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Character on Trial: Reading and Judgement in Henry Fielding's Works

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**RESEARCH
DEGREES
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

**CHARACTER ON TRIAL: READING AND JUDGEMENT IN
HENRY FIELDING'S WORKS**

by

R. K. Mace

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

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Character on Trial: Reading and Judgement in Henry Fielding's

Works

by Rachel Kathryn Mace

Abstract

To be placed above the Reach of Deceit is to be placed above the Rank of a human Being

- Henry Fielding, *A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning*, 1753

Throughout his literary and legal careers, Fielding was concerned with the difficulties of reading and judging character accurately. He saw society as being rife with deceptive and duplicitous individuals and articulated his concerns in his writing, offering various advices to his readers. This thesis examines Fielding's changing approaches to characterization and his proposed methods for judging character.

There is a strong tradition within Fielding criticism, particularly prevalent in the mid-twentieth century, of seeing Fielding's characters as 'essential', that is to say, innate and unchanging: the product of his theory of 'Conservation of Character'. As such, his characters are often deemed easy-to-read and lacking fully-determined internal lives. Since the mid-1990s, however, critics have begun to argue that his characters are more dynamic than first supposed. While critics have noted the role of judgement in Fielding's novels, it has not yet been explored in depth in his plays. With some notable exceptions, few studies have explored the interrelation between his novels and plays in a sustained way. I argue that Fielding examines questions of discerning character in *both* his plays and his novels, and that the early plays are essential for understanding the concepts which are central to his theory of judgement. This thesis contributes to studies of Fielding in three ways: by intervening in long-standing discussions of Fielding's

characterization; by analysing themes of good nature, perception and gossip which develop from his early dramatic work into the better-known novels; and by exploring its relationship to wider ideas about character in the eighteenth-century theatre and novel.

Beginning with his plays, I consider Fielding's presentation of the judgement of character in a range of his works from 1728-1753. I suggest that the early plays gave Fielding the space in which to experiment with the presentation of character and his relationship to his audience. His novels build upon concepts first introduced in the plays, such as good nature, perception and gossip, which he suggests are key to perceiving character. Fielding encourages his audiences and readers to engage with character as a process of discovery (as it is in life), but does not punish or mock them when they make mistakes. In doing so, he gives his audiences and readers indulgences he could ill afford in his magisterial career: time for judgement and the luxury of occasionally being proved wrong.

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Introduction

To be placed above the Reach of Deceit is to be placed above the Rank of a human being

-- Henry Fielding, *A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning*, 1753

On 1 January 1753, an eighteen-year-old servant girl, one Elizabeth Canning, went missing on her way home from her uncle's house. Nearly a month later she returned, emaciated, bruised and missing several items of clothing. The story that emerged of her ordeal would be one of the first *causes célèbres*, provoking the conviction of three people, a pamphlet war, and it would divide opinion in London spectacularly.

In her testimony, given to the Justice of Westminster, Henry Fielding, on the 7 February 1753, Canning described how she had been robbed and kidnapped on her way home from her uncle's house by two men. She was held at the house of an infamous brothel madam, Susannah Wells, and there met a gypsy woman by the name of Mary Squires, who 'promised to give her fine Cloaths [sic] if she would go their Way, which Expression she understood to mean the becoming a Prostitute, she utterly refused to comply with' (Fielding 1988a, 287). Squires cut off Canning's stays and locked her in a hay-loft with a jug of water and a small loaf of bread. She remained locked in the loft for twenty-eight days with no further contact with her captors and no other sustenance. On the 29 January 1753, Canning broke out of window and, in a thoroughly weakened state, made her way back to London.

For many in London society, Canning's story was highly improbable.¹ With no clear facts or impartial witnesses, the case seemed to rest on establishing the characters of Canning against those of her supposed captors, Wells and Squires.² Canning produced

¹ Fielding attempts to address this in his pamphlet on the case, *A Clear Case of the State of Elizabeth Canning* (1753) (Fielding 1988a, 288–95).

² Arlene Wilner compares Fielding's *Case of...Elizabeth Canning* to his earlier legal pamphlet *A True State of the Case of Bosavern Penlez* (1749). Wilner suggests that while the establishment of motive and character witnesses are central to Fielding's argument in *Canning*, he refuses to

twenty-seven witnesses to attest to her innocent character. However, Squires (the focus of the prosecution) could produce an alibi (she apparently had been in Dorset on the day of the abduction) and a total of forty-one witnesses (including a clergyman) in her favour (Wilner 1991, 196).³ London was divided into those who supported Canning's narrative (known as 'Canningites') and those that believed the testimony of Squires (the 'Egyptians') (see Figure 1).

Enter Henry Fielding. Referred to the case by Canning's solicitor, Fielding's interest was immediately piqued by the unusual nature of Canning's story. He was greatly impressed by Canning's 'modest, sober, well-disposed character' and he immediately issued warrants for the arrest of Squires and Wells (Fielding 1988a, 293). In the public trial that followed, Wells was branded for keeping a disorderly house and Squires was sentenced to hang for stealing Canning's clothing. However, this was not the end of the case. Impressed by Squires's character witnesses and alibi, the Mayor of London, Sir Crisp Gascoyne, set about building a case against Canning. Gascoyne's scrutiny of the case led Fielding to publicly defend his handling of the case in the pamphlet *A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning* (1753).⁴ Despite Fielding's defence, Squires was pardoned and on the 7 May 1754 Canning was tried and found guilty of perjury. She was transported to America, where she lived out the rest of her life.

Had Fielding been deceived in his assessment of Canning's character? Had the

give character witnesses for the 'unfortunate' Penlez, the son of a clergyman, who was apprehended with a bundle of stolen linen during the three-day riot by sailors against brothels in London in July 1749 (Wilner 1991, 196). In his pamphlet on the case, Fielding felt no need to establish the public character of the accused, as Penlez had been caught red-handed. Fielding also felt justified in making an example of Penlez, despite wide-spread public sympathy for his plight and that of the rioters more generally. Penlez was hanged on the 17 October 1749 and significantly was the only one of the seven men arrested in connection with the riots to suffer capital punishment (see Fielding 1988a, 33–60; Wilner 1991, 185–201).

³ An anonymous print of the case entitled 'A True Draught of Eliz Canning' (c.1753) satirically pictured Wells as a witch riding a broomstick as a way of explaining how she could have been in Dorset and Enfield on the same day.

⁴ Wilner estimates that Fielding's pamphlet was one of forty published in 1753, generated by the debate between the 'Canningites' and the 'Egyptians' (Wilner 1991, 187).



Figure 1. Anon. c. 1753-1760. *The true Pictures of Elizabeth Canning and Mary Squires*. British Museum Collection Online. Accessed 22 January 2017. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by the British Museum.

man who dedicated so much of his literary and legal career to exposing hypocrisy and deceit been imposed upon by ‘one of the most simple Girls [he] ever saw’ (Fielding 1988a, 310)? In the *Case...of Elizabeth Canning*, Fielding defended his assessment, arguing that

the only Error I can ever be possibly charged with in this Case is an Error in Sagacity. If *Elizabeth Canning* be guilty of a false Accusation, I own she hath been capable of imposing on me [...] for I remain still in the same Error (Fielding 1988a, 310)

While it is unclear whether he was finally deceived or not (indeed the ‘facts’ of the case are still debated today), the Canning case establishes a concern for judging character which characterizes many of Fielding’s literary productions from 1728-1751.

Throughout his literary and legal career, Fielding was concerned with the question of how we accurately read the characters of other people and the potential errors we can make in the process of judging. While the theme of judgement has often been noted in the later novels, I seek to expand Henry Fielding studies by assessing his treatment of the judgement of character *throughout* his literary works. This thesis examines Fielding’s changing theories of discerning character from his early plays through to his final novel, focusing particularly on the developing themes of good nature, perception, gossip and the role which he invites his reader to play.

Fielding was not alone in his desire to promote good judgement. For many of his contemporaries, judgement was a natural and inescapable part of daily life. Writing in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-1740), David Hume argued that ‘[n]ature, by absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel’ (D. Hume 1978, 1983). This is also supported by John Locke’s definition of ‘judgement’ in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690):

The Understanding Faculties being given to Man, not barely for Speculation, but also for the Conduct of his Life, Man would be at a great loss, if he had nothing to direct him, but what has the certainty of true Knowledge [...]. The faculty,

which God has given man to supply the want of certain knowledge, is judgement, whereby the mind takes any proposition to be true or false, without perceiving a demonstrative evidence in the proofs (Locke 2008, 421-22)

While Hume and Locke agreed that judgement was a natural faculty, many added that an individual's discernment needed to be supported and improved by a proper education and frequent use. In his *Essay on Criticism* (1711), Alexander Pope comments that most people have 'the seeds of judgement in their mind', but their good sense is later 'defaced' by 'false learning' and fashion (Pope 2008, 30). Some writers claimed that discernment was being hampered by credit culture, political corruption and the emerging literary market, which increasingly eroded traditional distinctions and markers of character. A rise in crime and the public exposures of hoaxes (including Canning's) and political plots also contributed to belief that the eighteenth century was an age of deception. Moreover, contemporary philosophers added that self-love and conceit could lead individuals to make rash decisions or perform in ways to elicit specific reactions, making it difficult to distinguish performance from truth. In his *Moral Essays* (1677), Pierre Nicole warns:

[e]veryone acts as if he were infallible, and out of danger of being prejudiced and deceived: And at the same time that we acknowledge how common this fault is, and very often accuse others of it; we imagine our selves [*sic*] almost always exempt from it (Nicole 1677, 302-3)

Social discernment was therefore becoming increasingly important in a society that was widely recognised as encouraging individuals to perform virtuous acts for social approbation.

The question for many writers was how to cultivate good taste and judgement in their readers and audiences to fortify them with the tools necessary to participate in society. Satire was a key weapon in the fight to promote judgement, but was used by different authors for contrary purposes. Jonathan Swift often uses his satire and penchant for 'biting' and 'shamming' to 'win, baffle or provoke readers' (Loveman 2008, 153). A *Modest Proposal* (1729) takes this to an extreme by offering a controversial solution to the poverty crisis in Ireland – for the Irish poor to cannibalize their children. The

projector rationalizes this extreme approach by reminding the reader that they have rejected his earlier proposals: ‘having been wearied out of many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal’ (Swift 2008b, 498; McMinn 2003, 27). Kate Loveman argues that ‘the novelty of his works and much of their success lay in the scope they afforded readers to exercise their own critical wits upon the subject at hand’ (Loveman 2008, 154). Through shamming, ‘biting’ or turning on the reader, Swift attempts to shock them into using their critical judgement.

In contrast to Swift’s direct technique, other writers favoured a gentler approach to encouraging their reader’s judgement. In their *Spectator*, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele attempted to create a ‘fraternity of Spectators’ who would observe and assess the behaviour of those around them, and would, in turn, would reflect on their own actions (Addison and Steele 1735, 1:47). Their ‘sympathetic’ satire aimed at reform rather than ridicule, prompting an individual towards improvement (Marshall 2013, 169-70). In *Tatler* No. 242 (26 October 1710), Steele argues that ‘good-nature [is] an essential quality in a Satyrist’, as it causes them to ‘disdain all baseness, vice, and folly’ and ‘prompts them to express themselves with smartness against the errors of men, without bitterness towards their persons’ (Steele 1712, 4:231).⁵ Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) offers examples of exemplary judgement and virtuous behaviour in an ‘attempt to instruct the audience in sociomoral propriety’ (Marshall 2013, 152, 32).

Virtue too is uppermost in the presentation of the eponymous protagonists of Samuel Richardson’s novels. However, many Richardson critics suggest that he distrusted his reader’s judgement and often sought to limit unauthorized responses to his texts. He argued that ‘[i]t is impossible that Readers the most attentive, can always enter

⁵ Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) also attempts to ‘instruct the audience in sociomoral propriety’ by giving them examples of exemplary judgement.

into the Views of the Writer'. Instead, readers often put themselves 'into the Character they read, and [judge] of it by their own Sensations' (Richardson 1965, 316).⁶ The desire for the reader to project themselves into Richardson's characters 'has the effect of eliding the proper *distance* between reader and character, the interval that allows clear judgement' (Koehler 2005, 73). Richardson feared that readers could 'subvert, revise, or even rewrite' his texts (Pawlowicz 1995, 46). Fielding's and Eliza Haywood's respective parodies of *Pamela* (1740) were only the most obvious cases of potential misreading. Due to its publication in 'widely spaced instalments', *Clarissa* (1748) encouraged readers 'to imagine their own conclusion'. Among those who demanded a happy ending were Lady Bradshaw, Colley Cibber and Fielding (Pawlowicz 1995, 46). To ensure that the reader understood *Clarissa* 'in the Way [he] choose', Richardson revised subsequent editions (1749, 1751), adding a table of contents and summaries of letters to direct readings (Richardson 1965, 126; Pawlowicz 1995, 46). Instead of relying on his reader's unpredictable judgement, Richardson offers models of otherworldly perfection for the reader to emulate.

For Fielding, Richardson's models of perfection were both unattainable and highly suspicious. In *Tom Jones* (1749), he argued that '[a] single bad act no more constitutes a villain in life than a single bad part on the stage' (Fielding 2008b, 286). His characters regularly err in both their judgement and actions, and are often forgiven for doing so. He 'maintains that imperfections in a character's nature raise compassion and encourage moral reflection' more than pious adherence to a moral code (Napier 2012, 115):

if there be enough of Goodness in a Character to engage the Admiration and Affection of a well-disposed Mind, though there should appear some of those little blemishes [...], they will raise our compassion rather than our abhorrence. Indeed, nothing can be of more moral use than the imperfections which are [...] more apt to affect and dwell upon our minds than the faults of very vicious and wicked persons (Fielding 2008b, 455)

⁶ From a letter to Lady Echlin, 10 October 1754.

Fielding passes the responsibility for assessing character onto the spectator, asking them to make generous assessments of action within the wider context of their knowledge of an individual.

Although other writers do deal with questions and issues of judgement, they often do so obliquely through ideas of taste, wit, or morality. In comparison with his contemporaries, I suggest that Fielding is unusually direct and consistent in his concern with judging character. Throughout his works, he considers the issues surrounding understanding character in response to wider philosophical, political, literary and social debates. He examines this most explicitly in his 'An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men' (1743). First published in the *Miscellanies* (1743), Fielding's 'Essay' examined different methods for judging character, from reading a person's countenance to assessing their behaviour and actions towards others. In doing so, he hoped to 'arm' the 'innocent and undesigning' with knowledge to prevent them from being imposed upon by 'the artful and cunning Part of Mankind' (Fielding 1972, 153). However, the methods which he proposes for discerning character in the 'Essay' seem unsatisfactory for his purpose and he is finally forced to concede that none of his rules are 'without some Exceptions' (Fielding 1972, 162). He is repeatedly troubled by the idea that the signs of character are readily available, but observers lack the skill necessary to read these signs correctly. 'The Truth', Fielding argues, 'is, we almost universally mistake the Symptoms which Nature kindly holds forth to us' (Fielding 1972, 156). Fielding wants to construe character as essential and natural, 'ever endeavouring to peep forth and show herself' from beneath the shifting masks of public behaviour (Fielding 1972, 155). Instead, Laura Freeman suggests, 'he finds all efforts to gain access to "character" blocked by potentially misleading displays of "character" and frustrated by the infirmities of human discernment' (Freeman 2002, 26). This problem of how to judge character accurately is a concern throughout Fielding's works, and this thesis

concentrates particularly on the role that he encourages audiences and readers to play in assessing character.

Throughout his works, Fielding suggests that there are two essential qualities which any sagacious judge or virtuous individual should have: good nature and perception. Based on the teachings of latitudinarian divines, particularly those of Archbishop John Tillotson and Bishop Benjamin Hoadly, Fielding's concept of good nature stressed that individuals are often imperfect, but should be active in their benevolence towards others and willing to defend themselves against threats of hypocrisy and deceit.⁷ First introduced in the early plays, Fielding develops this concept in his novels and it becomes central to the presentation of two of his most famous protagonists, Parson Abraham Adams and Tom Jones. In a change of direction, his final novel, *Amelia*, puts good nature under scrutiny and asks if immoral characters could also be capable of acts of good nature. While good nature cannot finally guarantee either a correct judgement or a moral character, I argue that it is nonetheless central to Fielding's idea of good (if imperfect) judgement.

Of course, even the most sagacious judge of character is liable to make mistakes, as Fielding himself suggested in *Elizabeth Canning* above. Like many of his contemporaries, Fielding argues that only God is 'above the Reach of Deceit' and as such is the final and absolute judge who will measure the worth of all souls (Fielding 1988a, 311).⁸ In the later novels especially, Fielding often leads his readers to make errors of judgement, demonstrating the difficulties of understanding character when

⁷ Hoadley argued that there were two essential virtues: "Virtue and Integrity as to ourselves, and Charity and Beneficence to Others" (quoted in Battestin 2000, 223). Fielding's concept of good nature was greatly influenced by these teachings, particularly in the later novels, in which active benevolence features prominently as a necessary quality for all his virtuous (if flawed) individuals, as I discuss below. For further discussion of Fielding's beliefs and his relationship to God, see Battestin 1959; Sacks 1966; Battestin 2000, 221–23; Janes 2011.

⁸ This belief of God as the ultimate judge was a conventional one in the eighteenth century, as I discuss in more detail in the Conclusion.

information is limited, manipulated or omitted. Gossip and other forms of oral testimony play an important role in exposing character and misleading the reader. I argue Fielding developed this theme from his later plays into the novels to challenge his sagacious audiences and readers, showing them the ‘infirmities’ of judgement and the difficulties of discerning motives accurately.

Studies of Fielding’s works have generally tended to focus on the novels, with *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) unsurprisingly claiming the lion’s share of attention as Fielding’s ‘masterpieces’. For many critics, the characters in Fielding’s novels lack the depth and concern with individual experience which characterize the novels of his contemporary, Samuel Richardson. This argument has been made since James Boswell described Samuel Johnson’s now famous comparison of Richardson’s and Fielding’s methods of characterization as being the difference between a man who ‘knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the time by looking at the dial plate’. Johnson suggested that Fielding’s characters are ‘very entertaining’ but ‘they are to be understood by a more superficial observer than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart’ (Boswell 1998, 389).⁹

Mid twentieth-century histories of the novel have generally held this distinction between Richardson and Fielding as being between ‘internal’ and ‘external’, ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ methods of characterization. In his seminal *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt argues that while Richardson aims for a ‘detailed description of individual states of mind’, Fielding’s elaborate plots avoid ‘the subjective dimension’ and refuse ‘to go too deep into the minds of his characters’ (Watt 1960, 261, 273). As a result, Watt suggests, ‘Fielding’s characters do not have a convincing inner life that means that their possibilities of psychological development are very limited’ (Watt 1960,

⁹Frank Kermode agrees with Johnson’s assessment of Fielding and evinces a clear preference for Richardson’s novels. He argues that Fielding’s are ‘types’ based on models of characterization found in the early-eighteenth-century theatre (see Kermode 1950, 106–14).

274).¹⁰ Writing in the same decade, John Coolidge (1960) and Morris Golden (1966) have both argued that Fielding's characters adhere for the most part to classical ideals of the 'Conservation of Character' (a theory of character to which Fielding himself refers ironically in his *Jonathan Wild*, 1743).¹¹ Each individual is given a 'character' on their first entrance either by the omniscient narrator or by other persons in conversation, from which they do not change (Coolidge 1960, 246). Coolidge and Golden suggest that Fielding only began to experiment with different concepts of character in his final novel *Amelia* (1751), in which he supplies a Lockean 'idea' of a person, the understanding of which grows and changes as we witness their actions and behaviours (Coolidge 1960, 250; Golden 1966, 30).

Responding to Watt's study, Ronald Paulson (1967) and J.P. Hunter (1975) reassess Fielding's concern with 'outsides' in his novels and argue that his interest is not in action, but rather understanding intentions. Paulson suggests that Fielding moves away from the older forms of Augustan satire – in which satirists encourage their readers to make absolute assessments of moral action – towards a more 'organic' vision of character – focusing on motives and intentions, rather than the consequences of action. This, in turn, presents difficulties for readers' judgement as they try to discern these motives:

Fielding also says that motive too is so difficult to assign that only much later, by surprise, by accident, can we see behaviour as good or evil [...] the reader as well as the character never knows all he need to know in a given situation (Paulson 1967, 147–48)

¹⁰ This 'failure' to represent the psychology of his characters is often repeated in criticism. Sheridan Baker suggests in his Preface to *Tom Jones* this can be disconcerting for modern readers, as 'we are not used to observing life from the outside. We want the inside story, the hidden stream of consciousness' (Baker 1973, vii). Robert Higbie adds that Fielding's method of characterization 'does not offer the kind of fulfilment we seek through characters' (Higbie 1984, 93).

¹¹ Coolidge argues that this is based on Horace's ideas of character in *Ars Poetica*, while Golden suggests they are based on Aristotelean principles (Coolidge 1960, 246; Golden 1966, 30).

J.P. Hunter takes up this criticism, arguing that Fielding was '[i]ntrigued by the inherent ambiguities of action – how the same action might mean different things when performed by different people' and was primarily concerned 'with the question of knowing how to construe' these actions properly (Hunter 1975, 69). Fielding asks his readers to 'share in the difficulty and uncertainty' of judging character and action, but never 'allows us to feel comfortable' (Hunter 1975, 20, 8). However, even Hunter contends that Fielding's characterization demonstrates an 'inattention to inner life' which is the 'greatest limitation' of his novels (Hunter 1975, 162).

William Empson's (1958) study of *Tom Jones* presents a notable exception to this critical trend. Empson argues that Fielding presents his characters from the 'outside' because he 'refused to believe that the "inside" of a person's mind (as given by Richardson in a letter, perhaps) is much use for telling you the real source of his motives' (Empson 1958, 235).¹² Internal narratives can be unreliable if individuals are not conscious of their own motives or wish to wilfully misrepresent themselves. Fielding's work indeed seems to demonstrate that he understood this implicitly, and such unknowability must be an added impetus in the doubt he throws on the reliability of single-perspective accounts of character. Taking up this criticism, Bernard Harrison (1975) suggests that Fielding does 'point to the inwardness of a man's character', but argues that this can be discovered only through the 'public world of discourse and behaviour' rather than through 'Cartesian "inwardness" of consciousness' favoured by theories of the novel (Harrison 1975, 48-9). Instead of a single consciousness, Fielding offers conflicting perspectives on character in his novels. These destabilize the reader's assessment of character and show 'no *one* view-point [even that of the self looking inward] is ever "guaranteed"; ever wholly adequate as a basis from which to grasp the

¹² Mark Kinkead-Weekes suggests that this is because Fielding 'isn't all that interested in what goes on inside his character, but is very much interested in what goes on inside his readers', particularly as they attempt to form ideas about character (Kinkead-Weekes 2008, 7).

nature of human reality' (Harrison 1975, 48). 'Fielding's conception of character, in short, is founded in the notion of the coherence of a [person's] speech and action when seen from multiple viewpoints' (Harrison 1975, 45). It is only by viewing character from multiple viewpoints that we can start to acquire any knowledge about character.

Since the 1990s critics have begun to reassess Fielding's methods of characterization in his novels, and the presentation of eighteenth-century character more generally. Elizabeth Kraft's *Character and Consciousness* (1992) reappraises traditional claims about Fielding's 'failure' to represent the internal lives of his characters and his presentation of 'consciousness' in *Tom Jones*. Kraft argues that histories of the novel have tended to privilege stories of individuals and their experiences (like those by Defoe and Richardson) over those of 'comic novelists' (the likes of Fielding and Sterne). Subsequently, critics attempt to apply twentieth-century notions of character as 'flat/round' (to borrow E. M. Forster's terminology) to the emerging eighteenth-century novel, in which such ideas of 'character' were only just beginning to develop (Kraft 1992, 5). Moreover, Kraft suggests that 'while [comic novelists] avoid total involvement in the mind of any one character, they are nonetheless fundamentally concerned with the nature of consciousness' and Fielding is no exception to this (Kraft 1992, x).¹³ In her *Economy of Character* (1998), Deidre Lynch also challenges the traditional narrative of the eighteenth century as a period in which 'flat' characters gave way to 'rounded' ones as the novel developed. Instead, she asks the question: 'what happens if we do not assume that the history of character and the history of the individual are the same thing?' (D. Lynch 1998, 1). Lynch suggests that for most of the century, authors, actors and painters (Fielding and Richardson included) were concerned with the 'legibility of

¹³ Robert Chibka also explores Fielding's presentation of consciousness in *Tom Jones*. Chibka argues that while Fielding allows us briefly into some of his characters' minds (most notably Tom, Sophia and Blifil), he shows us that this access does not always give the reader a clear sense of a character's motive for action (Chibka 2008, 92–95).

character’ and shared an outward conception of and language about character that helped people make sense of the developing commercial world around them. Focusing on the representation of gender, Jill Campbell’s *Natural Masques* (1995) similarly questions the critical tradition which has juxtaposed Fielding’s ‘masculine’ method of characterization against Richardson’s ‘feminine’ one. Instead, she argues that Fielding ‘consistently treats problems of male identity and female identity together, as necessary interlocking parts of a single economy or system’ (Campbell 1995, 7). Tiffany Potter’s *Honest Sins* (1999) offers a counterpart to Campbell’s discussion, exploring the presentation of libertine masculinity in Fielding’s works. Significantly, both Campbell’s and Potter’s studies are among the few critical discussions of Fielding’s works to consider *both* Fielding’s plays and novels, showing how the concern with gender develops through his works.¹⁴

Interest in Fielding’s work was briefly increased by the tercentenary of his birth in 2007, and anniversary conferences and publications celebrated this milestone. Robert Hume notes that the number of publications on Fielding rose from sixteen in 2007 to twenty-nine in 2008 (R. Hume 2010, 224–25). Notable among these are Claude Rawson’s *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding* (2007) and *Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate* (2008), and J.A. Downie’s

¹⁴ Since the 1980s, gender and queer discussions of Fielding’s works have dramatically increased. Important monographs include Angela Smallwood’s *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and the Feminist Debate* (1989), Brian McCrea’s *Impotent Fathers: Patriarchy and Demographic Crisis in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (1998) and Tiffany Potter’s *Honest Sins: Georgian Libertinism and the Plays and Novels of Henry Fielding* (1999). Articles and chapters which discuss gender in specific works by Fielding also include Anthony Hassall’s ‘Women in Richardson and Fielding’ (1981), April London’s ‘Controlling the Text: Women in *Tom Jones*’ (1987), Terry Castle’s ‘Matters Not Fit to Be Mentioned: Fielding’s *The Female Husband*’ (*The Female Thermometer*, 1982), Susan Staves’ ‘Henry Fielding and the Comedy of Attempted Rape’ (1994), George E. Haggerty’s ‘Amelia’s Nose; or, Sensibility and Its Symptoms’ (1995) and ‘Friendship and Marriage in *Amelia*’ (*Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Henry Fielding*, 2015), Gerard Butler’s ‘Fielding’s Disruptive Sexuality’ (*Henry Fielding in Our Time*, 2008), Emily Bowles’ ‘You Have What You Ought Not’ (2010), Simon Dickie’s ‘Fielding’s Rape Jokes’ (2010), Sarah Nicolazzo’s ‘Henry Fielding’s *The Female Husband* and the Sexuality of Vagrancy’ (2014), Brian McCrea’s ‘Find the “Mark” of the Mother’ (*Approaches*, 2015) and Pamela S. Bromberg’s ‘*Tom Jones* as the Cornerstone in the Course’ (*Approaches*, 2015).

Henry Fielding in Our Time (2008) and *A Political Biography of Henry Fielding* (2009). Significant studies since 2010 also include Henry Power’s *Epic into the Novel* (2015), Jennifer Wilner’s and Elizabeth Kraft’s (eds) *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Henry Fielding* (2015) and Anne Widmayer’s chapters on Fielding in her *Theatre and the Novel, From Behn to Fielding* (2015). However, a search of the *MLA International Bibliography* shows that since 2008, the number of studies of Fielding have again fallen, with 2016 and 2017 producing just six studies of Fielding’s works each (see Table 1).¹⁵

In contrast to the novels, Fielding’s plays and miscellaneous prose have garnered considerably less critical attention.¹⁶ The plays, Thomas Lockwood has argued, have

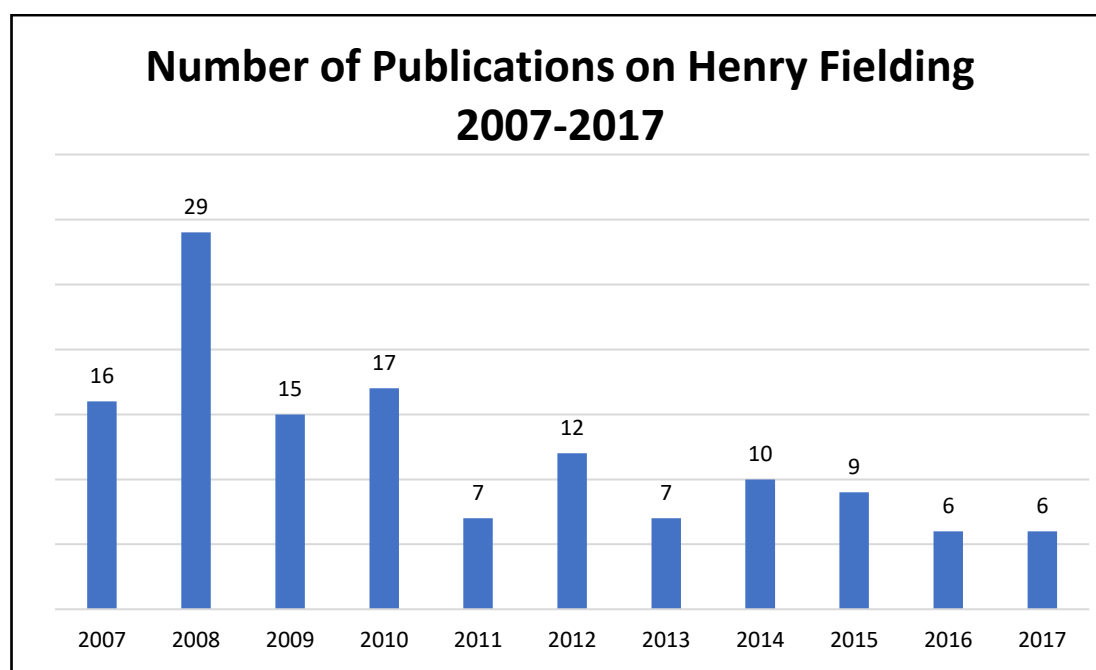


Table 1. Number of Publications in peer-reviewed English language journals and books on Henry Fielding from 2007-2017¹⁷

¹⁵ As of 26 November 2017. Figures for 2007, 2008 and 2009 are those listed by Robert Hume in his ‘Fielding at 300’, to which I have added my own figures for 2010 onwards (see R. Hume 2010, 224-5). This search excludes dissertations and foreign language publications. Chapters in edited collections, such as those in Jennifer Wilner’s and Elizabeth Kraft’s *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Henry Fielding* (2015) are counted together as one study for consistency with Hume’s methods.

¹⁶ Albert Rivero suggests that the list of scholarship on Fielding’s plays prior to the 1988 is ‘relatively long’ including works by Sheridan Baker, J.P. Hunter, Ronald Paulson, E. V. Roberts and C. B. Woods. While the plays have not been ‘neglected’, Rivero suggests that they have not ‘received the critical attention they deserved’, often being seen as a period of apprenticeship for the later novels (Rivero 1989, ix).

¹⁷ Chapters in edited collections are counted as single publications.

traditionally been seen as a period of apprenticeship for Fielding, ‘as if he had been waiting to become a famous novelist’ (Fielding 2004, xix). ‘To most’, Robert Hume argues, Fielding’s time in the theatre ‘seemed a false start’, with readers finding his conventional plays ‘derivative’ and his ‘topical ones scrappy and superficial’ (R. Hume 1985, 79).¹⁸ The standard view, Albert Rivero suggests, has been that Fielding ‘from the very beginning of his career wanted to write novels, but somehow did not heed his calling’ until the passing of the Theatrical Licensing Act in 1737 released him from ‘his often not so harmless drudgery as a theatrical hack’ (Rivero 1989, ix). Indeed, Hunter goes so far as to argue that ‘Fielding’s separation from the theatre’ as a result of the Licensing Act was ‘fortunate, freeing him from a relationship and commitment that had always been in some sense against the grain’ (Hunter 1975, 69). Such criticism seeks to downplay the role of the plays, using the historic success of the novels (with the notable exception of *Amelia*) as an indication of their superiority. This also overlooks the popularity of many of Fielding’s plays, notably *The Author’s Farce* (1730), *Tom Thumb* (1730), *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731), *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737). Where studies do engage with the plays, they often to do so only to use them as a source for information about Fielding’s early political allegiances, or to explain the frequent theatrical allusions and techniques they find in his later novels (R. Hume 1985, 79–80; Rivero 1989, 1–3; Keymer 2007, 17–18; Widmayer 2015, 23).¹⁹

This criticism overlooks the success Fielding enjoyed as one of the most successful and prolific playwrights of the 1730s. As Lockwood points out, we should consider Fielding’s output in the 1728-1737 period in relation to his career as a whole: ‘representing as it does more than a third of his working life and almost the same share

¹⁸ Hume argues that much of the discussion of the plays before the 1980s had focused on drawing on the plays ‘for what they tell us about Fielding’s political allegiances’ (R. Hume 1985, 79).

¹⁹ Anne Widmayer argues that this has been part of a larger tendency in twentieth-century criticism to overlook the role that drama plays in the emerging novels (Widmayer 2015, 1–2).

of written pages' (Fielding 2004, xix). During his nine years in the theatre, Fielding produced a staggering twenty-eight plays and afterpieces, as well as managing the Little Theatre in the Haymarket for the 1736-1737 season. Alongside John Gay, he helped to pioneer a new form of irregular, satiric drama which would take the 1730s by storm and contributed in no small way to the passing of the Licensing Act. He seems to have been 'passionately absorbed by the theatre' in the first third of his writing life, and even after the passing of the Licensing Act 'he can still be found regularly haunting the playhouse, literally and figuratively, as he seems in a way to have been haunted by it' (Fielding 2004, xix). As many critics have pointed out, Fielding's later novels are heavily influenced by his theatrical past and regularly draw on allusions to the stage and the techniques he developed as a playwright (Hassall 1967, 4; Lockwood 1999, 104–14; Widmayer 2015, 1–23, 167–230).²⁰

Since the 1980s, interest in Fielding's plays has steadily increased, with important studies being conducted by Peter Lewis (1987), Albert Rivero (1989) and Thomas Lockwood (1987, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2011). Chapters dedicated to the discussions of the plays include Simon Varey's *Henry Fielding* (1986), Campbell's *Natural Masques* (1995), Potter's *Honest Sins* (1999), and Widmayer's *Theatre and the Novel* (2015), as well as chapters in edited collections by Thomas Keymer (in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, 2007) and Vanessa Rogers (in *Henry Fielding in Our Time*, 2008). These studies explore a variety of themes in Fielding's plays,

²⁰ This can be read in the context of wider recent criticism which explores the influence of theatre on the emerging eighteenth-century novel. Studies by Nora Nachumi (2008), Francesca Saggini (2012), Ros Ballaster (2012) and Anne Widmayer (2015) all argue that the two forms were closely tied together, despite the fact that this relationship has rarely been explored in critical studies of the novel's development (Widmayer 2015, 1). Saggini remarks that the two forms shared a mutual audience, similar characters, references and situations, binding them together 'by a thick web of intertextual references – some explicit, others covert – that [...] were readily identified and understood at the time' (Saggini 2012, 1). In their respective studies, Ballaster and Widmayer further add that many of the early shapers of the novel 'often had or maintained careers in the theatre, as actors, playwrights, and/or managers', with many 'import[ing] dramatic techniques into their early fictional works to provoke readers' and authors' meta-awareness of the constructedness of prose fiction' (Ballaster 2012, 6; Widmayer 2015, 2).²⁰

including his experiments with form (Lewis, Rivero, Varey, Lockwood, Keymer, Rogers), presentation of gender (Campbell, Potter), use of author-characters (Widmayer) and theatrical influences on the novels (Campbell, Lockwood, Widmayer). Foremost among the more recent studies is the publication of Lockwood's prodigious three-volume Wesleyan edition of the plays (2004, 2007, 2011), which collates, annotates and introduces Fielding's theatrical works together for the first time.²¹ As a result, the plays are now more accessible than ever before and I hope will feature more prominently in future studies of Fielding's works. Despite this wealth of scholarship, no study to date has considered the plays as an important source for Fielding's concepts of good nature, perception and gossip, all of which are central to the presentation and judgement of character in the later novels.

With this in mind, this thesis considers *both* Fielding's plays and novels, as well as drawing on much of his miscellaneous prose, journalism and essays. In contrast to many critics, I argue that Fielding's plays are more than just an 'apprenticeship' for the novels. Rather, I submit that they are essential for introducing Fielding's developing concepts of goodness, perception and gossip, which are central to understanding a theory of character he would develop across his entire oeuvre. In Fielding's early plays (1728-1730), he begins to realise the importance of uniting good nature with perception in order to make accurate, yet forgiving, assessments of character – an idea which will become central to the characters of Abraham Adams, Thomas Heartfree, Tom Jones and Billy Booth in the later novels. In the later plays (1736-1737), Fielding turns to caricature in

²¹ Hume notes in his review of the *Plays* that prior to Lockwood's edition there had been a few serious editions of individual plays. These include editions of *The Author's Farce* (edited by Charles B. Woods, 1966), *The Grub-Street Opera* (Edgar V. Roberts, 1968; L. J. Morrissey, 1973), *Tom Thumb* (Morrissey, 1970), *Tragedy of Tragedies* (James T. Hillhouse, 1918; Morrissey, 1970), *Pasquin* (O M Brack Jr., William Kupersmith and Curt A. Zimansky, 1973), and *Historical Register for the Year 1736* (William W. Appleton, 1967) (R. Hume 2012, 448). Hume also comments that there had been no significant collected edition of the plays since W.E. Henley's 1903 version, 'which had no explanatory apparatus' (R. Hume 2012, 447).

order to participate in the public gossip about the characters of ‘Great Men’ of the contemporary world. Through gossip, Fielding encourages his audience to take a more active role in judging character than in his earlier plays. In *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, gossip has a profound and lasting effect for its subjects and draws readers into making their own (occasionally inaccurate) speculations about character. I argue that the plays play a crucial role in the realisation of the concepts which would later shape the presentation and assessment of character in his best known novels.

Moreover, I argue that Fielding’s theatrical career gave him the opportunity and desire to experiment with form, genre and the presentation of character. In turn, the desire to innovate persists in and influences his later prose narratives. I suggest that by playing with different methods of presenting character, Fielding alters his relationship with his audiences and readers, by inviting the ‘sagacious’ to be involved in the process of judging character and gradually increasing the demands he makes on their abilities. In the later works especially, he encourages his readers to make errors of judgement, showing them how easy it is for even the most experienced and wary judges to be lead astray by false evidence.

I have identified five distinct periods of ‘experimentation’ in Fielding’s literary career, to each of which I have dedicated a chapter. These chapters are arranged for the most part along the chronological lines of Fielding’s career to show the changes in his ideas about character and judgement. However, I would stress that Fielding’s treatment of character and judgement throughout his career is not a simple teleological development towards the more complex forms of the novel (as much twentieth-century criticism would have it). Rather, I suggest that Fielding’s techniques often produce uneven results, as he tries out new methods and concerns. For example, although chapters 3 and 4 consider overlapping periods in Fielding’s career (covering 1743-1746 and 1741-1749 respectively), the texts they represent demonstrate distinct approaches

and concerns towards judgement and, as, such make different demands of their readers. Similarly, the demands made of readers of caricature in Chapter 2 on balance outweigh those on the readers of Fielding's criminal biographies in Chapter 3. Of course, not all of Fielding's experiments were successful, as the critical legacy of *Eurydice* (1736), *The Female Husband* (1746) and *Amelia* (1737) shows.

Chapter 1 examines ideas of the 'performance' of public character and how they are judged in Fielding's early plays (1728-1730). My interest is in establishing Fielding's early concern with questions of the reliability of public 'performances' as an indicator of essential character, which reflect wider cultural anxieties about the 'theatricality of character', and his penchant for manipulating form and satire. This chapter begins by drawing on studies of the presentation of character on the eighteenth-century stage by Edward Burns (1990) and Laura Freeman (2002) to discuss how an audience might experience character in the theatre. It then moves on to examine the 'roles' which individuals play and how to read them in Fielding's first and most 'orthodox' play, *Love in Several Masques* (1728). I submit that this play establishes an early concern with *how* to read character and the importance of penetrating public performances to 'reveal' essential character hidden underneath in response to contemporary philosophical debates. It also emphasises the importance of combining perception with good nature, establishing Fielding's early concern with these two concepts. The final part of the chapter turns to consider Fielding's first attempt to experiment with form and genre in his 'irregular' play *The Author's Farce* (1730), and its satirical presentation of the consequences of the degradation of taste and judgement. I argue that *The Author's Farce* presents Fielding's first real (if light-hearted) appeal to his audience's judgement, as he breaks down the boundaries between 'essential' and 'performed' character and encourages his audience to compare their tastes with those of the characters presented onstage.

Chapter 2 turns to consider Fielding's use of caricature in his later 'Haymarket plays' (those produced during his time as manager of the Little Haymarket Theatre in the 1736-1737 season). In these later plays, I argue that Fielding turns away from presenting the 'characters' of *dramatis personae*, and instead focuses on establishing caricatures of real-life individuals from the political and theatrical spheres. Criticism of these plays has often used these caricatures to explore Fielding's political allegiances during the later 1730s and to examine his role in the passing of the Theatrical Licensing Act in 1737. However, I suggest that Fielding was participating in wider cultural gossip about the public characters of the 'Great Men' of the 1730s. His conflation of the political and theatrical worlds suggests the similarities between the 'Great Men' of each sphere and allows him to caricature them interchangeably. Astute members of the audience are encouraged to recognise the similarities between the real-life individuals they simultaneously represent and their respective styles of 'management'. As a result, the audience are given a much more substantial role in judging caricature than they had previously been given in Fielding's plays, and are central to the production of meaning and satire in the 'Haymarket plays'.

Chapter 3 considers the presentation of deception in Fielding's criminal biographies (1743-1746). In *Jonathan Wild* (1743) and *The Female Husband* (1746), Fielding takes deceivers as his protagonists and comically presents their methods of trickery to the reader. Through his satire, I posit that Fielding breaks down the reputations of these 'master criminals', showing them to be at best ineffectual, small-scale fraudsters. Instead, I suggest that he places the moral responsibility for their ability to succeed (albeit temporarily) on other characters' repeated failures to read the signs of deception. Developing on his ideas from early plays, the good nature of virtuous characters is also brought into doubt when they are unwilling to defend themselves or wilfully blind themselves to the cruelties and hypocrisies of the world. Fielding suggests

that good nature requires active benevolence as well as perception to guard itself against deception. The process of judging these characters is not particularly onerous on the reader in these criminal biographies. However, I suggest that Fielding redirects his energies to present discernment as a social and moral imperative that helps to protect not only individuals, but wider society from deception.

Building upon the role of gossip in the later plays, Chapter 4 examines the role of oral testimony in the construction and speculation of character in Fielding's two best-known novels, *The History of Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *The History of Tom Jones* (1749). Drawing on little-discussed criticism from the 1970s and 1980s, I argue that Fielding uses storytelling, gossip and trial testimonies to expose character by offering different accounts to the reader. We are encouraged to examine these accounts for their truthfulness, picking up on discrepancies, inconsistencies or exculpatory reasoning from the speaker. The process of judging character is further complicated by the narrator, who often misleads the reader by encouraging us to engage in the process of gossip and to form inaccurate assumptions about character. I suggest that this demonstrates the pitfalls of judgement and encourages the reader not to be too quick or absolute in their judgements of character.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines Fielding's darkest and most demanding novel, *Amelia* (1751), demonstrating the difficulty of judging character based on ambiguous, incomplete and misleading evidence. Critics have often distinguished *Amelia* from Fielding's other novels due to its darker tone and lack of ironic narrator. However, I argue that Fielding builds upon the themes of gossip and good nature in *Amelia*, albeit in a more pessimistic manner. In the first part of the chapter, I argue that *Amelia* examines the darker consequences of maliciously-motivated gossip for its subjects, which exposes the more morally dubious aspects of their character. The second part of the chapter focuses on the failure of good nature to stand as an assurance of moral character. In

Amelia even the most perceptive and good-natured characters are shown to make inaccurate judgements when the forces of gossip and self-interest manipulate their judgement. I argue that Fielding's final novel makes the greatest demands on its readers. The reassuring narrator increasingly retreats from view and even misleads readers through carefully manipulated gossip. As a result, readers are left to make their own judgements on character based on ambiguous and conflicting evidence, and are finally left with no clear or absolute indication if they have reached the correct conclusions. I argue that Fielding stresses the infirmities of judgement and the need for onlookers to be prepared to revise their conclusions about character as new evidence arises.

I

‘The Whole World Acts the Player’: Performing Character in Fielding’s Early Plays (1728-1730)

It is certain that if we look all around us and behold the different Employments of Mankind, you hardly see one who is not, as the Player is, in an assumed Character.

-- Richard Steele, *Spectator*, No. 370

There is a Difference between a Man and a Pea, you may know a Pea by its Outside

-- Fielding, *The Welsh Opera*, 1731

For many eighteenth-century writers, the social world could be understood as a stage, a *theatrum mundi*, on which individuals performed parts to elicit approbation, as Richard Steele lamented in his *Spectator* No. 370 above. Anne Widmayer has argued that

everyday life was imbued with a latent theatricality: one expected both to gaze upon and be watched by other actor-spectators in various public settings, such as ridottos, balls, masquerades, gardens, churches, auction houses, public executions [...] and of course at the theatre themselves (Widmayer 2015, 1)

Public character then was widely understood to be a mask that one put on which potentially had little connection to one’s ‘true’ internal worth. E.J. Hundert argues that ‘eighteenth-century thinkers [...] were faced with the argument that character itself was a social artefact’ as individuals were increasingly ‘understood as players pressured by circumstance and goaded by opportunity to perform in certain ways’ (Hundert 1997, 81). Fielding summarizes this argument in the introductory chapter to Book VII of *Tom Jones* (1749), when he suggests:

[s]ome have considered the larger part of mankind in the light of actors, as personating characters no more their own, and to which, in fact, they have no better title than the player hath to be in earnest thought the king or emperor whom he represents. Thus the hypocrite may be said to be a player; and indeed the Greeks called them both by one and the same name (Fielding 2008b, 283–84).

The problem for writers and philosophers was how to judge individual moral character accurately if it could be assumed that everyone was playing a part. As Addison and Steele remarked in their *Spectator* No. 7 (12 March 1710), ‘every one that considers the World as a Theatre [...] desires to form a right Judgement of those who are actors in it’ (Addison and Steele 1735, 1: 36). Failure to do so correctly could potentially compromise the observer’s character through their association with the hypocritical individual. Of course, not all performances are hypocritical: some do reflect the internal worth of the individual. The concern for writers and philosophers alike was how to determine the moral integrity of human action.

These concerns with the theatricality of character can be understood as part of a Europe-wide shift in moral psychology at the end of the seventeenth century, particularly in the debates of French philosophers and theologians, Pierre Bayle, Pierre Nicole and La Rochefoucauld (Hundert 1998, 142). These writers were concerned that most people’s outward adherence to religious ceremony and convention were little more than a public show motivated by self-love rather than Christian virtue. Pierre Nicole argued that ‘[n]othing is so natural to Man as the desire of being belov’d by others’ and so people are ‘naturally inclin’d to seek and procure it’ (Nicole 1677, 233, 234). Similarly, in his *Reflections [...] Occasion’d by the Comet* (translated in 1708), Bayle suggests that ‘Men conform to the rules of religion, when they may without much Uneasiness, and where a contempt of these Rules is of ill Consequence to their present Interest’ (Bayle 1708, 276). He continues to assert that where men did seem to perform according to their Christian duties ‘‘tis because they don’t interrupt the prevailing Passion of their Soul, or because the Danger of infamy or some temporal Punishment constrains’ (Bayle 1708, 278).

These arguments were expanded upon in the early eighteenth century by Bernard Mandeville in his infamous *The Fable of the Bees* (1714, 1723, and 1728). Mandeville

argued that social relations and commercial society were founded upon the private interests and passions of individuals. Following the subtitle of his work ‘Private Vices, Publick [*sic*] Benefits’, Mandeville argued that social relations depended upon the expression and satisfaction of private passions, which through ‘skilful management’ could be made ‘subservient to the Grandeur and worldly Happiness of the whole’ of society (Mandeville 1970, Preface).²² He presented contemporary society as ‘an aggregation of self-interested individuals driven by passions for gain and approbation that necessarily binds persons together [...] by the tenuous bonds of envy, competition, and exploitation’ (Hundert 1998, 143). As with Bayle and Nicole, good actions under Mandeville’s theory could be understood as emanating from private interests and passions: ‘the Reward of Virtuous Action [...] consists in a certain Pleasure he procures to himself by Contemplating on his own Worth’ (Mandeville 1970, 92). In his *The Virgin Unmask’d* (1709), Mandeville suggested that even seemingly virtuous actions could not guarantee the morality of the intentions behind them:

many things are done daily; for which People are extoll’d to the Skies, that at the same time, tho’ the Actions are Good, would be blamed as highly; if the Principle from which they acted, and the Motive that first edg’d them on, were thoroughly known (Mandeville 1709, 73)

Good actions and traditional moral psychology under Mandeville’s theory, then, could no longer sufficiently explain the motivations for action. Judgement under Mandeville’s theory, therefore, seems unnecessary as everyone can be assumed to be acting in their own self-interest.

For many of Mandeville’s contemporaries, however, these ideas represented an attack on traditional values and an endorsement of unrestrained and unethical commercialism. Dubbed the ‘Machiavelli of his age’, his name became synonymous

²² Mandeville was responding in the *Fable* to the Earl of Shaftesbury’s claim that men were naturally virtuous and that good actions alone contributed to the public good: ‘he calls every Action perform’d with regard to the Publick Good, Virtuous; and all Selfishness, wholly excluding such a Regard, Vice. [...] His Notions, I confess are generous and refined [...] What pity it is that they are not true!’ (Mandeville 1970, 329).

with ‘depravity, inequity, and excess’ (Pinkus 1975, 193; Bellamy 1998, 21). Fielding often voiced his objections to any philosophical presentation of human nature as essentially depraved (Battestin 2000, 96-7; McCrea 1981, 138-9, 155, 158-9; Paulson 2000, 218, 356 n34). Despite this, Hundert argues that while Fielding tried to ‘demolish’ Mandeville’s ideas, his own ‘diagnosis of contemporary social ills’ were ‘virtually identical’ to Mandeville’s (Hundert 1997, 161). Alongside this ‘creeping Mandevilleanism’, Andrew Bricker adds that both writers understood that virtuous action could be motivated by self-interest. However, Bricker suggests that for Fielding a ‘misguided emphasis on motivation fails to account adequately for the dispositional goodness of the actor, the consequent good produced, and the socially cohesive nature of mutual empathy’ (Bricker 2017, 66). Good nature, or ‘the glorious Lust of Doing Good’ as Fielding termed it, outweighs any self-interest inherent in a good act (Fielding 1972, 31). Judgement of motivations is required in Fielding’s argument to separate the good-natured acts from those which are vicious or self-serving. Moreover, in his early plays, Fielding suggests that good nature can also aid judgement by allowing individuals to connect empathetically with others, helping them to see that not all performances are vicious.

In this chapter, I argue that Fielding’s early plays engage with these wider philosophical debates about social performance and judging action. He repeatedly exposes the theatrical nature of public character to his audience by conflating the social and theatrical worlds, drawing attention to the ways in which people in life act out roles and imitate the theatre. In doing so, he expresses his concern that individuals’ ‘outsides’ – their outward social performances – might not match their ‘insides’ – their moral intentions, as opposed to the legibility of the pea he invokes in *The Welsh Opera* above. While critics have often dismissed Fielding’s plays as just an ‘apprenticeship’ for his later novels, I argue that they perform a vital role in Fielding’s developing theory of the

judgement of character in three ways. Firstly, by introducing the key themes of good nature and perception which would later be central to the novels, and secondly, by giving Fielding the space to experiment with form and inject social satire on poor taste and judgement. Finally, I propose that through his satirical experiments, he encourages his audience to take a more active role in judging action, satire and character. From his earliest plays, then, I argue that Fielding was developing his ideas for judging character and attempting to get his audience involved in that process.

The first part of this chapter looks more widely at the presentation of character on the eighteenth-century stage and considers how a contemporary audience may have experienced character. The second section of the chapter examines Fielding's first play *Love in Several Masques* (1728), in which he attempts to teach his characters and audience how to 'read' private essences through public performances, appealing to our good-nature and perception to distinguish between hypocritical and sincere performances.

The final section of this chapter turns to consider Fielding's first experimental play and the increasing emphasis he places on his audience's judgement. In his *Author's Farce* (1730), the ability to read character is severely hampered as dirty dealings in the world of print culture, reflecting wider anxieties about the contemporary print market, and characters' imitations of the theatre blur the boundaries between performance and reality. The introduction of the play-within-the-play in the third act signals the point at which characters and the roles they play become indistinct, requiring the audience to make their own decisions. In this play, Fielding places much greater emphasis on his audience's ability to judge character, stepping back to allow them to form their own judgements.

Character on the Eighteenth-Century Stage

To begin with, it may be useful to consider the experiences contemporary audiences would have had of eighteenth-century character and theatre. For early-eighteenth-century playgoers, the experience of attending the theatre was often a disruptive affair, with a myriad of distractions affecting their perception of the characters onstage. The theatrical evening offered several different types of entertainment alongside and in between the acts of the main play, including songs, dances, curtain-raisers, pantomimes, entr'actes and afterpieces (Ennis and Slagle 2007, 14).²³ As such, the audience's experience of the main play was 'at best, discontinuous', broken into often unrelated episodes (Freeman 2002, 3).²⁴ Unlike modern theatres and cinemas, the lights in the playhouse were not dimmed during the performance. This meant that the other members of the audience would be visible throughout the performance and often became as much a part of the spectacle as the actors on the stage (Freeman 2002, 3).²⁵ In his *Love in Several Masques* (1728), Fielding introduces his Lady Matchless as a spectator and source of considerable interest at a playhouse:

Merital. Did not you see the Lady Matchless last night? what Ecstasies did she impart even at a distance to her Beholders!

Malvil. A beautiful, rich, young Widow in the Front-box, makes as much Noise, as a Blazing-star in the Sky; draws as many Eyes on her,

²³ Several of the pairings of Fielding's plays and afterpieces with his own and other authors' works are significant for considering their reception. In particular, the pairing of the afterpiece *The Welsh Opera* (later extended but never performed as *The Grub-Street Opera*) with the distinctly anti-Walpolean *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731) may have resulted in the play's suppression or at least Fielding's withdrawal of it under pressure (and probably in receipt of some monetary incentive) from the government. For further discussion of the *Fall of Mortimer* and *The Grub-Street Opera*, see Kern 1976, 45; Downie 2009, 48–53; Bissonette 2009b, 31 and Chapter 2.

²⁴ In *The Author's Farce* (1730), the puppet-characters Somebody and Nobody perform a song and dance between the episodes of the puppet show, simulating the broken and often unrelated interruptions between acts of the main play on the eighteenth-century stage (see Fielding 2004, 268; Lewis 1987, 97). Ennis and Slagle have also suggested that the pairing of the main play and afterpiece could vary the reception of both pieces (Ennis and Slagle 2007, 15).

²⁵ In his *Historical Register for the Year 1736*, Fielding satirized audience members who used the mirrors in the theatre to look at themselves during the performance. His critic-character Lord Dapper complains that 'one can't see! One's self, I mean. Here are no looking glasses' (Fielding 2011, 421).

and is as much criticised on in the polite world, as the other in the learned (Fielding 2004, 25)

As Lockwood points out in his notes to this scene, Lady Matchless' position within the audience would have given her 'good exposure to all the other boxes, when their eyes wandered from the stage, and the pit benchers too, who liked to turn around and stare' (Fielding 2004, 25 n2). The line between performer and spectator was further blurred by those spectators who stood or were seated on the stage, and who might interact or interfere with the actors. Audiences and actors alike were spectators for one another, judging and being judged on their relative performances.

In keeping with this visibility, audience members rarely felt obliged to remain silent and often conversed loudly with other members of the audience during the performance (Nicoll 1961a, 1:11). In his diary (18 February 1667), Samuel Pepys complained that he 'lost the pleasure of the play wholly' when he was distracted from a performance of *The Maid's Tragedy* at the Royal Theatre by 'two talking Ladies and Sir Charles Sedley' (Thomas 1989, 175–76).²⁶ Similarly, the audience's opinion of a piece was often loudly vocalised with whistling, clapping, hissing or cat-calling. In his early poem *The Masquerade* (1728), Fielding describes a young man of quality who hisses at the opera to make a spectacle of himself or, as he puts it, just 'to show my teeth' (Fielding 1731, 4). Some audience members might even form cabals or parties in order to vocally assure the reception or damnation of a play (Freeman 2002, 3).²⁷ Fielding begins his *Don Quixote in England* (1734) with a satirical image of the raucous theatre audience and the playwrights who attempted to quell them:

²⁶ Widmayer notes that when Pepys writes about his experience of attending the theatre, he focuses far more on the other audience members than on the acting itself (Widmayer 2015, 6).

²⁷ Fielding expressed great distaste for audiences who would condemn a play 'unheard' in his Advertisement to the *Universal Gallant* (1735), reserving his particular ire for spectators 'who make a Jest of damning plays' (Fielding 2011, 144). In his notes on the play, Lockwood argues that several playwrights and novelists complained of spectators who damned plays for fun, including notably, Fielding's half-sister, Sarah. In her novel *David Simple* (1744), Sarah's titular character attends a play which is disrupted by "a Set of idle young Fellows, who came there on purpose to make a noise, without any Dislike to the Author" (quoted in Fielding 2011, 144 n1).

Player. Sir, the Audience make such a Noise with their Canes, that, if we don't begin immediately, they will beat the House down before the Play begins; and it is not advisable to put them out of Humour, for there are two or three of the loudest Cat-calls, in the Gallery, that ever were heard.

Author. Be not frightned [sic] at that. Those are only some particular Friends of mine, who are to put on the Face of Enemies at first, and be converted at the End of the First Act (Fielding 2011, 29)

However, even 'salting' an audience with supporters could not guarantee the reception of a play (Fielding 2011, 29 n2). Several productions failed due to audience disruption, including Colley Cibber's *Rival Fools* (1722), which had to be abandoned on its opening night due to violence, and Fielding's own *Eurydice; or the Devil Henpeck'd* (1736), which was hissed off the stage during its first performance.²⁸ Journals, including the *Spectator* No. 235), the *Female Tatler* (9 December 1709), the *Daily Journal* (8 February 1734) and the *Weekly Oracle* (no. 65, 1736), also complained of audience disruptions at the theatre (Hughes 1971, 18, 86; Fielding 2011, 144 n1). Indeed, audiences were a force to be reckoned with during the Restoration and eighteenth century, exercising a great deal of influence over the rules of the playhouse and the shape of the theatrical evening.²⁹ As Fielding's ill-fated author Spatter finds out to his great cost in *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737), it was a foolish playwright, actor or manager who underestimated the power the audience might hold over the success or failure of a piece.

These problems were compounded when one also considers the role of actors in bringing characters on the stage to life: a role over which playwrights and managers had

²⁸ Hughes notes that on the opening night of Fielding's *Eurydice* at Drury Lane (19 February 1737), audience members led a revolt to try to evict noisemakers in the footman's gallery. This ultimately failed and the play was stopped, after which Fielding withdrew it (Hughes 1971, 13, 18–19).

²⁹ Critics suggest that audiences resisted successive acts (7 December 1663, 2 February 1673, 7 January 1704, 2 March 1708) to prevent them from sitting on the stage, going behind the scenes, and into actresses' dressing rooms during the performance (Nicoll 1961a, 1:12; Hughes 1971, 20; Thomas 1989, 180, 187–88 Hughes also comments that Colley Cibber complained in his *Apology* about people being admitted backstage and interfering with actors. However, managers were resistant to the ideas of banishing spectators from the stage, as they derived financial benefits (known as swaggers) from them (Hughes 1971, 20–21). Indeed, the practice of allowing spectators onstage and behind the scenes appears to have continued until Garrick's reforms in the 1760s.

little stable control. Actors were often cast to play certain types of parts (e.g. a fop, the virgin), known as ‘lines of business’. This allowed audiences to anticipate what ‘type’ of characters would be featured in a play from the actors which appeared on the play bill. Those who took roles which contradicted their ‘type’ were recognised for ‘stepping out of line’ and risked drawing the ire of the audience (Freeman 2002, 28). However, before Garrick’s reforms in the 1760s, actors rarely stayed in character throughout the performance. Instead, they were noted for looking around the theatre, and even conversing or bowing to members of the audience while onstage (Freeman 2002, 4). In their Prompter No. 62 (13 June 1735), Aaron Hill and William Pople complained that actors:

[r]elax themselves as soon as any speech in their part is over, into an absent unattentiveness [sic] [...] looking around and examining the company of spectators with an ear only watchful of the cue, at which, like soldiers upon the word of command, they start suddenly back to their postures (Thomas 1989, 1989)

It must have been difficult, then, for spectators to judge when a character was not speaking which actions were part of performance and which were a result of the actor being out of character.

Furthermore, an actor’s own public character might also influence the audience’s judgement of a role, adding further layers of meaning through their similarity or difference to the part they were playing. In his *A General History of the Stage* (1749), William Chetwood recounted two differing responses to the actresses playing the role of Cordelia in *King Lear*. When Anne Bracegirdle took the part, Chetwood reports that she ‘Receive[d] a Plaudit from the Audience, more as a Reward for her reputable Character, than perhaps, her acting claim’d’. However, when the role was played by Elizabeth Barry (who was infamous for her promiscuity), the audience broke out into a ‘Horse-laugh’ during her ‘Arm’d in my Virgin Innocence’ speech, which changed the tone of the scene from one of ‘generous Pity and Compassion’ to one of ‘Ridicule’ (Chetwood 1749,

28).³⁰ In Mrs. Barry's case, William Gruber suggests that the disjunction between the character of the actor and that of the role she was playing was too great for the audience to bear. Importantly, Gruber suggests that it also shows that the audience had been 'silently assessing the relationship between the two all along', turning to mirth when the two forms of character (the role and the actress) came into obvious and comic opposition with one another (Gruber 1986, 2).

For Fielding, actors and their bodies often offered an opportunity to create extra layers of meaning and satire for character. For example, in his *Tom Thumb* (1730) which was later revised and extended to become the *Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731), Fielding used cross-gendered casting to satirize 'literary notions of public heroism or "greatness"' (Campbell 1995, 20). The play casts as its male hero the Lilliputian-sized Tom, who defeats an army of giants and is '[i]n every way except physical size [...] a typical hero of heroic tragedy' (Lewis 1987, 118).³¹ However, repeated jokes about Tom's size and masculinity continually point to the fact that he is less than a full man, as Lord Grizzle argues:

can my Princess such a Durgen wed,
One fitter for your Pocket than your Bed!
Advis'd by me, the worthless Baby shun,
Or you will ne'er be brought to bed of one (Fielding 2004, 568)

³⁰ Interestingly, Anne Oldfield does not appear to have suffered the same reaction when she took the part of Cato's virginal daughter, Marcia, in Addison's *Cato* (1713), despite being heavily pregnant at the time (Freeman 2002, 31). J.D. Phillipson notes that in the frontispiece to the published edition of *Cato*, Oldfield's pregnancy was not represented and the actress was pictured instead with her waist cinched by a structured corset. Phillipson suggests that representing Oldfield's pregnant body may have risked 'detract[ing] significantly from the shared memory of the quality of the performance'. Instead, they chose to 'depict Oldfield's characters as imagined' rather 'than "as acted"' (Phillipson 2014, 50–51). This suggests that the audience may have been willing to overlook the disparity between an actor's body and the part they were playing, if the quality and style of acting were maintained. For further discussion of these incidences see Gruber 1986, 2; Freeman 2002, 38; Phillipson 2014, 48–53.

³¹ Fielding repeatedly satirized the appearance of 'greatness' throughout his career, highlighting the disparity between what great men (like Sir Robert Walpole and Jonathan Wild) appear to be and what they actually are. I discuss Fielding's satire on Walpole and Wild in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

Fielding may have attempted to emphasise the disparity between Tom's size and his status as a traditional hero by casting an actress 'as young as five, who would have spoken the heroic bombast with high-pitched voices' (Lewis 1987, 119).³² Lewis, Campbell and Lockwood have all suggested that other parts may have also been cross-dressed, including Princess Huncamunca, Glumdulca and Grizzle (played by Charlotte Charke in 1735) (Lewis 1987, 119; Campbell 1995, 19–20; Fielding 2004, 533–34).³³ Certainly the physical difference between the size and bodies of the actors playing Tom and Huncamunca, or Tom and Glumdulca, would have added another layer of satire onto Tom's 'greatness' for their audience. As Jill Campbell suggests, such casting would have allowed Fielding to 'strip off layers of acquired or affected identity and find something truer underneath' (Campbell 1995, 13). Indeed, unmasking the differences between what a character appears to be and what they actually are was a central theme to many of Fielding's plays, as I explore below.

In such an environment, it is perhaps unsurprising then that we do not find the same connection with the inner lives of eighteenth-century characters as we have come to expect from the modern novel. Freeman similarly argues that

[t]his was not a theatre of absorption in character, then, but a theatre of interaction in which the audience was as much a part of the performance as the players. [...] [T]he power of performance was routinely shared and exchanged between audience and performers. Together they monitored not the depth of a character, but rather the arc of a genre over the course of five discontinuous acts (Freeman 2002, 5)

³² Lockwood notes that a 'Miss Jones' is listed as playing Tom on the *Dramatis Personae* for *Tom Thumb* (see Fielding 2004, 384). In the *Dramatis Personae* for *Tragedy of Tragedies*, however, the part is played by 'Young [John] Verhuyck', suggesting that the part was no longer gender reversed (Fielding 2004, 547). However, Campbell argues that 'the role quickly reverted to female actors such as "Miss S. Rogers, the Lilliputian Lucy," Miss Jones Jr., Miss Brett, and Mrs. Turner in subsequent productions in the early 1730's' (Campbell 1995, 256 n3).

³³ The Battestins have suggested that '[i]t is amusing, to be sure, to consider Tom Thumb the Great, played by a diminutive actress swaggering about the stage in hero's attire, as an ironic figure for the Great Man himself, Sir Robert Walpole' (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 88). While Fielding would later go on to satirize Walpole in a number of his plays and early novels (as I discuss in Chapter 2), I suggest that the cross-gender casting of Tom is probably incidental to the satire of Walpole in the play. I discuss cross-dressing in Fielding's works in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

This is not to say that audiences did not connect with characters on the stage at all. Rather, it seems that that creating a successful character on the stage was a challenging task for even the most experienced playwright, requiring a conscious eye to audience tastes and often requiring their cooperation in the process of creating character. As Carl Fisher observes, Fielding's relationship with his audience was always contested and he often satirized their bad behaviour and fickle nature in his plays (Fisher 2007, 123). However, he was also conscious and 'canny' about their role in play-making and used a variety of techniques at his disposal in order to 'cater to and resist audience preconception and expectations' (Fisher 2007, 119). Even this, however, could not guarantee success, as *Eurydice* proves. Nevertheless, Fielding's early plays (1728-1730) demonstrate a consistent awareness of the theatricality of play-going and of life more generally. He repeatedly exposes this theatricality to his audience by conflating images of social life with the theatre and by presenting individuals who are drawn into acting out roles. His experiments in theatrical form after 1730 place greater emphasis on his audience's ability to judge character, requiring that they maintain a critical distance and self-awareness that prevents immersion in character.

'Under false Vizors and Habits': Performance in *Love in Several Masques* (1728)

Fielding's first play, *Love in Several Masques* (1728), draws upon his early anxieties about the theatrical nature of public character. Premiering at the Drury Lane theatre on 16 February 1728 and running for four nights, *Love in Several Masques* 'follows the standards of the day, mock[ing] inappropriate social behaviour and personal foibles' (Fisher 2007, 122).³⁴ It is generally noted as Fielding's first play, but has traditionally

³⁴ Hume and Rivero have noted that while *Love in Several Masques* did reach its author's benefit on the third night, the play was neither an abject failure or a complete success in terms of performance history (R. Hume 1988; Rivero 1989). Despite this, Fielding seems to have been reasonably pleased with the reception of his first play, considering that its premiere was delayed due to the success of first run of Colley Cibber's *The Provok'd Husband* at the Drury Lane

been dismissed as an ‘orthodox play’ in imitation of Congreve (Lewis 1987, 86; Fielding 2004, 12).³⁵ Although it has attracted an increased degree of critical attention since the 1980s, discussions of it are often fairly perfunctory.³⁶ Hume deems it ‘interesting because it is Fielding’s’ and because of the ‘vehicles it offers to the principal actors’ but argues that it was ‘an imitative venture taking him in the wrong direction’: away from his yet-to-be-manifested strengths in dramatic satire and irregular drama (R. Hume 1988, 31). In contrast to these critics, I argue that this play is significant in the light of Fielding’s evolving theory of judging character because it introduces the concepts of good nature and perception, which would become central to Fielding’s presentation of good judgement in his later works. Throughout the play, Fielding repeatedly shows that these qualities are necessary in equal measure to protect individuals from hypocritical social performances and to enable them to judge the moral integrity of others’ actions.

Although many critics have overlooked *Love in Several Masques*, some have attempted to rescue it from obscurity. In one of the most in-depth and influential studies of the play, Albert Rivero notes its recurring concern with ‘the theatricality of human action’ as Fielding presents characters who ‘act out roles and scenes that other characters attempt to interpret’ (Rivero 1989, 18). Rivero argues that *Love in Several Masques*

Theatre (10 January to 12 February 1728) and was competing for audiences against John Gay’s spectacular first season of *The Beggar’s Opera* at Lincoln’s Inn Fields (1 February 1728) (see Preface, Fielding 2004, 20; Battestin and Battestin 1989; Paulson 2000, 17).

³⁵ Hume argues that Cross and Dudden both misleadingly label the play an imitation of Congreve. Instead Hume suggests that Fielding’s ‘affinities are closer to Centlivre and Cibber than Congreve (R. Hume 1988, 31). Lockwood notes that Arthur Murphy was among the first of Fielding’s critics to link *Love in Several Masques* with Congreve, but points out several similarities with many other Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays, in particular, the work of Molière (Fielding 2004, 3–4). Hunter, Lewis and Rivero all suggest the influence of Restoration comedy on *Love in Several Masques* and Fielding’s next play, *The Temple Beau* (1730) (Hunter 1975, 11; Lewis 1987, 86; Rivero 1989, 4).

³⁶ Notable scholars who have engaged with the play since the 1980s include Simon Varey (1986), Robert Hume (1988), Albert Rivero (1989), Tiffany Potter (1995), Matthew J. Kinservik (2002) and Thomas Lockwood (2004). The Battestins also provide a useful discussion of the play’s acceptance at Drury Lane theatre, but do not offer any analysis of the play itself (see Battestin and Battestin 1989, 59–62).

focuses on ‘stripping away [...] masks to reveal the reality behind them’ and stresses the importance of ‘the ability to read the world properly and thus arrive at correct judgements’ (Rivero 1989, 18). While Matthew Kinservik admits that Rivero’s reading is ‘hard to argue with’, he contends that ‘it does not reveal much about how to read the world or which masks must be stripped away’ (Kinservik 2002, 59). Instead, Kinservik suggests that ‘the repeated references to good- and ill-nature define what constitutes a correct judgment: a “satirical” or “censorious” judgment is bad, while a generous, forgiving judgment is good’ (Kinservik 2002, 60). I argue that this appeal to generous assessment is a common theme throughout Fielding’s work which he takes up in opposition to the image of innate human depravity offered by materialists like Hobbes and Mandeville. Such ill-natured and wide-sweeping judgements are shown in Fielding’s play to blind characters to other explanations for individuals’ behaviour. Moreover, Fielding seems to suggest that censorious judgement can lead an individual to become socially isolated by limiting their ability to empathise with and read others. In answer to Kinservik, I suggest that Fielding does not offer a strategy for ‘stripping masks away’ because he is concerned it could not be consistently and universally applied, and might inadvertently lead to censorious judgement. Instead, like a judicial examination, he encourages good-natured and empathetic judgement, which takes context and the necessity of performance into account.

I argue that in *Love in Several Masques*, Fielding engages with wider debates about the theatricality of human character as he presents spectators (predominately the other *dramatis personae*) who struggle to read ‘authentic’ private essence through exaggerated (though not necessarily ‘inauthentic’) public performances. Rather optimistically, Fielding suggests that private character can (eventually) be ‘uncovered’ or ‘unmasked’ by worthy and good-natured individuals when they unite this quality with perception and empathy. The play centres around a loosely connected trio of courting

couples: Wisemore and Lady Matchless; Merital and Helena; and Malvil and Vermilia. With the exception (as his name suggests) of Merital, ‘all of the main characters must prove their sincerity and value of their pretensions to love’ (Rivero 1989, 16). I suggest that the main characters can only do this by demonstrating that they possess the necessary qualities of good nature and perception, which allow them to read other characters accurately. In the manner of many of Fielding’s later novels, good nature and an ability to look beyond one’s own experiences and desires are key to uncovering private character. As Merital argues at the end of the first act, only those who possess both ‘good Judgement’ and ‘Good-Nature’ are able to recognise the internal worth of others and fully ‘relish’ these qualities (Fielding 2004, 36). However, the process of judgement is complicated by the presence of self-interested fops who use performance to hide their desires for other’s wealth. In response, many of the major characters are forced to adopt their own performances to guard against deception. The difficulty of reading character for the characters onstage (who do not have the benefit of the audience’s privileged knowledge) is identifying which characters are performing ‘under false Vizors [sic] and Habits’ and which performances sincerely reflect intentions (Fielding 1972, 155).³⁷

³⁷ It seems to me that Fielding revisits this problem of discerning misleading performance (albeit in a more comic and irreverent way) in his later play *Rape Upon Rape* (1730) (later retitled *The Coffee-House Politician*). In *Rape Upon Rape*, Fielding presents a world in which all characters are assumed to be performing a part and so are read in opposition to their protestations and appearances. The heroine, Hilaret, is repeatedly mistaken for a prostitute by the play’s male cast and her protestations of being a virtuous lady only strengthen her spectators’ conviction that she is playing a part. In this world, social and legal corruptions have progressed so far that no one can be taken on their appearance, even the innocent and virtuous characters. By the end of the play, however, Hilaret’s virtue is compromised when she plots to entrap the corrupt Justice Squeezum. This plan fails as she is outmanoeuvred by the wary Squeezum. While Fielding is more than happy to punish the corrupt, justice must be delivered by the hand of the law (in this play represented by the good-natured and aptly named Justice Worthy) rather than by those working outside of its bounds. Although *Rape Upon Rape* offers some interesting contrasts to *Love in Several Masques* in its presentation of performance and comic failures of perception, it does not examine the importance of good nature to judgement in as much detail as the earlier play.

It seems to me that the difficulty of judging the performances of other characters in *Love in Several Masques* is explored most clearly through the vexed relationship between its central couple, Wisemore and Lady Matchless. As experienced members of London society, they both appear to accept that the people around them are playing roles and have the potential to deceive them.³⁸ However, both must learn to temper their judgements of society with good nature and look outside their past experiences in order to read one another correctly.

Wisemore's ability to read Lady Matchless' character is severely hampered at the beginning of the play by his ill-nature, preconceptions about society, and his disappointed expectations in love. As a reformed beau, Wisemore is 'no ingénu' in society and readily recognizes its performative nature and inversion of traditional values and qualities (Varey 1986, 6):

London is to me [...] a Mistress, whose Imperfections I have discovered, and cast off. [...] I have seen Hypocrisy pass for Religion, Madness for Sense, Noise and Scurrility for Wit, and Riches for the whole Train of Virtues (Fielding 2004, 29)

Wisemore uses this as an excuse to close himself off from society, retreating to the country to study philosophy. However, Merital readily recognizes this as a performance and advises Wisemore not to 'affect Singularity this way, for in Town we look on none to be so great a Fool as a Philosopher' (Fielding 2004, 30). As the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that Wisemore's philosophy is indeed a mask he dons to hide his 'true' face as the distressed lover (Rivero 1989, 20). Ironically, Wisemore's 'true' character is revealed at the end of the play only when he puts on a disguise as a sergeant in order to convince Lady Matchless of the 'mercenary Views of her pretended Admirers' (Fielding 2004, 86). Tiffany Potter has pointed out that in donning this costume 'Wisemore

³⁸ Varey argues that Wisemore shows a preference for country over town which would later be reiterated by characters who visit London in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). However, he also argues that unlike the stock country buffoon (like Squire Western), Wisemore has experience of the town, having been a former rake (Varey 1986, 6).

chooses to participate in the libertine practices of masquerade and disguise to gain the woman he desires' (Potter 1999, 39). As such, he appears to echo the libertines and prudes in Fielding's poem and first published work, *The Masquerade* (1728), '[w]ho masque the face, t' unmasque the mind', revealing more of his character in the act of disguising than he does throughout the rest of the play (Fielding 1731, 3). Having donned the disguise of a sergeant, Wisemore can lay aside his philosophical performance and reveal his 'true' character: that of a libertine lover desperate to gain the affections of his mistress.

An individual's choice of reading can also reveal character in *Love in Several Masques*. Wisemore uses his classical reading and ill-natured philosophy to isolate himself from society. When Wisemore returns to town, he claims to have limited his company in the country entirely to books: for who, he argues, 'would converse with Fools and Fops, whilst they might enjoy a *Cicero* or an *Epictetus*, a *Plato* or an *Aristotle*?' (Fielding 2004, 28). Fielding contrasts Wisemore's high-minded study with Merital's description of Helena's reading practice, which she uses to transcend the restrictions of her physical environment.³⁹ Isolated by her overbearing and mercenary guardians, Sir Positive and Lady Trap, Helena instead resorts to reading to broaden her horizons:

by an intimate Conversation with Plays, Poems, Romances, and such gay Studies, by which she has acquired a perfect knowledge of the Polite World without ever seeing it, [she has] turned the Confinement of her Person into the Enlargement of her Mind (Fielding 2004, 27)⁴⁰

³⁹ Potter finds similarities between Merital's praise of Helena and Fielding's compliments on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's 'accurate judgement' and learning, which Fielding argues makes her 'the Glory of her own Sex' and 'a living Confutation of those morose Schoolmen who wou'd confine Knowledge to the Male Part of the Species' (Fielding 2004, 19; Potter 1999, 38).

⁴⁰ Fielding's attitude to female education appears ambiguous here. While it does prepare her for life in society, suggesting that it is ultimately more useful than Wisemore's classical learning, Helena's reading educates her in seemingly frivolous and unproductive topics: 'gay Studies' rather than household or philosophical principles. However, Angela Smallwood suggests that in his later novels Fielding 'sees no moral benefit to be gained in extending the experience of women to include classical learning' and argues that Fielding does not see Sophia or Amelia's lack of it a burden to their understanding or character (Smallwood 1989, 137). This is directly

Helena's reading practice prepares her for life in the 'Polite World', helping her to decipher the performances of those around her. In comparison, Wisemore's classical reading and isolation in the country only reinforces his preconceptions and leads to his greater self-enclosure.⁴¹ As such, Thomas Keymer has argued that Wisemore can be read as an early version of Fielding's Man of the Hill in *Tom Jones* (1749) (Keymer 2007, 21).⁴² Like Wisemore, the Man of the Hill isolates himself from society when it fails to meet his expectations. He argues that all societies evince the 'same hypocrisy, the same fraud; in short, the same follies and vices, dressed up in different habits' (Fielding 2008b, 417).⁴³ However, as Tom himself points out, this sceptical view is heavily tainted by the Man of the Hill's past experiences, leading him to make sweeping statements about human nature: 'none seem to have any title to assert human nature to be necessarily and universally evil, but those whose own minds afford them one instance of this natural depravity' (Fielding 2008b, 421). With Mandeville and Hobbes evidently in mind, Fielding suggests here and in the *Champion* (11 December 1739) that it is the 'Deformity [of] their own Minds' which leads self-enclosed individuals to pass censorious judgement on society *en masse* and present the world 'in a very vile and detestable

contrasted with Mrs Bennet in *Amelia* (1752) whose learning is often presented as vain and self-aggrandizing at the expense of her relationship with those around her. In one of their many debates, Dr Harrison points out that female learning could be a barrier to a happy marriage, when it is used to challenge traditional gender relations. Mrs Bennet's own marriage to Sergeant Atkinson is held up the microscope of the reader's judgement, and is saved more by Atkinson's good-natured (although illiterate) understanding than Mrs Bennet's learning (see Fielding 2010, 404–7).

⁴¹ Morris Golden has argued that Fielding was greatly concerned throughout his works with people who were 'unable to see outside their own opinions and supposed interests and in consequence cause great confusion and danger' (Golden 1966, 12). Golden suggests that several of Fielding's major plot issues in the later novels are a result of self-enclosure, such as Lady Booby's attempted seduction of Joseph in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) (see Golden 1966, 9–10, 42–59).

⁴² Potter argues that Fielding's plays presents several character types which would appear again in Fielding's later novels (Potter 1999, 34). This suggests that many of Fielding's later novelistic characters were influenced by his theatrical roots and experiments, as I argue above.

⁴³ For the Man of the Hill episodes see *Tom Jones*, book VIII.xi-xv, 390-421.

Light' (Fielding 2003a, 56). Such a judgement, Fielding argues, reveals more about the moral character of the individual than it does about the society they censor.

Furthermore, I argue that both men's sweeping statements about society demonstrate an excessive scepticism which renders their judgements ungentlemanly. Steven Shapin has argued that since the seventeenth century, contemporary wisdom (especially amongst the scientific community) recommended that gentlemanly readers find the 'golden mean' between naïve credulity and excessive scepticism: "Believe not all you hear, nor speak all you believe"; "It's an equal Mischief to distrust all, as to believe all" (Shapin 1994, 224). This became especially important when considering new claims to knowledge in the scientific community, such as the accounts of travellers and observations made using developing technologies (for example, the microscope and telescope), which pushed the boundaries of what was known and knowable. Scientists and writers called for claims to new knowledge to be vigorously tested before they were admitted into the halls of knowledge and warned their readers to be weary in their own assessments.⁴⁴ Too much '[c]redulity on one part', Samuel Johnson warned in 1775, was 'a strong temptation to deceit on the other' and should be tempered with a healthy degree of scepticism (Johnson 1775, 192).⁴⁵ On the other side, extreme scepticism (Pyrrhonism) could lead one to disbelieve widely accepted facts. An example of this can be seen in the case of Jesuit historian Jean Hardouin, who in 1697 suggested that all but a few of the surviving classical texts had been forged by thirteenth-century monks (Lynch 2008, 182-

⁴⁴ Francis Bacon argued that people often viewed novel claims with a great deal of distrust, and 'were prepared to credit – even to a fault – the empirical reports of the ancients' over those made by their contemporaries.' However, 'too servile an attitude to the ancients' might lead individuals to make 'epistemic error[s]' in their assessments of new knowledge claims (Shapin 1994, 196). For further discussion of scientific testimony, see Chapter 4.

⁴⁵ Ashley Marshall comments that satirists also often recommended that a degree of scepticism for their readers: '[t]he advocacy of healthy scepticism is not merely an abstract moral lesson; it has considerable topical relevance to the hottest debates of these years and applies to contested subjects of real practical importance to everyday life' (Marshall 2013, 164).

3). In *Tom Jones*, the Man of the Hill expresses a similar level of scepticism in his ill-natured disbelief of Tom's account of the Jacobite Rebellions:

no, no, young man, unacquainted as I am with what has passed in the world for these last thirty years, I cannot be so imposed upon as to credit so foolish a tale; but I see you have a mind to sport with my ignorance (Fielding 2008b, 414)

Shapin suggests that extreme sceptics ran the risk of 'being ejected' from their social groups due to their 'uncooperativeness' (Shapin 1994, 20). Indeed, David Hume recognised that being an active member of a community was the 'great subverter of *Pyrrhonism*' and so was to be recommended after long periods of study (D. Hume 1975, 158-9). Having indulged his scepticism for so long, the Man of the Hill seems unable or unwilling to let go of these ill-natured opinions and re-join society, even when confronted with another's distress. In comparison, Wisemore's return to London helps to gradually break down his scepticism and allows him to judge performances individually. Specifically, he must recognise that not *all* performances are hypocritical: some (including his own) are defence mechanisms designed to help individuals survive in an inherently theatrical society.

Among those who adopt performance as a protective measure is Lady Matchless, Wisemore's former fiancée. For Lady Matchless, performance is a necessary evil to help her negotiate society without being deceived by her would-be suitors. It is also, however, something she derives pleasure from, as it allows her to make fools of the fops and beaux of the play. As a beautiful, rich widow, Lady Matchless is always aware that she is a target for fortune-hunting fops. She comments in her opening scene that 'I sometimes look on my Drawing-Room as a little Parliament of Fools, to which every different Body sends its Representatives' (Fielding 2004, 37). To combat this threat, Lady Matchless alternates between two distinctive performances: one of modest unawareness of the attention that she draws, and the other of a social coquette who flirts and encourages her would-be suitors to compete with one another. In doing so, she stages her public

character consciously to fool the fops and keep them at bay. When Merital describes Lady Matchless at the playhouse, he suggests the ways in which she stages her public character, affecting an ‘air’ of unawareness about the attention which she inevitably draws:

[s]he carried it with an Air not conscious of the Envy and Adoration she contracted. That becoming Modesty in her Eyes! that lovely, easy Sweetness in her Smile! that Gracefulness of her Mein! that Nobleness, without Affectation in her Looks (Fielding 2004, 25–26).

The dissection of each of these qualities (‘air’, ‘mien’, ‘looks’) reads like an actor’s handbook, drawing the audience’s attention to their studied and theatrical nature, and suggesting that Lady Matchless is in fact ‘a consummate actress, using art to conceal art’ (Rivero 1989, 19). Her ability to act is made explicit at the end of the play when, having discovered Wisemore’s masquerade, she plays along in order to expose her would-be suitors, knowing full well that she ‘shall find [them] guilty’ (Fielding 2004, 90).⁴⁶ Her performance then both draws attention to her and allows her to extricate herself from those who are unworthy of her. It is a protective stance to which she can retreat when her suitors become too threatening or forward in their advances.

At other points of the play, however, Lady Matchless switches from this modest performance to present the appearance of a coquette in order to revenge herself against men who, like her tyrannical first husband, would try to dupe her out of her money and freedom: ‘my revenge shall not be on his Memory, but his Sex; that Part of it which I know wou’d follow his Example, were they but in his Place’ (Fielding 2004, 37).

However, she also uses this performance for more selfless reasons in the play, saving her cousin, Helena, from a mercenary marriage with Sir Apish Simple. Adopting an air of coquetry, Lady Matchless flirts with Sir Apish, teasing him that: ‘a Lady who has seen

⁴⁶ It is unclear from the text how much of what follows this declaration is an act. I suspect that Lady Matchless realises that the sergeant is Wisemore in disguise and so feigns her distress when she receives news that he has died. Unfortunately, no contemporary accounts of the acting choices in this play remain, and Anne Oldfield could have chosen to play this scene either way.

the World shou'd be more agreeable to one of your refined Taste; besides, I have heard you say, you like a Widow' (Fielding 2004, 59). Sir Apish takes this as a positive declaration of her interest in him and stumbles over himself in the final two acts to extricate himself from his promise to Helena. He even goes so far as to aid Merital in secretly marrying Helena by performing the part of the parson. However, when she is confronted by Sir Apish and her suitors about her 'promises', Lady Matchless turns their fashionable discourse against them, using it to excuse her behaviour: 'are you so conversant in the *Beau-Monde*, and don't know that Women, like Quicksilver, are never fixed 'till they're dead?' (Fielding 2004, 88). Unlike the *beau monde*, however, Lady Matchless (as her name suggests) is the 'genuine article' and '[b]y the end it will turn out that her performance and her inner worth coincide' (Rivero 1989, 19). Like Wisemore, Lady Matchless must resist the sceptical view of the world and learn that not all suitors are hypocrites out to seduce her for her money. Instead, Kinservik argues that she must temper her censorious judgement of men as a collective 'and replace misanthropy with philanthropy' (Kinservik 2002, 60). Once she has exposed the fops and recognised that Wisemore values her for herself rather than her money, she can relinquish these performances and reveal her true character and worth.

While characters' performances in *Love in Several Masques* may be initially problematic for the other *dramatis personae* to judge, the audience is rarely in much doubt about a character's true worth. Throughout the play and in keeping with the techniques of traditional drama, Fielding exposes private character to us through their asides, disguises and a character's dialogue with others. This creates comedy, as we witness characters adjusting their performances for their onstage spectators (the other characters). For the contemporary audience, Fielding also exposed the 'type' of character by cannily writing his parts along the 'lines' of the principal actors at the Drury Lane theatre. Hume suggests that the 'greatest virtue' of *Love in Several Masques* was 'the

vehicles it offered to the principal actors' of the Drury Lane Theatre: '[b]ecause Fielding is working in clichés, he contrives parts squarely in the "lines" favoured by Drury Lane's most prominent performers' (R. Hume 1988, 33).⁴⁷

While this was no doubt a shrewd business move on Fielding's part, I argue that it also offered him the opportunity to 'flesh out' his characters by linking them to the principal actors' 'lines of business' and their performances in other plays.⁴⁸ As Lockwood has noted, Fielding used a similar combination of actors as had been previously cast in John Vanbrugh and Cibber's *The Provok'd Husband* (1728) which had proved to be a 'memorable success' only weeks before the opening of *Love in Several Masques* (Fielding 2004, 9).⁴⁹ I suggest that Fielding was able to draw upon the actors' success in those earlier parts to flesh out his own characters. For example, Anne Oldfield's sensational performance of Lady Townly in *The Provok'd Husband* heavily influenced the role of Lady Matchless in Fielding's play, which she also played despite having what Fielding described as 'a slight Indisposition [caused] by her violent Fatigue' from playing Lady Townly (Fielding 2004, 4–5, 20–21). The foppish Rattle also bears a marked similarity to Tattle in Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) which was 'perhaps not

⁴⁷ Hume notes that Merital was played by Robert Wilks, Wisemore by John Mills, Rattle by Colley Cibber, Lady Matchless by Anne Oldfield, Vermilia by Mary Porter, Helena by Hester Booth, Malvil by Bridgwater and Sir Apish by Josias Miller (R. Hume 1988, 33). Lockwood adds to this list that Benjamin Griffin took the part of Lord Formal, and John Harper played Sir Positive Trap, but notes that Barton Booth was left out of the production owing to the fact that he was seriously ill at the time (Fielding 2004, 9). Fielding would later design several of his plays around specific actors, most notably Kitty Clive. Fielding would later write *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734) as a vehicle for Clive's 'histrionic talents' and extend the role of Harriet for in his revised edition of *The Author's Farce* (1734) to give her a greater part (Rivero 1989, 41; R. Hume 1988, 169; Dickie 2011, 179).

⁴⁸ Kinservik similarly argues that Fielding has a 'good sense of the theatrical milieu when he wrote' *Love in Several Masques* (Kinservik 2002, 60).

⁴⁹ Lockwood comments that this is despite the fact that the cast for *Love in Several Masques* were 'rather senior' for a play 'so devoted to characters and themes of youth' (Fielding 2004, 9). For example, while we are never told by Fielding how old Merital is supposed to be, Lockwood argues that he is 'obviously a lot younger than the Wilks who was playing him at 62 or thereabouts' (Fielding 2004, 9). The audience's seeming acceptance at the age difference between the actor and the part he was playing again suggests that they were more concerned with the preservation of the 'type' of character rather than the 'realism' of the part portrayed.

coincidentally a signature role of Cibber's' (Fielding 2004, 4).⁵⁰ With the 'types' of characters easily readable through the actor's 'lines', it must have been fairly straightforward for the audience to identify which characters' performances were likely to be disingenuous and which were not. The comedy is created as the audience gain a privileged position over the other characters in the play and we watch them misread one another's performances. While this play is not particularly complex in the demands it makes of its audience or experimental in terms of genre, I argue that it demonstrates Fielding's first attempt to present his concepts of good nature and perception, and to examine their role in forming good judgement on character. I suggest that it therefore plays an important role in Fielding's emerging theory of judging character, and so deserves greater critical consideration than it has hitherto been given. Although in their infancy here, I submit that these ideas would later become central characteristics to many of Fielding's virtuous protagonists and his formula for judging character in his later novels.

Although *Love in Several Masques* enjoyed a modest reception, Lockwood suggests that contemporary reactions seem to have been one of 'polite suffrage, then a blank of indifference', with the play disappearing from the stage after just four performances (Fielding 2004, 10).⁵¹ Fielding's next theatrical offering, *The Temple Beau*— another five-act intrigue comedy with similar sentiments and tone — fared slightly better at Goodman's Fields, playing for nine nights continuously (beginning 26 January 1730).⁵² During the 1729-1730 season, however, Fielding found it increasingly difficult

⁵⁰ Lockwood discusses Fielding's debt to Restoration and contemporary playwrights in his introduction to the play (see Fielding 2004, 3–6).

⁵¹ Fielding returned to University in Leiden in March 1728. While at Leiden, Fielding began work on a 'few loose Scenes' which would later become *Don Quixote in England* (1734) and *The Wedding Day* (pub. 1743). He began writing *The Temple Beau* sometime after he left Leiden at the end of April 1729 (Fielding 2004, 99).

⁵² Lockwood notes that *The Temple Beau* was performed again on the 10 February and 3 March "at the Particular Desire of several Persons of Quality" and was revived again for two productions during the summer of 1730 (Fielding 2004, 104).

to get his plays produced at Drury Lane or Lincoln's Inn Fields. During this period, three or four of Fielding's plays were rejected by these playhouses, leading him to become increasingly frustrated with the managers of the patent theatres. In response, he wrote an irregular three-act play based on Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (first performed in 1671 and published in 1672), entitled *The Author's Farce*, which would become his first major theatrical success. Importantly for my argument, *The Author's Farce* is the first of Fielding's plays to involve the audience in the process of judgement, breaking down the dramatic illusion and exposing the similarities between life and the stage.

Judging Degraded Taste in *The Author's Farce* (1730)

Following his own failure to have several of his plays produced during the 1729-1730 season at Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, Fielding set about writing a farce on the woeful experiences of professional authors in the London literary market.⁵³ In *The Author's Farce* (1730), Fielding turned away from the regular five-act formula which had won him only modest applause for *Love in Several Masques* and his second play, *The Temple Beau* (1730).⁵⁴ Instead, he began to experiment with dramatic form and the rehearsal format to produce what has since been called the first of his 'irregular' plays.⁵⁵

⁵³ Lockwood argues that while Fielding was obviously disappointed at the rejection of his *The Wedding Day* and *Don Quixote in England*, Cibber and Wilks (managers of the Drury Lane theatre) were 'probably right to reject' these plays in their early form (Fielding 2004, 185). Fielding's second play *The Temple Beau* (1730) may have also been rejected by the managers of the Drury Lane theatre, and was produced in January 1730 at Goodman's Fields. Fielding was given a second opportunity to present *Don Quixote in England* for production in 1734 when Theophilus Cibber led a revolt of actors from the Drury Lane theatre. In the wake of the principal actors, Fielding quickly revised the piece, adding in the scenes of electoral corruption, for those remaining at Drury Lane to perform (Fielding 2011, 1). Harold Pagliaro notes that John Rich rejected *The Wedding Day* for production at the Lincoln's Inn Theatre in 1730 (Pagliaro 1998, 61). It was first performed in 1743, after the passing of the Theatrical Licensing Act, and was published as part of Fielding's *Miscellanies* shortly afterward.

⁵⁴ Although Fielding moved away from the traditional five-act comedies for *The Author's Farce* and several of his later productions, he did not abandon the form entirely in the 1730s. Rather, Rivero has suggested that Fielding regularly returned to the five-act format after 1730, believing that 'he would eventually achieve his potential as a dramatist in them' (Rivero 1989, 33).

⁵⁵ Hunter notes that the rehearsal tradition dates back to ancient Greece, with 'numerous plays' being produced in a similar format during the English Renaissance; 'but scattered early instances

Although this play is mostly a *jeu d'esprit* which Fielding hoped would make amends for his own bad experiences in the London theatre market, *The Author's Farce* helped to uncover Fielding's talent for experimentation, which would be key to his later successes in the theatre and the novels. Lockwood argues that Fielding's experiments in *The Author's Farce* helped him to tap into 'some essential creative vein' which would 'stand in the same vital relation to his dramatic career as *Shamela* or *Joseph Andrews* [would] to his novel-writing' (Fielding 2004, 185).⁵⁶ Indeed, *The Author's Farce* proved to be Fielding's first theatrical success, running for a total of forty-one performances at the Haymarket theatre from 30 March 1730, making it the longest opening season since John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728 (Hassall 1974, 75). Building on Lockwood's comments, I argue that *The Author's Farce* helped to open Fielding's 'creative vein' for experimentation, altering his relationship with his audience and allowing him to place greater emphasis on their ability to judge accurately. His irregular structure and satire opens a space for the audience to make their own judgements on action, taste and character. I suggest that this penchant for experimentation and Fielding's appeals to the audience's judgement play a key role not only in his later theatrical career, but throughout his literary works.

The Author's Farce follows the comic frustrations of author-character Luckless as he fails to get his 'serious' plays produced or published. Thwarted by the mercenary and corrupt practices of booksellers and managers, Luckless presents his farcical puppet

do not begin to predict the popularity of the form during the eighteenth century' (Hunter 1975, 49–50). Buckingham's play proved popular, being revived over one hundred and fifty times during the century after its first production. Hunter argues that while Fielding's rehearsal plays did not achieve the 'lasting success' of *The Rehearsal*, 'several of them were extremely popular in their early runs, and they all show Fielding's affinity for the form and his competence in it' (Hunter 1975, 50).

⁵⁶ Lockwood here echoes C.B. Woods's comment that the position of *The Author's Farce* 'is somewhat analogous to that of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* with respect to his development as a writer of prose fiction' (C. B Woods 1966, xv). However, Rivero argues that to put such 'prophetic significance' on the text is to risk committing a 'teleological fallacy' (Rivero 1989, 34).

show as the third act of the play. The puppet show satirizes ‘The Pleasures of the Town’ (also the title of Luckless’ play), featuring allegorical puppets played by living actors to burlesque each genre (tragedy, opera, novel) who pay court to the Goddess of Nonsense in the afterlife.⁵⁷ Drawing on, in Lockwood’s words, a ‘period habit of satire by way of ironically well-disposed imitation’, Fielding participated in wider debates about the status of authorship and literary taste in the period (Fielding 2004, 188).

The Author’s Farce has traditionally drawn critical interest due to its contemporary popularity and the use of the ‘irregular’ rehearsal form, which Fielding would build upon for his later political satires. Critics have suggested that while Fielding’s adaptation of the rehearsal technique was not new – two of Fielding’s competitors, James Ralph and Gabriel Odingsell, also produced plays in the rehearsal format in the same week that *The Author’s Farce* opened at the Haymarket theatre – his methods are ‘decidedly original and very different from those of his predecessors’ (Lewis 1987, 87).⁵⁸ Susan Ahern has similarly argued that Fielding uses the rehearsal technique in ‘more than an economical way to combine burlesque of theatrical trends with critical comments’ (Ahern 1982, 46). Instead, she argues that Fielding uses the form to expose the theatricality of life, showing how ‘individuals in real life act out roles much as characters in drama do’ (Ahern 1982, 46). Fielding uses the rehearsal format to

⁵⁷ Fielding attempted to align himself with the Scriblerus Club (of which Swift, Pope and Gay were notable members) by publishing the original version of *The Author’s Farce* and *Tom Thumb* under the pseudonym ‘Scriblerus Secundus’ (Lewis 1987, 86). Scriblerus also appears as an author-character in *The Welsh Opera* (1731) and its revision *The Grub-Street Opera* (pub 1731, but never performed) (Widmayer 2015, 170).

⁵⁸ Rudolph and Rivero both note that James Ralph’s *The Fashionable Lady* (Goodman’s Fields, 2 April 1730) and Gabriel Odingsell’s *Bayes Opera* (Drury Lane, 30 March 1730) are ballad operas in the rehearsal format, and may have been the main competition to *The Author’s Farce* during its first season (Rudolph 1975, 46; Rivero 1989, 45–46). Battestin also suggests that Ralph’s *The Touch Stone* (1728), with its ‘ironic survey of the diversions of the town’, may have been a key influence in Fielding’s experiments in *The Author’s Farce* and *Tom Thumb*, and Fielding ‘freely incorporated’ several of Ralph’s songs from *The Fashionable Lady* in his *Grub-Street Opera* (1731) (Battestin 2000, 123). Richard Bevis argues Fielding’s main innovation in *The Author’s Farce* was to change the ‘fatuous’ author-character of previous rehearsal plays into a ‘spokesman’ for his own ideas (Bevis 1990, 57-8).

suggest the similarities between people and puppets, blurring the boundaries between performance and ‘reality’ through a series of revelations about character. Freeman has argued that Fielding

exploits confusion over how to construe characters and their actions in order to attain a position of authority from which he can act as a culture Spectator, legislating taste and judgment and distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate forms (Freeman 2002, 58–59)

Similarly, I argue that Fielding makes it difficult for the audience to judge character as distinctions between essential character and the parts that characters play dissolve. He suggests that this breakdown is a direct result of the degradation of literary taste and the collapse of genre boundaries, which gives rise to nonsense and reduce the audience’s involvement to mechanical applause. While Fielding upholds a sense of the duality between public and essential character, these become increasingly difficult to distinguish between in the play as nonsense takes over. Instead, individuals seem to become so comically immersed in their performances that they appear to ‘forget’ their essential characters, leaving the audience to question if these too were just performances all along. While Fielding frames this in a comic and light-hearted way, it creates some interesting questions at the intersections between performance and character. Fielding refuses to offer any definite commentary on character in the closing scenes of the play and instead leaves his audience to form their own judgements based on the shifting performances that his characters enact. I argue that this encourages the audience to become more involved in the process of judging character, and Fielding would build upon the technique in his later plays and novels.

In *The Author’s Farce* Fielding returns to his early anxiety that poor reading and spectating practices, and the degradation of literary taste may lead audiences to be unable to distinguish between essences and performances. In doing so, he engages in wider satire about the status of literary taste and authorship during the period. While Fielding treated inept reading practices as an individual matter in *Love in Several Masques*, in *The*

Author's Farce he presents them as symptoms of a wider literary corruption that makes audiences incapable of judging character.

In the opening two acts, Fielding satirizes the degradation and corruption of literary taste by presenting the struggles of his author-character Luckless as he attempts to get his 'serious' play performed. He is prevented by a series of corrupt booksellers and theatre managers who privilege an author's public reputation (and his ability to make money) over his talent as a writer. As one bookseller tells Luckless:

the Reputation of the Author carries the greatest Sway in these Affairs. The Town have been so fond of some Authors, that they have run them up to Infallibility, and wou'd have applauded them even against their Senses (Fielding 2004, 237)

Taste and sense are subservient to fashionable nonsense, making it difficult for untested new playwrights like Luckless (or Fielding) to get their works produced. Any author who is lucky enough to have his play read by theatre managers must then contend with their alterations. When Luckless presents his initial play to actor/managers Marplay and Sparkish (caricatures of Drury Lane managers Colley Cibber and Robert Wilks), their amendments reduce Luckless' lines to nonsensical drivel:⁵⁹

Luckless. [Reads] With thee, the barren Rocks, where not one step
Of human Race lies printed in the Snow,
Looks lovely as the smiling Infant Spring. [...]
Marplay. I cou'd alter those Lines to a much better Idea.
With thee, the barren Blocks, (That is Trees.) where not a bit
Of human Face is painted on the Bark,
Look green as Covent-Garden in the Spring.
Luckless. Green as Covent-Garden!
Marplay. Yes, Covent-Garden Market: where they sell Greens. (Fielding 2004, 242–43)

Cibber was notorious in the period for his alterations to playwrights' work, most notably his 'amendments' to Shakespeare's *King John* (Fielding 2011 433 n1).⁶⁰ In his *Dramatic Miscellanies* (1784), Thomas Davies argued that Cibber's edits caused a great 'clamour

⁵⁹ Varey and W. B. Coley have both identified Marplay and Sparkish as caricatures of Cibber and Wilks respectively (Varey 1986, 9; Fielding 2003a, 27 n1).

⁶⁰ Fielding would later ridicule Cibber's amendments to *King John* in his *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) (Fielding 2011, 433)

against the author, whose presumption was highly censured for daring to alter Shakespeare' (Davies 1784, 1:3). Although Cibber was far from alone in this, he became a focal point for satire on poor taste and mismanagement. Writing in his *Dunciad* (Book IV), Pope lamented the 'impertinent alterations' of modern writers, who sought to make their names by issuing new editions of 'the most distinguished Writers' (Pope 2006, 522). He was so concerned about the misrepresentation of his works that he went so far as to issue his own edition of his works in 1717 and strictly forbade future editors to change even a single word (Baines 1999, 43).

At issue here was the changing status of authorship and copyright in the emerging literary market. A key study of this is Brean Hammond's *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740* (1997). Hammond suggests that during much of the seventeenth century, writing had a predominantly aristocratic endeavour for young men seeking social advancement (Hammond 1997, 22). By the end of the century, demand for printed materials had outstripped the supply that could be supported by patronage alone. This paved the way for the beginnings of professional authorship as 'educated, liberate individuals who possessed imaginative fecundity' began to support themselves through their writing (Hammond 1997, 27). As the market for literary works grew, so too did concerns surrounding the ownership of intellectual property and authors' rights to their works. Traditionally, monopoly over copyright had been held by the Stationer's Company (incorporated 1556), which licensed books 'after the payment of a fee' (Hammond 1997 34). Authors surrendered the rights to their work to the stationer, who could print and reprint a work as long they saw fit. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the idea that a writer should be paid for their work was gaining force (Rivers 1982, 21). Some writers (most notably Pope) negotiated considerable sums in exchange

for the surrender of their copyrights.⁶¹ However, it was still common practice for authors to be paid nothing at all for their works, and transactions ‘might go either way’ (Rivers 1982, 21).

Moreover, the surrender of their copyright left writers powerless to resist the changes of editors and pirates. Limited copyright laws following the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 had opened the floodgates for literary piracy and spurred debates about intellectual property rights. For Defoe, the issue of altering or abridging works raised larger questions about the potential punishments heaped on authors for seditious libel. In *An Essay on the Regulation of the Press* (1704) he suggested that:

if an Author has not the right of a Book, after he has made it, and the benefit be not his own, and the Law will not protect him in that Benefit, ‘twould be very hard the Law should pretend to punish him for it (Defoe 1704, 21)

Writers found guilty of sedition could be pilloried or lose an ear for their crimes.⁶² Defoe had been pilloried for seditious libel in July 1703 for his *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702). He was also famously sent up in Pope’s *Dunciad* (1743), depicted standing ‘Earless on high’ among his fellow Grub-street hacks (Pope 2006, 470). For Defoe, the possibility that an author might be held accountable for work altered or pirated by another seemed a misuse of justice.⁶³ Despite the passing of the 1709 Copyright Act, there was little protection for author’s intellectual property rights or guarantee of remuneration for their works at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Hammond suggests that by the 1730s there were growing calls to ‘legitimize the

⁶¹ Dustin Griffin argues that Pope was incredibly successful ‘at manipulating the economic levers – floating hugely profitable subscriptions, driving hard bargains with his booksellers, setting up a printer and a bookseller to produce his works, retaining control of his copyrights’, all of which helped him to ‘establish the financial foundation of his proud independence’ from the traditional system of patronage (Griffin 1996, 123).

⁶² Baines notes that Japhet Crook lost an ear in 1731 when he was pilloried for forgery (Baines 1999, 47).

⁶³ In the *Essay*, Defoe also protests against the arbitrary use of press regulation and suppression of texts ‘because Mr. *Licenser* does not please to like it’ (Defoe 1704, 6). He argues that regulation has the potential to stunt learning by ‘bringing the whole Trade of Books, and the whole Body of Learning, under the Arbitrary Power of Mercenary Men’ or by making it a ‘slave’ to party politics (Defoe 1704, 5).

professional author-function and even to address the degree of economic exploitation by the publishing trade' (Hammond 1997, 39).

Faced with these problems and the need to survive, writers in *The Author's Farce* are forced to become hacks, penning nonsense for unscrupulous booksellers. As Witmore sardonically advises Luckless: '[i]f you must write, write Nonsense, write Operas, write Entertainments [...] Set up an *Oratory* and preach Nonsense; and you may meet with Encouragement enough' (Fielding 2004, 234–35). Writers are forced to sacrifice their (potential) public reputations and even their sense to serve the nonsensical demands of the booksellers, managers and their audiences. In doing so, they seem to become pale imitators of their 'true' characters and appear as insubstantial as the ghosts they are forced to write about. In the frame play, Fielding presents his unscrupulous bookseller, Bookweight, encouraging a hack writer to churn out works for profit, 'murdering' literature in the process and reducing characters to paltry descriptions: '[w]hat sort of a Ghost wou'd you have, Sir? the last was a pale one' (Fielding 2004, 247). In the puppet-show, the characters are also presented as ghosts who pay court to the Goddess of Nonsense in the underworld. Luckless jokes that many of the allegorical characters have 'died' during their performances as they have failed to impress audiences: '[a] Tragedy occasion'd me to die;/ That perishing the first day, so did I' (Fielding 2004, 262). Motivated by profit, hack writers are presented as a restless mill, churning out sub-par works for a quick return.

Fielding's criticism of the literary market here attempts to tap into wider Scriblerian satire on the ephemeral nature of modern literary productions. In Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), the hack narrator claims to have conceived of the work 'in bed in a garret', having 'sharpened [his] invention with hunger' and completed the whole 'under



Figure 2. William Hogarth, 1737, *The Distressed Poet*. Courtesy of the British Museum Collection Online. Accessed 03 January 2018. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1361757&partId. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by The British Museum.

Studious to sit, with all his books around,
Staring from thought to thought, a vast profound | *Plung'd for his sense, but found no bottom there ;*
Then writ, and stumber'd on, in mere despair.

‘under a long course of physic, and a great want of money’ (Swift 2004, 55). Writing in his ‘Panegyric Epistle to Mr. Thomas Snow’ (1721), Gay connects the fortunes of the Exchange Alley poets, ‘[w]ho live on Fancy; and can feed on Air’, to the disappointed expectations of speculators in the South Sea Scheme (Gay 1721, 2). Similarly, the image of the starving, spectral writer ‘[w]ho hunger[s], and who thirst[s] for scribbling[‘s] sake’ haunts Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum* (1729) (Pope 1729, 5). It is not accidental that he presents ‘Poverty and Poetry’ as sisters, lying together ‘shiv’ring’ ‘in one bed’ in the bowels of the underworld (Pope 1729, 4). He later imagines a dunce writer bent double in his garret over fragments of half-finished works, which became the inspiration for William Hogarth’s print *The Distressed Poet* (1737) (see Figure 2):

Studious he sate, with all his books around
 Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!
 Plung’d for his sense, but found no bottom there;
 Then writ, and flounder’d on, in mere despair,
 He roll’d his eyes that witness’d huge dismay,
 Where yet unpawn’d, much learned lumber lay (Pope 1729, 12)⁶⁴

‘In a market culture’, Freeman suggests, ‘wit and merit have become undervalued currencies’ making space for sub-par writers to churn out nonsense for pitiful rewards (Freeman 2002, 61). It is important to note that while they decried the profit-driven system, Pope and Fielding also benefitted artistically and financially from it. As Hammond puts it, Pope was ‘himself profit’s creature’, and was not averse to demanding his worth from booksellers (Hammond 1997, 4). I would add that Fielding was little better, although whatever money he earned quickly fell through his fingers. Following a theme of Scriblerian satire in *The Author’s Farce*, Fielding invites us to see how emerging print culture and the popularity of ‘nonsense’ has led writers to become

⁶⁴ In the 1743 *New Dunciad in Four Books*, Pope alters these lines to create a more visceral and bloody image of the dunce’s abortive works: ‘Then gnawed his pen, then dashed it on the ground./ Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!/ Plunged for his sense, but found no bottom there./ Yet wrote and floundered on, in mere despair./ Round him much embryo, much abortion lay./ Much future ode and abdicated play;’ (Pope 2006, 444).

wraithlike. ‘For who’, as Luckless laments ‘would not then rather Eat by his Nonsense, than Starve by his Wit?’ (Fielding 2004, 256).

While booksellers, authors and theatre managers bear the brunt of Fielding’s satire for their part in undermining literary standards, Fielding reserves a large portion of his satire for the audience themselves for consuming and so fuelling the demand for nonsense and fashionable ‘entertainments’. By continuing to attend and applaud the foreign dancers and singers, harlequinades, pantomimes and puppet shows which were increasingly being presented at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and Drury Lane during the 1720s, audiences were encouraging the rise of nonsensical popular entertainments at the cost of traditional forms of theatre.⁶⁵ Instead of using their collective power to encourage managers and authors to produce plays of sense and taste, Fielding suggests that contemporary audiences had been lulled into passivity by a string of nonsensical productions which required little thought or discernment. In the prologue, he draws attention to the audience’s dullness in judging the action onstage by likening their claps to the mechanical bows of the animals used in stage productions:

⁶⁵ John Rich was the notorious and illiterate manager of Lincoln’s Inn Fields (1714) and later the Covent Garden theatre (1732) who introduced pantomime to the English stage. Fielding satirically noted in his dedication to *Tumble-Down Dick*; ‘[i]t is to You, Sir, we owe (if not the Invention) at least the bringing into Fashion, that sort of Writing which you have been pleased to distinguish by the Name of *Entertainment*’ (Fielding 2011, 329). He regularly features as a satirical target in Fielding’s plays, caricatured as Monsieur Pantomime in Luckless’s puppet show in *The Author’s Farce*, Machine in *Tumble-Down Dick*, and as Quidam in *The Historical Register* (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). In his poem *The Masquerade* (1728), Fielding suggests that watching such entertainments could ‘embolden’ the virtuous and the curious to attend the more risqué masquerades hosted by Count Heidegger, where deception reigned supreme (Fielding 1731, 2). While Fielding criticises these new forms of popular entertainment, he is equally aware in *The Author’s Farce* that the traditional dramatic forms of tragedy and comedy had become stale and had lost their meaning through overfamiliarity and a lack of innovation. He includes satire of the traditional forms alongside that of modern popular entertainments in Luckless’s puppet show in the third act (for example see Fielding 2004, 269–70). Hassall also argues that Luckless’s complaint that tragedy and comedy have been kept from the stage by farce, burlesque, harlequins, puppets and foreign dancers and singers was a regular feature of prologues during the period (Hassall 1974, 75). Fielding would later go on to satirize the routine nature of these complaints in the prologues in the period in the opening scene of *Don Quixote in England*, in which his author-character refuses to provide a prologue, despite having several in hand (Fielding 2011, 27–28).

*Like the tame Animals designed for show,
You have your cues to clap, as they to bowe [sic]?
Taught to commend, your Judgments have no Share;
By Chance you guess aright, by Chance you err* (Fielding 2004, 222)

Fielding aims to increase the audience's self-awareness and ability to judge in *The Author's Farce* through his satire of degraded forms and by breaking the dramatic illusion. As J. Douglas Canfield has pointed out, Fielding deliberately has Luckless stage his play-within-the-play at the Haymarket theatre, the same theatre in which Fielding's own audience were watching *The Author's Farce*. As such, the contemporary audience were made aware that they were spectators of both 'the play and the play-within whom as Master [Luckless] repeatedly addresses' (Canfield 1995, 329). The Haymarket audience (as consumers of nonsense) are also made a target for satire. Similarly, Widmayer has argued that Fielding increases the audience's self-awareness by including an author-character and other characters who demonstrate sound critical judgement (at least initially) in the frame play. In the first two acts of *The Author's Farce*, Fielding encourages his audience to compare our judgments to those of Witmore and Luckless, who accurately assess the degraded status of literature (Widmayer 2015, 167).⁶⁶ However, Luckless' role as a good judge begins to break down in the final act, as he becomes an object of satire himself—as I will discuss below. The breaking of the dramatic illusion allows the audience to maintain an important critical distance from Luckless so that we can attempt to judge his actions in the final act. Hunter has argued that as the audience is made increasingly self-aware through the breaking of the dramatic

⁶⁶ In the puppet show, Luckless acts as the 'Master of the show', introducing his puppets, criticizing his actors and explaining their actions to other members of the puppet show (Widmayer 2015, 181). Widmayer suggests that in Fielding's later irregular plays, he presents author-characters who are often 'incorrect in [their] assumptions about [their] audience's preferences, though sometimes the satire is intended to revise the audience's expectations for plot, character and spectacle' (Widmayer 2015, 167). Examples of this can be seen in the failed author-characters in *Tumble-Down Dick* (1736), *Pasquin* (1736), *The Historical Register* (1737) and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737). Richard Bevis argues that the author-characters in the satirical plays are the forerunners of the narrators in the novels: 'the Author begot the narrator; the child is father to the man' (Bevis 1990, 68).

illusion, Fielding transforms the theatrical space from ‘being another world where one can contemplate in tranquillity’ into ‘a creative, live experience without the leisure – or perspective – of Arden’ (Hunter 1975, 66). In other words, through self-reflexivity, Fielding encourages his audience to take a more active role in the processes of judging character in *The Author’s Farce*.⁶⁷

However, Fielding’s attempts to boost his audience’s self-awareness does not mean that he made the process of judging character easier for them in *The Author’s Farce*. Instead, I suggest that the final act of *The Author’s Farce* challenges the audience’s ability to judge character by breaking down the boundaries between performance and reality. Following his failure to get his ‘serious’ play staged, Luckless produces a farcical puppet show in the third act, which skewers the decay of literary genres and the popular tastes of the town.⁶⁸ As a number of critics have pointed out, the final scenes of the puppet show shatter the dramatic illusion of the play through a series of revelations about character.⁶⁹ As a result, Fielding blurs the distinction between the ‘real’ characters and the roles they play, making it difficult for an audience to judge where one ends and the other begins. This breakdown is initiated by a series of interruptions to Luckless’ puppet show.⁷⁰ When Parson Murdertext and the Constable

⁶⁷ Hunter suggests that audience responses to onstage action are an implicit attribute in the text of Fielding’s rehearsal plays, but that it is difficult to judge how audiences reacted to this during performance. He suggests that the ‘emphasis put on the reciprocity between stage and audience’ probably depended in no small part in ‘how stage business was used’, an element which Fielding had greater control over in his later plays when he also acted as the manager of the Haymarket theatre (Hunter 1975, 66).

⁶⁸ Woods has pointed out that, in the 1730 edition of *The Author’s Farce*, Luckless’s speeches in the third act are given as *Mast*, rather than by his name until the Bantomite interruption, when it reverts to *Luck*, for the remainder of the play (C. B Woods 1966, xii n2). In the 1734 version, Fielding refers to Luckless by his ‘real’ name during the puppet show. While Woods sees this as one of Fielding’s inconsistencies, I would argue that it is suggestive of the blurring between actor and role, as Luckless performs the part of the Master of the show, only to become a puppet himself in Fielding’s *Author’s Farce*.

⁶⁹ For discussions of this scene see Hassall 1974, 76; Hunter 1975, 54–55; Rudolph 1975, 31–38; Lewis 1987, 101–104; Freeman 2002, 63–65; Widmayer 2015, 180–184.

⁷⁰ J.P. Hunter points out that the lack of a clear ending to Luckless’s puppet show is a result of the repeated interruptions, which help to break down the boundaries between the play and the play-within (Hunter 1975, 54).

arrive to arrest Luckless for ‘abusing *Nonsense*’, it is unclear whether they too are puppets in Luckless’ play or if they are ‘real’ characters from the frame play who interrupt the performance (Fielding 2004, 282).⁷¹ Readers of the play benefit from the *dramatis personae* in which both Murdertext and the Constable are listed as ‘Persons in the Puppet Show’, suggesting that they are part of Luckless’ play (Fielding 2004, 227, 305).⁷² However, in the scene itself, Fielding leaves no definitive stage directions to suggest this and the responses of the actors playing the puppets in Luckless’ show offer little to clarify the situation for the audience.⁷³ At first, Mrs Novel’s protestation against the interruption of the puppet show and appeals on Luckless’ behalf seem to indicate that the Constable and Murdertext belong to the frame play: ‘[w]hat does this Fellow of a Constable mean by interrupting our Play?’ (Fielding 2004, 283).⁷⁴ However, as the scene progresses, she resorts to theatrical language and songs in order to persuade her onstage audience to allow the puppet show to continue. She is so successful that she convinces Murdertext to allow the play to end with a dance and draws the Constable into responding in song. Is this a part of Luckless’ satire on the degraded state of contemporary taste, in which even its critics are drawn into permitting nonsense, or is

⁷¹ In this scene, Fielding satirizes the lecherous Parson Murdertext as a hypocrite who attempts to close Luckless’s play as an ‘A–bomination’ and for its ‘Prophaness’ only for his protestations to be nullified by his lust for Mrs Novel, whom he resolves to take ‘to my self [sic] for a Handmaid’ (Fielding 2004, 282, 284). As Lockwood notes, Fielding repeatedly satirized this type of the prurient or hypocritical cleric in his works, most notably in the characters of Father Girard in *The Old Debauchees* (1732) and Parson Tickletext in *Shamela* (1740), and in his *Champion* essay (19 April 1740) (Fielding 2004, 285 n1). Murdertext could easily belong to either the frame play, as a similarly hypocritical counterpoint to the corrupt theatre managers and booksellers, or to the puppet show.

⁷² Murdertext and Constable appear as ‘Persons in the Puppet Show’ on the *dramatis personae* for both the 1730 and revised 1734 edition of *The Author’s Farce*.

⁷³ Frustratingly, the only stage direction in this section of the play is Murdertext’s aside, illustrating his less-than-innocent thoughts about Mrs Novel, which could be argued to belong to either the frame play or the puppet show equally.

⁷⁴ Mrs Novel is often identified as a caricature of Eliza Haywood, whose amatory fiction proved popular in the early part of the eighteenth century (Battestin 2000, 250; Freeman 2002, 63; Hammond and Regan 2006, 63). Pope had similarly satirized Haywood holding two illegitimate babes (now thought to be her novels) in the *Dunciad* (Fielding 2004, 263, n2). Mrs Novel’s comic aria, which states that she died a maid for love, but would have rather ‘kept my Breath a,/ And lost my Maiden-head’ (Fielding 2004, 263). It later transpires that Novel has died giving birth to her lover’s child.

Mrs Novel imitating theatrical language as a persuasive form of rhetoric? Valerie Rudolph suggests that Fielding creates ‘deliberate chaos by no longer providing his audience with clear indications of what it is to accept as real’ (Rudolph 1975, 33). Instead, I suggest that by blurring the boundary between theatricality and ‘real’ life, Fielding leaves his audience to judge the characters for themselves.

The process of judging character in this scene is further complicated when a Bantamite tutor arrives moments later to announce that Luckless is actually the long-lost son of the King of Bantam; a fact which Luckless has conveniently forgotten having lost his senses in a shipwreck.⁷⁵ This surprise announcement begins a train of revelations which satirize the unlikely and emotional dénouements of contemporary plays, such as Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in a similar tone to Macheath’s reprieve in *The Beggar’s Opera* (Lewis 1987, 102). I would add that this also breaks down the distinction between people and the roles that they play. Mrs Moneywood and Harriet are identified as the Queen and Princess of Old Brentford respectively (with obvious links to Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* (1671)) and Punch is discovered to be their long-lost son and brother.⁷⁶ Fielding makes no distinction here between the ‘real’ characters of the frame play (Luckless, Moneywood and Harriet) and the puppet characters of Luckless’ show (Punch). Rather, he allows Punch to claim that they are blood relations without exciting contradiction or query from any of the other characters. Freeman argues that

⁷⁵ Lockwood notes that the tiny and exotic Kingdom of Bantam in Java appeared in several seventeenth-century plays, including Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610), Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1695) and Behn’s *Memoirs of the Court of the King of Bantam* (1697). It often ‘signified exotically distant opulence’ and gained a measure of mystique after the Dutch expelled English merchants in 1682 (Fielding 2004, 285 n2). Fielding here appears to be encouraging his audience to read both meanings of the ‘loss of sense’ in Luckless’s behaviour: to indicate both a loss of consciousness and the loss of one’s ability to reason. As Luckless recounts his loss of consciousness as a result of the shipwreck, Fielding invites his audience to make the connection to his current loss of reason as he crosses the boundary into his own satirical puppet show.

⁷⁶ Punch recognises Mrs Moneywood by her ‘Phiz’ suggesting that ‘true’ character can be revealed on the surface of the skin (Fielding 2004, 288). Fielding similarly ridiculed recognition scenes in which characters are identified by marks on their skin in his *The Welsh Opera* (1731), in which almost all the major characters are ‘recognised’ by a series of unlikely birthmarks (Fielding 2007a, 60).

‘[t]he line between [...] “character” as role and “character” as person’ begins to blur here, allowing “flesh-and-blood” characters [to] have a familial relationship to the allegorical “puppet” characters’ (Freeman 2002, 64). However, I suggest that this relationship also exposes the possibility that people are more like the puppets than *vice versa* in that they too may also have been playing parts all along.⁷⁷ As the characters in the frame play all simultaneously recover from their individual amnesia, Moneywood revealingly states: ‘I am sorry, in this Pickle, to remember who I am. But alas! too true is all you’ve said: Tho’ I have been reduced to let Lodgings, I was the Queen of *Brentford*’ (Fielding 2004, 288). Moneywood’s timely recollection of her ‘real’ character leaves the audience to question if she has merely replaced one performance with another. Was her shrewish and licentious behaviour at the beginning of the play just a performance designed to protect her ‘true’ identity, or (the more likely) were these were always facets of her private character which she can now conveniently mask under her public reputation as the Queen of Brentford? As the recognition scene continues, what we think we ‘know’ about characters in the frame play unravels and collapses, leaving more questions than answers. Freeman similarly argues that:

the very distinctions we think can be made between real and merely fictional experience become manifestly fluid and arbitrary [...]. [T]he boundaries that distinguish nature or real from unnatural or fictional experience in everyday life are exposed as merely the provisional or temporary fictions by which we organize, and by default come to say that we ‘know’ the real or that we ‘know’ character (Freeman 2002, 64–65)

As characters in the frame play are led to play increasingly nonsensical parts, the layering of performances completely obscures private character from view, making it

⁷⁷ Ahern argues that in the frame play characters often imitate the language and values of the theatre, ‘act[ing] out roles much as characters do in drama’ (Ahern 1982, 46). She suggests that Mrs Moneywood resembles Mrs Peachum in Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera*, when she exclaims ‘Hussy, to be poor and unfortunate are crimes – Riches are the only Recommendations to People of Sense of both Sexes’ (Ahern 1982, 50; Fielding 2004, 254). Similarly, in their duets, Luckless and Harriet imitate the language and values of the stage as they declare their willingness to sacrifice for love. However, ‘their resolve turns out to be merely theatrical, a convention like that in drama’ as their postpone they marriage until Luckless’s fortunes improve (Ahern 1982, 51).

difficult to distinguish what is 'real'. As a result, the other *dramatis personae* and the audience can never truly 'know' a character: private character is inaccessible to public view.

Fielding reflects this inability to properly judge where performance ends and reality begins in Luckless' reactions to the revelations. Having recovered from his amnesia, Luckless is quick to assume his new role of the King of Bantam and immediately begins appointing members to his new court. In doing so, however, he adds to the confusion of roles caused by the entrance of *Murdertext* and the Constable as he appoints members of both the puppet show and the frame play to form his new court in Bantam:

[y]ou, Mr. *Murder-text*, shall be my Chaplain; you, Sir, my Orator; [...] you *Don Tragedio*, Sir *Farcical* and *Signor Opera*, shall entertain the City of *Bantam* with your Performances. Mrs. Novel, you shall be a Romance Writer; and to shew my Generosity, *Marplay* and *Sparkish* shall superintend my Theatres – All proper Servants for the King of Bantam (Fielding 2004, 287)

By referring to the characters by their names in the puppet show (*Don Tragedio*, Sir *Farcical* etc.) rather than by the actors' names in the frame play, Luckless seems to be appointing his fictional puppet-characters to positions in his new kingdom. It is unclear to the audience whether Luckless has entered the realm of the puppet show or if the puppets have invaded the realistic frame of the play. Importantly, though, Luckless also appears to be unable to distinguish between the 'real' and the 'fictional' or between 'sense' and 'nonsense' as he becomes absorbed in his new character as the King of Bantam. Ahern points out that Luckless could use his new-found power to promote literary taste within Bantam, by-passing the corruption of booksellers and theatre managers to stage his own 'serious' productions. Instead, he invites the satirical puppets, booksellers and managers to populate his court with the same nonsense he has spent the third act satirizing (Ahern 1982, 52). He seems to lose the interpretative control he held over his puppet show only moments before. Instead of seeing the farcical nature of the

situation for what it is, he unquestioningly accepts his new situation as a reward for his 'hard work':

Taught by my Fate, let never Bard despair,
Tho' long he drudge, and feed on *Grub-street* Air:
Since him (at last) 'tis possible to see
As happy and as great a King as me (Fielding 2004, 289)

Widmayer suggests that as the scene unravels Luckless becomes an object of satire himself, having 'moved from the edge of the stage to the middle, from author-character to actor' (Widmayer 2015, 182). In doing so, he loses his ability to judge and distinguish sense from nonsense, and inadvertently becomes a part of the problem he set out to satirize: he in effect becomes just another nonsensical puppet in Fielding's play. As the play concludes, Fielding seems to suggest that all his characters are just puppets, performing parts in life in an indistinguishable manner from those who do so on the stage. Even 'authors' like Luckless (and Fielding) are not immune to performance and can easily become embroiled in the nonsense they create. With private character almost completely obscured by public performances, the audience are left to try and assess the shifting surfaces of performance for indications of character.

In Fielding's early plays, private character is often masked from public view by performances. Drawing on wider debates about moral integrity and performance, Fielding invites his spectators (both onstage and off) to read and judge private character through shifting screens of performance. This is possible in *Love in Several Masques* when characters demonstrate sufficient good nature and perception, creating comedy for the audience when characters judge incorrectly. I argue Fielding builds upon these concepts in his later novels, making good nature and perception central to the characters of his virtuous protagonists and his ideas of good judgement. As such, Fielding's early plays are essential for understanding the development of his concepts of goodness and perception, and his changing relationship with his audience.

Unable to make much headway with his traditional dramas after 1729, Fielding began experimenting with form in order to create his satire on literary taste. In doing so, however, he created a more complex vision of character than he had been able to do in his regular dramas. By satirizing the degradation of literary taste, Fielding encourages his audience's self-awareness and coaxes them into a more active role as judges. Ultimately, however, private character in *The Author's Farce* appears to be unknowable as individuals are drawn into performing nonsensical parts in Fielding's wider puppet show. Fielding leaves us with the uncomfortable possibility that we may be unable to ever truly 'know' a character with any certainty. While *The Author's Farce* is a satirical exploration of the theme of judgement, it leaves space for its audience to become involved in the process of judging character, a role which Fielding would later expand upon greatly in his later plays (discussed in the next chapter) and his novels.

While Fielding would continue to write 'regular' five-act dramas during the 1730s, the success of *The Author's Farce* initiated a period of experimentation in dramatic form for Fielding which continued until the passing of the Theatrical Licensing Act in 1737. He would reuse and develop the rehearsal format as a source for political and theatrical commentary in many of his later productions, including *Pasquin* (1736), *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737). In keeping with this experimental attitude to form, Fielding increasingly moved away from presenting character in a traditional form in his satirical burlesques, using it instead as a vehicle for his political and social satire of real-life individuals. He turned away from traditional methods of presenting character and questions of reading performances and essences, and instead chose to present satirical caricatures of the 'great men' of his society. Although the later plays do not explore the early concepts of good nature and perception, they introduce another theme which would be central to Fielding's novels: the role of gossip in judging character. In the next chapter, I argue that Fielding engages

in a form of gossip through his use of caricature, using them to encourage his audience to use their judgement in a more sustained way.

II

The Great Man and the Great Mogul: Reading Caricatures in Fielding's Dramatic Satires (1736 – 1737)

After the success of *The Author's Farce*, Fielding went on to produce nine plays and afterpieces between 1730-1732, two of which, *The Welsh Opera* (1730) and its revision *The Grub-Street Opera* (withdrawn in rehearsal 1730, pub. 1731), were also in the rehearsal format.⁷⁸ However, as J.P. Hunter has noted, Fielding's theatrical outputs during the 1733-1735 period seem to have waned slightly (at least in terms of his usual productivity) as he only produced five plays and afterpieces, one of which was an adaptation of a play by Molière and another was a hasty revision of a play he had written in 1729 (Hunter 1975, 58).⁷⁹ After the disastrous reception of *The Universal Gallant* (1735), Fielding retreated from the stage for a year, and penitently spent most of 1735 in East Stour. His next play, *Pasquin*, opened on 5 March 1736 and ran for a total of sixty nights, proving it to be well worth the wait.⁸⁰ Based on Buckingham's *Rehearsal* (1671) and John Hoadley's *The Contrast* (1731), *Pasquin* was a sensational success. As one contemporary commented: 'when I went out of Town last Autumn the reigning madness was Faranelli [*sic*], I find it now turn'd on Pasquin' (quoted in R. Hume 1988, 209). Beyond its commercial success, *Pasquin* initiated a period of experimentation with the rehearsal format and political and cultural satire which would shape Fielding's final four plays at the Haymarket theatre.⁸¹ I argue that in his last plays at the Haymarket, Fielding

⁷⁸ Lockwood argues that these early plays are not true rehearsal plays, as the role of the frame play and author-characters are limited to the opening scenes or to a single act (as in the case of *The Author's Farce*) (Fielding 2011, 223).

⁷⁹ This is in comparison to the eight plays he produced in 1730 and 1731, five in 1732 and four in 1736-1737 season. *Don Quixote in England* and the revised *Author's Farce* (both 1734) were the only of Fielding's plays produced in a rehearsal format during this period.

⁸⁰ Five more performances of *Pasquin* were staged during July 1736 at the Haymarket theatre, but Lockwood argues there is no evidence that these were supervised by Fielding. During the next seasons, *Pasquin* was staged twice at *Lincoln's Inn Fields* and four times at the Haymarket, before vanishing from the stage (Fielding 2011, 229).

⁸¹ These final four plays are *Pasquin* (1736), *Tumble-Down Dick* (1736), *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737).

uses the irregular shape of his plays to shift the audience's attention away from judging the characters of his *dramatis personae* and instead refocuses it on unmasking the characters of real-life individuals caricatured in these roles. It has been well documented in critical studies of the plays that these caricatures were often satirical attacks against the 'great men' of the contemporary political and theatrical worlds: most notably against Britain's first minister, Sir Robert Walpole (in office 1721-1742), and the managers of the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres, John Rich, Charles Fleetwood, and Colley and Theophilus Cibber. What has not been discussed in criticism of these plays is the increased role Fielding invites his audience to play in discerning these caricatures. I argue that through caricature, Fielding engages in a form of gossip and speculation with his audience about the characters of these 'great men'. As I discuss in later chapters, Fielding would develop this relationship in his novels, using gossip to involve his readers in the process of judging character. His Haymarket plays offer an early example of this relationship and of the theme of gossip, which were to become central to his presentation of character in his later works.

In his caricatures of Walpole most especially, Fielding participated in a wider cultural trend of gossip and satirical commentary against the 'Great Man' from the 1720s onwards. As one of the most recognisable and controversial figures of the period, Walpole was satirized in numerous plays, pamphlets, essays, poems, journals, prints and portraits during his time in office. During the 1720s and 1730s, 'satirist after unhappy satirist disparaged the "Skreenmaster" for shielding the ministry' during the South Sea Bubble, with '[d]isapproval' turning to 'abhorrence' as Walpole managed to retrain power after the death of George I in 1727 (Marshall 2013, 197).

Walpole's detractors stridently enunciate familiar complaints: the minister is a corrupt usurper of royal power whose peculation knows no bounds, votes are bought, places are bestowed on incompetent yes-men, merit is irrelevant, and so on. The satires range from petulant to abusively scabrous, but the nature of the attack is fairly consistent (Marshall 2013, 199)

Most famously he was caricatured in several characters, including the corrupt thief-taker Mr Peachum, in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), in which he was satirically dubbed the 'Great Man'. Given this context, it is hardly surprising that Fielding satirized Walpole in so many of his plays during the 1730s.

In this chapter, I will examine Fielding's caricatures of Walpole in his Haymarket plays (1736-1737). I argue that juxtaposing all of Fielding's caricatures of Walpole allows us to reconstruct an image of the 'Great Man's' public character in the late 1730s, showing Fielding's participation in the public gossip surrounding Walpole during the latter part of his time in government. Complicating this reading is the fact that Fielding often conflates his caricatures of Walpole with those of Rich, the Cibbers, and even himself as manager of the Haymarket theatre. Like the characters at the end of *The Author's Farce*, he does not clearly indicate where one caricature ends and another begins, making them increasingly difficult to judge. I argue that he encourages his audience to become more involved in judging caricatures than they had previously been in assessing character in his earlier plays. The audience are crucial to the production of meaning and comedy in these plays, identifying the caricatures and similarities between them, and protecting Fielding from a charge of libel.

From Character to Caricature

Before we explore Fielding's use of caricature in his Haymarket satires, it may be useful to begin with a brief examination of the term and its relationship to the early eighteenth-century stage. Derived from the Italian *caricatura* (*caricare* meaning to 'load' or 'exaggerate' in Latin) and based on the French *portrait chargé* (a charged or loaded portrait), a caricature is a portrait of an individual whose features have been exaggerated or otherwise deformed in order to create satire, but which, crucially, still retains enough

likeness to the individual to be recognisable.⁸² Amelia Rauser argues that caricatures have the ability to ‘unmask’ the individuals they represent, ‘paradoxically mak[ing] a more-like likeness, a truer portrait’ (Rauser 2008, 15). The emphasis is placed on the external appearance of an individual – their body, mannerisms and public characters – as surfaces from which the accomplished caricaturist can select elements to deform. As such, the term ‘caricature’ is usually applied in an art-historical context, to the genre of satirical prints which gained popularity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and, in studies of this period, is most often characterised by the works of James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson.⁸³

In contrast, when ‘caricature’ is applied to literary texts it usually describes a particularly visual or defamatory description of an individual: a ‘mere’ caricature. Caricature, in this sense, is closer to what Leo Hughes (quoting Oliver Larkin) calls the ‘symbolic type-character’; a character which has been distorted and exaggerated to such an extent as to become a one-dimensional ‘type’. However, this overlooks the popularity of ‘character-writing’, which formed an important part of the instruction in rhetoric in schools, and caricature on the stage during the period.⁸⁴ Hughes suggests that describing the 1730s caricatures as ‘type-characters’ does not fully represent the more sustained uses and complex forms which caricatures were beginning to take on during the early eighteenth century (Hughes 1984, 219). He suggests that the roots of caricature on the

⁸² For a history of caricature, see Leo Hughes (1984) ‘Theatre and the Art of Caricature’ and Amelia Rauser (2008) *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity and Individualism in the Eighteenth-Century English Print*.

⁸³ Rauser and Paul Langford (1986) are quick to distinguish caricatures from earlier satirical or emblematic prints, such as those by William Hogarth which use a series of ‘symbols, emblems, rebuses’ and ‘heraldic art’ as a form of hieroglyphic language, which must be read and interpreted by the viewer (Langford 1986, 15–16; Rauser 2008, 22).

⁸⁴ Based on the character-sketches of Greek writer Theophrastus (whose *Characters* was translated into English several times during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) and La Bruyère’s *Caractères* (1688), character sketches and character-writing involved creating a description of an individual person that could also stand for a social, moral or psychological category (e.g. the Miser, the Envious Man, the Dandy. Students were encouraged to keep notes on observed behaviours for later sketches (Smeed 1985, 9). La Bruyère’s influence can be seen in many eighteenth-century periodicals, including *The Tatler* (1709) and *Spectator* (1711).

English stage can be traced from the Restoration, in plays such as Robert Howard's *The Committee* (1662), John Wilson's *The Cheats* (1663), and Thomas Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1667) and *The Sullen Lovers* (1668). Perhaps the most notable caricature of the period, however, is Buckingham's bombastic caricature of John Dryden as the pretentious author Bayes in *The Rehearsal* (1672), which is often credited with killing off heroic drama in England (Hughes 1984, 221). Much of the satire during Charles II's reign was 'dominated by personal lampoons' shared within a familiar court circle (Marshall 2013, 151). Ashleigh Marshall argues that the breakup of the court circle after the Glorious Revolution in 1688 cause satire to become more generalised. Rather than on caricaturing specific individuals for a 'close-knit court audience', Carolean satire tends to focus on general topics, such as women, drinking and greed: '[i]n the first quarter of the eighteenth century, little of the drama has any bite' (Marshall 2013, 151).⁸⁵ However, the increasing availability of newspapers and journals in the early part of the eighteenth century meant that 'satirists [could] count on a much higher level of familiarity with public figures and events' and so could make greater use of political and social caricatures in their works (Marshall 2013, 36-7).⁸⁶

By the late 1720s and 1730s caricatures began to take on a richer, more complex role on the English stage due to increasing experimentation with theatrical forms and the growing politicization of satire in wider literary culture. J. A. Downie argues that during this period 'an extraordinary assault was launched by the most gifted writers' against the leading political figures (Downie 1994, 111). On the stage, this satirical 'assault' was led

⁸⁵ There are exceptions to this. Swift's satires during this period are often, it is suggested, 'grubbily political' and 'viciously personal' and rely on a 'clearing rendering of judgement' (Marshall 2013, 158, 187). However, his early satires also include 'rather a lot of genially mocking playthings and *jeux d'esprit*' which 'counterbalance [...] the aggressive anger we associate with him' (Marshall 2013, 181).

⁸⁶ There are still examples of specific caricatures in plays during this period, such as Gay, Arbuthnot and Pope's *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717), which caricatures John Dennis as Sir Tremendous Longinus, Colley Cibber as Plotwell and John Woodward as Dr Fossile.

by Gay and Fielding through their use of caricatures. I suggest that it is significant that Hughes identifies the year 1737 as being the height of English stage caricature. This was the year in which Fielding produced two of his most scathing satirical plays at the Haymarket theatre; the ones which have often been pinpointed as having played an important role in provoking the passing of the Licensing Act in June.⁸⁷

In addition, I also argue that the stage offered a unique space for an author to suggest a caricature through a variety of mediums simultaneously. During a performance, a playwright, manager or actor could suggest a caricature through the doubling of parts, a particular costume or make-up choice, or even the use of a prosthetic. An actor might also mimic tones, speech patterns, gestures or habits particularly associated with an individual. Frustratingly for modern critics, these details were frequently the product of what L.W. Conolly has called ‘unscripted mimicry [...] spontaneous satiric ad-libbing’ (Conolly 1976, 599). As such, they are not generally included in the play scripts and are only sparingly recorded in the accounts of playgoers during the period. J.A. Downie notes one rare account which records an incident occurring during a pantomime at the Haymarket theatre in 1733:

one of the Comedians took the Liberty to throw out some Reflections upon the Prime Minister and the Excise, which were not design’d by the Author; Lord Walpole being in the House, went behind the Scenes, and demanded of the Prompter whether such Words were in the Play, and he answering they were not his Lordship immediately corrected the Comedian with his own Hands very severely (quoted in Downie 2009, 48).⁸⁸

This sort of off-script ad-libbing seems to have been a staple part of the theatrical experience, so much so that it was made illegal under the 1737 Licensing Act, as it could not be subjected to the scrutiny of the censor (Conolly 1976, 603). Among the most

⁸⁷ I discuss the Licensing Act below. For further critical discussions on Fielding’s involvement in the Licensing Act and its effect on his theatrical career, see Dudden 1952, 1:206–11; Lockwood 1987; Hunter 1975, 69; Battestin and Battestin 1989, 222–234; Lewis 1987, 203–205; Thomson 1993, 60–65; Paulson 2000, 69–70; Burch 2008, 75–88; Downie 2009, 81–87; Ribble 2009, 243; Fielding 2011, 394–402.

⁸⁸ Downie quotes this incident from the *St. James’s Evening Post* for 22–24 March 1733.

accessible forms of caricature available to modern critics are the sustained textual allusions that playwrights created within their plays. Melissa Bissonette has suggested that '[a]llusion hunting was part of the fun' for eighteenth-century audiences and allusions became 'increasingly subtle as spectators sharpened their interpretive skills, sometimes to the point of seeing political innuendo where none was meant' (Bissonette 2009, 31). A playwright or manager then had multiple tools at his or her disposal to create caricature. Fielding's position as both playwright and manager of the Haymarket theatre during the 1736-1737 season meant that he could use a range of stagecraft techniques to create his caricatures, giving him greater (though not absolute) control over how they were presented.

Fielding's first uses of caricature can be seen as early as *The Author's Farce* (1730), *The Welsh Opera* (1730), and the revised form of the latter play *The Grub Street Opera* (1731, withdrawn in rehearsal). In *The Author's Farce*, Fielding caricatures Colley Cibber as both Marplay and the puppet-character, Sir Farcical Comic, John Rich as Monsieur Pantomime and adds a caricature of Theophilus Cibber as Marplay Junior in the 1734 edition of the play.⁸⁹ In *The Welsh Opera* and its revision *The Grub-Street Opera*, Fielding's caricatures took on a more political edge, with the play presenting the disorganised 'petticoat-government' of the Apshinkens and their household.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁹ Other caricatures in *The Author's Farce* include Lewis Theobald as Don Tragedio, John Henley as Dr Orator, Francesco Senesino as Signior Opera, Eliza Haywood as Mrs. Novel, and Robert Wilks as Sparkish (1730 edition only). Sparkish was replaced by Marplay Jr. in the 1734 edition of the play following Wilks' death in 1732 (Hunter 1975, 52).

⁹⁰ Downie has pointed out that *The Welsh Opera* was paired first with the *Tragedy of Tragedies*, which also directed satire towards the royal family. Downie argues that in *The Welsh Opera* Fielding takes his ridicule of King George and Queen Caroline 'considerably further' and, as such, 'it is hard to resist the conclusion that a contemporary audience would have been encouraged to make a connection between the thrust of the main plain and its afterpiece' (Downie 2009, 44). A week after its opening, *The Welsh Opera* was paired with William Hatchett's *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731), which was distinctive for its attack against Walpole. The parts of King Arthur (*Tragedy*), Robin (*Opera*) and Mortimer (*Fall*) were all played by William Mullart (Brown 1955, 33; Downie 2009, 48). As such, Bissonette suggests that audience responses to Robin in *The Welsh Opera* were 'partially coloured by their response to Mortimer' and we might add King Arthur and may have contributed to its being postponed *ad infinitum* while still in rehearsal (Bissonette 2009, 27).

Apshinkens are recognisable as caricatures of the royal family, King George II, Queen Caroline and Prince Frederick, with their servants Robin and Will corresponding to Walpole and his political opponent, William Pulteney (Fielding 2007a, 12). ‘For the first time’, Bertrand Goldgar argues, ‘Fielding unambiguously jeered at politicians and court figures, reducing them to the level of a Welsh family and its domestic squabbles’ (Goldgar 1976, 110). Downie, however, argues that this ‘fails adequately to convey the seriousness’ of Fielding’s attack on the royal family and Robinocracy, as Fielding ‘set out, quite deliberately, to offer much more sustained criticism of the Walpole ministry than he had done previously’ (Downie 2009, 47, 48).⁹¹ As such, *The Welsh Opera* and *The Grub-Street Opera* can be seen as Fielding’s first attempt to present political caricatures, paving the way for his later satirical attacks against Walpole.

In his later plays, Fielding increasingly turned to caricatures to satirize leading political and theatrical figures. I argue that the irregular structure of Fielding’s later dramatic satires helps to shift the audience’s focus from the characters of the *dramatis personae* to the caricatures they represent. These caricatures are more satirical than those in his earlier plays, and focus particularly on the analogous corruptions of the two conflated types of government (political and theatrical). His position as manager of the Haymarket theatre during this period gave Fielding greater freedom to experiment, allowing him to produce some of his most cutting and brilliant political satires.⁹² In his

⁹¹ For some critics, however, *The Grub-Street Opera* is not so politically motivated as Goldgar and Downie suggest. Some, like Jack Brown, Simon Varey, and Melissa Bissonette have suggested that the political satire of *The Welsh Opera* is generally ‘light-hearted in tone’ and relies on the audience ‘applying the general satire to specific people and topical events’ to make it political (Brown 1955, 37; Varey 1986, 24; Bissonette 2009, 27). Brown argues that ‘Fielding was far more interested in writing a clever play than in carrying the flag for any political faction’ (Brown 1955, 37). Bissonette similarly suggests that the politics are only partly in the text itself and depend on the audience’s response to the performance (Bissonette 2009, 27).

⁹² Ronald Paulson argues that the Haymarket theatre ‘offered Fielding the opportunities of an ad hoc situation of a sort that was ideal for his improvisational genius’ (Paulson 2000, 68). Despite being reduced to what the Battestins have described as the ‘smallest and worst of the London theatres with a barely competent troupe of actors’, Fielding was able to experiment with various devices including improved lighting effects and the rehearsal form, which ‘framed and

final four plays before the Licensing Act, Fielding used the rehearsal format to create almost plotless, episodic satires on his political and cultural world. This is exacerbated in *Pasquin* as Fielding introduces not one, but two plays-within-the-play.⁹³ As a result, Hunter has commented that *Pasquin* ‘is almost plotless in the traditional sense, moving from one satirical joke to the next’ (Hunter 1975, 58). Fielding would retain this technique for his *Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737). Indeed, in *The Historical Register*, the author Medley claims to have presented not only the ‘whole Actions of the Year in half an Hour’ but also ‘the whole History of Europe’ in a single scene (Fielding 2011, 415, 420). In keeping with this episodic structure, the audience is presented with a quick succession of characters who are not allowed to ‘develop’ in the traditional sense. Simon Varey has similarly suggested that, in these plays,

few characters are memorable at all, since character is less important than fast action and absurd situations [...]. Fully rounded characters are unnecessary to achieve these aims: suggestive caricatures will do (Varey 1986, 24)

Only the author-characters and critics of the frame plays remain onstage throughout to offer commentary on the action.⁹⁴ They often expose their ineptitude as writers to the audience when they provide silly answers to sensible questions (Fielding 2011, 223). Yet even these author-characters are often caricatures of playwrights and theatre managers, such as the Cibbers, Rich, and Fielding himself, and through them, Walpole. By adapting and developing the rehearsal technique, then, Fielding downplays the role of character and increases his audience’s awareness of the caricatures they represent.

highlighted scenes’ and which ‘permitted commentary’ on the action (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 233; Paulson 2000, 68).

⁹³ Frederick Ribble has argued that this format was probably inspired by a play by Fielding’s close friends John and Dr Benjamin Hoadly, entitled *The Contrast*, which he saw in rehearsal at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in spring 1731, but which was never publicly performed (Ribble 2009, 236). Although Fielding built upon many of the elements he had experimented with in *Pasquin*, he did not retain the two-play format for his latter plays.

⁹⁴ As Anne Widmayer has pointed out, the author-characters in *The Welsh Opera*, *The Grub-Street Opera* and *Don Quixote in England* are confined to the introduction and do not comment on the play-within as it progresses (Widmayer 2015, 170).

Fielding's use of caricature in his Haymarket plays reaches its pinnacle in his final two plays: *The Historical Register* and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (both 1737).⁹⁵ Of Fielding's later plays, these offer the most scathing caricatures of the leading 'Great Men' of Fielding's day. They were also presented as part of the same theatrical evening which allowed him to sustain and develop the caricatures and themes from *The Historical Register* in the afterpiece. As such, critics have looked to Fielding's political satire in these plays as potential provocations for the passing of the Licensing Act. I argue that these caricatures participate in the wider culture of speculation around the public characters of these 'Great Men'. In doing so, Fielding collapses the boundaries between one caricature and the next, making them increasingly difficult to read and encouraging his audience to take a more active role in judging caricatures.

Conflating Caricatures in *The Historical Register* (1736)

Of all the figures caricatured in *The Historical Register*, Fielding reserves his most sustained satirical commentary for the first minister, Sir Robert Walpole. In *The Historical Register*, Fielding participates in (predominantly Opposition-led) public speculation about Walpole's character, political practices and his desire for power. He shares in this gossip with his audience, inviting them to use their knowledge and discernment in a more sophisticated way than in his previous plays. I argue that by piecing these caricatures together we can see the rich and complex work that Fielding is doing at the intersections between caricature and public character.

⁹⁵ *The Historical Register* opened as the afterpiece to George Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity* on 21 March 1737. The play ran for ten consecutive performances with *Fatal Curiosity* before becoming the main piece, to which Fielding added his final afterpiece before the Licensing Act, *Eurydice Hiss'd* on 13 April. In total, between March and May 1737, *The Historical Register* was performed an impressive thirty-six times and was joined by *Eurydice Hiss'd* on sixteen occasions. In terms of early-eighteenth-century theatre, Lockwood that this was considered a 'big hit', although not on the same scale as *Beggar's Opera* and *Pasquin*, that latter of which had managed sixty performances in 1736 (Fielding 2011, 370).

By experimenting with the rehearsal form, Fielding was ‘unhampered by the constraints of plot and character development’, leaving him greater scope to caricature Walpole in the play (R. Hume 1988, 235). The play-within-the-play is divided into six separate episodes, each of which satirize a facet of political or social life.⁹⁶ I suggest that, following this irregular format, the caricature of Walpole is not contained in one character, but is instead divided over six different characters. Although some overlap, each of these caricatures in turn emphasises a slightly different aspect of Walpole’s public character and so helps to build a richer image of the great man than may have been possible to present in a single character.

I will begin with the more overtly ‘political’ caricatures of Walpole in the play. The two most explicit and ‘political’ caricatures of Walpole frame the play-within-the-play, drawing the audience’s attention to the political nature of Fielding’s satire.⁹⁷ In the first of these scenes, a group of politicians gathers to discuss the political climate and to agree on a new tax on ignorance. The politicians comically display little knowledge of current foreign affairs and spend most of the scene trying to formulate a scheme to acquire more money, or, as one politician eloquently puts it: ‘[h]ang foreign Affairs, let us apply ourselves to Money’ (Fielding 2011, 419). The author-character Medley suggests the connection to Walpole by naming one of the politicians in the scene ‘my first and greatest’ (Fielding 2011, 418). In contrast to his companions, the first politician remains silent throughout the debate, only perhaps breaking his silence to participate as one of the ‘Omnes’, ‘Hum’s or ‘Ay, ay, ay’s’ (Thomson 1993, 59). Medley ironically

⁹⁶ Lewis argues that *The Historical Register* is only a rehearsal play in the most ‘tenuous sense’ (Lewis 1987, 188). He argues that the unrelated episodes of the play-within are only given ‘coherence by the rehearsal framework’ (Lewis 1987, 189). However, I argue that it is this development away from the traditional rehearsal framework that allows Fielding to place more influence on his political and theatrical caricatures.

⁹⁷ Lewis, Peter Thomson, and Lockwood have all identified the First Politician in the opening scene and Quidam in the final scene as obvious caricatures of Walpole. Their context within political scenes (both set in ‘Corsica’ – a thinly veiled representation of England) makes this identification fairly straightforward (see Lewis 1987, 189; Thomson 1993, 59; Fielding 2011, 363).

describes the character as ‘a very deep Man’ who likes to ‘keep his Politicks a Secret’ (Fielding 2011, 418). Lockwood notes that Walpole was known for his silences during parliamentary debates, preferring to keep his own ‘deep counsel’ whilst others spoke (Fielding 2011, 418 n3). When coupled with Medley’s insistence that despite the character’s silence, he ‘knows it all’, this reading of the caricature has a sinister (and farcical) edge (Fielding 2011, 419). By withholding his knowledge of foreign affairs from his colleagues, the politician denies them vital information which would aid in their defence against an invasion and ensures his hold on power.⁹⁸

This caricature can also be read as a comment on Walpole’s promotion of ‘dullness’ and refusal to patronize some of the leading writers of the day. Despite (and perhaps because of) Medley’s frequent insistence that the politician ‘knows it all’, the audience is left unconvinced of his supposed ‘wisdom’ (Fielding 2011, 419).⁹⁹ Walpole was often satirized for his ‘dullness’ during the period due to his ‘failure’ to patronize some of the leading writers of the day, including Pope, Swift, Gay and Fielding.¹⁰⁰ Dustin Griffin has suggested that instead of mollifying the leading writers, Walpole’s literary policies drove them into the arms of the opposition (Griffin 1996, 51; Pearce 2007, 332–37). Of these four, only Gay was awarded a place at court. However, the position he was offered after a long wait in 1727 was as a gentleman usher to the

⁹⁸ Dudden similarly argues that Walpole is caricatured as the ‘silent little gentleman who conceals his plans even from his colleagues in his determination to make the government of the country a one-man show’ (Dudden 1952, 1:201).

⁹⁹ Tellingly, Medley asks ‘must not a Politician be thought a wise Man without giving Instances of his Wisdom?’ (Fielding 2011, 419).

¹⁰⁰ Despite this vilification of Walpole’s literary policies, contemporary writers and modern critics have often overlooked much of the support that Walpole did award to writers. Jean Kern has estimated that during the period covering Walpole’s reign (1720-1750) some fourteen per cent of dramatists are known to have received pay from one political party or another (Kern 1976, 19). Among the writers who did receive some form of support from Walpole are many whose literary reputations still survive today. According to Griffin, Edward Young received a pension from Walpole of £200 per year in 1726. Pope also received a £200 gift for his *Odyssey* in 1725, and often dined with Walpole. Thomson, Savage and Voltaire were also among those awarded money by Walpole (Griffin 1996, 52). Although Fielding never officially received patronage from Walpole Fielding suggests in *The Champion* (1741) that that money may have passed between the two men, which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

youngest princess, an ‘honour’ which he declined.¹⁰¹ This ill-advised appointment probably inspired Gay to pen his popular satirical attack on Walpole in *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), where he invited his audience to compare highwayman to politicians. It also popularized the view amongst opposition journals that Walpole only sponsored writers whose loyalty was guaranteed (Griffin 1996, 51).¹⁰² Satirists argued that Walpole had ‘debauched the patronage system’ by making ‘sycophantic hacks [...] the darlings of the ministry’ and forcing ‘semi-competent artists have to debase themselves to win favour’ (Marshall 2013, 202).

For opposition writers, the appointment of Colley Cibber to the laureateship in 1730 confirmed this.¹⁰³ Edward Pearce has argued that although Cibber was an able actor and manager, he was ‘no poet of any sort, he was hired as a wonderfully compliant, bad-verse, Hanoverian loyalist’ (Pearce 2007, 331).¹⁰⁴ His appointment confirmed many writers’ fears that the literature of the age had become ‘low’, creating what some believed was a culture of ‘dullness’ in place of one of sense. Pope headed up this charge in his *Dunciad*, where he criticised Walpole for bringing ‘Smithfield muses to the ear of kings’ and so encouraging the spread of dullness and the ‘moral bankruptcy’ of the nation (Pope 2006, 434; Downie 1994, 118). Pope’s concerns were visualised in a print entitled *The Late P--m-r M-n----r* (1743) (see Figure 3), which depicts Walpole

¹⁰¹ Swift satirized this appointment in his ‘To Mr. Gay’ (1731): ‘How cheaply had thy Liberty been sold/ To squire a Royal Girl of two Years old!’ (Swift 1746, 2: 350).

¹⁰² Quoted in the Earl of Chesterfield’s *Characters* (1778), Matthew Tindal argued that Walpole ‘looked upon writing as a mechanical kind of business’, and saw it as a ‘kind of currency that would pass by its nominal value, let its intrinsic worth be ever so inconsiderable’ (Chesterfield 1778, 34).

¹⁰³ Hunter and Varey have noted that Cibber and Walpole had often been conflated in satires of the period, particularly after Cibber’s appointment as Poet Laureate in 1730 (Varey 1986, 4–5; Hunter 1975, 63). Fielding himself had used this conflation in his revised *The Author’s Farce* in 1734.

¹⁰⁴ Cibber’s annual New Year Odes were a source of chagrin to writers, and were repeatedly satirized for their inanity in *Grub-Street Journal* (6 January 1732; 13 January 1737). Fielding also satirized Cibber’s odes in the prologue to *The Historical Register*. The prologue is filled with redundant drivel such as ‘*This is a Day in Days of Yore,/Our Fathers never saw before:/ This is a Day, ’tis one to ten,/ Our Sons will never see again*’ which Fielding emphasises by having it sung twice (Fielding 2011, 417).

unflatteringly yawning in his own dullness and threatening to swallow all in his gaping maw.¹⁰⁵ The caption, taken from *The Dunciad* emphasises this: ‘Lost was the Nation’s Sense, nor could be found,/ While the long solemn Unison went round; Wide, and more wide, it spread o’er all the realm;/ Ev’n Palinurus nodded at the Helm’ (Pope 2006, 550). By putting his own political interests ahead of those of the nation, Pope suggests that Walpole was leading the nation into moral and artistic degeneracy, the results of which he suggests vividly in the final lines of *The Dunciad*:

Art after Art goes out, and all is Night.
See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of casuistry heaped o’er her head.
Philosophy, that leaned on heaven before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
[...] Lo! thy dread empire, CHAOS! Is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall
And universal darkness buries all. (Pope 2006, 552-3)¹⁰⁶

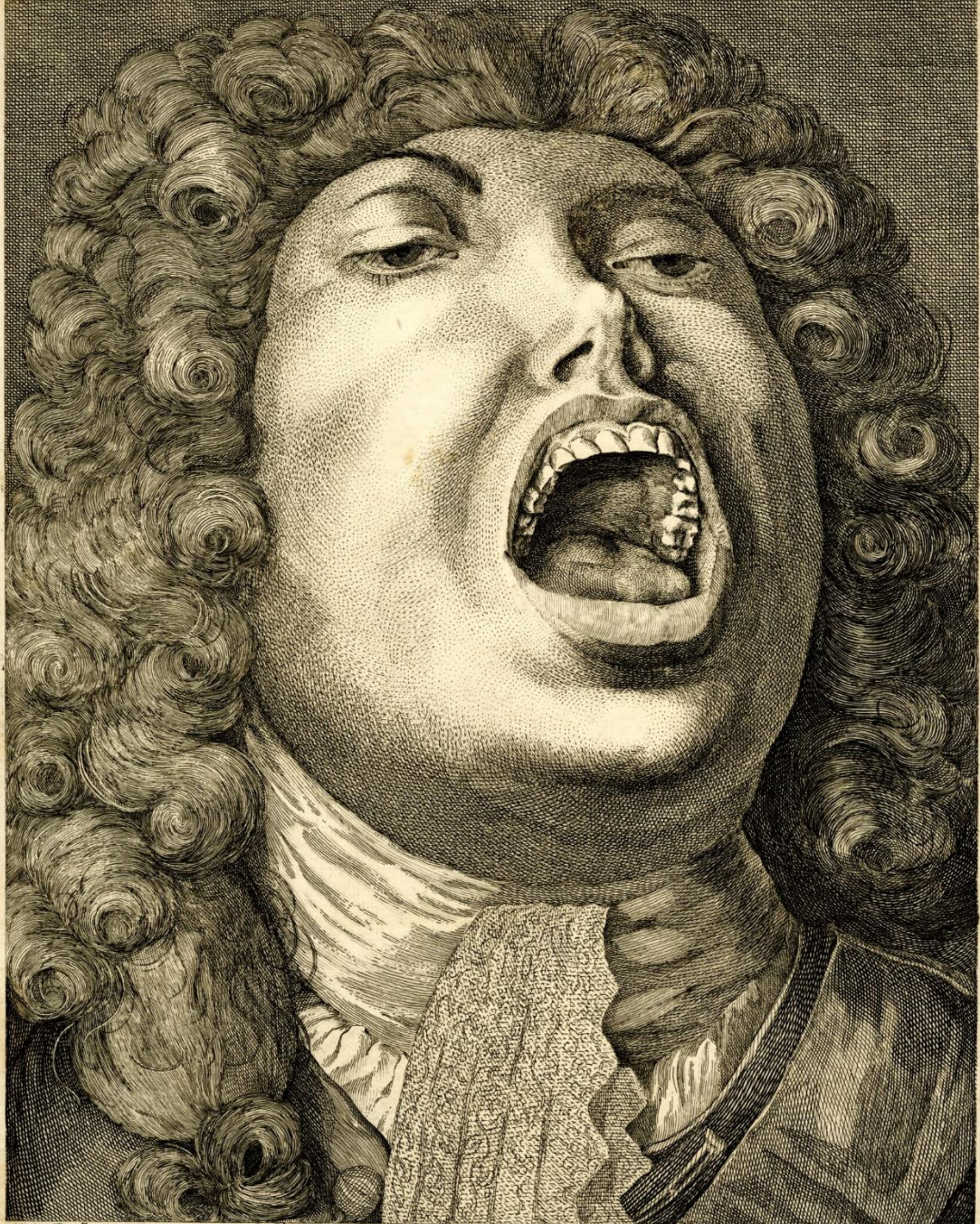
I suggest that Fielding’s caricature of Walpole as the silent politician in *The Historical Register* participates in this wider dialogue of dullness. Due to his failure to share information with his colleagues (read: failure to patronise writers), the first politician condemns them to ignorance, and a potential invasion by foreign forces (harlequinades, pantomimes and Italian singers).¹⁰⁷ Though Fielding’s vision is not as apocalyptic and

¹⁰⁵ This image of Walpole’s ‘all digesting Maw’ is also satirized by Swift in his poem ‘To Mr. Gay’ (1731): ‘I place a STATESMAN full before my Sight./ A bloated *M—r* in all his Geer [*sic*]/ With shameless Visage, and perfidious Leer. Two Rows of Teeth arm each devouring Jaw;/ And *Ostrich-like*, his all digesting Maw’ (Swift 1746, 2: 351).

¹⁰⁶ This can also be read as part of the wider distrust of the rise of credit and ‘monied’ men, which threatened civic humanist notions of character. Downie comments that Pope and his allies distrusted ‘upstart, monied men like Walpole,’ whom they suspected of ‘undermining the ancient constitution’ by ruling in their own self-interest (Downie 1994, 120). Such claims should be read with an awareness that both sides were promoting arguments which supported their own interests.

¹⁰⁷ Freeman notes that many satirists were concerned with the ‘invasion’ of foreign entertainments and taste, and responded ‘with grotesque, gender-inflated satires on those forms’ to appeal to audience’s ‘nationalistic sensibilities’ in plays such as *The English Stage Italianiz’d* (1727) (Freeman 2002, 76, 53). Fielding was vocal in his plays about what he saw as the ‘invasion’ of foreign tastes, particularly into the theatre, which diluted the quality of many pieces on the stage. This can be seen in the second episode of *The Historical Register*, in the fashionable ladies’ discussion of Italian castrato Farinelli. Fielding also satirized the degraded state of modern theatre and the importation of foreign entertainments in the puppet show in *The Author’s Farce*.

THE late P—m—r M—n—r.



1743 Dec. 3

Lo! What are all your Schemes come to?

Published by G. Bickham, in May's Buildings

More he had said, but yawn'd—All Nature nods:
What Mortal can resist the Yawn of Gods?
Churches and Chapels instant! it reach'd,
St. James's first, for leaden G-l-b-t presch'd:
Then catch'd the Schools; the Hall scarce kept awake;
The Convocation gap'd, but could not speak.
Loft was the Nation's Sense, nor could be found,

While the long solemn Unifon went round;
Wide, and more wide, it spread o'er all the realm:
Ev'n Palinurus nodded at the Helm;
The Vapour mild o'er each Committee crept;
Unfinish'd Treaties in each Office slept;
And Chief-lefs Armies doz'd out the Campaign;
And Navies yawn'd for Orders on the Main.

DUNCIAD.

Figure 3. George Bickham the Younger, 1743, *The Late P--m-r M-n----r*. Courtesy of The British Museum Collection Online. Accessed 22 January 2017. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by The British Museum.



Figure 4. George Bickham the Younger, 1740, *The Stature of a Great Man, or the English Colossus*. Courtesy of The British Museum Collection Online. Accessed 22 January 2017. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by The British Museum.

final as Pope's, he does similarly suggest that by failing to patronize 'deserving' writers and promoting 'low' loyalists in their place, Walpole was deliberately circulating dullness in order to maintain his grip on power.

This conflation of the political and literary worlds also informs the other political caricature of Walpole in the play, the harlequin figure Quidam. In the final scene, Quidam offers a bribe to a group of poor and corrupt 'patriots' and then invites them to dance. The patriots link the wealth of the nation to the success or failure of their own business ventures and so accept Quidam's bribe without question: 'my Shop is my Country, I always measure the Prosperity of the latter by that of the former' (Fielding 2011, 442). Such a claim would have been viewed with suspicion by supporters of the landed interest, who argued that 'monied' men (like Walpole) were attempting to perpetuate the national debt for their own personal gain (Bellamy 1998, 2). Unbeknownst to the patriots, Quidam has cut holes in their pockets, allowing the bribe money to fall out during the dance, which he collects back 'so not to lose one Half-penny by his Generosity' (Fielding 2011, 443). Although neither party comes out of the scene unscathed, the focus of the satire is predominantly aimed against Quidam, whose dishonesty even to those he has just bribed is presented as the lowest form of trickery. Quidam has generally been identified by critics as an explicit caricature of Walpole, satirizing his reputation for bribery, corruption and double-dealing (see Hunter 1975, 64; Lewis 1987, 189; Thomson 1993, 59; Ribble 2009, 243; Fielding 2011, 370). The name 'Quidam' gives the most obvious and immediate clue to the classically-educated among Fielding's audience, being Latin for a 'certain unspecified someone'. Medley also suggestively describes Quidam as 'a very considerable Character', indicating an important public figure (Fielding 2011, 441). Moreover, Fielding listed the character as 'Quidam Anglicae, a certain Person' in his advertisement for the play published in the *Daily Advertiser* on 21 March 1737 (Fielding 2011, 362). This seems to suggest that

audiences would have known before stepping into the theatre that the character was intended as a specific caricature, and were encouraged by Fielding to identify it.

Fielding also appears to have used several theatrical devices to ensure the link was made between Quidam and Walpole by the audience. The first of these was to cast the same actor (a Mr Smith) who played the first politician in the opening scene of the play. The doubling of parts encourages the audience to link ‘a certain unspecified someone’ with the ‘first and greatest Politician’ of the opening scene (Fielding 2011, 418). Thomson takes this link a step further by suggesting that Mr Smith was probably fat, creating a visual link to Walpole (Thomson 1993, 59).¹⁰⁸ From satirical prints and portraits of Walpole during the period, we can see that Walpole had a large stature and was often portrayed with a protruding stomach, bushy black eyebrows and the blue sash and star which denoted the Order of the Garter (see Figure 4). J. H. Plumb has also described Walpole as ‘a short, dumpy man, weighing rather more than twenty stone’, with ‘large and coarse’ features, a ‘square double chin, strongly marked black eyebrows’ and a ‘sharp emphatic nose’ (quoted in Thomson 1993, 56). Some of these traits may have found their way into the performance through the use of prosthetics, costume or make-up, and Mr Smith’s stature may have greatly helped. Although there are no clues in the text as to how the character was presented onstage, I think it is safe to assume, given Fielding’s use of stagecraft, that he may have engaged in some form of visual caricature to supplement the action. Tellingly, in one of the few contemporary comments on the play, John Hoadly remarked that Quidam was ‘actually dress’d in [Walpole’s] very Peruke and Coat’ (Fielding 2011, 370). This strongly suggests that Fielding utilized every theatrical technique available to him to create the link between Quidam and Walpole.

¹⁰⁸ Lockwood also notes that there may have been a resemblance between Smith and Walpole, but does not make any suggestions as to what this resemblance might be (Fielding 2011, 370).

The explicit nature of this caricature is quite daring, with Fielding picturing Quidam/Walpole openly engaging in bribery, corruption and trickery. Indeed, Fielding goes so far as to compare Quidam to the devil in his mock defence of the Great Man in the dedication to the play:

But I am aware I shall be asked, who is this *Quidam*, [...] Who but the Devil could act such a Part? [...] Indeed it is so plain who is meant by this *Quidam*, that he who maketh any wrong Application thereof might as well mistake the Name of *Thomas* for *John*, or old *Nick* for old *Bob* (Fielding 2011, 409)

Fielding obviously took great pleasure here in comparing Walpole (old Bob – a well-established nickname for Walpole) to the devil, particularly as he does so whilst under the ironic guise of defending him against ‘malicious Insinuations’ (Fielding 2011, 409). The caricature of Walpole which emerges here then paints him as a master manipulator and a devil, bribing all of those around him to do his bidding, but ultimately ensuring that he recuperates everything he has invested. It seems to me, however, that the most damning element of Fielding’s satire against Walpole here is expressed in the threat Quidam poses to Corsican (read: British) patriotism. Thomas Davis (who played Pistol) commented that Fielding had presented Walpole ‘as a fiddler [...] followed by the members of parliament, who danced to the tune played by the Premier’ (Thomas 1740, 153). As ‘the fiddler’, Walpole threatens to lead the government and society astray, fiddling merrily while Britain burns.

Fielding adds to the idea of Walpole as a master manipulator by presenting Quidam as a harlequin. Consequently, he conflates his caricature of Walpole with that of theatrical manager and harlequin, John Rich. Harlequins were traditionally comedic or grotesque parts, known for their trickery and disguise, and became popular with audiences in the 1720s (O’Brien 1998, 492-93). Rich was well-known for popularizing pantomime during the 1720s and 1730s with his successful productions at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and the Covent Garden theatres. He was also known for his performances of

Harlequin in *The Jealous Doctor* (1717), *The Necromancer, or the Harlequin Doctor Faustus* (1723) and *The Rape of Proserpine* (1726).¹⁰⁹ Fielding had previously satirized Rich as ‘Mr John Lun, [Rich’s stage name] Vulgarly call’d Esquire’ for this in his dedication to *Tumble-Down Dick* (1736); ‘It is to You, Sir, we owe (if not the Invention) at least the bringing into Fashion, that sort of Writing which you have been pleased to distinguish by the Name of *Entertainment*’ (Fielding 2011, 329).¹¹⁰ These types of ‘Entertainments’ were typically characterised as popular but low forms of theatre and often included rope and ladder dancing, tumbling, music, pantomimes, masquerades and harlequinades. As the proprietor of such entertainments, Rich became a focal point for satire on the degradation of public taste, as Fielding’s prompter in *Tumble-Down Dick* laments: ‘[Rich] brings more Money to the House, than all the Poets put together’ (Fielding 2011, 336). In his *Dunciad*, Pope also mocked ‘Immortal Rich’ for slavishly performing the whims of his mistress, Dullness, ‘Mid snows of paper and fierce hail of pease’ (Pope 2006, 3: 261-262). This links Rich to our earlier caricature of Walpole as the proprietor of ‘dullness’. Also known for his roles as the Harlequin, Rich was a repeated focus of Fielding’s satire for the spread of ‘low’ entertainments. As with Quidam’s threat to Corsican patriotism, Fielding suggests that such entertainments presented a threat to the English stage. Through his ‘trickery’, Rich had ‘bribed’ the public away from traditional and edifying forms of drama by introducing his new popular and dull ‘entertainments’.

The presence of both caricatures in the scene creates an analogy between Walpole and Rich and, through the latter, to the figure of the harlequin. It also draws

¹⁰⁹ Hunter argues that Quidam can also be read as a caricature of Colley Cibber, as we witness him being taught to spell (satirizing Cibber’s writing) and ‘improving’ the ancients (an attack on his editing of plays) (Hunter 1971, 64).

¹¹⁰ Rich also appears in Christopher Hen’s list of auction lots during *The Historical Register*; ‘All the Wit lately belonging to Mr *Hugh Pantomime*, Composer of Entertainments for Play-Houses’ (Fielding 2011, 429).

attention to what Medley calls the ‘strict resemblance between the states political and theatrical’, helping to conflate the two spheres (Fielding 2011, 431). Hunter argues that superimposing one object onto another was ‘an old Augustan trick’, perfected by Swift in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) (Hunter 1975, 63). Swift also presented a caricature of Walpole as the Lilliputian treasurer, Flimnap, who is ‘allowed to cut a Caper on the strait Rope, at least an Inch higher than any other Lord in the whole Empire’ (Swift 2008a, 33; Downie, 1994, 112). Although this is not strictly a Harlequin character, Swift suggests that he possesses the physical and political agility of a tumbler or mountebank. Fielding builds upon this suggestion in *The Historical Register* by presenting his caricature of Walpole as ‘the harlequin of politics’, creating ‘an interesting fusion of theatrical and political satire’ in the process (Lewis 1987, 189). When read as part of the caricature of Walpole, it suggests that, like the harlequin, Walpole could employ his agility (politically in this sense) to tumble his way through his sphere. Although Fielding does not provide any detailed stage directions for the action of this scene, harlequins would traditionally have been expected to employ the staple array of pantomime trickery, including acts of physical agility and dexterity to deprive the patriots of their money. In the hands of a clever comic actor, this part clearly had the potential to lend itself to some clumsy, slapstick action.

The conflation of spheres in the last episode also extends to the other episodes in the play. This allows Walpole to be read in a variety of theatrical caricatures which are not immediately obvious as caricatures of the Great Man. This enables him to satirize even more elements of the Great Man’s public character, but relies heavily on the audience to make these connections. The third episode of the play is set in a fashionable London auction house. It satirizes the real-life auctioneer, Christopher Cock, who is caricatured as Christopher Hen, and the *beau monde* who gathered at his auction house. In the scene, Hen presents various political or social qualities for sale, including ‘a most

delicate Piece of Patriotism’, a ‘curious Piece of Political Honesty’, ‘Three grains of Modesty’, a ‘Bottle of Courage’, ‘A very neat clear Conscience’, ‘Cardinal Virtues’, and ‘A great deal of Wit, and a little common Sense’, all of which (unsurprisingly) receive no bids (Fielding 2011, 427–30). The only lot to receive a bid is ‘Lot 8, a very considerable Quantity of Interest at Court’, which sells for a thousand pounds (Fielding 2011, 429).¹¹¹ The social and political satire here is obvious, as Hen fails to sell off the qualities which supposedly should make a ‘good’ citizen or politician. Self-interest corrupts the qualities he names, turning them into mere words to be bandied around fashionable society.

The willingness to sell these qualities also suggests that Hen can be read as a Walpolean caricature. It seems to me, however, that the implication of bribery here becomes secondary to the wider effect Walpole’s corruption appears to have had on society. Through the sale, the qualities which should make a ‘good’ individual, and perhaps, more importantly, a ‘good’ politician, become commodified and corrupted by self-interest.¹¹² Hen is ironically unable to sell the qualities, due to the wider corruption of society. This implies that personal corruption breeds wider social corruption, escalating to such a point where nothing but ‘interest at court’ will buy the support of the *beau monde*. In a Mandevillean vision of the world, society is imagined as a series of isolated individuals, each pursuing their own self-interest with little thought to the greater social good. As with the circulation of dullness, then, Fielding seems to suggest

¹¹¹ In this scene, Hen sells to a gaggle of fashionable ladies, including one Mrs Screen, which Thomson has identified as a possible caricature of Walpole’s mistress and later second wife, Maria Skerrett (Thomson 1993, 59; also see Fielding 2011, 369 n1). ‘Screen-Master General’ was one of the nicknames ascribed to Walpole in connection with his supposed involvement in the Charteris Rape case during 1730 (see Goldgar 1976, 106–9; Pearce 2007, 343). This nickname was also later included in satirical prints, such as *The Screen* (1741) and *The Screen: A Similie* (1741/2) (see Atherton 1974, 202–3).

¹¹² Arguably, the length of Walpole’s reign (which is unsurpassed by any other British politician) could be taken as a strong indication of his success, making him appear as a ‘good’ politician. However, it seems to me that the focus of Fielding’s satire here appears to be aimed at the moral implications of Walpole’s reign and his perception of the ‘damage’ it does to wider society. The measure of a ‘good’ politician, for Fielding, seems to be his ability to embody the proper social and political qualities he names in the auction, although it is unclear how far Fielding imagined this would be possible.

that Walpole's corruption has a wider influence on society in this scene. As a visible and powerful public figure, he should set an example to the rest of society by adhering to the civic humanist principles that constitute the *vir virtutis* (Pocock 1975, 486). His failure to do so and his avid pursuit of power corrupts society, turning it into a series of otherwise isolated, self-interested individuals, with little notion of their civic duty to wider society.

In addition, Thomson also connects Walpole to this part through Fielding's choice of casting. Fielding cast the infamous and estranged daughter of Colley Cibber, Charlotte Charke, to play Hen in *The Historical Register*.¹¹³ Charke was best known for her breeches parts both on the stage and off it (living as a 'Mr Charles Brown'), and for her impersonations of her father.¹¹⁴ Before *The Historical Register*, Fielding had exploited Charke's impersonations for satiric effect in *Pasquin*. As Phillip Baruth has pointed out, Charke had taken on the part of Lord Place in Fielding's *Pasquin* on its eleventh night in 1736 (Baruth 1998, 23–24). Lord Place had originally been played by Richard Yates, but Charke stated in her *Narrative* that 'as he had other Parts in that Piece, Mr *Fielding* begged the Favour of him to spare that to make room for me' (Charke 1999, 34). Fielding evidently could not pass up the opportunity to add another layer of satire by having the daughter mimic the father. In *Pasquin*, Lord Place offers a voter the position of Poet Laureate in exchange for his vote, despite the fact that the latter does not know what an ode is:

2nd Voter. Poet! no, my Lord I am no Poet, I can't make Verses.

L. Place. No Matter for that, - you'll be able to make Odes.

2nd Voter. Odes, my Lord! what are those?

¹¹³ Fielding had previously employed cross-gender casting in the character of Tom in his *Tom Thumb* (1730) and *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731): see previous chapter. Charke's transgender playing in *The Historical Register* also provides one of the only opportunities in the play for Fielding to exploit the disparity between the actor/role, private/public character. By cross-dressing, Charke emphasises the emasculation implicit in Fielding's change of the character's name from 'Cock' to 'Hen'.

¹¹⁴ In her *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Charke* (1755), Charke describes an incident in which she dressed up in her father's wig and waistcoat, and paraded and bowed in an impersonation of her father to the gathering crowd (Charke 1999, 10–11).

L. Place. Faith, Sir, I can't tell well what they are; but I know you may be qualified for the place without being a Poet (Fielding 2011, 270)

Although Charke was impersonating her father in the character of Lord Place, he can equally be read as a caricature of Walpole, giving out patronage in exchange for support. This scene is an obvious satire on Walpole's appointment of Colley Cibber as Laureate and his subsequent production of the annual New Year's Ode. Charke's impersonation of her father here conflates Cibber's and Walpole's characters so that they become interchangeable. Similarly, in *The Historical Register*, Fielding reuses Charke's impersonation for Hen, creating a link between her, Cibber and Walpole. These caricatures become analogous and interchangeable, making it difficult for the audience to judge where one ends and the other begins.¹¹⁵ As a result, their public characters become blurred, allowing Fielding to alternatively pick traits from each as a criticism for the other.

This is far from the only example of Fielding conflating caricature in *The Historical Register*. I will now turn to examine the three remaining theatrical caricatures of Walpole in the play. Like Hen and Quidam, these caricatures work through the conflation of political and theatrical spheres, and Walpole's connections with its leading figures. However, Fielding's simultaneous presentation of these three caricatures in a single episode allows him to satirize more traits of the Great Man at once than in any other scene. In doing so, however, he exposes the instability of these caricatures and their dependence on their audience to give them meaning.

The fourth episode of the play centres on three actor-managers: Ground-Ivy, Pistol and the bastard son of Apollo. Split into two parts, the episode (like *The Author's Farce*) addresses issues of managerial control and ultimately asks how far power should be allowed to extend in either sphere. In the first part of the scene, Pistol attempts to

¹¹⁵ This appears to be a development of the blurring of character/role which Fielding had used in the final act of *The Author's Farce*.

force a mob to accept his casting for the part of Polly Peachum in *The Beggar's Opera*. The second part of the episode concerns Ground-Ivy and Apollo's editing and casting of *King John* and Pistol's subsequent attempt to overthrow his father (Ground-Ivy). These three figures are instantly recognisable as caricatures of some of the leading theatrical figures of the day.¹¹⁶ Ground-Ivy and Pistol are caricatures of father-son duo Colley and Theophilus Cibber. Apollo has proved more difficult to identify, with possible candidates including Walpole, Theophilus Cibber, Lewis Theobald or Charles Fleetwood.¹¹⁷ Lewis makes a convincing case for Fleetwood, who took over the management of Drury Lane Theatre after the actors' revolt in 1733, arguing the satire is too mild for the caricature to be Cibber (Lewis 1974, 255).¹¹⁸ Fleetwood, Colley and Theophilus all held managerial roles at the Drury Lane theatre during the 1730s. As managers, all three men can easily be seen as parallels to Walpole through their relative positions within the theatrical sphere, becoming what Pistol calls 'Prime Minister[s] Theatrical' (Fielding 2011, 432). As the two spheres are conflated, the characters' management of their sphere can be read as an analogy for Walpole's administration, which Medley states is 'as weak a Ministry as any poor Kingdom cou'd ever boast of' (Fielding 2011, 431).

¹¹⁶ Lewis also identifies the prompter in this episode as a possible caricature of William Rufus Chetwood, the experienced prompter at Drury Lane. According to Lewis, the inexperienced Fleetwood depended heavily on Chetwood's expertise and often influenced by him (Lewis 1974, 255).

¹¹⁷ Lockwood notes that William Appleton has argued that Apollo is 'almost certainly' a caricature of Theophilus and Walpole, and possible also of Fleetwood (Fielding 2011, 436 n1). Richard Bevis adds Lewis Theobald to this list (Bevis 1970, 29 n22). Lockwood suggests that the satire of Apollo does appear more general than that aimed against Fielding's other caricatures, leading him to argue that the character might be a more 'abstract signification: a bastardized god 'only of modern Wit' (Fielding 2011, 436).

¹¹⁸ Lewis also states that it is unlikely that Fielding would maintain two caricatures of Theophilus in the same scene. This assessment, however, overlooks Fielding's various presentations of Walpole in the play, and in particular his three simultaneous appearances in this episode in the characters of Apollo, Ground-Ivy and Pistol, making a double appearance of Theophilus equally possible. It is probable, however, that this character is either a caricature of Chetwood or another general managerial figure (perhaps even a self-parody), in keeping with Fielding's satire of theatrical administration and possibly as a mimic of the triumvirate which Colley Cibber was a part of that ruled the Drury Lane Theatre until 1733.

Of the three, however, Pistol seems to offer the most damning caricature of Walpole's leadership. Pistol is a caricature of Theophilus Cibber.¹¹⁹ Theophilus was famed for his acting and was the deputy manager for the Drury Lane theatre. He was noted for his bombastic acting style, particularly his portrayal of Pistol in *Henry IV*, Part II, which he first performed in 1727. He had been ridiculed for the 'buskin manner' of this performance in Edward Phillip's *The Stage Mutineers* (1733) and Robert Baker's *The Mad-House* (1737) (Fielding 2011, 431 n1). Fielding repurposes the name to satirize Theophilus' acting style. In the scene, Pistol 'run[s] mad, and thinks himself a great Man', shouting out his lines and 'over-act[ing] his part' (Fielding 2011, 431). The actor playing Pistol clearly had scope to make the most of the physical and verbal satire in this scene by mimicking Theophilus' acting style. The actor may even have utilized the same wide-legged, puffed up stance which Theophilus is pictured in, in his role as Pistol in John Laguerre's satirical 1733 print, *The Stage Mutiny* (see Figure 5).¹²⁰ The point of the scene, however, is not to satirize Theophilus' acting, but rather to ridicule him in his role as the deputy manager of Drury Lane, as Medley states: 'we don't over-act him half so much as he does his Parts; tho' 'tis not so much his acting Capacity which I intend to exhibit as his ministerial' (Fielding 2011, 431). Indeed, this 'ministerial' theme runs throughout the episode. In the first part of the episode, Pistol gathers a mob to announce the casting of the part of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*. Lockwood notes that this scene pertains to a public dispute between Catherine 'Kitty' Clive and Susanna Cibber, Theophilus' wife, over the part of Polly, and subsequently the ownership of roles by

¹¹⁹ Hunter argues that Colley can also be read in Pistol as 'the two Cibbers are virtually made one in Pistol' (Hunter 1975, 64). This is hardly surprising due to their familial relationship, but I argue that the caricature is geared more towards satirizing Theophilus than his father.

¹²⁰ We might also see similarities in the stance Pistol uses in *The Stage Mutineers* (Figure 5) and the one Walpole was pictured in by George Bickham the Younger seven years later in *The Structure of the Great Man* (see Figure 4). It is unclear whether there is any concrete connection between these prints, however, the similarity suggests a theatricality to the presentation of both 'great men' in these satirical prints.



Figure 5. Anon. after John Laguerre, c.1733, *The Stage Mutiny*. Courtesy of The British Museum Collection Online, Accessed 22 January 2017. Available at: Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by The British Museum.

actors (known, as noted above, as ‘lines of business’). Although the part should have belonged to Clive, it was awarded to Susanna Cibber instead. Clive meanwhile was given the lesser role of Lucy. The debate was taken to print in a series of letters by Clive and Cibber (*London Daily Post*, 19 November 1736; *Grub-Street Journal*, 9 December respectively). Various arguments were raised about the manager’s right to overrule convention on such occasions (*London Daily Post*, 13 November) or the Town’s right to see both actresses perform the part and decide for themselves (*Grub-Street Journal*, 25 November) (Fielding 2011, 432 n3).

Eighteenth-century managers and playwrights were well aware of the power the audience held over the ultimate success or failure of a play, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Pistol’s attempt to control the casting of Polly can be read as a denial of the power and ‘right to choice’ of the audience:

Say then, Oh Town, it is your Royal Will,
That my Great Consort represent the Part
Of *Polly Peachum* in the *Beggar’s Opera*? [Mob Hisses]
Thanks to the Town, that Hiss speaks their Assent (Fielding 2011, 432–
33)

Pistol uses his managerial power to override the decision of the crowd, by deliberately misinterpreting their hisses as ‘assent’. Pistol appears to be undermining the ‘rights’ of the audience and so is potentially damning his own play to be hissed. This makes him appear a tyrannical figure, who attempts to bend the audience to his will by taking power from them unjustly. Walpole’s manipulation of the systems of government and law were equally viewed by the opposition as a usurpation of power. Fielding had previously satirized Walpole for the corrupt election process in *Pasquin*.¹²¹ Opposition writers also suspected the close relationship between Walpole and Queen Caroline, and the influence

¹²¹ In *Pasquin*, Mrs Mayoress convinces her husband to ‘return’ the vote (to government) despite a clear victory for the Country party (Tory), so that they might gain influence with the Court party (Whigs). Downie suggests that this was based on a real practice called ‘weeding the house’ which returned disputed election results to the Commons’ Committee of Privileges and Elections. This committee was in turn controlled by the party who held the majority in the house and so generally found in their favour (Downie 2009, 73).

Walpole might wield over her husband through her. For example, Walpole was suspected of exploiting this influence in the 1730 case of Colonel Charteris, a known informer for Walpole, who was given a royal pardon following a conviction for rape (Goldgar 1976, 106; Pearce 2007, 343). Walpole's seeming ability to manipulate the system for his own benefit was perceived as a threat to the British electoral and legal systems. Fielding equally warns in the dedication to the play that the 'Liberties of a People have been subdued by the Conquest of Valour and Force, and have been betrayed by the subtle and dexterous Arts of refined Policy' (Fielding 2011, 409), making a seeming link between Walpole's 'policies' and Pistol's actions. The implication then is that whilst these men are allowed to remain in 'power' in their respective realms, the system will continue to be corrupted until the right to choose is taken entirely from their 'audiences'.

This threat is realised in the second part of the episode, when Pistol attempts to usurp his father as manager of the theatre:

Your Pardon, Sir, why will not you obey
Your Son's advice, and give him still his way;
For you, and all who will oppose his Force,
Must be o'erthrown in his triumphant Course (Fielding 2011, 440)

Theophilus had similarly led an actors' rebellion at Drury Lane in 1733 after his father had sold his share of the patent to John Highmore. Martin Battestin suggests that Theophilus considered the share of the patent as his 'birthright' and led the company as they defected to the Haymarket Theatre. As a result, he drove Fielding out of his 'lucrative position as house playwright at Drury Lane' and made himself and his father a target for Fielding's ridicule (Battestin 2000, 44–45). Pistol's usurpation of power in *The Historical Register* can be read as an extension of this quarrel between father and son. To emphasize this point, Fielding reveals that Pistol likes nothing better than to 'act [the king] behind the Scenes', suggesting a desire for greater power (Fielding 2011, 436). Walpole's manipulation of government and of the King and Queen too was seen by

satirists as an attempt to take greater powers for himself, behind the guise of loyal service. By conflating these caricatures, Fielding seems to suggest that Walpole presents as distinctive a threat to British liberties as Pistol and Theophilus did to the rights of the audience. He invites his audience to read Pistol/Theophilus' despotic government of the playhouse as an analogy for Walpole's dominance over the political realm.

By conflating his caricatures of Walpole with others in the theatrical realm, Fielding could multiply his satirical allusions to Walpole in *The Historical Register*. This gave him greater opportunities in the play to satirize Walpole and his systems of management, allowing him to participate and draw meaning from the wider cultural gossip about Walpole's public character in the 1730s. This also enabled a degree of deniability against a libel charge by allowing him to argue, as he did in the dedication, that applying the caricature to Walpole was simply a misjudgement on the part of the audience. Of course, away from the threat of legal action, we can recognise how tongue-in-cheek this defence is. Fielding repeatedly encourages his audience to 'misapply' the satire to Walpole, drawing on his similarities to those in the theatrical realm to create meaning. As such, the audience are encouraged to take a much greater role in the process of judging caricature than he had previously done in his earlier plays. It is only by comparing the conflated caricatures that we understand the full meaning of Fielding's satire.

While the audience are encouraged to make these connections and to draw meaning from them, Fielding does not make the process of judging the caricatures any easier for them. By multiplying the conflated caricatures, he also complicates the process of judgement for an audience. In this, he separates the more judicious theatre-goers from the more simple-minded members of the audience. As he superimposes caricatures on top of one another, 'the cross-references complicate' and it becomes increasingly difficult to judge where one caricature ends and another begins (Hunter 1975, 64). As

with the distinction between character and role in the final act of *The Author's Farce*, those between caricatures within the play collapse into one another in *The Historical Register*. The multiplication of these cross-references makes the lines between caricatures blur and become fluid. This, in turn, creates greater meaning for each caricature from the comparison of their relative positions, styles of management and attitudes towards the more sophisticated members of the audience. However, it also exposes the possibility that the public characters (of Walpole, Cibber) which have been caricatured are themselves also unstable. As we explore the similarities between the public characters of these 'Great Men' and conflate them through caricature, they become interchangeable, suggesting that they are not unique to that particular individual. Instead of being a definitive marker of personal character then, public characters and caricatures are a changeable, fluid surface which the audience (both onstage and off) have to interpret and derive meaning from. They are a product of the public speculation of meanings (gossip) which provide little knowledge of the private character underneath.

The Great Mogul of Haymarket: *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737)

The caricatures and satire within *The Historical Register* are often read today as being 'openly hostile to Walpole' and provoking the passing of the Licensing Act (R. Hume 1988, 234).¹²² However, Downie has convincingly argued that it was not until *The Historical Register* was paired with the afterpiece *Eurydice Hiss'd* on the 13 April that it 'began to be represented in the ministerial press as a satire on Walpole' (Downie 2009, 78). Writing in the *Daily Gazetteer* on 7 May (almost three weeks after the *Historical*

¹²² Dudden argues that *The Historical Register* is 'daring in the extreme' and the drama caused a 'sensation in political circles', while Kinservik similarly suggests that *The Historical Register* attracted 'hostility from the ministry' (Dudden 1952, 1:201; Kinservik 2002, 87). The Battestins, meanwhile, comment that the play was the 'brashest of all of [Fielding's] political dramas' and that 'it was precisely the opportunity Walpole wanted [...] that would put Parliament in a mood to place the theatres under restraint' (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 217).

Register premiered with *Eurydice Hiss'd*), one contemporary 'Adventurer in Politicks' complained of the growing politicization of Fielding's satires.¹²³ In *Pasquin*, the 'Adventurer' argued that Fielding had 'laid the Foundation for introducing POLITICKS on the Stage', but was 'general in his Satyr', making Walpole one target amongst many (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 98–99). Encouraged by the success of the *Pasquin*, Fielding had set out to go one better in *The Historical Register*, and was determined 'make a *Minister appear ridiculous to a People*', although the 'adventurer' does allow that he treated the 'PATRIOTS no better than the POLITICIANS' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 99). However, in *Eurydice Hiss'd*, 'Fielding was resolv'd to try his Vein further', comparing not just the 'Government to a Farce [...] (*perhaps a damned one too*)' but more especially 'the present Managers, to *Farce-Actors*' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 100). As such, the attack on Walpole was seen as much more focused and deliberate in the afterpiece than in the main play. The Earl of Egmont's diary for 1737 is also suggestive of the change in reception after the addition of *Eurydice Hiss'd*. When Egmont first attended the *Historical Register* at the Haymarket on 22 March, he commented that it was 'a good satire on the times and has a good deal of Wit' but made no mention of its satire of Walpole (Egmont 1923, 375; Downie 2009, 79). However, when he saw the play again on 18 April, this time with *Eurydice Hiss'd*, he described the afterpiece as

an allegory on the loss of the Excise Bill. The whole was a satire on Sir Robert Walpole, and I observed that when any strong passages fell, the Prince, who was there, clapped, especially when in favour of liberty (Egmont 1923, 390)

By presenting these two pieces alongside one another, Fielding could fill the theatrical evening with his caricatures of Walpole, allowing him to present a more sustained attack against the 'Great Man' and his 'corrupt' ministry than he had ever attempt to before.

¹²³ Dudden comments that the *Daily Gazetteer* article was probably written by someone in a position of authority within Walpole's government – perhaps Lord Hervey – which would account for its hostility to Fielding's satire of Walpole (Dudden 1952, 204).

The inclusion of the afterpiece then seems to have intensified the satire of the political caricatures of the main play, giving them greater meaning and satirical bite.

Eurydice Hiss'd develops many of the themes and caricatures presented in the main play. Like Fielding's other dramatic satires of 1736-1737, it is a rehearsal play in which conflates the political and theatrical worlds. However, in *Eurydice Hiss'd*, Lewis suggests that Fielding chose to go 'one better' than his previous productions, making it 'a play about a play about a play' (Lewis 1987, 193). In keeping with this, Fielding introduces not one but two author-characters, Spatter (frame play) and Pillage (play-within), who both have had their plays *Eurydice* damned by their audiences. Determined to recuperate his losses, Spatter stages a rehearsal of his tragedy, *The Damnation of Eurydice*, a farce on the failure of his *Eurydice*: 'for as the town have damned my play for their own sakes, they will not damn the damnation of it' (Fielding 2011, 448). Trying to manipulate his audience, Pillage uses his connections at the theatre to try to buy their support during the next performance. However, this fails when the audience turn against him and damn his farce. The play ends with Pillage's spectacular fall from favour.

Fielding chooses to caricature Walpole in the figure of the unlucky author Pillage, a part also played by a Mr. Smith. Akin to some of the caricatures of Walpole in *The Historical Register*, Pillage is both an author and a manager, controlling a government of actors, prints and theatre staff all of whom vie for parts in his theatre.¹²⁴ In return for the promise of a place, Pillage expects his dependants to support his latest play: 'if by my Friends,/ Against their Liking, I support my Farce,/ And fill my loaded Pockets with their Pence; Let After-ages damn me if they please' (Fielding 2011, 451). Pillage's attempt to coerce the audience into accepting his play also resembles Pistol's

¹²⁴ In this, Pillage can also be seen to caricature the Cibbers, extending the satire of despotic managerial styles from *The Historical Register*. However, by centring the play on the failure of Pillage's *Eurydice*, Fielding mocked not only his own play's failure, but also the failure of Walpole's Excise Bill.

attempt to woo the mob. Similarly, Pillage appears as the despotic and unchallenged head of his theatre. Rather than allowing the audience to make up their own minds about his play, Pillage bribes his dependants to clap ‘when you hear a hiss – let that be your Cue for Clapping’ (Fielding 2011, 451), ensuring that any disapproval is quickly drowned out. He attempts to manipulate the audience’s interpretation and deny their right to choice and expression. Despite the ‘claps’ of his friends, however, ‘the shallow plot’ of Pillage’s play causes ‘stern Contention’ ‘twixt Claps and Hisses’ which quickly gives way to general disapproval: ‘[t]he Audience, as [if] it were contagious Air,/ All caught it, hollow’d, cat-call’d, hiss’d, and groan’d’ (Fielding 2011, 458).¹²⁵ Walpole is readily recognisable in all aspects of this caricature, and Fielding is compounding his satire by linking Pillage to both Walpole and his earlier caricatures of the Great Man in *The Historical Register*.

It is widely recognised that Fielding’s real stroke of genius in *Eurydice Hiss’d* was, however, to conflate his caricature of Walpole with that of another well-known author-manager: Fielding himself. Both Spatter and Pillage can be read as caricatures of Fielding, whose own *Eurydice* had been hissed off the stage during its first performance at the Drury Lane theatre in February 1737 (Lewis 1987, 193; Kinservik 2002, 88; Fielding 2011, 385).¹²⁶ Like the author-characters, Fielding too was attempting to stage a

¹²⁵ The account of the scene also states that an actor ‘issued forth a horrid Dram,/ and from another rush’d two Gallons forth’, which appears to be a reference to Walpole’s unpopular Gin Act of 1736. Fielding also made a reference to the Gin Act in his damned *Eurydice*, which Goldgar cites as a potential ‘turning point in the audience’s response’, the act being an ‘emotional issue’ for many (Goldgar 1991, 188).

¹²⁶ Critics disagree as to exactly why *Eurydice* failed during its first performance, but most link it to the footmen’s riot which occurred in the theatre that evening. According to Hughes and Goldgar, the riot was started when the footmen were evicted from the upper gallery during the mainplay (Addison’s *Cato*) by the rest of the audience for hissing, cat-calling and disrupting the play. Before the end of the first act, however, the footmen returned with a hatchet and broke down the doors to the gallery. They continued to disturb the performance for the next two acts until the pit rose up again and locked them in the gallery. The ringleaders were arrested and the riot act was read (Hughes 1971, 18–19; Goldgar 1991, 186–87). Whilst the riot accounts for the disruption in the theatre that evening, it does not provide a reason why *Eurydice* was never revived after its first performance. Instead, Goldgar looks to Fielding’s references within the play to Walpole’s unpopular Gin Act (1736), which charged a £50 tax on the sale of spirits in

damnation of the failure of his earlier play in *Eurydice Hiss'd*.¹²⁷ Like Cibber, Rich and Fleetwood, Fielding was also a manager of the Little Haymarket Theatre for the 1736-1737 seasons. As he had done previously in *Pasquin* and *Historical Register*, Fielding used the similarities of his and Walpole's positions to draw comparisons between them. Furthermore, as manager of the Haymarket theatre, Fielding styled himself as 'Great Mogul' in his advertisements for the theatre in order to excite public curiosity.¹²⁸ Aside from the obvious similarities to Walpole's nominal title, this self-imposed mantle was intended to mock the despotic management styles of his fellow actor-managers, Rich and Fleetwood, at their relative theatres (Fielding 2011, 220). As we have already seen, this can equally be applied to Walpole. Pillage's style of management in the opening scenes of the play-within appears to be modelled on such domineering practices. These connections then help to develop the caricatures presented in *The Historical Register*.

However, Fielding took this one step further in *Eurydice Hiss'd*, by using the connection to overlay the farce of his failed play 'over that of Walpole and his excise bill, leaving the one still visible through the other' (Fielding 2011, 385).¹²⁹ In this play, he made his most pointed attack against Walpole, as Lockwood has argued:

quantities of less than two gallons, as the potential source for the afterpiece's unpopularity. As the Gin Act had been passed only four months prior to the staging of *Eurydice*, Goldgar suggests that the audience may have found the play too 'provocative [a] topic' as it was 'still very much an emotional issue' (Goldgar 1991, 188). Perhaps he pushed the audience too far on this occasion.

¹²⁷ Lockwood notes that Fielding's afterpiece was originally advertised under the title *The Damnation of Eurydice* on 21 March, before it was withdrawn from the programme bill and replaced with Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity* as the main play and the *Historical Register* as afterpiece. On the 7 April an advertisement for the afterpiece appeared under the revised title *Eurydice Hiss'd* in the *London Evening Post* (Fielding 2011, 383).

¹²⁸ Fielding advertised the Haymarket theatre as the 'Great Mogul's Company at Haymarket of English Comedies' in the *London Daily Post*, 11 March 1736.

¹²⁹ The excise bill attempted to convert custom duties on wine and tobacco into inland duties, thus offering 'a sop to country gentleman before the general election due to take place in 1734 by reducing the land tax to one shilling in the pound' (Downie 2009, 61). However, the bill caused an outcry from the opposition, who latched on to the term 'excise' to conjure fears of a general excise on goods and cast the bill as 'an attack on the constitutional liberties of the English nation' (Charles B. Woods 1937, 369). During the period between the first and second reading of the bill, Walpole lost considerable support, forcing him to withdraw the bill on the 11 April (Charles B. Woods 1937, 371-72; Downie 2009, 61).

Fielding could not possibly have chosen his instrument of torture more wickedly than to make the farce Walpole acts, or rather re-enacts, his political near-death experience with the excise bill. This was goading the minister in the most sensitive spot (Fielding 2011, 386)

Added to this was the growing uncertainty of Walpole's political position in 1737 caused in part by Prince Frederick's open break with the court and by a 'bustle of opposition activity' (Goldgar 1976, 154).¹³⁰ Given Walpole's reaction when an actor made ad-lib comments about the excise crisis in 1733 (described above), it is perhaps no wonder that Fielding's 1737 plays were branded as 'anti-ministerial' and began a 'serious issue' necessitating a serious response (Downie 2009, 79).

Several critics have pondered the question of Fielding's motives in equating himself to Walpole. Battestin has argued that it was a 'puzzling exercise in self-ridicule' and an act of 'penitential self-mortification' for the failure of *Eurydice* (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 221). In contrast, Kinservik has suggested that Fielding is ridiculing himself in his managerial persona as the 'Great Mogul' as a way to satirize the other theatrical managers and Walpole's domination of politics, rather than satirizing his 'real' public character (Kinservik 2002, 89). Lewis and Lockwood offer another explanation. They argue that in achieving the 'magically potent fusion of [...] miserable farceur with – miserable farceur' Fielding encourages his audience (political opponents included) to 'laugh at him' and in doing so, 'he trapped them into laughing at Walpole as well' (Fielding 2011, 394; Lewis 1987, 195). I suggest that there is an element of all of these in *Eurydice Hiss'd* and, like his caricatures more generally, Fielding relies on this ambiguity and fluidity to encourage his audience to use their judgement to find meaning.

Critics have often commented upon the conflation of the spheres and Fielding's use of caricatures in his later dramatic satires as part of discussions of his political

¹³⁰ This activity included the publication of Lyttelton and Chesterfield's journal *Common Sense* (named after the play-within in Fielding's *Pasquin*), Lyttelton's appointment as Prince Frederick's secretary, and the narrow defeat of Pulteney's motion to raise the Prince's allowance to £100,000 a year (Goldgar 1976, 154; Downie 2009, 79–80).

allegiance during the 1730s. Often seen as juvenile efforts, these plays have been plumbed for their political references and for examples of Fielding's use of author-characters. However, I argue that Fielding's caricatures can be read as part of a wider trend of experimentation, through which he encourages his readers to become more involved in the process of judging character. Acting as and depending on a kind of 'gossip', Fielding's caricatures allow him to satirize the public characters of notable individuals in the political and theatrical worlds. This gave Fielding a degree of deniability, as he could argue (in his usual tongue-in-cheek manner) that the audience had simply misinterpreted his caricatures and satire. Through his system of allusions, gossip and connections, he relies on the abilities of his audience to make links to and between his caricatures of 'great men' which he could not make explicit. The conflation of these two spheres meanwhile allows these caricatures to become porous and flexible, requiring the audience to recognise the connections to real individuals. They are asked to acknowledge, in the manner of many contemporary satires, the similarities in the corruption of 'management' in both spheres and its wider effect on society. By splitting these caricatures over multiple characters in both plays, Fielding was able to extend his satire of contemporary 'Great Men' across the entire theatrical evening. I argue that these plays are significant in Fielding's changing theory of judgement, as they offer him the space to experiment with form, satire and his relationship with the audience. I suggest that Fielding takes these, along with the concept of gossip, and builds upon them in his novels of the 1740s and 50s in order to further challenge his readers' judgement.

Although Fielding did manage to protect himself from a libel charge in his final plays, he could not escape the wrath of Walpole. On 20 May 1737, a bill, which would later become known as the Licensing Act, was read in the House of Commons and was passed four days later. The bill limited play performances to playhouses bearing a royal license (only Drury Lane and Covent Garden) and declared that a separate license would

be needed to be obtained for all new plays prior to performance (Lockwood 1987, 379). The play cited as causing the Licensing Act, however, was not one of Fielding's but rather a farce manuscript entitled *The Golden Rump* provided to Walpole by Henry Giffard, the manager of the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre. The story, as Thomson tells it, states that Giffard was so offended by the (unsolicited) manuscript that he felt compelled to show it to Walpole, 'but anyone who believes that will believe anything' (Thomson 1993, 62). More likely is that Walpole commissioned the piece to be so outlandishly satirical and offensive as to shock the house and the King into agreeing to pass the act. Either way, the result was the same. The Licensing Act was passed on the 24 May 1737, effectively ending Fielding's theatrical career.¹³¹

The Licensing Act also put an end to the central role which caricatures would play in Fielding's literary works. While caricatures can be found throughout Fielding's later novels, they would never again take centre stage as they had done in his Haymarket plays. Instead, in his novels, Fielding would build upon the relationship he had begun to develop with his audience. Drawing on and developing the theme of gossip begun in his plays, Fielding would make oral accounts central to the reader's experience of character in *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*. He would use gossip to challenge and mislead his readers in the later novels, making the process of judging character ever more challenging.

¹³¹ Following the passing of the Licensing Act, Fielding was admitted as a 'special' student at the Society of the Middle Temple on 1 November 1737. Downie comments that we 'know nothing about Fielding's movements between the 23 May' and his admission into the Middle Temple. He rejects Battestin's suggestion that Fielding was supported by his friends in the Opposition and by contributing to the *Craftsman* during this period, as journal writing was often poorly paid, particularly in comparison to writing for the stage (Downie 2009, 83). Lockwood suggests that Fielding may have been 'bought off' by Walpole just before the passing of the Licensing Act which allowed him to 'submit quietly' to the study of the law (Lockwood 1987, 382). Fielding seems to have left hints that this may have been the case in later works (see *Champion* essays for 13 December 1739 and 4 October 1740, and preface to *Of True Greatness*, 1741) (McCrea 1981, 79–80; Battestin and Battestin 1989, 285; Downie 2009, 83–87). During the 1737-1741 period, he seems to have devoted himself to the study of the law, and wrote for *The Champion* in 1739-1740.

While gossip and the reader's capacity to judge would become central to the later novels, Fielding's criminal biographies (1743-1746) return to and expand upon his concern with misleading public performances and the concept of good nature which he had introduced in the early plays. In *Jonathan Wild* (1743) and *The Female Husband* (1746), Fielding presents the misadventures of his 'criminal' protagonists as they manipulate the space between public performances and private essences to fool their spectators. He examines the limits of performance and good nature in these prose pieces. In a step back from their role in his later plays, the onus of judging character in the criminal biographies is also lessened somewhat for the reader. Instead, we are invited to enjoy the comedy of watching other characters misinterpret Fielding's 'criminal' protagonists, as they lie, cheat and perform their way through their social worlds.

III

Fronti Nulla Fides: Reading Deception in Fielding's Criminal Biographies (1743-1746)

Identifying falsehood and knowing when we are being imposed upon is central to our ability to judge character, both in literature and in the world more generally. How do we know if another person is being duplicitous? How can we recognise when we are being humbugged? Jack Lynch suggests that 'the fear of being duped haunted the eighteenth century, and [...] many writers recognized the need for vigilance' (Lynch 2008, 180). Contemporaries were convinced that 'theirs was an exceptional age of deception, and they became increasingly concerned with authenticity' (Lynch 2008, 1). Increasing reports of forgeries, frauds, hoaxes, shams and plots accompanied the period's 'Financial Revolution', testing the bonds of 'trust' between people. Kate Loveman adds that from the mid-seventeenth century, there was 'an abiding concern with deception – its pleasures and its dangers – [which] structure[d] relations between authors and readers' (Loveman 2008, 2). 'The "great rascality" of writers and publishers required readers to be alert to a spectrum of deceit,' particularly those of a fundamental nature which would attempt to 'trick them from their religious and political allegiance' (Loveman 2008, 1). Writers encouraged their readers (both satirically and authentically) to examine claims to truth. The 'wary reader' was to be 'commended' for not being drawn in 'by erroneous and false claims'. The 'unwary reader', meanwhile, was often 'imposed on by "the grossest Falsities"' and 'came in for a great deal of opprobium' as a result (Loveman 2008, 19).

The concern with deception is born out in the number of literary forgeries and social hoaxes which were uncovered during the period. Literary forgeries, including those of William Lauder, George Psalmanazar, Thomas Chatterton, James Macpherson and William Henry Ireland, were subjected to much public debate. Non-literary hoaxes

too were put to public scrutiny in print. As we have already seen, the Canning case divided opinion in London, giving rise to a pamphlet war as each side defended their chosen candidate. Despite being less plausible, the infamous case of Mary Tofts, who claimed in 1726 to have given birth to seven baby rabbits, also provoked much ‘learned debate (and much more unlearned satire)’ (Lynch 2008, viii). Satire was held by some to be a proper way to test the authenticity of such claims. In his *Characteristics of Men* (first published in 1711), the Earl of Shaftesbury argued:

We may be charged perhaps with wilful ignorance and blind idolatry for having taken opinions upon trust [...] For that which can be shown only in a certain light is questionable. Truth, it is supposed, may bear *all* lights (Shaftesbury 1999, 30)

Shaftesbury proposed that suspected frauds should be exposed to ridicule to test the credibility of their claims. ‘Gravity’, he states, ‘is of the very essence of imposture’ and it is important for an onlooker to distinguish between the ‘truly serious’ and the ‘ridiculous’: ‘how can this be done unless by applying the ridicule to see whether it will bear?’ (Shaftesbury 1999, 9). This testing of authenticity through ridicule can be seen throughout Fielding’s work, particularly in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), as he advocates the use of humour and satire to correct the errors of the ridiculous.¹³² In this chapter, I argue that Fielding uses ridicule, inversion and irony in his criminal biographies to ‘test’ and undermine the public reputations of his protagonists as deceptive masterminds.

Concerns about forgery and fraud were also accompanied by a perceptible rise in crime and punishment in the period. Ian Bell suggests that

[e]ighteenth-century commentators were describing a world they saw as replete with rogues and desperadoes of all kinds, a world without detectives, without even much of police force, without reliable insurance companies or other mechanisms of personal protection, and with an inefficient and often flagrantly corrupt court and prison system. (Bell 2003, 9)

The need for individual vigilance, collective discernment and the enforcement of state authority was essential for protecting private property and policing behaviour.

¹³² Fielding discusses the use of ridicule in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* and often uses it to expose the hypocrisy of his comic secondary characters, including Parson Trulliber, Lady Booby and the passengers in the coach (among others) in the novel.

Accurately reading an individual's character might be a first step to uncovering deceptive, fraudulent, or even treasonous activity. Daniel Defoe argued that his was an 'Age of Plot and Deceit', and that deception was essentially a 'political issue' (Defoe 1710, 10; Marshall 2013, 156).¹³³ Rachel Weil argues that in the wake of the Glorious Revolution in 1688, concerns about plots against the newly established government were rife and 'became the terrain on which the credibility, lawfulness, and longevity of the new Williamite regime were tested and contested' (Weil 2013, 1). Being able to distinguish dangerous individuals and groups from the multitude of loyal or indifferent subjects was a key concern for the new regime as they attempted to establish stability and control. Gerald Howson adds that the early eighteenth century saw renewed outbreaks of social and moral disorder, including riots by tradesman, 'Mohocking' (upper-class hooliganism), rumours of 'Hell Fire Clubs' and of various reports of treasonable conspiracies and Jacobite risings (1715 and 1745) (Howson 1985, 3).

These threats against the government were only a small part of a 'great wave of crime' which had been gathering momentum in the south of England, reaching its peak after the South Sea scandal in 1720 (Howson 1985, 3; Gladfelder 2001, 12; Pepper 2011, 473). This 'explosion of criminal activity' was not limited to petty crimes, but was seen to extend across society and up the political scale (Pepper 2011, 473). J.A. Downie comments that contemporaries were shocked at the scale of the embezzlement uncovered when the South Sea Bubble burst, which seemed 'to threaten the very social structure', especially when members of the royal family were implicated (Downie 1994, 98-99). Coinciding with outbreaks of plague and smallpox in Europe, the crisis was readily interpreted by many as a divine punishment for greed (Clery 2004, 55). Swift, Pope and Gay, who all participated and lost money in the scandal, were among those writers to

¹³³ Ashleigh Marshall notes that Defoe was most concerned about the High Church's (hidden) intentions toward non-conformists, and that a 'too-innocent reader [could] be misled by a seemingly harmless speaker – or worse, a seemingly benevolent one' (Marshall 2013, 156, 151).

vent their fury in ‘capital satires’ on the bubble and emerging credit culture more widely (Nicholson 1994, 4-5, 52-5, 137, 144-7; Gerrard 2001, 43-44).¹³⁴

To tackle the increase of crime, the ‘Black Act’ was passed in 1724 which took the overall number of capital felonies to over 350 and ‘reiterated the primacy of the “Bloody Code” as a key weapon in the state’s arsenal’ against crime (Howson 1985, 3; Pepper 2011, 473). Contemporary writers and philosophers called for capital punishment as a way of ensuring the stability of the state and emerging credit culture. Writing in his *Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn* (1725), Bernard Mandeville argued that ‘[i]t is necessary to the publick [*sic*] Peace and Security’ that ‘those Crimes where Violence is mix’d with Injustice, should be capitally punish’d’ (Mandeville 1725, 35). Paul Baines argues that the death sentence was felt by many to be necessary to ensure the stability of commercial society, particularly in cases of forgery:

[c]ontemporaries maintained that severe measures against forgery were necessary in order to protect the new commercial system [...]. Public credit, faith in banks, confidence between merchants all required the threat of death for their stability (Baines 1999, 10-11)¹³⁵

As the state pushed for harsher punishments to enforce their authority, however, their means proved ineffective in curbing rampant criminality. Pepper argues that escalation in the number of capital felonies and public executions during the period ‘attest to inherent weakness of the state’ and the inadequacy of the measures for policing and preventing crime (Pepper 2011, 473). Moreover, the mechanisms for detecting crime could also allowed individuals to profit from the systems (or lack thereof) put in place to enforce

¹³⁴ See Swift’s *The Bubble* (1720) and ‘The Bank Thrown Down, To an Excellent New Tune’ (1721), Gay’s ‘Panegyric Epistle to Mr. Thomas Snow’ and Pope’s *Epistle to Bathurst* (1733). Colin Nicholson argues that even while these writers denounced credit culture publicly, they quietly participated by investing in stocks. Nicholson suggests that Pope ‘developed his own expertise as a market analyst, sometimes seeing opportunities where Swift expressed doubt and misgivings’ (Nicholson 1994, 54, 51-91).

¹³⁵ Paul Baines argues that this was especially true for cases of forgery. Between 1700-1800, he surmises that there were thirty-six statutes passed ‘virtually all of them capital’ dealing with forgery. He argues that three quarters (some seventy-one out of ninety-five cases) of individuals convicted of forgery between 1749 and 1771 were hanged, while only ten per cent of those charged with burglary and robbery in the same period were executed (Baines 1999, 9-10).

the law. Howson argues that the peace officers of the crown were ‘hopelessly inadequate’ and many were ‘deeply involved in crime themselves’ (Howson 1985, 4). Bell adds that as the systems for prosecution were largely privatised, injured parties often recruited hired agents through rewards to help apprehend thieves and bring them to justice (Bell 2003, 7).

These ineffectual measures allowed room for criminal figures such as Jonathan Wild to operate on the edge of the law and promote their Mandevillean self-interest for the seeming good of society. Famed as the ‘Thief-Taker General’, Wild ran a protection racket during the early 1720s, arranging robberies through his gang of thieves, then returning the stolen goods to their owners for a price. He also turned the thieves (many of whom were members of his own gang) over for a fee. The hierarchical organisation of Wild’s gang provided writers and satirists with a convenient metaphor of ‘crime as organised as trade’ which they used to discuss wide-spread social and political corruption, particularly in the wake of the South Sea scandal (Pepper 2011, 474). Both Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) and Fielding’s *Jonathan Wild* (1743) drew strongly on the idea that their criminal protagonists were the *defacto* heads of state within their respective criminal underworlds, with obvious comparisons to Sir Robert Walpole.

Given the increasing visibility of crime and punishment in the early decades of the eighteenth century, it is hardly surprising that criminal activity was increasing becoming a recognisable feature of contemporary literature. The popularity of criminal biographies, anatomies of roguery, providence books, gallows speeches and sermons all attest to a growing interest in crime in the period (Gladfelder 2001, 5).¹³⁶ Hal Gladfelder suggests changes in the format of trial reports from 1670-1730 placed ‘increasing emphasis on verbatim testimony and circumstantial evidence’ and ‘increasingly situated

¹³⁶ Gladfelder notes that this growing interest in crime literature was aided in no small part by the development of new printing technologies and mechanisms of distribution in the mid-seventeenth century (Gladfelder 2001, 5).

their readers in the position of judges' as they assessed 'competing stories of innocence and guilt' (Gladfelder 2001, 12). Despite readers' growing involvement in these narratives, Andrew Pepper argues that early criminal biographies were often 'crude, truncated tales in which the crime itself is usually glossed over, as is the investigation and capture of the offender' (Pepper 2011, 475). Instead, the focus is placed squarely on the offender's confession and repentance, which often acknowledges 'the fairness of the sentence and pleads for God's forgiveness' (Pepper 2011, 476). The focus of these tales is then on justifying the punishment for the crime to ensure the state's authority and obtaining the individual's repentance for their sins.

Forgery, fraud and theft were also frequently represented in plays and novels, including notably William Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1677), Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724), Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744), Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1760) (Baines 1999, 15), and are recurring themes in Fielding's works. Uncovering deception and the importance of social 'wisdom' or 'prudence' has often been noted as a key feature of Fielding's later novels. I argue that in his criminal biographies, Fielding turns the tables on his readers by deconstructing the 'genius' and success of his criminal protagonists. He does this by demonstrating that they are only as successful as their (un)observant audiences allow them to be. I suggest that Fielding places social and moral responsibility for assessing character at the door of *both* individuals and communities more widely. By sharing their experiences with others, individuals can build a more accurate account of a person's character and help to ensure that the devious are not permitted to play their tricks on others.

‘The Artful and Cunning Part of Mankind’: Detecting Deception in Fielding’s

1740s Works

The anxiety over deception and a concern for the way it was read by onlookers permeates much of Fielding’s work. His virtuous heroes and heroines often negotiate their way through societies replete with devious individuals, who seek to undermine them for their own self-interest and sport. Fielding investigates this problem in his *Champion* (4 March 1740) and ‘An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men’, the latter of which was first published alongside *Jonathan Wild* in the *Miscellanies* (1743), to investigating this problem, and more importantly to theorizing methods by which the innocent could avoid being imposed upon.¹³⁷ The ‘Essay’ examines the methods which the ‘artful and cunning Part of Mankind’ use to ‘impose on the rest of the World’, especially the ‘innocent and undesigning’ who are not attuned to recognise it (Fielding 1972, 153). He warns his readers to be on their guard against affectation, false promises and in placing too much faith in a person’s words or reputation over their actions.¹³⁸ In particular he cautions that ‘*Fronti nulla Fides*’ or ‘*no trust is to be given to the Countenance*’ (Fielding 1972, 156). Fielding expands on this idea in both the ‘Essay’ and his criminal biographies to argue that spectators should not place trust explicitly in any type of appearance – be that an individual’s physical appearance, or their public reputation and performances:

¹³⁷ In the *Champion* (4 March 1740), Fielding refers to the real Jonathan Wild in his discussion of how individuals achieve public fame. He argues that ‘[r]eputation often courts those most who regard her the least. Actions have sometimes been attended with Fame, which were undertaken in Defiance of it. *Jonathan Wyld* himself had for many Years no small Share of it in this Kingdom’ (Fielding 2003a, 219). Although there is some debate about when Fielding started composing *Jonathan Wild*, it is clear that Fielding had the real Wild on his mind during the early part of 1740 and may have been in the process of drafting parts of the novel at the time of the *Champion* essay.

¹³⁸ Fielding’s warnings against taking a person’s words above their actions as an indication of their private character in the ‘Essay’ echo his concerns with the growing popularity of Methodism and its emphasis on faith over works. Fielding had previously presented this concern in the frame letters between Parson Oliver and Parson Tickletext in *Shamela* (Ingrassia 2004, 26). For further discussion of Fielding’s presentation of Methodism, see Anderson 2012, 70-99.

however cunning the Disguise be which a Masquerader wears [...] yet if closely attended to, he very rarely escapes the Discovery of an accurate Observer; for Nature, which unwillingly submits to the Imposture, is ever endeavouring to peep forth and shew herself (Fielding 1972, 155)

For Fielding, accurate observation and sagacious judgement were fundamental skills which would arm the innocent against the designs of the devious. However, he also argues that it is 'owing chiefly to want of skill in the observer' that spectators are unable to detect the signs of falsehood (Fielding 1972, 157). This recalls his argument in the *Champion* essay, which suggests that 'when we consider the general Incapacity of Mankind' to judge the signs of duplicity, 'we shall be so far from being astonish'd [...] that we shall rather think it [a] Matter of Wonder, that they have ever judged right' (Fielding 2003a, 217-8). This inability to read deception properly, in turn, allows the deceptive to continue practising on other innocent victims. In his plays and novels, then, Fielding frames his narratives to put the innocent on their guard and to subtly instruct his audiences and readers to correctly interpret the signs of treachery through his satire and comedy.

Although anxieties about deception, as we have seen, are a recurrent theme throughout the early plays, duplicity develops into a central concern and source of comedy in his 1740s prose fiction. In these texts, Fielding often represents social worlds in which hypocritical and dishonest individuals practice upon unwary characters and readers. In contrast to the 'Essay on...Characters', Fielding's *Shamela* (1741), *Jonathan Wild* (1743) and *The Female Husband* (1746) make fraudsters and criminals their protagonists and presents them comically playing their tricks, shams and hypocrisies on other characters with varying degrees of success. I suggest that this is a departure from contemporary criminal biographies, which tended to focus on the repentance and justice of the punishment of the individual, rather than the crimes committed. This gives him the opportunity to present the other side of the equation from the 'Essay' by showing some of the methods by which the duplicitous may attempt to impose on others. This chapter

examines Fielding's ironic presentation of deception in his two criminal biographies, *Jonathan Wild* and *The Female Husband*. I argue that Fielding deconstructs the public characters of these master fraudsters, revealing them to be little more than petty and ineffectual criminals. Instead, he suggests that victims are in part responsible for being deceived, as they fail to defend themselves from falsehood or correctly read the blatant signs of deception presented to them. In this way, Fielding frames accurate judgement as a social and moral responsibility for the whole of society.

Fielding's first prose narrative to take a deceiver as the central character was *Shamela* (1741), in part a parody of Samuel Richardson's popular novel *Pamela* (1740) and Colley Cibber's *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740). *Shamela* proposes to uncover its protagonist's duplicity and the misrepresentation which Richardson 'practised' on his readers: that Pamela is not a virtuous maidservant, but the conniving, duplicitous and self-interested Shamela.¹³⁹ As with Fielding's later criminals, Shamela is able to deceive through her limited acting skills and Squire Booby's susceptibility to being duped. Squire Booby only discovers her treachery when evidence of her infidelity is placed in front of his eyes (he catches her in bed with Parson Williams) (Fielding 2008a, 344). Shamela too is not immune to being deceived by those around her. Earla Wilputte argues that Williams often manipulates Shamela to get what he wants – sex, a 'Canister of Tobacco (the Saffron cut)' and his release from jail (Wilputte 2015, 162; Fielding 2008a, 322, 333). Wilputte further adds that Williams often twists language and religious principles in order to present his affair with Shamela as a spiritual relationship, all while casting her marriage to Booby as a 'tawdry "Necessity"' to satisfy her

¹³⁹ Fielding makes this aim clear in the opening letter from Parson Oliver to the gullible Parson Tickletext, who calls 'the whole Narrative' of *Pamela* 'a Misrepresentation of Facts' and 'a Perversion of Truth' (Fielding 2008a, 312–14). While uncovering the 'sham' of Richardson's text, Fielding also proposes that we question what we are being told in *Shamela*. We too must be cautious when reading *Shamela* not to slip into the same role as Parson Tickletext and accept what is presented as absolute truth.

economic needs (Wilputte 2015, 162; also see Fielding 2008a, 339). In contrast to the protagonists of his later criminal biographies, however, Shamela is not a criminal in a legal sense, although ability to fool Squire Booby does allow her to commit a kind of character fraud.¹⁴⁰ As Fielding's first prose narrative and a parody of Richardson's novel, *Shamela* has traditionally attracted a fair amount of critical interest, broadly focusing on Fielding's authorship, comparisons to *Pamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, and the 'rivalry' between the two authors.¹⁴¹

My focus in this chapter, however, will not be on *Shamela*, but rather on Fielding's two criminal biographies: *The History of Jonathan Wild* (1743) and *The Female Husband* (1746). These texts have hitherto attracted significantly less critical attention than Fielding's other works of the 1740s, due in part to his cavalier treatment of Wild's and Hamilton's biographies. To date, they have also rarely been considered together, despite their similar subject matter. Fielding develops many of the themes of deception found in *Shamela* into these later texts, with the added interest of basing them on real-life criminals. I argue that by considering these texts together, we can see how Fielding undermines the deceitful 'greatness' of the protagonists' real-life counterparts. He demonstrates that their ability to 'pass' with spectators is not due to their own cunning, but rather to their spectators' excessive credulity. I suggest that Fielding builds

¹⁴⁰ In the postscript to Parson Tickletext's final letter in the novel, he reports that Squire Booby has discovered Shamela in bed with Parson Williams, and has subsequently 'turned her off, and is prosecuting [Williams] in the spiritual Court' (Fielding 2008a, 344).

¹⁴¹ *Shamela* is also often read alongside *Joseph Andrews* (1742) by critics who discuss the development of Fielding's novelistic techniques. Thomas Lockwood comments that Fielding never acknowledged his authorship of *Shamela*, although most critics now recognise it as his (Lockwood 2007, 38). The Battestins suggest that Fielding may have written *Shamela* while incarcerated in a sponging house in March 1741 for debt (amounting to £35 9s 8d including costs and charges, which he did not pay off until 1742) (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 136–37). For a detailed discussion of the 'rivalry' between Fielding and Richardson, see Michie 1999. For comparisons between the three novels see Albert Rivero (2000) "'Pamela/Shamela/Joseph Andrews': Henry Fielding and the Duplicities of Representation', *The Scriblerian and the Kit-Cats*, 32 (2), 309–311. Robert Hume also provides a useful summary of the history of the Fielding vs. Richardson debate in his article 'Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?' (see R. Hume 2010, 234–38).

upon his ideas of good nature and perception, showing that both are necessary to guard against deception.

First published in the third volume of the *Miscellanies*, *Jonathan Wild* is loosely based around the biography of an infamous protection-racketeer and self-styled ‘THIEF-CATCHER-GENERAL of GREAT-BRITAIN’ (Fielding 2003b, 210).¹⁴² Wild was sentenced and executed at Tyburn on 24 May 1725, technically for the sum of 10 guineas (Fielding 2003b, xv–xvi; Varey 1986, 35).¹⁴³ Wild’s story inspired several criminal biographies in the 1720s, including Daniel Defoe’s ‘True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild’ (1725) and H.D.’s *Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725), and inspired John Gay’s ‘Newgate pastoral’ *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). Similarly, *The Female Husband* follows the story of Mary Hamilton, a notorious cross-dresser who posed as one Dr Charles Hamilton, and married Mary Price in Somerset in July 1736. She was arrested in Glastonbury on 13 September 1746 and charged with vagrancy on the evidence of her wife. Hamilton was sentenced to spend six months in Bridewell and to be whipped in four towns over a three week period, after which she disappears from the public record (Baker 1959, 219–20; Castle 1982, 604; Bowles 2010, 7). Fielding probably encountered the story through a series of articles that appeared in Boddley’s *Bath Journal* (22 and 29 September, 3 November), which was later reprinted in the *Daily Advertiser* (7 November) and *St. James’s Evening Post* (8 November) (Baker 1959, 214–15; Battestin and Battestin 1989, 411). These articles elaborated on Hamilton’s story, one account even stating that she married fourteen times, and that she used ““certain vile and deceitful Practices, not fit to be mentioned”” (quoted in Baker 1959, 222). Sensing an opportunity to make some money, Fielding turned the account into a sixpenny pamphlet,

¹⁴² As described in *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (1725).

¹⁴³ Wild’s skeleton is currently on display in the Royal College of Surgeons’ Hunterian collection in London. It was sold for dissection after his execution and was later given to the Royal College of Surgeons in 1749.

entitled *The Female Husband*, which he published anonymously on the 12 November 1746. The first print run of the pamphlet sold out quickly and a second run was ordered (Castle 1982, 602).

While both pieces present themselves as ‘histories’ of their namesakes, critics have often noted that neither text stays particularly true to the real-life individuals they purport to represent (Baker 1959, 213–24; Castle 1982, 602–22; Varey 1986, 35–36; Davidson 2007, 66–69; Downie 2008, 138–39; Bowles 2010, 1–37; Powell 2015, 163). It was not uncommon for contemporary criminal biographies to sacrifice ‘authenticity’ of their accounts ‘in favour of fictional pleasure’ of their readers (Gladfelder 2001, 84). However, I suggest that Fielding’s changes allow him to focus on the ways in which Hamilton and Wild ‘pass’ with their unsuspecting audiences, despite their lacklustre performances.

Despite Fielding’s spurious claim in *The Female Husband* to have had Hamilton’s account ‘from her own mouth’ – a common assertion of criminal biographies, which doubles as a bawdy pun – he makes substantial changes to Hamilton’s story (Fielding 2007b, 859). Sheridan Baker notes that Fielding alters the details of Hamilton’s birthplace, aliases, the places she visits, as well as adding another profession, several notable characters and the marriages to her tale (Baker 1959, 213). Since the 1980s, critics of *The Female Husband* have often lamented Fielding’s changes to Hamilton’s story and his lack of interest in exploring her psychological motivations for cross dressing (Castle 1982, 602–22; Bowles 2010, 1–37). I suggest that the changes to Hamilton’s story not only extend the narrative, but also create comedy as the other characters in the pamphlet repeatedly misread the signs of Hamilton’s deception. Throughout the pamphlet, Fielding suggests that Hamilton’s ability to cross-dress is a result of her spectators’ willingness to be deceived.

Similarly, in the preface to the *Miscellanies*, Fielding admits that his *Jonathan Wild* 'is not a very faithful Portrait' of the real-life Wild and proposes instead to present 'Roguary and not a Rogue' (Fielding 2003b, 219). Fielding's protagonist adheres to only the most fundamental elements of the historic Wild's story: his criminal activities, his incarceration at Newgate and his execution at Tyburn. Critics of *Wild* tend to agree that this departure from strict biography opens up some interesting spaces for Fielding to explore the central themes of 'greatness' and 'goodness', and Wild's connection to Sir Robert Walpole (Varey 1986, 35–36; Davidson 2007, 66–69; Downie 2008, 138–39; Powell 2015, 163). Fielding accounts for his changes in *Jonathan Wild* by arguing that 'it is sufficient if [...] the Historian adheres faithfully to the Matter, though he embellishes the Diction with some Flourishes of his own Eloquence' (Fielding 2003b, 100). While Defoe's and H.D.'s biographies both present Wild as a cunning criminal, I argue that Fielding's ironic embellishments help to deconstruct the myth of the historic Wild's 'greatness' by revealing how often he fails to enact his schemes. Building on current criticism, I suggest that this move away from presenting Wild as an accomplished villain allows Fielding to compare Wild's failure to attain 'greatness' with Heartfree's flawed 'goodness', showing that neither are able to live up to expectations. Through this comparison, Fielding develops on his concept of 'good nature' which he had introduced in his early plays, showing that virtuous individuals must be willing to actively defend themselves against deception.

However, the comedy of these figures does not lessen the importance of identifying the signs of their falsity. In contrast to the plays and his other novels, Fielding ensures that the reader is always aware of the protagonists' motives and private characters in the criminal biographies. He does this through privileged access to private information, such as their personal letters, 'soliloquies' and plots. This is a departure from his earlier plays, in which access to essential or private character is often limited to

brief asides or soliloquys between scenes. The reader's privileged knowledge in the criminal biographies creates comedy as we witness other characters fail to properly read the signs of chicanery. Fielding repeatedly draws our attention to the methods of deception being practised throughout these narratives. The reader is not asked then to judge *if* the protagonists' public characters accurately reflect their private motives, for clearly they do not. Rather, I argue that Fielding prompts us to take note of the signs of hypocrisy which other characters miss or fail to interpret correctly, and he implicitly directs us to imagine making different judgements if placed in their position. He demonstrates that characters are often fooled in these biographies not because the deceiver is particularly talented at it, but because the victim is overly credulous. Throughout these narratives, the inability to read characters properly allows conniving individuals to continue circulating and practising upon others. Fielding suggests that it is the responsibility of the virtuous to correctly identify and judge the signs of deception. In doing so, they not only help to prevent themselves from being imposed upon again, but also protect wider society from the nefarious machinations of these criminal individuals.

Deconstructing 'Greatness' and 'Goodness' in *Jonathan Wild* (1743)

In *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding uses deception to deconstruct the concepts of 'goodness' and 'greatness'.¹⁴⁴ Expanding on recent criticism, I suggest that Fielding uses multiple layers of irony to undermine Wild's pretensions to 'greatness', showing that he is neither a Machiavellian hero nor a particularly accomplished criminal. Instead, he is driven by his

¹⁴⁴ Simon Varey suggests that Fielding 'prepares the ground' for his concepts of goodness and greatness in an allegorical passage in *The Journey From This World to the Next*, which was published alongside *Jonathan Wild* in the *Miscellanies* (Varey 1986, 34). This passage presents two roads: one beset with obstacles, rocks and bogs 'so that it was impossible to pass through it without the utmost Danger and Difficulty'; and the other 'the most delightful imaginable, leading through [...] verdant Meadows'. Despite the difficulties of the former (representing greatness), 'great Numbers' crowd along its craggy path, while 'only one or two solitary Spirits' choose the road to goodness (Fielding 1997a, 23).

ruling passion and egoism, and is regularly outwitted by those around him. Although Fielding does present Wild as a proficient actor, the only people to be fooled by his displays are the Heartfrees and the lesser members of the gang. Throughout the novel, Fielding seems to suggest that Heartfree is culpable in part for being deceived by Wild. His excessive gullibility and credulity makes him vulnerable to Wild and his associates, and his passive virtue leaves him unable to defend himself. I argue that *Jonathan Wild* builds upon the concepts of goodness and perception which he introduced in his early plays, showing that hypocrisy and treachery *can* be read by those with *active* virtue and sagacity, and that deceivers are not as successful as their reputations would suggest.

Much of the criticism of *Jonathan Wild* focuses on Wild's pretensions to 'greatness' and discussing whether Fielding intended the novel as a satire on Sir Robert Walpole. As several critics have noted, the real Jonathan Wild had been popularly associated with Walpole by Opposition writers since Wild's execution in 1725 (Fielding 2003b, xvi, xxix; Battestin and Battestin 1989, 281; Downie 2009, 126–27). Bertrand Goldgar and Claude Rawson add that it was commonplace for writers to use Wild's name to allude to Walpole (Fielding 2003b, xvi; Fielding 1997b, xxvii, xxxi). However, some critics have questioned whether Walpole was Fielding's intended satirical target in the novel. Goldgar has argued that '[i]f *Jonathan Wild* is anti-Walpole, it is so by virtue of its general fable satirizing false greatness than by a series of inserted "giveaway" details' (Fielding 1997b, xxxii). Hollis Rinehart earlier asserted that reading Walpole in Wild creates 'serious distortions in interpretation', and that Fielding's use of the term 'Great Man' refers instead to 'the capacity to do good without the will' (Rinehart 1979, 421). It is argued that Walpole's fall from power in February 1742 renders much of the anti-Walpole satire in *Jonathan Wild* 'stale and irrelevant' by its first publication in 1743 and even more so by the second edition in 1754 (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 281). Varey adds that although the real Wild was still a notorious figure, by the time of the

novel's publication he had been dead for eighteen years (twenty-nine years by the second edition) and so was hardly a topical figure in either edition (Varey 1986, 36).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, J. A. Downie has suggested that contemporary readers would still have read Fielding's *Wild* as an attack on Walpole (Downie 2009, 139). Critics exploring the relationship between theatre and the novel in the eighteenth century have recently argued that the majority of contemporary novel-readers would have also been theatre-goers (Saggini 2012, 1–4; Ballaster 2012, 5–6). As such, they would have been familiar with earlier theatrical satire – *The Beggar's Opera* being the most obvious example to connect Wild and Walpole under the appellation 'great man' – and Fielding's own derisive satires on Walpole. Despite Fielding's half-hearted appeals to his readers not to misread the satire in the Preface (which is suspiciously reminiscent of his 'defence' of Walpole in *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*), it seems clear that many readers would have applied the satire to Walpole regardless (and perhaps because of) of Fielding's protestations to the contrary.

Perhaps the most obvious connection between Walpole and Wild is through the narrator's appellation of the latter as a 'Great Man' of London's criminal underbelly (there are no less than forty-four recurrences of this term): '[i]n our Hero there was nothing not truly GREAT', 'he was certainly born to be a Great Man' (Fielding 2003b, 32, 13). On one level, this attempts to link Wild to other 'great men' in history, whom we are told Wild was a 'passionate Admirer of', including Alexander the Great, Achilles, Charles XII of Sweden (Fielding 2003b, 13–14) and we might also add Niccolo Machiavelli, Louis XIV and Walpole. Of course, the reader is aware from the beginning of the novel that Wild is not a classical 'Great Man' in terms of his status, as the narrator's ironic biography of Wild's nefarious ancestry makes clear. The narrator stresses that Wild's admiration for these 'Great Men' is reserved for their cunning, trickery and oratory rather than their martial prowess, honour or policies (Fielding

2003b, xviii). To emphasise this, the narrator further describes Wild as possessing ‘the most exquisite Cunning’, as well as lust ‘inferior only to his Ambition’, and he argues that Wild is always ‘restless in inventing Means to make himself Master of the meanest Pittance’ (Fielding 2003b, 176–77).

The image of Wild as a cunning mastermind is consistent with the reputation of the real Jonathan Wild and his presentation in contemporary biographies. The historic Wild – ‘or rather the infamous figure he became in the popular imagination’ – was generally considered by contemporaries to be ‘a Machiavel or worse’ (Battestin 2000, 162; Rawson 1972b, 137 n7). In *The Life of Jonathan Wild*, Wild’s biographer (H.D.) presents Wild as possessing ‘a ready wit’ and ‘the utmost Cunning’, and even argues that Wild’s actions demonstrate ‘a System of Politicks [*sic*] unknown to *Machiavel*’ (Fielding 2003b, 186, 187, 185).¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Gerald Howson adds:

[Wild] did have an abundance of what the eighteenth century called ‘Genius’ – that is, ingenuity, cunning, resource, energy and that mysterious power we sometimes call ‘personal magnetism’. He was able to manipulate the thieves for so long because, I suspect, they felt that he was really on their side, no matter how murderous his behaviour (Howson 1985, 286)

Accordingly, some critics have read Fielding’s Wild in a similar vein. Sir Walter Scott famously described Fielding’s Wild as ‘a picture of complete vice, unrelieved by anything of human feeling and never by any accident even deviating into virtue’ (Scott (1825) 1847, 1:258).¹⁴⁶ More recently, Carl Fisher has also commented that Wild can be

¹⁴⁵ Accounts of Wild’s arrest and execution, however, paint a different story of the ‘great man’s’ character in his final days. In H. D.’s account, the author reports that the real-life Wild’s ‘Cunning and Sagacity forsook him’ as soon as he was apprehended (Fielding 2003b, 217). Similarly, Davidson has commented that the real Wild spent his final days at Newgate in ‘abject terror’ and tried commit suicide by drinking laudanum: he ‘had only partly recovered by the time he was taken to be hanged’: hardly the rational cunning we would expect of a Machiavellian hero (Davidson 2007, 75).

¹⁴⁶ Bernard Shea has suggested that there are several similarities between *Jonathan Wild* and Machiavelli’s *Life of Castruccio*, particularly in Fielding’s use of the term ‘greatness’ and in several significant passages (see Shea 1957, 55–73). Shea’s suggestion that *Wild* was based on Machiavelli’s writings have been criticised by R. S. Crane and Rawson, who both suggest that Shea’s arguments lack supporting evidence (see Crane 1958, 328–33; Rawson 1972b, 137 n7).

read as a Machiavellian hero: one who uses his ‘political ruthlessness, practical intelligence, and psychological insight’ to manipulate or intimidate those around him into doing his bidding (Fisher 2015, 172). Of course, Fielding’s Wild is not truly a ‘great man’ of status with control or influence over wide political networks. Like Gay’s highwayman Macheath, Wild is a low-born criminal working within the confines of his gang. Even Wild states his preference for his lowly station over those of other great men in bathetic mimicry of Milton’s Satan: ‘I had rather stand on the Summit of a Dunghil [sic], than at the bottom of a Hill in Paradise’ (Fielding 2003b, 18).¹⁴⁷ The contrast between Wild’s lowly station and his pretensions to ‘greatness’ provides one of the main comic strains in the novel, suggesting in the same register as Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* that ‘great men’ are little better than ‘prigs’ with greater access to ‘tools’.

Moreover, Wild’s ability to act and his control over his facial features are often held by critics as further evidence of his ‘greatness’.¹⁴⁸ Simon Varey argues that ‘like all great men, Wild exercises perfect control over the facial muscles. The narrator often comments that Wild possesses a ‘perfect Mastery of his Temper, or rather of his Muscles, which is as necessary to form a GREAT Character as to personate it on the Stage’ (Fielding 2003b, 55).¹⁴⁹ This allows him to mask his motives and emotions under his outward appearance. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the scene in which Wild (having robbed Heartfree and in turn been robbed by Miss Straddle) visits Heartfree in his shop:

¹⁴⁷ Wild here evokes Satan’s speech in *Paradise Lost*, 1:263: ‘Better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven’ Fielding makes repeated references to Milton in *Jonathan Wild* as part of his mock-epic satire on ‘Great Men’. The references to Milton’s Satan add to the image of Wild as a great deceiver and diabolical manipulator.

¹⁴⁸ Many critics have noted the theatrical underpinnings of *Jonathan Wild* and agree that the novel’s composition was heavily influenced by Fielding’s earlier theatrical career. For discussions, see Rawson 1972b, 121–28, 183–84, 204–7; Rawson 1985, 261–310; Varey 1986, 40; Pettit 1994, 153–68; Lockwood 1999, 110–13; Fisher 2015, 176–77; Powell 2015, 164; Widmayer 2015, 202.

¹⁴⁹ Wild’s ‘steady countenance’ is emphasised throughout *Jonathan Wild* (Fielding 2003b, 41, 50, 60–64, 115–16; Rawson 1972b, 107).

He entered the Room with a cheerful Air, which he presently changed into Surprise on seeing his Friend in a Night-Gown, with his wounded Head bound about with Linen [...] When *Wild* was informed by *Heartfree* what had happened, he first expressed great Sorrow, and afterwards suffered as violent Agonies of Rage against the Robbers to burst from him (Fielding 2003b, 60)

In a style reminiscent of Mandeville's cynicism about motives, Wild feigns friendly surprise and concern to mask his involvement in Heartfree's ordeal. Varey has suggested that Wild's '[f]acial expressions are stylized in the manner of stage directions to suggest abstract emotion or gesture' (Varey 1986, 41). The reader is given room to imagine in this passage Wild mimicking the different emotions in a farcical, over-the-top manner. Even when he is confronted with one of the stolen notes, Wild is still able to maintain a 'notable Presence of Mind, and unchanged Complexion, so essential to a GREAT Character' (Fielding 2003b, 61). As Wild acts this range of emotion to demonstrate his friendship, the reader sees Wild debating with himself whether to 'borrow or steal' the money 'or indeed whether he could not effect both' (Fielding 2003b, 61).¹⁵⁰ The reader here witnesses the disjunction between Wild's appearance (his behaviour and facial expressions) and what he is thinking, emphasising the disparity between his essence and appearance.¹⁵¹

More recently, however, critics have challenged the idea that Fielding's Wild is a great man in any sense by suggesting that many of Wild's actions and performances during the novel prove to be ineffective or unsuccessful (Rawson 1972b; Varey 1986; Bell 1994; Bogel 2000). Bogel suggests that surveys of Wild's megalomania tend to omit his 'sheer propensity to fail' when they consider his crimes in the novel (Bogel 2000,

¹⁵⁰ Rawson notes that 'he appears as a kind of twin-engined mechanism, outwardly producing all the appropriate words and appearances, inwardly ticking away at possible further schemes, both equally compulsively' (Rawson 1972b, 108).

¹⁵¹ Varey has also described other moments in the text where Wild uses body language and facial expression to suggest a particular emotion. For example, when Wild realises he has no money to pay his bill at a tavern, he 'cock[ed] his Hat fiercely' and 'marched out of the Room without making any Excuse, or any one daring to make the least Demand' (Fielding 2003b, 59; Varey 1986, 41).

152). Wild's success as a thief and a leader are repeatedly brought into question in the novel by his failure to bend others to his will, the small profits he reaps as rewards and the several instances in which he is outwitted by his friends. Instead, Wild often 'suffers the Punishment without obtaining the Reward' (Fielding 2003b, 221). These instances of Wild's failure are intended to undermine his 'great' reputation and show him to be little more than a petty thief who is largely unable to control or manipulate those around him. In agreement with these critics, I suggest that Fielding deconstructs the myth of Wild's greatness and shows the ease with which his chicanery could be exposed, if onlookers were sagacious enough to read the signs.

Wild often defines 'greatness' as the ability to manipulate others to do his dirty work for him. In one soliloquy, Wild 'reasons' with himself that great men are distinguished by the number of 'hands' they can employ to do their bidding:

Mankind are first properly to be considered under two grand Divisions, those that use their Hands, and those who employ Hands. The Former and the Base and Rabble; and the latter, the genteel Part of Creation. [...] [T]hose who employ Hands for their own Use only: And this is that novel and GREAT part, [...] are generally distinguished into *Conquerors, absolute Princes, Prime Ministers, and Prigs*. Now all these differ from each other in GREATNESS only, as they employ *more or fewer* Hands (Fielding 2003b, 43–44)¹⁵²

Throughout the novel, he regularly employs the Count and members of his gang (Marybone, Bagshot, Fireblood, Sly, Fierce) to cheat unsuspecting characters. However, with the exception of the jewels and purse which Wild steals from Heartfree, which Wild quickly loses, Claude Rawson points out that the rest of the sums which Wild acquires are 'ludicrously small', most amounting to no more than a few shillings (Rawson 1972b, 110–11). Moreover, Wild often struggles to convince his 'hands' to give up their share of the booty, once the robberies have taken place. Indeed, Wild usually has to resort to

¹⁵² Downie comments that in the 1754 edition of *Jonathan Wild*, 'prime Minister' was changed to 'Statesman', so that this sections reads '*Conquerors, absolute Princes, Statesmen, and Prigs*' (Downie 2009, 140). It is perhaps unsurprising that Fielding made these changes for the latter edition, toning down the anti-Walpolean satire, as Walpole had been out of power for more than ten years.

‘Oaths and Threatnings [sic]’ or to hanging uncooperative members of his gang as a deterrent to others (Fielding 2003b, 53).¹⁵³ When Wild has Bagshot rob the Count, for example, the latter ‘generously (as he thought) offered to share the Booty’ (Fielding 2003b, 25). Having pocketed his share, Wild makes moves to try to claim Bagshot’s portion, arguing that as the mastermind of the plan he should be entitled to the majority.¹⁵⁴ However, Wild’s rhetoric fails and he is forced to retreat when Bagshot threatens him with violence. Although he does eventually obtain half of Bagshot’s share, Wild has to resort to borrowing it rather than persuading Bagshot to give it up.¹⁵⁵ Throughout this scene, the narrator tries with heavy irony to convince the reader that this an ‘*astonishing Instance of [Wild’s] GREATNESS*’ (Fielding 2003b, 25).

Similarly, Wild also has mixed success when he attempts to persuade Marybone to rob and murder a young gentleman in a stagecoach. Although Marybone ‘agree[s] to the Robbery’ he refuses to murder the gentleman, despite Wild’s arguments in favour of it and insistence that he wields absolute power over his gang: ‘[d]o not think of continuing in my Gang without abandoning yourself absolutely to my Pleasure’ (Fielding 2003b, 92).¹⁵⁶ Claims to ‘absolute power’ evoke seventeenth-century political debates

¹⁵³ Similarly, when Fierce refuses to give up his share of the booty, Wild has him committed and convinces Miss Straddle and Sly to give evidence against him (Fielding 2003b, 60–63).

¹⁵⁴ Pettit has argued, Wild is ‘given to oratory throughout’ the novel and often relies on speeches to persuade the Count, Marybone, Fireblood, Bagshot, the inmates of Newgate, and the various members of his gang. Pettit also notes that Wild has a tendency to speak and behave in a theatrical manner and is even given to soliloquys at several points in the novel (Pettit 1994, 164). Pettit suggests that Wild ‘is a persuasive orator’ at the beginning of the novel, ‘calculate[ing] the rhetorical task require of him’ and eventually achieving his ends (Pettit 1994, 164). However, as the story progresses, his ability to persuade others diminishes as his theatricality increases (Pettit 1994, 164).

¹⁵⁵ Bernard Shea argues that these early episodes are part of Wild’s ‘apprenticeship’ in the criminal world, which teach him the uncertainty of conducting crime on a small scale, which later gives way to Wild’s ‘entrepreneurship’ in which he ‘resolves to extend his power by recruiting a gang’ (Shea 1957, 68). Despite the extension of his realms of influence, I argue that Wild never truly has the power and authority over his gang which he would seek to wield. The only instance in which seems to gain victory through persuasion is during his usurpation of Roger Johnson as head of the prigs in Newgate prison. Once he is in a position of power, though, he is unable to sustain it for long and is quickly ousted by the other inmates.

¹⁵⁶ Shea suggests that Wild’s ‘relationship with his gang is that of an English Cabinet minister with the Parliamentary faction which constitutes his majority’ (Shea 1957, 68). This relationship suggestive of a subtler connection between Fielding’s Wild and Walpole.

about the power and authority of the monarchy, and the trust the people placed in them to rule. Michael McKeon suggests that during the early modern period, the British monarchy lost its '*arcana imperii*', its 'mysteries of rule' as it increasingly became the subject of discussion, debate and scrutiny (McKeon 2005, 4). 'Once postulated', McKeon suggests, 'the conception of absolute self-justified authority could be detached from the 'body natural' of the absolute monarch and embodied elsewhere in the courtier, in Parliament, even in the common people' (McKeon 2005, 5). As the monarchy increasingly lost its 'mysteries of rule', its authority depended on the relationship and trust it held from Parliament and the people. Kevin Sharpe has argued that

government was from the top to the bottom a process shared between 'rulers' and 'ruled'. In such a system, the exercise of government was [...] a negotiation: an exchange between the needs of the sovereigns, subordinates and subjects (Sharpe 2000, 416).

This negotiation was based on an agreement of trust between the monarch and his people. Howard Nenner suggest that references to trust were 'ubiquitous in contemporary political discourse, invoked freely by both those who would limit royal power and those who made claims for that power being absolute' (Nenner 2009, 859). Emerging party politics during the Restoration fuelled the division between those who held that the crown's power was absolute and so could not be resisted, and those who argued that the king ruled by consent of his people, and so might be removed if he overstepped the mark.

For royalists and Tory supporters, there could be no sanctioned active resistance to the King's authority.¹⁵⁷ Following ideas held by the Stuarts themselves, they argued

¹⁵⁷ Tim Harris suggests that while Tory supports did not actively resist, they 'refused to comply, dragged their feet, or continued to enforce laws' which had been suspended as a method of passive resistance (Harris 2006, 485). Toni Bowers comments that 'slight or passive obedience' was regarded as a necessary evil 'in those uncommon situations where competing duties might seem to come into conflict' (Bowers 2011, 19-20). Bowers argues this 'collusive resistance' can also be found in the struggles faced by women in Behn, Manley, Haywood and Richardson's work, who have to 'exercise submission and refusal simultaneously' and 'maintain [their] virtue in coercive situations' (Bowers 2011, 20; also see Latimer 2013, 80-83).

that the King's authority came in trust from God, which placed him above the judgement of the people. In his *The True Law of Free Monarchy* (1598), James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) argued that the king was a 'judge set by God over [the people], but to be judge[d] onely by God, whom to onely hee must give count of his judgement' (James I 1642, 9). James held that although the king was 'morally impelled' to keep the laws that he had made, there was no legal obligation for him to do so (Nenner 2009, 84). This 'moral imperative' became a sticking point for Tory supporters when Charles II's and James II's royal prerogative threatened Tory-Anglican interests through the lessening of sanctions against Catholics and non-conformists.¹⁵⁸

In contrast, Whigs and opponents of absolute monarchical authority argued that trust was an integral part of the 'contract' between a king and his people. In exchange for the submission and obedience of the people, a king agreed to rule within the limits of the law. Writing in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), John Locke argued that the King has 'only a fiduciary power to act for certain ends'. If he overstepped the boundaries of the 'trust reposed in' him, 'the trust must necessarily be forfeited, and the power devolve into the hands of those that gave it, who may place it anew where they shall think best for their safety and security' (Locke 2003, 166). In other words, Locke argued that if a king broke the contract of trust with his people, they could legitimately rise up against him for their collective safety (*salus populi*), and find an alternative who would better support and uphold their laws. Locke encouraged the people to exercise their judgement ('every man is judge for himself'), for 'who [are] so proper to judge as the body of the people (who, at first lodged that trust in [the king]) how far they meant it should extend?' (Locke 2003, 208). This bond of trust was tested repeatedly during the

¹⁵⁸ To appease parliament to pass his grants of taxation, Charles was forced to back down from pushing his 1662 and 1672 Declarations of Indulgence. However, James II similar proclamation in 1687 evoked considerable opposition, not helped by the fact that James was himself a Catholic, paving the way to the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

seventeenth century, particularly in 1640-42 and again in the 1680s, and at both junctures, it failed. The political nation came ‘to believe that neither Charles [I] nor his son [James II] could be trusted at all. Both Stuarts had upset the moral order that required a king’s word to be his bond’ (Nenner 2009, 860). In both instances, the breakdown of this trust legitimized resistance to the crown, and led to the removal of the respective king as head of state.

I suggest that Wild’s management of his gang could be read in light of these wider ideas of political authority and trust. Wild presents his authority over his gang as ‘absolute’ and demands complete submission and trust from his subordinates. However, the members of the gang often do not share this view and must be corralled into compliance. Unable to persuade Marybone, Wild has him ‘impeached and executed, as a Fellow on whom his Leader could not place sufficient Dependence’ (Fielding 2003b, 93).¹⁵⁹ This breach of ‘trust’ backfires on Wild later in the novel when Fireblood, fearing that Wild might impeach him, gives evidence against Wild which leads to his imprisonment and eventual execution (Fielding 2003b, 140). Through Wild’s connection to Walpole, we might also read this as a satire on the ‘Great Man’s’ seemingly limitless power (maintained through corruption rather than trust). It suggests, in a similar manner to Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, that Walpole will meet the same fate as Wild, when his gang (the people) resist his authority and repay him in kind for failing their trust.

Beyond this failure to wield absolute power over his gang, Wild repeatedly demonstrates that his actions are driven by passion rather than calculated interest. This is manifested most obviously in his compulsive and automatic need to steal with his own hands (Rawson 1972b, 107; Bogel 2000, 153). Standing on the gibbet at the end of the

¹⁵⁹ Bogel suggests that Wild’s execution of Marybone is one of the moments of ‘real brutality’ which Fielding uses to punctuate his protagonist’s career in *Jonathan Wild* (Bogel 2000, 153 n9). Bogel argues that by adding this to the malevolence of Wild’s intentions (regardless of their success or failure), Fielding makes his Wild more than the ‘clownishly bumbling rogue’ which Rawson would depict him as (Bogel 2000, 153 n9).

novel, for example, Wild ‘applied his Hands to the Parson’s Pocket, and emptied it of his Bottle-Screw, which he carried out of this world in his Hand’ (Fielding 2003b, 175–76). Bogel characterises this instance as a moment of futile and ‘useless mechanicity’ (Bogel 2000, 155). It reveals that Wild is driven by his desires and does not possess the cunning and forward thinking that one might expect of a ‘great man’. Bell adopts a more theatrical analogy when he suggests that Wild’s habit of stealing ‘turns the character into no more than a puppet’, making Wild appear ‘as a kind of clown figure at the centre of the blackest of comedies’ (Bell 1994, 163). ‘Supported by drink and drugs’, Wild’s last act of villainy exposes him as a ‘puppet or clown’, who fails to show the ‘brazen courage of the diabolic Machiavel’ he is supposed to be (Rawson 2003b, xxvii).

Moreover, the narrator also presents several instances in which Wild is outwitted by the Count, women, and even some of the members of his gang.¹⁶⁰ After his first (and only) significant heist, Wild is outwitted by the ‘sagacious’ Count, who exchanges the real jewels for ‘artificial stones’ under Wild’s nose (Fielding 2003b, 56-57). Wild does not realise that the stones have been switched until he attempts to present them to Laetitia Snap. Unbeknownst to Wild, Laetitia has been educated by her father and an obliging pawn broker to recognise fakes.

The lightning, therefore, which should have flashed from the Jewels, flashed from her Eyes, and Thunder immediately followed from her Voice. She be-knaved, be-rascalled, re-rogued the unhappy Hero, who stood silent, confounded with Astonishment, but more with Shame and Indignation, at being thus outwitted and over-reached (Fielding 2003b, 57)

This incident not only reveals that Wild has been ‘outwitted’ by the Count, but also exposes him to Laetitia’s tirade, which Wild is forced to endure passively. This episode undermines not only his pretensions to ‘greatness’ and his masculine honour, but also his

¹⁶⁰ Howson argues that historic Wild possessed a ‘personal magnetism’ which was ‘attested by the awe in which the criminals held him, and by the number of women who were his mistresses and, in some cases, remained loyal to him to the end’ (Howson 1985, 245). In contrast, Fielding’s Wild is regularly outwitted by those around him.

judgement as a professional criminal, since Laetitia can tell the difference between real jewels and fake ones, and Wild cannot: a skill one would think essential to any thief.¹⁶¹

As other characters outwit and outmanoeuvre him, Wild is revealed to be inept and as much at the mercy of other hypocritical characters as his victims are. Instead, Wild is left to question: ‘while [a thief] employs his Hands in another’s Pocket, how shall he be able to defend his own?’ (Fielding 2003b, 58).

By presenting Wild as a petty thief and a cuckold, then, it is clear that Fielding deconstructs his hero’s ‘greatness’. Varey similarly suggests that ‘Fielding ridicules the rogue instead of glorifying him’, inverting the presentation of Wild in many of the contemporary criminal biographies (Varey 1986, 36). In doing so, he is able to reduce the myth surrounding the ‘real’ Wild, as presented in other contemporary biographies, and other ‘great men’, and make his protagonist into a comic and less threatening figure. Fisher suggests that Fielding ‘redefines’ greatness so that it ‘is not heroic, not admirable, but at best a chimera for the self-inflated’ (Fisher 2015, 176). While the reader is always aware that Wild is not a ‘great man’ in the traditional sense (a man of status and influence), we are also invited to see him as a failed criminal, propelled inevitably to his own destruction by his compulsive need to steal and regularly outwitted by his duplicitous ‘friends’. The reader is encouraged to read between the narrator’s multiple layers of irony to see Wild’s failure to attain ‘greatness’ in any sense of the word.

Despite this lack of greatness, Wild is still able to deceive the Heartfrees (at least temporarily) during the novel. Drawing on the criticism of Fisher and Varey, I argue that Wild’s ability to deceive is not a result of his cunning, but the failure of virtuous bystanders to recognise and take positive action against his manipulative nature. In the

¹⁶¹ The joke about Wild’s ‘honour’ as a man and a thief is also extended to his other dealings with Laetitia. During several episodes in the novel, the reader witnesses Laetitia fool Wild, playing the fiercely virtuous maiden with him, all while hiding a lover upstairs or in her closet. Varey has noted that this scene is reminiscent of theatrical farce, and it would not be out of place in a Restoration or early-eighteenth century play (Varey 1986, 40).

final part of this section, I examine Heartfree's failure to read Wild properly due to his overly passive goodness and willingness to 'credit' others. I suggest that through his presentation of Heartfree as a figure not to be emulated, Fielding builds upon the concept of good nature which he introduced in the early plays. He argues that a willingness to actively defend oneself against the threats presented by the deceitful is essential both to his concept of good nature and to the process of judging character accurately.

Throughout the novel, Heartfree is held up as the example of 'goodness' in direct contrast to Wild's 'greatness', but neither come out of the novel unscathed. Critics have often agreed that Heartfree's characterization is 'the least successful aspect of *Jonathan Wild*', particularly when he is compared to the more engaging heroes of Fielding's other novels (Davidson 2007, 71; Rawson 1972a, 296; McKeon 2002, 391). Davidson suggests that the reader cannot help be infected by 'a little contempt for Heartfree' as we see repeated examples of his 'extreme gullibility and naïveté' (Davidson 2007, 72). I see this 'unsuccessful characterization' as not merely an accident, but as evidence of a similar process of active deconstruction. I suggest that under the narrator's irony, Heartfree's passive goodness is deliberately turned into a personal failing. As Wild's 'greatness' is gradually broken down by his actions and the narrator's irony, so too (albeit to a lesser extent) is Heartfree's 'goodness' challenged by his passivity, unwillingness to pursue justice and inability to read Wild. As the novel progresses, we cannot help but feel that Heartfree is in part responsible for being deceived by Wild.

Heartfree is introduced to the reader as a gullible, 'silly [...] fellow' who is 'good-natured, friendly, and generous to a great Excess' (Fielding 2003b, 47). Above all he is unaware 'that there are such things as Deceit and Hypocrisy in the World' and so has little natural suspicion of those around him (Fielding 2003b, 47). The narrator tells us that this lack of suspicion also permeates Heartfree's business practices, in which he

extends credit and forgives the debts of people who had no intention of ever honouring them. The narrator ironically comments that Heartfree

had indeed too little Regard to common Justice, for he had forgiven some Debts to his Acquaintance, only because they could not pay him; and had entrusted a Bankrupt on his setting up a second time, from having been convinced, that [...] it was owing to Misfortune, and not to Neglect or Imposture (Fielding 2003b, 47)

Despite the narrator's upside-down irony, Heartfree's forgiving nature might seem laudable to the sympathetic, modern reader in this instance. However, contemporaries would have recognised that Heartfree's credulity and passiveness run the risk of undermining his character and credit as a tradesman.

For eighteenth-century merchants, reputation and trust were fundamental to their ability to summon credit among their fellows. Following the 'financial revolution' of the 1690s, the forms of credit available to individuals began to increase and diversify, offering new opportunities for financial investment and speculation.¹⁶² By the end of the seventeenth century, goldsmiths' notes, bank bills, lottery tickets, exchequer notes, stocks and letters of credit were 'among the numerous forms of "credit"-able paper in circulation' (Ingrassia 1998, 5; Glaisyer 2007, 687). Natasha Glaisyer argues that for the merchant classes particularly

credit depended on the maintenance of a good reputation. Trust was required at every stage of business transactions, and merchants, in particular, strove to protect their reputations, for as the proverb warned: 'He that lost his credit is dead to the World' (Glaisyer 2007, 686)

Credit, Glaisyer explains, refers to 'payments to be made later, one's capacity to pay later, and one's reputation' (Glaisyer 2006, 38).¹⁶³ Failure to honour one's obligation, therefore, could lead to an individual to be refused credit in the future.

Trust (to fulfil financial obligations and deliver on promises) and reputation (for having done so in the past) were therefore essential to the character of a merchant, and

¹⁶² John Brewer notes that credit offered greater opportunities for trade in a society which was facing a 'terrible cash shortage' as demand outstripped supply (Brewer 1982, 209)

¹⁶³ This is surely not far removed from the trust a people place in their political leaders (which Howard Nenner terms an 'unsecured expectation' (Nenner 2009, 859).

contemporaries frequently warned of the need to maintain their credit with their fellows.¹⁶⁴ For Defoe, writing in *The Complete English Tradesman* (1727-1732), maintaining such a character was a precarious business: '[c]redit, which [a tradesman] knows is the basis of his whole prosperity, is at stake, and in the utmost danger; if his credit is gone, he is gone' (Defoe 1726-7, 5). '*Rumour and Clamour*' might be especially deadly to a tradesman's credit (Defoe 1727-1732, 1: 185):

[t]here is a particular nicety in the credit of a tradesman, which does not reach in other cases: a man is slander'd in his character, or reputation, and 'tis injurious; [...] but if this happens to a tradesman, he is immediately and unavoidably blasted, and undone (Defoe 1727-1732, 1: 186)

Gossip and slander then represented an acute threat to a tradesman's character, credit and livelihood. Similarly, in *Spectator* No. 218 (9 November 1711), Steele laments that merchants were 'the most unhappy of men,' who were more especially 'exposed to the malignity or wantonness' of gossip than most: '[c]redit is undone in whispers. The tradesman's wound is received from one who is more private and more cruel than the ruffian with the lantern and dagger' (Addison and Steele 1735, 3: 186).

While Heartfree does not strictly suffer from malicious gossip, his reputation and livelihood are repeatedly threatened as Wild, the Count, and even his supposedly 'honest' customers take advantage of his overly-trusting nature. After he is cheated and robbed by the Count and Wild, Heartfree attempts to call in some of his customers' outstanding debts, only to find the debtors unwilling to honour them, or as one Peter Pounce puts it: 'as to the Sum mentioned therein, doth not suit at present' (Fielding 2003b, 68).¹⁶⁵ It was not uncommon in the period for 'great' patrons to delay payment in

¹⁶⁴ Glaisyer notes that the London Exchange was the stage on which merchants' reputations and credit could be tried, won, lost and saved. Merchants advised to visit the Exchange to check the reputation of those they were considering doing business with (Glaisyer 2006, 41).

¹⁶⁵ Peter Pounce also appears as Lady Booby's agent in *Joseph Andrews*, who manages to accumulate 'a small Sum of twenty thousand Pounds or thereabouts' by paying the servants' wages late and lending money to others (Fielding 2008a, 41). This again reinforces the idea that Heartfree is lending to disreputable individuals who are always happy to take advantage of his generosity and goodness. Bree comments in her notes that the character of Peter Pounce was probably based on one of the neighbours of Fielding's family estate in East Stour, Dorset: the notorious miser Peter Walter (1664?-1746). Bree suggests that Fielding disliked Walter and

this way, sometimes for months or years, to the distress of tradesmen, and such behaviour incited regular protests from the middling sorts from the 1720s onwards (Brewer 1982, 198-9; Wilson 1995, 60-61). Elaine McGirr notes that in the Restoration period, ‘bilking tradesmen’ was seen as one of the privileges of a rake, signalling his ‘superiority to the merchant class and to society as a whole’. George Etherege’s Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* (1676) is exceptional in that he actually *pays* his tradesmen (McGirr 2007, 29). Although rake culture gradually diminished over the course of the eighteenth century, the tendency to stall on honouring debts to tradesmen appears to have remained strong. In Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782), the eponymous heroine’s unscrupulous guardian Mr. Harrel also abuses his credit with both his ‘friends’ and the local tradesmen, putting many of the latter into great hardship by his refusal to pay. He finally commits suicide to avoid the social and financial ruin when his debts are called in.¹⁶⁶ In a client economy, the power to honour debts lay with the wealthy and powerful, putting merchants and traders at considerable disadvantage. Defoe advised his fellows to try to find a balance between trust, which allowed for the extension of credit to a customer, and scepticism, expressed in meticulous account keeping and making regular checks on customers’ reputation. In *Jonathan Wild*, however, Fielding seems to suggest that Heartfree is overly credulous and reckless in his business practices, regularly trusting and extending credit to customers who have no way or no intention to pay. Such open-handed goodness puts himself and his family in danger, and allows duplicitous individuals such as Wild to benefit from his lack of prudence.

satirized him in several of his works, including as ‘*Great Peter, or Peter, the Great*’ in *A Journey from this World to the Next* (1743) (Fielding 2003b, 264 n68).

¹⁶⁶ Burney notes ironically after Harrel’s suicide that ‘with tolerable ease, he could forget accounts innumerable with his tradesmen, one neglected *debt of honour* rendered his existence insupportable!’ (Burney 2008, 433). He attempts to ‘sell’ Cecilia to Sir Robert Floyer in exchange for the cancellation of this debt

Heartfree's inability to recognise the risky nature of his business investments function can also be read as part of a wider narrative of his inability to read character. Michael McKeon has similarly suggested that Fielding encourages us to associate Heartfree's willingness to extend credit to his customers, Wild and the Count with his later 'willingness to "credit" the lies by which Wild and the Count impose' upon him (McKeon 2002, 390). Heartfree repeatedly suppresses his suspicions and fears about Wild's behaviour, allowing Wild to continue his double-dealing. He often proves more willing to credit what people say than the actions he witness them perform. This is in direct contrast to Fielding's maxims in the 'Essay...on Character', where he advises that 'the Actions of Men seem the justest [*sic*] Interpreters of their Thoughts, and the truest Standards by which we may judge them' (Fielding 1972, 162). For other writers, however, actions could be as misleading as words or intentions in assessing character, if current observation were ignored in favour of past experience. Writing in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), David Hume noted people's willingness to be influenced in their assessments of character by the 'general rules', which they had 'derived from habit and experience'. Hume suggests that people allow these rules to 'influence their judgement, even to contrary to present observation and experience', believing falsely that they understand the causes and effects of any visible action (D. Hume 1978, 259).

Although Heartfree's past experiences of Wild should make him wary, I argue that he demonstrates a repeated willingness to ignore present experience in favour of a past 'idea' he holds of Wild. Even when he is presented with a strong suggestion of Wild's villainy, he still seems unwilling to believe the evidence before him: '[h]e was unwilling to condemn [Wild], without certain Evidence, and laid hold on every probable Semblance to acquit him' (Fielding 2003b, 110). Although Heartfree does convince himself that Wild 'was one of the greatest Villains in the World', his attempts to excuse Wild's behaviour suggests that he would acquit him, if possible. It is revealing that it is

Wild's proposal (his words/intentions) that Heartfree break out of prison by murdering rather than any of Wild's other actions (the theft, running off with Heartfree's wife) which 'totally black[ens] [Wild's] Character' with Heartfree (Fielding 2003b, 110, also see 96-98).

I argue that, for Fielding, Heartfree's willingness to forgive Wild despite the mounting evidence against him is an inexcusable fault and demonstrates his failure to attain true 'good nature'. In his *Champion* essay (27 March 1740), Fielding argued:

Good-nature is not that Weakness, which without Distinction affects both the Virtuous and the Base, and equally laments the Punishment of Villainy, [...] for as this amiable Quality respects the whole, so it must give up the Particular to the Good of the General (Fielding 2003a, 253)

Instead, he continues to argue that true 'Good-nature requires [...] Judgement, and is perhaps the sole Boundary between Wisdom and Folly' (Fielding 2003a, 253). Of course, judgement is exactly what Heartfree lacks in *Jonathan Wild* and this makes him vulnerable to the schemes of Wild. '[U]nreflective goodness', Fisher suggests, is 'not only easily victimized but also insipid, almost as inhuman and lacking in character as greatness' (Fisher 2015, 176). Beyond this, however, I suggest that Heartfree's gullibility also allows Wild to continue circulating in society, potentially enabling him to ruin other people's lives as well. As such, Heartfree becomes complicit in both his own deception and any potential manipulations which Wild may have gone on to commit (had he not been stopped by Fireblood's revelations). Fielding suggests implicitly that it is every virtuous individual's responsibility to be active in their goodness: to be vigilant and to defend against any attack on the innocent and undesigning. Passive goodness, then, presents a risk not only to the individual but also to wider society.

This is perhaps the most important distinction between Heartfree and Fielding's other 'good' heroes. Heartfree's 'goodness', virtue and lack of natural suspicion might lead us to read him as a forerunner of Parson Adams, Tom Jones or Captain Booth, all of whom end up in sticky situations due to their lack of suspicion and prudence. However,

by showing the faulty nature of Heartfree's goodness (in parallel with the deconstruction of Wild's greatness), Fielding encourages us to recognise that only a certain form of goodness will do: one that is active in defending itself and others. Allan Wendt argues that

Heartfree is limited precisely because he lacks this native energy which Fielding associates with good-nature. All of Fielding's admirable characters are active rather than contemplative. The most memorable quality of Parson Adams is his willingness to wade into a fight; Tom Jones and Captain Booth come close to despair only why they are locked up in prison, with idleness forced upon them. (Wendt 1957, 315)

Instead of the active virtue shown by Fielding's later heroes, 'Heartfree is always consistent: his practice always follows the precepts of passivity' (Wendt 1957, 309). His lack of agency throughout the novel leaves him unable to defend himself against the forces which work to destroy him. Even when his life hangs in the balance, he has to rely on the good magistrate, his apprentice Friendly and his wife in order to procure his freedom.¹⁶⁷ As such, I suggest that Heartfree seems to represent goodness in excess: a passive virtue which leaves him unable or unwilling to defend himself against the machinations of Wild.

In *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding deconstructs the ideas of both 'goodness' and 'greatness', showing how Heartfree and Wild both fail to attain either status. Wild is a poor judge of character and is regularly outwitted by those around him. His only successes in deceiving in the novel come when he is pitted against the susceptible and naïve Heartfree. Wild's deception of Heartfree has little to do with his abilities as a criminal, but is rather a result of Heartfree's excessive credulity.¹⁶⁸ Wendt argues that

¹⁶⁷ Fireblood's fear of Wild's retribution also plays no small share in Heartfree's release, again suggesting the reliance Heartfree places on others (even disreputable characters) in order to obtain his freedom.

¹⁶⁸ McKeon compares Heartfree's willingness to be deceived to an 'audience at a puppet show' or the 'reader of a romance novel' (McKeon 2002, 389). However, I suggest that while an audience or reader generally knows they are being presented with fiction and participate in willingly in the suspension of disbelief, Heartfree's lack of suspicion means that he is never conscious that he might be being deceived until well after the act has passed.

both men represent ‘ethical extremes’ but that neither ‘present a direct example of recommended conduct’ for the reader (Wendt 1957, 320). Similarly, Bogel suggests that ‘the novel’s moral exemplar, if there is to be one, must be produced – rather than simply identified – by the reader’ (Bogel 2000, 185). Reading between the lines of the narrator’s irony, we must recognise that neither greatness nor goodness is all it would initially appear to be. Instead, I suggest that Fielding asks us to recognise the signs which Heartfree fails to perceive, positioning the reader as possessed of the judgement which his characters lack.

Reading Gender in *The Female Husband* (1746)

After the publication of *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding turned away from presenting criminal biographies and deceptive protagonists in the later novels. Of his later works, only the scandalous pamphlet, *The Female Husband* (1746), sought to place the deceiver at the centre of the tale. *The Female Husband* centres on the actions of another real-life criminal: the notorious cross-dresser Mary Hamilton. As with *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding’s interest in *The Female Husband* lies not in representing the ‘real’ life of Hamilton, but in using her story as a method for exploring gender and character fraud. Setting *The Female Husband* alongside *Jonathan Wild* allows us to see that, like Wild, Hamilton is not a master deceiver. Rather, her ability to deceive is the result of her audience’s willingness to credit her outward appearance. As I discuss in the following section, Hamilton’s trickery lies not only in her ability to act a part, but also her ability to assume the character of the opposite gender.

In contrast to *Jonathan Wild*, *The Female Husband* has often been overlooked in critical studies of Fielding’s career. Terry Castle points out the pamphlet has often been ‘indecorously ignored’ or side-lined as a ‘sensational potboiler’ in Fielding studies, only being ‘rescued from its enforced oblivion’ by historians of sexuality and feminist critics

(Castle 1982, 602–603, 619 n2).¹⁶⁹ This is perhaps unsurprising given the pamphlet’s content and its production history – written ‘to cash in on the scandal surrounding the true story of Hamilton’ (Bowles 2010, 4). Since Castle’s essay in the early 1980s, critics have begun to take greater interest in Fielding’s unusual pamphlet, with notable studies by Jill Campbell (1995), Bonnie Blackwell (2002) and Emily Bowles (2010).¹⁷⁰ The consensus of these studies can be summed up by the idea that *The Female Husband* demonstrates ‘Fielding’s blithe lack of interest in recording the “real” life of his subject’ or in representing her psychological motivations for cross-dressing (Castle 1982, 605; Bowles 2010, 12–20). Instead, the pamphlet plays out ‘Fielding’s fear that sexual difference and desire [...] may be successfully impersonated or approximated in artificial forms’ (Campbell 1995, 58). What this criticism tends to overlook, however, is the role that judgement (or lack thereof) plays in uncovering Hamilton’s deception in the pamphlet. I argue that while Hamilton is able to manipulate her appearance and performance in order to ‘pass’ as a man, she is unable to disguise her natural female body for long, making her eventual discovery inevitable. From our privileged position, readers are encouraged to recognise the signs of this female body which the other characters comically overlook. The challenge to the reader, then, is to be able to recognise the signs of Hamilton’s biological body disguised beneath the shifting surfaces of gender and performance.

As critics have noted, Fielding’s pamphlet centres on Hamilton’s ability to manipulate gender categories through cross-dressing. In *The Female Husband*,

¹⁶⁹ Fielding’s early play *Rape Upon Rape* (1730) has been similarly overlooked in critical studies of Fielding’s career for similar reasons, with many modern critics finding its content and themes uncomfortable. One notable exception to this trend is Simon Dickie’s recent article ‘Fielding’s Rape Jokes’ (2010), which views the theme of rape-related humour in the wider context of Fielding’s works.

¹⁷⁰ Prior to Castle’s study, Sheridan Baker’s article ‘Fielding’s *Female Husband*: Fact and Fiction’ (1959) was the only study to engage with *The Female Husband* at any length, and focuses around establishing Fielding’s authorship of the piece.

Hamilton's deception of her audience is tied to her ability to purchase and assume male dress. Cross-dressing allows Hamilton to reinvent her character, travel in relative safety and make money through marriage.¹⁷¹ Castle suggests that

[c]ross-dressing was a direct if risky way for a woman to escape those constraints – physical, economic, and psychological – imposed by rigid sex roles and the graphic demarcation of masculine and feminine spheres [...]. Disguise meant a certain primary mobility (Castle 1982, 606)

Hamilton is often assumed to be a man by spectators in the pamphlet simply because she is dressed as one. Twice, Fielding imagines her acquiring male clothing without raising any questions or suspicions as to her purpose. Hamilton initially 'decides' to begin cross-dressing when she is rejected by her first lover, Anne Johnson, and 'provides herself with [men's] dress' in order to pose as a Methodist preacher (Fielding 2007b, 864). When she is eventually exposed by Mrs Rushford as a fraud, Hamilton is forced to flee from Ireland but again manages to assume a new male character by purchasing more male clothing: '[a]t length she landed at *Dartmouth*, where she soon provided herself with linnen [*sic*], and thence went to *Totnes*, where she assumed the title of a doctor of physic' (Fielding 2007b, 869). Fielding does not imagine that her purchases raise any suspicions in either incident (although to do so may have been contrary to his purpose). Instead, Hamilton is able to slip into these new characters and professions with the ease of putting on a new coat, or, as Nicolazzo puts it: 'one need only arrive in a new place and assume the appearance and comportment of a doctor in order to act as one'

¹⁷¹ Fielding suggests that Hamilton's primary motive for marrying is to commit financial fraud. As a husband, she would have been entitled to her wife's money and property. Nicolazzo argues that the 'dildo enters the story as an instrument of financial fraud' rather than for any sexual gratification it might provide to Hamilton (see Nicolazzo 2014, 340–41). Her cross-dressing also affords her the opportunity to make money as a (quack) doctor through her fees and the sale of remedies (often called powders), although Fielding does not represent Hamilton making money in this way in the text. Castle also suggests that cross-dressing offered women greater security when travelling: 'women travelling alone constantly risked loss of reputation, harassment, or sexual assault' (Castle 1982, 606). Ironically, while Hamilton's disguise does protect her from heterosexual advances, it does not shield her from the Methodist's homosexual assault. In this instance, she is required to defend herself physically, as I discuss below. I discuss the threat to a woman's reputation when travelling alone in more detail in Chapter 4.

(Nicolazzo 2014, 343). Although Fielding does not employ the metaphors of the stage here, Hamilton's disguises seem to suggest that gender and profession are largely theatrical: dependent on the quality of an actor's disguise and performance, and their ability acquire the signs of masculinity.¹⁷²

For many eighteenth-century writers, the growth of commerce and greater availability of credit threatened to undermine traditional ideas of character. In his *Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1751), Fielding complained that the 'Introduction of Trade [...] [had] given a new Face to the whole Nation' and had 'almost totally changed the Manners, Customs, and Habits of the People', particularly those of the 'lower sort' (Fielding 1988a, 69–70).¹⁷³ This 'new Face' created by the increase of trade, in turn, led to fears that people might be able to manipulate clothing to assume a station or character amongst strangers which they were not entitled to. Contemporary writers readily acknowledged the erosion of social distinction which clothing (usually purchased on credit) afforded:

People where they are not known, are generally honour'd according to their Clothes [...]. It is this which encourages every body [*sic*], who is conscious of his little Merit, if he is any ways able to wear Clothes above his Rank; especially, in large and populous Cities, where obscure Men may hourly meet with fifty Strangers [...] and consequently have the Pleasure of being esteem'd by a vast Majority, not as what they are, but what they appear to be (Mandeville 1970, 152)¹⁷⁴

Clothing, it was often argued, eroded the traditional markers of social difference between the classes, so that 'the Maid is very often mistake for the *Mistress* and the *Valet* for my

¹⁷² Campbell has pointed out that modern gender theorists, such as Marjorie Garber and Judith Butler, have also used metaphors of the theatre to describe gender as 'theatrical' or 'performative'. Campbell suggests that while Garber and Butler treat these metaphors 'with enthusiasm, Fielding does so, always, with ambivalence' (Campbell 1995, 20). Castle has similarly suggested that Fielding is 'both repulsed and attracted to his heroine, concerned to distance himself from her morally, but also unconsciously drawn to her' (Castle 1982, 612).

¹⁷³ Fielding makes a similar complaint in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1741), when he describes the 'Source of the true Ridiculous' a poor, starving family who adorn their home with 'Flowers, empty Plate or China Dishes' rather than try to feed themselves (Fielding 2008a, 6, 7).

¹⁷⁴ Dror Wahrman notes that Erasmus Jones copies these words 'in toto' in his *Luxury, Pride and Vanity: The Bane of Britain* (1736), without acknowledging the debt to Mandeville.

Lord' (Steele 1714, 70).¹⁷⁵ Eliza Haywood adds in her *Female Spectator* that there is 'no difference made between the young gentleman and the city-apprentice, except that the latter is sometimes the greater beau' (Haywood 1771, 126). The concern for many was, as in Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst* (1733), that a 'Peeress' might 'share [...] the box' with a 'butler' disguised in credit-bought finery without ever suspecting she had been duped (Pope 2008, 81). The reliance on dress as an index of character could lead the spectator to make more serious misjudgements about a person's character and virtue. Despite being framed humorously, in one episode in Charles Walker's *Memoirs of Sally Salisbury* (1723), the notorious Sally is mistaken by an elderly lady for a gentlewoman. When she realises her mistake, the lady exclaims: "[a]s I live she is a vile Whore in all this finery. Who could have thought it? She looks as much like a Woman of Reputation, as any I ever saw in my Life!" (Walker 1723, 96-7). Bonnie Latimer argues that this episode 'destabilise[s] the reader's comfortable epistemologies of female virtue', revealing the distinct possibility that any woman, no matter how finely dressed, might actually be a whore (Latimer 2013, 76). Although Fielding's Hamilton is not strictly a prostitute, she also uses clothing to transgress the boundaries of gender, class and propriety in a similar way to Salisbury.

While some writers viewed the mutability of sartorial codes with concern, for other writers, the blurring of social distinctions offered new opportunities for their (female) protagonists (particularly the female ones) to experiment with and revise their public characters. The eponymous heroines of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and

¹⁷⁵ In *Champion* (22 November 1739), Fielding mocked 'wise Men' who were 'immoderately fond of certain outward Distinctions from the Vulgar, such as Ribbons of several Colours [...] which those. Who are skilled in these Matters, assure me are understood to be infallible Tokens of all the Cardinal Virtues and are always to be honoured as such by the Beholders' (Fielding 2003a, 29–30). Fielding obviously had Sir Robert Walpole in mind, who used the ribbons of the Orders of the Bath, Garter, and Thistle, to reward his political allies. Walpole was also given the Order of the Bath, which he persuaded George I to revive in 1725 (Fielding 2003a, 29 n2). Fielding also satirized the use of ribbons to promote political allies in *Jonathan Wild* (see Fielding 2003b, 121–24).

Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725) all use dress to alter their social classes to mask their chicanery. In *Moll Flanders*, Moll regularly dresses as a gentlewoman in order to cover her stealing: 'on these Adventure we always went very well Dress'd, and I had very good Cloths [*sic*] on' (Defoe 1722, 220). This disguise and her quick thinking save her in one episode when she is detected attempting to steal a lady's watch in a crowd. In *Fantomina*, meanwhile, clothing and make-up allows the heroine to 'dress down' the social scale and protect her 'real' reputation as she impersonates (with varying degrees of success) a prostitute, servant, and a widow to maintain the interest of her promiscuous lover. Dressing down paradoxically allows *Fantomina* greater freedom to satisfy her private desires for Beauplaisir without risking her public character. Her deception is only revealed when she goes into labour at a masquerade. Credit, clothing and the instability of sartorial markers allow these women to reinvent their public characters, making the ability to judge these performances accurately even more important.

Alongside such debates were fears that gender might be similarly undermined by the greater availability of goods and the changing status of sex and gender in the period. In his *Making Sex* (1990), Thomas Laqueur argues that '[s]ex before the seventeenth century [...] was still a sociological and not an ontological category', while gender 'was primary or "real"' (Laqueur 1990, 8). As such, sex and gender were 'bound up in a circle of meanings from which escape to a supposed biological substratum [was] impossible' (Laqueur 1990, 128). Dror Wahrman adds that 'sometime around the late seventeenth century, as gender lost its divine moorings, sex gradually replaced it as the primary category, deriving its sway not from the certitudes of godly providence but from those of scientific biological knowledge' (Wahrman 2004, 42). As sex 'acquired the putative uncompromising rigidity of biology, eighteenth-century gender was still allowed some of the fluidity and versatility of culture' (Wahrman 2004, 43). This, in turn, created a '*space for play*' within gender categories, allowing men and women to 'sidestep the cultural

expectations of “femininity” and “masculinity” (Wahrman 2004, 43). Clothing, some writers feared, was one area in which the space for play could be easily manipulated. In *The Ladies’ Library* (1714), Richard Steele complained that ‘women, without blushing, assume the *Coat, Periwig, Hat and Feather*, [...] as if there was really nothing in Sex’ (Steele 1714, 69). Similarly, when Wisemore returns to town in *Love in Several Masques* (1728), he complains that women have gone through a ‘Transformation and Dress like us’, only to later discover that these ‘women’ are actually beaux dressed in their finery: ‘so much greater the Transformation, for they apparently had more of the Woman than the Man about them’ (Fielding 2004, 30). Clothing could help individuals manipulate the space for play within gender categories, allowing them to manipulate their outward appearances and with it the expectations of their characters.

As the status of sex and gender began to change, contemporary writers increasingly turned to the biological body to explain the differences they saw between male and female character. In the *Spectator* No. 128 (27 July 1711), Addison imagined that there might be ‘a kind of Sex in the very Soul’, emanating from the differences in male and female bodies: ‘whether it be that [women’s] Blood is more refined, their Fibres more delicate, and their animal Spirits more light and volatile [...] I shall not pretend to determine’ (Addison and Steele 1735, 2: 167).¹⁷⁶ Two decades later, the Earl of Chesterfield echoed this argument in the *Common Sense* 33 (17 September 1737), when he suggested:

each sex has its distinguishing characteristic [...] The delicacy of their texture, and the strength of ours, the beauty of their form, and the coarseness of ours, sufficiently indicate the respective vocations (Chesterfield 1737)

Building on Chesterfield and Addison’s ideas in his final novel, Richardson’s *Grandison* (1753) espouses a similar model of gender relations which characterises women as

¹⁷⁶ Also see Steele’s *Tatler* No.172 (16 May 1710) for difference between men and women.

‘precious property to be indulged and controlled’ (Latimer 2013, 135). He argues that ‘nature has designed [men] to be superior to women. The highest proof [...] of such superiority is, in the protection afford by the stronger to the weaker’ (Richardson 1753, 3: 204-5). Some writers went further, claiming that women’s essential characters were ‘too soft a lasting mark to bear’ (Pope 1999, l. 3). As Pope famously contended in his *Epistle to a Lady* (1743) “‘Most Women have no Characters at all’” and so were ‘best distinguish’d by’ the colour of their hair: ‘black, brown, or fair’ (Pope 1999, ll. 2-4). Fielding too argued in his ‘Essay on...Characters’ that men and women had different essential characters, and so should be considered separately. He goes so far as to exclude female characters from his analysis in the ‘Essay’ based on their assumed difference:

I do by no means hint at the various Laughs, Titters, Tehes [*sic*], &c. of the Fair Sex, with whom indeed this Essay hath not any thing [*sic*] to do; the Knowledge of the Characters of Women being foreign to my intended Purpose; as it is in Fact a Science, to which I make not the least Pretension (Fielding 1972, 161)

These essential, biological differences between men and women were intended to stabilize sex even as gender became increasingly porous and slippery. While men and women might transcend gender boundaries through dress and behaviour, these biological differences would maintain the boundaries between the two sexes.

I argue that, in *The Female Husband*, Fielding repeatedly turns to sex as a method of uncovering Hamilton’s fraud and with it her private character. Although cross-dressing allows Hamilton to transcend the restrictions placed on women temporarily, Fielding suggests that she cannot maintain her appearance as a man indefinitely. Her biological body, ‘natural’ feminine behaviours and her performance continually undermine her appearance as a man. A wary reader would be easily able to pick up on the signs of Hamilton’s female body through her performance, and so uncover her betrayal and private character. Onlookers in the pamphlet often remark on Hamilton’s odd appearance and unmanly behaviour, even if their significance as signs of

her essential character is not fully recognised. Hamilton's beardless face especially seems to be a subject of humour and speculative fascination. During her wedding to Mrs Rushford, Rushford's nephew 'jested on the bridegroom because he had no beard' arguing that "[t]here should never be a beard on both sides" of a marriage (Fielding 2007b, 868). Although this joke is primarily aimed at Rushford— '[f]or indeed the old lady's chin was pretty well stocked with bristles' (Fielding 2007b, 868) — it points to Hamilton's inability to grow a beard, even if her new wife apparently can. The other characters make this joke at Rushford's expense, mocking the almost fifty-year age gap between husband and wife and speculating on the latter's unfeminine desire for a much younger 'man'.¹⁷⁷ Yet, they also unconsciously touch upon Hamilton's inability to fully imitate a man due to her lack of a beard (and a penis). The connection between male facial hair and genitalia is made again later by Miss Ivythorn, when she discovers Hamilton has 'not what [she] ought to have' (Fielding 2007b, 871). Ivythorn remarks that 'I always thought indeed your shape was something odd, and have often wondred [*sic*] that you had not the least bit of a beard' (Fielding 2007b, 871). For Ivythorn,

¹⁷⁷ Sheridan Baker has argued that we can read Mrs Rushford's name as Mrs 'Rush-for-it' or Mrs 'Rush-forward', suggesting her sexual forwardness. Baker argues that this character is a type: a lusty older woman in pursuit of a much younger man. This caricature has its roots in Congreve's drama, and is a recognisable figure in many of Fielding's works: Lady Trap (*Love in Several Masques*, 1728); Lady Gravely (*The Temple Beau*, 1730); Mrs Squeezum (*Rape Upon Rape*, 1731); Lady Booby and Slipslop (*Joseph Andrews*, 1741); Bridget Allworthy (mistakenly – see Chapter 4 for discussion), Mrs Western, Mrs Waters and Lady Bellaston (*Tom Jones*, 1749); and Mrs Bennet's aunt (*Amelia*, 1751) are all noted for their improper desires towards men. Although Rushford marries Hamilton in *The Female Husband*, elsewhere Fielding's lusty ladies express this desire outside of wedlock, often under the guise of rape. As Simon Dickie notes, in *Rape Upon Rape* and *Joseph Andrews*, Mrs Squeezum and Lady Booby both attempt to goad their respective gallants (Ramble and Joseph) into raping them, with varying degrees of success (Dickie 2010, 577). Susan Staves has also noted that 'loose and lascivious women' in Fielding's fiction often 'falsely cry rape to cover up their own delinquencies' (Staves 1994, 93). In *Tom Jones*, Mrs Waters cries rape when she is discovered in bed with Tom Jones (see Fielding 2008b, 455–60). Similarly, in *Joseph Andrews*, Slipslop cries rape when Beau Didapper mistakes her bed for Fanny's. Disappointed to find her would-be ravisher is not Joseph but the unsatisfactory Beau Didapper, Slipslop is determined to use the '[o]ppportunity to heal some Wounds which her late Conduct had, she feared, given her Reputation' (Fielding 2008a, 291). Dickie argues such behaviour was part of a long-running joke in the eighteenth century: '[o]lder women were always fantasising about rape, it was said. They loved rape trials and flocked to every rape tragedy on the London stage' (Dickie 2010, 576).

Hamilton's beardless face acts as a sign of her other 'lack', and should indicate what is hidden beneath her clothes. However, she comically does not realise this until it is too late.

Furthermore, jokes, sneers and rejections hit closest to the mark when they compare Hamilton's appearance to female or castrated bodies. When Hamilton marries Molly Price, Price's sister argues that she would 'almost as willingly be married to one of her own sex' than to have 'such a husband' (Fielding 2007b, 874). Similarly, when Hamilton makes her overtures to a widow in Dublin, the latter rebuffs Hamilton's letter of proposal, commenting that:

I thought, when I took it, it might have been an Opera song, and which for certain reasons I should think, that when your cold is gone, you might sing as well as *Farinelli*, from the great resemblance there is between your persons (Fielding 2007b, 866)

The widow here draws comparisons between the voice and 'person' of Hamilton and the famed Italian castrato, Farinelli.¹⁷⁸ Fielding had previously satirized Farinelli as 'Squeekaronelly' in Fustian's tragedy in the *Pasquin* (1736), suggesting a certain high-pitched or uneven tone to the singer's voice as a result of his bodily modifications (Fielding 2011, 312). This comparison suggests that Hamilton may not be able to sufficiently mask her feminine voice, despite her cold. Lanser has argued that Hamilton 'is too feminine of physique and feature to succeed as a man' (Lanser 2001, 260). Her female body and voice continually undermine her appearance as a man, if only her audience would read the signs of it correctly.

Beyond this, Fielding suggests that Hamilton's female body and essential character betrays itself in her natural reactions to other characters' sexual advances or

¹⁷⁸ Carlo Broschi (popularly known as Farinelli) (1705-1782) appears as a figure of satire or a caricature in several of Fielding's plays. He is caricatured as Orpheus in the ill-fated *Eurydice* (1736), 'Faribelly' and 'Squeekaronelly' in *Pasquin* (1736), and he appears as a subject of discussion and desirability under the name Farinello for a gaggle of ladies in *The Historical Register* (1737). Fielding often uses him to ridicule the popularity of Italian Opera, or to comment on the irony of the singer's status as an unlikely sex symbol (see Fielding 1997b, xxxix; Campbell 1995, 29-39; Fielding 2011, 266, 312, 423).

rudeness. During the crossing to Ireland, for example, Hamilton receives unwanted homosexual attention from her fellow passenger, another Methodist preacher. While praying, the preacher thrusts his hand into Hamilton's 'bosom' and Hamilton inadvertently lets out 'so effeminate a squawl [*sic*], that it reached the Captain's ears' (Fielding 2007b, 864). When the preacher returns for a second attempt, Hamilton again almost gives the game away, when she 'gently reject[s] his hands several times' before she 'at last *recollected the sex she had assumed*, and gave him so violent a blow in the nostrils, that the blood issued from them with great Impetuosity' (Fielding 2007b, 865, my emphasis). Hamilton's performance as a man here does not seem particularly convincing, requiring her to consciously act the part in order to cover her natural blunders. Hamilton's 'effeminate squawl' and her initially 'gentle' rejection of the preacher's advances mark her as not-a-man or less-than-a-man, indicating her female body hidden beneath the disguise. Luckily for Hamilton, the preacher comically misreads these signs, taking them as a confirmation that she is a man (albeit an 'unmanly' one) and so may be receptive to his attentions.

Later in the pamphlet, Hamilton's duplicity is again nearly exposed when Mrs Rushford tells her of her conversation with a friend:

the bride [Rushford] expressed herself so well satisfied with her choice, [...] that her friend began to envy her, and could not forbear inveighing against effeminacy in men; upon which a discourse arose between the two ladies, not proper to be repeated [...] but ended at last, in the unmarried lady's declaring to the bride, that she thought her husband looked more like a woman than a man (Fielding 2007b, 868)

Upon hearing herself described as looking 'more like a woman than a man', Hamilton cannot help but 'blush, which the old lady perceiving and regarding as an effect of youth, fell upon her in a rage of love like a tigress, and almost murdered her with kisses' (Fielding 2007b, 868). Like the preacher, Rushford fails to attribute the real reason for Hamilton's reaction and what it signifies. This is perhaps because she *wants* to be deceived on some level (as Heartfree is also willing to be deceived in his friendship with

Wild): it satisfies her own interests to believe that Hamilton is a young man who is receptive to her advances. I suggest that this can be read as an example of Pierre Nicole's theory of rash judgement. Pierre Nicole argues that an 'over-weening affection to our sentiments' often causes individuals to seek out evidence which supports their suppositions, and overlook that which does not:

[it] is this disposition which carries our mind to consider whatsoever may induce us to judge disadvantageously of them, and diverts it from taking notice of what might make our judgements favourable (Nicole 1677, 297-298).

Rushford reverses Nicole's principle by interpreting Hamilton's behaviour favourably as a youthful innocence, rather than an expression of her guilt, because she desires it to be so. As a result, she overlooks the other explanation for Hamilton's behaviour and fails to uncover the truth of her deception.¹⁷⁹

This incident leaves Hamilton in a rather sticky situation, as Rushford's advances become more insistent: 'having not at that time *the wherewithal* about her, [Hamilton] was obliged to remain merely passive, under all the torrent of kindness of his wife' (Fielding 2007b, 868). Her natural response almost leads to the exposure of her body, and with it, her essence. She is forced to act passively, more closely resembling the behaviour assumed of a woman than a man. The comedy of this scene is of course that the roles have been reversed; Rushford becomes the sexual aggressor, while her 'husband' is forced into the role of passive receiver of affection.¹⁸⁰ Rushford in effect 'proves' the effeminacy of her husband by smothering Hamilton and failing to get her to

¹⁷⁹ Fielding builds upon this kind of misreading in his later novels, particularly *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, as I will discuss in the chapters below.

¹⁸⁰ A similar situation plays out in *Joseph Andrews*, in which the 'victim' of attempted rape, Slipslop, is pictured as stronger and more aggressive than her would-be ravisher, Beau Didapper. When he realises that he has mistaken Slipslop's bed for Fanny's, Didapper tries to leave only to be held down by Slipslop: '[t]he beau attempted to get loose, but she held him fast, and when he struggled she cried out "Murder! murder! rape! robbery! ruin!"' (Fielding 2008a, 291). Staves has argued that this episode 'depends on a reversal of gender roles that casts the woman as the big, strong person capable of physically controlling another' (Staves 1994, 94). The gender reversal is further highlighted moments later when Adams enters the room and mistakes Didapper for the woman and Slipslop for the man.

rise to the occasion. Like Farinelli, then, Hamilton is stripped of any sexual agency and rendered sexually impotent in this scene by her lack of a phallus.¹⁸¹ Hamilton's natural responses (or lack thereof) repeatedly expose her female body, and so her essential character. What saves her from being exposed on both these occasions are the advances of her partners who, blinded by their lust, fail to recognise the signs of her female body.

Given the ineffectual nature of Hamilton's performance and the many signs of her deception, it is perhaps surprising that she is not exposed sooner by the other characters in the pamphlet.¹⁸² While onlookers often note Hamilton's strange appearance and less-than-manly performance, they repeatedly fail to recognise what these signs point to. Like Nicole, Fielding had similarly warned in his 'Essay on...Characters' that 'we almost universally mistake the Symptoms which Nature kindly holds forth to us' (Fielding 1972, 156). Fielding argues that '[t]he Passions of Men do commonly imprint sufficient Marks on the Countenance', as we have seen above with Hamilton. He continues to argue that 'it is owing chiefly to want of Skill of the Observer, that Physiognomy is of so little Use and Credit in the World' (Fielding 1972, 157). Comparably, in *The Female Husband*, the other characters also seem to want the proper attention and judgement required to identify Hamilton's falsehood. Through their failure to correctly read these signs, Hamilton's audience become complicit in her passing and on-going deception. Nowhere is this complicity more evident than when Hamilton's naked breasts are exposed to public view. Just before her marriage to Mary Price, Hamilton's shirt is torn open during a public dance:

a quarrel arose between the Doctor and a man there present, upon which the mother seizing the former violently by the collar, tore open her

¹⁸¹ Jill Campbell notes that although singers like Farinelli were castrated, the process 'removed the singer's testicles rather than his penis', leaving his 'penis impotent and developmentally infantile, [...] neither sexually functional nor capable of sustaining all the symbolic attributes and powers of the 'phallus' (Campbell 1995, 29).

¹⁸² Fielding allows Hamilton to circulate for much longer and at greater geographical distance than the real Mary Hamilton did. Castle has suggested this is in part because of his fascination with her as a character and partly to spin the tale out (Castle 1982, 608).

wastecoat [*sic*], and rent her shirt, so that all her breast was discovered, which, tho' beyond expression beautiful in a woman, were of so different a kind from the bosom of a man, that the married women there set up a great titter; and tho' it did not bring the Doctor's sex into an absolute suspicion, yet caused some whispers, which perhaps might have spoiled the match with a less innocent and less enamoured virgin. (Fielding 2007b, 874)

Expecting a male body, the audience are confused and intrigued when they are confronted with Hamilton's female breasts. Instead of identifying her as a fraud, however, the incident only raises speculation and gossip, but no 'absolute suspicion' as they try to square her female body with her male appearance. Bowles has argued that in this scene 'Fielding suggests a deliberate misreading of a highly legible corporeal text' (Bowles 2010, 19). Unable to fully comprehend the significance of Hamilton's body, the audience choose simply to ignore it or whisper about it behind their fans. This allows Hamilton to continue 'passing' as a man and, significantly, to marry Mary Price. In effect, then, these onlookers become complicit in the act of passing by failing to read the signs of Hamilton's female body. As such, Fielding holds them partly responsible for allowing Hamilton to continue appearing as a man: they allow themselves to be deceived (as Heartfree also is in the earlier novel) through their lack of judgement.

I argue that Hamilton's ability to pass as a man, then, seems to have little to do with her skills as an accomplished deceiver or actress. Rather, she is 'allowed' to pass by the other characters through their lack of observational and judgemental skills. As with the 'Essay on...Character' and *Jonathan Wild*, Fielding seems to suggest that the ability to impose upon others is often the result of the lack of judgement or willingness to be deceived in the observer rather than the skill of the dissembler. In *The Female Husband*, Fielding offers a lesson in interpreting the signs of deception. From our privileged position in the pamphlet, the reader is asked to recognise the slippages of Hamilton's performance (both in terms of costume and behaviour) which the other characters overlook. Given the right sort of interpreter, Fielding implies that Hamilton would not be

able to pass as a man for long. While Hamilton's cross-dressing in *The Female Husband* might blur the distinctions between the genders temporarily, she cannot escape her natural female behaviour and body which shines through her disguise for the wary reader. As such, Fielding suggests that observation and judgement are necessary to prevent various forms of character fraud, and that is a cultural duty for all virtuous individuals to be on their guard against deception.

When considered together, I argue that Fielding's criminal biographies deconstruct the public reputations of his protagonists' real-life counterparts to show how deception might be read by a sagacious spectator. Building upon his concepts of goodness, greatness and perception which he introduced in his plays, Fielding suggests that active goodness is necessary to uncover deception. He unpicks the myths around his criminal protagonists to suggest that neither are particularly accomplished villains. In doing so, he puts the moral imperative on individuals to promote good judgement to uncover deception.

Fielding would continue to represent the deceitful and hypocritical in all of his remaining novels during the 1740s and 50s, which I discuss in the following chapters. However, the duplicitous are generally secondary characters in the later novels, who influence the actions of the protagonists for a time. Despite this, the effects of deception in Fielding's later novels have a much wider and potentially more tragic effect than in *Jonathan Wild* or *The Female Husband*. Plying their falsehood through gossip, storytelling and other oral accounts, individuals can have a marked influence on the lives of others. In keeping with this, Fielding often withholds the details of individuals' duplicity until later in the novel. He encourages his reader to develop their discernment, reading the signs of deceit and hypocrisy, and engaging in speculative readings about character.

IV

Gossiping about Character: Storytelling and Oral Testimonies in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749)

Of all of Fielding's works, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* have traditionally attracted the lion's share of critical attention and are often regarded as Fielding's masterpieces. Major critical themes, which reflect some of the wider trends in Fielding studies more generally, have tended to focus on the role of Fielding's self-conscious narrator and his relationship to the reader; Fielding's treatment of character (often in comparison to Samuel Richardson's characterization); the moral purpose of his works; his rehabilitation of 'prudence' and 'wisdom'; his experiments in form and style and his presentation of gender.¹⁸³

In terms of character, much of the traditional debate focuses around whether Fielding's characters are 'exclusively exterior creatures', as Samuel Johnson famously suggested in his comparison of Fielding's characters with those of Richardson (Kraft 2015, 11).¹⁸⁴ More recent studies have rejected Johnson's criticism and point instead to the role of consciousness and Fielding's concerns with what Arlene Fish Wilner calls the 'knowability' of character – our ability to read character without stable access to motives

¹⁸³ For discussions of the role of narrator see Alter 1968; Booth 1987; Bevis 1990; Knight 1998; Chibka 2008; Power 2015; Widmayer 2015; A. J. Hassall 2015 and his relationship to the reader see Preston 1970; Iser 1974; Černý 1992; Hudson 1993; Hammond 1993; Janes 2008; Power 2010; Power 2015; for treatment of character see Samuel Johnson's famous comparison of Richardson and Fielding's techniques of characterization in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and Coolidge 1960; Sacks 1966; Wilner 1988; Kraft 1992; D. Lynch 1998; for his moral purpose see Empson 1958; Battestin 1959; Golden 1966; Harrison 1975; Tavor 1987; on 'prudence' and 'wisdom' see Hatfield 1967; Ribble 1981; Kinkead-Weekes 2008; for form and style see Wright 1968; Rawson 1972b; Hunter 1975 and gender see Smallwood 1989; Campbell 1995; Potter 1999. Other themes of criticism in these novels also include studies on the role of the interpolated tales (Mandel 1969; Bartolomeo 1998; Halevi-Wise 2003) and Fielding's debt to the classics (Mace 1996; Power 2015). Elizabeth Kraft also provides a useful summary of the critical trends in Fielding studies more generally in her *Approaches to Teaching the Novel of Henry Fielding* (2016), 10-15.

¹⁸⁴ Ian Watt (1960) famously maintains this distinction between Fielding and Richardson's methods of characterization in his *The Rise of the Novel*, preferring the psychological narrative favoured by Richardson over Fielding's more externalized approach (see Watt 1960, 260–79).

(Wilner 1988, 181).¹⁸⁵ Bernard Harrison suggests that Fielding regularly shows in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* that no single viewpoint (especially that of an individual looking inward) can adequately and consistently explain the motives for behaviour. Instead, readers are asked to judge multiple, often conflicting, narratives of human action (Harrison 1975, 44-5). I suggest that these ‘viewpoints’ are often presented through oral accounts which characters offer to one another. Even the narrator gets involved in this by feeding the reader counter-narratives, which are later revealed to be hearsay. The frequency with which we misjudge these narratives aligns us with the other characters in the novel as we fall into similar epistemological errors (Tavor 1987, 112).

I argue that in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* readers and characters often experience these conflicting viewpoints through various kinds of oral accounts. To date, relatively few studies have focused on the role that storytelling, gossip and other forms of testimony play in the construction of character in these novels. Such studies have been overlooked in wider critical discussions of the novels, despite the fact that much of the plot, especially in *Tom Jones*, is driven by oral accounts. Drawing on this overlooked criticism, I argue that gossip and storytelling play a central role in the reader’s experience of and ability to judge character in these novels. As we have already seen, Fielding had previously used gossip in his Haymarket plays to encourage his audience to judge caricature and get involved in the production of meaning. I suggest that Fielding builds upon that relationship in his later novels, using oral accounts to expose the character of storytellers, gossipers and the gossiped about to readers and get us involved in the process of judging. As we ‘listen’ to these accounts, the reader is encouraged to be alert for inconsistencies, to recognise different perspectives on the action and to judge the truth of the character being presented to them. Our ability to discern character,

¹⁸⁵ For discussions of the role of consciousness in Fielding’s novels and the comparison of Fielding’s techniques with Richardson’s, see Empson 1958, 235; Harrison 1975, 48-50; Kraft 1992, 65–82; D. Lynch 1998, 23–122; Chibka 2008.

however, is often undermined by the narrator, who actively misleads the reader in to making false judgements about character. Consequently, Fielding makes the reader's role more closely akin to that of other characters in the novel or to a judge in a trial: we are placed in a position where we are required to judge character based on missing, inaccurate or misleading information.

Revealing Character Through Storytelling

One of the primary methods by which Fielding reveals character in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* is through the stories that individuals tell about themselves and others. As Yael Halevi-Wise has noted, 'Fielding's novels exhibit more storytelling scenes than any other eighteenth-century English novel except *Tristram Shandy*' (Halevi-Wise 2003, 64). Of the few critics who have paid attention to the role of storytelling in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, Jerome Mandel (1969), Susan McNamara (1979), Joseph Bartolomeo (1998) all agree that storytelling helps to reveal the private character of the speaker to the reader. The critical consensus of these studies suggests that the ability to tell one's own story also enables characters, such as Mrs Fitzpatrick, to try to shape the response of the other characters, recasting themselves as victims to excuse their past behaviour and characters. In doing so, individuals attempt to control the image of their character that emerges from their stories. However, careful reading of these stories shows the extent to which characters go to excuse themselves by wilfully omitting or editing parts of their stories which do not fit the character they attempt to present.¹⁸⁶ More sagacious readers like Tom, Sophia, and Fielding's ideal reader are often quick to spot these omissions and

¹⁸⁶ Cheryl Wanko argues that readers 'are permitted to make this mistake only rarely, and never about main characters; the time between our first meeting the character and learning the character's true merit is always short' (Wanko 1991, 509). In the majority of cases, Fielding quickly confirms our suspicions about characters. However, in the case of Partridge and Bridget Allworthy, we wait almost the entirety of the novel (not to mention twenty years of the narrative timeline) in order to discover the 'true' cast of their characters. The narrator leaves us in ignorance and leads us to false conclusions in these cases, as I will discuss in more detail below.

suspect motives, while less able readers like Adams, Partridge and (implicitly) the more gullible reader fail to penetrate beyond the surfaces of the stories. Through these stories, Fielding demonstrates the tenuous nature of public character built upon first-person narratives and the uncertainty of predicting how an audience will respond.

Storytellers in these novels often go to great lengths to excuse their past behaviours. Even those characters who appear to condemn their past lives and actions seem to seek to shift some proportion of the blame away from themselves in the act of storytelling. One example of this can be found in Wilson's tale of his history in *Joseph Andrews*. During his story, Wilson openly condemns his past behaviour as a London beau.¹⁸⁷ He recounts several dalliances with women, where he behaves in a less-than-desirable manner, eliciting the comical groans of Adams in response. In one example, Wilson describes a series of events in which he debauches a young lady on the verge of marriage. However, he soon tires of her and encourages her to find company amongst the other mistresses. While considering how best to get rid of her, he is surprised when she absconds, having 'taken with her all she could find, to the Amount of about 200 l.' (Fielding 2008a, 181). In a manner reminiscent of many contemporary prostitute narratives, including notably Charles Walker's *Memoirs of Sally Salisbury* (1723) and Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress* (1734), the lady falls into common prostitution, and 'at last ended her miserable Life in *Newgate*' (Fielding 2008a, 181).

Throughout his tale, Wilson constructs a character for himself as a repentant philosopher and reformed beau, somewhat resembling the character that Wisemore

¹⁸⁷ Martin and Ruthe Battestin have commented that Samuel Richardson (writing in a letter to Mrs Donnellan 22 February 1752) 'was convinced that, in many respects, [that] Wilson's narrative in *Joseph Andrews* was the story of Fielding's own early life. Wilson's brief encounter with the "Rule of Right" club is surely among the most revealing of these autobiographical episode, pointing toward what may well have been Fielding's own early flirtation with the alluring doctrines of deism' (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 154–55). Richardson also identified Tom Jones as being based on Fielding himself, and Sophia and Amelia as representative of Fielding's first wife, Charlotte Craddock (see Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 335). The Battestins have suggested many similarities between Fielding's life, appearance and personality and that of his literary characters (Battestin 1983a, xvii–lxi; Battestin and Battestin 1989, 5–6, 25–27, 289)

initially presents in Fielding's first play, *Love in Several Masques* (1728), which I discussed in Chapter 1.¹⁸⁸ Although Wilson does take his portion of the blame for having debauched the young woman – ‘I had been the first Aggressor, and had done her an Injury for which I could make her no Reparation, by robbing her of the Innocence of her Mind’ – he adds mitigating factors to the end of his tale, pointing to the lady's infidelity while his mistress (which forces him to make a *third* visit to the surgeon for treatment for venereal disease) (Fielding 2008a, 181). Bartolomeo argues that Wilson tries to ‘mitigate his acknowledged faults’ by ‘deflecting attention and blame elsewhere and emphasizing his own victimization’. He ‘shades his own disreputable actions [...] from the harshest interpretive light’ (Bartolomeo 1998, 85). Wilson's justification of his actions is subtly designed to manipulate his audience's (both Adams's and, implicitly, the reader's) response to his tale by encouraging them to empathise with his situation. This again helps to lessen the burden of his responsibility for the lady's ruin. He assures his audience that ‘[y]ou are not more affected with this Part of my Story than myself: I assure you it will never be sufficiently repented of in my own Opinion’ (Fielding 2008a, 180). Such emotional appeals attempt to dissuade the audience (both Adams and the reader) from reading Wilson's tale against the grain, and interpreting Wilson's character in a less forgiving light. Adams' interruptions and reactions to Wilson's tale also seem to encourage the reader to respond sympathetically. In the space of this tale (of under two pages), Adams interrupts the narrative four times, adding his exaggerated sighs and groans, pacing across the rooms and encouraging Wilson to tell the whole tale when he

¹⁸⁸ Like Wisemore, Wilson swears off women completely after his bad experiences. He turns instead to philosophy, falling in with a group of ‘jolly companions’ who ‘were engaged in a Search after Truth’, using only the ‘Rule of Right’ as a guide (Fielding 2008a, 184). Wilson soon realises the mistaken nature of this philosophy and leaves the group. The Battestins have argued that Wilson's ‘club of fallible philosophers’ were based on a combination of the ‘at times contradictory ethical systems of his two closest friends of the 1730s, Thomas Cooke and James Ralph (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 156). Cooke's philosophy of the ‘Rule of Right’ is especially echoed in Wilson's philosophical sect, which encourages man to do away with the prejudices of education, and instead conduct an “Enquiry after Truth,” using reason alone as their guide (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 156).

indicates he will omit parts (see Fielding 2008a, 180–81). Bryan Burns has argued that Adams' reactions are used as a kind of 'moral sounding board', attempting to shape how the reader responds to the (potentially titillating) tale, albeit perhaps in less theatrical a manner (Burns 1985, 131). However, I argue that Adams' ready acceptance of Wilson's reformed character seems more suspect when placed in the larger context of his inability to penetrate beyond the surface of character. The narrator often describes as Adams as having a character of 'perfect Simplicity', 'entirely ignorant of the Ways of this World, as an Infant just entered into it could possibly be' (Fielding 2008a, 8, 19). As a result, he is unable to see 'farther into People than they desire to let him' leaving him susceptible to other character's manipulations and hypocrisies (Fielding 2008a, 8, 19, 125). George Drake adds that Adams suffers with a kind of 'Quixotic blindness', that he 'overlooks things altogether' and believes what people tell him explicitly (Drake 2008, 135). His ready acceptance of Wilson's tale, then, seems to me to be suspicious, inviting us to question his sympathetic reading of the tale. Wilson's exculpatory remarks, I suggest, are constructed to put the reader on their guard, asking us to question the reformed and penitent character he proposes to show to the world.

In *Tom Jones*, Fielding expands upon exculpatory narratives as a method of revealing character through the interpolated tale of Mrs Fitzpatrick.¹⁸⁹ In telling her story

¹⁸⁹ The role of interpolated tales in Fielding's fiction (particularly in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*) has been a long-standing issue for debate amongst scholars. Established criticism tends to see the interpolated tales as unnecessary, 'dull and repetitious' interruptions to the plot (Ehrenpreis 1960, 23–42). Ian Watt complained that they 'break the spell of the imaginary world represented in the novel' (Watt 1960, 285). However, since the 1960s, efforts have been made to justify the interpolated tales by reading the tales thematically (Alter 1968, 108; Mandel 1969, 26–38; Hunter 1975, 151–161, 241–242 n10). Traditional apologists for the interpolated tales point to the fact that interpolated tales were a common feature of eighteenth-century literature. J.P. Hunter suggests that the interpolated tale and other digressive material had a long history 'dating back to early national epics' (Hunter 1975, 151–52). In her *Novel Beginnings* (2006), Patricia Meyer Spacks has similarly argued that interpolated tales were a regular feature of eighteenth-century narratives up to and including the mid-century, most notably in Fielding and Sterne's fiction. After this, however, the frequency of interpolated tale began to decline as novelists gradually moved away from plots of multiplicity towards those of unity (Spacks 2006, 20).

to Sophia, Harriet Fitzpatrick is given the opportunity to edit her past, masking the more morally dubious aspects of her character. She attempts to control Sophia's (and by extension the reader's) response to her tale, subtly reshaping the image of her character that emerges from her narrative. While these changes are designed to shift blame away from her, they often really expose how culpable she is and raise more questions about her character than they solve. At the beginning of her narrative, Mrs Fitzpatrick constructs a character for herself as a victim of deception, mismanagement and a general error of judgement. As Jerome Mandel has argued, Mrs Fitzpatrick repeatedly attempts to pass responsibility for her actions to others during her narrative (Mandel 1969, 31–32). In doing so, she tries to construct a character for herself as the innocent victim, practised upon by a 'Machiavel in the art of loving' and failed by her aunt and society more generally (Fielding 2008b, 507).¹⁹⁰ This is despite her having recognised Fitzpatrick's intentions towards her aunt: 'I confess, I made no doubt but that his designs [to Aunt Western] were strictly honourable, as the phrase is; that is, to rob a lady of her fortune by way of marriage' (Fielding 2008b, 507). She seems perfectly able here to interpret Fitzpatrick's motives for courting her aunt. Her shock, then, only a few pages later when she intercepts a letter from Mr Fitzpatrick's tailor clearly stating that Fitzpatrick had married her '*on account of her ready money*' seems all the more dubious and raises questions about her ability to judge character (Fielding 2008b, 511). Instead of admitting her error of judgement, however, she redirects blame and responsibility for her actions onto Aunt Western and the women of Bath more generally:

for, had it not been under the colour of paying his addresses to her [Aunt Western], Mr Fitzpatrick would never have found sufficient opportunities to have engaged my heart, which, in other circumstances, I still flatter myself would not have been an easy conquest to such a

¹⁹⁰ Unlike Fielding's earlier Machiavellian character, Jonathan Wild, Mr Fitzpatrick seems more capable of deceiving women and controlling their actions. Wild, in comparison, is repeatedly shown to be unable to control his women, and is repeatedly cuckolded and stolen from by Laetitia and Miss Snap and is even eventually outwitted by the innocent and undesigning Mrs Heartfree.

person. Indeed, I believe I should not have erred so grossly in my choice *if I had relied on my own judgement; but I trusted totally to the opinion of others*, and very foolishly took the merit of a man for granted, whom I saw so universally well received by the women (Fielding 2008b, 509 my emphasis)

Here she conveniently overlooks Beau Nash's warning to her only half a page earlier, when he advises her to "never suffer this fellow to be particular with you again," as he fears (rightly) that it will "prove your ruin" (Fielding 2008b, 509). She downplays the extent to which she is driven by 'inclination' as she argues she 'could not be persuaded that women of quality would condescend to familiarity with such a person as [Nash] described' (Fielding 2008b, 509). She attempts to shift the blame from herself, recasting herself as the victim. If she can present herself as just one of the deceived, she lessens 'the onus of her own responsibility and guards against the charge of imprudence' (Mandel 1969, 31). As such, her character is less subject to speculation, being just one of the many that were deceived by Mr Fitzpatrick's affectation of gentility.

In light of the rest of her story, however, Mrs Fitzpatrick's self-excusing remarks take on new significance for the interpretation of her character. There are several instances during her narrative where she glosses over significant elements of her tale under the guise of not boring or tiring her audience (see Fielding 2008b, 509, 512, 523, 524). Perhaps the most significant of these happens when relating the story of her release from Mr Fitzpatrick's house.¹⁹¹ Having been left locked in her room by Mr Fitzpatrick, she argues:

I – at a time when I began to give way to the utmost despair – everything would be excusable at such a time – at that very time I received – But it would take up an hour to tell you all particulars – In one word, then (for I will not tire you with circumstances), gold, the common key to all padlocks, opened my door, and set me at liberty' (Fielding 2008b, 524).

¹⁹¹ While she gives quite a lot of detail about Mr Fitzpatrick's courtship of both herself and her aunt, Mrs Fitzpatrick omits the details of her elopement. Instead she invites Sophia to imagine the details for herself of her aunt's reaction, again drawing focus away from her decisions in the act of the elopement (Fielding 2008b, 509).

Significantly, Mrs Fitzpatrick does not divulge whose money has procured her release. Stephen Dobranski has noted that the dashes in her speech draws the reader's attention, 'clearly signifying that information is being withheld' but leaving the reader to imagine what this information might be (Dobranski 2010, 639). Her omissions seem to invite the reader to fill in the gaps, supplying explanations for the information that Mrs Fitzpatrick omits.¹⁹²

However, the use of dashes here, when considered in the wider context of eighteenth-century typography, appears to me to be another textual indication of the untrustworthiness of her narration. Janice Barchas notes that dashes were a common feature of eighteenth-century typography and were often used to mark 'pauses, rhetorical transitions, approximate syntax, and moments of aposiopesis – the intentional refusals to complete an idea, name or phrase' (Barchas 2003, 158).¹⁹³ Adopted from early journals, dashes or asterisks were often used to suggest 'easily decodable' but otherwise 'un-nameable' persons, as can be seen in the title for the print *The Late P--m-r M-n----r* (1743) (Figure 3) (Flint 2011, 124). In *Spectator* No. 568 (16 July 1714), Addison similarly uses asterisks and dashes to 'disguise' names and institutions (Lady Q-p-t-s, B-y's, T-t's, Ch-rch, P-dd-ng) leading one elderly gentleman to complain: 'Asterisks, says he, do you call them? They are all of them Stars. He might as well have put Garters to 'em. [...] Our Clergy are very much beholden to him (Addison and Steele 1735, 8:44).

¹⁹² Dobranski also argues that the narrator frequently draws attention to the fact that he is omitting parts of his narrative (Dobranski 2010, 633–34). Omissions also allow the narrator to playfully and implicitly invite the reader's imagination during more illicit episodes in a manner reminiscent of *The Female Husband*, as in the case of Tom's liaison with Mrs Waters: '[h]ere the Graces think proper to end their description, and here we think proper to end the chapter' (Fielding 2008b, 444).

¹⁹³ Christopher Flint notes that eighteenth-century authors often experimented with various typographical effects to 'exploit the expressive function of print'. Swift's asterisks and glosses in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), Richardson's use of italics, upside down text, bullets, florets and indices in *Clarissa* (1748) and Maria Edgeworth's satiric footnotes in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) all show author's willingness to experiment with the form of their texts (Flint 2011, 8). Fielding's plays and novels also demonstrate a playfulness with form, which is perhaps most evident in his use of play scripts and asterisks in *Jonathan Wild* (1743).

While Addison uses these playfully in *The Spectator*, for Swift, dashes were a symptom of the degraded state of modern writing: ‘In modern Wit all printed Trash, is/ Set off with num’rous *Breaks* – and *Dashes* –’ (Swift 2008b, 537). Samuel Johnson uses this as one of two examples of dashes in his *Dictionary* (1755), confirming ‘the long-standing rhetorical prejudice against the dash in mid-eighteenth-century print culture’. Dashes were connected by to ‘ephemeral’ forms of writing, particularly the amatory fiction of Behn, Manley and Haywood (Barchas 2003, 165-166).¹⁹⁴ In *The British Recluse* (1722), Haywood uses varying lengths of dashes a staggering 403 times in a 134-page novel to denote moments of passion, tension or difficulty for the narrator:

– Oh! If I may Credit those endearing Lines, I have all that Fate can give! – If, did I say? I must – I will – Lysander is all Honour, and he a thousand Times has sworn himself my everlasting Votary – How have I wrong’d you then? – Divinest of your Sex! – But you must pardon me – I love – am absent – am unworthy – (Haywood 1722, 64)¹⁹⁵

Dashes here create a sense of breathlessness as Cleomira skips headily from one expression to the next. Similarly, Barchas notes that Sarah Fielding also used dashes in her *David Simple* (1744) to create ‘auditory realism’ and ‘emphasize the important role of non-verbal communication’ (Barchas 2003, 160). However, when Henry Fielding edited the second edition of the novel, he systematically removed 90% of Sarah’s dashes (727 out of 808 instances) (Barchas 2003, 159 Table). In his Preface to the novel, Henry explicitly links Sarah’s use of the dash to her ‘Want of Habit in Writing’, arguing that ‘no Man of learning would think [it] worth his Censure in a Romance; nor any Gentleman, in the Writing of a young Woman’ (Fielding 1744, vii). In doing so, Henry is

¹⁹⁴ Despite this condemnation of the dash, both Richardson uses dashes in *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1748) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) to mark moments of high emotion and tension. In *Tristram Shandy* (1759) uses dashes and other textual devices to emulate natural speech, disrupt the reader and to cultivate proactive reading practices (Moss 1981, 179 n1; Flint 2011, 149).

¹⁹⁵ 28 pages of the novel contain 1-10 dashes, 7 have 10-20 dashes, and 2 contained over 20 dashes. One letter alone from Cleomira to Lysander contains thirty dashes (see Haywood 1722, 72-74).

measuring ‘his sister’s text against decidedly masculine standards of “correctness” and finds it wanting (Barchas 2003, 155).

Having taken such pains to edit out Sarah’s dashes in *David Simple*, why then would Henry include them in *Tom Jones*, published just five years later? It seems to me that he is deliberately evoking the more ‘feminine’ style of writing found in amatory novels to further suggest the dubious nature of Mrs Fitzpatrick’s narrative.¹⁹⁶ Like Cleomira, Mrs Fitzpatrick intends her pauses to be read by Sophia (and the reader) as a symptom of overwhelming emotion (her ‘utmost despair –’), which prevents her from describing completely the ‘distressing’ circumstances of her escape from confinement (Fielding 2008b, 524). These appeals ask the sympathetic reader to respond appropriately at the key moments when her narrative is open to alternative and more sceptical readings than those she is offering. Clearly unconvinced of the authenticity of such appeals, Fielding uses the dash as a visual indicator of the gaps which the astute reader must attempt to decipher.

Although dashes help to signal the omissions in Mrs Fitzpatrick’s account, Dobranski argues that our ability to infer what is missing is limited, as ‘the narrative requires particular motives that close the gaps in the speech’ (Dobranski 2010, 639). While Sophia and the reader cannot know the exact nature of Mrs Fitzpatrick’s release, I suggest that Mrs Fitzpatrick’s attempt to gloss over it and the presence of the gold raises suspicion about its nature. These suspicions are later confirmed by the narrator at the end of the next chapter when the reader learns of the Irish peer’s involvement in obtaining her release: ‘no sooner, therefore, did he hear of her confinement than he earnestly applied himself to procure her liberty, which he presently effected [...] by corrupting the governor’ (Fielding 2008b, 529). The nature of her release suggests that a more

¹⁹⁶ Jane Austen also uses dashes to criticise Mrs Elton’s ‘loose, conversational manner’ and ‘stilted emotionalism’ in *Emma* (1815) (Moss 1981,196; Austen 2008, 278-281)

mercenary deal had been struck between the two men *for* Mrs Fitzpatrick. The narrator also lays several hints about the ‘intimate’ nature of the relationship between Mrs Fitzpatrick and her ‘very particular friend’, adding to the moral dubiousness of their relationship (Fielding 2008b, 529). By omitting the peer from her story then, Mrs Fitzpatrick attempts to silence the more questionable parts of her story and control the image of her character that emerges:

as a human being, she avoids or hides any occasion which might draw public censure to her. But as a character manipulated by Fielding, she reveals it. Although she resolves “never to give the least room for censure” both the reader and Sophia discover that she is culpable (Mandel 1969, 32)

Her revisions become more revealing as the novel progresses, hinting at the hidden parts of her private character. The extent to which she tries to control Sophia’s response demonstrates that she is conscious of the precariousness of her social position and character. Despite this awareness, she unwittingly reveals her private character to the astute reader.

However, it is not only deceptive characters that edit their stories in *Tom Jones*. Even Tom is guilty of being economical with the truth. When he relates the tale of his eviction from Paradise Hall to Partridge, the narrator comments that Tom ‘forg[ot] only a circumstance or two, namely, everything which passed on that day in which he had fought with Thwackum’ (Fielding 2008b, 364). The narrator goes on to make some excuses for the fairly substantial holes in Tom’s story and its failure to explain why Allworthy dismissed him:

[Partridge] could not help observing that there must be surely something more invented by his enemies, and told Mr Allworthy against him, or so good a man would never have dismissed one he had loved so tenderly [...] for [Tom’s] actions were not now placed in those injurious lights in which they had been misrepresented to Allworthy (Fielding 2008b, 364)

Although this in part accounts for Tom’s inability to fully explain Allworthy’s reasons for throwing him out, it also calmly overlooks Tom’s own revisions to this story: his missing tumble with Molly and the resulting fight with Thwackum (see V.xi) which adds

weight to Blifil's accumulated arguments against him (see VI, ix). This would seem to align Tom with Wilson and Mrs Fitzpatrick, whose stories are riddled with omissions and exculpatory remarks. The narrator delves momentarily into Tom's motives and tries to excuse his actions:

Not that Jones desired to conceal or disguise the truth [...] for let a man be never so honest, the account of his own conduct will, in spite of himself, be so very favourable that his vices will become purified through his lips [...]. For though the facts themselves may appear, yet so different will be the motives, circumstances, and consequences, when a man tells his own story, and when his enemy tells it, that we scarce can recognize the facts to be one and the same (Fielding 2008b, 364–65)

What is lacking in the first-person accounts of Tom and other characters is the 'distance required for reasonable evaluation' (Bartolomeo 1998, 85). Unable to detach themselves from their stories, first-person narrators are bound to downplay their role and responsibilities in their misfortunes, and try to construct their narratives to elicit empathy from their audience. As Bartolomeo points out, such first-person narratives resemble, for Fielding, the 'self-serving casuistry' of Richardson's *Pamela* (and I might add Cibber's *Apology*) and so are to be regarded with suspicion (Bartolomeo 1998, 85). Fielding had already mocked this at length in his *Shamela* and he similarly treats it with a deal of mistrust in *Tom Jones*. By telling his own tale, then, Tom risks being grouped with other first-person narrators, who use their stories to revise their public character. 'In spite of himself', Tom 'purifies' his tale, perhaps from embarrassment at his past actions, leaving Partridge understandably confused about Allworthy's motives for dismissing him.

I argue, however, that Fielding is careful to construct Tom's tale in such a way that it is distanced from Wilson's and Mrs Fitzpatrick's. The first important distinction is that it is the narrator who tries to excuse Tom's revisions, rather than Tom himself. Other than the overlooked events, Tom seems to make no move in his narrative to excuse his behaviour, although he does admit when prompted by Partridge that he believes (rightly) that some 'villainous arts had been made use of to destroy him' (Fielding 2008b, 364).

Of course, the reader has benefitted from seeing the events which Tom does not disclose, a benefit which is not replicated in Mrs Fitzpatrick's or in Wilson's stories, and which makes his tale easier to judge.

Fielding also constructs this passage to suggest that Tom's omissions are a natural part of his private character as a flawed yet essentially good-natured individual. Fielding presents Tom's vices, like Adams' faults in the earlier novel, as emanating from his good nature, adding in only Tom's natural lust.¹⁹⁷ In his 'Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men' (1743), Fielding spends some time distinguishing 'Good-Nature' from 'Good-Humour' and other forms of affected behaviour.¹⁹⁸ He explains that 'Good-Nature is that benevolent and amiable Temper of Mind which disposes us to feel the Misfortunes, and enjoy the Happiness of others' (Fielding 1972, 158).¹⁹⁹ He distinguishes this from 'Good-Humour' which he argues is 'nothing more than the Triumph of the Mind, when reflecting on its own Happiness, and that perhaps from having compared it with the inferior Happiness of others' (Fielding 1972, 158). As we have already seen, good nature is a quality often possessed by many of Fielding's characters in his plays and novels, with Shamela, Jonathan Wild and Mary Hamilton being notable exceptions.²⁰⁰ Fielding recommends that good nature should be active (a

¹⁹⁷ Gerald J. Butler argues in his 'Fielding's Disruptive Heterosexuality' (2008) that Fielding links good nature as in *Tom Jones* to the relationship between a child's mother and father. He suggests that Bridget prefers Tom over Blifil in the novel because of the love she bears for Summer (whose name conjures images of warmth), while the 'coldness' of Captain Blifil influences her relationship with her legitimate son (Butler 2008, 73–74). These attitudes, in turn, rub off on the children, influencing their future characters.

¹⁹⁸ Fielding also discusses good nature in his *Champion* essay for 27 March 1740. He suggests good nature received a mixed reception from his contemporaries, with some holding it 'in the most Sacred Esteem' and others dismissing it as a 'Mark of Folly' (Fielding 2003a, 252).

¹⁹⁹ In *Champion* (27 March 1740), Fielding is careful to distinguish the willingness to relieve others from distress with the 'weakness' that 'laments the punishment of Villany': 'for as this amiable Quality respects the whole, so it must give up the Particular, to the Good of the General' (Fielding 2003a, 253).

²⁰⁰ Characters are described as 'good natured'/'good-natured' in *Joseph Andrews* on pages 19, 48, 52, 73, 87, 153, 164, 182, 202, 240 and 255; and in *Tom Jones* on pages 34, 38*, 42, 52*, 88*, 123, 143, 144, 147, 161, 264, 266, 272, 297, 311*, 325, 360, 363, 374, 382, 405, 428, 435*, 441, 491, 512, 601, 660, 742, 766, 772, 778, 795, 825, 837* and 853 (pages marked with *

quality notably lacked by Heartfree in *Jonathan Wild*) and should be united with perception (which Wisemore in *Love in Several Masques* only achieves in the final scenes of the play). Fielding even constructs his ideal reader as a good natured and perceptive individual, and he frequently makes appeals to this during the novels (see Fielding 2008a, 8, 9, 32, 132, 284; Fielding 2008b, xxv, 157, 245, 252, 269).²⁰¹

Fielding also uses good nature to excuse his characters' other faults and flaws.²⁰²

For example, both the postilion and Betty the chambermaid in *Joseph Andrews* demonstrate their good nature and charitable feeling (particularly in contrast to the other characters' want of it) to Joseph when he is robbed, beaten and left by the roadside:

Poor *Joseph*, [...] must have perished, unless the Postillion [sic], (a Lad who hath been since transported for robbing a Hen-roost) had voluntarily stript [sic] off a great Coat, his only Garment, at the same time swearing a great Oath, (for which he was rebuked by the

denote where good nature is used ironically or in which later events reveal the 'good nature' of an individual to be serving self-interest).

²⁰¹ Recent criticism has suggested that Fielding anticipates several different types of readers, appealing to the 'virtuous', 'sagacious', 'judicious', 'discerning', 'classical' and 'good natured' reader (for examples see Fielding 2008b, 40, 41, 102, 103, 153, 161; also see Varey 1986, 93; Černý 1992, 141–43; Hudson 1993, 79–84; Mace 1996, 77–104; Power 2015, 176). Of course, any one reader might possess several or none of these qualities. Iser argues that Fielding's appeals to the reader 'aim at arousing a sense of discernment' and 'stimulat[ing] a process of learning' whereby we become more aware of our judgements and capacity to judge (Iser 1974, 31). Černý and Power, however, suggest that these appeals are often used ironically, as in examples of Squire Western and Aunt Western's use of their 'sagacity', and end up muddying our confidence in our ability to judge (Černý 1992, 142–43; Power 2015, 172–94). Nicholas Hudson, however, argues that Fielding uses multiple layers of irony so that we can never simply read his appeals in reverse (Hudson 1993, 82). Nevertheless, Hudson adds that the 'epithet "sagacious reader" never *entirely* loses its teasing intonation. Fielding's irony, it should be noted, always counts on our capacity to look past what is said to some unstated meaning' (Hudson 1993, 83). In agreement with Hudson, I would advise caution against reading all of Fielding's appeals to the reader as ironic or the reverse of what they appear. Like his wider ideas of public character, we should not be too quick to make hasty or blanket judgements about these appeals to the reader.

²⁰² Several contemporary readers obviously did not approve of Fielding's imperfect protagonists. In *The Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1749), one reviewer complained that the world was 'run a mad after that fool parson *Adams*, and that rake *Tom Jones*' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 178). Samuel Richardson objected to Fielding's attempts to 'whiten a vicious character, and to make Morality bend to his Practices' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 174). Other readers, such as Elizabeth Carter, felt obliged to defend Fielding's good but flawed heroes: 'I am sorry to find you so outrageous about poor *Tom Jones*; he is not doubt an imperfect, but not a detestable character, with all that honesty, good nature [sic], and generosity of temper. [...] Fielding's book is the most natural representation of what passes in the world, and of the bizarreries which arise from the mixture of good and bad, which makes up the composition of most folks' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 169)

Passengers) ‘that he would rather ride in his Shirt all his Life, than suffer a Fellow-Creature to lie in so miserable a Condition’ (Fielding 2008a, 46)

Despite later being transported for stealing, the postilion displays more charity than the other members of the carriage, who seem more than happy to abandon Joseph to his fate. Similarly, the narrator later describes Betty as possessing ‘Good-nature, Generosity and Compassion’ and also other ‘warm Ingredients’ which ‘were by no means able to endure the ticklish Situation of a Chamber-maid at an Inn, who is daily liable to the Solicitations of Lovers’ (Fielding 2008a, 73). Like Tom, her ‘warm’ nature renders her imperfect, even while her charitable actions make her one of the more moral individuals of the novel.

In his *Rambler* 4 (31 March 1750), Samuel Johnson argued that readers were more likely to relate to flawed characters, rather than the characters of romances, who were presented as acting in a manner ‘so remote from all that passes among men, that the reader was in very little danger of making any applications to himself’ (Johnson 1968, 11). Johnson suggests that when a character ‘acts in such scenes of the universal drama, as may be the lot of any other man; young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention, and hope, by observing his behaviour and success to regulate their own practices’ (Johnson 1968, 11). Similarly, Martin Battestin has argued in his study of *Joseph Andrews* that such examples encourage emulation by showing that imperfect goodness is much ‘more obtainable than the absolute goodness of Christ’ and ‘such lifeless paragons as Squire Allworthy, Dr Harrison and Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison’ (Battestin 1959, 37).²⁰³ By presenting Tom and other characters as good but

²⁰³ Other contemporary commentators were less convinced of Fielding’s characters as models for emulation. In *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), Richardson later questioned writers’ fondness for making their heroes ‘vicious, if not profligate, characters’ – probably with some of Fielding’s heroes (Wild and Jones especially) in mind (Richardson 1753, 7:303). In contrast, Richardson modelled his eponymous hero in *Grandison* (as well, arguably, as his earlier heroines Pamela and Clarissa) on Archbishop Tillotson’s doctrine of perfectibility. Richardson quotes Tillotson at length in his concluding note from the editor in *Grandison*, suggesting that “[n]o man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and tho’ he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to

flawed, Fielding offers them as a figures for emulation that are more feasibly obtainable for the average reader.

Storytelling in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* help to reveal character. As critics have noted, the character revealed is not necessarily the character that the story-teller intends to present: changes, omissions and exculpatory remarks all attempt to eschew and influence the reception of character. Ultimately, it is left up to the reader to interpret whether the character that is revealed is supported by the story they are being told. By presenting different types of constructed storytelling, Fielding makes it difficult to make a blanket judgement about the character of storytellers in his novels. His judgement of characters (particularly in *Tom Jones*) remains largely implicit, requiring the reader to form their own opinions about character. Readers must judge for themselves the motives behind a narrator's exclusions: whether these are exculpatory or if they emanate from a lack of critical distance from the tale itself. However, this process places a lot of emphasis on the reader's discernment and leaves considerable potential for error, as I discuss in detail below. While storytelling can help to reveal the characters of individual persons, I suggest that it also has a wider effect on the presentation of public character in these novels. I argue that the image of public character which emerges from these instances of storytelling is highly unstable. It can be easily manipulated by the skilful narrator and requires close attention by the reader to uncover. However, it can also be misread or misinterpreted by other characters and less wary readers. Public character in these stories does not seem to be a stable entity, but rather is the result of a process of

learn more, than by one less perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is sure to come short of, is like to shoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach” (Richardson 1753, 7:304). Similarly, in a letter to William Shenstone, Lady Henrietta Luxborough argued that ‘If Mr. Fielding and Mr. Hogarth could abate the vanity of the world by shewing its faults so plainly, they would do more than the greatest divines have yet been capable of: But human nature will still be the same, and would, I am afraid, furnish them, if they lived till the world ended, with such imperfect objects to represent’ (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 160).

silent negotiation between the storytellers and their listeners/readers. It is a temporary state, awaiting further information to support either the storyteller's claims or the reader's theories about individuals' characters.

Speculating on Character: Gossip and Idle Talk

Storytelling is not the only method of narrative-making which reveals character in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. For individuals in these novels, working out another's character is rarely a solitary activity. Rather, gossip and idle talk offer them an opportunity to exchange information and share theories about others. They help to create a provisional public character for an individual based on speculative information and demonstrate their own preoccupations and abilities as readers of character. This temporary character functions as truth until further information is revealed. While the character it produces might be transient, gossip can also compel an individual into action, advancing the plot, and forcing individuals into new situations and opportunities amongst strangers. This in turn provides further opportunities for character to be uncovered as people circulate and interact with others.

Like storytelling, the role of gossip in these novels has attracted little critical attention: only Jack Shear's recent article 'The Reader's Idle Talk' (2008) focuses in any detail on the effect of gossip in *Tom Jones*. To my knowledge, gossip's influence in *Joseph Andrews* has yet to be examined. In light of this, Patricia Meyer Spacks's (1985) and Bernard Capp's (2004) respective studies on the role of gossip in the eighteenth century provide a useful guide for understanding the significance of gossip to communities, particularly those outside of London. As Defoe suggests in the opening of his *A Journal for the Plague Year* (1722), in the period before printed news became accessible, gossip and oral reports were the main source of news for most people:

[w]e had no such thing as printed News Papers in those Days, to spread Rumours and Reports of Things; [...] But such things as these were gather'd from the

Letters of Merchants, and others, who corresponded abroad, and from them was handed about by Word of Mouth only; so that things did not spread instantly over the whole Nation, as they do now (Defoe 2010, 3)

For the most part, idle talk allows people (and characters) to harmlessly exchange important information about others, testing ‘the boundaries of what can be said, what can be accepted as truth and what constitutes public knowledge’ (Shear 2008, 23). Capp argues that during the eighteenth century, gossip was used in communities to exchange of news that satisfied natural curiosity and cemented social bonds (Capp 2004, 273).²⁰⁴ Similarly, Spacks also suggests that idle talk allowed individuals to test out their opinions and theories about others, sharing information and scrutinizing potential motives behind actions and behaviours with others (Spacks 1985, 5). Gossip constitutes a kind of public knowledge about character: a collection of shared information and the mutual interpretation of evidence that helps to determine the public reputation of an individual amongst their peers. As such, it ‘manufactures a version of the event [or, I would add, character] that stands as *truth*, until further notice’ (Shear 2008, 24). The image of public character which emerges from this type of gossip then is at best provisional: awaiting further information to confirm or challenge its assumptions. Of course, Fielding had previously drawn upon gossip in his presentation of the caricatures of Walpole and other great men in his Haymarket plays, which I discussed in Chapter 2. I argue that Fielding builds upon the theme gossip in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, giving it a central role in revealing the characters of both the subjects of gossip and the gossipers themselves. It offers a discursive space where character is speculated about, picked apart and reconstituted by both other characters and the reader.

²⁰⁴ Capp has argued that the term ‘gossip’ traditionally referred to a godparent of either sex. However, it gradually took on predominantly negative, female connotations (Capp 2004, 7). Later, ‘gossip’ came to denote any close female friend. A ‘gossip network’ was a circle of close female friends, which women depended on for the smooth running of the household and for advice, assistance, support and news (Capp 2004, 51). In this sense, gossip appears to be gendered, taking on specifically female qualities. Considering this, it is interesting to note how often men in Fielding’s novel engage in gossip, particularly gossip of a malicious kind.

In *Joseph Andrews*, gossip is often presented as a malicious or mischievous activity from which gossipers derive pleasure or hope to bolster their own reputations amongst their peers. Fielding presents several characters who seem to derive pleasure from circulating dreadful or injurious gossip about others, often with little or no concern for the subject's reputation, character or well-being. In Book III.vii, for example, the narrator describes the Roasting Squire, who employs a gang of 'Curs' to 'hunt out' ridiculous traits in others 'especially in the Gravest and best of Characters' and expose them to public view for the entertainment of the squire: 'if they failed in their Search, they were to turn even Virtue and Wisdom themselves into Ridicule for the Diversion of their Master and Feeder' (Fielding 2008a, 212). As I discussed in Chapter 3, the Earl of Shaftesbury recommended ridicule as method of testing out another's character, the credibility of their claims and the gravity of their countenance (Shaftesbury 1999, 9). While Fielding uses ridicule throughout his works to test the follies of his characters and readers, he evidently disapproves of the kind of wanton cruelty shown here by the 'curs'. Although their ridicule does not always take the form of gossip (they enact a series of physical 'jokes' against Adams in the ensuing scene, including lacing his drink with gin and dunking him into a vat of water), it is implied in their destruction of other people's reputations. This instance reveals the 'master' to be a cruel and improper host to Adams (the reader, of course, has already been made aware of this through the narrator's commentary). This then justifies Adams' response, which is to pull the Squire into the water with him, 'exact[ing] a more severe Revenge' upon the Squire than Adams intended: '[f]or as [the Squire] did not use sufficient care to dry himself in time, he caught a Cold [...] that had like to have cost him his Life' (Fielding 2008a, 218).

For the beaux of *Joseph Andrews*, gossip offers an opportunity to bolster their public reputations amongst their peers. Both Wilson and Beau Didapper want to have reputations for intriguing with young women (even if they do not have any actual sexual

encounters with these women). This is because reputation (specifically a sexually deviant one) is central to the public presentation of their characters. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), David Hume argued that it was not uncommon for men to falsify gossip in this way for fear ‘of passing for good-natured’ and lacking in understanding: ‘[men] often boast of more debauches than they have been really engaged in, to give themselves airs of fire and spirit’ (D. Hume 1978, 606). For Wilson and Didapper, however, this falsified gossip has the opposite effect, exposing their lack of or inability to fulfil their desires, suggesting a more effeminate character for both men. As we have already seen, Mr Wilson forges intrigues with and letters from fashionable women in order to gain himself a reputation amongst his fellow London beaux. He risks destroying the women’s public characters without having any intimate relations with them: they were ‘all Vestal Virgins for any thing [sic] which I knew to the contrary’ (Fielding 2008a, 176–78). Later the gossip backfires on him, when he is eventually caught out in a lie about a young woman’s character and is shunned from the group (Fielding 2008a, 178). Similarly, Beau Didapper tries to insinuate an intrigue with Slipslop at the end of the novel when he mistakenly steals into her room rather than Fanny’s.²⁰⁵ The next morning, the narrator comments that ‘far from being ashamed of his Amour’, Didapper ‘rather endeavoured to insinuate that more than was really true had past between him and fair *Slipslop*’ (Fielding 2008a, 295). His concern is squarely fixed on establishing a reputation for himself, even if that reputation is in connection with the unappealing and

²⁰⁵ This chapter reads like a Restoration comedy, complete with a series of mistaken identities, reversals and gender confusion. After Didapper’s first error, described above, Adams adds to the confusion by misidentifying Slipslop’s ‘rough beard’ as belonging to the ravisher and Didapper’s ‘soft skin’ to belong to the victim, rather than the other way around (Fielding 2008a, 291). Adams then completes the comedy of errors by accidentally navigating his way into Fanny’s room rather than his own. Robert Alter argues that some of Didapper’s actions also ‘read like comic stage directions translated into the idiom of the novel’, suggesting that Fielding was ‘appl[ying] in new ways [the] techniques he had learned in his years of writing for the theatre’ (Alter 1968, 50–51).

(suggestively) bearded Slipslop. Indeed, the narrator confirms this suspicion in his opening character sketch of Didapper:

[n]o Hater of Women; for he always dangled after them; yet so little subject to Lust, that he had, among those who knew him best, the Character of great Moderation in his Pleasures (Fielding 2008a, 274)

Jill Campbell argues that like Wilson and the beaus and castrati of Fielding's earlier plays, Didapper's sexuality appears to be 'purely mimetic [...] concentrat[ing] upon display and "reputation"' (Campbell 1995, 74).²⁰⁶ His inability to fulfil his desire with Fanny and his gossip about his 'conquest' of Slipslop confirm the reader's suspicions that he poses little threat to anyone's reputation but his own. Gossip then helps to indirectly reveal both Wilson and Didapper's characters when we see them failing to live up to the reputations they would create for themselves. They are exposed as ineffectual or even unwilling to earn that reputation, and instead prefer to attempt to forge such characters for themselves.

Although much of the gossip in *Joseph Andrews* is maliciously motivated, some has the inadvertent effect of revealing the character of Fielding's good-but-flawed character, Adams, through his reaction to the gossip. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator describes an incident in which Adams' son Jacky is reported by an onlooker to have drowned, only for the news to be proved inaccurate moments later:

The Person who brought the News of his Misfortune, had been a little too eager, as People sometimes are, from I believe no very good Principle, to relate ill News; and seeing him fall into the River, instead of running to his Assistance, directly ran to acquaint his Father of a Fate which he had concluded to be inevitable, but whence the Child was relieved by the same poor Pedlar who had relieved his Father before (Fielding 2008a, 271)

'Eager' to present his gossip to Adams and the community (perhaps in the hope of some later financial reparation or simply for the pleasure of being at the centre of a juicy

²⁰⁶ Furthermore, in their notes on the text, Douglas Brooks-Davies and Thomas Keymer suggest that among the connotations of Didapper's name are 'pertness ("dapper"), amphibiousness (from a bird that both flies and swims), and more specifically (from its habit of diving to the bottom) sodomy as well as ingratiating' (Fielding 2008a, 402 n274).

tragedy), the witness fails to aid the drowning boy. This failure to act comes close to causing Jacky's death until the good-natured Pedlar intervenes to save the boy's life. The narrator uses this instance comically to expose Adams' hypocrisy when his actions fail to live up to his words. Having counselled Joseph only moments before against giving into despair over the discovery that Fanny might actually be his sister, Adams falls into a fit of tears and lamentations at the news of the death of his favourite child.²⁰⁷ Even Joseph's patience with Adams here seems to run out, as he cheekily reminds Adams that it is "easier to give Advice than take it" (Fielding 2008a, 272). This mistake is quickly resolved by the narrator, when the bedraggled Jacky stumbles into the room only moments later, to the great joy of Adams. Wilner has argued that in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding is primarily concerned with exposing hypocrisy by showing the differences between people's words (their protestations) and their deeds (the actions they perform) (Wilner 1988, 186).²⁰⁸ The difference between Adams' words and his actions above would seem to align him with the other hypocritical individuals of the novel. However,

²⁰⁷ In an earlier incident in the novel, Adams counsels Joseph at some length to resist giving into grief when Fanny is abducted by the Roasting Squire (Fielding 2008a, 203–38). He argues that 'it is the Business of a Man and a Christian to summon Reason as quickly as he can to his Aid; and she will presently teach him Patience and Submission' (Fielding 2008a, 230). It is little wonder, then, that Joseph responds so pertly to Adams when the latter recovers from his outpouring of grief, following the return of Jacky.

²⁰⁸ Hypocrisy in *Joseph Andrews* often takes the form of misapplied religious principles and the failure to act charitably: a concern which Fielding had previously examined in his *Shamela* (1741). Several characters in *Joseph Andrews* deliberately misinterpret charity – which Adams defines as "a generous Disposition to relieve the Distressed" – in order to justify their own failure to provide it to the needy (Fielding 2008a, 239, see also 48–49 and 141–47). As Peter Pounce suggests "it is, as you say, a Disposition – and does not so much consist in the Act as in the Disposition to do it" (Fielding 2008a, 239). One such example can be found in the reactions of the coach passengers to Joseph when he is robbed and left naked and bloody by the side of the road (see Fielding 2008a, 44–49). They are initially hesitant to help Joseph, with one prudish lady exclaiming "[a] naked Man! Dear coachman, drive on and leave him" (Fielding 2008a, 45). They are only 'moved' to help him when the lawyer reminds them that if Joseph should die "they might be called to some account for his Murther [sic]" (Fielding 2008a, 45). Only the postilion shows any measure of charity, offering Joseph his coat so that he can ride modestly in the carriage. The prudish lady is later revealed to be a hypocrite when she is stripped by robbers of a small bottle of alcohol, which the highwayman declares contains some of 'the best *Nantes* he had ever tasted', having previously declared that she "never tasted any such thing" (Fielding 2008a, 47). Similarly, post-robbery, the lawyer is revealed to have a pair of pistols in the coach, which he 'informed the Company, that if it had been Day-light, [...] he would not have submitted to the Robbery' (Fielding 2008a, 47).

Wilner suggests that Adams ‘is an exceptional character’ because his ‘actions are *better* than his professed sentiments’ (Wilner 1988, 186). Allan Wendt has similarly pointed out that the ‘comedy of [Adams’] characterization rests largely in the disparity between his precepts and practice’: ‘when his hands are not tied’, as they are when Fanny is abducted by the Roasting Squire, Adams ‘always wades in with his fists’ (Wendt 1957, 309).²⁰⁹ Adams’ concern and love for his son outweigh the principles of his religion in a moment of unrestricted emotion. We might compare this to Heartfree’s passivity in the face of threats in *Jonathan Wild*. Wendt notes that ‘Heartfree is always consistent: his practice always follows the precept of passivity’, even when this passivity costs him his livelihood, freedom and almost his life (Wendt 1957, 309). In contrast, Adams’ ability to abandon his precepts and defend himself at key moments makes him far more accessible for the reader. In comparison to Heartfree and Fielding’s later ‘lifeless paragons’, Squire Allworthy and Dr Harrison, Adams appears more human to Joseph and the reader for his moment of hypocritical weakness. Gossip exposes this weakness to other characters and the reader. In contrast to the other examples above, it makes him paradoxically appear to be a better, more moral character: capable of true, unrestricted feeling.

In contrast, gossip in *Tom Jones* is often more speculative in tone (although malicious examples do still occur), allowing characters to test out their theories about one another. Partridge regularly engages in this kind of idle talk at the various inns in which he and Tom stay on their way to London. As they travel, Partridge gossips with a variety of characters, sharing his theory about Tom’s origins. Having heard and rejected Tom’s heavily edited account of his fight with Allworthy, Partridge quickly constructs an

²⁰⁹ Wendt compares this behaviour to Heartfree in *Jonathan Wild*, who has often been thought of as an early attempt at an Adams-like character. In contrast to Adams, Wendt notes that ‘Heartfree is always consistent: his practice always follows the precept of passivity’, even when this passivity costs him his livelihood, freedom and almost his life (Wendt 1957, 309). It is Adams’ ability to abandon his precepts and defend himself that makes him far more accessible for the reader. Fielding always appears to be dissatisfied with smug virtue that is unwilling to defend itself: a fault which he criticised Pamela Andrews for in both *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*.

alternative narrative which suits his purposes and views.²¹⁰ Partridge bases his image of Tom's character on public gossip he has received from his contacts in Somerset. This gossip paints Tom as having 'the wildest character' prone to rash and unreasoned actions (Fielding 2008b, 370). Such a character would seem to confirm Partridge's theory that Tom is Allworthy's unruly bastard child and that Allworthy is a duplicitous but doting father:

[Partridge] could not reconcile to himself that Mr Allworthy should turn his son (for so he most firmly believed him to be) out of doors for any reason which he had heard assigned. He concluded, therefore, that the whole was a fiction, and that Jones [...] had in reality run away from his father. It came into his head, therefore, that if he could prevail with the young gentleman to return back to his father he should by that means render a service to Allworthy which would obliterate all his former anger; nay, indeed, he conceived that very anger was counterfeited, and that Allworthy had sacrificed him to his own reputation (Fielding 2008b, 370)

Convinced that his reading of Tom's story is accurate, Partridge propagates the gossip that Tom is Allworthy's bastard to fellow gossipers at inns up and down the road to London. Elizabeth Kraft argues that Partridge's position resembles our own, in that we 'are constantly being told by the narrator that some circumstance or other has been passed over silently until he thinks it "proper to communicate"' (Kraft 1992, 70). Like Partridge we are left to fill in the blanks and are often led to draw incorrect conclusions

²¹⁰ J.P. Hunter calls Partridge a 'surrogate for the typical reader, good-natured in his intention to learn, but ultimately more anxious to justify himself and preserve his own views' (Hunter 1971, 144). This often leads Partridge to misread characters' stories and motives. At other points in the novel, Hunter argues that Partridge becomes an 'impertinent reader who feigns interest [in other people's narratives] only to exercise his own ingenuities' (Hunter 1971, 143). He evidences Partridge's interruptions of the Man of the Hill's narrative, in which Partridge frequently interjects with questions (395, 401, 415), comments (391, 396, 404), appeals to elaborate or define terms (394, 402, 408, 410), to assert his classical learning (391, 400, 408) and even to insert a story of his own (396-397) (see Fielding 2008b, bks. VIII, xi-xiv). Nancy Mace similarly argues that Partridge's use of classics is not used 'as a means of communication', but rather to 'set him apart' from his listeners, asserting the difference between their social classes and educational backgrounds (Mace 1996, 94). Mace compares Partridge's use of Latin with Tom's, who often 'tailors his use to his listeners', showing greater sensitivity and more interest in his audience (Mace 1996, 94). Partridge's interruptions then are a method of asserting his own learning, ideas and status, rather than an effort to converse with and read other people's characters.

through our preconceptions about narrative (as I discuss below).²¹¹ However, in his gossip, Partridge does not signal that this information is speculative. Instead, he presents it as truth, often greatly enlarging Tom's position and 'magnifying the fortune of his companion' in order to impress his audience (Fielding 2008b, 560). He presents Tom as the 'heir of Squire Allworthy', with a 'dozen horses and servants at Gloucester', and set to inherit 'a swinging great estate hereafter' (Fielding 2008b, 446). Partridge here willingly overlooks Tom's illegitimate status, which would debar him from inheriting Allworthy's estate.

Despite this, he continues to misrepresent Tom to others, creating a new public character for Tom as a young heir with money to burn. McNamara has argued that when gossip and other forms of narrative-making in Fielding's novels are '[n]ot framed or otherwise signalled as fiction', they are 'easily accepted by various characters as representations of reality' (McNamara 1979, 382).²¹² Harrison notes the willingness of spectators to interpret actions in a way that supports their own suppositions and principles, often ignoring the context in which an action is performed. Deceptive characters, like Blifil, are able to manipulate others' interpretations of them through carefully staged performances and appeals to their spectators' ideals (Harrison 1975, 33).²¹³ Pierre Nicole had similarly warned his readers not to believe too explicitly in 'the reports of others', even when those accounts seem credible:

²¹¹ Kraft suggests that like storytellers' propensity to revise their stories to present themselves in the best light, listeners are also equally likely to revise a tale told to suit their own ideas and conceptions (Kraft 1992, 70).

²¹² Scott Black has noted that Partridge himself is guilty of believing too implicitly in the gossip he is told. From the tale one landlady gives him, Partridge believes Tom to be a fellow Jacobite. She reports that the fight between Tom and Northerton erupted from Tom's having toasted Charles Stuart, rather than Sophia (see Fielding 2008b, 381–82). When it turns out that Tom isn't a Jacobite, Partridge falls back on another misunderstanding; that Tom is Allworthy's son and heir, which turns out to be only half right (Black 2008, 34).

²¹³ Harrison gives the example of episode in which Blifil releases Sophia's bird. Thwackum and Square are both more than willing to except Blifil's explanation when it appeals to their own principles (Christian duty and love of liberty). Both, however, miss the 'stumbling' nature of Blifil's explanation, which hides his malicious motives (Harrison 1975, 29-38).

Those who seem to be most sincere and without the least suspicion of imposture, or lying, deceive us sometimes, because often they first deceive themselves. Some there are who will give you their reflections and judgements as matters of fact, and who making no distinction betwixt what effectively has happen'd, and their own deductions, out of both of these make up the body of their stories (Nicole 1677, 316).

This is also reflected in his fellow gossipers' reactions to Partridge's tales. When telling his tale at the inn at Upton, Partridge's account of Tom has an immediate effect on the landlady's opinion of Tom's character. She argues 'I thought the first moment I saw him he looked like a good sort of gentleman', despite having violently attacked him only a few chapters earlier for bringing a half-naked woman (Mrs Waters) into her house (Fielding 2008b, 446; see also 432-3). Of course, the landlady's 'recognition' of Tom as Allworthy's heir has less to do with how convincing Partridge is as a storyteller and more to do with her sniffing out an opportunity to make money out of Tom. As with Wisemore, Rushford, Heartfree, and many of the characters in *Rape Upon Rape*, she is more than willing to credit Partridge's tale when it meets her purposes and interests. The narrator hints to this by pointing out that her ears 'picked up' when Partridge announces Tom as 'one of the greatest gentlemen in the kingdom' (Fielding 2008b, 446). The landlady's ready acceptance of Partridge's story confirms his opinions about Tom and encourages him to continue asserting it as fact elsewhere. In propagating this theory as fact, however, Partridge unwittingly rewrites Tom's public character and changes the way that other characters react to him. The seeming ease with which Partridge can change Tom's reputation on the road suggests the flexible nature of public character and the lack of control an individual has over it when it is exposed to public gossip. In contrast to Blifil and the deceptive individuals in *Jonathan Wild* and *The Female Husband*, individuals who are not conscious and careful of their public reputation in *Tom Jones* have less control over their public characters because they lack 'worldly wisdom'

and are not, as the Count in *Jonathan Wild* might put it, able to ‘*play the whole Game*’ (Fielding 2003b, 16).²¹⁴

While this gossip about Tom appears to have a positive influence on his public character with some individuals, other instances in the novel are less benign, resulting in more immediate and serious consequences for Tom. For example, during his stay at the inn in Gloucester, Tom is subjected to the malicious gossip of a petty-fogger. The petty-fogger describes Tom as a roguish seducer and aggressor, having supposedly ‘got one of the servant-maids with child’, broken Thwackum’s arm ‘only because he reprimanded him for following whores’ and having disturbed Allworthy while he was sick by beating a drum (Fielding 2008b, 375). Although the reader is intended to recognise that to some extent this gossip is based on actual events, we also supposed to note that many of the instances have been manipulated, exaggerated or misread to give Tom a poor character. Whereas Mrs Whitefield suspects no reason for this misrepresentation in the petty-fogger, Fielding constructs the passage for the shrewd reader in such a way as to suggest a possible motive for giving such a poor character: that the petty-fogger feels snubbed by Tom. Regardless of its motive, the petty-fogger’s tale has an immediate effect on Mrs Whitefield’s conception of Tom’s character, which dramatically affects her behaviour towards him. She ‘henceforth conceived so ill an opinion of her guest, that she heartily wished him out of house’ (Fielding 2008b, 376). Tom soon notes her cold behaviour

²¹⁴ Tom’s lack of prudence has often also been counted as one of his central flaws, one which he must rectify through experience and ‘worldly wisdom’. However, as Eleanor Hutchens has argued, ‘[n]early every unadmirable character in [*Tom Jones*] is described as prudent or is shown as advocating prudence’ (Hutchens 1965, 101). In this sense, ‘worldly wisdom’ and prudence comes to mean something akin to acting ‘in our “true Interest”’; the expectation that an individual will recognise and act in their own best interests, with obvious connections to the philosophies of sceptics like Mandeville (Battestin 1968, 188). Mark Kinkead-Weekes argues that over the course of the novel, Fielding attempts to rehabilitate these terms by showing that Tom ‘acquire[s] wisdom through loving *more and better*’ (Kinkead-Weekes 2008, 11). Andrew Bricker suggests that Fielding offers a ‘competing conception “Of Love”’ to the narrative of Mandevillean self-interest, helping to show that, in the manner of Shaftesbury, that ‘feelings of benevolence, pity, love and gratitude help to shape moral judgement’ (Bricker 2017, 72, 69).

towards him and feels compelled to leave the house in the middle of the night. As Shear has argued, gossip here both influences how ‘other characters in the novel assess Tom’s character’ and, as a result of their changed behaviour, ‘compels [Tom] to take action’ (Shear 2008, 26). In doing so, it not only changes Tom’s public character through the retelling of events, but also propels him into new actions.

The accumulation of gossip then not only influences others’ responses to an individual, but also drives the plot forward by propelling characters into action. Spacks has argued that the accumulation of ‘gossip impels plots’ by destroying reputations and circulating information (Spacks 1985, 7–8). This provides new opportunities for character to be revealed as individuals are forced into new situations and circumstances. It passes for a time as a discursive fact, influencing other characters’ reactions to the subject of gossip and shapes their experience of the world. Gossip, then, is ‘incorporated into and become[s] part of the reality within which characters move, on which they predicate future behaviour’ (McNamara 1979, 382). Shear notes that in another episode in the novel, Partridge’s gossip leads to Sophia’s departure from Upton (Shear 2008, 26). Having drunk too much wine, Partridge rudely tells Mrs Honour that Jones is in bed with Mrs Waters and is not to be disturbed. Angered, Mrs Honour relates the tale to Sophia, ‘which, if possible, she exaggerated, being as angry with *Jones* as if he had pronounced all the words that came from the mouth of *Partridge*’ (Fielding 2008b, 470). Partridge’s indelicate gossip about Tom here exposes what Shear describes as Tom’s more “‘liquorish” character flaws’ to Sophia and Mrs Honour, ‘expanding the boundary of what the two women know about Tom’ and complicating their conception of his character (Shear 2008, 26). When Sophia questions the validity of Partridge’s tale, the maid elaborates on the gossip, embroiling Sophia’s name and reputation in the mix: ‘[Partridge] told us all in the kitchen that Madam Sophia Western [...] was dying of love of that young squire, and that he was going to wars to get rid of you’ (Fielding 2008b,

472). Partridge's gossip then risks not only compromising Tom's reputation, but Sophia's as well through Partridge's publication of their association. As a result of this gossip, Sophia's conception of Tom's character changes dramatically: "he is not only a villain, but a low despicable wretch. I can forgive all rather than his exposing my name in so barbarous a manner' (Fielding 2008b, 472). Sophia's hasty departure from Upton drives the plot forward, spurring Tom to follow her when he discovers her muff in his bed the next morning (Fielding 2008b, 474).

Like Tom, Sophia's circulation in the novel is also initiated by an erroneous piece of gossip: her aunt's speculative theory that she is in love with Blifil. Having used what the narrator ironically calls her 'wonderful sagacity', Aunt Western wrongly attributes Sophia's 'symptoms' and shares her theory with her brother (Fielding 2008b, 237). This begins the series of events which leads to Sophia's, Mrs Honour's, Aunt Western's and Squire Western's departures from Somerset and their various journeys to London. For Sophia, travelling presents several threats to her public character as a dutiful, virtuous, Protestant young woman. As she circulates, Sophia's public reputation is questioned several times by onlookers through gossip. Having seen Sophia with her aunt in Bath, Ensign Northerton mockingly insists to Tom that Sophia is a well-known harlot who is known to have 'lain with [...] half the young fellows at Bath' (Fielding 2008b, 327).²¹⁵ Later in the novel, Sophia is also mistakenly identified by an innkeeper as a 'rebel lady', on her way to meet a 'young Chevalier' of the 'duke's army' (Fielding 2008b, 501). The innkeeper goes so far as to suspect her as being 'no other than Madam Jenny Cameron

²¹⁵ In *The Champion* (6 March 1740), Fielding criticised the legal proceedings against slanderers as being 'little severe against Slander, unless it be written or unless it be against the Great' (Fielding 2003a, 221–22). He argues slanderers are little better than the 'pitiful Thief, who steals away our Reputation, [and] can say nothing in his Defence; his Motive, which is a Delight in Mischief, is even more odious than the Act he commits' (Fielding 2003a, 223). Northerton here can be seen as a common slanderer, engaging in gossip he has written entirely himself without basis on fact, and designed to elicit a reaction in Tom.

herself', the mistress of Charles Edward Stuart, the 'Young Pretender' and Catholic leader of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion (Fielding 2008b, 503).²¹⁶

The mutability of Sophia's public character is made precarious by her situation, as a young woman travelling with only a maid. Terry Castle argues that 'ordinary women travelling alone constantly risked loss of reputation, harassment, or sexual assault' (Castle 1982, 606). Capp has similarly suggested that at every level of society, 'we can find men [...] who considered any unaccompanied female as fair game' and as a target that 'would quickly succumb to persuasion or pressure' (Capp 2004, 227). This may explain in part why Mary Hamilton dons male clothing in order to travel in *The Female Husband*, although she is still required to defend herself against the homosexual advances of the Methodist preacher.²¹⁷ Even though Sophia does not cross-dress in order to travel, Jill Campbell suggests that her 'venture away from home is also reminiscent of Jenny Cameron and other daring female rebels' who were often popularly imagined to have less-than-pristine sexual reputations (Campbell 1995, 171). Both Northerton and the landlord's gossip about Sophia speculate on matters of a sexual nature and so calls into question her appearance as a virtuous young woman. Capp argues that the fragility of women's reputations made them particularly susceptible to this type of gossip, and men would often target a woman's sexual reputation in their gossip (Capp 2004, 228).

Northerton and the landlord's comments on Sophia's sexual reputation then present a

²¹⁶ Fielding also makes reference to Jenny Cameron in *The True Patriot* (24 December 1745) when he suggests that it 'was a great Neglect in the Pretender, either as a lover or a General to leave his Baggage with so slender a Guard' (Fielding 1987, 387). Jill Campbell has argued that Cameron was often presented as a transgressive and rebellious figure in pamphlets, journal articles and prints of the period, usurping masculine roles and sexual appetites, and even engaging in cross-dressing (Campbell 1995, 154–57). Campbell also argues that Fielding often describes Sophia's possession of 'Spirit' and 'natural Courage', qualities which he associated with female Jacobites in his *Jacobite's Journal* (1747–1748) (Campbell 1995, 171). I suggest that Fielding may have named his surrogate mother for Tom after Cameron. Jenny Jones' attainment of male learning and sexual escapades throughout the novel make her a transgressive figure, not all that dissimilar the popular image of Cameron.

²¹⁷ Campbell notes that this situation is reminiscent of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which Rosalind and Julia (respectively) also don male clothing in order to protect themselves while travelling (Campbell 1995, 171).

distinct threat to her public character and reputation. Tom's physical defence of Sophia when Northerton slanders her attests to the severity of the threat against Sophia's public character and the necessity of mounting such a public and physical defence: a response which Sophia herself would be unable (within the realms of decency) to make.

Interestingly, Sophia's reaction to the defamation of her character varies throughout the novel. Despite reacting strongly to the news at Upton (as discussed above), in other instances she responds less warmly. A few chapters after the incident in Upton, Sophia loops round to stay at the inn near Gloucester where Tom earlier fought Northerton. Here she is told by the landlady (who guesses at the connection between Tom and Sophia) that Tom had spoken about her at great length during his stay at the inn. Instead of being offended by what Mrs. Honour calls the 'prostitut[ing]' of Sophia's name (a significant term which carries serious implications for her reputation), Sophia seems charmed by Tom's behaviour 'and was perhaps more pleased with the violent raptures of his love' (Fielding 2008b, 489). This suggests that Sophia is more offended by Tom's inconstancy than his muddying of her reputation. When we look back at the scene at Upton then, we also might surmise that Sophia is more offended at Tom's being in bed with another woman, than she is about his using her name, despite her protestations. Kinkead-Weekes argues that overall, Sophia's judgements about others (Tom, Blifil, Mrs Fitzpatrick) are generally good because they are directed by her good-nature and generous nature. However, in the scene at Upton, she is 'incapable of judging what Tom actually did, because her [...] heart's wisdom is clouded by her bruised ego' (Kinkead-Weekes 2008, 13). 'Bruised', she may be, but the fact that she leaves her muff behind for Tom to find is suggestive. Scott Black and Gerard J. Butler have both noted that in keeping with its suggestive slang, the muff represents a sort of 'sexual calling card' which Sophia leaves on Tom's bed in hope that he will 'overtake' her (Black 2008,

41–42; Butler 2008, 72).²¹⁸ When Squire Western later catches Tom (muff-in-hand) at the inn, he revealingly recognises this gesture as that of a ‘bitch’ leaving her scent for a ‘dog fox’ (Fielding 2008b, 478; Butler 2008, 72). This suggests that Sophia is less concerned with Tom’s sexual escapades and his threat to her reputation than she initially protests.²¹⁹ Tom, meanwhile, is often reluctant to reveal Sophia’s name to strangers, and only does so when pressed. When telling the story of his expulsion from Paradise Hall, Tom misjudges Partridge’s trustworthiness and reveals Sophia’s name to him (see Fielding 2008b, 365). It is then Partridge and other characters that spread Sophia’s name through gossip, allowing the story of their connection to circulate along the road with them.

Although gossip for most characters in these novels accounts for a temporary change to their public character, for others it can have longer lasting effects. Perhaps the most enduring example of gossip is that constructed between Mrs Partridge and Mrs Wilkins at the beginning of the novel about Partridge’s infidelity with Jenny, and his supposed ‘fathering’ of Tom.

In the first case, Mrs Partridge’s jealousy allows her to write a narrative of conjugal betrayal around Partridge and Jenny, reworking circumstantial evidence into a narrative which supports her theory. From her first introduction in the novel, Mrs Partridge is presented as a shrewish figure (‘a professed follower of that noble sect founded by Xantippe’) who is on guard against any female who would even dare to speak to her husband (Fielding 2008b, 72). Even in selecting a maid, she is careful to

²¹⁸ Black argues that Tom and Sophia’s courtship is mediated by Mrs Honour’s accounts of Sophia’s muff – her report of Tom kissing it inflames Sophia and *vice versa*, updating an ancient trope of erotic play of trading kisses through inanimate objects (Black 2008, 35, 41–42). He also suggests that it helps to confirm the reader’s opinion of Squire Western’s impetuous and selfish nature when he flings the muff into the fire when it gets in the way of Sophia’s piano playing (Black 2008, 35–36).

²¹⁹ Butler argues that while Sophia may appear to embody Fielding’s ‘ideal’ and ‘well-ruled’ woman, she cleverly utilizes this appearance in order to ‘cover her aims’ (Butler 2008, 73). In comparison to the other women in the novel who express sexual desire (Lady Bellaston, Bridget, Jenny, Molly, Deborah Wilkins), Sophia seems to ‘get everything she wants’ (Butler 2008, 73).

‘guard herself against matrimonial injuries’ and to ‘choose [a maid] out of that order of females whose faces are taken as a kind of security for their virtue’ (Fielding 2008b, 72). Elizabeth Kraft has argued that Mrs Partridge ‘expects her personal domestic history to include conjugal betrayal’ and in effect, she goes to great (if unconscious) lengths to bring this about (Kraft 1992, 71). On hearing that Jenny has given birth to twins, she mentally arranges unrelated events to find a ‘pattern consistent with the outcome’ (Kraft 1992, 72):

[t]he leaning over the chair, the sudden starting up, the Latin, the smile, and many other things, rushed upon her all at once. The satisfaction her husband expressed in the departure of Jenny appeared now to be only dissembled. [...] In a word, she was convinced of her husband’s guilt (Fielding 2008b, 77)

She allows what Hume calls ‘general rules’, formed by her expectations of conjugal betrayal, to influence her interpretation of the evidence before her, making unconscious and rash links between cause and effect:

our judgements concerning cause and effect are deriv’d from habit and experience; and when we have been accustom’d to see one object united to another, our imagination passes from the first to the second, by a natural transition, which precedes reflection, and which cannot be prevented by it (D. Hume 1978, 259)

Nicole earlier suggests a similar problem with ‘general suppositions’ in his conception of rash judgement:

[a]s we often ground our Judgements on general suppositions which are not true, [...] so also we often conjecture rashly all hidden intentions, supposing that such exterior action, (wherewith we are offended) did proceed from such a design, whilst we do not take notice that the same outward action may spring from several different intentions, and that we are not capable of comprehending the infinite number of hidden motions and considerations which might produce it (Nicole 1677, 312)

Having assumed that she has detected the ‘hidden motions’ behind Partridge and Jenny’s actions (their desire for each other), Mrs Partridge rewrites the evidence ‘to fit the details of her husband’s behaviour into the narrative she had planned to write all along’ (Kraft 1992, 72). The narrator ‘underlines the fact that there is a “contrary possibility” in each case’ by offering the reader other mitigating factors, such as Jenny’s friendship with a

local lad, to explain her sudden disappearance (Tavor 1987, 111-12). Convinced of the justice of her suppositions, Mrs Partridge helps to ruin Partridge's character and reputation through her false testimony.

However, it is Mrs Wilkins who rearranges events to make them fit Tom's birth. Having 'gotten a true scent of the above story, though long after it happened', Wilkins is able to piece together the narrative of finding Tom and Jenny's admission with the gossip about the Partridges (Fielding 2008b, 80). She recasts Partridge as Tom's father, reconstituting his public character as an adulterer – a falsehood which persists as fact *for twenty years* and a good portion of the novel. His subsequent trial and eviction from the neighbourhood destroys his reputation with Allworthy, who withdraws his financial support, in effect forcing Partridge out of the neighbourhood. He is compelled to assume a new identity as the barber-surgeon 'Little Benjamin', only to be met with further misfortunes when he is imprisoned for seven years after his pig trespasses on a neighbour's land (Fielding 2008b, 828–29). His fortunate encounter with Tom marks the beginning of the change of his fortunes, giving him an opportunity to rewrite his public character and restore his reputation.

Gossip in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, then, has the ability fundamentally to reshape public character and the realities in which the subjects of gossip move. As we have seen, gossip can allow spectators to test out their theories about one another in a public forum with potentially devastating effects for those involved. The length of time it takes Partridge to challenge his public character demonstrates how little control an individual might have when persuasive storytelling and gossip coincide to write a narrative against them. However, gossip can also prove to be a constructive force, offering individuals opportunities to create a new public character or prove the inaccuracy of their current reputations amongst strangers who are untainted by bias. Above all, though, gossip highlights the tenuous nature of public character. Like

storytelling, it emphasises the lack of control individuals might have over their public characters, if they are not careful to manage onlookers' expectations.

Oral Testimonies and Errors of Judgement

Although gossip and storytelling play a central role in discovering character in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, there is potential within each oral account for the listeners, gossips, and the reader to mistake the character being presented to them. In *Tom Jones*, 'no character is exempt' from making errors of judgement, helping to add to the 'epistemological satire' of the novel (Tavor 1987, 112). As a magistrate, Allworthy commits the most significant errors of judgement in the novel which have lasting knock-on effects for many of the major characters.²²⁰ His over-reliance on oral testimony and failure to examine the truth of the tales presented to him means that he is easily misled by the manipulative or prejudiced characters of the novel. However, the reader too is not immune to making mistakes about character. It has often been noted that the narrator encourages readers to draw false conclusions about characters based on our reading history and the gossip presented in the text. As Harrison has argued, Fielding shows that no one viewpoint is privileged in the novel (Harrison 1975, 45). Rather, we must consider a range of testimony and evidence to build an idea of character. In the final part of this chapter, I examine the role that errors of judgement based on oral accounts play in our experience of character in *Tom Jones*. I argue that by presenting the mistakes characters and readers make, Fielding attempts to show the difficulties of forming correct judgements on character based on missing, misleading or incomplete information.

²²⁰ While other characters also make errors of judgement and contribute to Partridge's exile, they do not have the direct power to assign punishment (although Mrs Partridge's shrill tongue might be considered punishment enough for Partridge). As a magistrate, it is Allworthy's duty to distinguish truth from fiction and his failure to do this leads to the unlawful punishment of an innocent man.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, establishing the reliability of testimony was becoming increasingly important both in legal cases and in the scientific community. Philosophers and scientists stressed the importance of using individual sensory data to test the authenticity and reliability of truth claims. However, new discoveries and travel accounts challenged the accepted ‘wisdom’ of the ancients. Microscopes, telescopes and the accounts of travellers pushed the boundaries of knowledge beyond that which most (European) people could experience for themselves, requiring them to make a judgement on the plausibility of the information presented ‘at a distance’ (Shapin 1994, 194, 245). Before these accounts could pass into the pool of accepted knowledge, their claims needed to be rigorously tested and scrutinized. In his *The New Organon*, Francis Bacon deplored ‘learned men’ who were too ready to accept ‘reports, or rather rumours and whispers, of experience, and have given them the weight of legitimate testimony’ (Bacon 2000, 80). However, many contemporaries recognised the necessity of testimony in forming collective knowledge. In his *An Essay Concerning... Human Testimony* (1709), Anthony Collins suggested that ‘[t]estimony, or the Witness of Men to the Truth of Propositions of fact, is a very great foundation of our Knowledg[e]. All our History [...] [is] founded on the Testimony of Men’ (Collins 1709, 6). However, he continues: ‘[t]estimony of it self [*sic*] is not sufficient to procure Faith or Assent, unless accompanied by these two Circumstances, credibility of Persons, and Credibility of the Things related’ (Collins 1709, 6). Both the nature of the claim and the person presenting needed to be scrutinized to establish their reliability before they could be admitted as ‘facts’.

Similarly, in his magisterial career, Fielding devoted much of his time and failing health to cross-examining witnesses and gathering evidence. Building on the work of Sir Thomas DeVeil, he made his house at Bow Street ‘a centre of magisterial work that was different from anything that had gone before’, conducting court-like examinations with

the help of his half-brother Sir John Fielding (Beattie 2012, 22, 14). J. A. Downie argues that Fielding introduced a number of innovations to Bow Street, including ‘extending the hours during which the J.P. was available for examining apprehended persons’ and ‘widening the scope of pre-trial examination’ (Downie 2008, 114). He was also ‘the first magistrate to bring suspected felons whom he had already committed to trial back to Bow Street to answer further charges or to be further questioned’ (Beattie 2012, 14, 97).²²¹ Throughout his novels and plays, Fielding regularly presents court-room scenes where characters’ testimony is tested.²²² In contrast to his own cross-examinations, the judges in Fielding’s works often fail to properly scrutinize testimony and the people presenting it.

During the various ‘trials’ in *Tom Jones*, Allworthy is shown to commit several serious errors while interpreting and judging the oral testimonies (or lack of testimony) presented by other characters. The narrator criticises Allworthy for his inclination to give too much credit to accusers’ testimony and his failure to fully examine all available sources of information. During Partridge’s trial, for example, Allworthy allows the testimony of Mrs Partridge to shape his judgement of the case in direct contradiction to legal procedure. As the narrator points out during the trial, the law ‘refuses to admit the evidence of a wife for or against her husband’, which, if allowed, Fielding suggests, would ‘be the means of much perjury, and of much whipping, fining, imprisoning, transporting, and hanging’ (Fielding 2008b, 86, 87). Despite this, Allworthy seems to base his judgement entirely on Mrs Partridge’s biased testimony. Even before Partridge is allowed to offer any form of defence, Allworthy assures Mrs Partridge ‘that she should

²²¹ The extension of Fielding’s examinations, however, did not mean that they were not contentious. He invited controversy in his handling of two high-profile cases and defended his decisions in his pamphlets, *The True State of the Case of Bosavern Penlez* (1749) and *A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning* (1753).

²²² Court-room scenes can be found in *Rape upon Rape* (1730), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Jonathan Wild* (1743), *A Journey from This World to the Next* (1743), *The Female Husband* (1746), *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Amelia* (1751),

have her justice', leaving Partridge rightly flabbergasted (Fielding 2008b, 86). J. E. Loftis has pointed out that Partridge reminds Allworthy that he should seek out other evidence before passing judgement (Loftis 2002, 7). However, when it is found that Jenny has run off with a recruiting officer, Allworthy takes it as confirmation of the guilt of both parties, 'thus finding Partridge guilty in spite of both legal and practical obstacles' (Loftis 2002, 7):

Mr Allworthy then declared that the evidence of such a slut as she appeared to be would have deserved no credit; but he said he *could not help thinking* that had she been present, and would have declared the truth, *she must have confirmed* what so many circumstances, together with his own confession, and the declaration of his wife that she had caught her husband in the fact, did sufficiently prove (Fielding 2008b, 87 my emphasis)

Allworthy here fills in Jenny's missing testimony to satisfy the narrative of Partridge's guilt, basing his judgement on biased testimony and his preconceptions about the case. Like Mrs Partridge and Mrs Wilkins, Allworthy is using general rules to make the transition from cause to effect to fit the narrative of Partridge's guilt. Of course, Allworthy's position here is unenviable: he does not have the luxury of time or the privileged information about Mrs Partridge to which the reader has access to form his judgement and must make one based on the evidence presented to him. However, his willingness to allow Mrs Partridge's testimony against the dictates of the law and failure to seek out other testimony suggests that he is too hasty in forming his judgement and too inclined to believe explicitly in oral witness testimony.

Allworthy's reluctance to question the motives and truth of his witness can be contrasted to the cross-examination held by the gypsy king in Partridge's second trial later in the novel. When Partridge is discovered with a gypsy woman by her husband in a compromising position, he offers little defence: '[f]or the poor Fellow was confounded by the plain Evidence which appeared against him' (Fielding 2008b, 624). In contrast to Allworthy, however, the gypsy king questions the witnesses' account and soon discovers

that the whole had been a scheme to extort money from Partridge and Jones. Although his cross-examination of the witnesses requires little in the way of hard grilling, it does reveal further evidence that is initially omitted, redirecting the punishment from Partridge and onto the husband and wife.²²³ Allworthy, by contrast, seems averse to submitting his witnesses' testimonies to examination throughout the novel. This leaves him open to being deceived by the testimony of the prejudiced or more malicious characters, such as Mrs Partridge and Blifil. For example, when Black George is suspected of poaching a hare, Allworthy condemns him on Blifil's evidence without looking for other mitigating factors. Although Black George is guilty of poaching the hare in this instance to feed his family, Blifil exaggerates the tale 'by the hasty addition of the single letter S [...] for he said that George had wired hares' (Fielding 2008b, 128). Bound to secrecy by Blifil, Allworthy does not seek further testimony in Black George's case, and 'by that means the poor gamekeeper was condemned without having an opportunity to defend himself' (Fielding 2008b, 128–29). Blifil also later adapts his tale of Jones' behaviour while Allworthy is ill and his fight with Thwackum in order to condemn Jones in Allworthy's eyes (see Fielding 2008b, 267–68). While Allworthy does examine Thwackum and delays his sentencing of Jones until the afternoon, his judgement seems to have been passed before Jones has a chance to defend himself. He also fails to examine the servants, the doctor or Square, all of whom were present in the house at the time of the incidents. Instead of seeking corroborating testimony, Allworthy seems determined 'to justify to the world the example I am resolved to make of such a monster' (Fielding 2008b, 268). Kinkead-Weekes suggests that, like Sophia's judgement of Tom at Upton, this declaration is not the product of 'a judgement on Tom's

²²³ Loftis suggests that in failing to punish Partridge, the final judgement of this trial is 'equally inaccurate' as the first: '[a]s attention shifts to the husband and wife and their punishment for entrapping Partridge, the initial facts (Partridge's misconduct) seem to just disappear' (Loftis 2002, 9).

imprudence, but the product of Allworthy's bruised heart; it is not a rational but an emotional decision' (Kinkead-Weekes 2008, 11). While this might excuse Allworthy in Tom's case, it does not account for his failure to cross-examine the sincerity of oral testimony in the other cases. His misjudgement leads to the wrongful (or at least unsympathetic) sentencing of four individuals (Partridge, Jenny, Black George and Tom) and their subsequent exile from the community. Secondary effects of these judgements also initiate the journeys of many of the other characters, including Sophia, Mrs Honour, Squire Western, Mrs Western, Blifil and Allworthy himself. In a sense, much of the novel's plot can be traced to Allworthy's failure to properly examine witness testimony and so to judge Partridge and Tom's characters accurately. Like Wisemore and Heartfree in the earlier chapters, Allworthy is too passive in his scrutiny of the evidence presented before him and too quick to credit his own opinion once formed.

While it would be easy to condemn Allworthy for his various errors of judgement, readers must not be too quick to assume that our own abilities to judge character correctly are any more accurate than Allworthy's. Harrison argues that no viewpoint should be assumed to be 'privileged', most especially the reader's. It is this presumption which often leads us to make similar mistakes to the characters in the novel (Harrison 1975, 45). Despite the many examples listed above of failed discernment, the reader too is often led to err by the narrator.²²⁴ As has often been remarked in studies of

²²⁴ There has been some critical disagreement about Fielding's presentation of the narrator or author-character's control over their narratives. In their *Making the Novel*, Brean Hammond and Shaun Regan suggest that Fielding's narrator is an omniscient god-like figure, who knows the 'entire story of an agent's motivation, [and] who [alone] can judge the calibre of hearts' (Hammond and Regan 2006, 116). However, Anne Widmayer argues that these novels are 'not controlled by a reliable, guiding authority', but rather by an author-character 'whose faulty authority demotes him to the status of just another character' (Widmayer 2015, 193). This would place the narrator in a similar position to the reader – forced to make judgements with limited information. Meanwhile, Regina Janes suggests that Fielding's narrator both is and is not omniscient: '[h]is "omniscience" to which he lays no claims, exposes his fallibility' to the reader when he makes errors about characters (Janes 2008, 166). I argue that his 'mistakes' are designed to deliberately mislead the reader and to encourage us to question his authority. This is an important part of Fielding's wider scheme to encourage the reader to use their own judgement, rather than simply accepting what they are told by a character, narrator or person.

Tom Jones, the narrator plays an important role in providing false accounts to the reader: presenting us with incomplete character sketches, tidbits about Tom's paternity which ultimately prove to be false, and by deliberately withholding key information until later in the narrative.²²⁵ Robert Alter has argued that 'Fielding shifts the onus of crucial decision from the characters to the reader, who is called upon to play the role of judge while the novelist presents evidence, both relevant and misleading' (Alter 1968, 21). Readers are often invited to 'fill in' the gaps left by the narrator, sorting through gossip and our own history of reading to supply missing information about character and motive.²²⁶ However, this usually turns out to be a tactic designed by the narrator to guide the reader into making inaccurate judgements about character. These suggestive gaps and tidbits of gossip, which the narrator leaves in the narrative, guide us toward false conclusions. Dobranski argues that when we read the novel a second time 'we discover that [our] sense of competence [in our ability to judge character] was illusory, for when the characters were away from the limelight they did not always behave as we expected' (Dobranski 2010, 643). As a result, I argue that we are put into a similar position to Allworthy and the other characters of the novel: we are encouraged to make incorrect judgements based on misleading or incomplete information placed by the narrator.

Perhaps the most enduring example of the narrator's misdirection in *Tom Jones* can be found in his presentation of Bridget Allworthy. Bridget is initially introduced to the reader as a prudish 'Old Maid [...] whom you commend rather for good qualities

²²⁵ For discussions of the role of the narrator in *Tom Jones*, see Preston 1970, 94–132; Iser 1974, 29–56; Booth 1987, 215–18; Černý 1992, 137–62; Hudson 1993, 79–84; Hammond 1993, 72–78; Hammond and Regan 2006, 116–17; Fielding 2008b, xxiv–xxv.

²²⁶ Iser similarly argues that the narrator often leaves 'gaps' or 'vacancies' for the reader to fill in using their imaginations (Iser 1974, 40). As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Fielding uses this technique to pass over certain scenes or sections of narrative which contain scenes that are overtly emotional or might (ironically) offend the reader's decency, or so that he can pass over information which he would prefer to reveal later in the narrative (i.e. Joseph and Tom's true identities). Fielding's use of caricatures in the Haymarket plays, which I discussed in Chapter 2, also works in a similar way, as Fielding leaves hints for the audience to make connections between the onstage action and public gossip about Walpole, Cibber and the other 'great men'.

than beauty' (Fielding 2008b, 32). The narrator regularly comments on the 'severity of her character' in matters of virtue and represents her as guarding her reputation 'as if she had all the snares to apprehend which were ever laid for her whole sex' (Fielding 2008b, 38, 32). However, her repeated flirtations with the men living in Allworthy's house, which set the 'malicious tongues' of the neighbour wagging, undermine this prudish appearance and lead the reader to suspect that she is actually a hypocrite (Fielding 2008b, 120; Janes 2008, 165):

[w]hen Tom grew up, and gave tokens of that gallantry of temper which greatly recommends men to women, [...] she so evidently demonstrated her affection to him to be much stronger than what she bore her own son, that *it was impossible to mistake her any longer* (Fielding 2008b, 121, my emphasis)²²⁷

The narrator draws the reader into speculative gossip, encouraging us, as Robert Chibka has argued, to see Bridget as a 'venerable comic type: the middle-aged person who fondly supposes a youngster could have an erotic interest in her' (Chibka 2008, 91). Chibka suggests that we are lulled into a false sense of knowing through our reading history, 'as we can hardly resist making Bridget at this moment a Mrs Booby, Tom a Joseph Andrews' (Chibka 2008, 91). I would add that this image of Bridget as a comic type also bears a marked similarity to the prudish stage coach passenger in *Joseph Andrews*, who complains of Joseph's nakedness while holding only 'the Sticks of her Fan before her Eyes' (Fielding 2008a, 46). It seems to me that the reader is lured here, in the manner of Nicole and Hume, into making a 'general supposition' based on our past experiences with Fielding's characters. In this way, we misidentify Bridget as a comic type and miss the alternative explanations for her behaviour.

Moreover, as John Bender and Simon Stern have commented in their notes on *Tom Jones*, the narrator also attempts to lead us to see Bridget as a comic type by

²²⁷ Bridget's flirtation with Captain Blifil appears to take a similar trajectory to Mrs Fitzpatrick's courtship later in the novel. Bridget is careful to appear unaffected by the Captain's attentions in public, feigning indifference to him in front of Allworthy in order to mask their amour. Blifil's birth *eight* months after his parents have married is also highly suggestive of a pre-marital affair.

imagining her as a Hogarthian figure. The narrator compares her unfavourably to the unattractive older woman who ‘ensoriously ogles an amorous young couple’ in the first print of William Hogarth’s *The Four Times of Day* (1738) (see Figure 6) (Fielding 2008b, 876, n58). Simon Varey has argued that by making the connection between Bridget and Hogarth’s ‘comic caricature’, the reader is ‘not asked to make any effort of imagination to picture [Bridget] ourselves’ (Varey 1986, 95). Instead, we are encouraged to misread her as a comic and hypocritical type by drawing on our reading history of Fielding’s fiction and wider visual culture. This mistake is only corrected at the end of the novel, when her true relationship with Tom is revealed. On a second reading, we can see that Bridget’s interest in Tom is not the lusty attentions of an older woman, but maternal interest in her son. We might even read the public gossip as a convenient guise under which Bridget can spend time with Tom without arousing suspicions of being his mother (at a cost to her public character).

Another example of misdirection can be seen when the narrator later presents the reader with some privileged information which Allworthy fails to find during Partridge’s trial. The narrator comments that

there is a possibility that the schoolmaster was entirely innocent: [...] for, to omit other particulars, there was in the same house a lad near eighteen, between whom and Jenny there had subsisted sufficient intimacy to found a reasonable suspicion; and yet, so blind is jealousy, this circumstance never once entered into the head of the enraged wife (Fielding 2008b, 88)

Through this privileged information, the reader is able to construct their own narrative around Tom’s paternity, making him the child of Jenny and this unnamed ‘lad’. Kraft argues that ‘when Fielding offers this detail, we compose our own narrative [...] solving



Figure 6. William Hogarth, 1736, 'Morning', *Four Times of Day*, plate 1. Courtesy of The British Museum Collection Online. Accessed 22 January 2017. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online. Permission to reproduce this image has been granted by The British Museum.

(we think) the mystery of Tom's birth within the first hundred pages of the novel' (Kraft 1992, 72). However, this narrative is also exposed as a 'red herring' when Jenny gives her testimony at the end of the novel (Loftis 2002, 8). It is planted by Fielding to lead the reader into making yet another error of judgement based on hearsay, and as such, it is 'as self-deceptive as Mrs Partridge's narrative' (Kraft 1992, 72). Nicholas Hudson similarly suggests that

Fielding construct[s] a mode of narrative that constantly reminds the reader of both the need and the great difficulty of judging correctly. We see the consequences of bad judgement in the novel, and we to some extent discover our own failures of judgement as readers (Hudson 1993, 82)

I argue that in showing us the consequences of bad judgement and luring us into making our own mistakes, Fielding demonstrates the difficulties and dangers of making hasty judgements on character. We are placed in a similar (if slightly more privileged) position to the other characters in the novel and are shown to be as liable to make mistakes. No matter how sagacious the reader, if information is not examined for its accuracy it can draw us into misjudging character.

In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the reception of an individual's public character is often shaped by oral accounts – by the stories they tell about themselves and others. Oral accounts have the potential to reveal more to the sagacious reader about speakers' and listeners' characters through their omissions and the gossip they circulate about others. In *Tom Jones*, these oral accounts become central to our ability to 'know' character. In the latter novel, our knowledge about character is always changing, awaiting further information to confirm or challenge its sincerity. Through his narrator, Fielding demonstrates that we, like the characters in the novel, construct our own narratives around characters, explaining their motives and behaviours through our own kind of speculative gossip. As such, public character in these novels seems to be unstable and temporary, based on other characters' or the reader's interpretation. As we have

seen, however, both the reader and the persons in the novel are liable to misinterpret motives and misjudge character. In doing so, Fielding demonstrates the difficulty of judging character based on oral accounts.

In his final novel, *Amelia*, published just four years after *Tom Jones*, Fielding did the unthinkable: he moved away from the style which proved so successful in the earlier novels to create a darker, richer social novel. He filled the novel with 'low' scenes of London prisons and sponging houses, reduced the role of the narrator and did away with much of the comedy. These changes in style were met with much disdain from his contemporaries, and still cause debate and discussion among modern critics. While these changes are often seen as a departure from his style in *Tom Jones*, in the next chapter I argue that Fielding retained and developed many of the issues of the earlier novels, particularly his concern with the power of gossip and the recommendations of good nature. The reduced role of the narrator puts even greater stress on the reader to judge characters. However, characters often prove to be capable of contrary actions and behaviours, making the process of judgement difficult for the reader. As such, we can never confidently 'know' the characters in Fielding's final novel and he offers us no absolutes or assurances.

V

On the Edge of Darkness: Malicious Gossip and the Problem of Good Nature in *Amelia* (1751)

I shall not [...] triumph too cruelly over the almost lifeless Corpse of [this] poor, wretched, departing *Novel* [*Amelia*]

-- *Old England*, 25 December 1751

I have finished [*Amelia*], but cannot say it has given me equal pleasure with *Tom Jones* or *Joaseph Andrews* [sic]. it certainly is his own history, the Love part foolishly fond *beneath the dignity of a man*

-- Lady Orrery, letter to Lord Orrery, 6 January 1752

To prop the tott'ring Credit of his own
H – I roars out, F – g's Spirit's dead and gone.
What hear we now, astonish'd Readers cry,
No Spirit in the Scenes of *Amely*!

-- C.D., F.R.S., *The London Evening Post*, 16-18 January 1752

When *Amelia* was published on 19 December 1751, it seemed set to capitalise on the success of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Indeed, Fielding's publisher Andrew Millar paid Fielding the huge sum of £800 for *Amelia* (double the amount he paid for *Tom Jones*) and ordered a 'massive printing of 5,000 copies' (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 532; Downie 2009, 196).²²⁸ Four days later, however, Fielding himself was aware of the poor reception *Amelia* was receiving in town, complaining in a letter (23 December 1751) to his friend Harris that 'I think I have been more abused in a Week than any other Author hath been' (quoted in Battestin and Battestin 1989, 533). On the 28 December,

²²⁸ Critics have noted that the first edition of the novel seems to have sold so briskly that Millar began to think of ordering a new edition of 3,000 copies. However, work on the second edition in January 1752 'had scarcely begun before it was terminated' (Battestin and Battestin 1989, 533; Sabor 2007, 94). J.A. Downie notes that a decade after the publication of *Amelia*, Millar still had some of the 5,000 copies of the first edition (Downie 2009, 196).

John Upton also wrote to Harris giving a fuller account of the novel's reception in

London:

Our friend's *Amelia* does not answer People's expectations in reading, or the bookseller in selling. They say 'tis deficient in characters; and see not a Parson Adams, a Square & Thwackum & Western in it. In short, the word condemnation, tho not Damnation, is given out. Millar expected to get thousands, & there chiefly the disappointment lies; for as to Fielding himself he laughs, & jokes, & eats well, as usual; & will continue to do so whilst rogues live in Covent Garden, & he signs warrants (quoted in Battestin and Battestin 1989, 533)

Not all of the early reviews of the novel were as hostile as those above. Writing in *The Monthly Review* (December 1751), John Cleland commented upon *Amelia*'s experimental style, calling Fielding's choice to take up the story after the Booth's marriage 'the boldest stroke that has yet been attempted in this species of writing' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 304). However, even Cleland thought that parts of the novel 'stand in need of an apology' and that Fielding had chosen his characters 'too low' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 304, 306). General agreement amongst many contemporary commentators suggested that *Amelia* failed to reach the heights of *Tom Jones*, and as such was doomed to fail.²²⁹

It suffices to say that both contemporary and modern readers have been perplexed by Fielding's change of style and tone in *Amelia*. Why did he abandon the model he had painstakingly developed and which had proven to be so successful in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*? Much of the critical heritage surrounding *Amelia* has focused on this question and attempts to justify (in a somewhat embarrassed fashion) Fielding's

²²⁹ Contemporary commentators particularly latched onto Fielding's failure to fix Amelia's nose in the first edition of the novel. Fielding felt compelled to issue a paragraph in his *The Covent-Garden Journal*, ironically reporting that Amelia's nose has been 'absolutely cured' by a 'famous Surgeon', and that she 'intends to bring Actions against several ill-meaning and slanderous People, who have reported that the said Lady had no Nose, merely because the Author of her History, in a Hurry, forgot to inform his Readers of that Particular' (Fielding 1988b, 395). John Hill, Bonnell Thornton and Tobias Smollett all mocked this oversight in their journals and pamphlets in the early part of 1752, leading Fielding to publish a two-part mock-trial of *Amelia* in *The Covent-Garden Journal* on 25 January 1752. For further discussion of these satirical exchanges, see Sabor 2007, 96–98.

unaccountable change in direction (Wright 1968, 45; Hassall 1972, 225–26; Bloch 1973, 461; Hunter 1975, 193–200; Battestin 1974, 613, 638; Folkenflik 1974, 168; Oakman 1976, 481; Schofield 1985, 45; Castle 1986, 186; Spacks 1990, 109).²³⁰ Critics often point to Fielding’s deteriorating health and his experience as a magistrate as primary reasons for his change in tone in *Amelia* (Wright 1968, 45; Hassall 1972, 225; Bloch 1973, 461; Battestin 1974, 613). While this may account in some ways for Fielding’s increased focus on social evils and systematic corruption, Hassall argues that this ‘does not satisfactorily account of this new kind of writing’ (Hassall 1972, 225). He suggests that *Amelia* does not represent the only (unsuccessful) change of direction in Fielding’s career. He points out that Fielding had similarly turned from the ‘hilarious and irreverent success of *The Author’s Farce* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies* to the unpopular moral acerbity of *The Modern Husband* and *The Universal Gallant* in his early theatrical career (Hassall 1972, 226). I would suggest that corruption had been a strong theme in many of Fielding’s earlier plays and novels (not least those that focus on caricaturing Sir Robert Walpole) and so is not a feature unique to *Amelia*.

While it is not clear why Fielding suddenly changed direction, it is apparent that darker tone greatly adds to the claustrophobic sense of *Amelia*. J.P. Hunter describes ‘[m]oving from the world of *Tom Jones* – with its sunshine, vitality, spaciousness, and health – to that of *Amelia*’ as being ‘rather like entering an overheated, small, and quarantined room’ (Hunter 1975, 193). Similarly, Mary Anne Schofield suggests that the ‘banter, repartee, and amusing naiveté’ of the earlier novels is replaced in *Amelia* by a ‘story coloured by Fielding’s concern with crime, poverty, and other social ills’ (Schofield 1985, 45). In this world, Fielding gives his readers ‘no “out”’, no relief from

²³⁰ Anthony Hassall argues that critics generally begin discussions of *Amelia* by comparing it to *Tom Jones*, using this comparison to explain ‘the falling off in artistic achievement’ (Hassall 1972, 225).

the encroaching darkness and sense of oppression caused as forces close in on the Booths (Hunter 1975, 200).

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that this feeling of oppression is created in part by the forces of malicious gossip, which unite to limit the Booths' financial and physical freedom and compromise their relationships with others. This, in turn, makes Amelia vulnerable to the desires and machinations of the novel's 'villains'. I suggest that many of the problems the Booths face in the novel stem from gossip and its influence reaches far into the plot. Despite the key role gossip plays in the novel, I have found no studies to date which consider the impact of gossip on perceiving character in *Amelia*.²³¹ Moreover, Billy Booth's failure to offer any resistance to gossip lead him to ever more desperate circumstances and compromise his moral and manly character. As with *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, then, I argue that gossip helps to expose character. However, the character it exposes in *Amelia* falls short of the ideal of Fielding's earlier good-natured heroes and shows the more tragic consequences for the subject of maliciously motivated gossip in a corrupt and unforgiving world.

The darker tone of *Amelia* has also been thought by critics to have been a result of the reduced role of Fielding's ironic narrator, who previously played an important part in injecting comedy and dispelling potential tragedy in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* (Wright 1968, 46, 50; Hassall 1972, 226–29; Battestin 1974, 613; Folkenflik 1974, 168; Oakman 1976, 481; Osland 1980, 57; Battestin 1983a, xv–xvi; Spacks 1990, 109).²³²

²³¹ In view of this, I draw on Patricia Meyer Spacks' *Gossip* (1985) and Bernard Capp's *When Gossips Meet* (2004) for a wider view of the uses of and attitudes towards gossip in the eighteenth century.

²³² Robert Oakman argues that other characters step into the breach left by the absent narrator and become a mouthpiece for Fielding. Dr Harrison is often noted as acting in this capacity, but Oakman suggests that Fielding also uses Booth at times to comment on social and legal corruption (Oakman 1976, 480). He also argues that this role has a limiting effect on Booth, who is not as 'free a character within the world of his novel as Tom Jones had been' (Oakman 1976, 481). Booth can only achieve freedom when he has fulfilled his narrative function (Oakman 1976, 488). We might also compare Booth to Luckless in *The Author's Farce*, who similarly fulfils an author-function for Fielding. Fielding uses Luckless as a mouthpiece to criticise the

Gone are the ‘prolegomenous chapters’ which Andrew Wright argues ‘serve the purpose of establishing a playful relationship between narrator and reader and thus of [...] defining the mood in which the novel is to be taken’ (Wright 1968, 46). Regina Janes suggests that as *Amelia* progresses, the narrator appears less frequently and increasingly leaves the reader to make their own judgements about the characters (Janes 2015, 186).²³³ As a result, the reader’s ability to judge is continually being tested in the novel. Cheryl Wanko argues that this feeling of being tested is what makes the experience of *Amelia* so disconcerting (Wanko 1991, 517). While many readers lament the lack of the reassuring narrator, some critics have found this change necessary to Fielding’s darker tone and overall social message. Robert Folkenflik suggests that having a reassuring narrator in *Amelia* would seriously undercut the darker tone and the potential tragic outcomes which the novel explores (Folkenflik 1974, 168). Similarly, Diane Osland suggests that:

[i]n *Amelia* Fielding has a hard lesson to teach, and while he does not make the lesson any more agreeable to the reader by abandoning his former congenial presence, he has good reasons for refusing to sugar the pill. In *Tom Jones* Fielding emphasized that his main concern was with folly, not vice, and with good nature rather than perfect virtue. *Amelia*, on the other hand, is dedicated to ‘the exposure of the most glaring evils, as well public as private’ (Osland 1980, 57)

Without the ‘congenial presence’ of the host of *Tom Jones* to guide readers, we are mostly left to make our own judgements about character. Although the narrator does occasionally break in upon the action to give the reader hints or privileged information about character, these interruptions are mostly limited to the early parts of the novel.

decaying literary standards of his contemporary society. In contrast to Booth, however, Luckless cannot escape this function and is finally drawn into performing nonsense.

²³³ Andrew Wright suggests that while the narrator is seen less frequently in *Amelia* than in the earlier novels, the overall effect of his interruptions is ‘of obtrusiveness’ as he occasionally breaks in on the action of the novel (Wright 1968, 50). Hassall also notes that appeals to the ‘sagacious’ and ‘good natured’ reader are less frequent and playfully ironic than they had been in previous novels (there are 3 references to the ‘sagacious reader’ and 2 to the ‘good-natured reader’ in *Amelia* as opposed to 7 and 3 references respectively in *Tom Jones*) (Hassall 1972, 228).

In the final part of this chapter, I argue that these early examples offer a warning to sagacious readers about the hazards of accepting good nature at face value and the fallibility of ‘Ocular Demonstration’. Such instances are designed to put us on our guard against later examples in which motives for action are not clear. In a change of direction from his earlier works, ‘good nature’ in *Amelia* is no longer the preserve of virtuous (if flawed) characters. The difficulty of judging character is compounded in *Amelia* by the fact that many individuals who are initially described as ‘good natured’ only to later show themselves to be capable of *both* acts of goodness and of self-interest or destructive desire. As such, they are often difficult to judge correctly and require the reader to be prepared to alter their judgement as new behaviours and information emerges. As with Heartfree in *Jonathan Wild*, Booth is blinded by his gratitude and fails to adjust his judgement of James’s character even as he sees evidence which runs contrary to his estimation of his friend. Consequently, he leaves his family exposed to the more devious parts of James’s character and future complications which arise from their ongoing friendship. The reader is encouraged take heed from this early example and be wary of presuming that acts of good nature indicate honourable, moral intentions. I suggest that in *Amelia*, Fielding asks his readers to be wary and reserved in making their judgements of character, and to be prepared to revise these conclusions as new information arises.

Responding to Malicious Gossip

As I have already discussed in Chapter 4, gossip plays a key role in many of Fielding’s novels, and *Amelia* is no exception to this. It may be useful, however, to start by looking back briefly at Fielding’s uses of gossip in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Fielding presents gossip as a largely expansive force in the earlier novels. In *Tom Jones*, gossip is often used to speculate about an individual’s character, allowing the gossips to share information and their theories with one another.

Occasionally, gossip can be used for malicious purposes, as can be seen in Blifil's carefully hoarded and manipulated gossip about Tom and Black George. While this does have the notable effect of exiling both Tom and Black George from the neighbourhood, it does not appear to severely limit their options. Despite this malicious intent, gossip in *Tom Jones* often precipitates activity, pushing characters (mainly Tom and Partridge) to begin or continue their journeys. As such, it creates new opportunities for the victims of gossip to meet new people, circulate and to repair their characters through positive behaviours. Rarely does it lead to tragic or oppressive outcomes.²³⁴ In contrast, gossip in *Joseph Andrews* is often used by those who delight in injuring the characters of others, either for their own pleasure and entertainment (as with the Roasting Squire) or to bolster their reputations with their peers (as with Wilson). I suggest, however, that the effects of this gossip are largely limited as the reader is not introduced to the victims of this gossip. Rather, the narrator's focus remains squarely on the gossiper and (more importantly) to Adams' comic reactions to them.

In *Amelia*, Fielding expands on the darker possibilities of gossip that he had begun to explore in *Joseph Andrews*. Gossip in *Amelia* is similarly used by individuals and groups for malicious purposes and often stems from privately-held or shared envy. In *Amelia*, however, Fielding focuses on the effect that malicious gossip has on an individual's prospects. For Booth, the effects of malicious gossip are debilitating, limiting his economic and physical freedom, as well as undermining his relationships with several of his friends. However, it is not the gossip of a few individuals (a Blifil, a Roasting Squire, or a Mrs Partridge and Mrs Wilkins) which affects Booth, but rather the collective envy of an entire community. Hunter similarly suggests that this change helps to contribute to the novel's darker tone:

²³⁴ The obvious exception to this being the period of hardship Partridge endures (which includes spending seven years in prison for the trespass of a pig) as a result of Mrs Partridge's and Mrs Wilkins' gossip about Tom's parentage.

[t]he difference in *Amelia* lies in the sense of evil and oppression generated by groups of people. It is not always an individual whose cruelty or selfishness or thoughtlessness brings about complication and unhappiness (Hunter 1975, 204)

Sometimes, as we see towards the end of the novel, this sense is created as individuals or smaller groups close in around the Booths.²³⁵ At other points, however, gossip is the product of larger groups of individuals coming together to undermine Booth's character. The force of this communal gossip provides one of the most destructive and oppressive forces in the novel and precipitates many of the other complications which arise for the Booths.

Perhaps, the most striking example of malicious group gossip in *Amelia* is the community-wide envy which unites to ruin Booth in East Stour.²³⁶ After Booth is put on half-pay by his regiment, Dr Harrison leases his parsonage to Booth and encourages him to become a farmer (Fielding 2010, 169). While Dr Harrison is away tending to the education of the son of his patron, Booth inadvisably purchases an old coach for his own pleasure: 'from a Boy I had been always fond of driving a Coach, in which I valued myself on having some Skill' (Fielding 2010, 171). This ill-considered act invites the ire of Booth's fellow farmers and neighbours, who see the purchase as a vain attempt by Booth to distinguish himself above his current social station:

[b]efore this, as my Wife and myself had very little distinguished ourselves from the other Farmers and their Wives, [...] they treated us as their Equals; but now they began to consider us as elevating ourselves into a State of Superiority, and immediately began to envy, hate and

²³⁵ I suggest that this is created when pairs of individuals (the noble peer and Mrs Ellison, Miss Mathews and Colonel James, Colonel and Mrs James) attempt to implement their respective plots against the Booths. This is also created when the narrator withholds important from Booth and the reader, such as when Booth is prosecuted by Dr Harrison. The lack of reasoning behind Harrison's sudden change of behaviour contributes to Booth's sense of isolation and abandonment.

²³⁶ In Book II.i, Fielding presents an early example of group gossip, as he shows several young ladies gleefully gossiping about Amelia's accident to Booth (Fielding 2010, 98–101). In contrast to the later incident at East Stour, which I discuss below, this incident appears to have no lasting negative impact on either Amelia or Booth, and aids in their blossoming courtship. In this sense, it might be seen as being closer to the uses of gossip in Fielding's earlier fiction, although it is still motivated by malice. I suggest that this incident prepares the reader for later incidences of gossip, malice and envy in the novel.

declare War against us. The neighbour little Squires too were uneasy to see a poor Renter become their Equal in a Matter in which they placed so much Merit (Fielding 2010, 171)

The community collectively ‘conspires’ to undermine Booth’s public character and ruin him financially: ‘[t]hey nick-named me in Derision, THE SQUIRE FARMER. Whatever I bought, I was sure to buy dearer; and when I sold, I was obliged to sell cheaper than any other’ (Fielding 2010, 172). This communal envy effectively isolates the Booths within their neighbourhood and cuts them off from their local social and economic networks. Bernard Capp has suggested that judgemental gossip was often used within local communities ‘to reinforce the boundaries of acceptable behaviour’ and often ‘target[ed] individuals who failed to conform’ (Capp 2004, 274). While this was generally designed to police unacceptable behaviour that might risk the reputation of the community as a whole, in *Amelia* judgemental gossip serves to maintain the appearance of the social hierarchy. United against Booth, the effects of their gossip reach far into the novel, creating further economic and social difficulties for the Booths long after they leave the neighbourhood, as I discuss below.

While the whole community seems to participate in this gossip, it is initiated and fanned by the pre-existing, private envy of a single individual. The community is encouraged by the curate’s wife, whose personal envy of Amelia’s beauty fuels her desire to see the Booths lowered in the public esteem. Rather ironically, it appears that the curate’s wife benefits most from Booth’s carriage, using it to bolster her own pride and status:

what will appear most surprising [...] was, that the Curate’s Wife, who being lame, had more Use of the Coach than my *Amelia*, (indeed, she seldom went to Church in any other Manner) was one of my Bitterest Enemies on the Occasion (Fielding 2010, 172)

The cynical reader is tempted to interpret this ‘lameness’ as an excuse for the curate’s wife to distinguish herself above her neighbours. She takes advantage of the Booths’ generosity and naivety with little risk to her own public character. In turn, she heads the

public gossip against the Booths, perhaps to ensure that it does not inadvertently turn against her. Patricia Meyer Spacks has suggested that the act of gossiping ‘can evoke the terror of the self as [...] victim of such power’ (Spacks 1985, 51). She argues that ‘terror of reprisal underlies part of the gossip’s guilt. Our superegos warn us what others might find to say of us; we dread an all too readily imagined danger’ (Spacks 1985, 51). I suggest that this can be applied to the curate’s wife: having first used the Booths for their carriage, she turns against them, leading the charge to cover her own guilt and pride, and continuing to slander the Booths long after they have left the neighbourhood.²³⁷

Individual envy is then translated through gossip into public and communal dissatisfaction. The inevitable consequence of this is the speedy ruin of Booth (with a debt of 300*l.*), forcing him to give up the farm and retreat to London. Deprived of his public character amongst his neighbours, Booth is brought to the brink of financial ruin and is forced from the community.

However, the narrator does not reveal the full consequences of this gossip for Booth’s character until well into the novel. In particular, this gossip compromises Booth’s character with his friend and primary financial supporter, Dr Harrison. When Harrison hears of Booth’s ‘Extravagance in the Country’, Harrison is ‘[p]oisoned with all this Malice’ and seeks Booth out to confirm the truth or otherwise of the tale (Fielding 2010, 362). However, during his visit to the Booths (while they are absent), he spies the gifts given to the children by the noble peer: ‘whereof he cry’d, heyday! what’s here? and then he fell to tumbling about the things like any mad [man]’ (Fielding 2010, 262). Believing this to be confirmation of the rumours, he resolves to prosecute Booth for his debt:

²³⁷ In Book IX.i, the reader is told that Dr Harrison returned to the neighbourhood after the Booth’s departure and had the gossip against them ‘confirmed by many Witnesses’, including the curate’s wife, who preserved ‘the outward Appearance of Friendship’ whilst slandering them to Dr Harrison (Fielding 2010, 362).

[t]his Account tallied so well with the Ideas he had imbibed of *Booth's* Extravagance in the Country, that he firmly believed both the Husband and Wife to be the vainest, silliest, and most unjust People alive. It was indeed, almost incredible, that two rational Beings should be guilty of such Absurdity; but monstrous and absurd as it was, ocular Demonstration appeared to be the Evidence against them (Fielding 2010, 362)

Fielding here recalls the preface to *Joseph Andrews* in which he argues that the 'only Source of the true Ridiculous [...] is Affectation' (Fielding 2008a, 6). Amongst the examples of affectation, Fielding includes a description of a poor family 'shivering with Cold and languishing with Hunger' but who have adorned their house with 'Flowers, empty Plate or China Dishes' as a suitable object for the reader's ridicule (Fielding 2008a, 7). The Booths, in Harrison's eyes at least, can be seen here to resemble this poor family, confined to the verge of the court for debt yet apparently still treating their children to toys and a gold watch. Harrison's anger, then, appears to be justified by the evidence he sees before him. He sets out to bring a lawsuit against Booth for his debts, resulting in Booth's imprisonment for all of Book VIII. However, the narrator withholds the information that Dr Harrison is Booth's prosecutor and the 'madman' who tumbled through the apartment (Book VI.iv) from the reader and Booth until the beginning of Book IX. Fielding here draws on the method he developed in *Tom Jones*, allowing the narrator to conceal important information in order to provide interpretive space for the reader. He refuses to give Harrison's reasons for prosecuting Booth, making the Doctor's behaviour seem erratic.²³⁸ Only at the beginning of Book IX, as the chapter title indicates, does the '*History look backwards*' and the narrator fills the reader in the missing information which he omitted earlier (Fielding 2010, 362). This leaves ample time for the Booths and the reader to speculate on the identity and motives of Booth's prosecutors. As a result of this malicious gossip then, Harrison's opinion of Booth's

²³⁸ Spacks similarly argues in her *Desire and Truth* (1990), that Harrison's behaviour towards the Booths here seems 'erratic' and he proves to be as liable to be misled as Allworthy is in *Tom Jones* (Spacks 1990, 110).

character is compromised, and Booth loses his freedom for much of the novel. It is only once Dr Harrison confronts Booth in prison for his foolishness that Booth is able to redeem his character in his friend's eyes and be granted his freedom. Malicious gossip, then, constrains Booth by limiting the options available to him. This adds to the novel's claustrophobic sense of a world closing in around the Booths.

While gossip does limit the options available to Booth, it seems to me that it is his failure to act decisively in these moments that contributes most to his financial and social ruin, and, as a result, exposes the more morally dubious elements of his character to the reader. Readers of *Amelia* (myself included) have often been frustrated with Booth's passivity in the face of threats posed by other characters' desires. Critics have tended to agree that Booth is essentially passive throughout the novel and is unable to mount any real resistance to threats against his family and his honour (Battestin 1974, 618; Hunter 1975, 194; Oakman 1976, 468; Schofield 1985, 47; Howard 1987, 290; Spacks 1990, 108; Campbell 1995, 205–6, 217; Haggerty 1996, 396; Potter 1999, 148).²³⁹ However, they disagree on the reason for Booth's lack of activity in the novel: some argue it is the result of his mistaken philosophy (Battestin and Howard); others, that it is a consequence of competing models of masculine behaviour (Campbell and Potter); or of his guilt at betraying Amelia (Schofield and Haggerty); and yet more argue that it is a result of the particularly corrupt society in which the Booths live (Hunter, Oakman and Spacks). While all these sources contribute in some way to Booth's lack of agency, I suggest that malicious gossip also provides a major source of oppression for

²³⁹ In several cases during the novel, it is Amelia's actions which prevent further misfortunes from occurring to their family (see for example her switch with Mrs Bennet at the masquerade and her burning of James's challenge letter). Spacks also suggests that Amelia 'inadvertently generates [Booth's] rescue from prison and their dire financial situation when she pawns her miniature (Spacks 1990, 110). While Spacks regards this as evidence of Amelia's passivity in the novel, I argue that Amelia shows more will to act than Booth does. This further helps to blur the gender distinctions between activity and passivity, which I discuss in more detail below.

Booth and severely limits his sphere of activity throughout the novel.²⁴⁰ I argue that Booth's responses to gossip (particularly when they are compared to Tom Jones' reactions to gossip in the earlier novel) demonstrate his submission to the forces working against him. The only actions he does take are those forced on him by other people and threaten to compromise his moral and masculine character. As such, malicious gossip both reveals Booth's character and presents a distinct threat to his ability to prosper in the novel, and contributes in no small way to the feeling of oppression which permeates *Amelia*.

Booth's failure to act can best be seen when we compare the Booths' responses to gossip with those of Tom Jones, who is also confronted with the negative effects of gossip in the earlier novel. Robert Oakman has also previously made this comparison, noting that Tom 'is not as mistreated and victimized by his fellows as Booth' (Oakman 1976, 486). Tom has to regularly face the consequences of other individuals' gossip about his character. What distinguishes his behaviour from Booth's, however, is his willingness to take action and defend himself and the reputations of others (mainly Sophia) from the threats posed by gossip. For example, while staying at the inn in Gloucester, Tom notes that Mrs Whitefield's behaviour visibly alters during his stay. The reader is told that this is a result of the petty-fogger's gossip, which paints Tom as an ungrateful rogue, who seduces maids and beats Allworthy when he tries to reprimand him. Faced with the 'constrained severity' of his hostess, Jones 'resolve[s], no matter how later, to quit the house that evening' and continue his journey (Fielding 2008b, 376).

²⁴⁰ Some of the gossip in *Amelia* is not maliciously motivated, yet still exposes Booth's passivity. For example, Mrs Bennet and Amelia speculate on the noble peer's intentions regarding Amelia when the former shares her story of her rape. Together, they take positive action to prevent Amelia from attending the masquerade by switching places for the evening. By acting, Amelia and Mrs Bennet turn this gossip into a positive outcome for them both (although Mrs Bennet's self-interest overrides her concern for Amelia's character at the masquerade) and thwart the peer's plans. Booth, in comparison, lacks such agency and so is often unable or unwilling to resist the forces which unite against him, as I suggest below.

In comparison, Booth takes no visible action when his community seek to drive his costs up and prices down. Instead, he waits for *four years* for the debt to build to breaking point before the landlord seizes his stock and Booth is forced to retreat with his family to the verge of the court to avoid their creditors (see Fielding 2010, 172–73). The reader is not even told if he sells the offending coach which brought him so many difficulties. Jill Campbell notes that once in London, Booth’s indecision causes further financial strain as he fails to support his family:

[when] the time-honoured gentlemanly choice of a military career does not offer Booth a viable form of support, [...] he finds it unthinkable to look for other means to support his family in trade or manual labor. This economic impasse results in Booth’s physical confinement for much of *Amelia* (Campbell 1995, 206)²⁴¹

While both men are mistreated in their respective novels, Tom takes positive action to relieve his discomfort while Booth persists to the point of ruin. Susan Howard suggests that Booth is ‘ill-treated because he is “too powerless to resist”’ and often ‘succumbs to passivity’ when faced by hardship or difficult decisions (Howard 1987, 290).²⁴² His lack of action leaves him open to the tragic possibilities that result from malicious gossip, to which Tom is never truly exposed.

This distinction between Tom’s activity and Booth’s inertia can also be seen in both men’s response to the threat of duelling in their respective novels. In *Amelia*, Booth is forced to duel with Colonel Bath when gossip threatens his friendship with Colonel James. After Booth ignores Miss Mathews after their release from prison, she falsely tells James that Booth has slandered his character: ‘she did not scruple to insinuate, that the Colonel was not at all obliged to the Character given of him by his Friend’ (Fielding

²⁴¹ Booth only becomes a farmer at the behest of Dr Harrison, who gives him the means to do so. Booth seem entirely unable throughout the novel to conceive on his own of a career outside the military. The system of preference and self-interest of ‘great men’, however, prevent him from ever attaining the position he hopes for.

²⁴² Howard makes this point about Booth’s time in jail, but I argue it is equally applicable here and in other instances throughout the novel. Booth’s powerlessness and the ill-treatment this breeds creates an unending cycle of hardship for the family that contributes to the novel’s dark tone and the feeling of claustrophobia.

2010, 204). She builds upon James's existing envy of Booth as the man who previously possessed his mistress's affections: 'for he was not a little pleased with finding a Reason for hating the Man, whom he could not help hating without any reason' (Fielding 2010, 204). The consequences of this gossip are two-fold. Firstly, it causes James to withdraw his financial support and his promise to help Booth find a commission, causing further financial difficulties for the Booths. Secondly (and perhaps the more immediately dangerous consequence), it results in Booth's duel with Colonel Bath, in which the latter is wounded (see Fielding 2010, 228–32). Campbell argues that duelling represents a threat to Booth's masculine character as two different codes of male heroism – the 'Christian' (characterized by Dr Harrison), and 'Cavalier' (satirized in Colonel Bath) – compete for dominance (Campbell 1995, 205). As a military man, Booth is required through the novel (usually by Bath) to defend his manly honour by duelling. Linda Bree comments that as a soldier (even one not on an active commission), Booth would have been seen to 'dishonour the regiment [...] and could ultimately be forced out' if he did not accept the duel (Fielding 2010, 25).²⁴³ However, the risk that he might wound or kill his opponent, or be injured himself threatens to compromise his Christian virtue, which expressly forbids the spilling of blood (Campbell 1995, 205).

As Campbell has noted, these concerns in *Amelia* reflect the 'lively controversy' on the ethics of duelling in journals, essays and fiction throughout the century (Campbell 1995, 215).²⁴⁴ Published just two years after *Amelia*, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) presents his eponymous hero declining challenges from several

²⁴³ Booth is often saved in the novel from having to make a decision to fight or not by Colonel Bath, who fights and wounds Bagillard on Booth's behalf, or by Amelia, who withholds her suspicions about Colonel James in order to prevent Booth from duelling (see Fielding 2010, 156–59, 487–92).

²⁴⁴ In his *Tatler* No. 25 (7 June 1709), Steele aimed to 'strip' duelling of 'all its false Pretences to Credit and Reputation amongst Men' by revealing the nonsensical nature of demanding 'satisfaction' for an insult (Steele 1712, 1:178). John Cockburn also opposed duelling in his *The History and Examination of Duels* (1720).

characters on the grounds that ‘refusing a duel is a duty to ourselves, our fellow Creatures, and our MAKER’ (Richardson 1753, 7:304).²⁴⁵ In his Note from the Editor, Richardson also quotes military law at length, which expressly forbids officers and soldiers to duel or to incite others to do so, and ‘acquit[s] and discharge[s] all men who [...] have challenges sent to them, of all disgrace’ (Richardson 1753, 7:302). For Fielding in *Amelia*, however, the issue is not so straightforward. He does satirize the issue of duelling through his bombastic portrayal of Dr Harrison, and criticizes it more solemnly in his presentation of Dr Harrison’s and Amelia’s concerns. However, Bree argues that ‘while [Fielding] is clearly hostile to duelling, [he] airs the issue without quite resolving it’. Instead, he suggests that while the ‘honour code is largely outdated and ridiculous’ it is nonetheless necessary for a man to defend his honour, so as not ‘to lose the regard of those around him’ (Fielding 2010, 25). Booth is therefore stuck the unenviable position – to risk his manly honour or his life by duelling.

Campbell and Tiffany Potter point out in their respective studies that Tom too faces this ethical dilemma in *Tom Jones* (see Fielding 2008b, 334–35, 787–90; Campbell 1995, 205; Potter 1999, 136, 148). Tom is twice faced with challenges from Northerton when he slanders Sophia’s character, and from Mr Fitzpatrick when he discovers Tom leaving Mrs Fitzpatrick’s house in London (see Fielding 2008b, 330–42, 768–71). In both these instances, Tom seems more than prepared to fight (he almost kills Fitzpatrick), and he only stops to consider the consequences when the event is delayed by other circumstances (his injuries and Northerton’s escape) or after it has happened. The difference between Tom and Booth’s characters becomes clear when we compare their responses to duelling. While Tom ‘considers both sides of the argument and then chooses to privilege his publicly-determined honour over his Christian leanings, Booth

²⁴⁵ Bree notes that Richardson is thought to have been the author of ‘Six Original Letters on Duelling’ (1765) which argued that duelling was a violation of Christian principles (Fielding 2010, 25).

vacillates' and only acts when forced to by Bath (Potter 1999, 148). When Bath forces him to duel and is wounded, Booth with 'great Concern and even Horror in his Countenance' revealingly exclaims "[w]hy, my dear Colonel [...] would you force me to this?" (Fielding 2010, 230). Potter argues that through his uncertainty, Booth

reveals himself to be not the self-determining hero who may be imprudent, but a nervous and weak near-hero [...]. He duels with Colonel Bath [...] only because he feels he has been 'forced'; he has neither the individualism nor the self-empowerment to argue against Bath's fallacious understanding and dubious interpretation of honour. In fact, merit comes not from necessarily choosing one side or the other of the debate on the nature of honour, but from pausing to consider the stakes in an incident and choosing accordingly (Potter 1999, 148)

Unable to act decisively in accordance with the ideals either of his Cavalier (soldierly) heroism or his Christian virtue, Booth is left 'paralysed and drained' by the conflicting parts of his character (Campbell 1995, 215). Gossip helps to expose this conflict by presenting Booth with situations where he must (and often fails to) make a choice. Instead, his responses to duelling and honour are mixed and ambiguous, reflecting the conflict at the centre of his character.

In addition to these conflicts in Booth's character, I suggest that Booth's passivity also threatens to compromise his masculine character in one further way. Like Mary Hamilton and Heartfree, Booth's lack of agency and his failure to provide for his family throughout the novel can be seen as a failure to act in a sufficiently masculine fashion.²⁴⁶

Spacks suggests that in *Amelia*

²⁴⁶ Elaine McGirr comments that during the eighteenth century, 'passivity' was increasingly being gendered as a feminine trait, which was, in turn, subordinated to masculine 'activity' (McGirr 2007, 15). However, Spacks argues that 'it would be far too simplistic to claim that the myth of eighteenth-century womanhood is one of passivity. [...] English social actualities largely enforce female passivity; but myths reflect more than social actuality. Myths declare wishes and reveal fears; the fantasized compliant woman expresses fear of alternate possibility' (Spacks 1990, 111). While *Amelia* is held as Fielding's ideal woman (a virtuous, dutiful, economical, Christian wife and mother), she is far from passive to threats against her family in the novel. She takes action to avoid the masquerade, burns James's challenge letter to Booth, and has to carefully manage her behaviour around James and Bagillard, even when it threatens to compromise her own character, in order to prevent Booth from duelling with them. Booth's lack of agency then stands in stark contrast to *Amelia's* activity.

the male-female contrast proves less distinct than one might anticipate, because Booth too finds himself forced towards a position of passivity. [...] He can exercise no force at all, except through verbal explosions at home. Increasingly, he too finds himself only able to respond, not to initiate (Spacks 1990, 108)

It seems to me that this is particularly emphasised by the narrator during Booth's affair with Miss Mathews while incarcerated.²⁴⁷ In a manner reminiscent of Mrs Rushford's seduction of Hamilton, Booth is only 'able to respond, not to initiate'. Rather than playing the role of active seducer, he is left in this scene as the passive and unsympathetic 'victim' of seduction. Instead, the narrator describes Mathews as the initiator of their affair, using Booth's sympathetic response to her story and 'every Art to soften, to allure, to win, and to enflame' while Booth puts up no obvious defence (Fielding 2010, 176).²⁴⁸ Instead, he spends '[a] Whole Week' living 'in this criminal conversation', alternating between the 'sweet Lethargy of Pleasure' and fits of anxiety in which 'his Virtue alarmed and roused him, and brought the image of poor injured Amelia to haunt him' (Fielding 2010, 176).²⁴⁹ George Sherburn argues that Booth's affair with Mathews is a result of his upper-class gallantry and is keeping with the character of a Cavalier: '[n]o man of his station (except Sir Charles Grandison) could have refused the overtures of Miss Mathews in Newgate' (Sherburn 1936, 5).²⁵⁰ However, I find Booth's

²⁴⁷ Osland suggests that the wider injustices done to Booth in the novel 'must be set against the injustice he is about to do to Amelia, making it difficult for the reader to take a clear stance towards the characters' (Osland 1980, 58). Our empathy towards Booth and his situation is always tempered by our knowledge of his passivity.

²⁴⁸ Candice Ward suggests that Booth and Mathews' affair is precipitated by their exchange of stories and the sentimental responses (tears, sighs and tender looks) that these tales facilitate. While these sorts of tales are intended to forge virtuous bonds between people in most novels, in *Amelia*, these 'sympathetic exchanges' lead to adultery (Ward 2007, 125).

²⁴⁹ Hunter suggests that Fielding's lack of tolerance for sexual transgression in *Amelia* is not 'derived from horror at sexual violation per se, but from horror at a betrayal of Amelia' (Hunter 1975, 210). While Tom Jones can engage in sexual transgressions without any lasting consequences, these 'dalliances' can be excused as the errors of youth because Tom is not married. In contrast, Booth's affair with Miss Mathews plagues him throughout the novel because it is a violation of his marriage, interrupting his peace of mind and presenting physical obstacles which threaten his life and freedom (such as with his duel with Bath and James's refusal to help him). Booth is only released from this torment by Amelia's revelation that she has known about the affair all along and has 'forgiven it long ago' (Fielding 2010, 484).

²⁵⁰ Campbell argues that Booth 'shares more with Grandison than he might seem to, for he is also serious enough about the ideal of marital friendship and fidelity to be tormented by his sexual

language during the affair to be particularly revealing, with its emphasis on his alarmed ‘virtue’ (we might see elements of both Grandison and Joseph Andrews here) and his haunted conscience. We might compare Booth’s language here to that of Miss Mathews when she describes her affair with Hebbers earlier in the novel: ‘[t]wo months I passed in this detested commerce, buying, even then, my guilty, half-tasted pleasures at too dear a rate, with continual Horror and Apprehension’ (Fielding 2010, 86). As with Mathews, Booth is overwhelmed by his guilty conscience and his wounded virtue. The language in these extracts suggest that both Booth and Mathews are speaking from similar positions as the (far from innocent) victims of seduction, rather than the seducer. While Mathews later goes on to take that position of power in her affair with Booth, Booth is never able to gain control. Instead, he remains crippled under the weight of his guilt for much of the novel. Campbell notes that after his release from prison, ‘Booth settles into a melancholy so deep that he is ‘scarce animated’ like ‘a dull lifeless Lump of Clay’, as if paralyzed and drained’ by his guilt (Campbell 1995, 215). It seems to me quite significant that that Booth does not extricate himself from his affair with Mathews by any action of his own. Rather, it is Amelia’s timely arrival at the prison which puts an end to his affair and her later forgiveness of his adultery that allows them to resume their happy marriage.

Gossip in *Amelia*, then, helps to expose the conflicts at the centre of Booth’s character. His inability to act positively in the face of gossip leads him and his family into ever more desperate circumstances. Through his passiveness and inability to respond to the forces of gossip, Booth fails to attain the ideal of Fielding’s earlier good-natured heroes, Parson Adams and Tom Jones. While flawed, Adams and Tom are always able to defend themselves and others from threats, and are happy to wade in with fists raised where necessary. Booth, on the other hand, is not, unless absolutely forced to by other

betrayal of Amelia’ (Campbell 1995, 215). She argues this is further evidence of the conflict between the Cavalier and Christian elements of Booth’s character.

characters. It is this inability which allows the tendrils of malicious gossip to invade so much of the novel, and which causes the Booths' seemingly unending financial and social difficulties. For many, the conclusion of *Amelia* and the change of the Booths' fortunes seems 'forced and arbitrary – out of focus with the basic thrust of Fielding's realistic method of presentation' (Oakman 1976, 487). The return of Amelia's fortune, which effectively rescues the Booths from debt, has been seen to be more incredible than the revelations of Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones' true parentage. However, I would argue that the conclusion of the novel is in keeping with Booth's character. Having failed to take any positive action throughout the novel, it would be miraculous to expect Booth to extract himself from his situation. Significantly, it is the activity of others (Amelia, Robinson and Dr Harrison) which pull him from the brink of destruction and prevent the novel from tipping over the edge of darkness.

Ocular Demonstration and the Problem of Reading Good Nature

Booth is not the only character in *Amelia* to put Fielding's theory of good nature under scrutiny. In his earlier plays and novels, Fielding had developed his concept of good nature as a marker of virtue, arguing that it should be united with perception and activity in order to promote good judgement. In *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding took this a step further, using good nature to excuse the transgressive, self-interested behaviours of his good-but-flawed protagonists, Parson Adams and Tom Jones.²⁵¹ Some contemporary readers, such as Sarah Chapone, complained that Fielding used good nature to 'soften the deformity of vice, by placing characters in an amiable light, that are destitute of every virtue except good nature' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 318).²⁵² 'Like a passport to material rewards', Simon Varey comments, 'good nature eventually

²⁵¹ Good nature is also used to excuse (to an extent) some of the morally dubious characters, like Black George and Partridge in *Tom Jones*.

²⁵² From a letter to Elizabeth Carter, dated 11 February 1752.

gets Tom Jones, Joseph and Fanny [...] out of their difficulties. But in *Amelia* good nature alone is no longer an index of virtue' (Varey 1986, 130).²⁵³ As several critics have pointed out, good nature in *Amelia* is no longer the preserve of Fielding's virtuous heroes alone. Instead, many of the major characters who are initially described as good-natured expose contrary behaviours and more morally dubious aspects of their characters later in the novel (Bloch 1973, 467; Battestin 1974, 639; Varey 1986, 128; Potter 1999, 146). Tuvia Bloch has noted that the narrator regularly attributes these qualities to some of the most deceptive and devious characters in the novel, including Colonel James, Betty Harris, the nameless peer and Mrs Ellison (Bloch 1973, 466–72).²⁵⁴ Their actions during the novel belie their initial appearances of goodness and reveal ulterior motives or excuses for their charitable behaviour, harkening back to Mandeville's theories about the lack of moral integrity in an individual's actions. As such, good nature becomes an unreliable indicator of moral character in *Amelia*.

However, these 'good-natured' characters are not simply hypocrites like Jonathan Wild or Blifil. Rather, in *Amelia*, Fielding allows his 'villains' to be capable of acts of goodness and charity, blurring the distinction between his 'good' and 'bad' characters.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Varey also includes the Heartfreeds in his list of characters in Fielding's novels who are eventually relieved of their difficulties due to their good nature. However, I argue that it is not Heartfree's goodness that finally releases him from prison, but the actions of his wife, the good judge and the self-interest of Fireblood. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Heartfree lacks the kind of active good nature which would later characterize and excuse the flaws of Parson Adams and Tom Jones. Instead, like Booth, he is powerless to resist the threats around him and can even be seen to invite difficulties through his lack of judgement.

²⁵⁴ Bloch argues that among those characters initially identified as 'good-natured' are Booth, Colonel James, the noble peer, Mrs. Ellison, Miss Bath (Mrs James), Mrs. Bennet (Mrs. Atkinson), Colonel Bath, Betty Harris, Betty the maid, and the curate's wife (Bloch 1973, 466–72). Many of these characters later betray contrary or ambiguous traits (e.g. Booth's gambling and adultery, Bennet's self-interest, Bath's duelling, the maid's stealing) which throw this good nature into doubt.

²⁵⁵ In keeping with this more mixed characterization, some of Fielding's 'good' characters in *Amelia* are also shown to be capable of seemingly deceptive acts. As we have already seen above, Dr Harrison, like Allworthy before him, is shown to be fallible in his judgements of character. Amelia repeatedly has to conceal information from Booth, including the challenge from James and the fact that she has exchanged places with Mrs Atkinson at the masquerade, in order to protect herself and her family from ruin.

As with the ‘prudent’ characters of *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*’s ‘villains’ occasionally seem capable of acts of charity without any expectations of something in return. For example, after having raped Mrs Bennet at the masquerade, the noble peer gives her an annuity of 150 *l.* (Fielding 2010, 315). While Mrs Bennet fears that this might lead to further sexual advances, the peer proves uninterested in making a second attempt, as Mrs Bennet suggests that ‘few of his numberless Mistresses have ever received a second Visit from him’ (Fielding 2010, 315).²⁵⁶ In the place of a single, stable character portrait, Campbell suggests that the narrator ‘repeatedly takes us through a disorientating process of shifting perspectives, offering one account of character [...] only to withdraw it and replace it with an unexpected alternative’ (Campbell 1995, 226). However, I suggest that this works in a similar way to what Bernard Harrison identifies as the shifting viewpoints in *Tom Jones*, which force the reader to consider multiple accounts of character and to ‘distrust’ the perspective which he might otherwise naturally fall into (Harrison 1975, 45). As a result of these shifting accounts, readers and other characters are encouraged to revise their judgements of character as they witness new behaviour or as new information arises. I suggest that this process is fraught with its own difficulties, as the behaviours we witness and the conclusions we draw from them are frequently misleading. We might think back to Dr Harrison’s discovery of the toys and watch in the Booths’ rooms, which I discussed above. Drawing on the evidence before him, Harrison logically concludes these items to be confirmation of the gossip about the Booths, fixing them in his mind as a vain and foolish couple. Only later, when he has Booth’s side of the story, does he see the alternative conclusion these objects symbolise. Here, ‘ocular

²⁵⁶ Similarly, during his attempt to seduce Amelia at the second masquerade, the peer agrees to give Sergeant Atkinson a commission. When it is revealed the next day that the ‘Amelia’ he met at the masquerade was actually Mrs Bennet in disguise, he allows Atkinson to keep the commission and makes no move to retaliate against Mrs Bennet for her deception (Fielding 2010, 469). Of course, these accounts should be treated with some caution as both come from Mrs Bennet, who proves herself to a ‘mixed character’ which is never absolutely fixed by the narrator.

demonstration', or the scientific process of drawing judgements from what can be observed (behaviours, actions, objects etc.), proves to be fallible, leading Harrison to make false conclusions.²⁵⁷ As a magistrate, Fielding was all too aware of the potential of such evidence to be misleading or conflicting, as can be seen in his discussion of the evidence in the Elizabeth Canning case in *A Clear State of the Case of Elizabeth Canning* (1753). I argue that Fielding extends this process to the reading of character throughout *Amelia*. Initial character sketches, accounts and good-natured behaviour rarely tell the whole story. As the novel progresses, new information comes to light which alters and complicates our judgement of character. I suggest that Fielding deliberately leads his reader to make mistakes when judging character in *Amelia* and encourages the reader to be prepared to revise their judgements as new information comes to light.

This need to revise our judgements of character can perhaps be best seen in Fielding's presentation of Booth's friendship with Colonel James. Several critics have argued that the reader is misled by James's initial presentation as a 'good-natured' character (Bloch 1973, 467; Varey 1986, 127; Wanko 1991, 511; Potter 1999, 151–52). However, his later behaviour shows the conditions of this initial character sketch and shows the fallibility of Booth's reading of his friend's character. On his first introduction

²⁵⁷ Ocular demonstration (from the Latin 'oculus' for eye) is described by Samuel Johnson as 'seeing a thing one's self' in his *Dictionary* (significantly listed under his entry for 'Autopsy'). As key part of empiricist thought, ocular demonstration underpinned much of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in natural philosophy and medicine. Thomas Hankins and Robert Silverman have argued that it was particularly important for physicians 'who wanted to make their science demonstrative': "[d]emonstrations" here means direct observations through anatomical dissection, the demonstrations being followed by "arguments" as to the cause of what is observed' (Hankins and Silverman 1995, 39). For example, William Harvey argued that his observation of the blood's circulation around the body was based on years of 'ocular demonstration'. Writers too seem to have made use of the term, and I have found references to ocular demonstration in Alexander Pope's *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741) and Tobias Smollet's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1750). Eliza Haywood also seems to have been particularly fond of the term, and a search reveals that she makes repeated use of it in her works, including *Love in Excess* (1719), *Lasselia* (1724), *The Kingdom of Utopia* (1725), *The Perplex'd Duchess* (1727) and *The Female Spectator* (1745).

in the novel, James is described as ““one of the best-natured Men in the World””, who ““had a Head and a Heart perfectly adequate to every Office of Friendship”” (Fielding 2010, 141).²⁵⁸ Bloch has suggested that his behaviour in the next twelve chapters seems to confirm this opening portrait, as we are told that James nurses Booth through two bouts of illness in Gibraltar and offers him financial assistance when he finds himself in difficulty (Bloch 1973, 467).²⁵⁹ I would point out, however, that these chapters and the initial character sketch of James are all a part of the account Booth gives Miss Mathews of his past. As such, they are unlikely to contradict the initial sketch of James which is based on Booth’s experience of James’s generosity and kindness. In other words, having had first-hand evidence of James’s good nature, Booth has no reason to doubt his friendship with the Colonel.

As with Harrison’s observation of the toys and watch, however, this initial sketch of James’s character does not tell the whole story. It is only when Booth’s narrative ends and James enters the novel as Booth’s rival for Miss Mathews’ affections, that the narrator begins to reveal new information about his private character which contradicts the initial account:

[James] was a perfect Libertine with regard to Women; that being indeed the principal Blemish in his Character, which otherwise might have deserved much Commendation for Good-Nature, Generosity, and Friendship. But he carried this one to a most unpardonable Height; and made no Scruple of openly declaring, that if he ever liked a Woman well enough to be uneasy on her account, he would cure himself, if he could,

²⁵⁸ Potter argues that Booth’s initial description of James presents him ‘as nearly identical to the standard of the good-natured libertine established in *Tom Jones*’ (Potter 1999, 151). While the reader might expect another Tom Jones, James’s later behaviour reveals the more unsavoury aspects of his libertine character.

²⁵⁹ Varey equates James’s generosity in these opening scenes with his willingness to give Booth money, arguing that this gives him the appearance of good nature without any of the necessary qualities (Varey 1986, 126). However, I suggest that this overlooks James’s nursing of Booth after the latter is wounded twice in Gibraltar, which involves no forwarding of money. Although we are not actually given an account of exactly what James does for Booth during his illness, this seems to be a genuine act of kindness and good nature towards his fellow officer.

by enjoying her, *whatever might be the Consequence* (Fielding 2010, 193 my emphasis)²⁶⁰

Although Booth is correct in his interpretation of James's past actions as sincere signs of good nature – there seems to be no evidence to suggest any contrary motives for James's help in nursing Booth – Booth fails to appreciate the limits to which their friendship will extend and the danger James's libertine ways may present to Amelia. Instead, he wilfully deceives himself to James's character (as Heartfree does of Wild's character in the earlier novel). As the narrator makes clear above, James's good nature and willingness to help Booth only applies when it does not conflict with his interests and desires.²⁶¹ When James visits Booth in the sponging house later in the novel, the narrator cannot resist ironically commenting on James's attitude to their friendship:

the Colonel, tho' a very generous Man, had not the least Grain of Tenderness in his Disposition. [...] A Man of this Temper, who doth not much value Danger, will fight for the Person he calls his Friend; and the man that hath but little Value for his Money will give it him; but such Friendship is never to be absolutely depended on: For whenever the favourite Passion interposes with it, it is sure to subside and vanish into Air (Fielding 2010, 339)²⁶²

²⁶⁰ I would argue that even this second account of James as a 'perfect libertine' is equally misleading as the first, as his ineffectual pursuit first of Miss Mathews and later Amelia proves. In both cases, he fails to actively seduce the women. Instead, he is outwitted by Amelia at several turns, who finds alternative sanctuary with Dr Harrison in the event of Booth's going abroad or to prison and exchanges places with Mrs Atkinson in order to avoid the risky masquerade. Although Mathews does become his mistress, she seems to do so to satisfy her own interests and desire to punish Booth for abandoning her, rather than for any particular desire she holds for James. At the end of the novel, he lulls into what Terry Castle has describes as a 'stoic, inoffensive calm' having seemingly lost all his desire for Amelia after he fails to seduce her (Castle 1986, 238). Instead, he settles into a passive monogamy with Mathews, whom the narrator tells us has grown 'immensely fat' and who rules him 'in a most tyrannical manner': hardly the behaviour of a 'perfect libertine' (Fielding 2010, 514).

²⁶¹ As the novel progresses, James's generosity increasingly can be read as a form of bribery, nullifying potential threats or opposition to his will. When James marries Miss Bath, for example, the reader is told that he helps her brother to become a member of parliament. The narrator ironically argues that this incident 'serves to set forth the Goodness of *James*', (Fielding 2010, 189). However, when we read the novel with knowledge of James's libertine nature, we can see this as a convenient way to nullify the threat of Colonel Bath (whose immoderate fondness for his sister and readiness to duel is well documented) by 'mak[ing] up in Kindness to the Family, what he wanted in Fondness for his wife'. At other points in the novel too, we see James 'generously' bribing Mrs James with money and freedom, and even recruiting her to aid in his attempts to seduce Amelia (see Fielding 2010, 445–49).

²⁶² In *Amelia*, Fielding challenges the idea, expressed most clearly in Robinson's fatalism, that 'every Man acted merely from the Force of the Passion which was uppermost in his Mind, and could do no otherwise' (Fielding 2010, 68). Similarly, Fielding also describes Jonathan Wild as

This is shown at several points in the novel when James proves more than willing to sacrifice his friendship with Booth to his desire for a woman. George Haggerty similarly suggests that ‘friendship fails whenever sexual desire for a woman intervenes’ and Booth’s and James’s friendship is always tinged by James’s sexual jealousy (first for Mathews and later for Amelia) (Haggerty 2015, 190).²⁶³ When Mathews and Amelia become the objects of James’s desire, his willingness to help Booth quickly diminishes. Their relationship deteriorates to the extent that James positively refuses to stand bail for Booth and even considers recruiting Atkinson as a pimp for Amelia when Booth is imprisoned for debt: ‘his greatest Comfort was that, *Amelia* and *Booth* were now separated, and his greatest Terror was of their coming again together’ (Fielding 2010, 347).

being driven by a ‘predominant passion’ – ‘Ambition’ – which propels him headlong to his inevitable execution (Fielding 2003b, 173). Bree notes that the theory of the ruling passion was a matter of ethical controversy for many of Fielding’s contemporaries, including notably David Hume (see especially Essay VIII, ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’ in Hume’s *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748)) (Fielding 2010, 68 n2). In *Amelia*, Robinson and Booth use this theory of the ruling or predominant passion to excuse their actions throughout the novel. Booth is ‘saved’ from this erroneous theory when he reads John Barrow’s *Sermons* while in prison (see Fielding 2010, 495–97). Booth’s miraculous conversion to Christian principles and Fielding’s attitude towards the ruling passions has been a recurrent topic of discussion in critical studies (see Wright 1968, 45–54; Battestin 1974, 620–42; Oakman 1976, 481–84).

²⁶³ I suggest that this is not the case for *all* of Booth’s friendships in the novel and some desires can have positive consequences for Booth. Sergeant Atkinson’s relationship with Booth is motivated primarily by Atkinson’s love for Amelia and, as a result of this, he is always willing to help Booth, even when he has little resources to share. In contrast to James’s libertine desires, Atkinson’s desire is always given at a distance and is virtuous in intention, excepting perhaps for the kiss Amelia permits him on his ‘deathbed’ and the miniature of her which he steals: ‘yet I can truly say, it was not the Gold nor the Diamonds which I stole – it was that Face which, if I have been the Emperor of the World’ (see Fielding 2010, 470–71). However, Campbell and Haggerty have both argued that Booth misreads this relationship and treats Atkinson more as a servant than as a friend (Campbell 1995, 222–23; Haggerty 2015, 192). For example, when Atkinson makes a subtle and generous offer to deduct £100 from Booth’s owed debt, Booth assumes that Atkinson has made an error in his calculation: ‘*Booth*, who did not apprehend the generous Meaning of the Sergeant [...] answered, [Atkinson] was mistaken; that he had computed his Debts, and they amounted to upwards of four hundred Pounds’ (Fielding 2010, 341). Similarly, Campbell suggests that Booth mistakenly believes that Atkinson’s attachment to the family stems from his loyalty to Booth himself, as his ““master” and military superior [...] rather than out of devotion to his foster sister and secret love object, Amelia’ (Fielding 2010, 222).

Significantly, though, Booth never recognises this aspect of James's character and instead persists in his belief that James is a good natured and loyal friend.²⁶⁴ Booth is often quick to excuse his friend, even when his own suspicions are piqued by elements of James's behaviour or conversation. For example, when James seems to suggest that Booth prostitute Amelia to the noble peer in hopes of advancement – which he quickly denies, contending that 'the Goods I meant, were no other than the charming Person of Miss *Mathews*' – James's behaviour creates 'Chimeras' in Booth's mind, 'which gave him no very agreeable Sensations' (Fielding 2010, 248). However, when James begins to recognise and display his desire for Amelia, Booth is unable to see what is right before him. Instead, he is taken up with his concern over the peer's intentions and completely ignores James's odd behaviour (see Fielding 2010, 249–55). Booth misreads the evidence before him, placing all his suspicion instead on the noble peer's behaviour and wilfully blinds himself to the threat of James (as other characters do in Fielding's earlier works). Similarly, Folkenflik comments that Booth also ignores several other hints about James's character given by the other major characters, including Amelia, Dr Harrison and the Atkinsons, all of whom recognise James's intentions toward Amelia and attempt to warn him (albeit subtly) of the danger (Folkenflik 1974, 172; also see Fielding 2010, 410–12, 379–84).²⁶⁵ I suggest that as with Heartfree and the spectators in *The Female*

²⁶⁴ Castle argues that Booth makes other mistakes in his initial approximation of characters elsewhere in the novel (Castle 1986, 202). For example, during his first stay in prison, Booth is repeatedly fooled by his fellow inmates' appearances. The noseless Blear-Eyed Moll, with her 'gristly' visage seems contrarily to be 'one of the merriest Persons in the whole Prison' (Fielding 2010, 65). Meanwhile the pretty girl whom Booth identifies as having 'Innocence in her Countenance' proves to be a common prostitute who 'damn'd his Eyes, and discharged a Volley of Words, every one of which was too indecent to be repeated' (Fielding 2010, 69). Similarly, Robinson, the Methodist philosopher who befriends Booth when he arrives, later turns out to be a common pickpocket and to have played a role in the loss of Amelia's fortune. Castle suggests that these scenes are 'a generic cue to the reader' that 'situate us immediately in the anti-world of satire'. However, Booth does not match the reader's 'moral schooling' and instead 'remains the epistemological naïf' throughout the novel (Castle 1986, 202).

²⁶⁵ Wright argues that Booth must discover James's character 'little by little, so that Booth will at last be able to believe in James's dastardy' and will be 'able to school his outrage far enough' to prevent him from duelling (Wright 1968, 119). Heartfree too is slow to fully credit Wild's real character (although Wild's proposition that Heartfree murder an inmate does spark his

Husband, Booth allows his 'general rules' about James to influence his assessment, even when that judgement runs 'contrary to [his] present observation and experience' (D. Hume 1978, 259). As such, he bears the same level of responsibility for the misguided trust he places in James as the characters in the early criminal biographies.

Through Booth's and James's friendship, Fielding suggests to the reader the limits and pitfalls of ocular demonstration if an observer proves unwilling to revise their judgement of character as new evidence emerges. While Booth is not wrong in his early assessment of James's good nature, he fails to recognise the conditions which allow James to act in this manner – the fact that it does not contradict his desires or interest to do so. However, Booth can never fully realise James's character: to do so would risk his character as a moral Christian man as I have already discussed above. Folkenflik argues that Booth's lack of recognition

is part of Fielding's creation of a world which narrowly avoids being tragic [...] there should be no *anagnorisis*, no full recognition on the hero's part of the true state of affairs (Folkenflik 1974, 170–71)

To recognise James's character would set Booth on a path to his own destruction by forcing him to call James out and fight (with the potential to either injure or kill James, or be killed or injured himself) in a duel. While Booth is unable to read James's character, the reader is always able to judge him as a false friend. Through the narrator's ironic hints and the privileged information he gives about James's character, readers are encouraged to see the mistakes which Booth makes in not adjusting his judgement of his friend. Fielding does not make any particularly strenuous demands of his readers' judgement in these episodes, but rather uses this example to school them in the problems of reading conflicting evidence about character. This ability becomes central to our ability to read the other 'mixed characters' in the novel (the peer, Mrs Ellison, Mrs

suspicious). In contrast to Booth, though, Heartfree is too passive and adheres too closely to his religious principles to challenge Wild to a duel. As such, he is not at the same risk of compromising his character as Booth.

Bennet), especially as the narrator increasingly retreats from view and refuses to give any privileged information or judgements about individuals.

In *Amelia*, Fielding exposes the difficulties of judging good nature in a world in which most characters are morally ambiguous. ‘Bad’ characters often prove capable of acts of genuine good nature when these do not conflict with their own private desires. The difficulty for other persons in the novel is how far to be suspicious to be of good acts, and when to lower their guards around supposed ‘friends’. Ocular demonstration often fails to provide the reader or other characters with the whole story and, as such, leads us to misjudge individuals’ motives. Having taught us through the example of James to be suspicious of seemingly good-natured acts, Fielding goes on to introduce several characters whose outward shows of charity then become suspicious in the reader’s eyes. The narrator’s gradual retreat from the novel leaves the reader to make their own judgements without Fielding’s ironic guide. As Terry Castle has pointed out, we are not given any direct indication of how to read Miss Bennet/Mrs Atkinson’s character (Castle 1986, 218–19). Instead, she is left at the end of the novel as a deeply mixed character, the ‘dangerous and suspicious Part[s] of her Character’ hidden beneath her friendship for Amelia and marriage to near-paragon Atkinson (Fielding 2010, 283). ‘More and more of Fielding’s characters’, Campbell argues, ‘begin to resemble Mrs. Atkinson – to approximate her doubleness and moral ambiguity’ (Campbell 1995, 236). The difficulties for characters and readers, then, is how to judge such ambiguous characters. I suggest that Fielding asks us to be on our guard and to be prepared to revise our judgements about character as more information and evidence comes to light. There is the possibility within this, however, that no clear indication will emerge, and that characters will always be ambiguous. I suggest that character in *Amelia*, then, at best appears to be provisional, awaiting further information to confirm or deny its truthfulness.

As with most of Fielding's plays and novels, *Amelia* is experimental, but uses this to present a darker social world. While many critics see it as a departure from his successful formula, I suggest that Fielding draws on and develops the concepts of good nature, perception and gossip which he had introduced in the earlier works following the changing concerns of his maturity. Never one to stand still, Fielding is always striving to surprise, entertain and challenge his reader, and does so most notably in *Amelia*. Both contemporary and modern critics have seen this as a change too far, unbecoming of the author of *Tom Jones*. However, the fact that *Amelia* still invites critical comment and analysis today attests to its complexity and the demands it makes of its readers. Diane Osland similarly suggests that:

[i]f *Amelia* were as bad as the collective critical fault-finding suggests, it would long ago have been hanged on these technicalities, or at least faded into a more obscure death. It has, however, survived, and there are sound reasons why it should have continued to do so. An intellectually demanding novel, *Amelia* makes few concessions to minds less lively than its author's (Osland 1980, 56)

I argue that of all of Fielding's novels, *Amelia* demands most of its readers, asking them to be most sagacious, wary and flexible in their judgements. It attempts to show the moral ambiguities of character and the difficulties of forming an absolute judgement on the shifting sands of behaviour and public opinion. While this proved an experiment too far for many contemporary and modern readers, it produces an interesting social novel about the fragility of public character.

Following the backlash against *Amelia*, his 'favourite Child', Fielding withdrew from novel writing and spent his final years concentrating on his work as a magistrate, declaring in the *Covent-Garden Journal* (28 January 1752) that 'I will trouble the World no more with any Children of mine by the same Muse' (Paulson and Lockwood 1969, 317). By 1753, however, his health was rapidly declining, which, Fielding argued in his *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (published posthumously by Andrew Millar in 1755) was due in no small part to his efforts in tracking down and examining gangs of 'cut-throats'

who were plaguing the capital (Fielding 1997a, 131). J.A. Downie notes that in spring 1754, Fielding borrowed the sum of £1892 from Millar and retired from London, hearing his last cases at Bow Street in May. On 30 June 1754, he began his journey to Portugal and landed at Lisbon on 6 August. He died on 8 October 1754, just nine weeks after his arrival in Lisbon (Downie 2009, 201).

Conclusion

Throughout his career, Fielding was concerned with *how* his audiences and readers judged character and consistently set out to surprise and challenge them through his various experiments. In this thesis, I have argued that Fielding consistently experiments with this idea of accurate and generous judgement over the course of his literary career. While many studies have noted the importance of judgement to Fielding's novels, mostly *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, few have explored it in his theatrical career. I argue that it in considering *both* the plays and the novels, we can see the role which the theatre played in Fielding's developing conception of good judgement. As I have shown, Fielding's theatrical career helped him to realise key concepts, such as good nature, perception and gossip, and gave him the space to develop a relationship with his audience whereby he could encourage them to use their own discernment.

As I have suggested, Fielding was not alone in the eighteenth century in wanting to promote good judgement amongst his audiences and readers, and many of his works draw on wider debates about and concerns with the necessity of discernment in the political, philosophical, scientific, literary, legal and social realms. Like many of his contemporaries, he agreed that an individual's judgement was often imperfect, and that they were liable to make errors.²⁶⁶ Promoting good judgement could help to alleviate some of these errors, but ultimately many argued that only God could have absolute and infallible knowledge of a person's intentions and character. Pierre Nicole commented that:

no Judgements are so palpably rash, as those by which we pretend to dive into the motives and intentions of others [...]. God Almighty [...] hath in a special

²⁶⁶ In the sixteenth century, Montaigne had suggested that good judgement might be 'overthrown' by illness, injury or inane circumstances, so that 'there is hardly one single hour in a Man's whole Life, wherein our Judgement is in its due place and right condition' (Montaigne 1993, 636).

manner reserv'd to himself the knowledge of the secrets of Hearts (Nicole 1677, 312). Similarly, in *Spectator* No. 257, Joseph Addison argued that '[God] is the only proper Judge of our Perfections, who does not guess at the sincerity of our Intentions from the Goodness of our Actions, but weighs the Goodness of our Actions by the Sincerity of our Intentions' (Addison and Steele 1735, 4:20). Even in the depiction of divine judgement, however, opinions differed on the tone and nature of God's assessments.

I suggest that a comparison of Fielding's and Swift's presentations of judgement in the afterlife reveals much about the different approaches these writers took to encouraging discernment in their readers. Swift's *Day of Judgement* (1731) imagines an angry Jove 'arm'd with terrors' who 'bursts [from] the skies' to unleash his fury on the world below.

While each pale sinner hung his head,
Jove, nodding, shook the heavens, and said:
'Offending race of human-kind,
By nature, reason, *learning*, blind;
You who, through frailty, stepp'd aside;
And you who never fell, *through pride*;
You who in different sects were shamm'd,
And come to see each other damn'd;
(So some folk told you, but they knew
No more of *Jove's* designs than you)' (Swift 2008b, 532)²⁶⁷

Here, all of humanity is condemned as blind fools under Jove's displeasure. More specific targets of Swift's ire are the 'different sects' who gather eagerly to 'see each other damn'd', each assuming that they have deciphered 'Jove's designs'. In typical Swiftian fashion, he offers the reader a possibility of witnessing this damnation only to snatch it away in the final lines:

'The World's mad business now is o'er,
And I resent these pranks no more.
I to such blockheads set my wit!

²⁶⁷ David Morris argues that *The Day of Judgement* ridicules 'Last Day' poems, such as Aaron Hill's *The Judgement-Day* (1721) and Thomas Newcomb's *The Last Judgment of Men and Angels* (1723), which imagined the awe of God and the terror of the final hours of judgement. For Swift, the 'habit of imagining the Last Day from *man's* point of view is but one more instance of the absurd vice of pride' (Morris 1972, 120).

I damn such fools! – Go, go, you're bit' (Swift 2008b, 532)

Patrick Reilly suggests that in Swift's works 'the reader is shockingly left treading air, seeking a toehold anywhere, bewilderingly aware that what he has trusted has betrayed him' (Reilly 1985, 76). We can see this above in *The Day of Judgement*, as Jove turns his listeners away leaving the reader with uncertainty as to the final outcome. Jove here is depicted as both the final judge and the ultimate satirist, dismissing all who have failed to live up to his expectations.

I suggest that we might contrast Swift's apocalyptic judgement in *The Day of Judgement* with Fielding's Lucianic vision of the afterlife in *Journey from this World to the Next* (1743). First published in the *Miscellanies*, the *Journey* presents the god-judge Minos, who guards the gates of Elysium to weigh and measure each soul. Those souls which have demonstrated goodness towards others are permitted to pass, for, as Minos states "no Man enters that Gate without Charity" (Fielding 1997a, 32). Most are sent back to upper world to try again: 'in [Fielding's] system almost anyone can eventually get in' (Janes 2011, 507). When one claimant admits to 'disinheriting his Son for getting a Bastard', Minos sends him back to the 'World and begat another; for such an unnatural Rascal shall never pass this Gate' (Fielding 1997a, 29). Only the cruellest souls are sent to annihilation in a bottomless pit. Regina Janes suggests that Fielding minimizes the system of punishments and the 'residual terrors of hell and judgement revived by Methodism', and instead imagines heaven as a place of 'benevolent inclusiveness', where a person can be reunited with their loved ones (Janes 2011, 504). I would add that these episodes read like a list of faults which Fielding himself wishes to be forgiven for (having 'indulged very freely with Wine and Women in [one's] Youth' is conveniently reckoned no great crime by Minos, so long as the supplicant also demonstrates 'general Philanthropy and private Friendship') (Fielding 1997a, 33). Despite this, I suggest that they also stand as a miniature of Fielding's vision of good judgement, both in the

afterlife and on earth. In contrast to Swift's Jove, who passes a generalised judgement over all for their folly, Fielding's Minos listens to each claimant in turn, allowing them to present their case as if they were in a court of law, for, as he argued in *The Champion* (29 March 1740), '[t]here is nothing so unjustifiable as the general Abuse of any [...] Body of Men' (Fielding 2003a, 256). As with the Man of the Hill in *Tom Jones* or materialists, such as Mandeville, Swift's Jove 'falls [...] into an Error [...] by taking the character of mankind from the worst and basest among them' and using this as an excuse to damn all (Fielding 2008b, 420). Rather than collective condemnation, Minos passes generous but firm judgement on a case by case basis, allowing charitable actions to outweigh instances of vice, so that '[a] single bad act no more constitutes a villain in life than a single bad part on the stage' (Fielding 2008b, 286). I suggest that this encapsulates the spirit of Fielding's idea of good judgement which he develops throughout his plays and novels.

As I noted in the introduction, much of the current criticism of Fielding's plays dismiss them as youthful aberrances, or use them as a resource for information about Fielding's political allegiances or the theatrical references in his later novels (Hunter 1975; R. Hume 1985; Rivero 1989; Keymer 2007; Widmayer 2015). The studies which have given space to the plays have tended to focus on his experiments in form and style (Lewis 1987; Rivero 1989; Varey 1986; Lockwood, 1987, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2011; Keymer, 2007; Rogers 2007), his presentation of gender (Campbell 1995; Potter 1999), or his use of author-characters (Hassall 1967; Bevis 1990; Widmayer, 2015). In contrast, I have argued that Fielding's plays demonstrate an engagement with the concern of proper judgement as he responds to contemporary anxieties and debates about the performative nature of social life. He introduces the concepts of good nature and perception in his earliest plays, arguing that they are essential to deciphering different types of performance. He revisits and builds upon these concepts in his later novels, making them central to his ideas of active, generous judgement. From *The Author's*

Farce onwards, Fielding's experiments in the theatre allow him to manipulate his relationship with his audiences. I suggest that he carries this penchant for experimentation through into his novels of the 1740s and 50s. In the dramatic satires, Fielding participates in wider satires on the corruption of politics and the literary market under Walpole. Alongside Pope, Swift and Gay, Fielding satirizes the adulteration of literature by greedy and corrupt 'managers' in both realms. Where Pope and Swift denounce the 'purveyors of bad art root and branch', 'Fielding stages lively, popular, highly effective nonsense pieces by way of parody' (Marshall 2013, 205). His dramatic satires come closest to the 'biting' satires of Swift and Pope. However, the conflation of caricatures in both the political and theatrical spheres prevent these plays from supplying straight assessments and instead require his audience to create meaning through comparison. I suggest Fielding uses widely-discussed gossip about the 'great men' of the political and theatrical worlds as a key tool for exposing and speculating on their public characters. The conflated political and theatrical realms allow Fielding to place a greater onus on his audience to make connections between the various caricatures presented over the course of the evening, and so enrich his satire through the layering of meaning.

Like his early theatrical works, Fielding's criminal biographies have attracted relatively little critical attention, with the majority of current studies focusing on the political allusions, irony and theatrical allusions in *Jonathan Wild* (Rawson 1972b, 2003b; Rinehart 1979; Varey 1986; Battestin 2000; Bogel 2000; Downie 2009). Terry Castle, Jill Campbell and Emily Bowles's studies of *The Female Husband* focus on the relationship between the 'real' Hamilton and Fielding's fictionalised version. None of these compare the two criminal biographies. I argue that Fielding treats these texts in similar ways by deconstructing the 'myths' around the public characters of their real-life counterparts. Responding to wider concerns about crime, deception and fraud in the period, Fielding presents his protagonists as failing to live up to their criminal

reputations. Instead, he places the responsibility for their ability to ‘pass’ in society onto their spectators and victims, who fail to recognise and act on the signs of deception placed before them. I suggest that Fielding here builds upon the concepts of good nature and perception which he introduced in his early plays, arguing that goodness must be *active* in defence of itself. Recognising deceit in others, then, is not just an individual responsibility, but rather it is a moral imperative for the greater good of society. Failure to properly read the signs of deception allows these criminal protagonists to continue circulating and playing their tricks on others.

In *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, I suggest that Fielding returns to and enlarges upon the role of gossip and other forms of oral testimony in revealing character that he introduced in his later plays. While critics have frequently noted the role of perspectives, the interpolated tales and the narrator in these novels, few have considered the role which gossip and story-telling play in revealing character to the reader (Mandel 1969; Harrison 1975; McNamara 1979; Bartolomeo 1998). Building on these studies, I suggest that oral accounts offer characters and readers an opportunity to ‘test’ multiple perspectives on an individual with others. However, the narratives which emerge can also be misleading, particularly when individuals misrepresent, modify or modulate their story for a designed audience or to support their own opinions. I suggest that in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding demonstrates that character is never fixed and requires spectators to continually re-evaluate ‘evidence’ presented through oral accounts. Character, in this way, is at best temporary, always awaiting further information to confirm or challenge established accounts. Most studies of *Amelia* stress the different approach Fielding takes from his earlier novels. In contrast to these studies, I argue that *Amelia* continues exploring the themes of gossip and good nature which are a key element of Fielding’s earlier works. However, both concepts are presented in *Amelia* as potentially disruptive and destructive forces as malicious characters use them to hide

their deceptive motives and manipulate others. I suggest that in doing so, they make the process of assessing character more difficult and pertinent, as the tragic consequences of getting it wrong are revealed. Judging character accurately in *Amelia* impacts not only Billy Booth's reputation and manly honour, but also his livelihood, family and freedom.

As I have shown, judgement plays an important role not only in Fielding's novels, but throughout his literary works. Amongst his contemporaries, he is unusually explicit and consistent in his concern with the judgement of character. Since he is considered as one of the forefathers of the British novel, it is unsurprising that the influence of Fielding's works can be seen throughout the eighteenth century and beyond.²⁶⁸ Nicole Wright argues that fictions of the late eighteenth century take up this concern with proper judgement, complicating the 'question of where competent judgement of others' emotions and motives should be located on the spectrum between impassioned proximity and aloof distance' (Wright 2015, 329). In Frances Burney's novels, the problems of 'judging "as a stranger"' confront her heroines regularly as they attempt to negotiate their way in town. Cecilia's repeated failure to judge those around her properly (particularly her guardians, Mr. Monckton and Delvile) leads her into a series of tragic circumstances and ultimately to the loss of her fortune. Jane Austen's fictions too feature regular instances of misjudgement, although she treats them in a more comic fashion than Burney. Catherine Moorland, Emma Woodhouse, and Elizabeth Bennet are all led to make rash conclusions about others based on hearsay and speculative gossip. Charles Knight suggests that while Burney and Austen 'borrow significant elements of [Fielding's] comic and ironic narrative', both 'seem constrained by his unsavoury reputation from associating with him too closely' (Knight 2007,

²⁶⁸ Charles Knight suggests that Fielding's influence can be seen on a number of eighteenth-century British authors, including Sterne, Smollet, Burney, Austen, Scott and Byron, and on a number of continental writers, international modernists and comic novelists of the twentieth century (Knight 2007, 175).

188).²⁶⁹ I suggest that in Fielding's work too we can see early efforts to find a balance between sympathetic feeling and objective distance in the pursuit of good judgement. Too much or little of either can leave an individual vulnerable to deception (as in the case of Heartfree) or can lead to self-enclosure and egoism (as with Wisemore and the Man of the Hill).

For Fielding, the best judges unite perception, good nature and active benevolence in their assessments of others. However, he also admits that we can be led to false conclusions if 'evidence' is considered under the wrong circumstances or is misrepresented as fact. Tom Jones' drunken behaviour as Allworthy lies ill in bed upstairs seems reprehensible, when the knowledge that Tom is celebrating his foster father's recovery is omitted in his trial. On the other hand, Blifil's motives in freeing Sophia's bird seem laudably to support notions of freedom and Christian duty, without the reader's privileged knowledge that he released the bird to spite Tom. While Fielding cautions his audience and readers to be careful in their scrutiny of character, he also warns them not to be overly suspicious or to make generalised judgements against mankind as a whole. If we only look inside ourselves for how to judge others, as Parson Adams, Thomas Heartfree and Jonathan Wild do at their respective extremes of the moral spectrum, then we are liable to be deceived and to read others incorrectly. An inability to see beyond one's own perspective risks isolating us from society and reading others properly.

²⁶⁹ Knight argues that Fielding's influence 'extends indirectly to authors who may not have read him and did not consciously imitate him' (Knight 2007, 188). It seems likely that Burney and Austen would have had knowledge of, if not have read Fielding's works. Jo Parker has made a case for Austen's debt to Fielding, paring their novels to show the commonality between them. In a letter (9-10 January 1796) to her sister, Cassandra, Austen makes the comparison between Tom Lefroy's light-coloured and Tom Jones's white coat, in which the latter is injured while defending Sophia Western's honour (Austen 1995, 4, 218). This suggests that Austen had intimate knowledge of *Tom Jones*, enough certainly to make this recondite connection.

Instead, Fielding suggests that we should follow the example of the good magistrate of *Jonathan Wild*, who is not afraid to overturn his original ruling in the case of Heartfree when evidence of Wild's duplicity comes to light. We too should be careful not to be too absolute or immediate in our judgements. Rather, we should take the time to consider character from different perspectives and be willing to revisit or revise our ideas of another's character if and when new evidence arises. Fielding, here, affords his readers a luxury which he himself rarely had – either as a magistrate or in the court of public opinion. 'Not every judge', Reilly, suggests 'gets a second chance to redeem a mistake, but neither is every judge generous enough to grasp it' (Reilly 1985, 83). Fielding asks his audiences and readers to be open to the possibility that we might at times make incorrect judgements. Indeed, his magisterial narrator in the later novels actively leads us to make mistakes in some cases, particularly in his hints about Tom's parentage, for the purposes of teaching us this lesson. Even the most sagacious and wary judge could occasionally make errors, as Fielding himself knew all too well:

[t]o be placed above the Reach of Deceit is to be placed above the Rank of a human being; sure I [...] make no Pretension to be of that Rank; indeed I have been often deceived in my Opinion of Men (Fielding 1988a, 311)

Reilly suggests that for mortal beings '[m]istakes are unavoidable; our best hope, that of the good magistrate in *Jonathan Wild*, is that they should at least be corrigible' (Reilly 1985, 88). Judging character in Fielding's plays and novels is rarely a simple business; it is a continually evolving process in which the audience or reader is repeatedly challenged, but is, crucially, not punished or mocked when they get it wrong.

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