Kant's Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime is often mined (especially, these days, for damning sexual and racial stereotypes) but rarely singled out for careful study. The essay was completed in 1763 when Kant, hardly forty and already a successful philosophic and scientific author, was enjoying his first years as an instructor at the University of Konigsberg where he was by all accounts a lively and popular teacher. Raised by his poor but honest father and a pious mother to whom he seems to have been especially devoted, Kant had recently returned from a series of tutoring posts that had introduced him to the ways of fashionable society. Indeed, to one cultivated mistress (using "mistress" in its old-fashioned sense), we owe the earliest extant portrait of Kant, set down in what might almost be called the bloom of youth. Konigsberg, then under Russian occupation, was itself enjoying a social and moral awakening from the dourer habits of Prussian pietism. Dashing Russian officers mingled socially with both local aristocrats and newly prosperous businessmen. Middle class women-formerly virtually sequestered-attained new social prominence. Something like salons appeared-for example, at the home of Frau Maria Charlotta Jacobi, with whom Kant may himself have been romantically linked. In these fluid times, Kant moved easily between the lowest and the highest circles. 1763 is also approximately the year in which Kant first read Rousseau's Emile—both the occasion for the well-known story about Kant's interrupted walk and the cause, according to Kant's famous confession, of a fundamental redirection of his thinking. "I am by natural inclination a
researcher...and I thought that this alone could constitute the honor of man; ...Rousseau set me upright. And I would consider myself more useless than the ordinary worker if everything I did did not contribute to establishing/securing the rights of man." "It is...fitting," he wrote in the same series of notes, "that a human being expend his life on teaching others how to live...by propagating (ziehen) Emile. Would that Rousseau showed how, on the basis of his book (Emile), there could spring forth schools." All of Kant's subsequent philosophy can be understood as an attempted answer to that implicit question. 3

Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime helps mark a first stage in that effort. In the previous year (1762), Kant had published a critique on the "false subtlety (Spitzfindigkeit) of the four syllogistic figures"-an essay whose purpose proves to be, in light of the later work, as much moral as abstractly scientific. 4 The operative word here is "subtlety"-a dry and lifeless digression, according to that work, from science's proper occupation. It is in part to illustrate this proper task that Kant writes, in Observations, less as a philosopher than an observer or Beobachter.

What exactly does Kant mean by Beobachter? On the one hand, Beobachtung (as in the observation of the heavens) is the term Kant used to characterize the fundamental astronomical insight of his own, pre-Rousseauian, and greatly ambitious Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens. (1:254, 255) And Beobachtung is also a term later defined rather precisely (in the Critique of Judgment) as "a kind of experience one pursues methodically" and which is capable of "prompting (Veranlassung) us to judge the intrinsic purposiveness of organized beings." (V:376) In the essay under consideration, on the other hand, Beobachtung is used almost apologetically-in opposition to philosophy and in apparent disregard of method and thoroughness. Among the rich field of peculiarities concerning human pain and pleasure, and which still hides rich sources for discovery, Kant "throws his glance" only upon a few places that seem especially to lend themselves to "harvesting." Kant, one could say, turns from stargazer to husbander of the peculiar
human genius.' What then is Kant's early answer to the question: how propagate *Emile*?

A clue is provided by the subject of Kant's observations: the "finer feelings" that are thoughtful and yet sensuous, excluding, on the one side, the crude pleasures unaccompanied by *any* concept of the pleasure felt by others (as when one loves a woman as one loves a thing), and on the other side, the still finer, solitary pleasures of a Kepler that escape sense entirely. (II: 208) This thoughtful, yet sensual, feeling is principally, says Kant, of a twofold kind (*zweifacher Art*): the feeling of the sublime and of the beautiful. And this involves, in the order that makes up the four sections of Kant's work, 1) distinct (non-human) objects of the feeling of beauty and sublimity, 2) attributes of beautiful and sublime in man in general, 3) the distinction between the sublime and beautiful in the relations of the sexes, and 4) the bearing of the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime on characteristics of nations.

Now the distinction between feminine beauty and masculine sublimity is one that Rousseau himself employs in his extraordinary suggestion, in *Emile*, that the moral degeneracy to which vain sciences have given rise might be ameliorated, if not cured, by a reordering of the relations of the sexes on the basis of their distinct, yet complementary, natural sentiments. Apropos of the fictional, yet ideal, courtship of Emile and Sophie, Rousseau writes: "this romance (i.e., *Roman* or "novel") ought to be the history of the species." (416) "We are given treatises on education consisting of useless...verbiage...and we are not told a word about the most important and difficult part of the whole education-the crisis that serves as a passage from childhood to man's estate. If I have been able to make [this work] useful in some respect, it is especially by having expanded ... upon this [crisis]." (415, 416)

This insight, preserved in Kant's life-long conviction that man as a species is essentially defined by the gap between his natural end civic puberty, registers with particular force in a work that has finer feeling as its topic and women (of a cultivated sort) as its special audience. This latter fact did not go unremarked by Kant's contemporaries, who noted that his work was as likely to be found in "the
dressing rooms of ladies" as in the "studies of the learned." But the particular strategy that Kant employs—above all, against a malicious effort on the part of certain educated men to obliterate what Kant calls the "charming [sexual] difference"—is harder to discern and will require a careful, and at times labored, reading.

We can skip lightly over Section One, which presents a brief review of the sublime and beautiful in art and nature. Generally, beauty arouses through motion and variety while sublimity astonishes. Beauty is associated with the shimmering and superficial; and sublimity with the deep or towering. Beauty charms (reizt); sublimity moves (riihrt). And yet finer feeling of the most "moving" (riihrend) sort presupposes their admixture. (221)§

Section Two, on the properties of the sublime and beautiful in human beings, illustrates this mutual dependence through a kind of portrait that is explicitly Hogarthian in inspiration; as in Hogarth's etchings, perfection is a median, delineated by progressive contrast on two sides. "In human nature," Kant says, "praiseworthy qualities are never found without degenerate varieties in infinitely descending shadings." (213) Beauty—or pleasure in immediate harmony with that of others—and sublimity—or mastery of inclination—are, so conceived, both mutually supporting and in tension.' Thus beauty without nobility is flaccid or trifling (ldppisch), while (terrifying) sublimity without "nature" is adventurous, and with less sublimity, grotesque (fratz). The sacrifice of passion to principle is noble; the channeling of lofty impulse to an unnatural end (as with errant knights), adventurous; the outright suppression of natural impulse (as with the monasteries that Kant calls living graves) grotesque. Whoever loves and believes in the adventurous is a visionary (Phantast); whoever inclines to the grotesque is a crank (Grillenfdinger). (214)

Kant thus presents us with two, dynamically related, ideal foci: if beauty without sublimity is threatened by flaccidity, sublimity without beauty misses its (natural) mark in a manner no less sterile.'
For virtue alone is truly noble, i.e., both sublime and moral in the highest sense. And yet, ethical qualities that are beautiful, such as sympathy and complaisance, "harmonize" with virtue by promoting the same end, and may thus be regarded as noble, as it were, by "adoption" (adoptirt). Sympathy is beautiful, inasmuch as it takes immediate pleasure in the well-being of others. And yet it also succumbs to "blind fascination (blinde Bezauberung)," as when one gives a beggar money already owed to others. A merely beautiful morality is thus both weak and blindly insufficient: one must not let oneself be overcome by sympathetic impulse. And yet resistance to impulse is not morally sublime, but merely grotesque-unless it too retains a link with nature and hence beauty. How, then, capture this dual requirement, according to which sublimity both does and does not divorce itself from nature? Kant's answer is a figure of "engraftment," whereby virtue-which must, as virtue, leave personal sympathy behind-connects with moral beauty at a higher, universal level.

"Virtue" must be "engrafted onto principles, such that the more universal they are, the more noble it becomes." Such principles are not speculative rules, but consciousness of a feeling (Gefühl) that lives (lebt) in every human breast and stretches itself much further than over the particular grounds of sympathy and complaisance. I believe that I hold it all together (fasse alles zusammen), if I say that it is the FEELING FOR THE BEAUTY AND THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN NATURE. The first is a ground of universal benevolence; the second of universal respect, and if this feeling attained the greatest perfection in someone with a human heart, this individual would still love and esteem himself, but only insofar as he is one of all those over whom his spread out and noble feeling extends itself. (217)

The relation between the beautiful and the sublime thus captures the dynamic of attraction and repulsion that constitutes the principle of worldhood, in the precise Kantian sense, throughout the Kantian corpus; and it anticipates the "intelligible world" as "king-
dom of ends," made famous in the later *Groundwork*. What is different, from the standpoint of Kant's later thought, is the prominence given here to human beauty (*in addition* to the human dignity later famously emphasized)—a beauty, however, that is divided between a *lower* version that the sublime must overcome and a *higher* one needed to sustain it.5

If we were (or could be) moved to place the love and esteem of all before our own self-love and self-esteem, we would be perfect. Perfection, for creatures with a human heart, lies not in abandoning self-love and self-esteem (as with Christian humility) but in loving and esteeming oneself no more than one loves and esteem mankind generally. Perfection, on these terms, is poised between noble renunciation of inclination and its limitless—indeed, universal—expansion. One is here reminded of the mysterious alchemy—at least partly sexual—that transforms the natural sentiment of pity in Rousseau's *Emile* into a rational idea of justice. "Only insofar as one subordinates 'one's own' inclination" to inclination "so extended," can our "good drives be proportionally applied" and bring about the noble decency (*Anstand*) that is the "beauty of virtue." In such a perfect moral world, self-love would precisely counter sacrifice for others, and mutual attraction offset mutual resistance.

But this delineation of moral perfection must confront the human predicament, and our ensuing weakness as a species.6 To the extent that virtue rises to a height from which the whole can be more adequately seen, it leaves the heat of sympathy behind and so loses force against the cruder drive of selfishness. Hence the need for "supplements" to virtue, the "helping drives (Trieben) of sympathy and complaisance (*Gefälligkeit*), which move some to good actions even without principles, and give others, with principles greater thrust (*Stop*) and stronger impulse (*Antrieb*)." And hence, too, the need for honor and shame, which, though they rest on a delusion as to the seat of worth, usefully offset base selfishness and sensuality.

These finer feelings that determine moral character correspond in turn with coarser traits that dictate human temperament. For example, the same melancholy traits that depress errant and exces-
sive sensation, "naturally unite" with "a deep feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature," and a "firm determination" to refer all actions to that feeling. A person of this type disdains false appearance and loves his wife "less for her charms than out of principle" (i.e., the love and respect to which her status as his wife entitles her). (220) Unless the melancholic's reason is aufgeheiterten or "brightened," on the other hand, his thought easily becomes adventurous, fanatical, grotesque and cranky-inspired, in other words, without a living link to nature. The sanguine person, in whom the feeling of the beautiful predominates, is gay, lively, amusing and candid; but at the same time unprincipled and given to respond to momentary impression. (222) The sanguine and melancholic types are in some ways, then, ideal compensatory companions—something that will become especially clear in Kant's later treatment of the sexes. Still, less pleasing aspects of the sanguine type (e.g., fickleness) leave its attractiveness to the melancholy doubtful.

The choleric person is readily dominated by the feeling for honor, which Kant links both with the splendidly sublime and the sublime's mere gloss (Schimmer). In his desire to dazzle (schimmer), the choleric person is, in a way, all surface. Hence, the particular association of this type with Frazier, whose superficial distortions contrast with the "breakthroughs" from depth to surface of the sublimely splendid. Invulnerable to the finer enchantments of love, such a person "knows how to take up all sorts of standpoint," and so long as "one does not look" with "fine eyes" at "the source from which his action springs," is almost as useful as the virtuous. The choleric might indeed serve as a universal spectator and model observer (223), did he not lack the finer feeling that allows one to "spy out" what is most deeply hidden in the hearts of others. (225)

All the more striking, then, Kant's admission at the end of Section Two of his own limitations as a spectator. "When I alternate between the noble and the weak sides of man, I rebuke myself," he says, "for being unable to take that standpoint from which these [grotesque] contrasts would present the great portrait of the whole of human nature in a moving shape." Kant himself is caught between the sublimity of virtue and the beauty of fellow feeling—between
despising the human weakness he embraces, and embracing the human weakness he despises. Still, he throws a "weak glance at human nature as a whole, in which the few men of principle are supplemented by the more numerous goodhearted, and more numerous still self-interested, and in which love of honor-distributed to all men's hearts-gives a beauty to the whole whose charm verges on the admirable." For it "easily happens" that one errs in one's principles-the harm increasing with the universality of the principle and the steadfastness (Standhaftigkeit) of the adherent. (227) The key to Kant's (dimmed) portrait of the beauty and dignity of human nature proves to be, strangely enough, virtue's susceptibility to waywardness or error. Principle, one might readily conclude, is, like some errant knight, intrinsically adventurous.

With the problem of errant principle left unresolved, Kant turns in Section Three to beauty and sublimity in the relations of the sexes. Section three is riven by a central ambiguity concerning the relation between sexual impulse and all finer feeling between the sexes. On the one hand, we are told that sexual impulse is the source of such finer feeling. On the other, we are told that finer feeling and sexual impulse mustn't come "too near" each other. This irresolution troubles the otherwise beguiling tone of the section-which seems to aim especially at lady readers. Throughout, the theme of spectatorship (Kant at one point cites the Spectator) is very much in play: men and women serve as objects-and, as we later learn, the principle objects-of each other's feelings for the sublime and the beautiful, respectively. Whether, however, these feelings reflect the truth or are rooted in illusion and deceit are matters difficult to fathom. The relation between the sexes is grounded in secrecy and veils, terms Kant uses half a dozen times; and yet that relation at its best requires that each sex esteem the other at his or her true value. The extraordinary and barely veiled candor with which Kant in these pages sketches his own erotic ideal, and in so doing reveals his own deepest and most intimate feelings, is balanced by the ironic suggestion that the woman to whom his (frustrated) longings are addressed possesses a refinement that overleaps the possibility of
physical fulfillment, and in so doing destroys what Kant calls nature's "great intention." The woman in whom beauty and dignity most perfectly unite, and who might, as such, most perfectly evoke a feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature, is in all likelihood herself, as Kant ultimately hints, an unnatural delusion. Kant's professed intention—to judge of feelings that relate, but not "too closely," to the sexual inclination—is beset by the dual worries of what he calls "sensual illusion" (or the permanent impression on the developing sexual impulse of young boys of their mother's shape), and of an illusion (his own amorous ideal) that is not sensual enough.

And now some details: According to Kant, "all instruction and education," and all "efforts at ethical perfection," must have "before its eyes" "the charming [sexual] difference (reizende Unterschied)—a difference that nature wished to strike (treffen) between two human species/sexes (zwei Menschengattungen). Beyond their physical beauty and the "secret" magic force (geineine Zauberkraft) by which they fascinate (bezauberen) male judgment (241), women display distinctive marks of heart or character; thus they are playful where men are diligent, sensitive where men are thoughtful, sympathetic where men are (or might be) principled. And although too easily offended (229), women's eagerness to please returns the honor they demand, thus partly compensating for their vanity. (232)

Women have "as much understanding" as men; but woman's mind is beautiful where man's is deep. What women know they know effortlessly, both because the appearance of effort would destroy their beauty (and hence their advantage) and because what they know can be known no other way. "The content of women's great science is humankind, and among humanity, men. Her worldly wisdom is not to reason (Vernunfteln) but to sense (Empfinden)." (230)

The proper sort of female education—one that gives women an opportunity to cultivate (ausbilden) their beautiful nature—will thus "broaden their total (gesammtes) moral feeling" not by dry rule (as per the malicious stratagem of certain cowardly and ignoble men), but [rather] by the exercise of judgment and example drawn from "other times in order to examine the influence [of women] on
world affairs, the various relations in which woman has stood to the masculine in other ages or foreign lands, the character of both insofar as it can be influenced by these...the changing tastes in amusements,...these [says Kant], comprise women's whole history and geography." And this from a man just introducing geography to Germany as an academic subject for men. Such a study would map the world only with a view to painting (schildern) the "different characters of peoples...along with differences of taste and ethical feeling, especially in regard to the effect these have on the relations of the sexes," and this "with a few easy illustrations on differences of climate, their freedom or their slavery," but without much attention to "particular subdivisions of these lands, their industry, power or rulers." Such an education would also include feeling for all that, connected as it is with "moral impulse," "refines or elevates" women's taste. The ideal education of women is, in short, much like Kant's own *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*—a feminine complement, so to speak, to Kant's new academic course on physical (and political) geography for men.²⁰

Such female education, Kant admits, is very rare, demanding as it does a man (like Kant himself?) with "talent, experience and a heart full of feeling." (231) And yet, Kant immediately adds, most women cultivate themselves quite well, thanks to a sense of shame that (almost) substitutes.

Shame (Schamhaftigkeit) is a secret (Geheimniss) of nature to set limits to an inclination that is very untractable.... It is therefore very necessary as a supplement to principles; for there is no case where inclination, turning sophist, more easily devises complaisant principles than here. But shame equally serves to draw a curtain full of secrets even before the most seemly and necessary ends of nature, in order that common acquaintance with it not occasion disgust or the least indifference in regard to the final intention of a drive on which the finest and liveliest inclinations of human nature are engrafted.

(234)

Where sexual impulse is concerned, human nature must, so to
speak, avert its eyes from what it aims at.

That Kant speaks here once again of "engraftment" itself provides matter for reflection, implying as it does that as virtue is to principle (on which virtue, as we recall, must be "engrafted") so the "finest and liveliest" inclinations of human nature are to sex. This striking and disturbing parallel makes sexual impulse on the one hand, and a "feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature" on the other, the twin roots of aesthetic and moral experience, respectively—or, alternatively, the one vital stem through which both are joined. No phrasing could more forcefully bring home the vexed relation of the moral and aesthetic for Kant at this time. 21

Everything in female beauty that charms reduces, it would seem, to sexual attraction.

This complete fascination (Bezauberung) is at bottom (Gründe) spread (verbreitet) over the sexual drive. Nature pursues her great intention, and all refinements that join together (hinzugestellen), let them seem to stand as far from it as they will, are only trimmings or veils [in a pejorative sense] (Verbrümerungen), and, in the end, borrow their charm from that very source. (235)

All the more reason, then, not to disdain those whose taste isn't fine, and hence most surely execute nature's "great intention" (Absicht; also Ordnung). And yet something in Kant resists his own, sexualized reduction.

Beauty (the specific moral quality of women) divides itself between sublimity and charm, which, on second telling, either breaks free of sexual impulse entirely or brings sexual impulse and moral expression into immediate alignment. (Charm, in other words, both is and isn't reducible to the sexual.) Kant's preferred version of beauty, on the other hand (beauty that lets sublimity "stick out" without indecent defeminization) is manifestly a mixture of beauty and dignity in human nature, and is, to this extent, a perfected "portrait" (as in abmalen) of the human race in miniature. Such a woman lets the shimmer (Schimmer) of a "beautiful understanding" play forth (hervorspielen) and, through modest
(bescheiden) glances and with noble decency (Anstand), "seizes hold" of a man's inclination and esteem, arousing feeling on his part that is tender, respectful and constant. (236)

Poised between attraction and repulsion, enjoyment and renunciation, the tender and respectful constancy of such a love would transcend blind fascination, while confining loftiness within the orbit of the natural. Principle would gain greater thrust and impulse without succumbing to the blinding and disabling limitations of personal sympathy.

Here, however, Kant stops cold. Not wishing to pursue his analysis further, since in such matters "authors always seem to paint (malen) their own inclination," Kant immediately turns to the fact that "many women" like to put on the pale color of sublimity, preferring, out of vanity, to move men rather than to charm them. In betraying his preference, Kant also confesses, in almost the same breath, his inability to trust the image that attracts him.

Thus the subject to which Kant's observations "naturally lead (238)-the difficulty of steering between coarseness of taste, that goes out to all women, and over-refinement, that "actually goes out to none"-is personally, as well as generally, pertinent. In the case of over refinement, Kant says, one occupies oneself with an object that enamored inclination creates in thought, and decorates with all the noble and beautiful properties that nature seldom unites in one human being, and still more seldom brings to him who can value them and would perhaps be worthy of such a possession. (239)

Kant would therefore advise noble souls to "refine feeling" to the utmost so far as it concerns themselves, but to "maintain their taste in its simplicity" insofar as it concerns "what they ...expect from others"-"if only," as he tellingly, and almost plaintively adds, he "saw how this were possible to achieve." (239)²

Thus, in the end, Kant's expectations with regard to the relations of the sexes remain modest-not least, it seems, in what concerns him personally. Sexual inclination might "especially ennoble" the male
sex if women's "moral qualities" could be more "seasonably" developed. She would then better recognize men's noble qualities, and in so doing reveal her own sublimity, for it is in treasuring men's noble qualities (despite the "grotesqueness" of their faces) that the sublimity of woman's soul uniquely shows itself. (241; 94) (Here, for once, women can't fake it.) Such a woman (developed "seasonably" with the help of Kant or someone like him) would see the noble in the grotesque and to this extent effortlessly attain the standpoint that Kant, by his own admission, lacks. Such a woman (expert in the human science [or anthropology] that, according to Kant, is woman's special province) would not only look beyond the physical defects of a man (like Kant?) to the noble qualities that shine through, but herself supplement and complete them. Above all, such a woman would disdain the lappisch, aping men to which womankind is otherwise so vulnerable. (241) As we are, however, reminded, "nature seldom unites all noble and beautiful qualities in one human being," and "even more seldom brings to him who would be worthy of them."

In any case, given time, the vexed relation of moral feeling and sexual impulse in some fashion resolves itself. Faced with the "terrible" fading of their own beauty, older women can-so long as they relinquish any claim to sexual attractiveness-be both more attractive than before (albeit differently) and finer than men of the same age, especially if they take up reading. (239, 240; 92, 93) Old women and men who remain sexualized, on the other hand, are disgusting and laughable, and, as such, at furthest remove from female beauty and male sublimity, respectively.

Although man and wife "ought to constitute" a living whole, given time all "refinements of sensibility" degenerate, so that "the entire art" consists in maintaining sufficient remainders that "indifference and satiety" do not cancel the whole value of a pleasure that alone makes marriage worth entering. (242, 243) Shame, finally, disintegrates.

Section Three thus reads something like a cross between a personals ad, and a declaration of perpetual bachelorhood. The woman who, in the end, most fully evokes the feeling for the beauty
and dignity of human nature looks less like a man's wife than like his (aging) mother. And yet it is precisely mothers, as we earlier learned, who decisively stamp men's sexual inclination at its crudest.

Section Four, on "national characters, in so far as they depend upon the distinct feeling of the sublime and beautiful," projects upon world history the charming sexual difference (and its attendant complications). Peoples of the non-European continents are distinguished from their European counterparts by two pertinent qualities: a lack of feeling for the morally beautiful, and the subjugation of their women." A single exception among the American savages is more than canceled by the labor with which their women are burdened. (255) Though feeling for the sublime flourishes in Asia and America

[t]he European alone has found the secret (Geheimnis) of decorating (schmücken) the sensual charm of a powerful inclination with so many flowers and of interweaving (durchflechen) it with so much morality that he has not only greatly elevated its agreeableness but also made it very respectable (anständig). (254)

Only Europe, in short, which mixes sublimity with beauty, is fully expressive of and open to a feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature.

The inhabitant of the Orient, who "has no concept of the morally beautiful which can be united with [the sexual] impulse," loses the value of his enjoyment, and delights in mere "grotesqueries" (Fratzen). And in black Africa, women are enslaved by men so abjectly that they "hardly dare look others in the eye." 

Kant accompanies these now notorious remarks with an anecdote, whose unpleasant humor masks a deeper irony that modern readers often miss:

Father Labat reports that a Black carpenter, reproached for haughty treatment of his wives, replied: You whites are true fools (Narren), for first you concede your wives so much, and
then you complain when they make you crazy in the head. And indeed, there might be something in this deserving of reflection (Überlegung) [except that, in short] this fellow (Kerl) was entirely black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid (dumm). (254, 255; 113)

It is not only that the behavior of the carpenter—who does not shrink from telling a white man to his face that all white men are fools—belyes the characterization of black men that immediately precedes it. More disturbing is the fact that the truth of his remark would make white men foolish rather than noble, transforming the masculine sublime into its (desexualized) extreme, and on the very ground—respect for women—that underlies Europe's vaunted superiority of feeling. The truth of his remark, in other words—a truth gainsaid, by Kant's own admission, only by the (superficial) fact that he is black—would jeopardize the very possibility of feeling for the sublime and beautiful (as per Kant's title), and with it moral consciousness itself. The opening provided by a gratuitous (and racist) joke briefly exposes the tenuousness of Kant's solution to the problem of combining the sublime and beautiful without collapsing them.

As for the varied finer tastes of Europe, Germany emerges from Kant's discussion as a nation of peculiarly mixed status: the German, who has a special feeling for the sublime and beautiful "in combination," "happily" avoids the defects of excess strength on either side. (243, 244) Where overheated and trifling Frenchmen esteem women too little, and cold, under-socialized Englishmen esteem women excessively, the German's cool and methodical approach to love lets him occupy his head with reflection on human appearances. French women could have a "more powerful influence" in arousing their men to noble deeds than anywhere else in the world, if only, as Kant puts it, "the lilies would spin" (247)—a phrase that calls to mind the interweaving of morality and sex with which the superiority of Europe was earlier linked. Germans, on the other hand, seems to have found an alternate route to decency (Anstand). Far more than other nationalities, the German, even in matters of love, "asks
himself HOW PEOPLE MIGHT JUDGE HIM. And [if there is room for improvement in his character], it is owing to a preoccupation with the opinion of others that detracts from his originality."

(248)

Where Frenchmen need more morally developed women if they are ever to improve, the sexually more matter of fact Germans need only develop their aptitude for spectatorship, above all, through elimination of linguistic awkwardness and stiffness that impedes the beautiful simplicity of their "way of writing (Schreibart)."

(249)

It is not difficult to see Kant's own essay, long praised as an early masterpiece of modern German style, and certainly the breeziest and most elegant work he ever published, as a first step in that direction.

As for the originality associated with the human genius (in which Germans have been heretofore deficient), a glance at history, according to Kant, reveals a taste for the sublime and beautiful arising in republican Greece and Rome, degenerating into splendor and then false shimmer under the Caesars, only to expire in Gothic adventurousness, grotesquerie (Fratzen), and idleness. More recently, however, the human genius has happily raised itself anew "through a kind of palingenesis, so that we now see bloom forth. (aufblühen) right (richtigen) taste of the beautiful and noble, in the arts as much as the sciences and with regard to morals (Sitten)."

(256) "Nothing is more to be wished for," Kant concludes,

than [that the false shimmer, that so easily deceives, should not remove us unremarked (unvermerkt) from noble simplicity; and especially,] that the still undiscovered secret of education should be torn (entrissen) from the old illusions, so as to lift up ethical (sittliche) feeling at an early time to an active sensation (Empfindung) in the breast of every young world citizen,-lest all fineness (Feinigkeit) amount to nothing more than a "volatile and idle (miissige) pleasure" of judging (with more or less taste [Geschmacke]) what goes on outside us (was ausser
Without an answer to that question, the genius of the species remains fatally at risk. And yet, how remove the secret of education from the "old illusions" without untangling the sexual/moral graft on which the human genius vitally depends? How tear away the secret without tearing off the veil?

*Observations* was composed when Kant, himself just forty, was engaged in such a "whirl of social distraction"-he was, evidently, often out till around midnight-that Hamann wondered if Kant would ever complete any of the books he carried around in his head.3 These were the years in which Kant introduced the academic study of geography to Germany, and in which he was asked by students (but declined) to teach a course on German language and eloquence. It was also a time, if we read between the lines, in which Kant himself seems to have most seriously contemplated marriage, or at the very least, wrote most positively and hopefully, albeit with characteristic coolness and method, about women in particular and social intercourse between the sexes in general as a basis for moral and aesthetic culture.37 The solution of the problem of human education hinges, for Kant, on resolving the relation between a lower and a higher female beauty.

Handwritten "Remarks," set down in his own copy of the *Observations in* the years immediately following its publication mark the rapid souring of Kant's flirtation with a feminine embodiment of wisdom to complement and complete his own moral and intellectual striving. In its place emerges a new conception of world-wisdom that incorporates into the male academy the anthropology that he earlier took to be women's special science.38 Women's cleverness is now a trap; and dogmatic metaphysics like the wig and greasepaint that beguiles the eager groom until his rude awakening after the wedding. (XX 134; cf. Montaigne, *Essais* 2:2; 12:138) Hereafter, thanks to the self-generated ideas of a reason purified of everything sensuous, principles become self-guiding. When his *Critique of Judgment* finally appears, Sophie has gone missing.
It would be going too far to call *Observations* a failed romance. Still, Kant's little essay offers important clues as to what distinguishes his thought, throughout his life, from a romanticism he in many ways anticipates. Where the Romantics yearn (hopelessly) for a recovery of natural wholeness (via the imagination), Kant pegs human wholeness on a moral integrity inseparable from man's natural disjuncture. The beauty of nature, for Kant, is always less than the sublimity of virtue-even, and perhaps especially, where he comes closest (as in the present work) to placing them on equal footing. "Purposiveness without purpose"-his later formula for beauty-is prefigured in Kant's sticking point in *Observations*: how find "purposive" a beauty that either fails to lift men up or succeeds so well as to threaten nature's great intention? Either way, women's beauty courts sublimity only by verging on the monstrous.

Kant translates the ancient conception of the beautiful/noble (*kalon*) into a difference between happiness and virtue on the one hand, beauty and sublimity on the other-between a moral gap that should be closed, in other words, and a natural gap that can't be. Kant's personal and philosophic resignation to our cleavage as a species-a cleavage that is also and primarily sexual (as in Geschlecht)-marks Kant's distance both from the classicism that proceeds him and the romanticism that follows.

I do not mean to reduce Kant's thought to the contingencies of his biography (though the necessity of such contingency is for Kant throughout his life, as I have argued elsewhere, a crucial issue). My aim is rather to help uncover the concerns that push him towards romanticism and, and the same time, prevent his yielding to it. Romanticism has been characterized as "a longing to believe." Applied to sexual love, this tendency displays itself as a capacity, or wish, to deify what one also regards as merely animal. Kant, in contrast, will not be beguiled. *Observations* catches Kant still open to the possibility of finding a woman he can respect without ceasing to desire, and of thus uniting a lower with a higher female beauty. Yet, even here, he is all but resigned to the impotence of such a wish-an impotence that he will later associate especially with novels. Rousseau claimed both that the history of our species ought to
be a novel, and that it isn't one and never will be. To this the philosopher/poet Novalis, who claimed his own Sophie, famously replied: "We live in a colossal...novel (Roman)." Kant draws the line, against Rousseau's romantic followers, by heightening Rousseau's political and moral hopes without abandoning his sexual pessimism.

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NOTES
1. But see Willi Goetschel, *Constituting Critique: Kant's Writing as Critical Praxis*, tr. Eric Schwab (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 58-78. This neglect is all the stranger, given the popularity of the work, which went through seven printings in Kant's lifetime. (I am indebted to John Zammito for drawing my attention to this fact.)
3. For a fuller consideration, see Shell, *Kant as Educator*, forthcoming.
4. References to Kant are to the volume and page number of the standard German edition. Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited and published by the Koniglich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1900-) See 1:215.
5. See also *Vorlesungen fiber Anthropologie* [Herder]: "The condition of observation is, for everyone, society." (XVII.1, 13)
8. Cf. Edmund Burke, for whom beauty and sublimity cannot combine without diluting beauty. (See *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, sections 17, 24.)
the *Observations*.

9. Beauty needs sublimity to move; sublimity without beauty "soon tires." Kant's later formulations, by way of contrast, stress the *tirelessness* (or constancy) of the sublime, able, like no other feeling, to "constantly rise." See, for example, *Critique of Judgment V* 272, 273; tr. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 133. In this early essay, but not later, beauty (especially in women) plays a necessary role in maintaining the exalted feeling that Kant associates throughout with virtue proper.

10. To present that sketch in greater detail, Kant specifies: *sublime* defense of the rights of self, friends and fatherland, *adventurous* crusades, *grotesque* duels; *noble* melancholy and separation from the world; *adventurous* hermits, *grotesque* monasteries; *sublime* subduing of passion by principle, *grotesque* castigation, etc. *Sublime* mathematical treatment of infinity and metaphysical treatment of providence, etc.; *grotesque* empty subtlety. *Noble* Vergil and Klopstock, *adventurous* Homer and Milton, *grotesque* French fairy tales. (215) Alternatively, the grotesque is to the splendidly sublime as the adventurous is to the noble. (224)

11. "Lap pisch," according to Grimm and Grimm, connotes both childish silliness and flaccidity or lack of power (as in "lappische glieder").

12. Judgment concerning this is, as Kant says, "Fein and verwickelt." (215)

13. "Adoptio," which in Latin means "adoption into a family" (especially of a person in *patria postestas*), can also refer to engraftment in a botanical sense.

14. Cf. Rousseau, *Emile* (253): "To prevent pity from degenerating into a weakness, it must...be generalized and extended to the whole of mankind. Then one yields to it only insofar as it accords with justice."


17. The phlegmatic temperament, which corresponds to an absence of finer feeling, is explicitly omitted (though it reappears in Section Four as a quality especially associated with the Dutch). Kant's later appraisal of the phlegmatic temperament (which varies inversely with his judgment of "enthusiasm") ranges from cool approval in the *Critique of Judgment* (1792) to disavowal in the *Anthropology* (1798).

18. The pejorative connotations of "*Vernunfteln*" should be noted.

19. On the implied parity of intellect and feeling, see also (225), where Kant calls feeling (*Empfindung*) the "motive spring" of understanding.

20. Ludwig Borowski, Kant's biographer and former student, notes the essay's reception, not only in "the study rooms of the learned," but also "auf den Toiletten der Damen." L. Borowski, et. al., 33. (Cf. Goetschel, *Constituting Critique*, 67-8.) Although Kant maintains throughout the essay a literary distinction between us (i.e., men) and them (i.e., women), he focuses on what women are particularly enjoined to study-namely, the impression they make on men. See also his emphasis on the "graceful" (*anmuthig*) as well as "instructive" character of the field he has in view (207).

21. Cf. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intention* (1784), in which Kant calls "everything good" (*alles Cute*) that is not "engrafted" upon a morally good *Gesinnung* "mere empty appearance (*lauter Schein*) and shimmering misery (*schimmerendes Elend*)." (VIII:26) The figure of engraftment, which suggests an artful break in natural processes that is nonetheless consistent with life, contrasts neatly with natural growth or efflorescence-Herder's preferred metaphor for human culture.

22. As he goes on to say, among the features that finer taste takes note of, what is "unmoral" in the "expression" of a woman's features makes for "prettiness," while what is "moral" (i.e., speaks to the heart or says something) pertains either to the feeling of the beautiful or that of the sublime. She in whom the agreeableness "decent" or "proper" (*geziemen*) to woman "lets the moral expression of the sublime stick out (*hervorstechen*)" is "BEAUTIFUL according to
the authentic understanding." While she "in whose features, in as much as the moral composition makes itself known (kennbar) in them, announce qualities of beauty, is AGREEABLE, and, if so to the highest degree, CHARMING." On the peculiar role of women in Kant's later treatment of beauty and charm in the Critical of Judgment, see Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chapter eight.

23. As Kant earlier notes, the melancholy/noble type is "fascinated" by sublimity rather than the deceptive charms of beauty. (220)

24. Cf. "Announcement of the Program of [Kant's] Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765-1766." Kant there describes the (Rousseauian) ideals of natural and noble simplicity as the two models of human perfection. (II: 311, 312)

25. The principle obstacle to female education—and with it, the moral improvement of mankind as a whole-can thus be understood to be the dry pedantry of the "schools," against which Kant's efforts at this time are largely directed. On the historical context of those efforts, see G. Felicitas Munzel, "Menschenfreundschaft: Friendship and Pedagogy in Kant," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1998-9), 247-259.

26. On Kant's own physical deformity, see, for example, Reinhold Jachmann, in Borowski, et. al., 184-6.

27. As Kant puts it, echoing Rousseau, the married pair "ought to constitute, as it were, a single moral person enlivened and governed through the man's understanding and the woman's taste." (242)

28. What Kant here calls the "schreckliche Epoche" of feminine old age calls to mind the "complete loneliness" earlier said to exemplify both terror and noble awe (Grause). The prospect of a terrifying solitude (Eindde) in which he is completely cut off from all community with creation (and in which time, and hence consciousness, ceases) teaches one Carazan to esteem mankind. (209n, 210n) The terrifying prospect of solitude that aging women especially face (and exemplify) can be offset by the attractiveness of their benevo-
lent (and wholly desexualized) care for and contentment with the pleasures experienced by those around them. (240) Carazan's dream can be said to offer a "masculine" version of this lesson—much like that which Kant claims to have learned from Rousseau.

29. And thus, as he adds, "replace the graces with the muses." No small incentive for university studies (among the less theoretically inclined) is acquiring the ability to make one's future wife a pleasant life-companion.

30. Cf. 233: "[N]othing is so set against (entgegengesetzt ist) the beautiful as disgust, and nothing sinks more deeply below the sublime than the laughable. Thus for a man no insult is more felt than being called a fool (Nan-) and for a woman than being called disgusting (ekelhaft)." The very emblem of Platonic "mysticism" is here identified with a repulsive sexualizing of old (and hence sterile?) women: to such a mystic, Kant says, Graces appear in the wrinkles of a Muse, "and [one's] soul seems to hover upon [one's] lips when [one kisses] her withered mouth." (240) On the "disgusting" character of old women's faces, see also Reflexion 1067, XV:473.

31. The latter claim is historically associated with Montesquieu, whom Kant mentions in passing. (247; 103)

32. Cf. the Kerle who were too "stupid" to be fascinated by Simonides's song, 241.

33. That the white man is a celibate makes him both less and more susceptible to the carpenter's reproof; white men, evidently, can avoid being made fools of only by giving up sexual love entirely. On priests as "monstrous bastardizations" of Europe's spiritual and worldly adventurousness, see 255.

34. Cf. the reference, in Section Four's title, to the "distinct feeling of the beautiful and sublime" as an element of national character.

35. On the healthy "stomach" of Germans and Englishmen in matters of love see 250.


37. This of course is the explicit theme of Emile; a more negative and pessimistic elaboration of the same theme takes up much of the
Bemerkungen.

38. The main parts of Kant's later lecture courses on anthropology are anticipated in the sectional divisions of the Observations.

39. It is no accident that Rousseau himself explicitly abandons, in Emile, a first version of Sophie, who "unnaturally" and hence unhappily combines beautiful femininity with sublimity of soul. The combination of masculine passion and feminine desire proves fatal: the first Sophie dies from lack of relief for her own imaginatively heightened sexual longings.