

THE CULTURE OF SENSIBILITY



SEX AND SOCIETY IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
BRITAIN

G. J. BARKER-BENFIELD

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London



Contents

List of Illustrations xi
Acknowledgments xiii
Introduction xvii

1 Sensibility and the Nervous System 1
Wollstonecraft's Perspective: The Gendering of Sensibility
A New Psychoperceptual System
The Application of the New System: George Cheyne, 1671–1743
The Reformation of Manners Combined with Consumerism
Nerve Theory in Novels
Female Nerves and Sensibility's Ambiguity

2 The Reformation of Male Manners 37
The Public Manners of Men
The Campaign for the Reformation of Manners
Heart Religion
The Civilizing Process and British Commercial Capitalism
Changed Environments and the New World of Parents
and Children

3 The Question of Effeminacy 104
Shaftesbury
Mandeville
Hume and Smith
Henry MacKenzie
Politics and Boys' Literature: Thomas Day

4 Women and Eighteenth-Century Consumerism 154
Home Demand
Women Become Literate, Women Write Novels
Women's Self-Expression in Fashion

Fiction Records Women's Pleasure Seeking
 Ambivalence toward Women's Pursuit of Consumer Pleasures
 Taste

5 A Culture of Reform 215

Antiworldview

Women and Humanitarian Reform

Stalking Horses: The Campaign on Behalf of Victims
 of Male Barbarity

Sensibility's Goal: The Man of Feeling

Sensibility's Method: Conversion

The Cult of Sensibility

Methodism and the Culture of Sensibility

The Rights of Woman and the Reformation of Manners

**6 Women and Individualism: Inner and Outer Struggles
 over Sensibility 287**

The Sentimentalizing Process

Egotism and Opposition

The Reality of Heroism and Romance

Subversive Potentials in Women's Developing Minds:
 Marriage and Class

Still More Subversive Potentials: Sensibility and Sex

**7 Wollstonecraft and the Crisis over Sensibility in
 the 1790s 351**

Amazons at the Boundary

Wollstonecraft, Hays, and the Conflict over Sensibility

Wollstonecraft Becomes Amazon

"Man Was Made to Reason, Woman to Feel": Compromise

Notes 397

Index 505