

5. The Complete Female: Musical 'Accomplishment' in the Late Eighteenth Century

... music is universally admired, even by those who have the misfortune to have no taste for it. Besides, it is such an elegant accomplishment in itself! ... Accomplishments are such charming *resources* for young women Next to beauty, they are the best tickets of admission into society which they can produce.¹

This paper concerns what is meant by accomplishments. I argue that for females, the pervading definitions of elegance, adornment, decoration, ornament, and embellishment – but without substance, completion or perfection – are evidenced in pedagogical and decorum manuals, in moralistic essays in ladies' magazines, and in the imaginative literature of the period. Accordingly, several related issues must be addressed: (1) societal expectations governing the education and accomplishments of young women; (2) levels of musical accomplishment and social respectability; (3) domestic (salon) music and its contexts; and (4) the instruments permitted by social arbiters.

Although women *were* expected to have a working knowledge of arithmetic, geography, religion, literature and languages, botany/natural history, and a considerable understanding of household management, too much knowledge was a distinct disadvantage, for 'knowledge, like power beyond a certain degree, subjects those who possess it to many temptations and inconveniences.'² And John Gregory, in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughter* (1784), warns of the lack of femininity associated with learning:

If you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts and cultivated understanding.³

Yet more important in the female curriculum were needlework, penmanship, drawing, dancing and music. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady