

SITUATING PATHOS IN ENGLISH DRAMA OF THE LONG EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

August, 2010

Nashville, Tennessee

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Dedicated to the memory of my mother.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would have been impossible to complete this dissertation without the kindly support of so many people. I offer special thanks to: the members of my committee, Jonathan Lamb, Mark Shoenfield, Bridget Orr, and James Epstein, for all of their help, intellectual, academic, and emotional; my community of friends, near and far, for keeping me mostly happy and relatively sane, especially: Yeo Ju Choi, Matt Doyle, Josh Epstein, Brian Rejack, Dan Spoth, Jeremiah Wade, and Jane Wanninger; my cat, Bruno, without whom my house would be incomplete; my family, for shaping me and keeping me grounded; and my gal, Meg, for her wit and sympathy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION: SYMPATHY AND SITUATION.....	1
Groundwork for an Alternative Genealogy of Sentimental Drama.....	5
The Question of Character.....	12
The Situation of Spectatorial Judgment: Pathos and the Public Sphere.....	26
Method.....	28
Outline.....	30
II. FROM FORM TO FIGURE: PATHETIC DRAMA AND THE CHARACTER OF SITUATION.....	33
Resistance to Form and Genre.....	36
Situation of the Actor: Betterton’s Jaffeir.....	45
Governing the Crowd.....	48
Banks and Judgment.....	50
Sympathy and Spectacle.....	53
Problems as Pathetic Drama Becomes a Formalized Genre.....	56
Conclusion.....	58
III. <i>THE BEGGAR’S OPERA</i> AND THE SOCIO-POETICS OF SYMPATHY AND WIT: INDUCTION, PROPRIETY, AND GENRE.....	60
Wit and Sympathy.....	70
Induction and Particularity.....	73
Particularity and Situation in Gay’s Drama.....	79
Conclusion.....	90
IV. SITUATION AND SPECTATION IN <i>THE LONDON MERCHANT</i>	92
<i>The London Merchant</i> and Adam Smith’s <i>Theory of Moral Sentiments</i>	105
Conclusion: Situation of the Public Person.....	122

V.	X.Y.Z.'D: REPUTATION AND THE COMMODOITIZATION OF CHARACTER....	125
	Colman and Reputation.....	129
	Pathetic Violation in <i>The Iron Chest</i>	131
	Subject and Object in <i>X.Y.Z.</i>	139
	Genre and the Contents of the Chest.....	143
	Conclusion.....	153
VI.	CODA: CHARLES LAMB'S ELIA AND THE LIMITS OF SYMPATHY.....	157
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	171

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: SYMPATHY AND SITUATION

On thy wild banks, by frequent torrents worn,
No glittering fanes, or marble domes appear,
Yet shall the mournful Muse thy course adorn,
And still to her thy rustic waves be dear.
For with the infant Otway, lingering here,
Of early woes she bade her votary dream,
While thy low murmurs soothed his pensive ear,
And still the poet---consecrates the stream.
Beneath the oak and birch that fringe thy side,
The first-born violets of the year shall spring;
And in thy hazels, bending o'er the tide,
The earliest Nightingale delight to sing:
While kindred spirits, pitying, shall relate
Thy Otway's sorrows, and lament his fate!

Charlotte Smith, Sonnet XXVI "To the River Arun,"
Elegiac Sonnets, 1784

Charlotte Smith's collection, *Elegiac Sonnets*, was a success both for its sales—allowing Smith to buy her husband out of debtor's prison, where she had been living with him—and for its literary influence; Coleridge and Wordsworth were both influenced by her program of capturing a moment of passion in verse. Her twenty-sixth sonnet is simultaneously an ode to pathos and homage to the restoration dramatist, Thomas Otway. In the poem she identifies Otway as an antecedent and "kindred spirit" to whom she is connected by the flow of the river Arun, with its "wild banks" and "frequent torrents," phrases that suggest effects of passion and imply that the river connecting Otway and Smith is a metaphor for a shared pathetic strain in their work. In the preface to the first and second editions

of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith makes an appeal to a small, inclusive crowd that is similar to the description of the sympathetic, “pitying” group with which she closes the twenty-sixth sonnet and portrays herself a pathetic figure, like the sorrowful Otway:

Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled, by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought. Some of my friends, with partial indiscretion, have multiplied the copies they procured of several attempts, till they found their way into the prints of the day in a mutilated state; which concurring with other circumstances, determined me to put them into their present form. I can hope for readers only among the few, who to sensibility of heart join simplicity of taste.

In order to cultivate a sympathetic audience in the face of the challenge of the anonymous distribution of print, Charlotte Smith fashions herself a pitiable figure, victimized by publication, her poems, themselves her own sensations “mutilated” by the process. Smith’s location of antecedence in Otway, rather than in a fellow poet, gets at the theatricality of her own performance, showing how little different in many respects the situation of the dramatist and the author of a collection of sonnets. Smith creates a persona that is a pathetic figure like the sympathetic characters of Otway’s plays. The poet, Smith, is like the suffering protagonist of *Venice Preserv’d*, Jaffeir, oppressed by systems; Smith is caught in the system of print, in which the author is alienated from her audience.

This brief glance at Charlotte Smith illustrates the central issues of the present study, capturing the convergence of three apparently disparate topics: the issue of character in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama; the manipulation of authorial personae in the print market of the Romantic period; and the history of sympathy in the long eighteenth century. I hope to demonstrate now, that these

three fields of inquiry are related. The passage from Smith above already begins to show the degree to which authors of the Romantic period were engaged in a kind of theatrical fashioning of the self as a character that was indebted to eighteenth-century dramaturgy. In turn I will show that eighteenth-century dramatists could only have been helpful to Romantic writers because they too were concerned with engaging and manipulating a changing public. And sympathy was the principal by which both eighteenth-century dramatists and Romantic essayists engaged their audiences. With the concept of sympathy comes a way of understanding both what is at stake in such engagements, and how they were achieved. This study primarily examines the adaption of sympathy to eighteenth-century dramaturgy in order to meet the challenges of a changing public.

My study enters by addressing the question of character in eighteenth-century drama. I will argue that the question of character is about negotiating the relation of the subjectivity of an individual spectator to the voice of the public. At issue is affective judgment and the location of epistemological authority, ergo, judging character rather than the depiction of realistic character is the real issue.

This study looks at Pathetic Drama alongside contemporary changes in thinking about the nature of knowledge and the attendant changes in thinking about the relation of self to the material world. Empiricism and aesthetics hold that knowledge and judgment come from sense experience; but both fields make moves to replace subjective experience with objective truth. As science uses induction to make particular sense experience objective knowledge, so generic form represents an attempt to standardize aesthetic judgment. In both cases the particular

experiences of individuals are abandoned for the sake of objectivity. Paradoxically this devalues the individual sense experience purported to be the basis of these fields of knowledge. At the same time, the individual subject's sense of what Habermas calls "saturated interiority" is threatened by the increasing social importance of public opinion. Pathetic Drama sought to engage its audience sympathetically, offering a way of maintaining the particularities of subjective experience by emphasizing the situational nature both of selves and of affective judgment and resisting the objectifying tendency of formal conventions. By creating an aesthetic experience that is simultaneously private and shared, pathetic drama negotiates the tension between the spectator's simultaneous desires for interiority and membership in the public sphere. This placed Pathetic Drama in line with the doctrine of moral sense philosophers like Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, and Adam Smith who sought to ease the tension between individual and public by rendering the division between them permeable.

In answer to the question of character I propose that character is functional rather than representational. The function of character is broken into two conceptual elements: a pathetic figure, and situation. The pathetic figure offers a way of understanding character as a rhetorical device that appeals to the pathetic concern of spectators. Situation represents arrangement of action versus the driving force of genre, which represents the dominance of public response over that of the individual. The distance between figure and situation is manipulated in order to maintain particularity in the face of systemic induction and to achieve a kind of sympathy aligned with the privileging of spectatorial judgment.

By focusing on figure and situation, this project attempts to explain the nature and significance of pathetic engagement between theatre audiences and theatrical performances¹ in the eighteenth century: what do the assumptions from which dramatists formulated strategies for enacting these engagements reveal about contemporary understandings of the nature of the self, and what role may the experience of being engaged with theatrical performances have had in shaping the audience members' conceptions of self; dramatic engagement stands to tell us something about the relation of individual to public.² This study will look specifically at the way a kind of English drama, a precursor of sensibility, in the long eighteenth century sought to engage its audience through pathos, how this sort of engagement was depicted on stage in the relationships between characters, and how these sorts of engagements and relationships suggested models of subjectivity.

Groundwork for an alternative genealogy of sentimental drama

In its focus on the development of a pathetic dramaturgy, this project contributes to our understanding of the long eighteenth-century by giving a new perspective on the period's culture of sentiment. The invention of sentimental drama has traditionally been credited to Colley Cibber or Richard Steele, both of

¹ I pursue this topic with the idea in mind that a text might be seen as a kind of performance as well, and that the present examination of theatrical engagement might serve to shed some light on the experience of reading down the road.

² Jerome Christensen, in "Hume's Social Composition", *Representations: Politics and Aesthetics*, Fall, 1985.

who wrote reformed and moralized kinds of comedy.³ Cibber's and Steele's sentimental comedies, however, were part of a broader evolution in dramatic values that occurred in the late seventeenth-century. If the sentimental is characterized by moralizing, emphasis on affective judgment, pathetic scenes, and sympathetic engagement⁴, then the pathetic tragedy that emerged in the 1680's played a key role in bringing important elements of the sentimental to the stage. An alternative and more complex genealogy of sentimental dramaturgy that considers the development of pathetic tragedy from the 1680's onward demonstrates how the contemporaneous philosophical reflection on questions of sympathy bear on our critical understandings of the birth of the genre. The generic confusion that surrounds sentimental drama leads to a tendency to equate sentimental drama with sentimental comedy, which not only assigns Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* an especially prominent place in the development of the eighteenth-century's culture of sensibility, but also leads to a misapprehension of the roles of pathos and situation. I hold with Ernest Bernbaum in *The Drama of Sensibility*, 1915, Eric Rothstein, in *Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change*, 1967, and Laura Brown in *English Dramatic Form*, 1981, who have demonstrated that the pathetic tragedies written by Lee, Banks, and Otway during the 1680's set the foundation for sentimental drama. This genealogy leads easily however to a problem of terminology. The equation of sentimental drama in such works as with the mixed mode pioneered by Steele, in a work such as Sherbo's *English Sentimental Drama*,

³ See for instance Ernest Bernbaum's *The Drama of Sensibility*, 1915, and Arthur Sherbo's *English Sentimental Drama*, 1957.

⁴ These criteria are loosely based on those laid out by Sherbo.

downplays the centrality of pathos which, in the field of drama, can be traced in a line from the works of Otway and Banks, to Rowe, and Lillo, and finally to the melodrama of the late eighteenth century. Sympathetic engagement is the essence of sentimental drama; this plays out through a protagonist who stands as the person of the viewer on the stage, and this figure's relationship with other characters models sympathy.⁵

Pathetic drama was a reaction to the formalism of heroic tragedy, just as sentimental comedy challenged the restoration comedy of manners. Both responded with a moralizing aim that anticipated the ideological principles of the moral sense philosophers that were first formulated in Francis Hutcheson's writings of the 1720's. In the earlier forms of restoration drama, passions and wit ran rampant over virtue; frenzied Almanzors slew, and witty Dorimants wooed all in their path. This does not mean that restoration drama had no moral end, but if it did, it was cast by negative example, and most significant, the passions are played at odds with virtue.⁶ The sentimental forms of drama sought to tame the rampant passions displayed on the restoration stage and unite them with moral virtue.

This raises the rather challenging question: why should the passions suddenly find common cause with virtue? Writers have approached this question by

⁵ In *Fatal Desire*, 2006, Jean Marsden offers what is the only extended study dedicated solely to the examination of pathetic drama to date. She contends that the advent of pathetic drama coincides with the return of female actresses, particularly female bodies, to the stage. The presence of the female body creates a mixture of sexual fascination and anxiety over the prospect of feminine transgression.

⁶ At any rate, its morals would have been different from those of sentimental drama. In *Two-Edg'd Weapons* Robert Markley argues that the comedy of manners sought to reinforce aristocratic ideologies.

aligning the development of moral sense with political expediency. Reinhardt Koselleck attends to the relationship between politics and ethics, contending in *Critique and Crisis*, 1959, that Hobbes sought to realign conscience with law, morality with politics through reason. Conscience having become private morality as it was alienated from the state under absolutist rule. In *The Passions and The Interests*, 1977, Albert Hirschman argues that the management of the passions was a crucial political problem of the seventeenth century and eighteenth centuries. The answer to which problem lay in setting the passions against each other. While glory seeking had hitherto been considered an accepted sort of lust, aristocratic in ideal, having replaced church ideology, this heroic ideal crumbled under the weight of Hobbes's attention, as it was demonstrated to be merely a form of self-preservation. Subsequently, unruly passions were kept in check by the seemingly harmless passion of interest in attaining worldly goods, an instance of private vice leading to public good. Victoria Kahn takes a different angle on the same issue in *Wayward Contracts*, 2004. Rather than attending exclusively to Hobbes's treatment of vainglory, Kahn looks at the response to the problem posed by self interest, *i.e.* breach of contract, as it is taken up in royalist literature, which proposed an "affective basis for political obligation" in the form of sympathy.⁷ Taken collectively, these accounts construct a theoretical frame for understanding the confluence of passion and politics from which pathetic drama emerged, with Kahn's work providing the closest parallel to the genre's trajectory, which rejects the heroic ideal

⁷ See Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, pp 27-35; Hirschman, *The Passions and The Interests*; Kahn, *Wayward Contracts*, pp 224-227.

and seeks to replace it with affective contract.⁸ While the political approach to understanding the alignment of passion and virtue offers a compelling explanation of the reasons for this new alignment, it does not demonstrate how it is carried out; for this we must turn to dramaturgy and to moral sense philosophy.

Eric Rothstein accounts for the theoretical evolution of pathetic tragedy during the restoration by describing the simultaneous influences of Cartesian physiology, Hobbesian psychology, and Aristotelian dramatic theory, by way of France. Prior to the Restoration there were two broad explanations of the moral effect of tragedy. The first of these explanations Rothstein calls “fabulist”. The fabulist explanation involved a separation of Horace’s delight and instruct. The work of drama was to create a moral fable on one hand, and “sweet” embellishments on the other, with the embellishments functioning as persuasives. The second explanation, the affective, came from Aristotle. The emotions aroused by tragedy themselves acted as a moral force. Similarly, there were two accounts of the source of tragic pleasure: that which Rothstein terms “aesthetic”, in which the poet’s skill delights, and “providential”, in which pleasure is derived from the symmetry of events; both require a view of the play as a whole. In the mid-seventeenth century these accounts of dramatic pleasure were replaced by new theories.

⁸ Kahn’s work is also helpful for its demonstration of a parallel between political contract and generic convention. This point, considered along with her argument for understanding sympathy as affective contract, alternative to Hobbesian contract—which is essentially rational according to Koselleck, makes clearer the grounds for pathetic dramaturgy’s privileging affective judgment over form, an understanding of genre as aesthetic and descriptive rather than cognitive and prescriptive.

Proceeding from Cartesian physiology wherein excitation of the passions is a sort of inner sensuality and from Hobbes's psychology in which one derives pleasure from a feeling of personal safety in the face of theatrical distress.⁹ These new theories, with their emphasis on moving the passions demanded formal change.

The rhetorical basis of tragedy had changed. To be persuasive, pleasure had to be deeply satisfying, it demanded sensationalism; and sensationalism, in turn, bludgeoned the sense of a providential whole out of recognition. ...This desire for critical justification, for exalting the individual emotional moment in theory as it was being exalted in practice, drove Restoration critics toward the new (scientific) theories of tragic pleasure discussed above. It also drove them toward a non-rhetorical, affective, theory of tragedy. (Rothstein 8-9)

There is a disjunction between terror and pity just as there has been between delight and instruction. The playwright's job is to move the passions, the moral instruction is up to the observer who must reflect on and learn from them. "Thus the pleasure of passion separates itself from the bitter moral of passion's fruits. Pragmatically, this division of labor, by which the playwright excited emotions that the spectator's reflections were to temper and apply, led directly to sentiment" (13). Providence of the whole is out; artistry is out; empathy with characters becomes most important. Dryden and Rapin emphasize the Aristotelian principle of "concernment" wherein "pity is evoked by undeserved misfortune, and fear by the plight of a man like ourselves" (16).

In "Emotions and the Ethics of Response in Seventeenth-Century French Dramatic Theory", 2009, Emma Gilby examines the written exchanges between

⁹ I want to stress the physicality of such theories of theatrical rhetoric. The Cartesian self, as Kant points out, does not follow from sensual experience – it is imaginary. Likewise, character is imaginary, while the figure in pathetic theater is material as well as imaginary.

Corneille and the Abbé d'Aubignac in which they debate over the most efficacious means for managing the passions of an audience. Gilby surveys early modern views of the passions in order to establish their broad importance and to call into question the notion that passions were meant to be overcome altogether, or indeed that it were ever possible. She cites Pascal, claiming, "critical thinking on passions and emotions simultaneously broaches the question of social control—reasoned, ordered control of the public sphere as well as of the personal—and with this the question of social bonds" (58). Corneille and d'Aubignac espoused Aristotle's idea of "catharsis" as a means of combating passion with passion (Gilby 60-1). But Corneille comes to favor a theory of "commiseration," an ethics of response achieved through emphasis on the "contingencies of circumstance" (63). These contingencies are illustrated through close relationships of blood, love, or friendship that cause a character to be subjected to the power of another. This reveals, by way of a powerful emotional response, a truth about the "mutable and messy material of human life," thereby blurring distinction between emotion and knowledge. We might see how, if Corneille's theories influenced pathetic dramaturgy on one side, the pathetic in turn shared common interest with philosophical theories of sympathy which were soon to develop.

David Marshall's work is especially useful for showing the connection between seventeenth-century dramaturgy and theories of sympathy. Marshall informs us that late seventeenth-century "theories of acting as well as debates about morality and the effects of drama focused on questions of identification, distance, and the ability of both actors and audience to perform acts of sympathy" (2).

Shaftesbury's "Advice to an Author," published two decades after the earliest plays we will look at here, might have been influenced by the debates out of which sentimental drama emerged as it shows concern with the theatrical nature of the relations between authors and readers, "as if they were actors and spectators."¹⁰ In the eighteenth-century, the French dramatist Marivaux rather belatedly called for a shift from classical aesthetics, with its *a priori* rules, to one that emphasizes subjectivity and affect; this is much the same as what we see happening in the seventeenth century with Corneille, and with the subsequent emergence of pathetic drama. Still, looking back with Marivaux's formulation in mind makes salient this development in dramatic theory that anticipates Frances Hutcheson's philosophy in which moral judgments are the product of a moral sense, a kind of judgment that is aesthetic rather than intellectual. When looking at the development of sentimental drama, it is important to keep these roughly contemporaneous philosophic concerns in mind. Both pathetic tragedy and sentimental comedy might be understood to aim at establishing a maximally sympathetic relationship with their audience in order to cultivate moral sense.

The question of character

The complaints leveled against pathetic tragedy give some insight into the sort of cultural influence the genre was perceived to have been exerting. Sentimental drama has been disparaged, in its own time and now, because it is perceived as unnatural, unbelievable, and artificial. This line of criticism is especially

¹⁰ See Marshall's *The Figure of Theater*, pp 69-70.

remarkable because it is so sharply at odds with the characterizations initially applied to pathetic drama, particularly to Otway's. Perceptions of what is natural have much to do with changing expectations. As Lisa Freeman notes in *Character's Theater*, David Garrick, the paragon of realistic performance in his period would likely appear artificial to a modern viewer. Similarly, the veneer of naturalness that contemporary spectators of Otway and Banks's dramas found so compelling would have worn thin by the time that theater critics of the nineteenth century viewed these same plays. But to account for a play's, or for a genre's, fall from favor as merely a matter of changing tastes is to shut down critical enquiry rather than open it up.¹¹ The question of what factors shape generic expectation must be explored, particularly given the connection of the present subject to the concept of sensibility, which itself makes interesting claims about the nature of generic expectation in the connection of matters of aesthetic judgment to subjective experience; suggesting that the issues that have begun to circle around this topic, character, genre, and affective experience are all connected.

We must ask what sorts of ideological frameworks shaped the generic expectations that determined the naturalness of character as the eighteenth century progressed? The grounds for evaluating the success of characterization need to be questioned. What does it mean for character to be believable, natural, and realistic? Ian Watt's account in *The Rise of the Novel* suggests that realistic means that it checks with the readers' experience – this seems to be a sort of empiricism. This

¹¹ As Aline Mackenzie Taylor does in *Next to Shakespeare: Otway's Venice Preserv'd and The Orphan and their History on the London Stage*, 1950.

gets at why the sentimental been so dismissed. It imagined, and advocated, a different model of subjectivity and to go with this, a different sort of rhetorical engagement. Recent work in literary studies has attempted to displace the rule of reason over emotion, to advocate an affective subjectivity over the cognitive model of consciousness that became prominent during the eighteenth and dominated the twentieth century.¹² The sentimental should be viewed then not as a flawed aesthetic, but as an alternate one—one that contested the cognitive perspective that seems now to dominate. Pathetic tragedy suggests a different sort of subjectivity—non-autonomous, non-cognitivist, i.e. not *the modern subject*, and demands a different kind of response.¹³ The subjectivity modeled by the pathetic/sentimental was not that of a contained subject. As such, it presented a sort of resistance, perhaps even at times a threat to autonomy, and to the ideological systems that proceeded from the assumption of an inviolable self.

In *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760* (1981), Laura Brown describes pathetic tragedy as something of a failed genre for its inability to portray plausible characters, but this underestimates the drama's capacity to deal with issues of identity and misses the function of the pathetic aesthetic. According to Brown, affective tragedy's emphasis on "the expressed pathos of situation" leads to an absence of coherent grounds for comprehending either character or motive (69). Brown's appraisal of affective tragedy presumes that drama of the time aimed for a

¹² Charles Altieri in *The Particulars of Rapture*, 2003, and Donald Wesling in *The Joys and Sorrows of Imaginary Persons*, 2008.

¹³ Cf Altieri's affective response, and aesthetic subjectivity in *Subjective Agency*, 1995, and *The Particulars of Rapture*, 2005.

realistic representation of a modern sort of subject through its characterizations. This is a point which Lisa Freeman has called into question, asking whether there could have been a “subject” on the eighteenth-century stage (17). According to Freeman, eighteenth-century drama was less interested in portraying the “modern subject” than in dramatizing complex relationships. Freeman’s writings on the issue of character in eighteenth-century drama reveal that Brown’s crucial misprision is in thinking that situation displaces character, when in fact the play treats character as situational. Pathetic tragedy explores the relationship of character to affective contracts like friendship and marriage. Opposed to heroic tragedy in which there is no differentiation between generic expectation and character, affective tragedy shines light on the situation of the subject in relation to forms, or systems.

Laura Brown’s critiques of pathetic tragedy for its failure to provide formal grounds for judgment and for its unconvincing characters are both answered by Rothstein’s account. There is more to the picture that is missed if we consider dramaturgy apart from rhetoric. Generic change is in effect rhetorical change, and these developments in dramatic theory and practice are in a sense as much about the influence of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as they are about his *Poetics*. Victoria Kahn’s work has shown that writers in the seventeenth century were keenly aware not only of a relationship between rhetoric and poetics, but between rhetoric and political contract, which was seen to have an analog in generic form.¹⁴ In this light, society itself functions as a rhetorical community. Its relation to society defines the subject,

¹⁴ *Wayward Contracts*, 2004, and “Rhetoric, Rights, and Contract Theory in the Early Modern Period”, 2003.

and the relation of subject to society is determined rhetorically, through the linguistic construction of laws and contracts. Kahn argues that the political crisis of the seventeenth century revealed the fictional, linguistic, rhetorical nature of contract and therefore of society.

Developments in political and natural philosophy led to a sort of rhetorical crisis. The generic change occurring in the development of pathetic drama was one of many responses to the heightened awareness of the rhetorical nature of society described by Kahn. One of the concerns of the age was to find a suitable style for the discussion of scientific topics, which needed above all a clear exposition of facts and arguments, rather than the ornate style favored at the time. Many of those looking for a simpler style looked back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In *The Advancement of Learning* Bacon criticized those who are preoccupied with style rather than "the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of judgment" (I.IV.2). On matters of style, he proposed that the style conform to the subject matter and to the audience, that simple words be employed whenever possible, and that the style should be agreeable.¹⁵ Along with a shortened translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Hobbes also produced a number of other works on the subject of rhetoric. Hobbes, like Bacon, promoted a simpler and more natural style that used figures of speech sparingly though himself continuing to make good use of figures in his writing. After all, what is the Leviathan but a figure?¹⁶ Hobbes

¹⁵ Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse*, 1975.

¹⁶ See Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, 1996, for an examination of Hobbes's use of rhetoric.

gave great latitude to the senses and the imagination, and his theory of association is congenial to the flow of sentiment.

Descartes, an outspoken opponent of formal rhetoric, was attentive to persuading an audience as he walked them through the inductions of the *cogito*. In *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric*, Thomas Carr explains Descartes's rhetoric of attentiveness. Despite his reputation for setting rhetoric below mathematical precision, Descartes favored a style that kept in mind the attention of his audience. Attentiveness, Carr argues, is a notion that holds a singular place as the point where the *cogitans* meets the body—sensations, and passions may either help or hinder understanding depending on attention. Yet Descartes held that evidence of truth was ultimately more persuasive than sophistic eloquence.¹⁷ He sought truths that were self evident, and therefore no one needed to be persuaded to accept them so long as they were understood. But self-evidence depends on a store of common sense, that is, on set of assumptions and expectations shared by an audience. Thus, the embodiment of the figure of pathos might be seen as a compromise between Aristotelian and Cartesian rhetoric as it transformed a figure into tangible data—proof of person, and proof of moral feeling.

So, on the one hand, it seems quite right to view the emerging prevalence of the pathetic with the familiar account, that the pathetic drama, as the precursor to the sentimental, was a part of the counter-enlightenment's rebellion against the disciplining discourses of rationalist and experimentalist philosophies of Descartes and Hobbes—and later Locke, which demanded a new, plain rhetoric that

¹⁷ Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 1637.

downplayed the role of ambiguity, affect, and its rhetorical component, figure. But, the above suggests quite strongly that there might not be such a clear distinction between the rhetoric of the pathetic and the reformed rhetoric of the seventeenth century. The pathetic drama then is part of the same movement of rhetorical reform that looks back to Aristotle. They share an emphasis on knowing and engaging the audience. This puts the sentimental strangely in league with enlightenment philosophy, rather than purely in league with moral sense, troubling the perception of the sentimental as anti-Hobbesian. The pathetic mode essentially carries the same rhetoric to its conclusion—though perhaps it is not the conclusion that Descartes would desire. But the pathetic rejects the scientific classification of the self, the separation of cognition from passions—“the involuntary subjection of bodies to systems of power by different kinds of discourse,” in other words, incorporation of the particular subject into the *sensus communis*.

Pathos in Aristotle’s rhetoric is an appeal to the passions through the use of figure. As the movement of passions became of crucial importance, the theater of the late seventeenth century gave the pathetic figure body, and made it the focus of drama. Here the use of the term figure is especially apt to describe the function of character in pathetic drama because of figure’s simultaneous appeal to multiple meanings. Figure suggests a rhetorical turn, a phrase that is not literally true. It summons the sense of a body, but more particularly the shape or outline of a body; outline enforcing an understanding of a thing’s being as determined by its being set in relief against a background, or its situation amongst other things. So that a thing, a character in this instance, is at once determined by its being distinguishable

against its situation at the same time that this set of circumstances reminds one that the relation between character and other things—be they other characters, props, *etcetera*; situation itself is determinant of character.

Much work relating literary culture to models of the self in the long eighteenth century has argued the evolution of deep subjectivity over the course of the period, presenting a narrative of the waxing popularity of a notion of identity that is interior and secure. This model is reinforced by Dror Wahrman's *The Making of the Modern Self* (2006), which proposes that a radical shift in notions of personal identity occurred at the end of the eighteenth century—the self ceased to be social and took on qualities of psychological depth and interiority. In both *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) and *How Novels Think* (2005), Nancy Armstrong insists that the eighteenth-century novel modeled a type of character that was then emulated by its readers, leading to different conceptions of subjectivity. These accounts of the development of the conception of subjectivity as deep interiority present a paradox. In fact, the argument that the eighteenth-century novel modeled a type of character that was then emulated by its readers, leading to deep interiority requires that the self must be seen as strongly engaged with the text, and that the appearance of individuality is really a symptom of very close engagement, resembling sympathy. So that when identity appears to be most independent, it is really most caught up in something other.

In *Naturalization of the Soul*, Raymond Martin and John Barresi give a different account that shifts the terms of the conversation by arguing that the predominant model of the self in the eighteenth century moves from immaterial

soul to natural mind.¹⁸ This suggests, in regards to the relation of the self to the material world, that by the end of the century thinkers have ceased to find the neo-Platonic/Cartesian model of the self a viable one: different measures needed to be taken to preserve the inviolability of the particular self, as is intimated in the passage from Hazlitt above. In light of Martin and Barresi's work, the issue of personal identity ceases to be about the development of the autonomous self, and becomes about the relation of the self to the material world. It is largely an issue of accounting for the meeting of the immaterial spirit, consciousness, with the world of the senses. The answer to the question of what mediates this meeting, or indeed, whether there is such a gap to be bridged, is the point where aesthetics and theories of the self meet.

Character is inextricably connected to scene and circumstance in order to represent the nature of subjective relation to the material world. It was drama of an epicurean sort: characters were atoms interconnected through material and passionate situation. Adam Smith's evocation of Epictetus in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* sheds some light on the sort of connectedness that bore on issues of character in the drama of *pathos*.

“In what sense,” says Epictetus, “are some things said to be according to our nature, and others contrary to it?—it is in that sense in which we consider ourselves as separated and detached from all other things. For thus it may be said to be according to the nature of the foot to be always clean. But if you consider it as a foot, and not as

¹⁸ Martin and Barresi give William Hazlitt, a writer better known for his literary criticism than for his philosophical productions, special place in their study as a thinker ahead of his time in his conception of identity. It is largely for this reason that Hazlitt's criticism holds special place in the present study, since one of my chief concerns is the overlap between literary engagements and the bounds of the mind.

something detached from the rest of the body, it must behave it sometimes to trample in the dirt, and sometimes to tread upon thorns, and sometimes, too, to be cut off for the sake of the whole body; and if it refuses this, it is no longer a foot. Thus, too, ought we to conceive with regard to ourselves. What are you?—a man. If you consider yourself as something separated and detached, it is agreeable to your nature to live to old age, to be rich, to be in health. But if you consider yourself as a man, and as part of a whole, upon account of that whole it will behave you sometimes to be in sickness, sometimes to be exposed to the inconveniency of a sea-voyage, sometimes to be in want; and at last, perhaps to die before your time. Why then do you complain? Do you not know that by doing so, as the foot ceases to be a foot, so you cease to be a man?" (TOMS VII.II.405.)

Characters served a rhetorical purpose: the movement of the passions, the achievement of sympathy. As such, characters were not meant to represent individual subjectivity; rather they showed that subjectivity was situational. In *Character's Theater*, Lisa Freeman offers an alternative to the conventional, novel-centered account of character in the eighteenth century as deepening into the modern subject. Freeman demonstrates that character is a contested site in England's attempt to negotiate a changing sociology of class, and gender. Freeman argues for the situational quality of character in order to make her claim about the sociological stakes of its deployment. However, she does not explore the conceptual importance of situation, an intervention that I intend to make in this study. The Pathetic drama's aim is to sympathetically engage the audience member to scene, circumstance, and situation in a manner like the characters on stage and sympathy arises from situation.¹⁹

¹⁹ In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith says, "Sympathy, therefore does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (I.1.7.) Deidre Lynch has argued that objects have pathetic properties in sentimental writing in "Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions", 2000. A similar

Character in pathetic drama is a rhetorical figure, a pathetic figure, which engages the spectator sympathetically so that he may negotiate the tenuous situation of being a judge in the midst of a sea of judges. The issue of realistic characterization then is irrelevant. The pertinent issue is the reading, or the judging of character.

Freeman offers a reading of Fielding's "An Essay on the Knowledge of Characters of Men" (1743) that describes the essay as exhibiting an increasing frustration with the project of offering a method for reading character, turning eventually into a commentary on the impossibility of ever being able to do so. But Fielding's essay signals this "frustration" clearly in its title, implying that it will be a meditation on knowing from the start, and not on character. It is about the judging of character and is as much if not more about the performer of judgment as it is about the performer of character. At issue in Fielding's essay is the preservation of the individual's capacity to judge for himself in the face of those who would impose their judgments upon him.

Fielding's essay opens with a statement of the problem: "men have devised systems to impose on the rest of mankind," while "few or none... have stood up the

line is taken up by the theatrically minded Laurence Sterne in *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, 1768, when he relates the sentimental power of circumstantial things in the mourning of a dead ass: "the mourner was sitting on a stone bench at the door, with ass's panel and its bridle on one side, which he took up from time to time—then laid them down—look'd at them and shook his head. He then took the crust of bread out of his wallet again, as if to eat it; held it some time in his hand—then laid it upon the bit of his ass's bridle—looked wistfully at the little arrangement he had made—and then gave a sigh" (39).

champion of the innocent and undesigning... to arm them against imposition.”²⁰ He goes on to assert that one cannot generalize when it comes to mankind, for, quoting Rochester, “man differs more from man, than man from beast.” Fielding is championing the particularity of knowledge arising from an individual suspect in the face of systems. He associates these systems of imposition with deception, which is encouraged by education in a society that is essentially self-serving and opposed to the stoic belief in man as fellow citizen, and working for common good.²¹ Deceitfulness depends on being taught to value self-interest.

Deception is learned as a means of furthering self-interest, and so it is that deceitful men impose themselves on others.²² The artifice of deception is put in opposition to the “natural,” which though suppressed by imposture always finds a way of coming out. Passions are natural, as opposed to the “face” which is performed. Passions leave legible marks on the countenance, which, Fielding claims, one must be trained to read for they often mean the opposite of what they appear to say. Rather than asserting a general principal, Fielding suggests an appeal to “instances.” Ultimately, the best way to judge of a man’s character is situational: observing the way that he behaves towards his “private family and nearest intimacies” allows one to judge “whether he has acted the part of a good son, brother, etc...”

²⁰ cf Swift in *A Tale of a Tub*.

²¹ cf Bernard Mandeville, and Adam Smith.

²² Think about the imposition of hypocrisy, which for Smith is remedied by sympathy, against Hazlitt’s view that sympathy is itself an imposition (cf Levinas).

The imposition of the deceptive performance of character is not the only danger identified by Fielding. Equally insidious are the impositions of bad judgment, which can serve a similarly self-interested purpose. Fielding deals at length with a kind of hypocrite that he calls “the saint”, a character saintly in form only, and who encourages a similar kind of shallow virtue because he sets himself up as a “rigid observer” but attends only to forms (think opposition between “nature” and performance.” The saint is particularly bad because he is a bad judge of character, hypocritical and partial, and he imposes his bad judgment as the standard of judgment.²³

In Lecture on jurisprudence, Adam Smith advocates an impartial judge (here we must think about the *TOMS*). What is an impartial judge then? If partiality is like self-interest aligned with hypocrisy and deceit, and opposed to nature, and if nature is aligned with passion and stoic belief in common good, then we have sympathy as the way of judging character. Judging the character of men for Fielding and Smith is a way of arming oneself against the imposition of artifice and performance, which ultimately put one in the service of the interests of selfish men. The answer proposed to this situation is impartiality, specifically the cultivation of a natural, socially-oriented passion, or sympathy. But Laurence Sterne, troubles the reliability of impartial, sympathetic judgment, showing that sympathy depends not just on

²³ cf *Jane Shore*, with its strict adherence to form, analyzed in Chapter 2, and *The London Merchant's* Thorogood, who exemplifies this kind of saintly character and bad judgment. The problem with the *LM* is that its virtuous characters are “saintly,” thus Charles Lamb’s calling the play a “nauseous sermon.” Compare Fielding’s claim that they are saintly only in form with my idea about distance between character and form (generic form as a kind of imposition).

situation, and circumstance, but on an expectation of scene/situation that resembles generic form. See “Calais” and “The Monk” in *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. After dilating “every vessel in his frame” through generous thoughts (and wine), Yorick is ready to share “—Now, was I a King of France²⁴, cried I—what a moment for an orphan to have begg’d his father’s portmanteau of me!” But the character who enters the scene does not match Yorick’s expectation, and so he does not elicit a sentimental response.

I had scarce utter’d the words, when a poor monk of the order of St. Francis came into the room to beg something for his convent. No man cares to have his virtues the sport of contingencies—or one man may be generous as another is puissant—*sed non, quo ad hanc*—or be it as it may—for there is no regular reasoning upon the ebbs and flows of our humours; they may depend upon the same causes, for ought I know, which influence the tides themselves—’twould oft be no discredit to us, to suppose it was so: I’m sure at least for myself, that in any case I should be more highly satisfied, to have it said by the world, “I had an affair with the moon, in which there was neither sin nor shame,” than have it pass altogether as my own act and deed, wherein there was so much of both. --But be this as it may. The moment I cast my eyes upon him, I was predetermined not to give him a single sous...

This passage troubles some key aspects of the solutions offered by Fielding and Smith, *viz.* the notion of impartiality, especially what looks like the alignment of impartiality with the “natural.” Sterne uses the natural to question how can one ever

²⁴ It is important to note that this cycle begins with Yorick’s annoyance at the King of France, which he’s overcome by drinking the French good health. Until the entrance of the monk he identifies himself as the very figure that had irritated him to begin with... a deliberate sort of movement to achieve sympathy that evokes Hobbes’s Leviathan in that he thinks of the good of all Frenchmen to get at sympathy with the King who represents them all. Regardless, the question is whether he has achieved Smithean impartiality. It would seem that he had achieved a false sympathy of the universal from which he is removed by the intrusion of the particular, in the form of the monk.

claim to be impartial when one is the sport of unseen forces? The problem of judging arises from the possibility of performance in Fielding's essay. Fielding wants to get around deception, but his test of character is ultimately performative and dependent on generic, formal expectations. Sterne's writing suggests the importance of situation as a sort of invisible force that determines judgment of character. In *TS* Walter Shandy explains to his son that the passions, themselves meant to equip the individual against the imposition of artifice on his judgment end up imposing upon his will:

Love, you see, is not so much a SENTIMENT as a SITUATION, into which a man enters, as my brother Toby would do, into a corps—being once in it—he acts as if he did; and takes every step to shew himself a man of prowess.”²⁵(VIII.xxxiv)

The situation of spectatorial judgment: pathos and the public sphere

The development of pathetic drama with its method of sympathetic engagement, was contemporary with the emergence of what Habermas has termed, the public sphere.²⁶ Previously, in what Habermas calls “representational culture,” politics, taste, fashion, and judgment in general were the preserves of an elite. The public sphere was a public space outside of the control by the state, where individuals exchanged views and knowledge. In Habermas's view, the growth in newspapers, journals, reading clubs, Masonic lodges, and coffee-houses in eighteenth-century Europe, all in different ways, marked the gradual replacement of

²⁵ Note too, his discussion of shaving as an aid to writing: “—the Situation, like all others, has notions of her own to put into the brain.—” (book IX, chapter xiii.)

²⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962.

"representational" culture with *Öffentlichkeit* culture. Habermas argued that the essential characteristic of the *Öffentlichkeit* culture was its "critical" nature. Unlike "representational" culture, where only one party was active and the other passive, the *Öffentlichkeit* culture dialogic as individuals either met in conversation, or exchanged views via the print media.

But some have argued that the public sphere was not so egalitarian. The development of the public sphere moved judgment to the public, but it created its own kind of hegemony, demanding a consensus. Nancy Fraser argues in "Rethinking the public sphere," that the public sphere excludes in order to include. Rather than creating equality the public sphere bracketed inequalities in order to make subjects fit into its community. The emergent public sphere drew, like the market, on the force of sentimental consensus for the formation of opinion, credit, and belief. This tended to weaken the idea of the self by assuming it was a creature of passion. In this state of affairs the debate about aesthetics takes it rise, supposing another kind of consensus immune to reason.

The public sphere depended on what Habermas calls the individual's "saturated interiority," but the individual did not give distinct voice to this interiority: it was interiorities in the mass that opened up fields of judgment outside the restricted domains of the court, the house of commons, and the Exchange. Public sentiment, and it was sentiment, counted for something. The effect of this upon individuals was to create a tension between public and private identification. Individuals had a stake in the preservation of their saturated interiority, and wished to express it not just in the mass. But it turns out that the public sphere makes the

definition of individuality difficult.²⁷ No longer is it defined by received opinion, nor is it yet defined by a strong liberal formulation of rights. Instead authors were driven to a series of pragmatic solutions to the problem, of which the deliberate indulgence of the passions is the most obvious: what you feel must be true because empirical philosophy says so. But the reality of the passions, insisted on in different ways by Mandeville, Hume and Burke, is a very fluid one, lasting only as long as one is in their possession. However, it is worth noting that those who emphasized the importance of the passions all have theories of sympathy.

By creating an aesthetic experience that is simultaneously private and shared, pathetic drama negotiates the tension between the audience member's desire for interiority and membership in the public. Pathetic drama ameliorates this tension between public and private self by denying the divide. Aesthetic experience, affective knowing, resists the cognitivist divide between subject and experience that is mirrored in the divide between saturated interiority and public self.

Method

My study, rooted in cultural studies, is concerned only tangentially with the shaping of subjectivity; rather it is concerned with how constructions of subjectivity determine the nature of aesthetic engagements. My method largely consists in identifying and examining resonances between practices of pathetic dramaturgy and the writings of roughly contemporary critics and social and political philosophers in the belief that this will help to clarify the broader cultural

²⁷ See Reinhardt Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 1959.

significance of these practices. That being said, throughout this study I return to figures employed by certain modern critics that I believe are useful for giving shape to the practice of analyzing these cultural resonances. As has already become clear, I find the idea of the emergence of a public sphere, put forth by Habermas to be useful way of organizing my thoughts on the relation of subjectivity to spectatorship, even though there have been significant critiques levied against his thesis. Victoria Kahn's arguments for considering the rhetorical elements in the ordering of ideas of seventeenth-century English society are fundamental to my study as well (*Wayward Contracts*, 2004). Kahn's demonstration that literary genre functions as a sort of social contract is especially important. Lastly, the figure of a market of sentimental exchanges that Deidre Lynch argues for so convincingly in *The Economy of Character* (1998) is one that I make repeated use of in my thesis. I envision these three models working together to make my point out the situational nature of character. Spectatorial subjects find themselves in the midst of a public connected by a system of pathetic exchange that is ordered by generic contracts.

Because my study is very much concerned with mainstream cultural phenomena, I examine theater, and the plays that I have chosen were all popular and exerted influence on the shaping of culture. The exception to this is my final chapter. While George Colman the Younger was a popular playwright, neither of the plays that I look at were particularly successful. This exception is justified by the primary purpose of that chapter, which I see as illustrating Hazlitt's musings on issues of rights and sympathy.

Why drama? While a great deal of valuable work has been done on the relation of the aesthetics of the novel and subjectivity, relatively little attention has been given to drama,²⁸ despite drama's status as a more popular cultural form. But the more pressing reason to consider issues of pathos, and subjectivity through an analysis of the eighteenth-century is because theater relations occurred as a popular trope in an array of prose forms, from novels to philosophical treatises.²⁹ Again, while important work has been done to explore the popularity of the theater as a figure in prose works, not enough critical analysis has been applied to exploring the ways in which principles of the theater set the stage for aesthetics and social philosophy.

Outline

In my first chapter I will look at the innovations of Thomas Otway and John Banks in developing a Pathetic drama that both builds on and rebels against Dryden's Heroic drama. Dryden's drama came about in response to the battle of the ancients and moderns, which had led to the separation of arts and sciences.³⁰ Dryden found a way to apply modern, scientific method by making use of Aristotle's *Poetics*. But the pathetic resisted this. While it embraced the privileged place given

²⁸ The modern preference for discussions of the novel is largely because of the modern preference for the novel. Analyses of the novel in relation to subjectivity traditionally attribute a correlation between the rise of this innovative form with the birth of the modern subject, though this approach has begun to fall from favor.

²⁹ See, for instance, David Marshall's *The Figure of Theater*, 1986.

³⁰ Michael McKeon argues that this separation came about as a result of the moderns' determination that there were different kinds of knowledge appropriate to these different disciplines.

pathos and concernment, it resisted the split between art and science, and between kinds of knowledge. Its aesthetic judgment depends on the senses, and the sense judgment is its aim. The difference between science and art is that the former does not depend on opinion for truth. Perhaps *pathos* is a way to try to get around this. *Pathos* is felt, not thought, and maybe more objective than opinion. But trouble arises when this sort of drama becomes formalized and subjective agency is lost, resulting in the sort of passive figure that is central in Nicholas Rowe's plays.

Chapter two picks up from the formalized passivity of Rowe's *Tragedy of Jane Shore* and looks at the Scriblerian response to it which attempts to temper sympathy with wit, to trouble form in order to maintain the particularity of aesthetic response and resist induction—the method by which the empirical purports to be objective knowledge by distancing from particular experience, through induction and getting away from opinion. The mix of wit and *pathos* in Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, and to a greater degree in John Gay's plays resists the loss of individuality in the face of the growing voice of public opinion.

In my third chapter I examine George Lillo's play *The London Merchant* through the lens of the debate the critique of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* levied by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Lillo's play exhibits a similar concern for figuring the role of passion in a modern, market-based society. Lillo appears to side with Smith in advocating control of the passions, and his dramatic techniques in many ways adumbrate Smith's delineation of sympathy in their emphasis on situation, spectation, and guilt. But Lillo's drama also performs a disciplining function that runs counter to the plays examined in the first two

chapters: *The London Merchant* wants to put its audience in its place socially speaking and diminishes the importance of particular subjectivity in favor of the whole. Lillo's play encourages spectators to imagine themselves as spectacles, which creates an estrangement of subjective experience from its source leading to anxiety over the loss of self-determination expressed in William Hazlitt's criticism of Burkean sympathy.

Chapter four looks at two of George Colman the Younger's plays alongside William Hazlitt's writings on fame. These texts on the edge of the nineteenth century are looking back at the mental/physical, subjective/objective split at the heart of the sentimental tradition.³¹ Expressing concern over the loss of subjective authority to the public, the characters in Colman's plays desire to combine the subject and object in character through manipulations of reputation and fame. Colman's plays get at the implications for the self. Wanting to become an object means wanting to preserve individuality by making sympathy impossible. They express the Romantic inheritance of the pathetic aesthetic while pointing to what has become paradox of wanting to be an object and a subject at once in the context of tightly defined boundaries of the person at the end of the century.

³¹ Thomas Nagel argued that the mental/physical distinction is really subjective/objective. Objective truth can be understood by more than one, while subjective can be understood by one point of view at most. "What is it Like to be a Bat?" 1974.

CHAPTER II

FROM FORM TO FIGURE: PATHETIC DRAMA AND THE CHARACTER OF SITUATION

The issue of the inadequacy of depictions of character in eighteenth-century drama can be addressed by looking at the rise of pathetic drama. The rise of pathetic dramaturgy marks a shift away from the formalism of the heroic drama that immediately preceded it while retaining the pathetic elements. As the essential quality of this dramaturgical approach is affective involvement, judgment is determined by the degree of pathetic response. Its characters were meant to serve a rhetorical purpose rather than depict realistic subjectivity. These *pathetic figures* were completed and justified by the sympathetic involvement of their spectators, suggesting a model of situational subjectivity. In this chapter I will illustrate and elaborate on these points through analysis of two plays by Thomas Otway and John Banks, both of whom were innovators of pathetic dramaturgy.

Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, 1682, is especially useful, not only because it enjoyed the most enduring success of any pathetic drama, but also because it enacts the genre's aesthetic. For these reasons I let the play stand as representative of its genre and examine it in detail. After enjoying an exceptionally long run of popularity, Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* fell from critical favor in the late nineteenth-century.³² This has been attributed to the growing expectation that "a play should

³² See Aline Mackenzie Taylor, *Next to Shakespeare: Otway's Venice Preserv'd and The Orphan and their History on the London Stage*, 1950.

produce in the study an effect comparable to the one it produces on the scene” (Taylor 5). This explanation for the play’s decline in popularity seems only partially correct at best. True, if the public had come to privilege a private reading experience over performance as Taylor argues, this play that depends so much on its physical performance in order to achieve its effect, must disappoint.³³ But the story of *Venice Preserv’d*’s changing relationship with its audiences must be understood in terms of the cultural and, more specifically, the generic contexts from which it arose. Taylor’s account would make the fall of Otway’s play from favor is something of a tragedy in itself in that the very sort of attitude that it sought to create ultimately undid it.

One of Otway’s early supporters, the restoration critic Gerard Langbaine, wrote that Otway has “a Tallent, very few of our English Poets have been Master of, in moving the Passions, that are, and ought to be the Aim of all Tragick Poets, Terror and Pity.”³⁴ A description which one of Otway’s more ardent supporters, Charles Gildon, included in *The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets*, 1699.

³³ Though this point was directly disputed by the nineteenth-century critic William Hazlitt, who wrote, “The merit of *Venice Preserved* is not confined to its effect on the stage, or to the opportunity it affords for the display of the powers of the actors in it, of a Jaffeir, a Pierre, a Belvidera: it reads as well in the closet, and loses little or none of its power of riveting breathless attention, and stirring the deepest yearnings of affection. It has passages of great beauty in themselves (detached from the fable) touches of true nature and pathos, though none equal or indeed comparable to what we meet with in Shakespear and other writers of that day; but the awful suspense of the situations, the conflict of duties and passions, the intimate bonds that unite the characters together, and that are violently rent asunder like the parting of soul and body, the solemn march of the tragical events to the fatal catastrophe that winds up and closes over all, give to this production of Otway’s Muse a charm and power that bind it like a spell on the public mind, and have made it a proud and inseparable adjunct of the English stage.” *Lectures Chiefly on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, 1821.

³⁴ Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatic Poets*, 1691.

Gildon was one of the first to claim that Otway was of the modern dramatists most fit to be compared with Shakespeare, claiming to prefer him to Shakespeare.³⁵ But Gildon's advocacy for Otway attempted to account for his poetic excellence in terms of classical form, and that was at odds with the accounts of his contemporaries. *Venice Preserv'd* plays a key role in the development of a new genre of drama to follow the decline of the heroic and with the advent of this new form, affective, or pathetic drama comes a shift in literary culture with far-reaching effects. Eric Rothstein claims that "the adoption of a pathetic drama in the late sixteen hundreds conditioned the entire subsequent development of English tragedy" (viii). With pathetic drama comes a move from the formal, stylized characterizations of heroic tragedy towards more affecting depictions of subjectivity, and this change demanded a new mode of engagement from its audience.³⁶ But the problem with pathetic drama in the nineteenth century might just as well be made sense of by reflecting once again on the significance of Hazlitt's staunch opposition to the principle of sympathy, which he perceived as a threat to the sanctity of the individual person. While the chronological focus of this chapter is firmly set in the

³⁵ See Taylor, p 259.

³⁶ See Bernbaum, and Laura Brown in *English Dramatic Form*, 1981. This mode of sympathetic engagement between spectator and performance resembles, and perhaps adumbrates the sort of private aesthetic experience that is most often attributed to novel reading. Though I shall not attempt to demonstrate this claim in the present study, Michael McKeon comes close to suggesting as much in his paper, *Experimental Method and the Emergence of the Aesthetic Category of Fiction*." Further, the facility with which Nancy Armstrong's readings of domestic fiction can be applied to the drama of an earlier period troubles her claim that "the domestic novel antedated—was necessarily antecedent to—the way of life it represented" as it suggests that novels were likely influenced by the theater. See Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p 9.

restoration and early eighteenth century, the period in which pathetic drama developed, it is important to have the looming specter of change in reception, albeit a distant specter, in mind as we examine the development of this genre that would have such an influence and to consider the difference in contemporary reception.

Resistance to form and genre

In *The Drama of Sensibility* (1915), a foundational text in contemporary studies of sentimental drama, Ernest Bernbaum describes the genre as one that was set against convention and prescriptive forms from its beginning.

The drama of sensibility... was from its birth a protest against the orthodox view of life, and against those literary conventions which had served that view. It implied that human nature, when no, as in some cases, already perfect, was perfectible by an appeal to the emotions. It refused to assume that virtuous person must be sought in a romantic realm apart from the everyday world. It wished to show that beings who were good at heart were found in the ordinary walks of life. It so represented their conduct as to arouse admiration for their virtues and pity for their sufferings. In sentimental comedy, it showed them contending against distresses but finally rewarded by morally deserved happiness. In domestic tragedy, it showed them overwhelmed by catastrophes for which they were not morally responsible. (Bernbaum 10)

The nascent sentimental drama's appeal to the emotions was aligned with its moral aim, and at the same time, this appeal to moral feeling was linked to its resistance to both literary convention, and by implication, social conventions, or "orthodoxy," which robbed the virtuous characters of their agency.

In *Venice Preserv'd*, Otway is dealing explicitly with issues of shifting aesthetics and generic change, expressing thematically the death of the heroic as a valid form of expression at the point of transition from the politically focused heroic

tragedy to the private realm of domestic drama. And as Otway is staging a commentary on dramatic form, he instructs his audience in the proper manner of sympathetic engagement through a protagonist who plays the spectator on the stage. Jaffeire's request to Pierre, "let me partake the troubles of thy bosom," voices the desire of the model spectator to intermingle his own person with the fictive other of the drama.³⁷ It invites the audience into a particular sort of engagement with the plight of the characters on stage.³⁸

Both Derek Hughes and Debra Leissner interpret *Venice Preserv'd* as essentially a depiction of a character split between two opposing systems of identification. Hughes describes the play as a portrayal of a "hero torn between politics and domesticity" while Leissner contends that Jaffeir's dilemma "dramatizes a national neurosis" brought on by social and political turmoil. Significantly, both readings see Jaffeir as a subject representative of a larger set of dynamic relationships between citizens and societal values. But if this sort of representation is acceptable, then one must entertain the possibility of the inverse—we might see the whole play as a public display of the interior workings of an individual mind, caught between systems of identification and resisting the necessity of choosing between the two. The divided self so prominent in *Venice Preserv'd* is part and

³⁷ Pathetic drama's ability to represent in the action the proper mode of spectation relies on a process of distancing from formal conventions by making these conventions salient through exaggeration. In this way, it is not unlike the parodic metadrama, *The Rehearsal*, 1671, which itself struck a major blow against Dryden's heroic drama.

³⁸ In fact, what it advocates is sympathy in the sense described a century later by Edmund Burke as "a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected".

parcel of sympathy. From Shaftesbury's "Advice to an Author" to Adam Smith's Internal Spectator, sympathy's possibility for shared passions implies a self that is not autonomous and that is aware of itself as a self that feels, performs, and spectates.

Venice Preserv'd insists that its audience enter into the same sort of sympathetic relationship with the characters on the stage that those characters share with one another. This relationship is marked by deep identification nearing the point of interchangeability. As we have seen, Jaffeir's identity is bound up with those of Pierre and Belvidera. We are told that Belvidera's soul is Jaffeir's soul, and that Pierre's heart and Jaffeir's are one as well. The three are linked but denied perfect sympathy until they are united in death at play's end, finally overcoming the distinctions forced on them by Venetian society.

In *Venice Preserv'd*, Otway treats subjectivity as necessarily dependent on affective identification with a social system even as his protagonist resists committing to such associations.³⁹ Jaffeir must decide whether to align himself with the heroic world of politics and masculinity, or with the domestic, and feminine. The split between the two ideological systems is not tidy. Belvidera, though immediately marking the private sphere, is in the end loyal to the political system represented by her father. Jaffeir resists choosing between the ideological systems represented by Belvidera and Pierre and this resistance is embodied in the play's descriptions of him in terms characteristic of both genders the play depicts the crisis of an

individual at the point where identities are being established in a new way. Jaffeir fittingly exclaims to Belvidera:

th'art my Soul it self; wealth, friendship, honour,
All present joys, and earnest of all future,
Are summed in thee...

That Belvidera is Jaffeir's "soul itself" shows clearly that their identities are commingled. Yet he stands in similar relation to Pierre, who addresses him: "My Friend good morrow!/How fares the honest Partner of my Heart?" Notice the temporal markers in Jaffeir's speech to Belvidera above, "present" and "future" joys describe their relationship. The past is left blank and as it is made explicit that everything is to be linked to Belvidera in the future, this should be taken as indication that she will supplant Pierre's role. Accordingly, Jaffeir grows increasingly effeminate throughout the course of the play as he is influenced by his allegiance, albeit a reluctant one, to this feminine subject represented by Belvidera. As it becomes clear that identification with Pierre will not be allowed, the language used by Jaffeir to express his desire grows increasingly sexual.⁴⁰ The sexualization of his desire appears to occur because of its prohibition, but the two happen simultaneously. He becomes the advocate of a new, interior system of value. But in doing so marks the end of the heroic. Jaffeir is stuck between the two aesthetic systems, two sets of circumstances and he must determine which with which to align himself. His agency lies completely in his capacity to judge, to know by gauging his feelings. But his affiliation with Pierre, representative of the heroic, transforms

his affect into sexual desire, stripping away his agency as his affective experience is defined by form.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction* Nancy Armstrong gives a Foucauldian account of the emergence of a new, feminine subjectivity, which she argues is equivalent to the modern subject. Armstrong claims that the promulgation of the new feminine subject is responsible for a shift in cultural preference from the political to the domestic sphere. The development of this new subjectivity follows from the emergence of clear demarcations in sexual difference. Much of what Armstrong observes at work in the domestic novel can be seen in *Venice Preserv'd*.⁴¹ Jaffeur's dilemma functions as a portrayal of the "struggle between competing ideologies" described by Armstrong, or in the terms laid out above, as the result of a discourse that categorizes and classifies, separating passion from reason, the domestic from the political, in terms of masculinity and femininity. This categorization leads to the breaking of promises, a breaking down of the rhetorical basis of society. Put in an impossible position, torn between two categories and contracted to both, Jaffeur is finally destroyed.

Jaffeur must choose between aligning himself with the masculine world of politics, or with the feminine and domestic, but the line between the two ideological systems is not clear. Belvidera, though immediately marking the private sphere, is in the end loyal to the political system represented by her father. Jaffeur resists

⁴¹ Jessica Munns gives an account of how Otway's plays were classified as feminine and affective by critics throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. She cites Samuel Johnson, who wrote of *The Orphan*, "Its whole power is upon the affections; for it is not written with much comprehension of thought or elegance of expression." Johnson's criticism clearly sets comprehension in opposition to affect.

choosing between the ideological systems represented by Belvidera and Pierre and this resistance is embodied in the play's descriptions of him in terms characteristic of both genders. As all of these figures represent the deep subjectivity of person centered in the figure of Jaffeir, it can be seen that the play depicts the crisis of an individual at the point where gendered identities are being established in a new way.

JAFFEIR. Oh Belvidera! We must change the Scene
In which the past delights of Life were tasted... (II.ii.305-6)

Armstrong argues that domestic fiction naturalizes institutional restrictions on domestic practices and sexuality. *Venice Preserv'd* plays out this process of sexual division but in its attention to the process of division resists its naturalization. Jaffeir's "divided Soul, that wars within [him]" is split along lines of sexual desire which are figured in terms of affective identification (IV.2.301-3). This division in his identity allows him to say quite honestly to Belvidera:

JAFFEIR. No, th'art my Soul it self; wealth, friendship, honour,
All present joys, and earnest of all future,
Are summed in thee... (IV.i.81-85)

That Belvidera is Jaffeir's soul itself expresses clearly that their identities are commingled. Yet he stands in similar relation to Pierre, who addresses him thusly:

PIERRE. My Friend good morrow!/How fares the honest Partner of
my Heart?" (I.i.120-121)

The temporal markers in Jaffeir's speech to Belvidera above indicate the shift from heroic to pathetic ideologies: "present" and "future" joys are embodied in their relationship. The past is left blank and as it is made explicit that everything is to be linked to Belvidera in the future, this should be taken as indicative of her

supplanting Pierre's role. Accordingly, Jaffeir grows increasingly effeminate throughout the course of the play as he is influenced by his allegiance, albeit a reluctant one, to this feminine subject represented by Belvidera. As it becomes clear that identification with Pierre will not be allowed the language used by Jaffeir to express his desire grows increasingly sexual. The sexualization of his desire appears to occur because of its prohibition, but the two happen simultaneously. As we will see, it is the entrance of the market as a dominant force in social affairs that sets these changes in motion.

The entrance of the market represents, literally and figuratively, the application of a fixed system of value.⁴² The fixed worth of sentiment represented by money means that there is no longer a place for affective response, and agency in the form of subjective judgment is lost. In a word, the entrance of the market represents the tyranny of form. Women are made prostitutes by the entrance of the market into politics, which corresponds with the dissipation of the heroic system. Aquilina, whose Hellenic origins connect her with classical heroism, is marked as a "purchase" in the fading economy of manly valor, indicating that in this older system the developments of the market were already present.

JAFFEIR. Oh Aquilina! Friend, to lose such Beauty,
The dearest purchase of thy noble labours... (I.i.165-6)

Pierre's anger evokes Achilles', but with the added tinge of the corruption of money. The invasion of economics into the play suggests that a citizen's obligation to the state depends on the state's respect and indeed its capacity to protect private life.

⁴² See Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character*.

PIERRE. A souldier's mistress Jaffeir's his Religion,
When that's prophan'd, all other Tyes are broken...
(I.i.199-200)

Though Jaffeire is desperately wants affiliation with Pierre, this possibility is doomed from the start because in stealing Belvidera from her father, he is guilty of the same offense that drives Pierre to rebel. Yet this is not the only way in which Jaffeir has been infected by the corrupting forces of the market. His penury forces him to accept money from Pierre, almost as though his affections are being bought, and gives Belvidera as a pledge to the rebels who are, ironically, revolting against the system that has brought about conditions wherein private desire is invaded and proscribed. The practices of the rebels reify those that they would stamp out in the state, which renders salient the fact that their ideology is not so different. What has changed is that ownership has been destabilized. Further, a superficial system in which ownership is linked to identity must be replaced.

The corrupting effects of money necessitate that value be attributed elsewhere, that inner virtue become the privileged site. Thus Armstrong's claim that "writing about the domestic woman afforded a means of contesting the dominant notion of sexuality that understood desirability in terms of a woman's claims to fortune and family name" (Armstrong 8). Indeed, Jaffeir is eager to attest that his attachment to Belvidera is based on her private virtue.

JAFFEIR. ...My heart that awes me is too much my master:
Three years have past since first our Vows were plighted,
During which time, the World must bear me witness,
I have treated Belvidera like your Daughter,
The Daughter of a senator of Venice;
Distinction, Place, Attendance and Observance,
Due to her Birth, she always commanded;
Out of my little Fortune I have done this;

Because (though hopeless e're to win your Nature)
The World might see, I lov'd her for her self,
Not as the Heiress of the great Priuli.— (I.i.84-95)

Jaffair has become the advocate of a new, interior system of value, and in doing so marks the end of the heroic. Pierre, as the representative figure of heroic tragedy tells the feminized Jaffair:

PIERRE. this vile world and I have long been jangling,
And cannot part on better terms than now,
When only men like thee are fit to live in't.(IV.ii.224-7)

Venice Preserv'd's thematic resistance to heroic form is not an expression of resistance to the particular qualities of that genre, indeed many qualities are shared between the two, so much as it is an attempt to circumvent the calcification of response brought that comes with an established and highly formalized genre. Formulae would interfere with the pathetic tragedy's aim for affective response and affective judgment, would serve as a sort of anaesthetic. The many acclamations of Otway on the grounds of his naturalness put his work in the context of the contemporary discourse on the binary of art and nature. This brings us up against a topic far too unwieldy and complex to approach in any depth in the present study. But this gets at the concern over avoiding the artificiality of art in order to elicit a kind of sensible response that is not prescribed by formal expectations.⁴³ The

⁴³ See Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*... Appraisals of Shakespeare during the eighteenth century centered around the 'naturalness' of his work. See D. Nichol Smith, *XVIIIth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, 1903, and Otway was frequently brought up as the contemporary playwright who best compared to Shakespeare. See Taylor, *Otway's Venice Preserv'd and The Orphan*, 1950. Additionally this brings up the terms to be used by Henry Fielding in his "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" (1743).

efficacy of pathetic tragedy depends on its being a genre between genres, one in which there is a certain degree of tension between expectation and action.

Situation of the actor: Betterton's Jaffeir

Many of the later negative appraisals of the sentimental were not an issue for viewers of the play's initial run because the particular qualities of the actor playing the lead role which would have tempered the perception of Jaffeir as bathetic rather than a pathetic figure. Eighteenth-century playgoers came to a performance with a great deal of expectation, including anticipation of the sort of characters to be encountered based upon the actors listed on the playbill. Viewers' experience of a character would be largely colored by their knowledge of the actor or actress playing a particular part. For instance, in *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*, Kristina Straub has shown how spectators' knowledge of the sexual reputations of actors affected reception of performance. Such anticipation would have affected the reception of the character of Jaffeir in *Venice Preserv'd's* initial run.

Venice Preserv'd was first performed by Thomas Betterton's company at Dorset Garden on February 9, 1682, with Betterton himself playing the role of Jaffeir.

In the nineteenth century dramatic reviewers lamented that Jaffier was at best a selfish fellow who alternated between roaring and whining. Broad-minded critics sometimes conceded that it was an uphill, difficult part, which put an actor on his mettle to keep sympathetic. How Betterton acted the part can only be guessed, but one may be sure that his Jaffeir was no whiner. (Taylor 146)

Betterton's stoic character would have put the figure on stage at odds with the judgment of Jaffeir's as whimpering. Betterton's stature and age would have tempered the unmanly impression that later critics formed of Jaffeir. In appearance he was athletic, slightly above average in height, with a tendency to stoutness; "his voice was strong rather than melodious, but in recitation it was used with the greatest dexterity" (Lowe). At the time of the first performance of *Venice Preserv'd* Betterton would have been forty-six or forty-seven years old, firmly in his middle age, and solidly established as a fixture of the London stage. His repertory included a large number of Shakespearian roles, many of them presented in the versions adapted by Davenant, Dryden, Shadwell and Nahum Tate. He played Lear opposite Elizabeth Barry's Cordelia in Tate's modified version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Betterton was himself author of several adaptations which were popular in their day.⁴⁴

In *The History of the Stage* (1742), Colley Cibber writes "Mr. Thomas Betterton's Character." Cibber proclaims, "Betterton was an Actor, as Shakespeare was an Author, both without competitors." Cibber credits Betterton's acting on the grounds of his ability to moderate passions, to express feeling without "tearing a passion to rags." And Steele writes in a memorial piece in *The Tatler* that Betterton was a man "from whose action I had received more strong impressions of what is great and noble in human nature, than from the arguments of the most solid philosophers, or the descriptions of the most charming poets I had ever read" (*Tatler* 167). These impressions indicate that the character of Betterton was itself a

⁴⁴ See Robert Lowe's *Thomas Betterton*, 1891.

model of stoic virtue. Yet Cibber grants Betterton special esteem for his ability to change with his characters:

A further excellence in Betterton, was, that he could vary his spirit to the different characters he acted. These wild impatient starts, that fierce and flashing fire, which he threw into Hotspur, never came from the unruffled temper of his Brutus: When the Betterton Brutus was provok'd, in his dispute with Cassius, his spirit flew only to his eye...

Steele compares Betterton to Roscius and repeats a line Tully had attributed to the roman actor that reinforces Cibber's claims: "The perfection of an actor is only to become what he is doing." Further, Cibber writes, "Othello became him better than the sighs and tenderness of Castalio: for though in Castalio he only excell'd others, in Othello he excell'd himself..." This line of praise for Betterton, one of the most respected actors of his time, on the account of his protean ability to shift character might suggest that the critic is not so fond of that which viewers are said to have taken in stride, the fact that they never quite lost sight of the character of the known actor as he plays a character on the stage.⁴⁵ But Cibber still refers to these characters in proprietary terms, e.g. "the Betterton Brutus" suggesting that even though Betterton excelled at "becoming what he was doing," of losing his own character to the situation of the character he was playing, there was still a strong sense in which he was himself become a figure on the stage meaning double and emphasizing the importance of situation by way of the distance between his own reputation and the written character of Jaffeir.

⁴⁵ See Freeman, 18.

Governing the crowd

Tendentious relationships are enacted not only on the stage, but between the stage and the audience as well. Though Eric Rothstein claims that restoration tragedy is to be understood in terms of aesthetic response as opposed to an aesthetic of creation, and Allardyce Nicoll argues that “all dramatic art depends ultimately for its form and content on its audience,” *Venice Preserv'd* exhibits signs of engaging in the task of audience shaping (Nicoll 5). This claim does not contradict the notion that audience determines the shape of drama, but it suggests that the relationship be understood in more dialectic terms. *Venice Preserv'd's* aesthetic arises very much as a response to the nature of the restoration audience. But rather than cater to the demands of audience, as Rothstein and Nicoll seem to suggest, Otway's play exerts demands of its own. *Venice Preserv'd's* strategy of creating a sympathetic connection with the audience was practical as well as aesthetic. The restoration play had to contend with the action in the pit for the audience's attention.

The conditions in which drama was staged during the restoration were unsuited for a serious playwright such as Otway. The challenge of conveying significant meaning to an audience as much interested in impressing one another with their witty quips, in pursuing the masked courtesans in the pit, or simply in dodging payment would have been no small one. Indeed, Allardyce Nicoll might be understating the conditions of the theater in writing: “When we conjure up before our minds such an audience and such a management fearful at every moment of offending the slender clientele, we can understand that attention to the play in hand

was grievously lacking” (Nicoll 14). Indeed, the character Pierre’s request within the play for a dignified death may have worked double duty as a plea that the audience remain quiet and attentive during a crucial scene.

PIERRE. Captain, you should be a Gentleman of honour,
Keep off the Rabble, that I may have room
To entertain my Fate, and dye with Decency.
(V.i.473-5)

Such a multi-valent utterance reveals that the boundary between the action on the play and the interaction between audience and actors was permeable at best. Otway’s ploy to sway engagement and ultimately identification from the aristocratic, masculine society of the pit to the pathetic scene on the stage by appealing to a feminine capacity for sympathy runs parallel to the dramatic theme of *Venice Preserv’d*. Jaffeir, the sentimental man, teaches theater-goers how to watch a play as he inscribes in them what it is to be a subject. For this shift in subjectivity might be seen as an evolution in the identity of drama itself—Jaffeir is a figure for drama caught between generic identities, or rhetorical contracts. Heroic tragedy is associated with masculinity, politics, and formal determinations and is represented by Pierre; it is a form that is no longer tenable. Jaffeir longs to associate himself with the formal certainty of the heroic even while his being already wedded to the domestic guarantees that such an association would be a dead end. Belvidera looks ahead to domestic tragedy and shows Otway’s desire for a new dramatic form that might better express the complexities of character. Pathetic tragedy then is a necessary step toward the sentimental as it works to establish a new relationship between audience and stage.

Otway's ploy to sway engagement and ultimately identification from the aristocratic, masculine society of the pit to the pathetic scene on the stage by appealing to a sentimental capacity for sympathy runs parallel to the dramatic theme of *Venice Preserv'd*. Jaffeir, the feminized man, teaches theatergoers how to watch a play as he shows them what it is to be a subject. This shift in subjectivity is inextricably mixed with an evolution in the identity of drama itself—Jaffeir might be read as a figure for drama caught between generic identities. Heroic tragedy is associated with masculinity, politics, and formal determinations and is represented by Pierre; it is a form that is no longer tenable. Jaffeir longs to associate himself with the formal certainty of the heroic even while his being already wedded to the domestic guarantees that such an association would be a dead end. Belvidera looks ahead to domestic tragedy and shows Otway's desire for a new dramatic form that might better express an alternate model of character. Affective tragedy is a necessary step towards a more productive aesthetic as it works to establish a new relationship between audience and stage that comes in the form of sympathetic identification.

Banks and judgment

While Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* is the textual focus of this chapter, it was not the sole example of innovating pathetic tragedy. Otway's play provides a useful example for exegesis because, in addition to being perhaps the most popular example of pathetic tragedy in the eighteenth century, it vividly underscores many of the dramaturgical, thematic, and performative issues central to the pathetic.

Equally important to the development of pathetic tragedy were Nathaniel Lee and John Banks.⁴⁶ I wish to turn briefly to Banks's work at this point to highlight an important element of the pathetic drama that aligns it with a relocation of judgment from prescribed form to the experience of the observer that was impacting the fields of rhetoric, natural philosophy, aesthetics, and in the emergence of moral sense philosophy; all of which presage the advent of sensibility.⁴⁷ In John Banks's *Virtue Betray'd*, first staged in 1682, passions, which run rampant in heroic tragedy, are in need of taming. The source of tragedy, however, is not that King Henry is lusty, but that his uncontrolled passion results in the breaking of promises or the betrayal of virtue. The play's title might be applied in a number of ways: to virtuous Queen Anne who is raised up only to be cast aside when Henry's passions find a new object; to Piercy, to whom Anne had pledged her heart, only to marry the King; or, to King Henry who has betrayed himself by heeding the counsel of self-interested advisors. According to the Cardinal, virtue is incompatible with unlawful love. So, the first lesson of this play is that virtue is roughly equivalent with legitimate affect, but this is a problem when a lusty tyrant controls the law.

The play opens with Rochford lamenting the forced marriage of his sister, Anne Bullen. The evil of loveless marriage, and the tyranny of the fathers who enforce them are themes that run throughout pathetic tragedy. This might be read alternately as saying something about the importance of contract, or the wrongs of

⁴⁶ See Laura Brown in *English Dramatic Form*.

⁴⁷ Peter Kivy is useful to look at for a perspective on the shifting of the power of valuation from artist to crowd. He sees this development expressed in the writings of Frances Hutcheson, a philosopher whose works show the proximity of theories of aesthetics and moral sense philosophy.

patriarchal, aristocratic ideology.⁴⁸ But I take marriage to stand for sympathy, and this partly explains sentimental literature's advocacy for romantic marriage—a union in which both parties feel the same love is a model for perfect sympathy. King Henry is wreaking havoc by rendering sympathy impossible:

PIERCY. The king! What, would the tyrant be a god! To take upon
himself to dispose of hearts, and join unequal souls to one
another?

In “joining unequal souls,” that is, souls that do not feel the same for one another, or are not sympathetic, King Henry is said to show a disregard for the heart. And though he is led about by his passions, the heart he least regards is his own, as it should be working as his guide in moral judgments.

In the dedication of *Virtue Betray'd*, John Banks explains his choice of domestic history as the material for his play, setting himself apart from other poets who find it

an easier course to write of the improbable and romantick actions of
princes remote, both by distance of time and place, than to be confin'd
at home, where ev'ry school-boy has a right to be a critick.

Banks appears strangely eager to invite criticism at the outset of his play. But what he is up to here gets more to the point of the play and announces his allegiance to tenets that will come to be associated with the sentimental. He advocates an abridgement of the distance between the play's audience and its setting, and

⁴⁸ Victoria Kahn's *Wayward Contracts* is useful to consider both here, in considering the relation of affect to contract, and in the analysis of *Venice Preserv'd* below, where I look at the relation of affiliation to subjectivity.

connects this to the issue of judgment.⁴⁹ Banks, it would seem, wants an audience that judges. In fact, the real moral of the play concerns subjective judgment and the cultivation of moral sense.

The play does not close on the pathetic spectacle of Anne going to her execution; instead it presents its audience with a penitent King Henry. In his final speech, the King resolves to reign alone, realizing too late that his subjects have led him astray because his passions have opened him to serving their interests.

KING. If subjects thus their Monarchs will restrain;
 'Tis they are Kings; for them we idly Reign:
 Then I'll first break the Yoak; this Maxim still
 shall be my Guide (A Prince can do no Ill!)
 In spite of slaves, his genius let him trust;
 for heav'n ne'er made a king but made him just. (V.i.)

This seems overtly royalist, and apologist, but the speech deals with a strange inversion of power; the suggestion of inversion, along with the King's resolve to trust in his own genius, and the dedication's pronouncement that "ev'ry school-boy has a right to be a critick," turns this into a call for the exercise of judgment generally.

Sympathy and spectacle

Venice Preserv'd works to engage by stirring the placid waters of formal expectation through its emphasis on spectacle: scenes which emphasize the place

⁴⁹ Steele also argued for the value of everyday characters and a domestic setting, as did writers of domestic tragedy like George Lillo, author of *The London Merchant*, and Joanna Baillie makes the case again late in the 18th century. The common thread is the belief that everyday settings and characters that the audience can sympathize with are more conducive to moral edification.

situation has in shaping character and response. The pathetic situations around which the play is structured are meant to draw in the audience through pity and fear—a sudden affective identification rather than a slow, unfolding one. Max Scheler, in his study of sympathy, describes certain cases of *divided consciousness*, noting, “they do not come about progressively, through the imitative performance of individual utterances, gestures or actions, but in a sudden leap” (Scheler 24). The explanation for the efficacy of the shock of the sudden pathetic scene, particularly relevant to the claims about affective tragedy here, might be seen in Scheler’s claim that true sympathy “occur[s] only when two spheres of man’s consciousness which are by nature always present concurrently in him, are almost or wholly empty of particular content: the cognitive, spiritual and rational sphere (which is personal in form), *and* the sphere of physical and corporeal sensation and sensory feeling” (Scheler 35). It is through the shock of the affective aesthetic that the play draws the spectator suddenly out of himself; his attention is pulled away from the crowd around him and into the scene of the tragedy.

The impact of the pathetic spectacle in its capacity to inspire horror is recognized but misunderstood in the aesthetically minded plan of the revolutionaries:

RENAULT. Without the least remorse then let’s resolve
With Fire and Sword t’exterminate these Tyrants;
And when we shall behold those curst Tribunals,
Stain’d by the Tears and sufferings of the Innocent...
With all that sad disorder can produce,
To make a spectacle of horror... (III.ii.375-9; 383-4)

Renault’s plan is to replace one pathetic scene with another. The tear-stained halls of the tribunal, presumably stained with the tears of the soldiers who have been

unjustly persecuted, are to covered up with a new scene of horror; the tears are to be washed away with blood. But the inadequacy of this heroic aesthetic, rooted in the logic of providence and poetic justice, is revealed in Renault's attempt to assuage the consciences of the rebels with the insistence that "there's nothing pure upon the Earth," suggesting quite strongly that the heroic can no longer accommodate virtue (III.ii.386). This, as has been argued above, is because virtue has moved from external forms to private interiority. The rebels' plan is to create a spectacle of destruction that will cover their tears—in effect, masking their own interiority in protest. The pathetic spectacle however works in the opposite manner, providing access to interiority through affect.

In stark contrast to this is Pierre's account of the effects of Belvidera's suffering on a crowd of spectators:

PIERRE. Hads't thou but seen, as I did, how at last
Thy Beauteous Belvidera, like a Wretch
That's doomed to Banishment, came weeping forth,
Shining through Tears, like April Sun's in showers
That labour to orecome the Cloud that loads 'm,
Whilst two you Virgins, on whose Arms she lean'd,
Kindly lookt up, and at her Grief grew sad,
As if the catch't the Sorrows that fell from her:
Even the lewd Rabble that were gather'd round
To see the sight, stood mute when they beheld her;
Govern'd their roaring throats and grumbled pity...
(I.i.256-266)

Pierre describes a scene of irresistible sympathy where Belvidera's suffering permeates all who observe the spectacle. But the effect of this shared sorrow is beneficial. It is compared to life-giving spring showers, and it creates social order as it "govern[s]" even the "lewd Rabble," transforming their roars to "grumbled pity."

Problems as pathetic drama becomes a formalized genre

Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, first staged in 1702, is a later example of pathetic tragedy. It responds to a play like *the Man of Mode*, and like *Venice Preserv'd*, it can be read as a meta-drama: Lothario is a carry-over from the comedy of manners, but here the rake is cast as the villain, his *joi de vivre* portrayed as cold-hearted disregard for all that is virtuous. Further, it continues the feminization of the sentimental protagonist. Lucilla wonders that Calista could have any feelings for the vile Lothario when she has the chance to join herself to the new model of sentimental man.

LUCILLA. Why do you follow still that wand'ring fire that has misled
your weary steps, and leaves you benighted in a wilderness of
woe, that false Lothario? Turn from the deceiver; turn, and
behold where gentle Altamont, kind as the softest virgin of our
sex... sighs at your feet and woos you to be happy. (II.i.)

The feminized man that emerges from pathetic tragedy anticipates Harley in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*.⁵⁰ Altamont, even more than Jaffeir, shows that this feminine subjectivity is marked by the benevolence, charitability, and sympathy characteristic of the sentimental. But in the final scenes of *The Fair Penitent* we begin to see that sentiment has a tendency toward morbidity if left unchecked and the play suggests that this undermines pathetic tragedy's bid at sympathy and moral instruction.

Sentimental comedy seems to be addressing the problem that emerges in pathetic drama: how can sentimentality lead to anything but suffering and false

⁵⁰ G. A. Starr has argued that the protagonist of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* is the true precursor to the man of feeling in his essay "Aphra Behn and the Genealogy of the *Man of Feeling*", 1990.

sympathy? Having, as I've claimed above, roughly the same aim as pathetic tragedy, the writers of sentimental comedy must come up with a different way to create a sympathetic response. Sentimental comedy intersperses pathetic scenes with humor. Judging from Richard Steele's words, this form is more a concession to audience than a pure artistic decision. He claims in a review of Terence's *The Self-Tormentor* that a sufficiently sensible culture would need nothing pathetic in its plays; he writes: "There cannot be a greater argument for the good understanding of a people, than a sudden consent to give their approbation of a sentiment which has no emotion in it" (*Spectator* 502). Meaning, that sentiment, and approbation *are* associated with emotion on the British stage and this is the result of weak understanding. In "wit... encourag'd in the interests of virtue" Cibber and Steele find an alternative to the excess of pathos that leads to the decay of understanding (Preface to *The Lying Lover*). In Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, wit becomes the means for achieving the sympathy represented by romantic marriage. The virtuous Amanda disguises herself as a wanton in order to win back the love of her faithless husband, Loveless. In keeping with my readings of these plays as meta-dramatic, I contend that Amanda's ploy models the use of wit in sentimental comedy in that a trick must be played on the fickle crowd in order to get them to do what is good for them. Sentimental comedy is essentially pathetic tragedy with a twist of wit to keep the crowd engaged. Both are genres that try to cultivate sensibility through sympathetic engagement.

Conclusion

In giving an alternate account of the genealogy of sentimental drama, this chapter has answered the criticisms aimed at it on the grounds of its unnatural characters. The forces at work influencing the innovations of pathetic tragedy were also inspiring, or inspired by new considerations of the nature of subjectivity in relation to experience, of epistemology and judgment. The development of pathetic drama as a genre created a unique challenge because it was a genre fundamentally opposed to generic convention. It emphasized affective response and spectatorial judgment. A distance between character and genre makes genre apparent and creates pathetic response. Reveals the relation of situation to character and judgment. In this way, the pathetic seems to be in league with sensation and its associates, sentiment and sympathy. Situation and concernment seem to be the two key elements in a 'pathetic scene': the disposition of bodies plus the play of emotion.

While any one character in pathetic tragedy cannot and does not model subjectivity—because this would presume an autonomous self—the production of the pathetic figure as the focus of attention does make claims about the status of the self. The pathetic figure is a rhetorical figure, a means of engaging the audience sympathetically. What emerges is a rhetorical sort of person, one whose passions are felt by all in the audience, and one that can inhabit, or be inhabited by them as well. But, as the pathetic figure is embodied, no imaginative work is really needed to feel the effect/affect as long as the actor is doing his job. This language of the body, the belief in the capacity for an actor to transmit passion from himself to his audience through his postures and movements and its cultural significance in the

eighteenth century is territory that has received due attention.⁵¹ What has not been covered is the genealogy of the phenomenon—how the body becomes inserted as a signifier in the rhetoric of social discourse, giving life to a pun on figure. Though perhaps this is coming at the issue from a perspective of textual prejudice and the question should be reconsidered—since rhetoric was a technique of oratory long before it was one of writing it should be no surprise that the figure of pathos should be embodied on the stage.

⁵¹ For example, see Paul Goring's *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 2005.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA AND THE SOCIO-POETICS OF SYMPATHY AND WIT: INDUCTION, PROPRIETY, AND GENRE

The Beggar's Opera debuted at the Theatre Royal on January 29, 1728, and ran for sixty-two nights in its first season, the record for that time.⁵² The first night's performance was attended by Pope and other notable figures, and was eagerly followed in Ireland by Swift, whose suggestion it was to write a "Newgate pastoral." The success of this formally innovative play was a surprise to some. After being turned down by Colley Cibber at Drury Lane, Gay took his play to the manager of the Theatre Royal, John Rich, who only agreed to stage the play at the insistence of the Duchess of Queensbury. But the ballad opera quickly made "Rich gay and Gay rich," as their contemporaries said.⁵³ Gay wrote in a letter to Swift:

The Beggar's Opera hath now been acted thirty-six times, and was as full the last night as the first, and yet there is not the least probability of a thin audience, though there is a discourse about the town, that the directors of the Royal Academy of Music design to solicit against its being played on the outlandish opera days, as it is now called. On the benefit day of one of the actresses last week, one of the players falling sick, they were obliged to give out another play, or dismiss the audience. A play was given out, but the audience called out for the Beggar's Opera, and they were forced to play it, or the audience would not have stayed. (20 March 1728)

Its popularity elicited, in 1728 and after, a flood of response, in the forms of pamphlets, sermons, letters, and newspaper verse. It received newspaper criticism

⁵² See William Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera: its Content, History & Influence*, 1923.

⁵³ *The Craftsman*, February 3, 1728.

that was both critical and complimentary to an extreme degree. There was much debate about the social effects of *The Beggar's Opera* over the course of the eighteenth century.

Some of the play's sharpest critics claimed that it led to a swell in the number of highwaymen as young men sought to emulate the gallant Macheath.⁵⁴ T.F. Dibdin, the nephew of Charles Dibdin and editor of a weekly journal called *The Director* (1807), printed a letter from a professed clergyman which gives an account of two young brothers, jailed for highway robbery a crime which they were inspired to by their viewing of *The Beggar's Opera*. In his commentary, Dibdin goes so far as to say:

The historical anecdote of the day, that the success of this Opera caused a distinguishable increase in highway robberies, appears to me both natural and probable. Thus the Author (as others have been since) became an accessory before the fact, to all the robberies and murders which have been suggested by the representation of it.

The Director, 1807

The problem arises, Dibdin claims, because the spectator admires either Polly or Macheath and becomes habituated "for the society of abandoned prostitutes." Others argued with equal force that the play had the opposite effect for nearly the same reasons. In "On Actors and Acting", 1815, Hazlitt ventured that "the acting of the *Beggar's Opera* a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery, than all the gibbets that ever were erected" because, "a person, after seeing this piece, is too

⁵⁴ *The Newgate Calendar* mentions Mary Young, hanged in 1740, who called herself Jenny Diver, and Isaac Darking, a highwayman who modeled himself closely on Macheath, and read *The Beggar's Opera* in the death cell. 5 vols (London, 1779) 2.385; 4.191-7.

deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humour with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets.”

Robert Bisset, in *The Life of Edmund Burke*, 1798, explains that Burke had little esteem for *The Beggar's Opera*, believing that its merits were overbalanced by its moral deficiencies. Burke did not however hold with the common opinion that the play inspired imitation. Rather, he found *The Beggar's Opera's* moral failing in,

arraying vice in agreeable colours, and representing the greatest crimes without exciting the proper detestation ; that there is more pains taken to shew that others are greater villains than thieves and highwaymen, than to teach and induce these to refrain from their villainies. (151-2)

Burke denied the “hypothesis” of Gay’s play, that thieves and courtiers were essentially the same, and perceived it as representing “mankind, in civilized society, as universally vicious” (152).

But going back to those in the know, the beggar’s opera was believed to have an aim, a function. In a letter to Gay dated November 27, 1728, Swift writes:

The Beggar’s Opera hath knocked down Gulliver; I hope to see Pope’s Dulness knock down the Beggar’s Opera, but not till it hath fully done its job. To expose vice, and make people laugh with innocence, does more public service than all the ministers of state from Adam to Walpole...

Swift repeats this theme of the play doing work in a letter to Pope: “You talk of this Dunciad, but I am impatient to have it *volare per ora*—there is now a vacancy for fame; the Beggar’s Opera hath done its task, *discedat uti conviva satur.*” Meaning, roughly, to break up, or disperse through the use of satire. But what structures were the Scriblerians trying to break up?

In 1714 Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, a play bearing strong resemblance to the manner of Otway's and Banks's pathetic dramas of the 1680's, was performed at Drury Lane where it had a successful run of nineteen nights. Rowe's drama draws heavily on pathos, relying for its effect almost exclusively on the presence of the suffering figure of the titular character.⁵⁵ But it differs from Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* in that there is no striving against form, thematically or generically. Jane Shore is passively acquiescent, and the tragedy itself is a distillation of Otway's techniques. The thematic and formal passivity of Rowe's play expresses a struggle to reestablish the reality of disinterestedness in response to views typified by Hobbes and Mandeville that reinforce economic and political self-interest. In *Power of the Passive Self*, Scott Paul Gordon points to an "inescapable suspicion" in Mandeville's worldview. This suspicion of motives puts people in a real bind. Characters are portrayed as passive in order to deny that they are calculating. Agency is located outside of them, in God, Nature, or in other characters. The discourse of passivity constructs a self whose disinterestedness is guaranteed by forces outside of conscious control, external forces that work through the body and bypass the mind. This discourse seems to tie in rather nicely with the forced insistence on obedience put into effect with the passage of the Riot Acts in the same year that Rowe's play was enjoying such success. The Riot Acts gave the parliament a way of controlling unruly crowds—even if they were not unruly. And it is interesting to place this development next to the growing importance of public opinion and concerns for audience in the theater. Just as the Riot Acts enforced a

⁵⁵ See Laura Brown on she-tragedy in *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760*, 1981.

sort of civil obedience, pathetic drama like Rowe's led to a sort of passive engagement. And I think this subtle difference between obedience and passive virtue is to the point which I argued in the previous chapter: it is a mistake to think of the pathetic mode as a negative response to Hobbes, rather it represents submission of the contracting self to civil society as described in *Leviathan*.⁵⁶ The Pathetic drama's wedding of materialism and Aristotelian rhetoric renders concernment a form of sympathy as it aims at a sort of deep material resonance between audience and character, and a complete wedding of character to form. These generic principles imply a definition of persons as deeply tied to the ordering ideological systems of state. Rowe's timing was impeccable, introducing a drama of passive virtue just as the Tories were driven from power. In 1715, Rowe staged another She Tragedy, *Lady Jane Grey*. This one was not nearly as popular as *Jane Shore*, but the year was still a good one for Rowe as he was named poet laureate. The passivity of form, theme, and character in Rowe's plays amounts to an indirect plea for accepting the sovereignty of George. The pure appeal to pathos, with its growing association with the passive acceptance of generic form and the commitment to the contracted structure of civil society which form represents must have chafed the sensibilities of the Tory writers who suddenly found themselves scrambling for patronage.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 2009.

⁵⁷ For a demonstration of the corollary between formal expectation and political contract see Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: the Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674*, (2004).

No longer favored by the court, the Scriblerians found themselves in a new relationship with their audience, a relationship not altogether uncommon as audiences became more demotic. Previously politics, taste, wit, fashion, and judgment in general were the preserves of an elite. But pathos's democratization of judgment joined in the host of social forces at work to render public opinion a powerful force.⁵⁸ Jonathan Swift had opened his "Argument Against the Abolishment of Christianity" by positioning himself as a lone voice of reason against the growing tide of public opinion.

I am very sensible what a weakness and presumption it is to reason against the general humour and disposition of the world. I remember it was with great justice, and a due regard to the freedom, both of the public and the press, forbidden upon several penalties to write, or discourse, or lay wagers against the — even before it was confirmed by Parliament; because that was looked upon as a design to oppose the current of the people, which, besides the folly of it, is a manifest breach of the fundamental law, that makes this majority of opinions the voice of God. (Swift, 1708)

Public sentiment counted for something and needed some kind of regulation if it was to be managed and exploited: hence the prevoyance of Addison and Steele whose magazine, *The Spectator*, aimed to elevate the public's tastes. The stated goal of *The Spectator* was "to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality... to bring philosophy out of the closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffeehouses." Addison and Steele recommended that their readers "consider it part of the tea-equipage" and not leave

⁵⁸ The flourishing of print culture was hugely important to the growing power of public opinion as has been demonstrated by Habermas. Still, I think it is worth focusing on the other factors that shifted power of judgment to the audience: aesthetics (see Kivy); the pathetic; and scientific method.

the house without reading it in the morning (No. 10). One of its functions was to provide readers with educated, topical talking points, and advice in how to carry on conversations and social interactions in a polite manner. But it is not clear that Swift and company wanted to have the public to tea, no matter how many issues of *The Spectator* they had read. Their sort of wit belonged to an era prior to the public sphere. But if it was to find a satisfactory position in the new dispensation, it had to acknowledge an audience outside the elite company of the club. If one sets *A Tale of a Tub* alongside Shaftesbury's "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" one sees that this is done by means of irony, but irony put to new uses to fit the changing contexts. Instead of saying what one means by not saying it, or saying the opposite, in such a way that everyone instantly understands, irony becomes a means of defending oneself against those not fit to understand. The growing authority of public opinion in matters of taste led to a transformation of the function of wit. The ideal of comic wit in the restoration had been imitative of gentlemen's conversation, developed to legitimate royalist ideology and the ideals of the ruling class.⁵⁹ The emergence of new political realities meant that wit had to appeal to the public en masse in order to succeed. Writers like the Scriblerians had to rely more on the mask of irony, producing works that were speciously demotic, secretly hegemonic.

The exclusive Scriblerians resented public opinion playing a role in judgment. They were not so much against form as representative of ideological contract so much as they are against it as something that puts the audience in a

⁵⁹ See Robert Markley, *Two-Edg'd Weapons: Style and Ideology in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve*, 1988.

position to judge, to know. In 1715, *The What d'ye Call It?*, written by Gay, Pope, and Arbuthnot was staged and well received—much better than *Lady Jane Grey*.⁶⁰ This curious play rebelled explicitly against passive subjection to form while retaining an interest in engagement through pathos. It deployed wit to achieve a different sort of sympathy, and to shift the nature of pathetic exchange from the fixed proprietary terms under which it had begun to operate in tragedies such as Rowe's back to a kind of sympathy that prioritized the experience of the individual.

The effect of the burgeoning public had an effect upon individuals who believed in the authority of their own particular, subjective experience, and wished to express them not just in the mass.⁶¹ But it turns out that the public sphere makes the definition of individuality difficult.⁶² No longer is individual interiority defined by received opinion, nor is it yet defined by something like Hazlitt's kind of rights.⁶³ The impetus to express individuality is driven to a series of pragmatic solutions to the problem, of which the deliberate indulgence of the passions is the most obvious: what you feel must be true, empirical philosophy says so. But the reality of the passions, insisted on in different ways by Mandeville, Hume, and Burke, is a very fluid one, lasting only as long as one is possessed by them. Sympathy was coming to be a favored mode of aesthetic engagement, and while the sort of engagement that

⁶⁰ See *Pity and Tears: the Tragedies of Nicholas Rowe*, 1974, by Landon Burns.

⁶¹ See Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962.

⁶² See Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Parthogenesis of Modern Society*, 1959.

⁶³ At least, by the kind of rights formulated in his, "Project for a New Theory of Civil and Criminal Legislation," 1828.

the pathetic drama sought to elicit from its audience might be described as sympathetic, Gay and the Scriblerians sought to temper sympathy with wit.

Accounts of *The Beggar's Opera's* first performance claim that, while initially silent, at some point the crowd became enthralled and responded with great applause. But the accounts differ in locating the point at which the crowd began to show its enthusiasm for the play. Pope was present at the first night's performance and recounts that,

We were all at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyle, who sat in the box next to us, say, "it will do,--it must do!—I see it in the eyes of them."—This was a good while before the first act was over, and so gave us ease soon; for the duke, (besides his own good taste) has a more particular knack than any one now living, in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this, as usual; the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger with every act, and ended in a clamour of applause.

Benjamin Victor, writing in 1730, says that,

...on the first night of performance, its fate was doubtful for some time. The first act was received with silent attention, not a hand moved; at the end of which they rose, and every man seemed to compare notes with his neighbor, and the general opinion was in its favor. In the second act they broke their silence by marks of their approbation, to the great joy of the frightened performers, as well as the author; and the last act was received with universal applause.

This account does not necessarily conflict with Pope's, it being possible that the "silent attention" on the part of the spectator might be accounted for by the strangeness of the production, and the audience at large might not have been so quick in its judgment as the Duke of Argyle was.

But other spectators present at the play's opening interpreted this silence differently. In his biography of the comic actor Charles Macklin William *Cooke* says:

Macklin was present at the first representation of the Beggar's Opera, and confirmed what has been often reported, that the success was doubtful, till after the opening of the second act, when, after the chorus song of 'Let us take the road,' the applause was as universal as unbounded. *(Memoirs of Macklin 57)*

Macklin's account, as Schultz points out, indicates a later turning point than that described by Pope, who was confident of the play's success, "a good while before the first act was over." The silence of the crowd takes on a different cast altogether in the report given to Boswell by Richard Owen Cambridge,

that there was good reason enough to doubt concerning its success. He wast told by [James] Quin that during the first night of its appearance it was long in a very dubious state; that there was a disposition to damn it, and that it was saved by the song,

"Oh ponder well! be not severe!"

the audience being much affected by the innocent looks of Polly, when she came to those two lines, which exhibit at once a painful and ridiculous image,

"For on the rope that hangs my Dear,
Depends poor Polly's life."

(Life of Johnson)

This song, which is the twelfth, comes about two-thirds of the way through Act I. This story sounds plausible, both because of Pope's comment and the earlier position in the play, at a somewhat natural break in the plot. It is likely that some in the audience were struck with Polly's pathetic appeal to her parents, especially when it was sung to a popular tune. Polly's supplication puts her clearly in the pathetic role of suffering figure, and it makes explicit appeal to a clichéd notion of sympathy wherein her life and her husband's are one. But Gay slips in a clever pun—the dual sense of "depends," mocks sympathetic involvement by alluding to the literal and particularly physical image of Macheath's body hanging from the noose, and this pun takes on third and fourth senses as it points to the sinister customs necessary for sympathy, and to the allusion to hanging as the scene on

which the play depends. This point of unabashed pathos, one which piles on all of the effects: pathetic figure, melancholy air, and even an expression of complete sympathy actually achieved sympathy, and this was the point at which the audience was likely to have entered into the play. Despite flipping form and social order, pathos remains the way into engagement with the play—it remains the center—even as Gay occasionally makes light of it. While *The Beggar's Opera's* great success is clear, the source of that success is and has been much in question. Was it the acting? Probably not: while the acting was by all accounts good, it has been successful with many different casts. Arguably, much of the incredible success of the *Beggar's Opera* was owing to its use of popular songs—allowing the audience to resonate at the same pitch. This tension, capitalizing on cultural expectation in order to deny and put accepted forms to new use. *The Beggar's Opera's* novel appropriation of popular ballads results in a reversal of polarities in which the hegemonic attitude is made passive by popular culture.

Wit and sympathy

The work of the Scriblerians shows that wit and sympathy can be used together in different measures, and that there are close parallels, as well as sharp distinctions between the two concepts. In terms of aesthetic engagement, the relationship between wit and sympathy is about rhetoric, or style in the sense that the issue is language's capacity to transmit emotion. In Pope's "Essay on Criticism," the word "wit," allows for the play of wit in making various connections between sense and context. The substitutability to which "wit" lends itself, i.e., one sense for

another, at once is already making an important point, that substitutability establishes an analogy between wit and sympathy. Empson says of Pope's "Essay," "there is not a single use of the word in the whole poem in which the idea of a joke is quite out of sight" (Empson 87). The jocularity of wit is important. First, because wit is often joined with mirth it must be noted that this faculty of the mind is strongly associated with a kind of passion. Secondly, humor suggests an alternate form of sympathy, one that might not allow for substitution, but which does suggest separate souls resonating to the same chord. Humor, like sympathy takes two.

The sympathetic relationship between performance and audience depends upon the performance's ability to move the audience. Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime*, the influence of which on eighteenth-century rhetorical and aesthetic theory was quite strong, claimed that "the effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport" (Longinus 43). The effects of the sublime in oratory described are much like Burke's description of sympathy. His "substitution" implies a "transport" through the imagination and the affinity between his "social passion" and the acts of reading and writing become clear, so that the text becomes a means for enacting substitution and transport.

Pope's account of how texts convey sympathy facetiously evokes the idea of transport while advocating sympathy of a different kind. He writes: "A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit,/With the same spirit that its author writ." The absurd quintuple rhyme suggests the impossibility of such substitution. Here the "spirit" is to be transferred, but this spirit does not seem to be essential to the identity of either party, there is no substitution at work, only something shared. While the

rhetoric of the sublime aims at a substitutive sympathy witty writing aims at getting readers and authors to resonate to the same instrument, the text, but each remains firmly within his self. Just as humor might be seen as an alternate sort of sympathy from the usual partaking in the suffering of another, wit as a style or technique should be seen as an alternate to the rhetoric of the sublime. The sublime aims at using the text as a conduit for felt passion, and works by drawing the reader out of himself through the right use of techniques and figures. And Jonathan Swift's *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* is a rhetorical tract of sorts, and in keeping with Pope's "*Peri Bathous*: or, the Art of Sinking in Poetry," it blatantly eschews every principle laid out by Longinus. And, as in *Peri Bathous*, wherein Pope returns again and again to the figure of the state as a way of projecting "reform" in poesie and drama, Swift's work uses textual concerns to get at social ones. From the start, the work is marked as a fragment in a note from "the bookseller" which not only points to the materiality and the artificiality of the text, but announces the impossibility of following Longinus's insistence on the importance of the relation of the whole to its parts as well. The reader has been denied access to the whole, indeed, as the reader soon discovers, the part which has been removed seems to be the most important. The piece reads like a string of features deliberately aimed at undercutting its capacity for achieving sublime transport.

The bookseller's advertisement appeals to the reader's judgment in determining the identity of the author, and then a footnote on the first page questions the reliability of said bookseller. On the first page Swift has achieved the creation of a chorus of voices, all addressing the reader. In addition, the reader is

inclined to see himself as, “the learned reader” printed on the page, and is aware of the presence of two hovering yet unseen presences: the “Sir” addressed in the letter, and Swift hovering behind it all. The effect is hardly unity. Swift, through his narrator, overturns traditional rhetoric, such as his announcement of intention to employ allegory and delineation of its terms, which is directly against Longinus’ observation that “The cunning use of figures is peculiarly subject to suspicion, and produces an impression of ambush, plot, fallacy” (95). Swift’s wit is always calling attention to its own technique, and to his text’s material embodiment in a book. This is analogous to his tendency to reduce all ideas to a body that’s presented as vulgar, and to sexualize sentiment. Swift does not appear to think that wit can directly convey sympathy, but it can do it indirectly. But the range of this sort of sympathy is limited. The satirist and his audience can share in a derisive mirth, but no more.

Induction and particularity

In order to put the comparison of wit and sympathy into philosophical perspective, it is useful to jump ahead and see what later thinkers thought as they looked back on the early eighteenth century. In the introduction to his *Philosophical Enquiry* Edmund Burke examines Locke’s definition of wit⁶⁴: “Mr. Locke very justly and finely observes of wit, that it is chiefly conversant in tracing resemblances” (Burke 17).⁶⁵ Burke goes on to write that the “satisfaction in tracing resemblances”

⁶⁴ See Locke’s *Essay*, XI.ii.

⁶⁵ Burke goes on to remark on judgment and to make clear that the two, though they “both seem to result from different operation of the same faculty of comparing”,

is one of man's great pleasures and argues that this is a sort of pleasure of the imagination. Sympathy, according to Burke is one of the "social passions," and it is its status as a passion that distinguishes it from wit, yet it is a source of pleasure too, and one that arises from a sort of tracing of resemblances. That is, sympathy arises when we see a person like ourselves in pain; presumably it could not happen if one did not first note the resemblance between himself and the sufferer. As Hume says, "resemblance must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others" (318). There is an analogy between wit, which finds resemblances in ideas, and sympathy, which is felt resemblance between persons.

Much later in the century, Kant defines wit as "the faculty by which we determine the universal appropriate to the particular" (*Anthropologie*, i.42). Kant's definition of the function of wit would seem to put it at odds with sympathy as the move to universalize works against sympathy's reliance on particularity. Representations of sympathy tend to depend on the particular. Mandeville, and Hume rely on violent scenes to illustrate the workings of sympathy. In Mandeville, the sight of an infant being devoured by a sow elicits an undeniable, nearly physical reaction. He seems to relish in showing that a sort of immediate sympathy arises from such a detailed scene. Mandeville's vivid description of a sow eating an infant does elicit a reaction from its reader, but it isn't sympathy. The scene becomes ridiculous as the details of the passage grow more particular—it moves from pathos to bathos, until at its end, we see that it's a joke. The reader is the "cruel animal" that

they are quite different such that the "perfect union of wit and judgment is one of the rarest things in the world" (Burke 17).

finds pleasure in this scene—as Burke says, sympathy is a sort of delight in the suffering of others. Mandeville makes the point that sympathy, as a merely physical reaction is one that can be easily manipulated. With Mandeville, and Swift below, one encounters a cynical kind of sympathy that does not penetrate to the heart and a dismissal of the body as a potential seat for understanding. This refusal to move beyond particular detail to a universal, sympathetic response amounts to a refusal of the inductive move to standardize, or make objective a particular subjective response.⁶⁶

“Locke,” writes Kant, “sensualized all concepts of the understanding.” This reflects Kant’s fundamental belief that wit left unchecked will always go too far in its application of universals to particulars (see above). This tendency of wit leads the mind to arrive at certain illusions wherein ideas that can only be known through reason are falsely believed to be knowable through empirical experience, *viz.*, ideas are mistaken for substances. This flaw of reason, hypostatization, was frequently mocked by Jonathan Swift, who frequently turned abstract ideas into objects in order to model the faulty wit of hack authors and poor readers who confuse figures for things, universals for particulars. Hypostatization is a sort of inverse personification: materiality is assigned to human qualities. Kant’s chief example of hypostatization is Descartes’ *cogito*, wherein the philosopher moves from the “I think,” which already mistakenly presupposes a persisting “I” that can be known empirically (intuitively in Kant’s terminology), to assigning the soul with the

⁶⁶ See Michael McKeon’s account of the relation of experimental method’s induction to aesthetics.

properties of a substance. Kant's critique of Locke, which seems so pertinent to the matter at hand, is in fact an attempt to rehabilitate empirical knowledge from David Hume's skepticism.

Hume questioned whether inductive reasoning might lead to knowledge. That is, what is the justification for either generalizing about the properties of a class of objects based on some number of observations of particular instances of that class or presupposing that a sequence of events in the future will occur as it always has in the past. Hume called this the Principle of Uniformity of Nature. The problem calls into question all empirical claims made in everyday life or through the scientific method. Although the problem arguably dates back to the pyrhonnism of ancient philosophy, David Hume introduced it in the mid-18th century. Hume described the problem in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, §4. Hume comes to the question of induction in his reflection on the discovery of causal relations, which form the basis for what he refers to as "matters of fact." He argues that causal relations are found not by reason, but by induction. This is because for any cause, multiple effects are conceivable, and the actual effect cannot be determined by reasoning about the cause; instead, one must observe occurrences of the causal relation to discover that it holds. In general, it is not necessary that causal relation in the future resemble causal relations in the past, as it is always conceivable otherwise; for Hume, this is because the negation of the claim does not lead to a contradiction.

Hume ponders the justification of induction. If all matters of fact are based on causal relations, and all causal relations are found by induction, then induction must

be shown to be valid somehow. He uses the fact that induction assumes a valid connection between the proposition "I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect" and the proposition "I foresee that other objects which are in appearance similar will be attended with similar effects."^[8] One connects these two propositions not by reason, but by induction. Although induction is not made by reason, Hume observes that we nonetheless perform it and improve from it. He proposes a descriptive explanation for the nature of induction in §5 of the *Enquiry*, titled "Skeptical solution of these doubts". It is by custom or habit that one draws the inductive connection described above, and "without the influence of custom we would be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses."^[9] The result of custom is belief, which is instinctual and much stronger than imagination alone.^[10]

In "Hume's Social Composition," (1985) Jerome Christensen describes Hume's rhetorical practice in terms of ideology and induction. Christensen argues that in Hume's writing on property as the basis for civil society the threat of ideological breakdown is a necessary step in the inductive move from particular to whole: "the idea of annihilation supplies the essential opening for induction, which retrospectively discovers a necessary connection between an effect and a cause" (46). The cause, or reason, he then describes as a sort of composition, "an idea of mass that induces ostensibly aleatory, potentially anarchic particulars across a surface of propensities that mobilize and contain energy" (47). The public is one such composite created by induction. The Scriblerians sought to break apart this composition by exposing the induction at its root and to put a moveable structure in

its place, to invert the position of cause and effect with a composite genre, so that the particularity of individual response might be maintained and agency restored to individuals rather than to the public opinion.

Christensen argues that theatrical performances provide an ideology of ideology, and drama such as Rowe's makes clear an ideology of passivity. The spectator is taught to be properly submissive in the face of a form in which he has no say. Genre is a kind of composite, a form of authority that takes the agency of judgment away from the individual spectator and puts it in the hands of the public at large in the form of convention. In *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (1985) J. G. A. Pocock demonstrates that mid seventeenth-century debates over ownership were actually debates over authority. In this case, ownership of subjective experience is generalized, so the standardization of genre represents induction.

In an essay called "Definition of Wit", 1829, William Hazlitt describes wit as a faculty that reveals and breaks apart associations, describing its function as "the untwisting the chain of our ideas, whereby each link is made to hook on more readily to others than when they were all bound up together by habit, and with a view to a *set* purpose." Notice that Hazlitt, like Swift, emphasizes the purposeful nature of wit. He then proceeds to elaborate that purpose as one that reveals and reforms ideological structures:

Ideas exist as a sort of *fixtures* in the understanding; they are like *moveables* (that will also unscrew and take to pieces) in the wit or fancy. If our grave notions were always well founded; if there were no aggregates of power, of prejudice, and absurdity; if the value and importance of an object went on increasing with the opinion entertained of it, and with the surrender of our faith, freedom, and every thing else to aggrandise it, then " the squandering glances " of the wit, " whereby the wise man's folly is anatomised," would be as

impertinent as they would be useless. But while gravity and imposture not only exist, but reign triumphant; while the proud, obstinate, sacred tumours rear their heads on high, and are trying to get a new lease of for ever and a day; then oh! for the Frenchman's art ("Voltaire's?—the same") to break the torpid spell, and reduce the bloated mass to its native insignificance! (1829)

Hazlitt's definition of wit can be reconciled with sympathy's reliance on particulars because it breaks down inductive associations. The Scriblerians sought to break down this composite and install a new sort of composite in its place: one that resists induction and restores agency to individuals. They do this by keeping the artificiality of genre, the move of induction in clear sight. So both sympathy and wit might be compared to induction, the intellectual move from the particular to the general that figured strongly in Hume's theory of the basis of civil society, and in experimental method.⁶⁷ The inductive move to make a rule of the particular and subjective has a corollary in generic form. Play with form reveals the fictionality of form and exposes the fiction at the base of public opinion, in a blend of wit and pathos that emphasizes situation.

Particularity and situation in Gay's drama

Swift's *Tale of a Tub* links hypostatization and sympathy in order to mock them and to emphasize the importance of particularity over universal, or catholic principles. The running joke of the text is that authors or readers treat ideas as material things. Swift derides the implications of treating discourses as things that matter as he describes zeal growing on a warm day into substance. Swift's work has

⁶⁷ See Christensen, and Michael McKeon.

its pathetic figure, and it gives several accounts of sympathy. It turns out that he is not denying material pathos, but he does seem to be critiquing its sufficiency as it is merely physical and thus of the same order as any other bodily function. *A Tale of a Tub*, takes an ambiguous position on the uncertainties of the mediated relationship between author and reader by simultaneously demonstrating and denouncing as absurd the principal of sympathy. Swift's "author" claims that

Whatever reader desires to have a thorough comprehension of an author's thoughts cannot take a better method than by putting himself into the circumstances and posture of life that the writer was in upon every important passage as it flowed from his pen. For this will introduce a parity and strict correspondence of ideas between the reader and the author. (*Tale of a Tub* 20)

This appears at first glance a straight description of sympathy as an aesthetic principal of affective substitution. But Swift makes a joke of the absolute substitution demanded by sympathy as the author goes on to list in increasing detail his squalid circumstances. The list of physical particulars makes it clear that one can never really enter the circumstances of another's life, nor would one want to. The author concludes this passage by informing his reader that the better part of the work was written while hungry, in bed, in a garret. This image of the author suggests the insurmountable isolation of the Cartesian subject, a consciousness trapped in a body. But, the reader who *gets* this, through not sympathizing with "the author" has achieved a kind of ironic sympathy with Swift, rather than the mad version of sympathy, which is compared to the resonance of strings tuned to the same pitch, the reader and Swift are united by their sense of superiority over the passive reader. Swift's denies being moved by situation and the passive reception of feeling.

John Gay's dramatic work stands in interesting relation to the deployment of wit and formal innovation in response to pathetic drama. Like Swift's prose, Gay's plays resist genre, sporting with form and expressing this resistance thematically, suggesting that he desires a different sort of engagement, but he allows more room for the inclusion of pathos and situation than Swift. While Pope and Swift want to replace pathos with wit, and install a sympathy of exclusivity, Gay tries to blend the two. As he resists committed contract he denies the complete concernment of pathetic drama and the material objectification of the subject. Still, his mixed modes make use of the figure of pathos, albeit tempered by wit in attempt to straddle the line between subject and object, or perhaps to deny the split altogether. *The What d'ye Call It* is explicitly a mash-up of form in order to please all. An earlier play, *The Mohocks*, makes a motif of the mutilation of bodies that creates an analogy between the destruction of body and bucking generic form. There has to be tension between character and form in order to avoid a subjective passivity that is anathema to the Scriblerians. Gay's dramatic productions thematize the breakdown into particulars, seemingly random articles are given the weight of something like icons in order to resist their being interpellated into the universalizing induction thematically manifested in hegemonic forms of affective circulation: marriage, and currency.

In the preface to his *The What d'ye Call It?*, Gay sets up a number of issues that characterize the nature of the Scriblerian response to the pathetic. He defines his project in relation to stage productions that have preceded it as something entirely new.

We have often had Tragi-Comedies upon the English Theatre with Success: but in that sort of Composition the Tragedy and Comedy are

in distinct scenes, and may be easily separated from each other. But the whole Art of the Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce lies in interweaving the several Kinds of the Drama with each other, so that they cannot be distinguish'd or separated. (Preface 6-10)

Gay insists that the audience and the critics should not classify his work as a hybrid, but as 'composite' fitting into each of the many categories he has applied. Particularly significant is his use of the term 'composition', an oft-used term of the age, which generally suggests a sort of blending of idea and matter.⁶⁸ Gay goes on in his preface to take on claims against the appropriateness of applying each generic category one by one. Curiously, he uses the term 'character' again and again to defend his play's composite categorization, ultimately using the term to describe the figures in the play, and the play's form. It is as if to say that the nature of the characters in a play that determine its generic categorization, and this point is driven home when finally he applies "character" to the play itself. So that genre is defined by its characters and genre is itself character. This, coupled with his insistence on the notion of the inseparability of this composite quality suggests a relation between subject and form that resists being split into separate categories, along the lines of the split between mind and body, or subjectivity, and objectivity. Gay's resistance to standard formal categorizations is an attempt to preserve individual subjectivity in the face of objectifying impulse of the public. But he makes use of pathetic figures to draw the public in.

⁶⁸ See Jerome Christensen, "Hume's Social Composition," *Representations: Politics and Aesthetics*. Fall 1985.

Historically, *The Beggar's Opera* is exemplary of the marketability of pathos, yet thematically it critiques exchange that has become estranged from subjective value. The sensation of *The Beggar's Opera* included making a celebrity of the character Polly, and Lavinia Fenton, the actress who played her. The public's desire to possess Polly manifested in a sort of merchandising that is familiar to the modern moviegoer. Fans with Polly's likeness printed on them, and numerous pamphlets inspired by her, or advertised as collections of her own quips were sold (Schultz 24-29). A note in *The Dunciad* remarks, "her pictures were engraved and sold in great numbers, her *life* written; books of letters and verses to her publish'd; and pamphlets made even of her sayings and jests." The popularity of his own creation prompted Gay to remark to Swift:

There is a mezzotinto print published to-day of Polly, the heroine of the Beggar's Opera *, who was before unknown, and is now in so high vogue, that I am in doubt, whether her fame does not surpass that of the opera itself. (Letter, March 20, 1728)

None of this would be remarkable in the world of theater and popular culture aside from the unprecedented extent of the phenomenon except for the fact that it is ironic considering the play's thematic concern with danger of marketability and the undesirability of a woman's transformation into currency. This thematic concern was already visible in *The What d'ye Call It?*. The relationship of people to sentimental things, i.e., to the pathetic figure ceases to be one that can be described in terms of property as it replaced by the model of currency, which has fixed value, but which empties out individual interiority. The exchange of pathos must be accompanied by formal play in order to preserve the authority of individual response.

The What d'ye Call It is constructed as a frame play, but the boundaries between frame and play are permeable. There are points of convergence: interactions between the nobles, who maintain their identities, and the actors, who respond in character. The nobles take a significant part in shaping the plot while it seems at first that the play is staged to please them, it turns out that the players are using the performance in order to take control over the dispensation of justice. At the end of *The What d'ye Call It?*, the boundaries between imagined spaces breaks down again: a real curate performs what was to be only a mock wedding, and so the wedding is real and all is right inside the frame and out. This had all been the steward's contrivance to right things. *The What d'ye Call It?*'s tragic ending is a wedding.

Timothy Peascod is the unlikely hero of the play: a deserter who admittedly lacked the heart to fight. Bound by his captors and about to be shot, it is not surprising that Peascod should weep, but the curious thing is that he weeps while reading publication information on *Pilgrim's Progress*.

PEASCOD. Lend me thy Handkercher—*The Pilgrim's Pro—*
[Reads and weeps.
 (I cannot see for Tears) *Pro—Progress—Oh!—The Pilgrim's*
Progress—Eighth—Edi-ti-on Lon-don—Prin-ted—for—Ni-cho-
las Bod-ding-ton: With new Ad-di-tions never made before. –Oh!
 'tis so moving, I can read no more.
[Drops the Book.
(II.i.23-28)

Much of this passage consists of Peascod reading aloud. His only expressive words are passionate exclamations and complaints about the effects of his pathetic outpouring. The farce is in the mismatch between his pathetic response and the completely affectless quality of the words that he is reading. We might imagine that

nearly any reading could be an excuse for tears under such circumstances, but the specific nonsense chosen to illustrate this pathetic effect is significant. Might be read to be about the sorrows of the literary marketplace, or as making a point about anything being potentially tragic depending upon how it's read, or the context in which it is read.

Subsequently Peascod announces that he might get out of being shot if he "could but raise five Pound" to give the Sergeant. Hearing this, the countrymen offer up a sympathetic rush of personal, sentimental effects.⁶⁹ A few have a bit of money, but what's offered quickly becomes a list of things with sentimental value: "my Cramp-ring, would that it were a better thing"; "my box of copper"; "my wife's thimble"; and a "Bacco stopper." But the Sergeant will have none of it. Preferring cash to mementoes, he tells the countrymen: "Take back your Things—I'll have them not." However, the Sergeant's refusal is not an outright refusal of sentimental exchange but a refusal to barter sentiment for sentiment as Peascod himself has become a token of pathos. The Sergeant's demand for currency is about cashing in on pathos. Shifting the terms of exchange from sentimental tokens to currency, that is to say, from something that has unique, subjective value, to something whose value is determined and objective. This turn makes new sense of the play's Prologue which proclaims the work a "Something, or [a] Nothing of a Play, Which strives to please all Palates at a time." This is the danger of complete sympathetic engagement of which Gay and his companions are chary, the rendering an object of the subject.

⁶⁹ See Deidre Lynch's "Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 2000.

It is a well known story that the idea for *The Beggar's Opera* came from Swift, who wrote to Alexander Pope on 30 August 1716 asking "...what think you, of a Newgate pastoral among the thieves and whores there?" This novel idea of making a pastoral of a prison sets the stage for the riffing on social inversions that runs throughout the play. But what does it mean to effectively idealize a place of forced confinement? The prison offers security; it is inviolable, a place of one's own. It offers a way out of the anonymity and the threat to subjectivity found in the squabbling crowd. As an image, it evokes Swift's author in the garret, and the prison is ultimately a trick pastoral because it is really the calcification of hegemonic ideology. Rather than offering an imaginative space outside of civil society, the Newgate pastoral reveals that even imaginative spaces contain one firmly within its reach. In the introduction the Beggar says "I have a Prison Scene which the Ladies always reckon charmingly pathetick" (18-19). Death scenes figure prominently in Gay's drama, whether they are hangings, or weddings. Both Hobbes and Rousseau look at executions in their writings and describe the passivity of the felon going to the gallows as an acceptance that depends on the individual's subscription to the laws of the society. This is analogous to the audience's acceptance and delight in a performance's adherence to expectation.

POLLY. –Methinks I see him already in the Cart, sweeter and more lovely than the Nosegay in his Hand!—I hear the Crowd extolling his Resolution and Intrepidity!—What Vollies of Sighs are sent from the Windows of *Holborn*, that so comely a Youth should be brought to disgrace!—I see him at the Tree!—even Butchers weep!
(I.xii.1-7)

This passage shows that even those least inclined to passively accept the rules of law, i.e. the denizens of Holborn, are moved by a scene so touchingly pathetic that it

draws tears from butchers, who, it is implied are society's members least likely to feel pity. This spectacle unites and orders the citizens of London for a moment in a way that mere laws cannot, operating as an affective version of Hobbesian civil society. But, given the Scriblerian resistance to an inductive kind of pathos, it is not clear that such a spectacle that inspires a giving over of the self is altogether desirable. Gay's plays show a resistance to this sort of thing in their criticism of marriage.

In *The Beggar's Opera* when Peachum tells his wife he would indulge his dear Polly "in anything but marriage! After that, my Dear, how shall we be safe" Are we not then in her husband's power?" (I.iv.78-80).

*A Maid is like the golden Oar,
Which hath Guineas intrinsical in't,
Whose Worth is never known, before
It is try'd and imprest in the Mint.
A Wife's like a Guinea in Gold,
Stamp'd with the Name of her Spouse;
Now here, now there; is bought, or is sold;
And is current in every House. (I.v.7-14)*

He explains "All men are Thieves in Love, and Like a Woman better for being another's Property," putting affective value directly at odds with the fixed value of currency. Macheath compares women to money, saying "a man who loves money, might as well be contented with one Guinea, as I with one woman" (II.iii.2-4). He goes on to brag about the number of women he has "recruited" to the prostitution showing that his attitude toward them begets actuality as these women considered as currency come to treat themselves as commodities. But he is soon betrayed by these some of these same women, who turn him over to the constables—for money—showing the danger of setting monetary value on what should have

sentimental value. Upon his arrest Macheath's position is made clear by Peachum, who tells him,

PEACHUM. Your Case, Mr. Macheath, is not particular. The greatest Heroes have been ruin'd by Women. But, to do them Justice, I must own they are a pretty sort of Creatures, if we could trust them. You must now, Sir, take your Leave of the Ladies, and if they have a mind to make you a Visit, they will be sure to find you at home. This Gentleman, Ladies, lodges in Newgate.
(II.v.5-11.)

Macheath's attitude influences his relationships with the two women who love him as well. Stamped with Macheath's face, Polly and Lucy exhibit a sort of sympathy that made is made to seem ridiculous as their author prepares for the gibbet.

LUCY. Would I might be hang'd!
POLLY. And I would so too!
LUCY. To be hang'd with you.
POLLY. My Dear, with you.
MACHEATH. O leave me to thought! I fear! I doubt!
I tremble! I droop!—See, my courage is out.
[Turns up the empty Bottle.
POLLY. No token of love?
MACHEATH. See, my courage is out.
[Turns up the empty Pot.
LUCY. No token of love?
(III.xv.10-18)

Macheath does not get off lightly here either. His perverted sense of value reduces the sentimental tokens his lovers ask for to empty vessels, hollowed even of matter that might have provided a cheap substitute for the sort of feeling that his lovers seek.

The frame of *The Beggar's Opera* evokes and subverts a particular kind of triangulation that occurs frequently in the eighteenth-century novel.⁷⁰ This triangulation involves a beggar, a middle class sort of protagonist, and an observer. At the end of Gay's play, it is the beggar giving alms to the audience in the form of a happy ending that adheres to formal convention, while revealing the arbitrary quality of such conventions.

BEGGAR. Your Objection, Sir, is very just; and is easily remov'd. For you must allow, that in this kind of Drama, 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about. —So—you Rabble there—run and cry a Reprieve—let the Prisoner be brought back to his Wives in Triumph.

PLAYER. All this we must do to comply with the Taste of the Town.
(III.xvi.11-17)

The relationships that existed at the outset of the play are flipped—the beggar/playwright begins as supplicant to the audience, just as the audience begins as hesitant almsgiver and ends up beggar, while, perhaps most curious, the player is the spectator all the while indicating that the one that stays constant, despite the witty play with form, is the pathetic figure, the performed pathos whose value has been fixed. The society of thieves, which is the underside and mirror image of civil society, is united in its opposition to an institution that represents mainstream authority and valuation. Currency means the marketability and easy circulation of affect, but value is prescribed by rigid, formal authority rather than determined by individual judgment. Like *Venice Preserv'd*, *The Beggar's Opera* has a plot driven by competing systems, but here the competing systems are piled on top of one another:

⁷⁰ Lisa Zunshine emphasized the importance of this pattern of triangulation in a recent paper given at Vanderbilt University.

Polly is torn between her love and filial obligation, Macheath is torn between the life of the highwayman and that of the lover, and he is torn between his competing lovers, i.e., he is torn between competing kinds of love. And these systems represent two solutions to the problem of induction: the first is represented figuratively by currency as a method for fixing value and thereby guaranteeing knowledge at the cost of subjective agency; the second solution is to resist induction altogether—value, and knowledge are determined according to the influence of situation, the arrangement of particularities, both objects and subjects.

Conclusion

The Beggar's Opera continued in its popularity and was performed more than any other piece during the eighteenth century. In fact, there is some record of its appearance in nearly every year between 1728 and 1886.⁷¹ Its enduring popularity a result of its ability to be “all things to all men,” a phrase Christensen refers to in his description of Hume as a man of letters, “an elastic representational practice laboring to perfect an imitation of social reality that was conceived of as discursive through and through” (44). This is much like Gay’s claim in the *What d’ye Call It?* that he has written a “nothing of a play” to “please all palates.” *The Beggar's Opera* continues in this conceit, its form, or forms, lacking particularity undercuts the composite of generic propriety. By playing with the boundaries between the

⁷¹ See Schultz, xxi.

recognizable and the new, by mixing sympathy and wit, Gay puts authority of pathetic judgment in the domain of the individual spectator.

CHAPTER IV

SYMPATHETIC SITUATION IN *THE LONDON MERCHANT*

In this chapter I examine George Lillo's play *The London Merchant* through the lens of the critique of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* levied by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Lillo's play exhibits a concern similar to Mandeville's and Smith's for figuring the role of passion in a modern, market-based society. Lillo appears to side with Smith in advocating control of the passions, and his dramatic techniques in many ways adumbrate Smith's delineation of sympathy in their emphasis on situation, spectatorship, and guilt. Smith sought to counter Mandeville's vision of a society impelled by self-interest by locating impartiality in the natural, social passion of sympathy. In this instance, sympathy also stands to offer a form of impartial judgment that gets around the deceptive masks worn by self-interested operators of a system of gain and preserves the possibility of subjective knowledge, i.e. being able to trust one's own experience as a basis for legitimate knowledge. But as David Marshall has argued in *The Figure of Theater* (1986), Smith's theory of sympathy ends up creating a problem for the sort of knowledge which had hitherto been taken for granted, the knowledge of oneself as the subject comes to think of himself as a spectacle. Lillo's drama follows an analogous disciplining function that runs counter to the work of *The Beggar's Opera* examined in the previous chapters of this dissertation, and in order to understand Lillo's most successful play I will compare it at points to Gay's as well as to his own

failed first project, *Sylvia*, a ballad opera. *The London Merchant* puts its spectators in their place in relation to the viewing public and diminishes the importance of particular subjectivity in favor of the whole. Lillo's play encourages spectators to imagine themselves as spectacles, which creates an estrangement of subjective experience from its source leading to the kind of anxiety over the loss of self-determination that will later be expressed in William Hazlitt's criticism of Burkean sympathy.

George Lillo's play, *The London Merchant* was first performed June 21, 1731 at Drury Lane and was staged ninety-six times from 1731 to 1741. Although not performed as frequently as the most successful play of the period, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, *The London Merchant* was extremely popular with English theatergoers of the time. However, prior to being staged the play had been considered something of a risk for its unconventional subject matter. Its story was adapted from the ballad, *George Barnwell*, about an apprentice led astray by a woman, but the plot had been modified to strengthen its connection to the urban middle classes. Lillo's choice of characters from the middle classes, while not unprecedented, broke with the prominent dramaturgical dictum of its day that demanded that serious drama should feature characters from the upper ranks of society.⁷² While theaters commonly held pantomimes produced especially for the apprentice audience on selected days throughout the year, the extension of this practice into proper drama was a different matter. Even the attendance of

⁷² See McBurney's introduction to *The London Merchant*, 1965. Also, the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* must have made this move a bit less bold.

pantomimes was fraught. The fact that apprentices were encouraged to attend these plays was frowned upon by larger society as they felt that apprentices would abandon their businesses in pursuit of entertainment and would learn unacceptable behavior from the characters in the plays (O'Brien 2004). These pantomimes generally contained an apprentice character that represented the audience and was conceived as someone with whom they could identify.⁷³ In *The London Merchant* there are two such characters, George Barnwell and Trueman, who might be read in line with the pantomime traditions as representing a dichotomy of the apprentice class. Trueman is a model apprentice, as evidenced by his name, and George Barnwell, the apprentice led astray by the wiles of women, serves as a warning to apprentices everywhere that even a small act of disobedience, breaking the master's curfew, could lead to disaster. It is generally agreed that *The London Merchant* aimed to offer its audience instruction in virtue, and it has even been suggested that the play's popularity due less to its satisfaction of the public's taste than to its being perceived as useful instruction for the youth.⁷⁴ But the *London Merchant* does not perform a regulatory function in the manner of a pantomime. Instead it reflects on parallels between dramaturgy and economic exchange and offers a critique of self-interest that applies to both arenas.

In its focus on Barnwell, a poor apprentice, and Millwood, a woman who must market her body in order to have agency, the play makes clear the black side of

⁷³ See John O'Brien's chapter, "Infamous Harlequin Mimicry': Apprentices, Entertainment, and the Mass Audience," in *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760*, 2004, pp.138-180.

⁷⁴ See William H. McBurney's introduction to *The London Merchant*, Regents Restoration Drama Series, 1965.

a system that not only exploits, but which excludes some of its members. The play's critique of the social implications of capitalism can best be understood in the context of two writers whose works fall on both sides of Lillo's play, chronologically and ideologically: Bernard Mandeville, and Adam Smith. In *The London Merchant* Lillo advocates a socio-economic system based on sympathetic interconnection, wherein individual subjectivity is always situated, one that anticipates Smith's in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Sympathy works as a model of socio-economic interrelation within the play as well as being its dramaturgic principal of engagement. So the play simultaneously situates its spectators as members of an ideal socio-economy and as members of an audience. In its two main characters, Barnwell and Millwood, the play demonstrates two kinds of sympathy and looks to teach its audience the right sort of sympathy to allow.

There has been little question throughout the history of the play's critical reception that George Lillo aimed to offer his audience instruction in virtue, there has been some disagreement regarding the efficacy of the play's capacity for moral correction. Some have seen the play as a sort of moral medicine that might be topically applied to cure social ills. In 1763 George Alexander Stevens suggests uses the efficacy of *The London Merchant* as the standard by which to compare his mock proposal for setting right defaulters in the exchange. This turns out to amount to comparing Lillo's play to physical abuse, putting the status of this comparison in question, but establishing at the least that the play was viewed clearly as a corrective. In *The Beauties of all Magazines Selected for the Year 1763; Including the Several Original Comic Pieces*, Volume II, Stevens writes:

...suppose every Lame Duck was to be foot-ball'd up and down the walks of the Change, three or four times on each walk, then kick'd over the area for about ten minutes, between the hours of one and two, in the middle of any day in the week, Sunday excepted; it would not only be very beneficial exercise, for the health of the gentlemen upon Change; but keep other people's principles in good order, and might have as fine effect upon the Change Alley dealers, as seeing the play of George Barnwell has had upon several London prentices.

But this pedantic strain rubbed some viewers the wrong way. Charles Lamb deemed it a "nauseous sermon" (On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, 1811). William Hazlitt took this negative reaction a step further, going so far as to say that the preaching quality of the play was as likely to inspire rebellion as correction. Hazlitt, in the essay, "On Actors and Acting" (1815), writes:

... we will hazard a conjecture that the acting of the *Beggar's Opera* a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery, than all the gibbets that ever were erected. A person, after seeing this piece, is too deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humour with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets. Whatever makes a jest of vice leaves it too much a matter of indifference for any one in his senses to rush desperately on his ruin for its sake. We suspect that just the contrary effect must be produced by the representation of *George Barnwell*, which is too much in the style of the Ordinary's sermon to meet with any better success. The mind, in such cases, instead of being deterred by the alarming consequences held out to it, revolts against the denunciation of them as an insult offered to its free-will, and, in a spirit of defiance, returns a practical answer to them, by daring the worst that can happen.

Hazlitt casts doubt on the efficacy of Lillo's play for instruction because it tries too hard to instruct, and in doing so the play threatens the agency of the spectator. Rather than allow the viewer to make his own determinations, Lillo would, as Fielding writes in "An Essay on the Knowledge of Characters of Men," (1743) "impose" his own judgment "on the rest of mankind."

Lillo offers his dramaturgical program in the play's dedication. Citing Dryden, he postulates that if the aim of tragic poetry is to be useful, then the more extensively useful it is, the more excellent is the tragedy. Tragedy does its work by "exciting the passions in order to the correcting such of them as are criminal." Lillo's play operates on the principle of pathetic concernment, which was taken from Aristotle's *Poetics* and advocated by Rapin in France, and then by Dryden in Britain. The principle of concernment requires that spectators invest themselves passionately in the circumstances of a character on the stage. In accordance with the Aristotelian theory of dramaturgy, the audience is concerned in order to move the passions in order to educate them. Following Lillo's logic, in order for his play to be excellent, it must move the passions of the bulk of his audience. But a changing public, and changing tastes, required a shift in subject matter to accomplish this task. A review of *The London Merchant* appearing in *The Gentlemen's Magazine* in 1731 mentions "an observing lady" who remarks that "the distress of great personages has of late, fail'd of raising those passions that us'd to accompany the representation of exalted characters." This gestures toward the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera*, though it is not clear whether this is one of the reasons for the success of Gay's play or a condition that it helped to bring about. While there is no explanation given for why "exalted characters" no longer moved audiences, it is important to note the position of this "observing lady" in relation to the passions on which she comments. She speaks not of her own passions or reactions to plays, but comments from a distance on the general, universal passions of the theater-going public. This implies that though the subjects of plays were no longer exalted, a

hierarchy still existed in order that a “lady” might comment dispassionately on the tastes of the masses. The change in tastes signals a change in notions about the social function of drama in line with Richard Steele’s program in *The Spectator* of civilizing the public. The appeal of a play like *The London Merchant* extends beyond the practical moral aim of instructing apprentices and extends to instructing the generality of the public.

A different sort of material is necessary to deal with domestic matters. Lillo chooses characters and concerns near to the situation and experience of the bulk of his audience and brings the drama closer to home.⁷⁵ Lillo writes:

Plays founded on moral tales in private life may be of admirable use by carrying conviction to the mind with such irresistible force as to engage all the faculties and powers of the soul in the case of virtue by stifling vice in its first principles.

Lillo offers *Hamlet’s* play within the play as an example of the affective efficacy of drama carefully aimed at its audience. Just as Hamlet used a performance that staged the transgressions of his Uncle and mother in order to confront them with their guilt, Lillo aimed to put his spectators, whose sins he wished to correct, or prevent, on the stage before them. At least one reviewer followed Lillo’s lead and brought up the old story of a woman, who watching a production of *Hamlet*, was so moved by the proximity of the affairs depicted on the stage to her own experience that she was overcome with guilt (so that the production of the play mirrors what

⁷⁵ As David Hume writes in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739-40: ...we find in common life, that men are principally concern’d about those objects, which are not much remov’d either in space or time, enjoying the present, and leaving what is afar off, to the care of chance and fortune. ...The breaking of a mirror gives us more concern when at home, than the burning of a house, when abroad, and some hundred leagues distant (II.III.vii).

happens within it) in order to describe a similar effect brought on by the *London Merchant*.⁷⁶ In a preface to *Hamlet*, published in 1784, bookseller and former actor, Thomas Davies recounts a modern equivalent to the old story of the woman whose guilt overcame her on watching *Hamlet*.

A more recent effect of stage-representation, to rouse a sense of guilt in the mind of a spectator, has been told me with such proofs of authenticity that I cannot disbelieve it. Dr. Barrowby was, many years since, sent for to attend a young lad who was an apprentice to a tradesman in the city: he found him extremely indisposed and low-spirited. After some questions asked him by the doctor, the boy said, his distemper was owing to his having lately seen the tragedy of George Barnwell. His case, he said, resembled Barnwell's, so far as the robbing of his master; and this, he said, lay very heavy upon his mind.

Yet, there is equal evidence that the play affected spectators of a different class, despite Lillo's advertised program and the common opinion that the play worked as a sort of topical moral medicine. Despite the purported aim at the middle class and apprentices, there is some evidence that Lillo's play appealed to an elite crowd with a taste for innovative drama. The *GM* reviewer "congratulates the taste of the *few* in town, for distinguishing so well." When the *GM* reviewer, after mentioning the "observing lady" who advocates the common characters of *The London Merchant*, concludes by asserting "such is the artful contrivance of his play; so delicate is the texture of its composition, that none, but a common prostitute, can find fault with it," he creates not only an opposition between the two female critics, the lady and the prostitute, but he creates an inversion of class-based taste and subject matter

⁷⁶ Thomas Davies in *Dramatic Miscellanies: Consisting of Critical Observations on Several Plays*, 1784.

that brings into question whether Lillo's play was doing the cultural work it advertised.

Lillo's play is meant to be enforcing the notion that character is related to virtue, that one's fortunes may be shaped by doing good acts. In its program it resembles Hogarth's twelve prints of *Industry and Idleness* (1747). Hogarth shows the progression in the lives of two apprentices, one of whom is dedicated and hard working, the other idle, which leads to crime and his execution. This shows the work ethic of Protestant England, where those who work hard get rewarded, such as the industrious apprentice who becomes Sheriff (plate 8), Alderman (plate 10), and finally the Lord Mayor of London in the last plate in the series. The idle apprentice begins "at play in the church yard" (plate 3), then holes up "in a Garret with a Common Prostitute" after turning highwayman (plate 7) and is finally "executed at Tyburn" (plate 11). To cap it off, the idle apprentice is sent to the gallows by the industrious apprentice himself. The idle apprentice strongly evokes both Macheath of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, and Swift's author in a garret. One might presume that of the two, Hazlitt, as a critic of Lillo's heavy-handed style, might come down on the side of the idle apprentice as an advocate of humanity over didacticism. But more importantly, over the notion of character as determinant of virtue rather than the idea, as advocated in *The Beggar's Opera*, that virtue lies in the preservation of the power of subjective judgment in the face of imposing systems.

The *Gentlemen's Magazine* reviewer makes clear that character is not the issue. Rather, the play's success in raising its viewer's passions is due to the circumstances and situations in which the characters are placed:

The objection, that the characters are too low for the stage, the Register answers—that 'tis lowness of action, not of character that is not allowed there. The circumstances here are of the utmost importance, and rise as high in action as any to be met with in the stories of mere pomp and ostentation.

Despite being the product of an attempt to create a distinctly domestic sort tragedy, these responses to its production reveal that the distinction is not so clear. One of the more revealing parts of the dedication comes in the passage wherein Lillo grants that the traditional characters and subject matter of tragedy deals effectively with problems of state.

I am far from denying that tragedies founded on any instructive and extraordinary events in history, or a well-invented fable where the persons introduced are of the highest rank, are without their use, even to the bulk of the audience. The strong contrast between a Tamerlane and a Bajazet may have its weight with an unsteady people and contribute to the fixing of them in the interest of a prince of the character of the former, when, through their own levity or the arts of designing men, they are rendered factious and uneasy, though they have the highest reason to be satisfied.

The reviewers appear to see Lillo's domestic drama performing the same sort of work in regards to class and taste that Lillo ascribes to traditional tragedy.

A column called "The Apprentices Looking-Glass" appearing in *The London Magazine* in 1732 affirms the prominence of the issues of class and taste, while calling into doubt what has hitherto seemed the clear moral aim of the tragedy. The writer recounts

...a visit I lately made to a new theatre, erected for the entertainment of certain wits, that inhabit the purlieus of Lombard-Street and Billingsgate, who were assign'd by their indulgent, but mistaken parents, to shops and counting-houses, when their genius's led them to the Muses and Parnassus: but at length one Mr. G__ arose, and resolv'd to set at Liberty these choice spirits.

I was surpriz'd when I was told by one next me in the Pit, that *The Orphan, or The Unhappy Marriage*, was to be acted; for I expected something adapted to the place and audience, either the *History of Whittington and his Cat*, *The London Apprentice*, or *George Barnwell*.

The writer goes on to describe the dress and manner of the audience. Not surprisingly, the apprentices are all dressed like fops. It becomes clear that the real issue here for the Grub Street reviewer concerns class and putting on airs. These apprentices think themselves part of an elite class of spectator, when they are they in fact “the public.” The “mirror” is held up as an impartial spectator of sorts, one in which the spectators may view themselves as spectators and mend their ways by recognizing themselves as part of public with a specific part to play, and not as individual subjects free to move wherever their desires and capital might take them.

In a review of *The Works of Mr. George Lillo; with some account of his life*,⁷⁷

Davies recounts a story of the play's first production:

Certain witty and facetious persons, who call themselves the town, bought up large quantities of the ballad of George Barnwell, with an intent to make a ludicrous comparison between the old song, and the new tragedy; but so forcible and so pathetic were the scenes of the London Merchant, that these merry gentlemen were quite disappointed and ashamed; they were obliged to throw away their ballads and take out their handkerchiefs.

Davies' description of the theater-goers' shame echoes the guilt that figures in to the accounts above. Lillo's play, filtered through the contemporary writings around it, works to encourage a sort of self-monitoring regulation of class and taste, and to plant an internal spectator, called “guilt” in the passages above within the theater-going public.

⁷⁷ “An Impartial Review of New Publications,” *The London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*. Vol 44, February, 1775.

In the *The London Merchant*, Lillo addresses the public's changing taste for different sorts of characters from a different angle than Gay did in *The Beggar's Opera*. While Gay's use of low characters furthered his satirical critique of social structures, Gay's low characters showed that there was really no difference between high and revealed the sham nature of ordering principles. Lillo used low characters in order to reinforce class structures. One can see this tendency in Lillo's first play, a ballad opera titled *Silvia*. *Silvia* was staged in 1730 and was a failure. Richard Noble's suggestion that this failure was in large part due to Lillo's lack for "lightness of touch and ironic theatricality" is informative considering the importance of irony to the function of *The Beggar's Opera*.⁷⁸ Gay's irony and wit kept his pathos in check and kept his play engaging rather than formally imposing. Lillo's ballad opera is the tale of a young woman, the titular figure, whose virtue remains intact when she, at the instigation of her mother refuses an indecent proposal that would solve her family's financial problems but render her a fallen woman.

The contrast between Lillo's and Gay's ballad operas is made clear in their treatments of marriage. Marriage, a legitimated form of affective attachment, has, as I have argued in the preceding chapters functioned to represent generically prescribed sympathy in Banks's *Virtue Betray'd* and in Gay's *The What d'ye Call It?* and *The Beggar's Opera*. While marriage is depicted as something to be avoided at all costs by the characters of Gay's plays, in keeping with their aim of protecting the ownership of individual affective response in the face of the totalizing systems of

⁷⁸ See Noble's introduction to *Silvia* in *The Dramatic Works of George Lillo*, edited by James L. Steffensen, 1993.

generic hegemony, Lillo's *Silvia*, like *The London Merchant* advocates marriage as a virtuous institution and equates its opposition with prostitution and thievery. As Silvia says, "the World owes its Order, Kingdoms their peaceful regular Succession, and private families their Domestick Happiness to Marriage" (I.iv.46-47). While the author of the illicit proposal, Sir John, argues that "love can subsist without the Marriage Tye," advocating a position that would be appreciated by Peachum and Macheath from Gay's play, in the end Silvia's position wins out. The position on marriage conveyed in *Silvia* should be read as aesthetic and ideological. Silvia sees marriage, the binding of affect, as the source of civil society, and Lillo employs dramaturgical sympathy as a means of controlling passion and reinscribing social order.

Victoria Kahn has demonstrated convincingly in *Wayward Contracts* that there is a connection between political contract and genre. Lillo, as has been suggested above, was ultimately concerned with appealing to the largest possible audience. Appealing to a large audience is desirable for all playwrights of course, but for Lillo it was not merely a matter of financial success, but of the satisfaction of the moral aim of his dramaturgy as laid out in his dedication. In his effort to appeal to a large segment of the population Lillo's play takes on the generic characteristics of melodrama.⁷⁹ The generic classification of *The London Merchant* as melodrama rather than tragedy makes clear its concerns, and explains some of its apparent formal inconsistencies, as I will show below. In *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of*

⁷⁹ Frank Rahill points out that "Melodrama is a form of dramatic composition intended for a popular audience," *The World of Melodrama*, p xiv.

Experience (1968), Robert Heilman asserts that divided consciousness is a quality of both tragedy and melodrama, but that “melodrama is the realm of social action, public action, action within the world; tragedy is the realm of private action, action within the soul” (97). This insight on the distinction between tragedy and melodrama renders salient both the thematic concerns of *The London Merchant* as well as its use of character. Barnwell’s private dilemma is not explored by the play because it is not concerned with individual interiority, its subject is the situation of persons within social systems. The play’s characters must come to terms with their status, and pathos is used to reproduce the effects within the play between performance and spectator. The play is inherently social in its concern so that it resists characterizations of interiority just as it resists containment of its action to the stage.

The London Merchant and Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments

If the reception of *The London Merchant*, or at least accounts of the reception in the periodicals, works as a lesson in being a self-aware part of a spectating public, then it would be helpful to look at *The London Merchant* alongside Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, to which it appears to stand in proleptic relation.⁸⁰ *The London Merchant* offers two potential pathetic figures, Millwood and Barnwell.

⁸⁰ In *The Figure of Theatre*, David Marshall discusses the centrality of theatrical relations in Smith’s *TMS*. I return to his work later in this chapter. Marshall’s analysis of the theatricality of Smith’s theory is insightful and invites an inverse analysis: if thinking about theater influenced Smith, as Marshall suggests, then it might be useful to look at contemporary drama through the lens of Smith’s theory, or as I attempt in this chapter, to look at earlier drama for ideas or themes that anticipate Smith’s *TMS*.

Millwood represents self-interest and a false form of sympathy, while Barnwell is tragic because he has succumbed to sympathizing with the first. This offers a lesson to viewer. The work of drama depends on sympathy. The play suggests, through Barnwell's example, that the viewer should be careful with whom he sympathizes, and sympathy should be based on approbation, not on a Mandevillian physiological response.

Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* responded to earlier works that attempted to explain the fabric of modern society. Notably, Smith sought to refute Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*. While Mandeville's *Fable*, offered a compelling account of society on an economic model, it also troubled the notion of private virtue. The difference between Mandeville's and Smith's accounts can be clarified by considering the illustrative figures that each uses. Mandeville's society is fundamentally economic, while Smith's is theatrical.⁸¹ They are similar in that both figures represent the relationship of individual subjects to society at large, both arguing in effect that the subject is inextricably a part of a system of exchanges. But the nature of the relationship between subject and society in the two schemes is as different as the nature of the exchanges represented. In Mandeville's economic model, exchanges are superficial.

According to Mandeville, passions are never conquered; they only appear so at times. His cynical fable depicts a society in which the motives of individuals are self-serving, and though one can always anticipate them, they are hidden from sight.

⁸¹ See David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*, 1986.

Rather than being controlled, passions are translated through purchase and flow around as economic forces. Pride is the source of all apparent virtue according to Mandeville. It is universal and sets up a need—a deficit—that must be satisfied by certain sentiments coming in. Pride demands the approbation of one's community (275). In the language of economic virtue, esteem is a kind of credit. Compassion then is a counterfeit charity; it is a way of buying peace, of buying off a discomfoting passion. In Mandeville's fable, exchange breaks down when desires (passions) are removed. His world of private virtue is a kind of economic hell. But this seems to place the market in the place of prime importance from the get-go (a sort of tautology? economy as his fiction of origin?)

Lillo's play resonates at times with Mandeville's model of society. Barnwell's master explains the importance of business in forming the fabric of society:

THOROWGOOD. Methinks I would not have you only learn the method of merchandise and practice it hereafter merely as a means of getting wealth. 'Twill be well worth your pains to study it as a science, see how it is founded in reason and the nature of things, how it has promoted humanity as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations far remote from one another in situation, customs, and religion; promoting arts, industry, peace, and plenty; by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole. (III.i.1-9.)

Barnwell describes economy as a science. This scientific approach suggests that economics is natural, and that its laws and principles can be discovered through the application of method. Mandeville's system appeals to nature too, but his is nature "red in tooth and claw" and not that of the natural scientist, waiting to be tamed. This economic system further differs from Mandeville's in that the passions and appetites must be governed by reason. As Barnwell says, "The law of heaven will not

be reversed, and that requires us to govern our passions". Millwood responds, "To give us sense of beauty and desires, and yet forbid us to taste and be happy, is cruelty to nature. Have we passions only to torment us?" (I.viii.8-12.)

Polly Fields argues that we understand Millwood as both "capitalist practitioner and victim of capitalism" in part of Lillo's analysis of the effects of capitalism.⁸² The play focuses on the effects that capitalism has had on people who are its victims through no fault of their own, but through accidents of birth and gender. Fields argues that Millwood is the play's central character, a woman who uses her body and her wits to convince George Barnwell to steal and even kill to supply her with money. Barnwell is Millwood's victim, but in the larger picture of the society he presents, Lillo shows Millwood to be the victim of capitalism. Millwood rebels against the hierarchy of women in society as well as women in business. Her rebellion continues to death, as the last scene in which she appears is a scathing criticism of the hierarchical dominance and hypocritical nature of men in the economy. In the gallows scene that was removed for most productions, a repentant George Barnwell urges Millwood to change her ways, to which she replies that she "was doomed before the world began to endless pains and (Barnwell) to joys eternal"(Faller 2004). In Lillo's world of trade, Millwood's commodity is her body; however, she refuses to be "victimized as a woman and a whore" (Burke 1994). Millwood critiques economic hierarchies, though it is doubtful that Lillo intends his audience to be receptive to her critique.

⁸² Polly Fields, "George Lillo and the Victims of Economic Theory," 1999.

The play offers two pathetic figures, each possible subjects of an audience's sympathy. Steffensen notes that the play is structured to some degree as a morality debate, like *Dr. Faustus*, with Millwood as the representative of vice set against the agents of good: Trueman, Marian, and Thorowgood.⁸³ Yet there is a great degree of determinism in Lillo's play. Once Barnwell gives into the temptation of passion, all of his other sins seem to follow almost automatically. After his sexual encounter, there is little conflict within Barnwell over whether to steal from his master, or to murder his uncle. The moral conflict resides in his acceptance of the determinism of a moral system that is analogous to the workings of the market. Millwood is depicted as a villain, albeit one produced by the evils of society. Her villainy resides in her attitude toward the determinism of the market: she sees herself as a victim, her will at odds with and oppressed by the market, while the play suggests that virtue resides in accepting the will of the market, and accepting one's role as a cog in the great machine. Millwood says that she herself was "doom'd before the World began to endless Pains" (V.xi.39). Even her name suggests something, an object without agency, produced as the result of a process of manufacturing in service of trade. Millwood's attitude is contrasted with the virtuous position captured in Maria's statement that "it is just and right that Innocence should suffer; for Heaven must be just in all ways" (IV.i.5-6).⁸⁴

⁸³ James L. Steffensen, Introduction to *The London Merchant*, in *The Dramatic Works of George Lillo*, 1993.

⁸⁴ Robert Heilman, in a casual analysis of *The London Merchant*, argues that the lack of anybody to blame is further reason for categorizing the play as melodrama. He writes: "Lillo aspires to tragedy, but is led astray by an irresistible impulse to assume the shrill tones of condemnation. With one hand Lillo makes Barnwell

Millwood expresses the philosophy of passionate self-interest unabashedly, showing that rather than having virtuously accepted the justice of the system she has come to see it as inherently evil and justifies her own wrong doing as matching the nature of the market society:

MILLWOOD. ... I have done nothing that I am sorry for. I followed my inclinations, and that the best of you does every day. All actions are alike natural and indifferent to man and beast who devour or are devoured as they meet with others weaker or stronger than themselves. (IV.xviii.41-45.)

Millwood is unapologetic because, as far as she is concerned, she has acted in accordance not only with her own inclinations but with the natural order as well. Her transgression arises from her refusal to mask her passions, to commit to the deception that, according to Mandeville, is a part of civil society. But her refusal to deceive herself gives her a kind of knowledge and agency that is lacking in the other characters.

Mandeville's system renders private virtue impossible so long as we consider subjects as individuals. Mandeville offers a kind of proto-utilitarianism: the good of the many, ends over motives. But this scheme is peculiar because it starts from the presumption of the self-interested subject and finds redemption for interest in the good of the whole. Smith wants to redeem the possibility of private good and does so by making the inherently social nature of the subject his starting point, getting around the problem of judging individual virtue posed by Mandeville by making a

tragically responsible for his own downfall; with the other he undermines tragic effect by rhetorically blaming Barnwell's downfall on the prostitute Millwood, and Millwood's, in turn, on society. Not only does this finger pointing muddle the focus, but it helps reduce Barnwell's self-accusation, already sentimental, to hysterical self-abasement" (*Tragedy and Melodrama*, 145).

claim about the nature of the individual subject, asserting that an individual is a kind of fiction. Smith cites Epictetus:

“In what sense,” says Epictetus, “are some things said to be according to our nature, and others contrary to it?—it is in that sense in which we consider ourselves as separated and detached from all other things. For thus it may be said to be according to the nature of the foot to be always clean. But if you consider it as a foot, and not as something detached from the rest of the body, it must behave it sometimes to trample in the dirt, and sometimes to tread upon thorns, and sometimes, too, to be cut off for the sake of the whole body; and if it refuses this, it is no longer a foot. Thus, too, ought we to conceive with regard to ourselves.” (VII.II.405.)

This all hinges on the alarming possibility of the foot’s refusal to comply with the exigent demands of an invisible agent with authority to decide what is best for the whole. While it is literally quite true that if a foot were to refuse anything, it could not be a foot as we conceive feet, the real point is that in broaching the possibility of the rebellious foot, the passage confronts us with a figure that has overstepped its bounds. The figure of the rebelling foot represents personification that is out of control, and to consider man as something separate from society, argues Smith via Epictetus, is to commit to a similar extravagance of personification. Self-interest as a guiding principle is as much as to consider oneself as separated from the whole.

Barnwell’s master, though he talks of pity, reveals that his view of human nature relies too much on reason and method though a kind of affect is what is needed. Thoroughgood advocates the mastery of the passions by reason, exactly that which Mandeville asserts is impossible.

THOROWGOOD. ...When we consider the frail condition of humanity it may raise our pity, not our wonder, that youth should go astray when reason, weak at the best when opposed to inclination, scarce formed and wholly unassisted by experience, faintly contends or willingly becomes slave of sense. (II.iv.17-22.)

Thorowgood's insistence on separating reason from sense is a sort of willful ignorance in the face of the need for sympathy. Sympathy for Thorowgood exists figuratively, or materially, in the motions of the market. Trade is a civilizing force akin to Smith's "social passion."

Exchange and trade are important issues to the merchant, and are also key factors in the text itself as they become metaphors throughout the play. Thorowgood describes the expansion of global commerce as a circulation throughout the world (Hynes 683). For example, he tells Trueman in act three that he should study trade because he can learn "how it promotes humanity as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations far remote from one another in situation, customs, and religion" (III.i.5-9). Similarly, important aspects of the play, such as the bond between Barnwell and Trueman in act five, are put into the language of exchange. Barnwell describes their union as an "intercourse of woe" instructing Trueman to "pour all your griefs into my breast and in exchange take mine" (V.ii.129-130). This illustrates a reciprocal trade of passion; a circular economy of sympathy which resonates with Thorowgood's description of humanity promoting global trade. But the exchange of sympathy can be easily mismanaged. In addition to exchange, excess is another economic element that functions as a metaphor in the play. Excess is most strongly exhibited through passion (Hynes 685). While Barnwell begins by following calm commerce, a passionate lust replaces it with the theft from Thorowgood and murder of Barnwell's uncle. Hynes describes that the most dangerous thing about passion is its insatiability, because "erotic love, unlike trade, includes no machinery of impulse and abatement, no way of rationally

regulating itself" (Hynes 285). While trade can easily sustain itself, passion has nothing stopping it from going to the extreme. Millwood also embodies this excess, as her absolutism political ideology is incompatible with a sustainable system of exchange (Hynes 686). She exploits contracts, simulating behavior of exchange, in order to defy the entire system.

Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is founded on the principle of sympathy in order to get around the problem of self-interest. This relation of sympathy to self-interest is pertinent to understanding Thorowgood's sympathetic market because it faces the same challenge, voiced by Millwood, of denying the accusation that it is founded on self-interest. Smith argues that we are by nature interested in others, because we are by nature "feet," things whose identity separate from the whole is rather nonsensical. So Smith begins his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* with the claim that

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it. (I.1.3)

Self-interest becomes a kind of compassion derived from man's social nature, and this in the strongest sense: the self is by nature a social thing. The difference between one person and another becomes merely a question of situation.

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. (I.1.3-4)

By way of imagination an observer enters a fictional situation that can have real, though weaker effects on his senses. He can in this way "become in some measure the same person" suggesting that a person is determined to some degree by

sensations (cf Locke), and also by their situations. Smith concludes: “Sympathy, therefore does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it” (I.1.7.) Smith’s point about the situational nature of sympathy resonates with the point raised above by the reviewer for the *Gentlemen’s Magazine* who claimed that character matters less than situation.

Mandeville, Hume, and Smith, all make use of scenes of violence to illustrate the workings of sympathy. For Mandeville, the sight of an infant being devoured by a sow elicits an undeniable physical reaction—perhaps the only true form of compassion, or sympathy that is possible in a world that is categorically motivated by self-interest. Hume offers a scene, not nearly so graphic, of a man about to be trampled by a horse, which stirs, he argues, an undeniable sympathy manifest in the desire of the subject to prevent the immanent suffering of the man. In fact, this scene is not only hypothetical, but incomplete; the violence only needs to be suggested to arouse sympathy. What these scenes share in common is that they are *scenes*.⁸⁵ Hume’s example clearly intends to illustrate the essential role of the imagination in sympathy. And Mandeville’s, though it argues for a physiological model of compassion wherein there is an immediate connection between a grisly spectacle and the sensation of compassion, ends up relying on the imagination as well. It is working as

⁸⁵ David Marshall writes:

It is no coincidence that Smith illustrates a discussion of how we enter in to the sentiments and actions of others with a description of reading; whether we are confronted with a person or a text, we must face a fiction. We must imagine that we are persons who can be only representations to us; through imagination we transport ourselves to a distant place, try to place ourselves in someone else’s situation. We take their part by trying to play their part. (*Figure of Theater*, 171)

an imagined scene in a text that arouses an uncomfortable sympathy in the reader. Smith makes the relationship of sympathy to imagination and scene clearer.

Millwood's sympathetic appeal works in a manner like that of the spectacle of the sow devouring the child; it is completely physiological. But it is sexual rather than violent. It is passion and self-interest untempered by reflection.

MILLWOOD. Yet do not, do not leave me! I wish my sex's pride would meet your scorn, but when I look upon you, when I behold those eyes—oh, spare my tongue, and let my blushes speak! This flood of tears to that will force their way and declare what woman's modesty should hide.

She manipulates this sort of sympathetic response in order to captivate Barnwell, swaying him from dutiful loyalty to his master.

BARNWELL. Oh, Heavens! She loves me, worthless as I am. Her looks, her words, her flowing tears confess it. And can I leave her then? Oh, never, never!—Madam, dry up those tears. You shall command me always. I will stay here forever, if you'd have me.
(I.vi.74-83.)

This speech illustrates the danger of sympathy motivated by a corporeal figure, rather than by situation and imagination.

Smith uses the familiar scene of violence, but he also uses the tight-rope walker, books, and above all, drama to illustrate sympathy. Performance is an essential element in Smith's theory of sympathy: whenever one encounters a sufferer, one encounters a performance. This is reinforced by musical figures Smith sometimes uses when he talks about sympathy: when we sympathize we "beat time to" the other, and we "lower our emotions to the right pitch." The execution of the performance determines whether the spectator will sympathize. Sympathy is approbation, essentially the same as applauding a scene well acted. For Mandeville,

social performance is something that only needs to be done by those in the upper classes. According to Mandeville, those who hold most power to exert their influence on society do so by masking successfully what they do. The further down the social scale one goes the more penetrable the disguise until with the working class none is needed at all. A deceptive prostitute or apprentice poses a threat to the stability of hierarchy and in order to remove the possibility of such deception, they must be taught to believe that they are always observed.

The London Merchant occupies a position in which Mandeville and Smith appear to overlap—just as the figures of economy and theater overlap in the accounts of the play in the periodicals discussed above. Lillo's drama resembles Mandeville's *Fable* in its allegiance of virtue with good economic practice, but only to a point. The play argues that economic virtue requires that self-interest and the passions be kept in check. So it turns to a kind of proto-Smithian scheme in which public approbation goes beyond the surface. Moral judgment for Smith is a kind of spectation of performance. Approbation is granted if, when the spectator imagines himself in the situation of the subject he sympathizes, or imagines that he would act in a like manner in those same circumstances. A sort of moral conscience comes about as a result of the subject imagining a spectator.

In *The London Merchant*, moral behavior breaks down in part because spectation breaks down. When Barnwell's friend Trueman, who seems to represent the impartial spectating public asks to be allowed to see what lies within Barnwell's heart, Barnwell refuses him. While figures who should be Barnwell's guides fail him in that they refuse to put themselves into his situation and judge him. When

Barnwell tries to confess to his master, Thorowgood responds by telling him: "I will not hear a syllable more upon this subject. It were not mercy, but cruelty, to hear what must give you such torment to reveal" (II.vii.35-7). And, like Thorowgood, Barnwell's uncle refuses to cast the eye of judgment even as Barnwell, after mortally assaulting him, asks to be judged.

BARNWELL. Expiring saint! Oh, murdered, martyred uncle! Lift up
your dying eyes and view your nephew in your murderer. Oh,
do not look so tenderly upon me. Let indignation lighten from
your eyes and blast me ere you die. By Heaven, he weeps in
pity of my woes. Tears, tears, for blood! (III.vii.16-20)

This speech highlights the difference between two sorts of pathetic response, pity and sympathy. Sympathy in Smith's scheme involves two elements that are lacking in pity: situation and judgment. Smith's sympathy requires that the spectator put himself into the situation of the person, into the person of the other person, and imagines what he would do, or want to do, in that situation. If the observed person's performance merits approbation, then the observer sympathizes. It becomes clear that this is not what is occurring with Barnwell's uncle. By referring to his uncle as a "saint" and a "martyr" Barnwell shows that there is a distance and inequality of moral status between the two, so that it would be difficult to imagine that his uncle's tears are due to approbation. The final line of Barnwell's speech reinforces this notion of inequality in the play's terms of pathetic economies. Barnwell's emphasis on "tears for blood" describes an unequal, unmerited exchange in which it is made clear that tears are more valuable commodities and should not be given away. The uncle's tears are like coins cast to a beggar, an act of pathetic exchange that, according to the logic of the play, does more harm than good.

In *English Dramatic Form*, Laura Brown considers the intended effects of this scene on the audience. Brown sees Barnwell's behavior as a calculated dramaturgical tactic meant to increase the spectators' sympathy. She writes:

The predominant portion of this scene is occupied by the pathetic consequences of this accident. Barnwell's histrionic guilt and vehement self-accusation help to anticipate and thus dismiss much of the horror and blame that inevitably accrue to his deed. The purpose of the scene, then, is to represent Barnwell in the commission of a heinous crime, but simultaneously to absolve him of blame so he can remain, in one formally essential sense, a moral paragon, and so that his fate, much like that of the self-flagellating Jaffeir of *Venice Preserv'd*, can be supremely pathetic. (160-1)

But this is a reduction of what is actually taking place in the scene. The sympathy that the audience is meant to feel is not the sort, later elaborated by Burke⁸⁶, where the spectator takes a sort of delight in the suffering of another any more than it is the unsatisfying pity bestowed on Barnwell by his uncle. This pivotal scene in the play is one that shows how looking at the function of sympathy in *The London Merchant* through the lens of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* pays dividends. Sympathy works as a control on society because the subject comes to think of himself always as being observed and judged as a candidate for approbation in the form of sympathy by the idea of an "impartial spectator." This perpetual condition leads to internalizing a representative of the impartial spectator, which Smith calls "the man within the breast" (I.VI). Barnwell shows that the impartial spectator has

⁸⁶ See *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, I.XIII-XIV.

been implanted within him and that he has come to see himself in this position as a neutral observer would see him.⁸⁷

BARNWELL. Oh, hide me from myself, if it be possible! For, while I bear my conscience in my bosom, though I were hid where man's eye never saw nor light e'er dawned, 'twere all in vain. For that inmate, that impartial judge, will try, convict, and sentence me for murder, and execute me with never-ending torments. Behold these hands all crimsoned o'er with my dear uncle's blood! Here's a sight to make a statue start with horror, or turn a living man into a statue. (IV.x.12-19)

Barnwell's suffering is a result of his being able to see himself from the perspective of an impartial spectator. His final lines play on the notion of cold impartiality. Even the most unfeeling of judges, represented by a statue would be turned against him, and the most compassionate would turn impartial at the sight of Barnwell's transgression. Dramaturgically speaking, the sort of sympathy in question here requires an extra dimension of pathetic exchange occurring that Brown's exposition does not account for. Barnwell and his uncle set up a situation that is mirrored by the audience who shed the same pity on the bloodstained hero, who is a hero because he can see himself in the same light they do.

The clearest test of virtue in *The London Merchant*, as it is in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, is in the subject's performance in the face of being lopped off

⁸⁷ In *The Figure of Theater*, David Marshall describes the social function of sympathy in a way that is pertinent to the *London Merchant*. He writes: "it forces us to moderate our passions in order to create a 'harmony and concord with the emotions' of those who are watching us. The need for this concord more than doubles the theatrical positions Smith sees enacted in sympathy by compelling us to become spectators to our spectators and thereby spectators to ourselves. In this kaleidoscope of reflections and representations in which the imaginary change of positions that takes place in the spectator's mind is imagined, reflected and repeated in the mind of the sufferer, both of the characters in the scene of sympathy play the role of spectator and spectacle," (173).

like a bad foot. During the eighteenth century a large number of people, many former apprentices, were executed at Tyburn for the crime of theft. This practice was especially prevalent during the 1720's. There were a number of scuffles during these executions between government representatives and the public as they tried to prevent both the hangings as well as the removal of the bodies (Burke 1994). *The London Merchant* originally closed with a gallows scene that Lillo was encouraged to cut from the production of the play. While it would have been a literal depiction of a violent scene that many in the audience would have witnessed firsthand, John O'Brien has suggested that the scene would have been too "entertaining" for the message it meant to convey to come across properly (O'Brien 2004).

The death scene should not be seen only as the site of punishment—an expression of the inexorable consequences of transgression—but rather the death scene is the true trial of virtue. In a context where virtue resides as much in a person's capacity to control the passions as in any right action, death offers a scene for testing the mettle of a more humble sort of character. This scene meets the particular challenges of domestic tragedy with its more humble conflicts and characters. The death scene acts as a sort of dramatic leveler; here the protagonist of domestic tragedy might prove himself heroic and noble. By the very nature of its more pedestrian concerns, heroism is precluded from right action; virtue in bourgeois society appears anything but. The death scene is the nexus of sympathetic identification.

The two competing pathetic characters in *The London Merchant* are set in sharp contrast through their manner of approaching execution. Although we are

denied the sight of Millwood going to her execution, perhaps to ensure that we do not sympathize, there is really no danger of that as we are told, “She goes to death encompassed in horror, loathing life and yet afraid to die. No tongue can tell her anguish and despair” (V.xi.5-7). Millwood’s comportment in the scene of execution reinforces her status as representative of self-interested subjectivity.

Meanwhile, Barnwell’s stoic performance guarantees approbation in the eyes of the impartial spectator, and the description of his execution centers on the sympathetic reaction of the observing crowd.

TRUEMAN. With bleeding hearts and weeping eyes we show
A human gen’rous sense of others’ woe,
Unless we mark what drew their ruin on,
And, by avoiding that, prevent our own.
(V.xii.10-13)

Trueman’s sympathy is a fitting performance. Here the economy of blood and tears is in balance, which it was not in the murder scene. Weeping is a show of generosity, and in the end it is self-serving because through it he prevents his own ruin and therefore an acceptable basis for a mercantile scheme of pathetic exchanges.

Barnwell’s performance in the situation of punishment is a point that marks a clear distinction between the programs of *The London Merchant* and *The Beggar’s Opera*. Where the hanging is canceled in order to please the public’s desire for poetic justice in the latter, the execution is carried out in the former making clear that it favors enforcement of the systemic epistemic authority over the subjective agency of the individual. And Barnwell performs just as he should: there is no distance between him as pathetic figure and the situation of execution. While he meets the test of Smith’s stoic sympathy, it is the play’s other pathetic figure, Millwood, who

advocates the agency of the individual spectator. But Lillo seems to advocate Barnwell and has Millwood tell Trueman, who represents the spectating public, the danger of a kind of sympathetic engagement with a figure compared at once to the devil and to feminine sexuality.

TRUEMAN. To call thee woman were to wrong the sex, thou devil.

MILLWOOD. That imaginary being is an emblem of thy cursed sex collected, a mirror wherein each particular man may see his own likeness and that of all mankind! (IV.xviii.4-7.)

In this mirror the spectator is confronted with his engagement in an unreflecting, superficial sort of spectatorship unlike the kind offered by Smith, or by Barnwell at the scene of his Uncle's murder.

Given the socially oriented nature of this play, it is fitting that the true moral dilemma, the real test of virtue occurs not within the divided consciousness of its protagonist—he seems utterly incapable of such complexity—it occurs within the breast of the viewer. The test lies in where the spectator attaches his sympathy, for as the proper performance of suffering warrants approbation, according to Smith, the attachment of sympathy is a test of virtue and of being in accord with the values of society.

Conclusion: situation of the public person

The play offers a lesson in sympathetic spectatorship to the viewing public. It seeks to wean them from a simple kind of sympathy, represented by Barnwell's passionate engagement with Millwood, wherein the self becomes completely absorbed in another with no regard for circumstance. It seeks to promote the sort of imaginative sympathy triggered by Barnwell's guilt after murdering his uncle, in

which he sympathizes not only with his uncle, but imagines himself as a spectacle.⁸⁸ This means seeing himself in his situation, and imagining how a spectator would imagine being in that situation. The analog with the theater-goer would be that he imagines himself not just in the position of the imaginary persons on stage, but he imagines himself as a spectacle too. He imagines himself reflected in a mirror, and that mirror shows him that he is not an individual with unique tastes and desires, but an atom in the body of the public. This leads to a problem of identity for members of the viewing public as it threatens individual subjectivity and threatens equally to render the distinction between interiority and spectacle negligible.

While the selection of characters is important to this task, the emphasis on characters being controlled by situation is equally so. Situation stresses the location of individuals within a system. The kind of pathetic concernment that developed in pathetic drama of the 1680's and which reached a height with Nicholas Rowe's works was not sufficient to achieve the goal of civilizing the public at large. The sympathy of Lillo's play teaches performativity rather than concernment. It does not teach the public how to be spectators so much as it teaches them how to be performers. Casting characters from the lower classes literally puts them on stage, and up for judgment. Spectators come to see themselves as part of a performative society subject to approbation, thereby ensuring the stability of a circulatory system of pathetic exchange. Yet in this situation a distance from the self arises. Once more,

⁸⁸ Again, Marshall's *The Figure of Theater* is to the point. Describing the distance inherent to Smith's scheme, he writes: "Imagining ourselves as a spectacle, we look at ourselves in exactly the same way that we look at others: we attempt to sympathize with ourselves, to enter into our own feelings and persons," (176).

I will return to a passage from David Marshall's commentary on Adam Smith that serves as an apt reflection on the effect of Lillo's dramaturgy:

Ironically, after founding his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* on a supposedly universal principal of sympathy, and then structuring the act of sympathy around the epistemological void that prevents people from sharing each other's feelings, Smith seems to separate the self from the one self it could reasonably claim to know: itself.

(Marshall, 176)

The dramaturgical strategy of Lillo's play, to affect instruction through such proximity of subject matter that the spectator comes to think of himself as spectacle, leads to the spectator's alienation from himself. The possible implication of this situation is that he is no longer in control of his self; it has become public property. Anxiety over the loss of self-ownership sets the stakes for the manipulation of reputation, which is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

X.Y.Z.'D: REPUTATION AND THE COMMODITIZATION OF CHARACTER

In an essay called "Project for a New Theory of Civil and Criminal Legislation," written in 1828, William Hazlitt takes Edmund Burke to task over his theory of sympathy, and raises a serious question about its implications. He writes:

I should like to know whether Mr. Burke, with his *Sublime and Beautiful* fancies, would deny that each person has a particular body and senses belonging to him, so that he feels a particular and natural interest in whatever affects these more than another can, and whether this peculiar and paramount interest does not give a direct and natural right of maintaining this circle of individuality sacred.

Why should Hazlitt come out against sympathy so forcefully? Why did he believe that the aesthetic theory at the base of sensibility could pose such a dire threat to the sanctity of individual rights? This second question is actually posed rather disingenuously, because the point is that for Hazlitt, Burke, and a wide range of other writers in eighteenth-century Britain, sympathy was not merely a principle of aesthetic response but was offered up as a candidate for the passionate glue that held together modern society.⁸⁹ Sympathy was, both for Burke, and for its other major proponent, Adam Smith, at once a social principle and a theatrical one.

Hazlitt's criticism of sympathy makes clear the high stakes of arguments in which arts and politics overlap. If a person might enter the place of another person, just as the viewer of a theatric spectacle enters imaginatively into the situation on

⁸⁹ See Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 2009.

the stage, then the boundaries between “particular bodies and senses,” and thus of individual rights, become discomfotingly violable. Burke’s definition of sympathy, to which Hazlitt takes exception, appears in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The foundations of human activity, Burke thought, were the passions of curiosity, pleasure, and pain. Curiosity stimulated the activity of mind on all matters. Ideas of pain and of pleasure corresponded respectively to self-preservation and society, and society involved the passions of sympathy, imitation, and ambition. Sympathy established an interest in other people's welfare that extended to mental identification with them. The scope of sympathy could embrace anyone, unlike compassion, which applied only to those in a worse situation than oneself. Burke claims it is by sympathy that we

...enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of any thing which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected, in many respects, as he is affected: so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which regard self-preservation, and, turning upon pain, may be a source of the sublime; or it may turn upon ideas of pleasure; and then, whatever has been said of the social affections, whether they regard society in general, or only some particular modes of it, may be applicable here.

(56)

Such width of concern has an obvious reference to the social order, but also expresses also Burke's thinking about the theatre, seeming to equate the two. People observe one another as spectators and sympathize as they would with characters in the theater. This takes the common eighteenth-century notion of performative society to its furthest point.

In the debates surrounding the French Revolution, Burke argued against the need for abstract definitions of individual rights, claiming that such rights are secured by tradition:

Our oldest reformation is that of Magna Charta. You will see that Sir Edward Coke, that great oracle of our law, and indeed all the great men who follow him, to Blackstone, are industrious to prove the pedigree of our liberties. They endeavour to prove that the ancient charter... were nothing more than a re-affirmance of the still more ancient standing law of the kingdom.... In the famous law... called the *Petition of Right*, the parliament says to the king, "Your subjects have *inherited* this freedom," claiming their franchises not on abstract principles "as the rights of men," but as the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers.

(Reflections on the Revolution in France , 151-3)

Burke's definition of individual rights depends on the individual's not being self-contained but connected to the past. Individual rights are inherited and as such exist outside of the individual, property to be passed along rather than something that inheres in the individual subject.

The development of the dramaturgy of domestic drama, of which George Lillo's *The London Merchant* is representative, encouraged a particularly insidious form of sympathy in that it encouraged spectators to see themselves as pathetic spectacles, creating a distance between the objective and subjective status of individuals. This condition is developed in the Romantic period's concern with the issue of fame, and reputation. In this chapter I will look at the way the plays of the popular dramatist, George Colman the Younger, alongside Hazlitt's writings, examine the possibility of individuals losing their "particular and natural interest" in themselves to the public in the form of reputation. Virtue is no longer connected to agency, there is no ownership of judgment, all of that exists merely in the public

world of perceived identity. In order to reclaim ownership of ones self one must manipulate public image through language, spoken, but mainly printed. The self becomes linguistic. Indeed, Hazlitt's demand for a legal recognition of the boundaries of the self is a move to engage in the struggle on the linguistic front of public exchange. Sympathy becomes associated with violation of the self and language that cannot be controlled.

This chapter looks at two of George Colman the Younger's plays alongside William Hazlitt's writings on fame. These texts on the edge of the nineteenth century are looking back at the mental/physical, subjective/objective split at the heart of the sentimental tradition.⁹⁰ Expressing concern over the loss of subjective authority to the public, the characters in Colman's plays desire to combine the subject and object in character through manipulations of reputation and fame. Colman's plays get at the implications for the self. Wanting to become an object means wanting to preserve individuality by making sympathy impossible. They express the Romantic inheritance of the pathetic aesthetic while pointing to what has become paradox of wanting to be an object and a subject at once in the context of tightly defined boundaries of the person at the end of the century.

⁹⁰ Thomas Nagel argued that the mental/physical distinction is really subjective/objective. Objective truth can be understood by more than one, while subjective can be understood by one point of view at most. "What is it Like to be a Bat?" 1974.

Colman and reputation

George Colman the Younger was England's most popular dramatist at the turn of the Eighteenth century. Between 1787 and 1800, Colman's fourth play, *Inkle and Yarrico*, writes Barry Sutcliffe, "was acted a total of 164 times at the London Patent theatres... plac[ing] it second in the league table of the most frequently produced plays of the last quarter of the eighteenth century" (Sutcliffe 24). Despite his success Colman still had to reckon with the critics of the London newspapers, and his relationship with the Grub Street writers was often contentious. In an epilogue to *Ways and Means*, produced in 1788, Colman engaged in a diatribe against the critics, describing them as nonchalantly "knocking down reputations by one inch of candle," a tactic that, not surprisingly, resulted in the play receiving poor reviews. Interestingly, Colman's attack on the critics preceded his ever having been the object of a bad review. Though he had not yet suffered the bitter fate of having a play damned by the critics, Colman, however arrogant he might have been, must have been aware of his vulnerable position. In his autobiography, *Random Records*, written forty years later, Colman describes the anxiety of the dramatist who is aware that reception, not effort, determines the success of his labor.

When you are laboring for fame or profit, or for both, and think, all the while that you are at work, that instead of obtaining either, you may be d-d, -it is not a pleasant thought; -nor is it agreeable to reflect, that a handful of blockheads may, in half an hour, consign first to disgrace, and then to oblivion, your toil of half a year. (*Random Records* 62)

A dramatist's capacity to earn capital is inextricably linked to his reputation, a situation which reveals the degree to which one's own character is out of one's control.

Events surrounding the first production of *The Iron Chest* at Drury Lane in March of 1796 show the dramatist once again engaged in a contest with the critics over reputation. At the request of Richard Sheridan, Colman had taken on the challenging task of adapting for the stage William Godwin's three volume novel *Things As They Are: Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. The play's first performance was a failure. While this may have been due in part to the ponderousness of Colman's adaptation—it was four hours long, Colman was quick to blame the failure on acting-manager and lead actor John Kemble, who despite his own illness had hurried the play to the stage and played his part while taking opium pills.⁹¹ The play was presented but twice more that season. When *The Iron Chest* was published, four months after its failed run, Colman attached a volatile preface, damning Kemble for his part in the play's failure. Colman's preface drew a great deal of ire and harmed public perception of the playwright. The press responded to Colman's attack on Kemble in kind: "The better newspapers were gentle but damning... but some of the others leaped at the opportunity to flay Colman. The *Oracle* printed almost daily... jibes at Colman" (Bagster-Collins 91). In the end Colman was vindicated. The play was produced the following season with a different

⁹¹ See Jeremy Bagster-Collins' biography of George Colman for a fuller account of the details of this play's interesting production history.

actor in the lead role to great success. *The Iron Chest* continued to be produced as a vehicle for star actors in the lead role of Sir Edward Mortimer as late as 1879.

Analysis of *The Iron Chest* invariably situates it in terms of Godwin and rarely in terms of Colman. By reading *The Iron Chest* within the economic paradigms suggested by one of Colman's later play's, *X.Y.Z.*, the former's politics, despite Colman's claims to have excised Godwin's, become clarified. And, in turn, the work of this popular playwright might be used to understand the issues of sympathy and character that were the issue of heated discussion between writers generally given more attention. This chapter will look at Colman's treatment of reputation as commoditized identity in two of his plays: *The Iron Chest* and *X.Y.Z.*, arguing that shifts in setting, both temporal and spatial, allow Colman to examine subjectivity in the burgeoning market-centered culture of turn of the century London, a setting in which newspapers were the marketplace where characters were bought and sold. As character becomes public, public opinion takes on the quality of determining force that subsumes individual agency, like the sort of violent sympathy described by Hazlitt in the passage at the start of this chapter. The plays examined in this chapter show the struggle of individuals to claim control over their own characters by negotiating their position in relation to the force of public opinion.

Pathetic violation in *The Iron Chest*

The Iron Chest draws emphasis away from the issue of class tyranny, focusing instead on the subject, embodied in Sir Edward Mortimer, of the conflict between conscience and reputation, public and private identity. Perhaps the most significant

change made by the playwright is in shifting the setting from contemporary in *Caleb Williams* to medieval in *The Iron Chest*. Colman is said to have stated an intention to depoliticize the play—a formidable task given Godwin’s reputation as a radical thinker, and this shift in chronological setting has been seen as part of the attempt to dislocate the play from political context.⁹² But if we take Colman’s claim seriously, this temporal shift turns out to undercut his attempt at recasting the story as apolitical. *The Iron Chest*’s medieval setting evokes Burke’s conservative nostalgia for chivalry, a subject treated in Godwin’s novel. This shift also affects the play’s economic setting. Rather than being situated in the context of the market economy of the eighteenth century, *The Iron Chest* takes place in a feudal environment. This economic setting infuses the internal economy of the play. In a work concerned thematically with the production of reputation and its relation to character, setting determines the ways in which reputation circulates if it circulates at all.⁹³

At the top of the feudal structure of *The Iron Chest* is the central figure of the play, Sir Edward Mortimer. Mortimer has a reputation as a generous and benevolent lord that is at odds with a secret crime he keeps hidden away—Mortimer is a murderer. He is plagued by anxiety that his crime might be revealed and ruin the good name he has worked to produce. Mortimer’s secretary Wilford, along with the rest of his household are concerned by the gloomy cloud hanging over their master.

WILFORD. Every new act of Sir Edward’s charity sets me a thinking;

⁹² See Bagster-Collins.

⁹³ Andrea Henderson argues: “the growth of the perceived division between a ‘true inner self’ and a ‘superficial social self’—the division constitutive of the canonical Romantic model of subjectivity as well as its obverse, gothic subjectivity—can be intimately related to late eighteenth-century economic developments” (38).

and the more I think the more I am puzzled. 'Tis strange that a man should be so ill at ease, who is continually doing good.
(TIC 20)

Wilford's surprise is at Edward's exhibition of two conflicting forms of outward behavior. Charitable acts and acting ill at ease are both performances of a sort, but Wilford does not appear to subscribe to a model of identity in which there is an essential, inner self to stand in contrast to outward, performed behavior. Mortimer accounts for his secretary's puzzlement:

MORTIMER. That fame's sole fountain! That doth transmit a fair, and spotless name when the vile trunk is rotten:--give me that!
(TIC 30)

The "sole fountain" of which Mortimer speaks is by his account the mind, which he sets in opposition to the body. This familiar dichotomy of mind and body correlates with a binary of public and private self. Mortimer sets as his object a fame that will live after he has died, as if a good name in posterity will absolve him of his ill deed. But this speech of his can, and should be read less figuratively. That "vile trunk" puns on the iron chest of the title in which evidence of Mortimer's guilt is locked, and that chest is a thinly veiled metaphor for Mortimer's heart.

In *The Iron Chest*, Colman distinguishes between an inner and an outer self.⁹⁴ By changing the name of the play, Colman not only shifts the focus from the Caleb Williams/Wilford character to Mortimer, but draws attention to this split between

⁹⁴ In "Of National Characters," David Hume argues that there are two levels of character, a personal character, "peculiar to each individual," and shared character that is the result of "a sympathy or contagion of manners" *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, 1741.

essential and social character as the title moves from proper name to that metaphorical figure which houses the essential self. This distinction between public persona and actual person underlies some comments made by William Hazlitt on the issue of fame and reputation:

The good or the bad opinion which my next door neighbour may entertain of me is nothing more than his conviction that such and such a person having certain good or bad qualities, is possessed of them; nor is the figure, which a Lord Mayor elect, a prating demagogue, or popular preacher, makes in the eyes of the admiring multitude--- *himself*, but an Image of him reflected in the minds of others, in connection with certain feelings of respect and wonder.

“On Different Sorts of Fame,” 1816.

At issue in *The Iron Chest* is the nature of the relationship between essential and social character. The passage from Hazlitt supports Mortimer’s position on the subject, what is important in regards to reputation is not whether the two are the same but whether they are believed to be so. Colman draws a metaphoric diagram of the relationship of essential and social self by situating Mortimer’s chest in his library. The chest, Mortimer’s essential self, is surrounded by words, words being that of which a person’s public self is made. It should be noted that the chest contains words too. Mortimer: “You may have noticed, in my library, a chest... where I have told you, brother, the writings which concern our family, with jewels, cash, and other articles, of no mean value were deposited” (115). Penetrating the trunk is the central image. Its contents are a lacuna—it is impenetrable—the text is filled with another text. In Colman’s adaptation, the chest takes on a more central role—or, it emphasizes the centrality already there, by replacing the name of the protagonist with the impenetrable thing, the chest. While this complicates the claim that the role of language is in the creation of social character, it strengthens the

argument that the chest stands for essential character that might be, at least in part hereditary.

The significance of the role of language in determining reputation is accentuated in Wilford's pivotal role in the matter. Wilford's role signals the importance of language because he is Mortimer's secretary; as Winterbottom says of him "he had the backs of all the books in our library by heart" (TIC 149-150). Notice the use of the phrase "by heart," which fits in to the established binary of hearts and words, trunks and texts. Winterbottom's line suggests that Wilford had at one point been convinced, concerning Mortimer, that the words and the man matched—to use Hazlitt's terms, that Mortimer truly possessed the good qualities he was said to possess.

If it is what is said about a person that shapes his character, at least in the social sense, still it matters who is doing the talking. Characters at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder face special difficulty in this regard. When Samson, the son of a poacher goes looking for more gainful and legitimate employment he is faced with the problem of how to establish a good name without anyone to speak for him. His father, Rawbold, cannot supply him with the good name he lacks himself.

HELEN. If I should hire thee, who will give thee a character?

SAMSON. My father, madam.

HELEN. Why sirrah, he has none of his own. (TIC 55)

Here occurs a pun which Colman will return to in *X.Y.Z.* Having created a dichotomy between essential and social character and then throwing in the use of the word as a letter of reference, *character* is operating in three senses here, leading to comedic miscommunication, but also telling the audience something about the relationship

between the three. Samson's essential character, his inner self is clearly not what is at issue here--certainly his father is capable of supplying him with character of that sort, but as an outlaw and a man of ill repute Rawbold cannot do the sort of work that Wilford has done for Mortimer and provide his son with a good name. It would not be at all surprising to learn that Rawbold was illiterate. As Samson says, "the naked and hungry have seldom many friends to speak well of them" (*TIC* 55). What Samson's family is incapable of doing Mortimer's circle is able to far surpass. Having money, law, and social status on their side they are able to cover up a murder:

MORTIMER. We met: and 'twas resolved, to stifle rumour, to put me
on my trial. No accuser, no evidence appeared, to urge it on.—
'Twas meant to clear my fame.---How clear it then? How cover
it? Yousay.---Why, by a Lie. (TIC 67)

On the question of whether the inner and the outer self are distinct from each other, Colman's answer is inconclusive. The model proposed by the main plotline suggests that the two cannot remain separate and that the essential character will find a way of leaking out into the public. Mortimer's brother Fitzharding presents an image of the way this model works when he says that he "cannot hoop [his] heart with iron, like an old beer-butt. I would have the vessel what some call weak:---I'd have it ooze a little" (106). Indeed the vessel does "ooze a little" in the final scene. Mortimer accidentally slips irrefutable evidence of his own guilt into Wilford's chest along with material that he had intended to incriminate the hapless secretary. Mortimer's attempt to transfer guilt from one chest to another is foolishly hopeful given the logic of the play, and it does not work. The inclusion, apparently uncontrollable, of evidence of Mortimer's own guilt into Wilford's chest merely shows the material catching up with the internal. What Mortimer has accomplished is to plant the

conviction in Wilford's heart of the vileness of his character. Mortimer says " I have labored for a name as white as mountain snow; dazzling, and speckles: Shame on't! 'tis blur'd with blots! Fate, like a mildew, ruins the virtuous harvest I would reap, and all my crop is weeds" (*TIC* 52-53). The incriminating evidence Mortimer lets slip, a bloody dagger wrapped in a written plea for the redemption of "the wreck of [his] lost honour," presents an image that correlates with the chest nestled in the library—again, the essential, material evidence of the deed, is covered in words which attempt to manipulate public interpretation of it.

The question of the proper relationship between the inner and outer self is taken up in the play's subplot in which two members of a band of thieves debate the matter explicitly. Armstrong, the leader of the thieves, commands his men to exercise compassion and most of his men comply, but Orson argues that one should be true to one's assumed identity.

ARMSTRONG. Humanity is scarcely counted fault: if so, 'tis a fault on the right side.

ORSON. Umph! Perhaps not with us. We are robbers! (*TIC* 38)

Armstrong, though a more sympathetic character than Orson, subscribes to a position identical to Mortimer's except that they inhabit social positions that lie on opposite sides of the law, as much to discount a reading of character in the play that is based on legality. In an even clearer formulation of his position, Orson puts it thus: "when a man takes to the trade of a wolf, he should not go like a lamb to his business" (*TIC* 41). For Orson there is no distinction at all between essential and social self, in fact he has no heart.

ARMSTRONG. Thou art a mere machine. Could I but give it motion, I would take an oak from the forest, here, clap a flint into it for

heart, and make as bold a fellow as thou art. (*TIC* 40)

Far from matching up with a character like Fitzharding whose heart leaks out into the social realm, Armstrong is lacking a requisite element in the model of the relation between essential and social character. In the end Orson comes out ahead of the other thieves, he retaliates for his banishment by turning them over to the law. This would seem to suggest that all that really matters is the surface and that the inner self is a negligible element. But this position is rendered untenable when Colman's notorious preface to the play is brought into consideration. Colman's bitter complaint about Kemble who, "dark as Erebus cast a gloom upon" the cast of *The Iron Chest* is strange in light of the fact that Kemble was playing the part of Mortimer, a gloomy character, but is germane as it suggests that performance is preferred over authenticity and that they are distinguishable.

The notion of performance characterizes the farcical elements that invade *The Iron Chest* and undermine what has been taken to be its position on the relation of inner and outer self up to this point. Samson assumes a new identity simply by putting on the livery of his new occupation, a change so effective that his own sister does not recognize him. He explains to her, "my old character is laid aside with my old jerkin. I am now exalted" (90). Such exaltation comes cheaply. The case of Samson casts the issue of character in a cynical light since character and clothing have become interchangeable. It is one thing to say that there is a particular sort of character: that which I have been calling social, that is shaped by words. That sort of character has been up until this point something not to be treated lightly, but in the case of Samson it has become casual, even laughable, making Mortimer a ridiculous

rather than a tragic character. Samson expresses the phenomenon of changing character with clothing again, this time in language of reptilian metaphor: I'm your fellow-servant:---the new comer. The last footman cast his skin this morning, and I have crept into it (*TIC* 59-60). Samson's metaphor of the snake casting its skin brings to his act of character changing the associations of serpentine qualities of cunning. The shrewd poacher's son is the only character in the play consciously aware of the way social character is working.

Subject and object in *X.Y.Z*

By the time that *X.Y.Z.* was written and produced in 1810, George Colman's position as a dramatist was firmly established. In fact *X.Y.Z.* marks a significant point in Colman's career, as it was the first time he had been asked in advance to write a play. Despite the different tonality of the treatment, several figures carry over into *X.Y.Z.* Chests and trunks figure in and characters in *X.Y.Z.* are parodic reproductions of characters from *The Iron Chest*. Hempseed and Galliard reproduce the relationship of Wilford and Mortimer. Hempseed, like Wilford, is a scribe occupied in the production of words but he is significantly less qualified for the job. The relationships correlate as well in that both of them have been the sites of a transfer of chests though the transfer between Galliard and Hempseed is far less melodramatic. While *The Iron Chest* is an expression of the anxiety of a young dramatist to create and circulate a good reputation for himself, *X.Y.Z.* is the product of a writer whose character is established.

The issue of character remains a central concern of Colman's, and despite the play's farcical tone, the issue is treated as seriously in *X.Y.Z.* as it is in *The Iron Chest*. Through its insistence of miscommunications, *X.Y.Z.* can play on its seemingly inconsequential surface the logic that drives *The Iron Chest*. The efficacy of farce to engage in serious criticism was often underestimated. A letter addressed to the editor of *The Examiner*, printed in 1808, responds to criticism leveled against the writers of farce. The letter's author writes:

Sir, you write very clever criticism and we write very bad plays yet you have not quite effected our derision; now, if you will only consent to turn poet, and let us turn critics, you shall find that our bad criticism shall damn your good plays in half the time. (178)

The writer of the letter to *The Examiner* concedes that the critics are cleverer, but in the end cleverness fails because it is not what the public wants. The writer's argument suggests that the writers of farce knowingly choose to engage in a lower form of humor because it will find an audience. The sort of criticism in which *X.Y.Z.* is engaged is particularly suited to a genre that is consciously attentive to the pressure of pleasing an audience since it is looking at the commoditization of the subject in the context of consumer culture.⁹⁵

Set in contemporary London, the plot revolves around Neddy Bray, a shy but well to do country squire who decides to advertise for a wife in the *Morning Post*,

⁹⁵ The eighteenth century has been characterized has long been characterized as a performative period. Judith Pascoe argues that the Romantic period was a performative one as well, due in part to the significant influence of the theater. Cultural figures such as Mary Robinson were adapt at using publicity to fashion images of themselves and create audiences. Pascoe suggests that Wordsworth himself was posing and advocates "a more detailed attention to and respect for the artificiality of authenticity."

while Roscius Alldross, a theatrical manager, takes out an advertisement for an actress in the *Morning Herald*. Both sign their advertisements “X.Y.Z.” and direct letters to Old Slaughter’s Coffeehouse, resulting in confusion. Bray’s act of taking out an ad for a wife in the *Morning Post* and signing it “X.Y.Z.” sets the play in motion. This is an act simultaneously anonymous and self-exposing. Alldross’ ad for an actress in the *Morning Herald* creates the opportunity for tension and draws a parallel between the would-be husband and the theater director, as well as the actress and the wife. Much of the play’s action is moved along through the agency of letters. Mrs. Mouse is eager to receive a letter from the lawyer, and her co-conspirator, Grubbleton—a letter that contains a copy of another letter, which he has written in response to Bray’s ad. Indeed, the title of the play itself resembles the plot in that it is a sequence of letters, but drama arises as a result of the letters functioning as signature.

An eye toward the function of language in *X.Y.Z.* should alert the audience to potential significance behind the curious diction of Hempseed, a bumpkin employed as a clerk who writes in “a tightish copying hand” (12). His speech is, like his writing, characterized by impenetrability. Because Hempseed never uses the objective form of the first person singular pronoun, his words have the effect of deflecting any transitive verb. For instance, in telling Mrs. Mouser how he ended up working for Grubbleton, Hempseed says: “I wanted somebody to take I in” (12). The strange phrasing makes Hempseed the agent in the act of “taking in.” Surely this is done in part for comic effect, but Hempseed is not a clever character so it should not be seen as a sort of knowing wink. Rather, Hempseed’s diction is an impediment of speech—

indeed, it is revealed that he is a stutterer, which is the effect of his social disadvantage. Hempseed is poorly suited to a setting where character is portrayed as a social performance strongly connected to language. Hempseed is, or claims to be, an orphan and this social disconnectedness is the cause of his perpetual subjecthood. The character Daggerwood, in one of Colman's earlier plays, *New Hay at the Old Market* (1795), says of his wife: "Mrs. Daggerwood a fine figure, but unfortunately stutters; so, of no use in the theatrical line," which offers a strong clue to the model of character that Hempseed is meant to illustrate.

Hempseed's pattern of speech is broken when he speaks of himself in connection with Maria, "Noa; we be too pratty for he to trust us alone" (16). Though he is able to use the objective pronoun in the plural, Hempseed's speech here is still wrong, but it is wrong with a purpose. Here he alters the form of the third person pronoun, but this is to draw attention to the verb phrase of which "us" is a part. Indeed the point is to highlight that "us" is a necessary condition of being an object. Hempseed's diction offers a way of getting at the underlying philosophy of the play.

An object is what one wants to be in the scheme of *X.Y.Z.*, this illustrates the absence of, or the negligible importance of the inner self in this play compared with *The Iron Chest*. In *X.Y.Z.* chests have been emptied of their value—literally in the case of Hempseed's theft of Galliard's trunk. The chest, which functions as a symbol of interiority and private, as opposed to social, space is no longer either since the landlady has the keys. Trunks and chests appear in the play but they have become burdensome—Hempseed warns Maria "if you ha' trunk to carry, Miss, I can tell ye you'll find it a bit heavy" (34). This means that in the setting of *X.Y.Z.* the inner self

that has been symbolized by chests and trunks is no longer relevant. An object is necessarily something observable and public, in the rather more cynical world of *X.Y.Z.* it is to have achieved the status of being of a recognizable character, to have a definite value. The preeminence of objecthood comes through in Alldross' reaction when reading the letter which he believes to be in response to his advertisement for an actress. After reading a line in which the writer says that the young lady he writes of "is really an object," Alldross exclaims: "An object! Then this is above your Lady Graveairs, Tragedy Queens and Mother Bundles" (21).

Genre and the contents of the chest

The different treatment of chests in *X.Y.Z.* relative to *The Iron Chest* has to do with generic difference. Billed in its time as "comic opera," *The Iron Chest's* blend of song and sentimentality qualify it for the more familiar designation of melodrama. The melodramatic dramaturgy of *The Iron Chest* uses exaggerated displays of pathos in order to engage its audience. But *The Iron Chest* is more precisely a gothic melodrama, it uses devices and techniques typical of the genre and its feudal setting gives strength to this classification. In general, the gothic shows a preoccupation with the link between internal and external dimensions of things, and the distance between these two dimensions. Disguises are key to the gothic, undercutting the credence given by proponents of sensibility of the legibility of inner self, or the passionate self, through the practice of observing physiognomy. This trope of disguises suggests a preoccupation with the difficulty of accurately judging character in a world of performative selves who mask dangerous passions. So, the

link between passion and outward signs of it is suspect. But in regards to inanimate objects—tears, statues, as in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the link is real. Objects are often crystallizations, and transmitters of emotion: sympathetic connections to the past. There is a curious double bind in the gothic that gets at the violent possibilities of sympathy. For example, in *The Castle of Otranto* the reader is asked to trust the author's literary devices (i.e. correspondence of statues, etc) even as the story warns against trusting rhetoric and appearances. Communicability of passions is only reliable in one direction, that is, characters can be influenced by concrete manifestations of emotion, but we cannot be sure that those concrete manifestations correspond to what produced them. On the other hand, in James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) as in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* it is presented as a dangerous possibility that one might enter into the subjective states of others by means of language rendered material: by bodily mimicry, or by penetration of a sympathetic object, i.e. the chest, and accessing a hidden past, hidden character in the form of letters.

So, *The Iron Chest* explores a thematic double bind that is typical of the gothic: the near impossibility of penetrating to the heart of illegible surfaces, and the horrible outcome that follows when interiors are actually accessed. In Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Caleb, after accessing Falkland's interior, is pursued and eventually transformed into an object, a stone. Like *Caleb Williams*, *The Iron Chest* simultaneously depicts the undesirability of encountering other persons as mere objects, and the danger of accessing their hidden inner, subjective states, which is

depicted ultimately as a sort of tyranny, in keeping with Hazlitt's view of Burkean sympathy.

As farce, *X.Y.Z.* plays upon surfaces. While the chest remains a central figure, the etymology of "farce" is at play in the treatment of its hidden space. *Farcire* means "to stuff," and is connected to food, as in to fill a pie. This elicits the way that farce is functioning in *X.Y.Z.*, filling the interior space of *The Iron Chest* through a metaphor linked to consumption. The inaccessible quality of interiority ceases to be a problem as interiority becomes undesirable. Characters in the farce answer the threat of sympathetic violation by striving to become objects, and like the pathetic objects of gothic novels they want to influence without being influenced, to be spectacles without being spectators. Exteriority has come to refer to interiority. These plays want to fill the interiority, do away with the difference and through the manipulation of reputation, do away with reference—the thing is the thing. This amounts to playing on "figure" just as the plays play on "character." Figure as a figure of speech that moves, and figure as a material thing with shape. In wanting to become an "object," a material thing that matters, the characters want actually to be a figure in both senses—able to move without being penetrable. Reputation, though vexed, offers a way of knowing characters and making one's own character known that is an alternative to violent, Burkean sympathy, and a way of manipulating the market of identity by becoming objects of consumption rather than consumers.

Hazlitt describes the desire for character to become entirely social, to become a name even to those whom one knows personally, effectively removing

ones person, which I take to mean inner self, from the equation entirely. He writes that “the desire to be known by name as an author chiefly has a reference to those to whom we are known personally, and is strongest with regard to those who know most of our persons and least of our capacities” (“On Different Sorts of Fame, 1816). This point of view is replayed in *X.Y.Z.* during the interview between Grubbleton and Alldross. Grubbleton, mistakenly believing that Alldross is trying to get a higher dowry tells him: “As your object goes to her personal accomplishments only, I should hope that would content you;” showing that personal accomplishments are of a lower order than a recognizable name (39).

To become an object requires entering into a set of social relations. Marriage is an act by which one is legally joined to another. Bray’s desire for marriage is both a literal and symbolic of a yearning for a fixed and recognizable identity that can only come about through entrance into the public, social sphere. Bray expresses his desire, or at least his recognition of the need to emerge from his private state, his bachelorhood in an exchange with Mrs. Mouser.

MRS. M. Well, Squire, success to X. Y. Z.

BRAY. “I’m tired of being I by itself, I do assure you” (9).

This pun on “I” should bring to mind Hempseed, and it is apparent that “X.Y.Z.” a cluster of letters, stands here for the marriage enterprise while “I by itself” is bachelorhood. Just as the move from singular to plural creates a shift from subject to object in Hempseed’s strange grammar, the entrance into social relations is a move that will give Bray the identity he wants.

The term “character” functions in the same way that “object” does above. While objecthood can be argued for abstractly, character is something that has

apparent value in itself—which is what I have claimed it is to be an object. But character too depends on social relations. The following exchange between Mrs. Mouser and Betty can be read straight and make perfect sense.

MRS. M. Don't be impertinent---how do you expect I can give you a character?

BETTY. I'm to be married on Monday, and then I can live without one.

Mrs. Mouser is of course talking about a letter of reference when she says “character.”⁹⁶ This makes clear that what one is doing when one writes such a letter is in fact giving character, once again reinforcing the theme that character is something dependent on social relations. Betty does not need to worry about getting her character from Mrs. Mouser because she is to be married. Her statement is working ambiguously: she does not need a letter of reference because she will not be looking for another job; and she does not need Mrs. Mouser to give her character because she is entering into a new social relationship which will provide her with one, i.e. the commercial role of female character is to enter into marriage.

The exchange between Mrs. Mouser and Betty works on yet another level that reinforces the importance of written language in both plays. “Character,” in Mrs. Mouser’s line is meant to stand for a letter of character, but of course a character *is* a letter. This punning equation of character and letter is significant and points once again to the fact that what Colman has in mind when he writes about character is reputation, or name. This is something that is formed in the public eye and which can be manipulated by those who are shrewd enough to see how it is accomplished.

⁹⁶ In *The Economy of Character*, Deidre Lynch looks at the significance of this play on character in her analysis of the trope of character as a thing that circulates.

Alldross describes some people of this sort: "I live at the Garrick's Head, in Bowstreet, with a parcel of fallen Stage Heroes, who still struggle for fame, by paragraphs of praise occasionally popt by themselves into the prints, and get new engagements" (20). There is more to this utterance of Alldross' however. The Garrick's Head is a coffeehouse, the second of which to appear in the play though this one indirectly. The *popping* of "paragraphs of praise... into the prints," is a recurrence of the same phrase used by Bray to describe the marriage proposal, evidence that these two acts are meant to be seen as analogous.

Ostensibly, Bray's object is marriage and he has come to taking out an advertisement for a wife in the paper because he is too "timbersome" to "pop the question" in person. But Bray's shyness has more to do with a fear of the public than of women.

MRS. M. We must cure you, Squire, of this shyness; London is a rare
Place for assurance, company, public places, and---
BRAY. Public places! Lord love you, that will never do!

But a newspaper is very public thing, as is a coffee house. Bray need not have submitted his advertisement in person, nor gone to the coffee house to pick up correspondence; a man of two thousand a year could very well have sent a servant. It might be argued that this was another precaution taken to protect his anonymity, but then, why tell Mrs. Mouser everything? What strike me as most contradictory in George Colman's *XYZ* are the apparently contradictory desires of the character Neddy Bray to be simultaneously anonymous and identifiable. Either of these desires would be unremarkable on its own but paired create a tension that demands unraveling. I mean to argue that the contradiction here is only a seeming one. By

signing his ad "X.Y.Z.", Bray is withholding that which he desires; he wants a name and sets about achieving it by entering into the public eye, by way of the newspaper and the coffee-house. Whereas in *The Iron Chest* language is a way of deliberately shaping ones public persona and potentially covering up a less than desirable inner self, in *X.Y.Z.* the inner self is out of the equation, there is only social character so to enter into print is to define oneself entirely.

The coffee house is the most public of places as it is the place where periodicals are circulated and letters are received. Bray's entrance into the coffee house for the first time is part of his scheme to obtain a marriage, but symbolically the two acts are the same. Consider that the coffee house is called "Slaughter's" and that Betty is marrying the butcher. By entering into the public realm, Bray is becoming a character, an object.

Bray describes the elaborate lengths he went to when he submitted his advertisement for a wife to the *Morning Post*: "I took it to the office, with the money, myself. I went in a Brutus wig, and a barouche great coat; so I defy 'em to tell whether I was a fine gentleman, or a hackney coachman" (7). Bray appears determined to mask his personal identity and his social standing. He enters the coffee house dressed in a strange combination of upper, and lower class apparel as if by failing to fall neatly into a category he might frustrate identification, or even make it impossible as he suggests. Identity by clothing is the theme that Samson embraced in *The Iron Chest*. Clothing becomes costume and person becomes performer. The mix-up of Bray's and Alldross' letters serves to draw a parallel between the husband and the theater director, the wife and the actress. The

correlation between society and the theater serves to make the case that character is really the same thing as a role in a play.

It makes sense in this instance that he would make an effort to disguise his social status since it might allow an observer to identify him as the writer of an advertisement that is quite explicit in expressing the financial standing of its author. In the ad, Bray is careful not to name the county in which his properties lie for fear that he might be identified. This desire for anonymity seems to disappear when Bray visits Slaughter's Coffee House—instead, he is upset by it. "I declare, somehow, coming into a coffee-room, for the first time in one's life, and where nobody knows one has two thousand a year, landed estate, quite dashes a body" (23, 24). This is all too evocative of what Hazlitt has to say about the unique character of the London coffee-house:

London is the only place in which each individual in company is treated according to his value in company, and to that only. In every other part of the kingdom he carries another character about with him, which supersedes the intellectual or social one. It is known in Manchester or Liverpool what every man in the room is worth in land or money; what are his connections and prospects in life—and this gives a character of servility or arrogance, of mercenaries or impertinence to the whole of provincial intercourse. You laugh not in proportion to a man's wit, but his wealth; you have to consider not what, but whom you contradict.

"On Coffee-House Politicians," 1822.

Bray does not truly desire anonymity; he wants to be known as he would be on Hazlitt's account, in the country. Still, it is not his inner self that he wants to be known by, but by a different model of social character.

In reading the switched responses to their advertisements Bray and Alldross each interprets according to his own set of values, which correlate with the

respective scheme of character held by each. Bray reads geography into each line of the letter he believes to be from his future wife while Alldross reads theater into what he takes to be a letter from a potential member of his acting troupe.

ALLD. May I take the liberty of asking your name?

BRAY. I don't see why I should tell him (aside) I am X.Y.Z. at Slaughter's Coffee-House.

GRUB. Are you? If that's the case, then, pray, sir, who the devil are you all this while? (To Alldross.)

ALLD. X.Y.Z. at Slaughter's Coffee-House---that's an imposter.

GRUB. Two X.Y.Z.'ds!

X.Y.Z. has become a verb at this point in the play, and a transitive one, showing that both Bray and Alldross have indeed become objects. But neither has attained the sort of character that he was seeking. Both have been reduced to an anonymous sequence of letters, totally lacking any meaningful character. To be X.Y.Z.'d is to be commoditized by the newspapers.⁹⁷

In Slaughter's, Bray moves through a rapid sequence of identities determined this time, not by clothing but by location, in keeping with the overall tendency of the play to locate identity in the external, and for Bray to assign identity to geography. Identity becomes not only external and geographic, but tied to consumption and economics. Customers in being identified by their orders have lost not only interiority, but name too. This resembles the association of identity with clothing observed above but it goes a step further in the externalization of character. It does so by way of consumption, by the internalization of the social identity. Bray enters the capillaire box, drinks the capillaire, and that identity has invaded his body. But

⁹⁷ In describing the way that poems became commodities in the newspapers, Judith Pascoe adds "the newspaper poet could also become transformed into a product for sale, a 'personality' with additive celebrity status" (171).

this identity assumption is not lasting. Bray gets up and moves to the next table where he assumes another identity and the process is repeated. The dynamic of identity of location that takes place in the coffee-house is different from the tying together of character and clothing is different because the distinction between inner and outer becomes permeable, making it unlikely that performativity could be said to play a part in the same way that it has above.

The London coffeehouses were notably democratic spaces; people of all classes might sit next to one another and engage in conversation. By the time of the production of *X.Y.Z.* the popularity of the coffeehouse was already in decline, much of the clientele being lost to the increasing popularity of the social club. Markman Ellis gives an account of Leigh Hunt's reaction to the waning of the coffee-house: "'society' now congregates in the pew at church and the box in the theatre, both places in which Hunt finds only a kind of confinement. He regretted the passing of the old coffee-house, where 'there was a more humane openness of intercourse'" (Ellis 208). Bray says, "if I had courage to swim round the room like that chap, I could get a wife without advertising!" (23). Colman punningly draws a comparison between the coffee house and the theater by using the language of the latter to describe the former. An unhappy customer complains, "there's the worst attendance in this house" (23). There is something that keeps Bray from being able to enjoy the "openness" of the coffeehouse, an impediment like Hempseed's stutter. It is his lack of an essential self. Harkening back to Hazlitt's description of the London coffeehouses, it is clear that Bray is exactly the type of person who would not fit in there.

Conclusion

Colman's plays illuminate the influence of economics upon contemporary models of subjectivity. Private spaces are not honored in *X.Y.Z.*, Mrs. Mouser uses her extra keys to rifle through the rooms and desks of her lodgers, showing that all that is left is public. This points to a shared anxiety over the potential threat of a burgeoning new culture to stable notions of identity. In the commercial economic setting of *X.Y.Z.* character becomes a commodity and essential character disappears. Colman clearly intends *X.Y.Z.* as a critique of the conditions of contemporary economics, which might not render such loss of inner self inevitably, but set up an environment in which the peril of such an occurrence is immanent.

At the same time, Colman satirizes the atavistic longing for days past. Philip Connell has described Romanticism as "an alternative strain of social criticism, which aligned itself in opposition to the new sciences of society" (Connell 5). But this claim is suspect given that the chief purveyor in the present mix is Edmund Burke, a figure to whom Godwin, Hazlitt, and Colman react negatively. Neddy Bray stands for this atavistic position that refuses to let go of a feudal model of subjectivity. Through Bray, Colman shows that the essential self of the feudal model is not the self-authenticating thing it purports to be but derives authority from connection to objects such as land, or lord. In this way the models of subjectivity presented in *The Iron Chest* and *X.Y.Z.* are not as dissimilar as they first appear to be. In both systems authentic identity depends on connection to a sort of object; in one

system that object is material property, and in the other, it is an image created through the circulation of print.

Colman's adaptation of Godwin's novel turns out not to be apolitical, as he had claimed, rather it joins in Godwin's attack on Malthus based on the issue of individual rights. Malthus claims that the poor have no "right" to complain about their situation or to receive government support because "the inevitable laws of nature" determine their situation. Much of Malthus' first edition of the *Principle of Population* was meant as a refutation of Godwin's theory of the perfectibility of society.⁹⁸ Malthus claimed that Godwin's perfect society would,

...from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period degenerate into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known State at present; I mean, a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers.

(*Essay on Population*, 1798)

Basically the idea is that without checks on population growth in the form of misery, starvation, and vice, society would realign itself on the basis of class even if it reached Godwin's perfect society for a moment. Godwin responds by taking Malthus to task for denying the individual rights of the poor based on his "inevitable laws of nature." He writes: "it is not *the Law of Nature*. It is *the Law of very artificial life*. It is

⁹⁸ In *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin argues for the perfectibility of the humanity on the grounds that there are no innate principles, and therefore no original propensity to evil. Godwin writes: "our virtues and our vices may be traced to the incidents which make the history of our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world." All control of man by man was more or less intolerable, and the day would come when each man, doing what seems right in his own eyes, would also be doing what is in fact best for the community, because all will be guided by principles of pure reason.

the Law which 'heaps upon some few with vast excess' the means of every wanton expence and every luxury, while others, some of them not less worthy, are condemned to pine in want" (*Essay on Population* 1820).

Hazlitt attacks Malthus in a way that resonates with the themes of Colman's plays: it connects literally to consumption, since it has to do with food, and with Malthus's assumptions about class organization that inform his beliefs about the economics of food consumption, i.e. Hazlitt argues that Malthus puts forward what he purports are "natural" laws about population that are actually reifications of existing categories of class ("Malthus and the Liberties of the Poor" 1819). In effect, Hazlitt claims that Malthus's world of scarcity would not be a problem if the rich would simply consume less. Hazlitt also seems to rely on sympathy

For my part, I place my heart in the centre of my moral system. I do not look on the poor man as an animal, or a mere machine for philosophical or political or economic experiments. I know that the measure of his suffering is not to be taken with a pair of compasses or a slip of parchment.

In response to Burke's tyrannical sympathy, which effectively equates concern for others with self-interest, and to Malthus's complete lack of it, Hazlitt asserts a kind of sympathy that maintains particularity. But in order to do so, he must acknowledge that we are disinterested, and somewhat estranged from ourselves. In his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), Hazlitt argues that self-interest depends on the imagination, as we have no more present access to our own future states than we do to the subjective experience of others. Therefore when we do act in the interest of our future selves, or in the interest of others, it is with disinterest, as it can bring us no present pleasure. This move establishes the possibility of a kind

of sympathy and does away with the undesirable, titillating aspects of Burke's sympathy.

The transformation that has taken place in Colman's work is that the social self, reputation, has become objectified. The objectification of the self, observable in Colman's plays joins in the cultural discourse over the definition of individual selves seen in the political debates between advocates of secure, inviolable individual rights. Colman's drama parodies the reduction of individuals to consumable things by a market that seems aligned with the theatricality of Burkean sympathy and with Malthusean class values; it looks for answers in sympathy, but sympathy of a different kind from Burke's substitution. In the end, the characters of Colman's plays are estranged from themselves, but are able to find completion in textually mediated sympathetic exchanges.

CHAPTER VI

CODA: CHARLES LAMB'S *ELIA* AND THE LIMITS OF SYMPATHY

In order to review the central issues addressed in this dissertation more clearly I turn now to the essayist and critic, Charles Lamb. In his writings under the pseudonym Elia for *The London Magazine* he constructs an imaginary figure to engender sympathy in the estranged situation of the periodical market. Though this situation is in many ways the opposite of the theater, the aim of pathetic involvement is the same. But where the pathetic figure in Otway's and Bank's plays might be called the embodiment of rhetorical, the figure in Lamb's world of print attempts to simulate the experience of embodied presence. Lamb shows a concern in the relation between theater and print that suggests the two share common interests, and his preference seems to vacillate. In his essay, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," (1811) Lamb argues that the best qualities of Shakespeare's drama can be fully appreciated only through reading: according to Lamb, stage performances often diminish the plays' meanings, and individual performers often misinterpret Shakespeare's intended characterizations, which makes clear that for Lamb the authority of judging should be kept seated in the individual. The material differences between theater and print are most marked in the situation of the periodical. But the conditions of the latter amplify many of the difficulties of the former. The challenges faced by the dramaturgist to engage his crowd through pathos are made clear by the situation of the periodical writer. In the guise of Elia—

a persona adopted for his writing in the *London Magazine*, Charles Lamb recounts his “First Play.” What is on the surface a nostalgic account of youthful experience is actually a sophisticated analysis of the workings of sympathetic engagement. The essay opens with a description of the place where the author witnessed his first play, a place that has since changed.

At the north end of Cross Court there yet stands a portal, of some architectural pretensions, though reduced to humble use, serving at present for an entrance to a printing-office. This old door-way, if you are young, reader, you may not know was the identical pit entrance to old Drury, --Garrick’s Drury, --all of it that is left.

The doorway’s decline goes beyond the reduction from theater to printing-office. It is a slide from the particular association with Garrick, to the anonymity of mechanism and business. At the same time it is a step down from the associations of the pit, with the class-based organization of theater audience to the invisible readership of printed text. And when, later in the essay, Elia tells his reader of the change that occurred between his first visit to the theater as a child, and his next as an adult, it becomes clear that the decline of the doorway stands a figure for a decline in his capacity to enter into the drama: “I had left the temple a devotee, and was returned a rationalist.” Lamb looks at the theater in order to reflect on the conditions of sympathy in periodicals. Now I will look at his examination of the limits of sympathy in the periodical market in order to reflect on pathos and situation in the theater.

Charles Lamb’s essay, “Imperfect Sympathies,” makes a point about the status of sympathy in the context of periodical culture through its expression of outright prejudice—sympathy becomes problematic as the reader becomes

consumer and judge. Read in the context of the August 1821 issue of the *London Magazine* Lamb's essay functions as a satire of notions of sympathy that run throughout many of the magazine's other pieces. Frequently evoking and undermining articles that precede it by no more than a few pages, "Imperfect Sympathies" argues indirectly that sympathy must inevitably be attended by apathy and antipathy and that the unspoken truth about sympathy is that its function depends on exclusion, and in doing so "Imperfect Sympathies" systematically reduces to absurdities the foundational ideological principles of the *London Magazine*.⁹⁹

"Imperfect Sympathies" begins with a passage from Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* that presents a model of what might be imagined to be perfect sympathy. Browne writes: "I am of a constitution so general, that it consorts and sympathizeth with all things, I have no antipathy, or rather idiosyncrasy in any thing" and proceeds to inform his reader that he makes no distinction among men (Lamb 66). Lamb, in the voice of Elia, quickly points out that such a level of "abstraction" makes it a wonder that the author might distinguish between man and

⁹⁹ Mark Parker argues that John Scott, editor of the *London Magazine*, sought to promulgate what he calls a "Burkean-Coleridgean literary culture," such as "wisdom without reflection," unity of thought and feeling, and reverence for the past. Ultimately Lamb's essay undermines what Parker sees Scott's project by carrying out certain Burkean principles to their extreme. Lamb's choice of Browne's *Religio Medici* as his touchstone piece is especially interesting in this light because the project of that work was to reconcile religion and science, a dubious project from the perspective of the "Burkean-Coleridgean" ideology.

beast at all.¹⁰⁰ In stark contrast to Browne's position is Elia's confession in which he equates sympathies with taste:

...I do feel the differences of mankind, national or individual, to an unhealthy excess. I can look with no indifferent eye upon things or persons. Whatever is, is to me a matter of taste or distaste; or when once it becomes indifferent, it begins to be disrelishing. I am, in plainer words, a bundle of prejudices—made up of likings and dislikings—the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies.
(Lamb 67)

Elia's "imperfect sympathy" might be seen as an exaggerated response to the passage from Browne; indeed, his particularities seem to grow more idiosyncratic as his meditation progresses. Elia's reduction of sympathy to entirely a matter of aesthetic preference is strongly driven home when he justifies his antipathy for "the Negro," explaining that it is "—because they are black" (Lamb 72). But this superficial basis for sympathy is not so far removed from Browne's position as it seems to be. In fact, the author of the passage from *Religio Medici* describes his freedom from national prejudices as a lack of the feeling of "repugnance." This might then be construed as evidence that the author has no *taste* and that what at first appeared a claim to virtue is a confession that he is lacking that which is required for him to enter into the elect community of *The London Magazine*. The import here is that while *The London Magazine* might purport to be a cultivator of sympathy in the "perfect" sense, what it actually accomplishes is a sympathy of exclusivity. That is to say that the only real sympathy it generates is between imagined figures: the

¹⁰⁰ The elect reader, perhaps Coleridge and a few other of the author's intimates, would have known of Lamb's great fondness for Browne and thus have recognized the ironic tone of the piece immediately.

reader and the author, and between the reader and other imagined members of the community of *London Magazine* readers.

In a footnote Elia tells the reader that “[he has] met with [his] moral antipodes, and can believe the story of two persons meeting (who had never seen one another before in their lives) and instantly fighting” (Lamb 67). Thus, he briskly and offhandedly lampoons the romantic conceit of the second article in the magazine, “Zariadres and Odatis; a Grecian Story,” a tale of two lovers who dream of one another and each fall in love with the other’s vision, “as if by divine sympathy,” before they ever meet in person. Here again the impact of the satire is not merely to make its object appear ridiculous, but to reveal its darker side as well. If it is possible to fall in love and wed without knowing anything of the other, then its opposite is equally possible, and equally foolish. Since the relationship between the periodical author and his audience cannot be other than that of Zariadres and Odatis, Lamb calls into question the project of the *London Magazine* to cultivate a sympathetic relation with its audience.

Or, is this a trick? “Imperfect Sympathies” is filled with pessimism about the possibility of creating an affective union between an anonymous public and a writer, but this might be seen as something other than a complete dismissal of a project in which Lamb was earnestly engaged. Likely Elia’s confession would mark the first point in the piece, if not the magazine, at which a large portion of the audience truly sympathizes with the sentiments of the author. Elia’s confession, clearly absurd, marks the piece as satire and allows the reader to understand how he is to proceed. The reader can see that Lamb is engaged in a self-reflexive criticism of the periodical

in which his work appears and because he recognizes the satire as such, feels included.

In his influential work, Jon Klancher describes a transformation in the English reading public that took place in the late eighteenth-century from one in which readers and writers might imagine changing places, to one in which the distinction between the two roles becomes quite clear even as the identities of the players cease to be. Citing Arnold Hauser, who describes a state in which books begin to be published for consumption by a “general public completely unknown to the author” and presents this relationship as one that “correspond[s] to the structure of middle class society based on the anonymous circulation of goods” (Klancher 19). The periodical sought to establish a more reciprocal relationship with its public than books could provide as the former allowed for exchanges in the form of letters and contributions from its readers. The authenticity of these contribution is often dubious, which is a key point about periodicals such as the *London Magazine*, they operate in a realm of the dubious, acting as imitations of themselves, creating imaginary situations. Klancher explains that part of the work of the periodical was to construct an audience. Reflecting on the determining effect of audience on letter writing, Manning writes in a letter to Charles Lamb: “I can no more *write* the same thing to two people, than talk the same things to ‘em... I am now writing satire, you see—presently ‘twill be morality, for my friends, to wit, & then Nonsense, *for the choise few!!!*” (109-110). The *London Magazine* demands of Lamb that he establish the illusion of a sympathetic relationship with his audience

that is at least superficially the same as that which he shares with a choice group of friends.

Jonathan Swift gives a similar account of sympathy in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) where he describes it as a resonance that unites a privileged group. We must imagine that he is describing the bond between members of the Scriblerian Club when he writes of “a peculiar string in the harmony of human understanding which, in several individuals, is of exactly the same tuning” (Swift 81). This is the sort of community that the periodical is attempting to establish, but Swift goes on to argue in a shot that seems aimed straight at the heart of the audience-forming project of the periodical, that it is madness for one “to conceive it in his power to reduce the notions of all mankind exactly to the same length, and breadth, and height of his own” (Swift 80).

The author of an “Epistle to Elia,” which also appears in the August 1821 issue of *The London Magazine* describes a longing to commune with Elia. The author describes his desire to sit with Elia in a club-like atmosphere in terms that illustrate the mirroring function of the act: “I would, that eye to eye it were my lot/ To sit with thee, the chafing world forgot”(LM 1821). A sort of narcissism is revealed in this concretized depiction of the act of sympathy. And the author reveals the way that this act functions even later when

...the sun finds us mix'd with common men.
But this brief night remains; a thing to tell
And re-enjoy; a mirth-provoking spell
To call up sympathies in other hours.

Surely this sort of sympathy cannot function if ones constitution makes no distinction between men, let alone things as it makes no sense without setting up

the distinction between the exclusive community and “common men.” But of course this is exactly the sort of letter that Lamb would have sent to his friend and frequent correspondent, Thomas Manning. In fact, the appeal of calling “up sympathies in other hours” recalls Lamb’s first letter to Manning.¹⁰¹ There is something ironic in the author’s desire to sit eye to eye with a fictional character, that is, until one realizes that in this has been achieved through the letter’s insertion into the pages of the *London*.

Charles Lamb was at once acutely aware of and largely resistant to this changing literary market. His relation to writing runs the gamut from one extreme to another. Jane Aaron describes the intensely intimate literary relationship between Charles and Mary Lamb: “they lived together, wrote together, ‘writing on one table’” (Aaron 2). This on the one hand represents the ideal scene of writing: responses are immediate, without delay or distance. Here the writer and the reader are immediately interchangeable. Somewhere slightly outside of the Edenic scene of textual sympathy yet still far removed from the wilderness of an anonymous public audience lies the exchange of letters between Lamb and his close circle of friends: Coleridge, Manning, and Wordsworth.

A theme that runs through many of Charles Lamb’s *Elia* essays is the dependence of a coherent idea of the self on a process of reflective interchange between the writer and an audience. In “Distant Correspondents” Charles Lamb’s literary alter ego, Elia, bemoans the temporal gap in communication that comes

¹⁰¹ Lamb writes: “Will it be agreeable to you, if I occasionally recruit your memory of me, which must else soon fade, if you consider the brief intercourse we have had?” (I.119)

when letters have to travel further. Elia's impatience at delays in "Distant Correspondents" might be seen as an instance of autobiography as it has a corollary in real life. After waiting two weeks for a response from his friend Thomas Manning, with none forthcoming, Lamb impatiently sent another letter, this time in triplicate, demanding to know why his friend had not yet answered. This gives some idea of the importance of these letters to Lamb—but the question is why? The significance of textual exchange might be understood in terms of the idea of sympathy. Lamb's reflections on writing presume the notion put forth by a line of English social philosophers from Shaftesbury through Burke that the self is essentially social. Hume tells us "man is altogether insufficient to support himself," and that we cannot even experience joy unless we share it with another, and as Burke puts it in somewhat more bitter terms, society is what gives us relief from "the positive pain of solitude" (Burke 67). In all cases sympathy is the invisible force that creates community and thereby makes the self in some sense complete. For Lamb sympathy becomes a matter of language. The exchange of written texts: letters, books, magazine articles, serves as the means of producing sympathy. Writer and reader depend on the mediating text to engender a sympathetic relation with the imagined other in order create a sense of community and of completeness.

This point is made clearer when Lamb begins the essay, "My Relations," by ruminating on the inevitability of oblivion. Lamb emphasizes that oblivion comes not with the death of the body, but when one has faded from the memory of one's friends. Once again there is a corollary in Lamb's private writing. In his first letter to Manning, Lamb asks "will it be agreeable to you, if I occasionally recruit your

memory of me, which must else soon fade (I, 164). This view makes clear that the self to some degree exists in the minds, or in the selves, of others. The self then, in the *Elia* essays is something largely constructed through exchanges between an author and his audience. However, delayed exchange is an inevitable characteristic of the printed text and it is dubious indeed whether the sort of sympathetic exchange through writing which has been outlined above can exist once writing enters the market.

The delay in the exchange of letters interrupts the reflective process of sympathetic communion between friends, and prevents their work of self-completion.

A pun is reflected from a friend's face as from a mirror. Who would consult his sweet visnomy, if the polished surface were two or three minutes (not to speak of twelve-months, my dear F.) in giving back its copy?
(Lamb 122)

Sympathy suggests interchangeability—Burke describes it as “a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man” (Burke 70). In the exchange of letters roles switch back and forth, hence Lamb's mirror metaphor. The pun, being what is reflected, itself suggests a double nature; a word that plays on interchangeable meanings. The pun stands metonymically for the interchangeable relationship between writer/readers, and the point that the currency of textual exchange as Lamb moves from epistolary to journalistic writing ceases to be sympathy and becomes money instead. Texts serve as tokens of exchange in what moves from a community to a market of affective identification.

Lamb's public deployments of affective exchange in the setting of the magazine incorporate his private correspondences. Lamb follows up a letter written

to Manning, who was then in China, in which he had exaggerated the sorts of changes his friend could expect to find when he returned home, including the deaths of many of their acquaintances, with the explanation that “A correspondence with the uttermost parts of the world necessarily involves in it some heat of fancy” (I. 358). If Lamb might forge the deaths of friends and acquaintances, then Elia very well might imagine the death of the underlying principles of the *London*. And the motivation might be seen as the same—delayed response. In this case, there can be no response and in a hopelessly non-reciprocal relationship, Lamb resorts to pretending to tear down and distance himself from the project to which he is attached. It is the fancy that is most important—in order to make sympathy work he must construct a fiction, Elia.

Lamb points to a contradiction in the way that sympathy can work in this context of the market oriented periodical. While the ostensible aim of the periodical is to create a sense of the sort of natural sympathy espoused by Swift, it can only really produce the illusion of such, one that is achieved through “some heat of fancy”. Here we should consider the creation of the figure Elia, not only as a rhetorical strategy for the promulgation of sympathy among a faceless public, but as a means for the author to achieve the effects of sympathy as well. In the Elia essays, Lamb simultaneously writes to multiple audiences: distant and near, strange and intimate. In “Distant Correspondents” Elia tells his reader that what is true in one situation does not necessarily hold in another. Something of Lamb’s layered rhetorical strategy can be seen in his letter to Manning: “I mean to confess myself nearer to truth as you come nearer to home.” Most readers will pick up some of

Lamb's hints and see that Elia is not always telling the truth. The nearer the reader is to Lamb, the better equipped he is to read through the fictions, and to see that the lies are really puns.

Just as Lamb's letters depend on his readers picking up on the play of puns, allusions, and irony, the Elia essays connect with readers through to the extent that they get the jokes. If Lamb might be imagined to have a perfect sympathy with any "distant correspondent" it is with Browne.¹⁰² And an elect reader would know that the claim for universal sympathy in *Religio Medici* is troubled quite a bit by Browne's following the passage given to us by Elia with a statement of complete self-sufficiency, which serves to render sympathy dubious. Browne writes: "I am no plant that will not prosper out of a garden. All places, all airs, make unto me one country; I am in England everywhere, and under any meridian." Browne's self-sufficiency could not be further removed from what the reader can see of Charles Lamb, or I should say, of Elia, who explains:

There is an order of imperfect intellects under which mine must be content to rank... The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to, have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive... They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of truth.

(Lamb 68)

Elia confesses to his incompleteness, but his incompleteness is meant to fit like the piece of a jigsaw puzzle into the sympathetic needs of both Lamb and his audience.¹⁰³ Charles Lamb solves the problem of sympathetic completion in the

¹⁰² In fact, a Harvard honors thesis about Lamb's relation to Browne entitled *A Perfect Sympathy* was published in 1937.

¹⁰³ In his volume of Lamb's letters, Alfred Ainger includes a "Sonnet to Elia" written by John Hunter of Craigcrook which had appeared in *Friendship's Offering*, 1832.

periodical market through a pun and a lie, or a pun on a lie. The creation of a fictional figure, standing as an affective mediator present in the text, allows both author and audience to identify with the same figure thereby a sympathetic community is born.

De Quincy asserted that Lamb had “the dramatic intellect and taste, perhaps in perfection,” (“Charles Lamb,” 1848). This brief chapter suggests the appropriateness of De Quincey’s observation on Lamb’s intellect. Lamb was keenly attuned to key issues of theatricality and how they extended to issues of print. His productions in *The London Magazine* create the effect of a “dramatic intellect.” Lamb’s writing explores the importance of situation and immediacy in the exchange of sympathy with the conditions of the literary periodical amplifying the challenges of the dramatist to engage a crowd sympathetically. Lamb’s strategy of constructing a persona in order to achieve sympathy sheds light on the function of the pathetic figures used by Otway, Banks, Gay, and Lillo. These figures create a nexus of affective exchange. Character, in the works of these dramatists functions within a

Thou Gentle Spirit, sweet and pure and kind,
Though strangely witted—“high fantastical”—
Who clothest thy deep feelings in a pall
Of motley hues, that twinkle to the mind,
Half hiding, and yet heightening, what’s enshrined
Within; --who by a power unknown to all
Save thee alone, canst bring up at a call
A thousand seeming opposites, entwined
In wondrous brotherhood—fancy, wild wit,
Quips, cranks, and wanton wiles, with deep sweet thought,
And stinging jests, with honey for the wound;
All blent in intermixture full and fit, --
A banquet for the choicest souls : --can aught
Repay the solace which from thee I’ve found?

situation of pathetic exchange. Like Charles Lamb's, Elia—punning on “a lie,” the pathetic figure was not meant to be a realistic character so much as a fictional construct to facilitate the circulation of sympathy.

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