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**Resolution-making in *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765*****and Boswell’s *London Journal***

**‘Resolution’ is a term which denotes “an act of resolving or determining;” “a fixed or positive intention” (“resolution *n.1*”) which has been resolved upon with “firmness or steadfastness of purpose” (“resolution *n.1*”). Resolutions to do better became “part of the New Year culture around the beginning of the eighteenth century” (Steel, online). But, resolutions “soon became very much about self-improvement in general” (Steel, online) and diversified into everyday life. Eighteenth-century “good manners” “proclaim their possessor’s self-control” (Spacks 12), with which “fixed” (“resolution *n.1*”) resolutions for self-improvement can be made. However, in** *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765* **and Boswell’s *London Journal,* frequently made resolutions for self-improvement, no matter how fixed, are subsequently broken. I will focus predominantly on resolutions against sleeping with** “whores” (Boswell 49) for Boswell, and getting “DRUNK” (Vaisey 24) for Turner. This essay will apply Charles Taylor’s definitions of ‘self’ and ‘identity’, as a “fundamental orientation” towards the ‘good’ (29), to both diaries as a framework to investigate their retrospective self-narration; and, consequently, how evidence is provided to critique these definitions as limited. The importance of self-image for Boswell and Turner – of being seen to uphold eighteenth-century “good manners” (Spacks 12) - suggests it is wrongly discounted by Taylor: Boswell and Turner derive their senses of self, how each relates to himself, from their ability to uphold the standards of their self-images. I aim to explore the inconsistencies between their high ideals and low habits in the light of Freud’s topography of the id-ego-superego, and how their self-narration of this conflict is adapted by the physical process of writing; though Boswell’s *London Journal* is more specifically aimed at an audience. As a result, this essay will argue that, for both, resolution-making, by covering up base impulses which deviate from eighteenth-century “good manners” (Spacks 12), serves as a means to reorient Boswell and Turner towards their ideal self-images. For both, their enduring want of self-improvement, resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle of remaking resolutions, comes from a fundamental aim to appear in a good light to those around them; as well as on the pages of their diaries.

Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* defines the term ‘self’ as a being “of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity” (Taylor 32) which “plays the role or orienting us, of providing the frame within which things have meaning for us” (Taylor 30). To have found one’s “fundamental orientation” (Taylor 29) is to “know where one stands, what one wants to answer” (29) to the question ‘who am I?’ Taylor posits:

To lose this orientation, or not to have found it, is not to know who one is. And this orientation, once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity (29).

An identity – “defined by the way things have significance” (34) for a person - is something that one “ought to be true to” but “can fail to uphold” (30) in a process of always “changing and *becoming”* (Taylor 46-47). Taylor gives our *becoming* a direction: we have to be “rightly placed in relation to the ‘good’” (44) and work towards a “strong commitment to a certain ideal of rationality and benevolence” (31). It follows that this aspiration to our own definition of the ‘good’ may not be obtrusive in our lives if we are satisfied with where and who we are. Both Boswell and Turner have a “strong commitment to a certain ideal of rationality and benevolence” (Taylor 31); they are oriented towards eighteenth-century “good manners” (Spacks 12) which outline the possessor’s “self-control” (12). I suggest, within these categories exists Boswell’s “model of the retrained, noble, ‘manly’ aristocrat” that he wants to establish as a “stable and seamless” (Weed 215) self; and Turner’s less self-conscious model of “health” (Vaisey 26), “proper regimen” (26), and consistency with “religion [and] morality” (26). However, by exploring resolution-making in both diaries – in which their aspirations are particularly obtrusive - this essay will demonstrate that Taylor’s definition is limited without an acknowledgement of the importance of self-image. Taylor argues that in the way self-image is conceived by Freud’s ego, or self, “the importance of image bears no connection to identity” (Taylor 33) because it is not essential that the ego orients “itself in a space of questions about the good” (Taylor 33). However, the fact the ego consists of “those functions which have to do with the individual’s relation to his environment” (Kay & Kay 195), implies the contrary.

The ego must integrate the conflicting demands of the id (“the subjective reality of the mind”), the superego (“the moral arm of personality” which “represents the ideal rather than the real” and which “strives for perfection rather than pleasure”), and the external world (Kay & Kay 195).

As mediator, it therefore follows that the ego serves to decide our fundamental orientation: creating an ideal based on “the traditional values or ideals of society (the superego)” (Kay & Kay 195). Moreover, the ego bears a connection to the observation that “people have a ‘self-image’ which matters to them” (in Taylor 33). People “care that their image matches up to certain standards” (33): generally socially and morally induced, and often based on religious cues. However, whilst Taylor argues this “is not seen as something which is essential to human personhood” (33); the fact that Boswell and Turner strive to “uphold” (Taylor 30) the standards of this image throughout their everyday lives, in opposition to basic impulsive “demands of the id” (Kay & Kay 195), aligns with Taylor’s notion: “we cannot do without some orientation of the good, that we each essentially are… where we stand on this” (33). Therefore, these components of ‘self’ – orientation, and self-image - should not be used dichotomously, but should be combined to better explore the process of bettering oneself in both diaries; a process “very typical of [the] century” (Priestly, *Introduction* xiii).

Moreover, I propose Boswell and Turner’s respective models of “rationality and benevolence” (Taylor 31) constitute a self-image “which matters to them” (Taylor 33). They “strive to appear in a good light in the eyes” of those they meet each day, “as well as their own”, and “care that their image matches up” (Taylor 33) to the standards of their models. Taylor notes:

The ideally strong character would be maximally free of [these standards], would not be deterred by the adverse opinions of others, and would be able to face unflinchingly the truth about himself… (33)

By contrast, Boswell and Turner’s constant want of self-improvement proves neither is able to “unflinchingly” face the “truth” about himself; a notion which underscores the act of resolution-making throughout both diaries. Boswell states:

Could I but fix myself in such a character and preserve it uniformly, I should be exceedingly happy. I hope to do so and to attain a constancy and dignity without which I can never be satisfied, as I have these ideas strong and pride myself in thinking that my natural character is that of dignity (Boswell 258).

The categories of “rationality and benevolence” (Taylor 31) are supported by his use of “uniformly,” “constancy and dignity”. For Boswell, his concept of ‘self’ – the way he relates to his “natural character” - is defined by his ability to adhere to these qualities: to be “a character compounded of elements of ease, dignity, and calm superiority to external event” (Fussell Jr 351); though many times throughout his year in London he proves himself capable of the sheer opposite. A sense of performativity is created by his resolution to “fix” (258) what he perceives as his “real character” (258), which suggests that, like an actor, he adjusts his behaviour for others to achieve his desired effect – a self-image which satisfies his orientation towards the rational and the benevolent. The value of upholding his ideal self-image is created by the notion that he “can never be satisfied” unless he can “preserve” what he perceives as ‘good’. Equally significant for Boswell’s self-satisfaction are the “opinions of others” (Taylor 33). Kay and Kay note: “Boswell the Man needed to seek out mirrors” from “actual experience” (friends, acquaintances) who would “provide some reflection of his selfhood” (Kay & Kay 199). Boswell’s ability to uphold this image must be confirmed by the reactions of those around him: he envisages his friends will say:

“But indeed that was his real character; and he only deviated into these eccentric paths for a while… Well let’s see if I have resolution enough to bring that about” (Boswell 258).

Thus, Boswell’s consciousness of “what effect [his] external appearance and address would have” (Boswell 60) on the “civility of [his] fellow-creatures” (60) and its importance as a means of confirming a sense of continuity between his ideal and actual self-images is shown. This awareness is key to his understanding of and satisfaction with his ‘self’. Comparably, being prevalently in the public eye “as one of the most enterprising and efficient members of the community” (Butler, online), Turner’s positions of responsibility place emphasis on appearing in a good light to his peers:

Now let me shift the scene and meditate on the vice of drinking to see how despicable it makes a person look in the eyes of one that is sober (Vaisey 76).

A sense of shame is created which works to reinforce the notion that the “opinions of others” (Taylor 33) contribute to his sense of self, and his self-satisfaction. The fact he resolves to “never more be guilty” of drinking (76) accentuates a mediation of his behaviour based on “how despicable” he would appear to others. However, Turner relies less on the opinions of his acquaintances and friends than Boswell. Turner’s ‘sins’, and his personal responses to them, more significantly underscore his relation to his own ‘self’. Grappling with the unpredictability of his own abilities and frequent lapses of self-control, his self-satisfaction is much less stable. For example, his self-condemnation - “let me never forget the goodness of God to this sinful creature” (Vaisey 76) - works to show his concept of self is predominantly derived from his opinions of his successes or failures at upholding his values of “religion [and] morality” (Vaisey 26). Unlike Boswell, Turner does not actively manipulate his behaviour for others, which outlines a greater sense of sincerity in his self-relation. The fact Boswell is consciously proud of his conception of his “natural character [as] that of dignity” (Boswell 258) works to paradoxically emphasise the performed quality which is absent in Turner’s diary. Nevertheless, both men work unsteadily, in a continual process of *becoming* (Taylor 47)*,* towardsa self-image which pertains to their own standards of ‘good’: the models of dignity (258) and “morality” (Vaisey 26). The way each relates to himself, consists of how well they are able to uphold their ideal self-image. Thus, the importance of combining Freud and Taylor’s concepts of ‘self’ to properly explore how Boswell and Turner perceive themselves is shown.

However, a factor complicating Boswell and Turner’s self-narration is the concept of audience. Habermas’s reflections on the popularity of the journal in the eighteenth century suggest:

Subjectivity… as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience (in Spacks 142).

Whilst “[c]onsciousness of an audience is never far from Boswell’s mind” (Spacks 142); Turner, “not a social and historical figure of any importance” (Priestly, *Introduction v),* (as far as we know) did not intend for his diary to be published, nor did he write for a specific reader other than himself. Nonetheless, by preserving events, thoughts and feelings in written form; both men convey an identity constituted in memory, mediated by their retrospective assessments of their behaviour. Taylor suggests one “can only find an identity in self-narration” (49). Whilst he does not specifically allude to written narration; when exploring the diaries, his notion is particularly apposite:

We are made what we are by events; and as self-narrators, we live these through a meaning which the events come to manifest or illustrate (288).

For Boswell and Turner, I argue, the “meaning”, or “significance” (Taylor 34) of their daily experiences, manifested in their written assessments, amounts to whether or not their behaviour upholds their ideal self-images. For example, when Turner’s “reflection” on finding himself “sober” one night is “pleasure immense” (Vaisey 69), and Boswell’s “low opinion” of the “gross practice” of sleeping with whores, induces a resolution to “do it no more” (231); their behaviour is assessed in the light of their orientation towards eighteenth-century “good manners” (Spacks 12). Their self-narration therefore works as an evaluation which, for them, reveals the “significance” of their behaviours, and hence their identity. However, the act of writing, documenting a subjectivity “oriented to an audience” (Spacks 142), serves to mediate their evaluations. Boswell’s journal was intended for a “tripartite audience made up of his friend John Johnston of Grange, the author himself, and unknown future readers” (Kay & Kay 192). The “stresses” in this “conscious” self-narration, to appear in a “good light in the eyes of” (Taylor 33) his audience is shown by his frequent attempts to steer his readers’ interpretations:

Let me consider that the hero of a romance novel must go uniformly along in bliss, but the story must be chequered with bad fortune... (Boswell 206).

Boswell’s allusions to literary “romance” and classical heroes like “Aeneas” (206) work in elevation, symbolising Spacks’s notion that he “makes himself into a ‘character’” created “linguistically… before our eyes” (145). The connotations of masculinity and superiority serve to position Boswell, his own protagonist, as a “hero” and his journal as a work equal to a fictional “romance novel” or a work of the epic tradition. As Fussell Jr notes:

…in the detachment of his writing… in his general artistry as a journalist – Boswell projects himself as a figure of unique fictive significance (356).

A sense that we are reading about a “literary character” (Spacks 146) enables Boswell to detach his objective existence (Boswell the man) from the Boswell of “unique fictive significance” (Fussell Jr 356) in the journal (the protagonist). From his detached position, the use of “bad fortune” serves to shift the reader’s attention away from the bad decisions Boswell (the man) has made, implying they are a work of chance building up to his story’s denouement. Thus, the manipulative translation of his reflections on the “bad” into the heroic and superior ‘good’ arises from his explicit desire to appear in a good light to his journal’s reader. This consciousness, I argue, heightens the significance of his self-image; making him more cautious of how his blunders, successes and reflections are conveyed for an audience. Moreover, Priestly articulates:

Turner is a character, in the fullest sense of that term. He might have stepped out, a minor figure, from one of Shakespeare’s comedies… (*Introduction* ix).

Whilst Boswell seeks to *construct* a “character” of such calibre for himself; Turner’s comic attempts to grapple with self-control derive the fullness of his “character”. Nevertheless, like Boswell, Turner shows an awareness that his thoughts and actions are being preserved in writing; a cautiousness which underlines the critical nature of his self-assessments. Similar techniques of tailoring towards the ‘good’ are used in his self-reflective passages, though without Boswell’s theatrical consciousness of an explicit audience. For example, Turner begins 1756 by reflecting on his marriage:

Oh, were I but endued with the patience of Socrates; then might I be happy, but as I am not I will endeavour to pacify myself with the cheerful reflection that I am well assured I have done my utmost to render our union happy… (Vaisey 21)

Instead of elevating himself with allusions like Boswell; Turner’s use of the conditional tense, coupled with the onomatopoeic sigh “Oh,” serves to imply “cheerful” modesty. The use of “well assured” and the superlative “utmost” highlights a mediated tone with which ‘good’ intentions are signified. Aligning with his desire to appear in a good light - whether this is to make himself feel better about his separation from his wife, or consciously organised to absolve himself of blame – the fact Turner settles to be “well assured” works to imply satisfaction with his efforts. Nevertheless, the act of writing - preserving one’s memories, actions and feelings on paper - works to induce a self-consciousness mediating the written expression of both men’s thoughts. Though Turner’s diary is not directed to a *specific* audience; like Boswell’s, his cautiousness to appear “to do well” is clear. Habermas’s notion that “subjectivity” is “always already oriented to an audience” (in Spacks 142) is present in the physical act of self-narration which involves a process of convincing oneself, and the reader, of ‘good’ intentions. From this cautiousness to be seen to live up to their self-images - both in everyday experience and through their writing - evolves the perpetual cycle of remaking resolutions for self-improvement.

Both Boswell and Turner almost constantly meander between solemnly vowing to be better and subsequently reflecting on their failures. The diaries, being the closest representation of Boswell and Turner’s interior thoughts, facilitate the exploration of a struggle to mediate a dichotomy of rationality and pleasure. The inconsistencies, throughout both journals, in the comically cyclical nature of their resolution-making - showing a lack of “self-control” (Spacks 12) conceived by eighteenth-century “good manners” - work to create a contrast between their ideal and natural ‘selves’. Equally applicable to Boswell, Priestly notes:

“…there seems to us, a very singular and rather comical contrast between the actual life Turner lived and the cast of his mind as it shows itself in the Diary” (*Introduction* x-xi).

An ironic sense of discontinuity between their high ideals (of dignity and religious morals) and their low behaviours (sleeping with prostitutes and excessive drinking) is reinforced by their inconsistencies themselves: their standards of rationality and sincerity are opposed by their immoral indulgence. Moreover, the fact their resolutions against sleeping with “whores” (Boswell 49) and getting “DRUNK” (Vaisey 24) frequently appear after indulgent episodes signifies a struggle to mediate the conflict between their orientation towards their ‘good’ self-image and a drive for pleasure. As a result, I propose this conflict can be elucidated by the Freudian topography id-ego-superego which it closely resembles. At the heart of both diaries is a struggle to “establish a normal working balance between the ego and the superego” (Kay & Kay 195) in order to mediate the “aims of the id” (196) – predominantly in sex for Boswell and drink for Turner. Whilst Boswell more often than not “giddily assumes” the “character of the ‘man of pleasure’” (Weed 216), pertaining to common pass-times amongst the eighteenth-century “middling and upper classes” who were “pre-occupied with sex” (Spacks 140); at other moments he places more importance on his understanding of:

…his masculine status in terms of his capacity to *refrain* from the passions that drive him to continue to live out his fantasies in London (Weed 216 italics added).

Refraining from the “passions that drive him” – which signify the id’s aims - symbolises an act of upholding “the traditional values or ideals of society (the superego)” (Kay & Kay 195). The supposedly rational, yet soon broken, resolution – “I determined to have nothing to do with whores, as my health was of great consequence to me” (Boswell 49) – works to influence his search for women according to these “ideals” (195). As the girl from the Strand was without “armour” (49), putting Boswell’s “health” (49) in jeopardy, he leaves his passions unsatisfied:

I gave her a shilling and had command enough of myself to go without touching her (Boswell 50).

His use of “command” self-consciously works to highlight his act of “self-control” (Spacks 12), creating a tone of rational intent - a symbol of his “masculine status” (Weed 216). The shilling functions to imply dignity and benevolence: a generous gesture of ‘good’ will. However, more commonly throughout the diary, Boswell “indulges his sexual needs through casual encounters with prostitutes and other working-class women” (Spacks 141) with decreasing regard for the consequences. After his extended encounter with the “dissembling whore” (Boswell 160) Louisa, his “sexual relations become confined to intermittent ‘debauchery’ opposed heartily by [his] manly and superior” (Weed 229) ideal self-image. His earlier resolution for “health” (49) – to have “nothing to do with whores” (Boswell 49) - is voided by his venereal disease (161), resulting in a string of immorally indulgent sexual encounters. For example:

I felt carnal inclinations raging through my flame. I went to St. James’s Park and, like Sir John Brute, picked up a whore (Boswell 227).

Boswell’s poetic use of “carnal inclinations”, “raging” and “flame” works to self-consciously symbolise sexual desire as a bodily sensation, out of his mental control; the id’s unconscious pleasure drive. The matter-of-fact tone and simplistic structure - “I felt”, “I went” - denotes cause and effect: an act of cathartic indulgence. Wanton independence is evoked by his allusion to “Sir John Brute[[1]](#footnote-1)”, working to reassert Boswell’s sense of fictive significance (Fussell Jr 356). Furthermore, his self-narration of this particular inconsistency works to theatrically position Boswell as a “character of the ‘man of pleasure’” (Weed 216) which contrasts with his high ideals. Yet, ironically, his use of allusion creates a similar sense of grandeur, which, I argue, works to symbolise the ego’s attempt to elevate the indulgence away from its basic, impulsive origins of the id. Moreover, the contrast between Boswell’s high ideals and low habits, mimicking the conflict between the aims of the id and the superego – despite his efforts to elevate them with allusions - creates an almost erratic journey through London. The journal itself represents the opposite of Boswell’s intention: he “wished [it] to contain a consistent picture of a young fellow eagerly pushing through life” (Boswell 206). Instead, we explore the mind of a very changeable self.

A similar conflict underscores the many inconsistencies of Turner’s diary, but contrastingly works to accentuate the relationship of unreliability and distrust Turner retrospectively has with his own self-control. Priestly articulates:

[Turner alternates]… between the most extravagant whimsies and the most logical systems of human conduct… (*Introduction* xiii)

This notion can be elucidated by exploring Turner’s most contrasting diary entries. Turner aligns his dietary “rules of proper regimen” (Vaisey 26) of February 1756 with religion, morality and health:

…I think it therefore [right] (as it’s a matter of so great importance to my health etc.) to draw up rules of proper regimen… which… I hope I shall always have the strictest regard to follow, as I think they are not inconsistent with either religion or morality… (Vaisey 26)

Living “in a low, moderate rate of diet” (Vaisey 26), Turner’s consciousness of the “great importance” of “health” works to repudiate indulgence. The connotations of order in “proper regimen” and the superlative use of “strictest regard” places rationality and self-control as desirable traits for self-improvement. His resolved consistency with “religion [and] morality” (Vaisey 26) - aligning with the notion that the Freudian superego, striving for “perfection”, acts as “the moral arm of personality” (Kay & Kay 195) - serves as a means for working towards his ideal self-image. Furthermore, in contrast to the meticulous detail and “logical conduct” (Priestly *Introduction* xiii) of his regime, Turner transfers a similar level of detail to recount one of the “most extravagant whimsies” (*Introduction* xiii) of his diary; his incident in June “committing [the] enormous crime” of being “very drunk” before being “struck at” with a “horse-whip” (Vaisey 44).

…I got very much in liquor… I was very much drunk, and then I must of consequence be no better than a beast… But, Oh! may the Supreme Director of all events give me grace to be wiser for the future… I hope I shall never more be so weak, but have resolution enough to make this the last time... (Vaisey 44-45)

The confessional quality, coupled with the fact he does not “remember” many of the extravagant details (Vaisey 44), contrasts with the sense of cause and effect of Boswell’s indulgence. A loss of rationality and self-control is signified. By rendering himself “no better than a beast” (44), I argue Turner’s episode mimics a forwarding of the id’s “most vile and sinful” (Vaisey 76) aims. His (superego’s) resolution for “health” (Vaisey 26) is voided in the same ironic manner as Boswell’s is by his encounter with Louisa. Turner’s invocation of the “Supreme Director”, aligning with the superego’s religious cues, works to imply that he cannot rely on himself not to get “drunk”, but must call for God’s support. The sense of “weak” unreliability, marks the ego’s attempt to mediate between his “beast”-like unconscious desire for pleasure from “liquor”, and “religion of morality” (Vaisey 26). Thus, Turner’s “lack of head for the alcohol he could not resist” (Davey 191), offset by his “obsession with recording what he ate” (191) and practicing rationality; and Boswell’s attempts to “adhere to a strict sexual morality” (Weed 216), against a desire for the “unrestricted” (Weed 215) pursuit of pleasure can be more thoroughly explored when read in the light of Freud’s topography.

In both diaries, broken resolutions work to induce a passage of self-reflection, and a subsequent transformation of Boswell and Turner’s reflective assessments into new, firm resolutions. An oriented identity, the established “ideal” (Taylor 31) of “rationality and benevolence” (31) for both men, is something one can “fail to uphold” (30). Taylor notes that when a person “falls below” this ideal, they feel “wrong” (31); a notion which can be explored in Boswell and Turner’s respective reactions to their broken resolutions. Priestly summarises:

We watch [Turner] waging his more than seven years’ war with his thirst, always making good resolutions and always letting them slide, for ever forging those excuses that are so old and yet never die (Priestly *Introduction* x).

Turner’s consistent inconsistency induces a “condemnation of himself” which runs through the diary “like a *leit-motiv”* (Priestly *Introduction* xiii). I argue that, in both diaries, making “*good* resolutions” and “always letting them slide” - constituting a failure to “uphold” (Taylor 30) their ideals - causes a sense of disorientation; a lost grasp of “who one is” (Taylor 29). The need for a passage of re-evaluation serves as both acknowledgement and remedy. After Turner’s incident at *The Cats*, he scorns his behaviour:

Sure I am a direct fool, so many resolutions as I have made to the contrary, and so much as I am desirous of living a sober life, that I should suffer myself to be so easy deluded away…” (Vaisey 45)

Being unable to resist alcohol for “whose effects he regularly castigate[s] himself afterwards” (Davey 191), yet being “so much” “desirous of living a sober life” (Vaisey 45), Turner is self-consciously aware of his internal conflict. The pejorative use of “direct fool” and “easy deluded away” serves to denote weaknesswhich creates a sense of disorientation, a “wrong” (Taylor 31) feeling. Turner’s castigations - coupled with the use of “suffer myself”, implying self-infliction – constitute the self-perpetuating cycle of self-criticism which underscores Turner’s own distrusting sense of self. However, for Boswell, the cycle is less critical and more contemplative. For example, he evaluates his forgotten aim to win a commission in the Guards:

O why can I not always preserve my inclinations as constant and as warm? ...But it serves to humble me, and it presents a strange and curious view of the unaccountable nature of the human mind (Boswell 205).

Boswell’s use of “constant and warm” works to present synonyms of his rational and benevolent orientation; the despairing “O”, though theatrical, denotes his failure to stand by it. When Boswell fails to uphold his ideal self-image, it “baffles” him as evidence of his “inconstancy of disposition” (Weed 218), excusing his “idle” (205) behaviour as a product of “the unaccountable nature” (205) of the human mind, out of his control. His “wrong” (Taylor 31) feelings provoke questions, yet serve to “humble” him which pertains to his model of “calm superiority to external event” (Fussell Jr 351). Therefore, reflective passages in both diaries work to acknowledge and assess a sense of disorientation: whilst Turner’s self-castigation works openly expose his weaknesses (Vaisey 45) and too “easy temper” (Vaisey 36); Boswell, more conscious of an audience, excuses his behaviour by suggesting it is out of his control.

Moreover, both subsequently translate their disoriented reflections into firm resolutions for self-improvement. “Conduct books of the period recommend good manners as a way to cover up base impulses” (Spacks 12); in this light, resolution-making signifies a means of covering up Boswell and Turner’s “base impulses” (12) of sex and excessive drinking. For example, Boswell reasserts his aim to join the Guards:

I am determined to pursue it with unremitting steadiness… (205)

Directness and a renewed sense of vigour is evoked, marking a reassertion of his dignified ideal. A sense of vigilance and rationality is created by “unremitting steadiness”, working to reinforce, and reassure himself and his reader, of his new sense of unceasing resolve. Similarly, in deliberate opposition to his former irrationality, Turner translates his horror into an equally vigorous resolution:

Oh! with what horrors does it fill my breast to think I should be guilty of doing so… Let me once more endeavour never, no, never, to be guilty of the same again (Vaisey 36).

Denoting regret, Turner’s exclamations work in conjunction with the guilt filling “his breast” to accentuate the severity of his reaction: his “wrong” (Taylor 31) feelings are so extreme that they create a bodily sensation. Turner’s repetition of “never, no, never” (36) marks an attempt to grasp, and reassert, his self-control. Furthermore, I argue, after episodes of indulgence in both diaries, emphasised by the cycle of repetition, the new firm resolutions for self-improvement mark a reorientation towards the ‘good’: a reassertion of their attempts to uphold their ideal self-images of “rationality and benevolence” (Taylor 31). As excuses for their indulgent base impulses which deviate from their respective models of dignity and religious morality, their new-found resolves pertain to their desire to appear in a good light: a constant want of self-improvement induced by their fundamental orientation towards eighteenth-century “good manners” (Spacks 12).

Thus, by applying and combining Taylor’s theory of ‘orientation’ with aspects of Freud’s id-ego-superego topography as a framework for both diaries, this essay has shown resolutions for self-improvement are integral for both Turner and Boswell’s own concepts of self. The extent of their self-satisfaction, and the way each relates to himself, pertains to their respective evaluations of their ability to uphold their ideal self-images. Based on a cautiousness to appear in a good light in real life, and when preserving their assessments and actions in writing - for themselves and, in Boswell’s case, his tripartite audience – their constant want of self-improvement induces Boswell’s performative behaviour and Turner’s self-chastisement. The inconsistency between their low habits and high ideals – Boswell’s sexual desire and his model of dignity, and Turner’s lack of head for alcohol and his predilection for religion and morality – aligns with the struggle between the three components of Freud’s topography to mark a conflict between rationality and pleasure. Whilst Boswell, excuses his base impulses; Turner’s more sincere self-criticism works to expose his weaknesses. Furthermore, in the light of Taylor and Freud’s conceptions of self: a broken resolution, as an indulgence of the id’s aims, constitutes a disorientation from the (superego’s) ‘good’; a failure to uphold their ideal self-images of rationality and benevolence. Consequently, the transformation of Turner’s self-criticism and Boswell’s contemplation into new, firmer resolutions – working to cover up their base impulses - marks a process of reorientation; a reassertion of the importance of eighteenth-century “good manners” (Spacks 12) for both men. Throughout both diaries, the cycle of making and breaking resolutions for self-improvement - outlines the complexity of the changeable and unstable nature of both Boswell and Turner’s senses of self: Boswell grapples with his unreliable self-control; whilst Boswell, though more in control of his ‘literary hero’s’ actions, alternates between the elevated ‘man of pleasure’ and his model of dignity. Moreover, in a time when concepts of self were coming to the forefront of thought, the value of both journals, as the closest representation of eighteenth-century inner thoughts, is undeniable.

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1. Sir John Brute, a character from the seventeenth-century Restoration comedy *The Provoked Wife* by John Vanbrugh, written in 1691-2 and first performed in London, 1697. An ill and drunk tempered husband to Lady Brute, who, on a drunken escapade – wearing a woman’s clothes – is arrested by the watch.

   “The Provoked Wife.” *Oxford Index.* Oxford University Press, *n.d.* Web 20 April. 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)