

**'KISSING FOR VIRTUOSI:  
WILLIAM STUKELEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF PLEASURE (1757)'**

**This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in  
the *English Historical Review*.**

**15 May 2015**

**Dr Lawrence Klein  
Faculty of History  
University of Cambridge**

**MAILING ADDRESS:  
Dr Lawrence Klein  
Emmanuel College  
Cambridge CB2 3AP**

**EMAIL ADDRESS:  
lek26@cam.ac.uk**

**‘KISSING FOR VIRTUOSI:  
WILLIAM STUKELEY’S PHILOSOPHY OF PLEASURE (1757)’**

The intellectual career of William Stukeley (1687-1765) has received much attention. However, one manuscript by Stukeley has never been discussed. In 1757 he composed a short treatise, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, in which he argued an unusual case, namely, that a man and woman ought to feel entitled to consummate their philosophic friendship with kissing. The manuscript does illuminate an interesting episode in Stukeley’s private life, but it has broader significance. First, it incorporates many of the themes developed elsewhere by Stukeley, showing how contemporary historical and scientific understanding could be synthesized with a mystical account, of ancient derivation, of the physical and social universe. Second, the manuscript sheds light on the changing relations of men and women. Social and cultural developments among the literate in eighteenth-century Britain were facilitating heterosocial interaction, outside the framework of courtship and marriage, in ways that enhanced both the possibilities for heterosocial friendship and the risks attached to it. In his manuscript, Stukeley was trying to expand the physical expression of amicable affection between a woman and man: he was looking for ways to move beyond the constraints of Platonic love without falling into libertinism. His position accords with the idea that the pursuit of happiness in the eighteenth century had a sexual dimension. However, while Stukeley sought greater latitude in erotic expression, his effort illustrates the challenge of doing so without undermining contemporary norms of social order.

\* \* \* \* \*

In November 1757, Mary Peirson was sitting with a couple of female friends at her New Bond Street house when another friend arrived. The visitor was William Stukeley who had just turned seventy and had known the widowed Mrs Peirson since 1750. As Stukeley wrote in his diary of the occasion:

I entertain'd 'em with a disc[ourse] on the regular mathematical Solids,  
the Studys & Symbols of the Druids some of wh[ich] I exhibited ....  
afterward I exhibited my *Luna solarium*, a machine I made at Stamford,

wh[ich] the Duke of Montagu was enamored with. Showing in an easy & natural way, the rising & setting of sun & moon, the tides over the globe of the earth, with the hours respectively, the dial being supported by the celestial figure of *Engonasis* [the constellation Hercules], kneeling on the Serpent.<sup>1</sup>

Stukeley's friendship with Mrs Peirson frequently involved discussions of the historical and scientific topics which occupied him.

Stukeley (1687-1765) was best known, and has remained so, as an antiquarian. He applied a strong concern with observation and measurement to his study of Britain's ancient monuments, but he also speculated adventurously, endorsing the idea that the monuments were temples of the Druids, whom he imagined to be 'primitive monotheists'. This was not because, as Stuart Piggott once suggested, Stukeley took a misguided turn from empiricism to speculation.<sup>2</sup> Rather, like other contemporaries, Stukeley had a polymathic ambition to reach an understanding of the material and spiritual unities of the natural and human worlds.<sup>3</sup> His interests were hardly confined to the British past. He had studied medicine at university and practiced it for many years.<sup>4</sup> He knew Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and was an avid Newtonian: he endorsed Newton's crystallization of the physical laws of the universe on a mathematical basis but also, like Newton, was keen to link the understanding of nature to a religious and mystical comprehension of the universe.<sup>5</sup> At the age of 42, Stukeley took orders in the Church of England, embracing a natural theology according to which the

---

<sup>1</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford [hereafter Bodl.], MS.Eng.misc.e.667/4, f. 3r-4r.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Piggott, *William Stukeley: An Eighteenth-Century Antiquary* (Oxford, 1950) and the 'revised and enlarged edition' (London, 1985). According to Piggott, Stukeley's 'splendid contributions' were followed by 'lamentable decline' (in the 1950 edition, p. x).

<sup>3</sup> Piggott's interpretation has been replaced by that of David Boyd Haycock's *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Stukeley's medically informed publications included *Of the spleen* (1722) and *Of the gout* (1735).

<sup>5</sup> A vast amount of scholarship has contributed to this revised understanding of Newton, including: J. E. McGuire and P. M. Rattansi, 'Newton and the "Pipes of Pan"', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 21 (1966), pp. 108-143; Stephen D. Snobelen, "'The True Frame of Nature': Isaac Newton, Heresy, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy", in John Brooke and Ian MacLean, eds., *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 223-262; David Boyd Haycock, "'The Long-Lost Truth': Sir Isaac Newton and the Newtonian Pursuit of Ancient Knowledge", *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 35 (2004), pp. 605-623.

physical world was a testament to God's workmanship on wise and beneficent principles.<sup>6</sup> All of this suggests why Stukeley has emerged, in Paul Monod's characterization, 'as a far more interesting and complicated intellectual figure than anyone had previously imagined'.<sup>7</sup> In talking with Mary Peirson, Stukeley drew on these areas of interest, which appear to have interested her too.

The scene in November 1757 evokes a number of themes in recent eighteenth-century British cultural history.<sup>8</sup> In the 1750s, New Bond Street was a relatively new and 'smart' street in the developing West End.<sup>9</sup> The 'front stage' area of Peirson's house was a site for conversation and sociability.<sup>10</sup> A material object (Stukeley's *Luna solarium*) was a focus for edification and entertainment.<sup>11</sup> The company was 'mixed': both genders present and, in consequence, so were different kinds of intellectual training and accomplishment. The scene testified to the intellectual literacy and curiosity of at last some affluent women and the willingness of some men to address them: heterosocial conversation had rewards for all involved.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Hutton's subtle analysis of his religious evolution from a version of arian deism to a version of trinitarian Christianity shows a complex trajectory: Ronald Hutton, 'The religion of William Stukeley', *Antiquaries Journal*, lxxxv (2005), pp. 381-394.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2013), p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> The historiography on these topics is vast. General accounts touching on urban development, the use of domestic space, the expansion of consumption, and the roles of sociability and conversation include John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 3-122 and Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 61-121.

<sup>9</sup> John Summerson, *Georgian London* (London, 1945), pp. 81-94; Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), pp. 93-130; Robert Bucholz and Joseph P. Ward, *London: A Social and Cultural History, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 345-353.

<sup>10</sup> Dan Cruickshank and Neil Burton, *Life in the Georgian City* (London, 1990), pp. 66-72; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (2nd ed., London and New York, 1996), pp. 8-13, 28-32, 137-165; Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 91-99; Michael Snodin and John Styles, *Design and the Decorative Arts: Britain 1500-1900* (London, 2001), pp. 249-267; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Alice N. Walters, 'Conversation Pieces: Science and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England', *History of Science*, xxxv (1997), pp. 121-154; Carl Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England: Cultural Ties and Social Spheres in the Provinces, 1660-1780* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 128-191; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 154-192, 199-246.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in Judith Still and Michael Worton, eds., *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices* (Manchester and New York, 1993), pp. 100-115; Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 42-53; Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite*

More specifically, the scene illustrates the way in which educated culture in eighteenth-century Britain was shaped by the design, articulated in Joseph Addison's famous 1711 *Spectator* #10, of bringing 'Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses'.<sup>13</sup> Over the succeeding decades, the appetite for learning among the literate, both male and female, became more conspicuous, and the means of satisfying that appetite became more numerous. Lectures, demonstrations and exhibitions, in both public and domestic settings, proliferated.<sup>14</sup> Material culture abetted the spread of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> So did associational life.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps most significantly, more and more publications appeared, aimed at all levels of literacy and all kinds of appetite. A significant portion of publication was dedicated to the Spectatorial goal of making knowledge accessible to wider audiences. Women and men both participated in these developments although their forms of access were different and unequal.<sup>17</sup>

---

*Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow, Essex, 2001), pp. 60-76; Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762-1830* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 37-67.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Bond, ed., *The Spectator* (5 vols., Oxford, 1965), i. 44 (Number 10, 12 March 1711). The significance of the Addisonian project for gender is treated in, among other places, Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London and New York, 1989), pp. 93-145, and E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2004), pp. 1-12, 42-46.

<sup>14</sup> Larry Stewart, *The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660-1750* (Cambridge, 1992); Simon Schaffer, 'The Consuming Flame: Electrical Showmen and Tory Mystics in the World of Goods', in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 489-526; Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 201-251; Mary Fissell and Roger Cooter, 'Exploring Natural Knowledge: Science and the Popular', in Roy Porter, ed., *The Cambridge History of Science. Volume 4: Eighteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 129-158; Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Christine Blondel, eds., *Science and Spectacle in the European Enlightenment* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Waters, *Conversation Pieces*; Jan Golinski, 'Barometers of Change: Meteorological Instruments as Machines of Enlightenment', in William Clark, Jan Golinski and Simon Schaffer, eds., *The Sciences of the Enlightenment* (Chicago and London, 1999), pp. 69-93; Celina Fox, *The Arts of Industry in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 135-177; Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, *La Pièce et le Geste: Artisans, Marchands et Savoir Technique à Londres au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 2013), pp. 51-99.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 60-140; James McClellan III, 'Scientific Institutions and the Organization of Science', in Porter, ed., *The Cambridge History of Science. Volume 4*, pp. 87-106; Fox, *The Arts of Industry in the Age of Enlightenment*, pp. 179-229; Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1850* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 40-62.

<sup>17</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 125-197; Helen Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural World of the "Athenian Mercury"* (Aldershot, 2003); Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2009).

One subset of publication has a particular relevance to the scene at Mrs Peirson's house: these were works seeking to illuminate and illustrate contemporary scientific thinking to general audiences. Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes* (1686, first translated in 1688) provided a model of dialogue between an educated man and an intelligent, fashionable woman in which scientific ideas were explored and explained.<sup>18</sup> John Harris's *Astronomical Dialogues between a Gentleman and Lady* (1719) acknowledged his debt to Fontenelle for showing how 'to render Those Notions *pleasing and agreeable*'.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Francesco Algarotti paid tribute to Fontenelle's model in *Il Newtonianesimo per le Dame* (1737), translated as *Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy Explain'd for the Use of the Ladies* in 1739. Elizabeth Carter, who was responsible for this first translation, conveyed Algarotti's assessment of Fontenelle and his imitators in words that echoed Addison's *Spectator*; 'Your *Plurality of Worlds* first softened the savage Nature of Philosophy, and called it from the solitary Closets and Libraries of the Learned, to introduce it into the Circles and Toilets of Ladies.'<sup>20</sup>

Such works manifest how natural knowledge was diffused to wider audiences, women being taken as the emblem of all the unlearned. However, these works also suggest the challenge of representing relations between a man and woman: as scholars have noted, such works often display an erotic undertow. Scenes of intellectual exchange between a man and a woman were marked by 'sophisticated flirtation': the gallantries of polite heterosocial conversation conduced to a 'romantic glow'. This was most explicit in Fontenelle, but it survived in Algarotti. Later English works in this vein by Benjamin Martin (1759) and James Ferguson (1768) sought to guard against the erotic potential of male-female conversation by devising conversants who were siblings.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Later English editions and translations in 1688, 1695, 1702, 1715, 1718, 1719, 1728, 1737.

<sup>19</sup> John Harris, *Astronomical Dialogues between a Gentleman and a Lady* (1719), p. v. Later English editions in 1725, 1729, 1745 and 1766.

<sup>20</sup> Francesco Algarotti, *Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy Explain'd for the Use of the Ladies*, (2 volumes, 1739), i. ii. Later English editions in 1742, 1765 and 1772.

<sup>21</sup> Aileen Douglas, 'Popular Science and the Representation of Women: Fontenelle and After', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, xviii (1994), pp. 1-14, at 3-4, 7; Mary Terrall, 'Natural Philosophy for Fashionable Readers', in Marina Frasca-Spada and Nick Jardine, eds., *Books and the Sciences in History* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 239-254, at 239-248; Christa Knellwolf,

This point is relevant to the scene at Mrs Peirson's. Just a few days before, indeed, on Peirson's birthday, 3 November, Stukeley had delivered to her a manuscript, written for her perusal. This manuscript was titled, 'Of the Philosophy of Pleasure'. The manuscript is not long, about 6000 words, but it is a rich, if also puzzling, document. In his diary, Stukeley referred to the manuscript as his 'discourse on the Salute': 'salute' was an eighteenth-century word for 'kiss', and kissing was at the centre of the manuscript's concerns.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the scene in Peirson's house on 10 November 1757 was more complex than it appears in the simple account Stukeley gave of it in his diary.

Put briefly, Stukeley's manuscript argued that a man and a woman who are not married should kiss as a consummation of their intellectual friendship. He grounded this argument in a view of God as an agent of human happiness and a view of the divinely created world as a platform for the pursuit of reasonable pleasure. Among the highest pleasures, according to Stukeley, was the commerce of the sexes. While Stukeley endorsed the conventional idea that sexual activity served the purpose of reproduction within marriage, he also argued that the salute is a legitimate physical ratification of male-female friendship. If nothing else, the manuscript illuminates an area for which our sources are limited: namely, the inner life of an eighteenth-century man reflecting on ideas or experiences of heterosexual love and physical intimacy. Stukeley should be added to the finite list of men, such as Edmund Harrold, John Cannon, Dudley Ryder and James Boswell, whose surviving records do provide such evidence.<sup>23</sup>

---

'Women Translators, Gender and the Cultural Context of the Scientific Revolution', in Roger Ellis and Liz Oakley-Brown, eds., *Translation and Nation: Towards a Cultural Politics of Englishness* (Clevedon, 2001), pp. 85-119, at 86; Massimo Mazzotti, 'Newton for Ladies: Gentility, Gender and Radical Culture', *British Journal for the History of Science*, xxxvii (2004), pp. 119-146, at 129-130; Paola Bertucci, 'Science in the Domestic Sphere', in Filippo Camerota, ed., *Museo Galileo: Masterpieces of Science* (Florence, 2010), pp. 285-295, at 285-286.

<sup>22</sup> Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.667/4, f. 3r. Stukeley consistently used the word 'salute' rather than 'kiss'. Samuel Johnson, in the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), gave three definitions for 'to salute' as a verb ('to greet; to hail', 'to please; to gratify', 'to kiss') and two definitions for 'salute' as a noun ('salutation; greeting', 'a kiss').

<sup>23</sup> William Matthews, ed., *The Diary of Dudley Ryder 1715-1716* (London, 1939); Frederick A. Pottle, ed., *Boswell's London Journal 1762-1763* (London, 1951); Craig Horner, ed., *The Diary of Edmund Harrold, Wigmaker of Manchester 1712-15* (Aldershot, 2008); John Money, ed., *The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master* (2 vols., Oxford, 2010).

The kiss has had a complicated history. Prior to the eighteenth century, the kiss functioned in a wide range of ways including but hardly confined to the erotic. It had uses in religious, economic, political and civil settings as well as in romantic or erotic ones. It has been suggested that over time many functions of kissing were taken over by other gestures, confining the kiss to an expression of personal affection if not always sexual attraction. By the eighteenth century, this process was advanced though not uniform in Britain, let alone in western Europe. The handshake and bow had become more prominent, especially among polite persons in polite venues, and kissing in non-affective situations was less common.<sup>24</sup> However, what was appropriate in different situations remained a matter for debate.

In the introduction to the important essay collection, *The Kiss in History*, Karen Harvey situated the role of kissing in the making and policing of boundaries: 'crossing the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate kissing signalled a rupture in normal power relations – between those of different ranks, the married and unmarried, and between men and women.'<sup>25</sup> Writers in the Christian tradition might disagree about the status of physical intimacy and sex: for some, they were expressions of sinful nature, unfortunate but necessary features of human life in a fallen world; for others, physical intimacy and sex were more wholesome, a positive part of God's design. For almost all, however, physical relations between men and women ought to be confined to marriage or to the various steps that led to marriage.<sup>26</sup> It is not surprising therefore that Stukeley, while seeking to expand the bounds of male-female physical intimacy, was, at the same time, almost as vigorously trying to limit the applicability of his argument. These limits, on which Stukeley insisted, indicate how much he was aware that he was innovating or at least renegotiating contemporary assumptions.

<sup>24</sup> Karen Harvey, 'Introduction', in Karen Harvey, ed., *The Kiss in History* (Manchester and New York, 2005), pp. 1-15; Keith Thomas, 'Afterword', in Harvey, ed., *The Kiss in History*, pp. 187-203. A number of the essays in *The Kiss in History* support this summary, which broadly accords with Norbert Elias' model of the 'civilizing process' as one of distancing.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey, 'Introduction', p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Mystery of Love and Marriage: A Study in the Theology of Sexual Relation* (London, 1952), pp. 54-62; Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relationship in Christian Thought*, (London, 1959), pp.196-197, 206-207; George H. Tavard, *Women in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame and London, 1973); Patricia Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England, 1500-1750', in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 82-106, at 83-84.



At first glance, it is puzzling that such an intriguing manuscript has not ever been so much as mentioned in the scholarship on Stukeley. The original document is among a small collection of Stukeley manuscripts in a major research library, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.<sup>27</sup> The manuscript is catalogued: it is not buried in a remote or private collection, difficult of access. However, the explanation for the neglect may be rather straightforward, namely, that the content of the manuscript is, *apparently*, remote from the main thrusts of Stukeley scholarship, his contributions to antiquarianism and his engagement with contemporary philosophy and religion. In fact, the manuscript redeployed many ideas found elsewhere in Stukeley's writings though they were here put to use for an unusual purpose.

The goals of this essay are to bring the manuscript to historical attention, to sketch its content, to explain why Stukeley wrote it, and to suggest its significance. For reasons that will be indicated, this manuscript had no 'influence'. However, it is historically significant, and in two ways. First, while the argument of the manuscript is eccentric, it incorporates many of the themes developed elsewhere by Stukeley. 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure' supports the interpretation of Stukeley as embracing a spiritualized or mystical view of the physical and social universe. The manuscript, thus, dramatizes the purchase that ideas, often deemed outmoded by 'science' and 'enlightenment', about the enchantments of human life continued to have in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Second, the manuscript sheds light on the changing terrain of relations between men and women. Bringing 'Philosophy' to the 'Tea-Table' reconfigured the relation of women to knowledge: that reconfiguration was part of larger developments, already alluded to, in urban

---

<sup>27</sup> The manuscript is Osborn.c.312 (31 pages, 19 x 16 cm, bound in vellum), hereafter 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure'. The Beinecke also holds volumes of poems, drawings and prints by Stukeley. The lot of Stukeley manuscripts was acquired by James Marshall Osborn (1906-1976) in 1957 from the New York antiquarian bookseller Emily Driscoll; the entirety of Osborn's collection was transferred to the Beinecke in the 1960s and 1970s (personal communication). The Beinecke catalogue dates the manuscript 1751; but this is a misreading of 1757 as evidence presented in this article confirms. Stukeley's manuscripts are widely dispersed. Stuart Piggott provided an account of the manuscripts' dispersal after Stukeley's death in the revised edition (1985) of *William Stukeley*, pp. 168-169. Further information about this manuscript diaspora can be gathered in Mary Clapinson and T. D. Rogers, *Summary Catalogue of Post-Medieval Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian library, Oxford* (3 vols., Oxford, 1991), i. 408.

culture, in domestic space and practice, and in print and other forms of access to knowledge about the natural, historical and artistic worlds. Bringing 'Philosophy' to the 'Tea-Table' also reconfigured gender relations. Of course, this endeavour usually granted to men an autonomy and initiative, denied to women. Still, it endorsed new kinds of mutual exposure between women and men and brought into being new possibilities for friendship and association. At the same time, as already indicated, these possibilities also implied new risks to propriety, as contemporaries understood it. Stukeley was trying in a modest way to expand the physical expression of amicable affection between a woman and a man. To do so, he sketched an ideal of male-female friendship outside the bounds of courtship and marriage: the salute was a physical ratification of ideal male-female friendship. In other words, he was looking for ways to move beyond the constraints of 'Platonic friendship' without falling into libertinism.

The first part of this essay explores the manuscript and its argument. The second part considers the manuscript in the contexts of Stukeley's own sociability and of the history of heterosocial relations.

Stukeley is an intriguingly indicative character with respect to the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century. Because the age of professionalized disciplines had not yet begun, vast amounts of intellectual and cultural terrain were still 'open range', available for inquisitive gentlemen and some ladies to investigate in myriad combinations of topics. Stukeley was such a gentleman, a man with diverse interests, polymathic ambitions, and a complex intellectual character. In addition, he had a long intellectual career, beginning in the second decade of the eighteenth century and ending only with his death in 1765, a period over which his ideas evolved. (He developed his ideas about the salute when he was in his sixties.) Finally, he had a strong predilection to locate unities underlying this diverse intellectual field. None of this makes him an easy figure to grasp as a whole. His intellectual style combined the empirical and the mystical, the descriptive and the speculative: he showed traits of both

the Renaissance virtuoso and the enlightened philosopher.<sup>28</sup> ‘Paradoxical’, ‘eccentric’ and ‘bizarre’ are words Michael Hunter uses to summarize Stukeley’s intellectual character.<sup>29</sup>

‘Of the Philosophy of Pleasure’ tends to confirm Hunter’s assessment: it is an idiosyncratic document. Nonetheless, the aims and emphases of the short treatise were compatible with a number of familiar contemporary developments. Stukeley was participating in the widespread endorsement of happiness and pleasure and of the role of physical health in the pursuit of these ends. As others were, he was seeking new ways to compass the physical embodiment of humans with their existence as conscious beings. He was also attempting to re-imagine the relations of women and men. To do all of this, he drew on and sought to synthesize a diverse range of sources, putting to work latitudinarian Anglican Christianity, a knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics, contemporary science and what we might call a mystical humanism, mixing Platonic, neo-Platonic and other ideas. In addition, though there are implicit references to many sources, he repeatedly cited and quoted two unexpected writers: St Paul and John Milton.

‘Philosophy is the Study of Wisdom’ begins the short treatise. Though commonplace, this definition opened the way for Stukeley to indicate both the narrow reach of philosophy and its great promise for those able pursue it.

According to Stukeley, wisdom was not widely diffused. Providence ordered the human world so that ‘the bulk of mankind are mean, in the[i]r understanding of things’ and the wise were few. Providential design conduced to a social and political order under the guidance of a small wise elite. Here, as elsewhere in the manuscript, Stukeley echoed Plato:

---

<sup>28</sup> Scholarship complicating the nature of ‘the Enlightenment’ and its relation to what preceded it includes: David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 85ff.; Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, ‘Nature, Revelation, History’, in Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, eds., *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1660-1750* (Leiden and Boston MA, 2012), pp. 1-7; Dmitri Levitin, ‘From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Pagans, Jews and Christians in European Historiography from the Reformation to “Enlightenment”’, *Historical Journal* lv (2012), pp. 1117-60; Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts*. Another polarity that Stukeley might be seen to bridge is that of ‘enlightenment’ and ‘counter-enlightenment’: see Brian Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Hunter, ‘Foreword’, in Haycock, *William Stukeley*, p. xii.

‘few to rule, many to be ruled’.<sup>30</sup> Wisdom of the few was to be distinguished from the superficial understanding of the many. Stukeley recognized that his argument in favour of friendly kissing was unconventional, and he was alert to its dangers. Though the main thrust of the argument was to expand the possibilities of physical intimacy, Stukeley hedged the argument with limits in order to contain its applicability. That containment took the form of the distinction between exoteric and esoteric knowledge, a theme to which he recurred repeatedly in the manuscript.

Stukeley was familiar with this distinction from his antiquarian studies. His durable antiquarian contribution had been understanding the true age of Britain’s megalithic monuments: that they had been built by pre-Roman occupants of the islands.<sup>31</sup> However, Stukeley also embraced the rather less durable idea, already circulating, that the megalithic monuments were temples of the Druids.<sup>32</sup> Stukeley identified strongly with the Druids, adopting the pseudonym ‘Chyndonax’, which he took to be the name of a historic Druidic priest.<sup>33</sup> Druidic religion was of paramount importance to him because his investigations at Stonehenge and elsewhere were attempts to understand the religions of early peoples, living before and without the benefit of the Hebrew and Christian dispensations. Stukeley endorsed the idea of primitive monotheism; that is, he imagined that early peoples believed in one god; a *prisca sapientia* had been made available to humanity from the earliest times. (As a Freemason, he imagined himself participating in a residual medium of the *prisca sapientia*.<sup>34</sup>)

<sup>30</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 1r.

<sup>31</sup> Inigo Jones had proposed that Stonehenge was Roman. John Aubrey had suggested that the monuments were connected with Druids and, therefore, with the Celts. On Stukeley’s complicated relation with Aubrey’s ideas, see Peter Ucko *et al.*, *Avebury Reconsidered from the 1660s to the 1990s* (London, 1991), pp. 35-48.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven and London, 2009), traces the development of ideas about the Druids, with Stukeley occupying a pivotal role: see chs. 2-3. Stukeley appreciated John Toland’s writings on the Druids while disagreeing with Toland’s hostility to organized religion: Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture 1696-1722* (Manchester and New York, 2003), pp. 216-232, esp. 219.

<sup>33</sup> Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>34</sup> David Anderson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland’s Century 1590-1710* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 6, 20-21, 77-107, 226-227; Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 8-9, 35-38; Haycock, *William Stukeley*, pp. 174-180; Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, p. 93.

For Stukeley, the Druids were the prime local example of this proto-monotheism. In time, he came to think that the wisest of early peoples were proto-trinitarians.<sup>35</sup>

Stukeley was perfectly aware that most early peoples (Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, for example) were polytheists. He drew on long-standing ideas, associated with the Hermetic tradition, that monotheism underlay polytheism. One available interpretation suggested that primitive monotheism had a historical tendency to degenerate into polytheism. Another, and in this context more relevant, was that polytheism was a tool used by a wise monotheistic elite to keep the general population in order. In other words, in thinking of the history of religion, Stukeley relied on the distinction between the esoteric knowledge of the elite and the exoteric beliefs of ordinary people.<sup>36</sup>

This notion of ‘double doctrines’<sup>37</sup>, that elites have access to wisdom from which ordinary people ought to be excluded, makes an important contribution to Stukeley’s philosophy of pleasure: he understood his argument for the salute in the same terms. The treatise addressed philosophical persons, the wise man and the wise woman. Most humans, ‘the Vulgar’, are insufficiently philosophical; they lack the capacity to judge well ‘of the fitness & reason of things, of the beautys of vertue, & the deformity of vice’.<sup>38</sup> It is appropriate that they should be guided by actual laws or the norms spelled out in religious and other prescriptive texts. They need laws and norms in order that social order be maintained. The wise are different: ‘Wisdom teaches us our duty without Laws.’<sup>39</sup> According to Stukeley, philosophy is a more supple and sophisticated tool than the law for regulating behaviour, the

---

<sup>35</sup> Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, pp. 91-100. He saw his antiquarian investigations as serving the cause of orthodox religion in its contest with freethinking and deism: David Boyd Haycock, “‘Claiming Him as Her Son’: William Stukeley, Isaac Newton, and the Archaeology of the Trinity”, in John Brooke and Ian MacLean, eds., *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 297-318.

<sup>36</sup> Haycock, *William Stukeley*, p. 139. The classic work on this tradition is D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1972).

<sup>37</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, ff. 23r, 24r.

<sup>38</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 2r.

<sup>39</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 2r.

law being, by its nature, rigid and mechanical in its application. The philosophical elite enjoy more ‘latitude’<sup>40</sup> with respect to what they should and should not do.

Stukeley went so far as to assert that ‘the philosopher is a Law to himself’.<sup>41</sup> This is a classic and potentially radical antinomian assertion. However, Stukeley reined in its implications by insisting, as well, that the wise person sees the value of social order and will not do anything to disrupt society: he respects God’s wish for ‘the quiet & order of the world’ and therefore refrains from ‘setting a bad example’.<sup>42</sup> Thus, if the philosopher has greater freedom in certain domains (such as kissing), he does so quietly and inconspicuously (‘it must be above observation’), not wishing to suggest that his behaviour is a model for people at large. The philosopher’s kiss is to be managed so that the appearance of conformity is maintained and the appearance of transgression avoided. In fact, Stukeley was deeply disturbed by conspicuous contemporary transgression, particularly in the form of aristocratic dissoluteness and neglect of the Sabbath.<sup>43</sup>

For all his debt to classical, humanist and hermetic thinking, Stukeley was a Christian for whom bringing Christian authority to bear on the argument mattered. St Paul represented a high standard of Christian validation, though he also was an unlikely source of support in a pro-kissing treatise: indeed, the Pauline doctrine of radical sinfulness was foreign to Stukeley’s benign view of human desire as a part of God’s plan.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, Stukeley quoted Paul. Of course, Stukeley was highly selective and often wilfully free in his interpretation of Paul’s meaning. Thus, Stukeley supported the distinction, just discussed, between ‘wisdom’ and ‘the laws’ with quotations about the Christian’s liberty from Old

---

<sup>40</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, ff. 3r, 14r.

<sup>41</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 8r.

<sup>42</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, ff. 10r-11r.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.d.719/22, f. 25r; Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.130, f. 44r, dated 3 April 1751; and his printed sermon, *National Judgments the Consequence of a National Profanation of the Sabbath. A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at St Margaret’s, Westminster, on the 30<sup>th</sup> Day of January, 1741-42* (London, 1742).

<sup>44</sup> From the seventh chapter of I Corinthians, in which Paul advanced an ideal of sexual abstinence, Stukeley quoted Paul as supporting latitude in marital relations: Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 24r.

Testament laws.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Stukeley found support in Paul for the discretion that the wise need to deploy in exercising liberty: that it must not become a cause of offense or a disturbing model for the unwise. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8.9, 'But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.'<sup>46</sup>

Philosophy may be narrowly distributed among humans. However, for the wise, it is the key to living: 'philosophy teaches us the art of life, dos true honor to our maker, know how to use his blessings, & our own facultys, give happiness to our selves.'<sup>47</sup> This statement bundles together a number of key points for Stukeley. Stukeley announces that philosophy brings the wise man into alignment with God's intentions: philosophy and religion are congruent, not antagonistic. Moreover, happiness is the reference point for the human life: the pursuit of happiness is the way to establish the correct relationship with God. This statement also points toward Stukeley's aesthetically- and scientifically-informed perception of the intricacies and functionalities of God's creation.

Stukeley was participating in a general revaluation of happiness and pleasure in the eighteenth century. As Roy Porter pointed out, although 'the new accent upon the legitimacy of pleasure' was forwarded by developments in science, philosophy and other worldly studies, this development 'came about partly *within* the culture of Christianity'.<sup>48</sup> Stukeley drew on broad changes in Anglican theology that had repositioned happiness as a central theological virtue. According to Isabel Rivers, the growth of a religion of reason, in contrast with a religion of grace, had involved a reappraisal of the status of happiness along with other social traits of religion.<sup>49</sup> In the Restoration decades, the first generation of latitudinarian clerics set the tone that would influence their successors. According to John Tillotson in

<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 6.12, 2 Corinthians 3.17, Colossians 2.20-23, Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff. 12r, 25r, 26r.

<sup>46</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 25r. In this connection, Stukeley also drew extensively on Romans 8, at f. 26r.

<sup>47</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff.2r-3r.

<sup>48</sup> Roy Porter, 'Enlightenment and Pleasure', in Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts, eds., *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke and London, 1996), p. 3. See also Darrin McMahon, *The Pursuit of Happiness: From the Greeks to the Present* (London, 2007), pp. 188-252, esp. 190.

<sup>49</sup> See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660-1780*, (2 vols., Cambridge, 2000), i. 77-88.

1675, 'Surely nothing is more likely to prevail with wise and considerate Men to become Religious, than to be thoroughly convinced that *Religion* and *Happiness*, our *Duty* and our *Interest*, are really but one and the same thing considered under several Notions.'<sup>50</sup> John Locke, William Wollaston and Samuel Clarke, among many others, all portrayed God as happy and his creatures as happy in the pursuit of religion.<sup>51</sup>

Such sentiments were compatible with the natural theology that mainstream Anglican thinking had embraced. In natural theology, the world is the creation of God: it is an object of both intricate functionality and palpable beauty: it was fundamentally good. Natural theology sought to endorse the glory of God through the rational understanding of nature, and, as will be evident, Stukeley took seriously the ways in which contemporary empirical investigations were adding depth to the understanding of nature as a product of divine design.<sup>52</sup>

However, Stukeley also brought to his observation of nature a strongly aesthetic streak, keen on harmony and analogy. As early as 1717, he produced a cosmological treatise in which he choreographed current empirical observation, ancient science and philosophy, and the Biblical creation story to understand the making of the cosmos. As he put it a few years later, he sought to approach the 'endless chain of beautiful Connexions & correspondencys between the parts of the creation' by elucidating the harmony of the celestial spheres. According to Ronald Hutton, Stukeley's intellectual longings 'found rich nourishment in the ancient traditions of Platonism and Pythagoreanism, which spoke of a united cosmos

---

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, i. 25. On Tillotson's influence, see Jacob M. Blosser, 'Pursuing Happiness in Colonial Virginia: Sacred Words, Cheap Print and Popular Religion in the Eighteenth Century', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, cxviii (2010), pp. 210-245, at 214-216, and 'John Tillotson's Latitudinarian Legacy: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and the Pursuit of Happiness', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, lxxx (2011), pp. 142-173 at 159-172.

<sup>51</sup> For these and other examples, see Charles Vereker, *Eighteenth-Century Optimism: A Study of the Interrelations of Moral and Social Theory* (Liverpool, 1967), pp. 39, 54, 60, 66. For more on this theme, Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London, 2000), pp. 258-275, esp. 260-261.

<sup>52</sup> Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 375-422; Neal C. Gillespie, 'Natural History, Natural Theology and Social Order: John Ray and the "Newtonian Ideology"', *Journal of the History of Biology*, xx (1987), pp. 1-49; John Gascoigne, 'From Bentley to the Victorians: The Rise and Fall of British Newtonian Natural Theology,' *Science in Context*, ii (1988), pp. 219-256.



streaming out from an original great divine being'.<sup>53</sup> These early writings testify to Stukeley's mystical bent, his ambition to identify the pattern of universal order and to bring himself into alignment with such an order for the sake of his own well-being, what he called 'the art of life'.<sup>54</sup> While, for Stukeley as for others, the fitness of God's creation was a topic of rational marvel, the natural world was also a medium through which the philosopher experiences a mystical unity of individual and universe, microcosm and macrocosm.

Thus, while wise and beneficent, Stukeley's God was not just a watchmaker. He was in addition a God of sociability and love: 'in reality, this is his perfection, & the excellence of his n[atu]re, that plesure, happiness, beneficence & glory is with him but one & the same principle, in a word tis love.' Stukeley noted, probably thinking of a remark in Plato's *Symposium*, that 'the antients made Love the first or oldest of all the Gods'. This Eros was cosmogonic, creating order out of Chaos and informing the cosmos with harmony. In Stukeley's words, love is 'divine amplitude, the very motive & end of creation. for look fro[m] one end of he[a]ven to the other, from one end of earth to the other, tis all but one great volume of divine love, expanded from the very first instant of creation, to this day, from each extremity of infinite Space'.<sup>55</sup>

Stukeley asserted that the Christian God's own plurality was a result of a sociable impulse: 'the allperfect Being himself was not happy alone. wherefore from before eternity, he multiply'd himself, his own divine n[atu]re, once & again; wh[ich] render'd his felicity compleat, in equals'.<sup>56</sup> In turn, God created humans out of love, 'to make an infinity of creatures happy'. It followed for Stukeley that humans had a duty, even a religious duty, to seek happiness.<sup>57</sup> For Stukeley and for Stukeley's God, pleasure was the route to happiness. Human felicity, like divine felicity, was founded in sociability: 'Society is a principle inborn

<sup>53</sup> Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, pp. 88-89. The 1717 manuscript is in Freemasons' Hall. The quotation is from Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.401, ff. 51-117, at 55.

<sup>54</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 2r.

<sup>55</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 4v. Stukeley referred to *Symposium* 178b.

<sup>56</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 5r. Stukeley explicitly cautioned against restrictively attributing the creation of the world to God's glory, which Stukeley saw as unworthy of the perfect being except insofar as 'it is interwoven with his true principle': that 'true principle' was 'that of doing good, wh[ich] we may properly call love': Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 4v.

<sup>57</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 4r.

with, & as the basis of all our happiness.’ Humans imitate God by seeking out love: ‘in imitation then of him, we human creatures seek our happiness in an equal object of love, & affection, whatever it is.’<sup>58</sup>

Given the importance of love in Stukeley’s account of the cosmos, it is not surprising that beauty also occupied an important place. ‘God made this beautiful world, & declard it all to be very good: & plac’d us in it, to enjoy it, the variety of a[n]i[m]als, flowers, herbs, trees, shrubs & all other furniture of the globe, was made for our plesure & use.’<sup>59</sup> In turn, humans were made to respond to this element of creation: ‘Man by n[atu]re is highly enamord at the Sight of beauty, it strikes unison to his Soul.’<sup>60</sup> This seems to suggest that the experience of beauty in the macrocosm brings to the microcosmic individual an order and harmony mirroring that of the cosmos. But in addition, beauty is an object of the human love for humans: it provides a target of human desire.

Having endorsed pleasure, Stukeley made clear that not all pleasures were equal. Harking back to ancient philosophy, Stukeley distinguished mental pleasures from physical ones, deeming the former superior. As he wrote, ‘plesures merely corporeal is [*sic*] not the business of philosophic happiness’.<sup>61</sup> Stukeley often wrote in this dualistic vein. However, although using the distinction of physical and mental (or corporeal and spiritual), he also aimed to overcome it. The superiority of mental pleasures to physical ones did not mean, for him, that physical pleasures were to be avoided. Sensual abstinence was as mistaken as sensual over-indulgence: it was misguided, he wrote, ‘to make vows of fancyed purity: to think any merit, in our abstinence, from any innocent gratifications’: ‘tis a mean notion to think, we please [God] by restraints, denyals, mortifications’.<sup>62</sup> Bodily pleasure, properly subordinated to mental pleasure, was allowed since it contributed to our happiness: God ‘has sown the world thick with all manner of delights, he has given us, passions, & powers, &

---

<sup>58</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 5r.

<sup>59</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 13r-14r. On beauty in the Platonic tradition, Melissa Lane, *Plato’s Progeny* (London, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 16r.

<sup>61</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 5v.

<sup>62</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, ff. 13v, 21r. Nor did God require ‘the abolition of passions’: f. 3r.

facultys, on purpose to be indulg'd, not for a punishm<sup>t</sup> (a notion altogether unworthy of the Sovereign Good) but to enjoy life, & its pleasures, in its largest extent'.<sup>63</sup>

For Stukeley, as already indicated, sociability was a foundational pleasure, but he was more specific than that: 'The grand point of Society' was precisely 'the commerce betw. the Sexes'. Like other Anglican writers, he thought that God intended men and women to relate not just for purposes of reproduction but for companionship and mutual care.<sup>64</sup> The commerce of the sexes was ordained by God, he wrote, 'not only for the purpose of continuing the world [that is, for reproduction]; but likewise for their mutual solace, joy, pleasure, whatever we please to call it, in a word happiness.'<sup>65</sup> He appealed to the everyday experience of male-female relations: 'we all know the gayety, & good humor kept up in common life, in female conversation'<sup>66</sup>; 'to live without female conversation, is but half to live, tis out of n[atu]re'.<sup>67</sup> In regard to this commerce, Stukeley again applied the superiority of mental to corporeal pleasure. 'The pleasure we are to reap from female conversation, in the light we are thinking of must be chiefly mental'.<sup>68</sup>

However, Stukeley was pushing beyond the exchanges of 'common life' towards another plane: 'the philosopher exalts the entertainment to a much higher degree, so as to approach to the joys of religion'.<sup>69</sup> The sort of relation that Stukeley is indicating required not just the philosopher (understood to be a man) but a woman of philosophical character, not any woman, therefore, but a woman endowed with the capacity to grasp philosophy and to be a philosophic friend: 'all this is only to be had with the Wise, that is, the philosopher, & with a female capable of giving, & receiving this mutual happiness, this mental, or Spiritual enjoyment'.<sup>70</sup> Such a female was 'truly a philosopher, & capable of initiation into this

<sup>63</sup> Stukeley 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 22r.

<sup>64</sup> Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 148-173.

<sup>65</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 6r.

<sup>66</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 16r.

<sup>67</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 7r.

<sup>68</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff. 7r-8r.

<sup>69</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 16r.

<sup>70</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 7r.

abstract doctrin'.<sup>71</sup> While the special sort of friendship imagined by Stukeley was premised on similarities of interest, it also pivotted on sexual difference: 'the agreableness of persons, makes part, equally as difference of sex; the furniture of th[e]ir minds, & method of using it, a Sympathy of Soul & Similitude of conception.'<sup>72</sup> From these and other remarks, it is clear that Stukeley was ambiguous about the equality of men and women in ideal friendship. At times, Stukeley wrote as if the woman was an accessory to the male philosopher's fulfillment: the text is riddled with presumed asymmetries between male and female experience; male pleasure is his principal subject. At other times, he wrote as if woman and man were equal participants in the physical and spiritual rewards of the consummated friendship. Recognizing that the woman friend must be 'truly a philosopher' suggests a parity, both 'giving, & receiving this mutual happiness'.

Indeed, the commerce of the sexes is the route to the most exalted forms of pleasure: 'As then with Adam so now with our philosopher, all the expanded beautys of nature, the beautys of art, the most delicate gratifications of tast, sight, hearing, smell, the delights of study, please not without participation of a fr<sup>d</sup>. & that fr<sup>d</sup>. a female, & that female, the beloved fr<sup>d</sup>.'<sup>73</sup> Stukeley's vision of Adamic experience came explicitly from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. All but one of Stukeley's sixteen Miltonic references were to two books. In Book IV, Stukeley drew on the conversation of Adam and Eve in paradise, which led to caresses and ultimately to sex without sin.<sup>74</sup> Book VIII provided an even clearer model for Stukeley's salute between the wise: here Eve prefers to hear important instruction not directly from the archangel Raphael but rather from Adam whom she knew would 'intermix' high discourse with 'grateful digression, & solve high dispute with cordial caresses' since 'from his lip not words alone pleasd her'.<sup>75</sup> Eve's preference looks forward, in its way, to the convergence of the edifying and the erotic in Fontenelle and, minus the erotic, to a pattern of

<sup>71</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 18r.

<sup>72</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 7r-v.

<sup>73</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 16v.

<sup>74</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff. 11r, 13r, 16r, 17r, 18r, 22r.

<sup>75</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 18r [*Paradise Lost* 8.48-57 where the original has 'conjugal' instead of the deliberately substituted 'cordial']; other lines quoted at ff. 15r and 20r.

polite heterosocial exchange, combining the edifying and the pleasurable in the eighteenth century. However, Stukeley was envisioning a union more mystical than polite, a union of loving friends with each other and with the cosmos: ‘the whole of each others mind solely & reciprocally transfused into each other, by an angelic irradiation;’<sup>76</sup> or in another formulation: ‘that spiritual love, by wh[ich] mortals imitate the celestial salute of angels, breathing our souls into each other by a metaphysical irradiation.’<sup>77</sup>

This use of Milton supported Stukeley as he took a crucial step farther. He wanted that mutual participation in mental pleasure to be celebrated in the physical pleasure of kissing. As already indicated, Stukeley believed that physical pleasures were not tantamount to sin and that mental pleasure need not be divorced from physical pleasure. The end point of the totally consummated philosophical friendship of a man and woman was the salute. While Stukeley was trying to avoid endorsing the unreflective sensuality of the merely corporeal, he regarded a sensual display in the form of the salute as a natural expression of the shared experience of philosophical friendship between a man and woman. He wrote: ‘Thus we find the philosophy of a Salute to be an exaltation [that is, a supreme expression] of that cordial affection, felt only by minds refin’d with a due Sense of the goodness of the Supreme Being, who made us, on purpose to be happy.’ Thus, kissing one’s friend was not merely corporeal: it was a consummation of a truly philosophical and religious understanding. He put it this way: ‘a Salute is one of the Sublimest Acts, or delights, our n[atu]re is capable of, a mental pleasure, immaterial, aspiring to divinity.’<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, God’s design of the world confirmed the propriety of physical relations between a philosophical man and a philosophical woman. Female beauty was a deliberate feature of the creation: it was ‘the last essay & crownwork of creation, the beauty made after an infinity of beautys’.<sup>79</sup> In Platonic manner, physical beauty points upward and onward to mental and spiritual beauties. However, for Stukeley, the physical does not become obsolete;

<sup>76</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 17r.

<sup>77</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 19r-20r.

<sup>78</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, ff. 21r, 22r.

<sup>79</sup> Stukeley, ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’, f. 27v.

one does not progress away from the physical but rather rounds back to it. Female beauty was an important feature of God's workmanlike construction of sexual difference. Stukeley called the salute 'an expression of thankfulness to the parent of all good, for giving us human n[atu]re, for giving us different Sex; giving us so admirable a composition betw. body, esp. capable of relishing the delicacy, out of the reach of the vulgar.'<sup>80</sup> In another place, Stukeley wrote that, among all the provision God made for humans on earth, 'far higher purpose was design'd in the different Sex of all the rational Species'.<sup>81</sup> The kiss honors the divine workmanship responsible for constructing humans with the physical and mental capacities to enjoy the complementarities of sex. It is a decorous allegiance to God for the rational man and woman to take advantage of a creation so designed. Stukeley's kiss was simultaneously corporeal and mental (or spiritual). God created the human being as a whole in order to experience the kiss as the highest form of rational pleasure.

The gap between body and mind was a standing conundrum of eighteenth-century philosophy and science, inherited from the philosophical tradition and intensified by seventeenth-century developments in philosophy and science.<sup>82</sup> Stukeley overrode the issue, writing as if the physical and the mental were simply one unified system: Stukeley had no mind-body problem. The pleasure of female conversation was simultaneously spiritual and corporeal: 'we enjoy it in Sp<sup>t</sup> yet the body is the organ, by wh[ich] the Sensation is convey'd to us.'<sup>83</sup> The ideas in 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure' were excellent illustrations of a larger pattern, sketched by Roy Porter, in which disregard or mortification of the flesh was replaced by 'a new stress ... emerging upon the right, and the responsibility of the cultivation of vigorous health'.<sup>84</sup> For Stukeley, health was 'the first & great law of individuals', a principle

<sup>80</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff. 22r-23r.

<sup>81</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 14r.

<sup>82</sup> This is a central theme in Roy Porter's *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul* (New York and London, 2003). The theme is set out in the introduction, esp. pp. 21-26.

<sup>83</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 14r.

<sup>84</sup> Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 235. Stukeley knew and communicated with such key health specialists as Richard Mead, James Jurin and George Cheyne. Cheyne emphasized 'the close interconnections between matter and spirit' (Anita Guerrini, 'Isaac Newton, George Cheyne and the "Principia Medicinæ"', in Roger French and Andrew Wear, eds., *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 222-245, at 233) and

of direct relevance to the subject of his manuscript: 'Tis one of the first principles to take care of the health & vigor of our constitution, both in mind & body. An especial means whereof is chearfulness, & female conversation.'<sup>85</sup>

Stukeley put his medical knowledge to use in explaining the conjuncture of the physical and the mental. He deployed the language of contemporary physiology to explain how contact, both mental and physical, with the right woman agitated the nerves in a way conducive to health: 'whilst his mind is entertain'd, the electrical fire, the animal flame is fan'd, so conducive to corporeal vigor. the sense, not the breath only, acc. to Hermippus, but the living breath of language, & even the touch, the Spiritual energy, the sight of the beloved fr<sup>d</sup>, raises that fine vibration of the nerves, wherein joy or happiness consists: what Providence design'd for us.'<sup>86</sup> The body is constructed to make humans recipients of pleasure. The philosophical woman has the power to animate those somatic components that enable the pleasure of the philosophical man. There is a physiological basis to the quasi-mystical, quasi-ecstatic condition of friendship between the wise. Stukeley shows a deeply holistic view of what human contact is about: this contact is both physical and spiritual; it involves a total sensual immersion (sight, touch, hearing, possibly smell) linked to supra-physical contact (mental and indeed, for him, spiritual contact).

When referring to the 'vibration of the nerves', Stukeley relied on contemporary physiology and thus drew on his medical experience. The importance of the nature and role of nerves in human animals had developed from Thomas Willis (1621-1675) through John Locke (1632-1704) and Isaac Newton to Stukeley's slightly elder contemporary, Dr George Cheyne (1671-1743). The nerves were understood mechanically (though not restrictively so)

---

was another exponent of 'a mystical Christian Platonism' (Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 238).

<sup>85</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff. 29v, 15r.

<sup>86</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 15r. The reference to Hermippus is no doubt derived from the English translation (1743) of Johann Heinrich Cohausen's *Hermippus Redivivus*, a satire on longevity that took off from a supposedly ancient inscription, announcing that Hermippus had lived to 115 by inhaling the breath of young women. Stukeley owned the second edition (1749) of this work: Stuart Piggott, ed., *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons. Volume 10. Antiquaries* (London, 1974), p. 438.

as the source of sensation (pleasure and pain), perception and knowledge.<sup>87</sup> Stukeley had himself written extensively on the animal spirits and the nature of life in a manuscript begun about 1718 where he introduced the idea of vibration. His ideas therefore anticipated the much fuller development of these and related ideas in *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749) by David Hartley (1705-1757), a long-standing acquaintance and correspondent of Stukeley.<sup>88</sup> At his death, Stukeley owned the first edition of Hartley's *magnum opus*.<sup>89</sup> In *Observations on Man* Hartley traced the origins of all aspects of human awareness to activities of the nerves and, in particular, 'the doctrine of vibrations', but he was not a strict mechanist. Like Stukeley, he had abandoned the separation of mind and body.<sup>90</sup>

Hartley had suggested at various points that electricity might clarify some of the mechanisms his work described.<sup>91</sup> Hartley and Stukeley both matured amid the growing intellectual excitement surrounding electricity, and Stukeley's reference to 'the electrical fire' in the passage quoted above is indicative. Stukeley suggested the health benefits of transfers of electrical charge between the sexes.<sup>92</sup> The development of an understanding of electricity began in the seventeenth century, but it entered into intellectual and social vogue in the 1740s. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) first used the word 'electrician' to describe himself as an investigator of electricity in 1751, but, already in the 1740s, Franklin was proposing the experiments that showed that lightening was a manifestation of electricity.<sup>93</sup> Stukeley was keenly interested in the developments that Franklin had presented to the Royal Society – so much so that, when an earthquake shook London in 1750, Stukeley published *The Philosophy*

<sup>87</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 3-9.

<sup>88</sup> Haycock, *William Stukeley*, pp. 60-66.

<sup>89</sup> Piggott, ed., *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, p. 439.

<sup>90</sup> Richard C. Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (Albany, NY, 1999). Hartley's replacement of a mind-body duality with an integrated 'mechanism of mind' is one theme of Allen's interpretation.

<sup>91</sup> Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (2 vols., London, 1749), i. 13-15, 28-29, 88-90, 97, 172.

<sup>92</sup> Hartley also devoted a section of his work to the application of the 'doctrine of vibrations and association' to 'the Desires of the Sexes towards each other': Hartley, *Observations on man*, i. 239-242.

<sup>93</sup> Patricia Fara, *An Entertainment for Angels: Electricity in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 26, 70-75



of *Earthquakes, Natural and Religious* (1750), explaining the phenomenon in terms of electricity.<sup>94</sup> As Patricia Fara writes, 'natural philosophers were convinced that electricity, weather and life were intimately linked to one another'. They began proposing how electricity worked within the body (especially through the nerves) and began proposing and experimenting with uses of electricity to cure bodily ills.<sup>95</sup> Stukeley was following the fashion in thinking electrically about what goes on between a man and a woman. Indeed, one common illustration of electricity on the demonstration circuit involved watching a spark jump to the lips of a willing man from a woman connected to a Leyden jar.<sup>96</sup>

Stukeley was never explicit about the nature of the kiss that he endorsed. However, the physical benefits that Stukeley associated with the salute seem unlikely to have followed from the limited contact of lips to cheeks or even lips to lips: he seems to be talking about contact of a more intimate sort. At the same time, he made clear that he was not using 'the salute' as a euphemism for genital sex. In discussing relations between men and women, he wrote that 'the majority of the world, (& that beyond compare) enter no farther than the grosser act; whether in the common, or in the matrimonial inclosure .... But I needs must hold the grosser act, to be the least part of the enjoyment of female Society, & always excluded in our present enquiry.'<sup>97</sup> So he really does seem to be making the case for intimate oral contact that physically celebrates the philosophical friendship of a man and woman: this contact was an end in itself, not a species of foreplay.

In this treatment of heterosocial relations, Stukeley put to work a complex array of materials. To be sure, he harnessed current thinking about nerves and electricity. However, 'modern science' did not necessarily imply brute mechanism or materialism. For Stukeley, contemporary ideas about the body and the physical world were fully compatible with the idea of the cosmos as a divine creation of fantastic intricacy. God's physical 'materials'

<sup>94</sup> Haycock, *William Stukeley*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>95</sup> Fara, *An Entertainment for Angels*, pp. 82ff.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Brian Schiffer, *Draw the Lightning Down: Benjamin Franklin and Electrical Technology in the Age of Enlightenment* (Berkeley, California, 2003), p. 68. Famously, in the 1770s, Dr James Graham, who had no real medical training, set up a fashionable practice in London dedicated to remedying sexual problems (impotence, sterility) using electrical treatments.

<sup>97</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', ff. 6v-7r.

('animal spirits', nerves, vibrations, electricity) did not reduce bodies to machines; rather, they suggested the ingenious ways in which divine design fitted the human, both bodily and mentally, for a sense of union with the cosmos. God's love created this cosmos. Human love of other humans was central to God's plan since it mimicked God's relation to humans and provided a route to spiritual enlightenment. If nothing else, Stukeley is a striking instance of 'the inadequacy of setting up an eighteenth-century Newtonian Enlightenment in opposition to the occult "irrationalism" of a former age'.<sup>98</sup> In other words, Stukeley demonstrates the alliance, rather than the battle, between the ancients and the moderns.

It is evident that Stukeley's more general intellectual and spiritual concerns were not remote from his 'discourse on the Salute' but rather underpinned it. A particular instance of this was sociability, which, as we have seen, he discussed conspicuously in 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure'. However, sociability was, for Stukeley, not just an idea but an essential practice.

The Addisonian programme of enriching conversation with philosophy had targetted the antiquary as the pedantic enemy of conversation and good company.<sup>99</sup> Stukeley, for one, defied this characterization. Throughout his life, he was a member or founder of clubs and societies.<sup>100</sup> These supported extensive networks of personal affiliation with contemporaries engaged in natural philosophy, natural history, medicine and antiquarian study. His contacts included a number of important aristocrats, themselves patrons and amateurs of knowledge and culture: the earls of Pembroke, Winchelsea and Sandwich and the duke of Montagu. He also had friendships with some highly educated aristocratic women, including Jane Brownlow Bertie, the duchess of Ancaster, and Francis Thynne Seymour, the countess of Hertford and

---

<sup>98</sup> Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, p. 179.

<sup>99</sup> Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Piggott, *William Stukeley* (1985), pp. 34-35, 42, 43, 53-55, 113-114, 118; Haycock, *William Stukeley*, pp. 45-46 49-50, 117-119, 131, 199.

later duchess of Somerset.<sup>101</sup> Stukeley's intellectual respect for women was highly relevant to his philosophy of pleasure. As he wrote, the female friend should be 'truly a philosopher'.<sup>102</sup>

His intellectual expectations of women were also evident in his two marriages, both to women who were highly educated. Stukeley had married for the first time in 1728, when he was 41. His wife, Frances Williamson (1696/7-1737), was a Lincolnshire woman whom he had met when living himself in Lincolnshire. She bore three daughters before her death in 1737. One revealing fact is that, having helped to found the Society of Roman Knights in London in 1722, Stukeley later arranged for his wife (as well as the countess of Hertford) to be admitted as members.<sup>103</sup> Since such societies were almost always all-male, this gesture was a token of intellectual respect. Stukeley remarried two years later (1739) to Elizabeth Gale (1687-1757). Her father, Thomas Gale (1635/6-1702), was a well-known antiquary, and her brothers, Roger Gale (1672-1744) and Samuel Gale (1682-1754), were also antiquaries and long-standing friends of Stukeley.<sup>104</sup> There can be no doubt that Elizabeth Gale would have been a very well educated woman.

In the early 1750s, when Elizabeth Gale Stukeley was still alive, Stukeley met another woman with whom he developed an important personal relationship based on intellectual affinities and ultimately involving deep affection, certainly on his part. In 1751 Stukeley had had an antiquarian exchange with the Reverend John Foote, who, from 1744 to 1768, was the rector of Yoxall in Staffordshire. Through Foote, Stukeley met Mrs Peirson, Foote's sister. Mrs Peirson is the key to understanding why Stukeley wrote 'On the Philosophy of

---

<sup>101</sup> Stukeley produced a design, with an inscription, for a funerary monument for the duchess of Ancaster at her death in 1736 (Beinecke Library, Osborn.c.371, William Stukeley, 'Poems', 1737-1755). In an album of engravings (Beinecke Library, Osborn.fc.166), Stukeley dedicated to 'the Right Honorable the Lady Hartford' an engraving from his *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1724).

<sup>102</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 18r.

<sup>103</sup> Frances was the daughter of Robert Williamson of Allington in Lincolnshire; Stukeley had met her when he was in Grantham; she had studied with Michael Maittaire (1668-1747), the French-born classicist: Piggott, *William Stukeley* (1985), pp. 76-77. For the point about the Society of Roman Knights, pp. 53-55.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Gale was dean of York. Elizabeth brought a wedding portion of £10,000 which gave Stukeley a new financial freedom: Piggott, *William Stukeley* (1985), pp. 114-115.

Pleasure'.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, using Stukeley's detailed notations on his daily life in contemporary almanacs, one can trace in remarkable detail the course of this friendship. Though he only refers to her as Mrs Peirson or by several pseudonyms of which the most frequent is 'Miriam',<sup>106</sup> it is possible to reconstruct some facts of her background. She was born Mary Foote about 1710, and she married a well-to-do landowner, Bradshaw Peirson of Stokesley in the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1732. Bradshaw Pierson died in Bath in 1747, whereupon his widow moved first to Kent, where she had been brought up, then to a house in Lincoln's Inn Field, London, and finally, in 1750, to the house in New Bond Street where she lived during the course of her friendship with Stukeley. Stukeley was by then rector of St George, Queen Square, a short walk from New Bond Street.<sup>107</sup>

In the 1750s, Mary Peirson is frequently mentioned in Stukeley's correspondence and in his diaries. In the early years, he usually saw her at her New Bond Street house in the company of her brother, visiting from Yoxall. She made the coffee, but she must have joined in the conversation: 'I had waited on Mr Foote more than once, in New Bond Street', wrote Stukeley in December 1751; 'his sister made coffee for us. We talkd about matters of literature. I at another visit presented to her my book of earthquakes [*The Philosophy of Earthquakes*]. We talkd about astronomy, when I perceiv'd in her library, an Orrery.'<sup>108</sup> If nothing else, the orrery would have signalled Mary Peirson's potential as an intellectual conversant. Decades before, Richard Steele had argued the necessity of an orrery for 'any numerous Family of Distinction':

<sup>105</sup> Piggott, *William Stukeley* (1985), p. 143, briefly noted the relationship; having indicated Stukeley's desire to keep the relationship secret, Piggott commented, 'It would not do for gossip to centre on the Rector of St George's.'

<sup>106</sup> Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron and was identified, in Exodus 15:20-21, as a 'prophetess', a characterization that, in Stukeley's view, made the name an apt pseudonym for Mrs Peirson. The explicit identification of 'Miriam' as Mrs Peirson is made in Stukeley's 1755 almanac, a Partridge *Merlinus Liberatus*, f. 11v (Bodl., MS. Eng.misc.d.719/13).

<sup>107</sup> Stukeley regarded the course of his life and hers as guided by both divine providence and by astrological determination. (See Patricia Fara, 'Marginalized practices', in Porter, ed., *The Cambridge History of Science. Volume 4*, pp. 485-507, at 498.) In a letter to her of 2 October 1754, he wrote: 'on the day of your Auspicious birth I hapned to buy Gibsons Camdens Britannia, just when having imbid just then a strong propensity to the study of my country antiquitys.' [Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.666, f. 33r.] Stukeley's active pursuit of local antiquities began about 1710, according to Haycock, *William Stukeley*, p. 110. Mary Peirson died in 1787 (*The European Magazine, and London Review*, February 1787, p. 136).

<sup>108</sup> Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.666, f. 27r.

This one Engine would open a new Scene to their Imaginations; and a whole train of useful Inferences concerning the Weather and the Seasons, which are now from Stupidity the Subjects of Discourse, would raise a pleasing, an obvious, an useful, and an elegant Conversation.<sup>109</sup>

Gradually, Stukeley came to see Peirson regularly on her own, at her house or at his house or in numerous London locations. Elizabeth Stukeley was aware of the friendship and, on occasions, Stukeley and his wife visited Mary Peirson together. However, it is unlikely that Elizabeth Stukeley was aware of the intensity of the friendship.

Certainly, Stukeley and Peirson shared interests. The evidence is almost entirely from Stukeley's side of the relationship, but it does suggest a good deal of reciprocity, in conversation and ultimately in affection.<sup>110</sup> In 1753 Stukeley received a letter from Peirson about Roman coins and 'then', noted Stukeley, 'commenc'd the intellectual attraction'.<sup>111</sup> He wrote of her in a journal of this period that she was a 'bosom friend, one exactly of one's own disposition ... a female of a most enlarg'd understanding' who 'enters readily into the secret of religious antiquity'.<sup>112</sup> A year later he summarized his view of her as follows:

A lady who may deservedly be called a philosopher, a lover of science, whose least excellence is an amiable & elegant person. She has a fine understanding, urg'd by a thirst after knoedg; but her chief passion lyes in sacred matters, sacred antiquitys. of these, She has a most elegant taste, & discerning judgment; a lively, apprehension, that immediately finds out the connexion between the heathen mythology, & the persons, & historys in

<sup>109</sup> Richard Steele, *The Englishman*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford, 1955), p. 48 (*Englishman* No. 11, 29 October 1713).

<sup>110</sup> Independent evidence testifying to Mary Peirson's continuing intellectual interests, long after Stukeley's death, is available in several letters (between 1777 and 1781) about fossil shells to the naturalist Emanuel Mendes da Costa: British Library, Additional Manuscripts 28540, ff. 189-191. 'Mrs Pierson' was a subscriber to Mendes da Costa's *Historia Naturalis Testaceorum Britanniae, or the British Conchology* (London, 1778), pp. [263-264].

<sup>111</sup> *The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D., and the Antiquarian and Other Correspondence of William Stukeley, Roger and Samuel Gale, etc.*, *Publications of the Surtees Society*, 73 (1880), p. 85.

<sup>112</sup> Bodl., MS Eng.misc.e.121, f. 102.

the Bible, from whence they are deriv'd: infinitely delighted in this track of learning, in wh[ich] I had for many years entertain'd my self; & by her prompted, to carry to a perfection.<sup>113</sup>

A flavour of the relationship is provided by the scene in Peirson's house on 10 November 1757, with which this essay opened. However, Stukeley did more than fill Mary Peirson's afternoons with edifying historical and scientific discourse. He addressed several pieces of writing to her, or wrote them with her in mind. In October 1755, he composed a description of Mount Sinai 'for the entertainment of MIRIAM Druidess'.<sup>114</sup> Two years later, in the summer of 1757, he took a two-week tour of southern Lincolnshire with one of his daughters, chiefly to look at antiquities. He wrote up his 'Holbe[a]ch journey' in the form of a letter 'to Mrs Peirson', describing his itinerary and his observations with occasional asides addressed to Peirson.<sup>115</sup> Later that summer, prompted by her (he says), he wrote up his thoughts 'concerning HADES, or the place of departed Spirits' in the form of a letter from 'Chyndonax to Miriam'.<sup>116</sup> He also composed verse to her with titles such as 'To Miriam on her birthday', 'To Hebe [an alternate pseudonym for Peirson] retired in the Countrey' and 'Chyndonax Druid to Miriam Druidess, 15 oct. 1754, presented with Schemes of the Universe deduc'd from the dandelion Seed globe'.<sup>117</sup>

It was not long before this relationship assumed a character requiring some self-conscious handling. In October 1754, Stukeley wrote in a letter to Peirson: 'I esteem you infinitely above all my acquaintance of either sex. this mutual kindness tho' as distant from any thing culpable as the poles of heaven are fro[m] each other stil requires that prudence we are talking of, & when I resign my share of it, to your discretion, I am confident, no evil even

<sup>113</sup> Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.136, f. 44. This description accompanies a portrait line-drawing of Mary Peirson, dated 5 June 1754. The passage refers to Stukeley's interest, and it would seem Mary Peirson's, in the derivation of classical myths from Biblical sources.

<sup>114</sup> Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Parker 622 ['Description of M.Sinai. 28 oct. 1755. Wrote for the entertainment of MIRIAM Druidess, on a Sabbath day'], ff. 7-27.

<sup>115</sup> British Library, London, Add Mss 51051 [Notes of William Stukeley, 'Holbech journey, june 1757'].

<sup>116</sup> Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Parker 615.11 ['Hades'], ff. 75-109.

<sup>117</sup> Beinecke Library, Osborn.c.371, ff. 76r, 78r, 81r.

imaginary can ensue.’<sup>118</sup> One form of prudence may have been Stukeley’s practice of incorporating his wife into some of his meetings with Peirson. Indeed, at this very time, Stukeley was already trying to justify closer physical contact with Peirson. His almanac for 1754 was dense with references to her, and he filled the back half of the almanac with a detailed sketch of ideas that would be worked out more formally in the 1757 manuscript ‘On the Philosophy of Pleasure’.<sup>119</sup>

A signal moment in the relationship must have been the death of Stukeley’s second wife in September 1757. That event seems to have prompted him to draft a more formal and somewhat revised version of his ideas about the salute and the philosophy of kissing – the Beinecke manuscript. Indeed, on 3 November 1757, Peirson’s birthday, Stukeley went to New Bond Street to drink coffee, and he gave her the manuscript.<sup>120</sup> It is clear that Stukeley wrote this manuscript not just with Mary Peirson in mind but *for* her. Why did Stukeley not simply ask Peirson to marry him? It seems that she had taken a vow not to remarry after Bradshaw Peirson’s death and, though Stukeley went to the trouble of demonstrating in a casuistical format why the vow was ‘void’, she was resolute in keeping to it.<sup>121</sup> They remained in contact though in due course the relationship appears to have flagged.

This context complicates the approach to understanding the manuscript. The manuscript presents itself as a short treatise with an argument. However, it was also a kind of love letter or an exercise in erotic persuasion or perhaps intellectual and romantic seduction. It was an invitation to Mary Peirson to explore a new dimension of male-female friendship. Stukeley was attempting to persuade an intellectual friend who was, crucially, a woman to join him in physical intimacy of a sort that did not fit with contemporary norms. His excitement about this relationship was founded in both Peirson’s feminine attractions and her intellectual sympathy. The evidence suggests that a good deal of the relationship between

---

<sup>118</sup> Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.666, ff. 32r-33r.

<sup>119</sup> Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.d.719/13 [Partridge *Merlinus Liberatus* 1755, though the notations are all for dates in 1754]. This material is discussed in Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, p. 176.

<sup>120</sup> Bodl., MS.Eng.misc.e.667/4, f. 3r.

<sup>121</sup> Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Parker 621 [‘Case of conscience. 5 oct. 1754’].

Stukeley and Peirson was indeed conversational and concerned serious intellectual topics. The evidence makes it difficult to speak of the psychological dimension. Here was an older man, established and accomplished, keeping regular company with a younger woman whom he deemed attractive, intelligent and informed. It is hard, from the record, to pin down the economy of mutual regard that must have shaped the relationship: each had reasons to appreciate the attentions of the other. Even more difficult to substantiate is the erotic undertow. Whatever the libidinous drives that propelled Stukeley to Peirson, he understood the relationship as philosophical. Thus, he framed the attempt at seduction as a kind of treatise; he clothed his desire philosophically.

Stukeley wrote the manuscript at a particular existential conjuncture in his life, but that conjuncture itself can be placed in the context of ideas and practices of sociability in the eighteenth century, especially sociability between men and women. Although the legitimacy of the salute is the end point of the manuscript's argument, it reaches this goal by way of happiness, pleasure, sociability and love as underlying cosmic principles. The physical kiss is the consummation of an ideal friendship between a man and a woman, a friendship founded on beauty, accomplishment and intellectual and spiritual insight. In other words, Stukeley was trying to join together two things that were always kept apart: the friendship of a woman and a man (outside courtship and marriage) and the physical expression of affection. Understood this way, it is important to place Stukeley's manuscript in relation to two stories: one about sexual emancipation and the other about male-female friendship.

Of course, William Stukeley and Mary Peirson lived in a social and moral world where relations between men and women were largely understood in terms of asymmetrical gender definitions and in relation to the production and reproduction of families.<sup>122</sup> As a result, the subject of non-sexual friendship between a man and a woman was comparatively

---

<sup>122</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London, 1977), pp. 498-507; Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London and New York, 1984), pp. 96-105.



unexplored.<sup>123</sup> When writers discussed the relations between a single man and a single woman, such relations were usually interpreted as preparatory for courtship and marriage. When writers discussed friendship, they tended often to assume that friendship was a relation between two people of the same sex.<sup>124</sup>

At the same time, the development of polite culture in eighteenth-century Britain expanded opportunities for conversation between men and women. The Addisonian model involved bringing philosophy out of male and homosocial settings ('Closets', 'Libraries', 'Schools', 'Colleges') into settings that often were mixed with respect to gender. That model was supported by and intertwined with a range of historical developments in the economy, society and culture. The very developments, suggested at the start of this essay, that made possible Stukeley's edifying afternoon conversations with Peirson must have made more plausible the idea of non-sexual male-female friendship. While 'Clubs' and 'Coffee-Houses' were defined not just by homosociability but by masculinity, 'Assemblies' and 'Tea-Tables' were heterosocial. With respect to women of some affluence, what was most important was the development of domestic spaces in ways that encouraged the culture of conversation for both sexes as well as for different age cohorts and different kinds of persons. Mary Peirson's amenities were clean, comfortable and light, equipped with wares for hot drinks but also with 'conversation pieces' such as books, prints and her orrery. On New Bond Street, Stukeley and Peirson had many conversations of the sort they had on 10 November 1757. While both Stukeley and Peirson sometimes took care to ensure that they were accompanied by others, they also appear to have often met by themselves without others, both at home and in public.

Yet, as the Fontenelle tradition suggested, the edifying and the erotic might work in tandem and proximity. In practice, this proximity might confuse and vex. It is tempting to see

---

<sup>123</sup> It was common to import the idea of friendship into the ideal of marriage: Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relationship in Christian Thought*, pp. 196-197, 206-207. Jeremy Taylor was an influential proponent of friendship and sociability within marriage. On friendship in marriage, see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 192-198.

<sup>124</sup> Stephanie Garrett, 'Friendship and the Social Order', in Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli, eds., *The Dialectics of Friendship* (London, 1989), pp. 130-142; Cassandra A. Good, 'Friendly Relations: Situating Friendships between Men and Women in the Early American Republic, 1780-1830', *Gender and History* xxiv (2012), pp. 18-34, at 18.

Stukeley as a randy old man in search of an osculatory thrill that would bring back, briefly, the experience of youth. However, in the manuscript, Stukeley was attempting to show how the edifying and the erotic were not at cross purposes but rather complementary. If he was trying to persuade Mary Peirson that a salute was the plausible consummation of their friendship, he was also trying to persuade himself. He was flattering both himself and her by grounding the argument in cosmic considerations fitted to Christian standards on Pauline and Miltonian authority. It was important, therefore, that his attempt to expand the terrain of sexual expression was not confused with libertinism.

An older historiography tended to identify arguments for expanded sexual expression with reform and radicalism and with enlightened postures against established normative orthodoxies, in particular, religious ones. In such accounts, libertinism was the main vehicle of sexual liberation in the eighteenth century. But what was 'libertinism'? Though used in diverse ways as an analytic tool, the term, in reference to sexual attitudes, has often been identified (for the eighteenth century) with a varying combination of hedonism, freethinking, philosophical materialism, and amorality. As Brian Cowan put it, 'central to all varieties of erotic libertinism is a valorization of sexual activity itself, especially in a way which legitimizes sexual promiscuity.'<sup>125</sup> Libertinism was mostly for men and often misogynistic. Many factors, including the reworking of masculinity under Addisonian auspices, had obviated the conspicuous performance of libertinism associated with the courtly aristocracy of

---

<sup>125</sup> Brian Cowan, 'Reasonable Ecstasies: Shaftesbury and the Languages of Libertinism', *Journal of British Studies* xxxvii (1998), pp. 111-138, at 123. On this view of libertinism, Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, pp. 527-545; Roy Porter, 'Mixed Feelings: The Enlightenment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Paul-Gabriel Boucé, *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 3-5; James Grantham Turner, 'The Properties of Libertinism', in Robert Purks Maccubbin, ed., *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment* (1985; Cambridge, 1987), pp. 75-87; Lynn Hunt, 'Introduction', in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* (New York, 1993), pp. 33-34; Randolph Trumbach, 'Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England', in Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography*, pp. 253-254; Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1850* (New Haven and London, 1995), p. 28; Margaret C. Jacob, 'The Enlightenment Critique of Christianity', in Stewart Brown and Timothy Tackett, eds., *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Volume VII: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 274-278. For a critical elaboration of this point, see Thomas Foster, 'Reconsidering Libertines and Early Modern Heterosexuality: Sex and the American Founder Gouverneur Morris', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, xxii (2013), pp. 65-84.

the Restoration decades. However, in Stukeley's day, libertinism could still be deployed as an element of aristocratic male identity, albeit in conjunction with politeness.<sup>126</sup>

Faramerz Dabhoiwala's recent account of eighteenth-century sexual history is more complex than this older model. Without denying the libertine strand, he underscores how shifts of emphasis within *mainstream* ideas and institutions promoted an atmosphere that was more friendly to sexual expression, at least within the courtship/marriage matrix.<sup>127</sup> Stukeley was no libertine: as a cleric in the Church of England, he preached against contemporary dissoluteness and against freethinking. Indeed, his religious attitudes were not a hindrance to but rather a resource for his remarkable views on kissing. Stukeley was, in many ways, orthodox and definitely committed to the norms that were widely accepted as necessary for social order in his period. He was not aiming to liberate physical expression from moral restraint but rather attempting to understand how the kiss could be itself a moral expression. The framework for his 'discourse on the Salute' was, evidently, a highly moralized notion of male-female friendship which spurred him to renegotiate the boundaries of acceptable physical intimacy.

While resisting libertinism, Stukeley also was reworking existing traditions that did envision male-female friendship. From the Middle Ages, notions of courtly love had described the possibility and rewards of chaste relations between a man and a woman who were not married. Such ideas were very alive in the early Stuart courts and had not disappeared from the later ones. In *Transformations of Love*, Frances Harris has provided a vivid and extensive account of the spiritual friendship -- 'seraphick love' -- of John Evelyn and Margaret Blagge, both denizens of Charles II's court. Platonic ideas were central for Evelyn. They gave rise to the notion that love for a friend 'stripped of all sensual appetite, could become the pathway to apprehension of, and eventually mystic union with, divine love

---

<sup>126</sup> Jason M. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti: Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 34-37.

<sup>127</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London, 2012), pp. 79-140 (Ch. 3, 'The Rise of Sexual Freedom'). The role of Christian thinking in shaping sexual attitudes was also acknowledged in Porter, 'Enlightenment and Pleasure', pp. 1-4.

and beauty'. Such friendship offered intimations of the divine.<sup>128</sup> Harris makes clear that this friendship did not lack undercurrents of romantic love and suppressed sexual desire and therefore sexual tension.

By the later seventeenth century, as Helen Berry has discussed, such ideas had been denominated 'Platonic love' or 'Platonic friendship' and were disseminating far beyond courtly circles through periodicals and other forms of print.<sup>129</sup> Nonetheless, Emma Donoghue, studying male-female friendship in eighteenth-century literature, makes clear that a purely chaste friendship between a man and a woman was difficult for novelists and others to imagine. It was hard for them to represent male-female friendship as something other than a stage on the way to courtship and marriage or as a pretense for a romantic and sexual affair. As represented in novels, chaste friendship was always liable to the suspicion that it hid or repressed sexual ambitions and desires. Thus, male-female friendship was often a matter for worry: always haunted by a sexual undercurrent.<sup>130</sup>

Stukeley was aware of the concept of Platonic friendship, but he denied that *that* was what he was talking about. The fully realized friendship of which he wrote was, in his words, 'not merely visionary, extatic, Platonic, but compounded of mind, & sense. The body is not set aside, but becomes the sensible goal thereof ...'.<sup>131</sup> Thus, he was working against the grain of contemporary understandings of Platonic friendship. He did so by denying the polarity of the physical and the mental. One way in which Platonic relations were said to work was that an initial physical attraction to the beauty of the other leads beyond and away from the physical towards the mental, the intellectual, the spiritual. It did not quite work that way for Stukeley. Stukeley's friendship did begin with superficial physical and other

---

<sup>128</sup> Frances Harris, *Transformations of Love: The Friendship of John Evelyn and Margaret Godolphin* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 5, 80-81, 103.

<sup>129</sup> Helen Berry, 'Lawful Kisses? Sexual Ambiguity and Platonic Friendship in England c.1660-1720', in Harvey, ed., *The Kiss in History*, pp. 62-79, at 70-72.

<sup>130</sup> Emma Donoghue, 'Male-Female Friendship and English Fiction in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', University of Cambridge, Faculty of English, PhD dissertation, 1996. The point is reiterated in many treatments of male-female friendship, such as Victor Luftig, *Seeing Together: Friendship between the Sexes in English Writing, from Mill to Woolf* (Stanford, 1993), pp. 1-7.

<sup>131</sup> Stukeley, 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure', f. 8r.

attractions. It developed through intellectual and spiritual reciprocation. But it was consummated by a return to the physical, fully informed by the intellectual and the spiritual.

As already indicated, there are many truly Platonic dimensions to Stukeley's thinking in general, but Plato did not figure explicitly in 'On the Philosophy of Pleasure' except for Stukeley's dismissal of the 'Platonic', just quoted. Nonetheless, Stukeley may, in a way, have been returning to the sort of love that was actually explored in some of the Plato's Socratic dialogues. In *Lysis* and other dialogues, friendship was distinguished from sexual love, but not separated from it. In the context of the male-male friendships assumed in those dialogues, friendship and physical intimacy were not severed, and in this manuscript, Stukeley was trying to put them together again with reference to male-female friendship.<sup>132</sup>

'On the Philosophy of Pleasure' had no influence. There is no evidence that Mary Peirson was moved by its argument. The manuscript appears to have had few readers since the eighteenth century, and none who thought it worth a comment. However, it is significant in a few ways. The manuscript sheds light on an interesting episode in Stukeley's personal life. It also reveals another dimension of Stukeley's original if idiosyncratic thinking. It illustrates the syncretic quality of his mind, which, in this case, used ideas from antiquarian, religious and scientific domains to think through a matter of personal importance.

As for the broader picture, Stukeley's treatise does fit with an interpretation of the eighteenth century, synthesized by Faramerz Dabhoiwala, in which attitudes were shifting towards greater latitude in sexual or erotic expression. But Stukeley's achievement was not simple. He was trying to expand the bounds of erotic expressiveness, but he could only do so

---

<sup>132</sup> Pat Easterling, 'Friendship and the Greeks', in Porter and Tomaselli, eds., *The Dialectics of Friendship*, pp. 11-25, at 20-21; on homo- and hetero-eroticism and transcendence in Plato, Lane, *Plato's Progeny*, pp. 76-86; on the migration of Platonic love from homosocial to heterosocial contexts, see Jill Kraye, 'The transformation of Platonic love in the Italian Renaissance', in Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 76-85.

by limiting his argument to the philosophical few and recording the argument in a manuscript intended for the eyes of one other.

Stukeley was challenging contemporary orthodoxies about erotic contact between men and women. Implicit in Stukeley's treatise was an enthusiastic endorsement of male-female friendship outside of marriage. Implicit too was a high regard for the philosophical capacities of at least some women. His boldest move, however, was, in Karen Harvey's terms, attempting to redraw 'the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate kissing'. He abandoned the expectation that such a male-female friendship be physically chaste and attempted to incorporate a limited element of physicality into such a relationship; thus, he was legitimating erotic expression outside of marriage. This much is a striking and even radical move.

However, the limits of his endeavour are equally conspicuous. He was far from a libertine. He did not aim to liberate the body from moral constraint but rather sought to integrate the kiss into a highly moralized view of the creation and the human destiny within it. Moreover, he regarded this extension of erotic freedom as a privilege of the philosophical elite, a practice to be kept from public view. Thus, he sought to endorse this radical redefinition of the boundaries of physical expression without a challenge to the established order: Stukeley's philosophy of the kiss had no dangerous implications for the distribution of authority in society and would not contribute to any shift in public morals. Stukeley distanced himself from any ambition, characteristic of libertines, to change norms and to liberate.

From one angle, then, Stukeley's 'discourse on the salute' confirmed the power of the very orthodoxies that, in its way, it sought to challenge. From another, however, the 'discourse' is interesting, precisely, because, eschewing the resources of libertinism, it attempted nonetheless to re-imagine male-female relations. In his 'discourse', Stukeley adopted an unorthodox opinion, supported by an array of distinctive intellectual convictions and yet committed to the prevailing order in society.