

**ERRORS AND RECONCILIATIONS: MARRIAGE IN THE PLAYS  
AND EARLY NOVELS OF HENRY FIELDING**

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SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PHD**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK  
ENGLISH AND RELATED LITERATURE  
SEPTEMBER 2013**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Henry Fielding's fascination with marriage, and the importance of the marriage plot in his plays and early novels. Its main argument is twofold: it contends that Fielding presents marriage as symptomatic of moral and social evils on the one hand, and as a powerful source of moral improvement on the other. It also argues that the author imported and adapted the theatrical marriage plot—a key diegetic structure of stage comedies of the early eighteenth century—into his prose fictions. Following the hypothesis that this was his favourite narrative vehicle, as it proffered harmony between form and content, the thesis illustrates the ways in which Fielding transposed some of the well-established dramatic conventions of the marriage plot into the novel, a genre that was gaining in cultural status at the time.

The Introduction provides background information for the study of marriage in Fielding's work, offering a brief historical contextualization of marital laws and practices before the Marriage Act of 1753. Section One presents close readings of ten representative plays, investigating the writer's first discovery of the theatrical marriage plot, and the ways in which he appropriated and experimented with it. The four chapters that compose the second part of the thesis trace the interrelated development of the marriage plot and theatrical motifs in Fielding's early novels, namely *Shamela* (1741), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Jonathan Wild* (1743), and *The Female Husband* (1746).

By drawing attention to the continuities between Fielding's plays and novels, my research challenges the conventional Richardson-Fielding dichotomy, proposing alternative readings that demonstrate that Fielding's novels are more indebted to their author's theatrical past than to the factual, but frequently overstated, rivalry with Samuel Richardson. A key argument, which this thesis offers as an innovative contribution, is that the novel form as moulded by Fielding at mid-century has an explicitly theatrical bearing, which has hitherto not been studied.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was made possible by a scholarship from the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACyT).

My greatest thanks go to my supervisors Emma Major and Richard Rowland for their discerning insights, constructive criticism, and unfaltering interest in this project. Each of them provided wonderful guidance in distinct and most welcome ways; I could not have asked for a better combination of erudition and enthusiasm. I am also very grateful to Alison O'Byrne and Catriona Kennedy, who read and commented on the manuscript at various stages of completion, and provided very useful advice of several kinds. I would also like to thank my examiners, Jennie Batchelor and Harriet Guest, who provided me with invaluable insights for future research.

I must likewise acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to a few amazing scholars from the National Autonomous University of Mexico who introduced me to the world of English literature, put me in a mind to pursue my research interests further, and without whose generous wisdom and encouragement this project would not have emerged in the first place: Nair Anaya, Irene Artigas, Charlotte Broad, Julia Constantino, and Ana Elena González.

Friends on both ends of the Atlantic provided many a happy hour of relaxation and conversation, which made the strenuous PhD life far more enjoyable. Among them I would like to single out Ariadna Molinari, who besides being a very dear friend to me for the past ten years, put her many responsibilities aside to lend a helpful eye to my Introduction, and gave me much-needed reassurance at a crucial moment.

On a more personal note I would like to extend the warmest of thanks to my parents, Luz Amada Santana and Juan Manuel Castro for their love, encouragement, and endless support of every kind imaginable. Heartfelt thanks are also due to Fernando Gamboa, as well as to my grandmas Lolita Carvajal and the late Evangelina Albarrán, who are always in my heart. Gracias.

Finally, in ways too important to condense in a few lines, my partner James helped this whole project come to fruition, and made my life indescribably richer and happier; for this I thank him.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work except where due acknowledgement is given.

Abridged versions of Chapter Five were presented at the “Erotica, Pornography and the Obscene in Europe” Conference at the University of Warwick in April 2013, and at the “Politeness and Prurience: Situating Transgressive Sexualities in the Long Eighteenth Century”, International Conference at the University of Edinburgh in September 2013.



## Introduction

A “Marriage, sir; the usual Reconciler at the End of a Comedy”, is the finale of the political comedy rehearsed within *Pasquin* (1736), one of Henry Fielding’s greatest box-office hits as a dramatist (*Plays* III, III, 284).<sup>1</sup> The humour of the valedictory joke of this celebrated piece lies in the absurdity of closing a play about corrupt electioneering with the unexpected announcement of the impending nuptials of Miss Mayoress and Colonel Promise, characters that had hitherto not been presented as lovers. This played on the fact that, as I explain in more detail on Chapter One, marriage endings were so ubiquitous in the early eighteenth-century English theatre that they amounted to a tacit rule for stage comedies. What Fielding satirised as a cliché in one of his last theatrical productions, however, was also the conclusion he used in all of his regular plays, in his famous courtship novels *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1748-49), as well as in *Jonathan Wild* (1743), and, in a slightly different way, in *Amelia* (1751).<sup>2</sup> As I will show in this thesis, in his plays and early novels Fielding alternated a facetious treatment of marital conflict and structural commonplaces, with earnest disquisitions and storylines in which loving marriage was presented as the logical diegetic closure and the best possible reward for good characters. The five chapters that compose this thesis investigate what at first glance may

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<sup>1</sup> *Pasquin* had a remarkable run of sixty-one performances at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket between 5 March and 26 May 1736. It consists of the mock-rehearsal of two pieces—“The Election”, a comedy, and “The Life And Death of Common Sense”, a tragedy—overseen by two onstage authors, Trapwit and Fustian. As the subtitle announces, the play is “a dramatic satire on the times”, concerned with electioneering and the debasement of culture. For details of production and stage history see Lockwood’s introduction to *Pasquin* (*Plays* III, 229-37).

<sup>2</sup> While in *Amelia* the protagonist is already married at the outset of the story, the novel closes with a short account of their “Uninterrupted Course of Health and Happiness “ in their married life, as a reconciliation with “Fortune”, who makes the couple “large Amends for the Tricks she played them in their Youth” (*Amelia*, XII, ix, 532).

seem an incongruity, offering an account of Fielding's diversified approach to marriage, and exploring in particular the implications this had upon his transition from dramaturgy to novel writing.

Fielding's longstanding fascination with the theme of marriage, and its literary vehicle, the marriage plot, can be traced back to the period between 1728-1737, when he developed his successful career as a London dramatist. In *Love in Several Masques* (1728), his first theatrical production, Fielding began exploring the idea that marriage for love could be the happiest of outcomes. But, as we will see, the author did not always adopt this type of exemplary didacticism, ostensibly modelled on the so-called sentimental plays of the early eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> He sometimes exploited a cynical stance toward matrimony for comical purposes, as in *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735), where a suitor instructs his intended on the ways of fashionable society, in which "hating one another is the chief End of Matrimony" (*Plays* III, I, 113-14). Both his sincere offering of a loving marriage as a reward for good characters, and his ironic depiction of what he saw as the modern debasement of the institution would resurface in his later works.

In *Shamela* (1741), his first published novel, following a similar logic, the artful protagonist assures her mamma that she "shall never care a Farthing for [her] Husband. No, I hate and despise him of all Things" (*Shamela*, 174). Writing "To a Friend on the Choice of His Wife" (1743), however, Fielding solemnly extolls the virtues of good marriage, recommending extreme caution in such an endeavour, for

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<sup>3</sup> I return to the term "sentimental play" in Chapter One.

In other Aims if we should miss the White,  
Reason corrects, and turns us to the Right:  
But here, a Doom irrevocable's past,  
And the first fatal Error proves the last (*Misc. I, 43*).

Similarly, in *Tom Jones* Mr Allworthy, the moral centre of the novel, endorsed “Love” as “the only Foundation of Happiness in a married State”, claiming that “all those Marriages which are contracted from other Motives, are greatly criminal; they are a Profanation of a most holy Ceremony, and generally end in Disquiet and Misery” (*Tom Jones, I, xii, 70-71*). A careful reading of Fielding’s works suggests that his multifarious approach to courtship and domestic conflict amounts to a belief that marriage is a parameter of moral worth and social health, simultaneously a cause of iniquity and a source of redemption; that it can be either the ultimate “State of tranquil Felicity”, as he put it in *Jonathan Wild* (III, viii, 111), or worse than hell itself, as he suggested in *Eurydice* (1736).<sup>4</sup> This notion intriguingly permeates Fielding’s work throughout. On closer inspection, it becomes evident that he turns repeatedly to the marriage plot as the main narrative pattern of his plays and novels.

Marriage has a prominent role in all of Fielding’s prose fictions. In *Shamela* he re-writes the main plot of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) so that the allegedly virtuous heroine is revealed as an artful schemer who manipulates Squire Booby away from his inept attempts to rape her, into a financially advantageous match for herself. *Joseph Andrews* revolves around the courtship of Joseph and Fanny and culminates in their marriage, with a hint of their matrimonial bliss. In *Jonathan Wild*, a novel ostensibly not

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<sup>4</sup> In *Eurydice; or The Devil Henpecked* (1736), when in hell, the eponymous heroine confesses that “it is really so much better to be here than to be married” (*Misc. II, I, 140*).

concerned with romance but with crime, deceit, and politics, the demise of the title character—as I argue in Chapter Four—is essentially dependant on his tampering with the happy marriage of the Heartfrees. Moreover, while the outcome of the protagonist (as of the historic Wild) is death by hanging, the finale of the novel is another happy marriage: that of Heartfree’s eldest daughter and his faithful apprentice Friendly. In his entertainingly bawdy *The Female Husband* (1746) Fielding tells the story of a cross-dressing woman who marries three times, trying to persuade her brides to “have all the Pleasures of Marriage without its inconveniences” (*Female Husband*, 375). In *Tom Jones* not only is the main conflict hinged on the improbability of providing a happy marriage between the destitute Tom and the wealthy Sophia, but the novel itself continuously offers disquisitions on love and matrimony. His final novel *Amelia* is concerned with the depiction of “the various Accidents which befell a very worthy Couple, after their uniting in the State of Matrimony” (*Amelia*, I, i, 15).

Besides the sheer—and at times dizzying—ubiquity of marriage in Fielding’s works, his almost obsessive insistence on matrimonial matters merits closer attention for a number of reasons. Good marriage (and its lack) is consistently offered as an index of morality in his fictional works, and presents a unifying theme through which to explore the famously changeable and contradictory Fielding.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as I explore over the course of this thesis, the writer’s moral and aesthetic ideals repeatedly come together in

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<sup>5</sup> For a recent survey of Fielding’s reputation in his time and ours, which highlights his “jumble of unresolved contradictions” see Robert D. Hume, “Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?”, *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010): 231.

the marriage plot, creating a narrative structure that proffers a harmonious fusion of form and content.

I would like to start with a brief exploration of the concept of the marriage plot. As Lisa O’Connell has recently pointed out, the phrase is often invoked and taken for granted within literary studies. Even though many critics have provided useful discussions about the structure and components of marriage plots—as is the case with Joseph Allen Boone’s *Tradition Counter Tradition* (1987), or Chris Roulston’s more recent *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (2011)<sup>6</sup>—actual definitions are surprisingly sparse. Acknowledging this critical gap, O’Connell glosses it as “any narrative that ends, or almost ends, in a marriage or marriages, and is largely concerned throughout with courtship”.<sup>7</sup> Helpful though it is, this definition can only be applied to courtship narratives, and thus excludes, for instance, all the dramatic pieces contained in *Four Restoration Marriage Plays* (1995), a relevant anthology on the topic that collects together comedies and tragedies revolving around marital discord and not courtship.<sup>8</sup> This second category of marriage plot—that of domestic distress—is also one of the versions of marriage narratives explored by Boone, as well as the type of

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 66-68, and 80-97; Chris Roulston, *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), especially 1-4.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa O’Connell, “Vicars and Squires: Religion and the Rise of the English Marriage Plot”, *The Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation* 52.3-4 (2011): 384.

<sup>8</sup> This anthology, edited by Michael Cordner and Ronald Clayton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), comprises Thomas Otway’s *The Soldier’s Fortune* (1681), Nathaniel Lee’s *The Princess of Cleves* (1681), John Dryden’s *Amphitryon; or The Two Sosias* (1690), and Thomas Southerne’s *The Wives’ Excuse; Or Cuckolds Make Themselves* (1692). It also lists fifty-nine other comedies of the period “in which at least one major plot centres on a marriage in disarray”. Cordner and Clayton, ed. *Four Restoration Marriage Plays*, lix-lx.

storyline that interested Tony Tanner in his important *Adultery in the Novel* (1979).<sup>9</sup>

A broader, and for the purposes of this thesis, more suitable definition, would consider the marriage plot as a storyline revolving around conjugal themes, either focusing on the process of courtship (usually stopping at the threshold of matrimony, with a wedding ceremony and an insinuation of the happiness that will follow), or presenting a moment of crisis in the marriage state (generally involving prospective or consummated adultery), which is resolved at the end. These are the narrative patterns that prove ubiquitous throughout Fielding's dramatic and novelistic career. Of the twenty-eight plays he wrote, only *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* and its afterpiece *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737) do not, strictly speaking, follow a marriage plot, as they are primarily political satires, although they do feature intermittent jokes on love and sex that link sexual, cultural, and political corruption. His novels, as I mentioned above, either revolve around the courtship of their title characters—following the “constant rule, that comedies should end in a marriage” (*The Fathers in Plays* III, V, v, 618)—or focus on the domestic ordeals of married couples, providing a (happy) resolution at the end. The theatricality that permeates the marital motifs of Fielding's novels, moreover, suggests that the marriage plot is a significant bridge between the two main literary genres he pursued.

Finally, a close examination of Fielding's work, with the theme of marriage as guiding thread, can help challenge some stifling critical clichés,

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<sup>9</sup> Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 4-13; and Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition*, 66-68.

such as, for instance, the Richardson-Fielding dichotomy. Critics—both impartially and in an effort to champion one over the other—still hold Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson to be irreconcilable opposites in their contribution to the mid-eighteenth-century English novel. The belief that Fielding wrote not only *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, but also *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, as direct responses to Richardson, is standard critical opinion. Patrick Reilly, for instance, contends that “despite his generous admiration for *Clarissa* [...] Fielding is still criticizing Richardson in *Tom Jones*”.<sup>10</sup> Even such brilliant scholars as Claude Rawson and Ronald Paulson rely excessively on this contentious paradigm. Rawson writes that after *Shamela*, “most of his subsequent fictions, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Tom Jones* (1749), and *Amelia* (1751), pointedly define themselves in relation to Richardson’s work and personality, which stood as a lifelong shadow over Fielding’s shoulder”.<sup>11</sup> Analysing the parallels he sees between Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Paulson argues that “Blifil is in some ways Fielding’s version of *Clarissa*’s Mr Solmes”, and that, as *Tom Jones*’s antagonist is an epitome of self-righteousness, he is also a male version of *Pamela*.<sup>12</sup> More strikingly, Paulson asserts that “the impact” that *Clarissa* had on Fielding “turned him around and led him to produce *Amelia*”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Reilly, *Tom Jones: Adventure and Providence* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Rawson, Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 201 and 259.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 285. In a similar vein, John Sitter advances the weak argument that “in *Amelia* Fielding attempts something like Richardson’s ‘writing to the moment’, even, I believe, to the confusion of his omnisciently providential argument”, while “In *Grandison* Richardson moves toward the temporal and spatial relaxation of Fielding”. What Sitter acknowledges as “exceptions”, however, are revealing: Fielding had done something similar to the “melodramatic” *Amelia* in *Jonathan Wild* and Richardson had attempted the “comedy of manners” of *Grandison* in *Pamela II*. John Sitter, “The Final Novels of Fielding and

Justified though it is in some respects, the perennial comparison of these authors tends to hinder our understanding of their individual agendas and achievements. In my close readings of Fielding's theatre and early novels, and of his adaptation of the marriage plot into his prose fiction, the weakness of this pervasive critical commonplace becomes apparent. Paulson's contention about Pamela and Mr Solmes being basic models for Blifil, for instance, seems to overlook that pairing up prudish and profligate characters is a literary *topos* (especially a theatrical one)—to which Fielding resorted in previous works.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as Linda Bree has rightly pointed out, the juxtaposition of heroes and antiheroes—particularly brothers—as a central element of the plot is a shared feature of Henry and his sister Sarah Fielding's novels, one which they had used for several years before *Clarissa*.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the argument that *Amelia* was the result of *Clarissa* having “turned him around” is unpersuasive if one remembers that Fielding developed clear antecedents to the heroine of his last novel in Lady Bellamant in *The Modern Husband* (1732) and in Mrs Heartfree in *Jonathan Wild*.<sup>16</sup> As these examples suggest, the notion that Fielding and Richardson wrote *solely* in conscious opposition to each other is overstated, and frequently false.

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Richardson”, in *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 190 and 191. Apart from the shift in gender of the protagonists of Fielding and Richardson's last novels, there are few resemblances in style and ideology other than those common to fiction writers of the same historic period.

<sup>14</sup> Examples of this are provided below, in chapters One and Three.

<sup>15</sup> As we will see in Chapter Four, in *Jonathan Wild* (1743) Fielding opposes Wild's flaws to Heartfree's virtues. This is similar to Sarah Fielding's characterization technique at the outset of *David Simple* (1744), in pairing the wicked Daniel to the paragon David. See Linda Bree “Henry and Sarah Fielding: A Literary Relationship”, in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate, a Double Anniversary Tribute*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 155.

<sup>16</sup> This will be further developed in Chapter Four.



As I explore in more detail in Chapters Two and Three, even the explicitly parodic relationship between *Pamela* and *Shamela* is complicated when analysed from the perspective of Fielding's longstanding investment in many of the issues raised by the *Pamela* controversy. While Richardson's first novel indeed acted as a catalyst for Fielding's first incursion into prose fiction, I believe it was also largely a matter of contingency and good timing. The author of *Shamela* was at a financial nadir. He longed for a new literary venture after the Licensing Act of 1737 had thwarted his promising career in drama and his first journalistic project had almost come to an end. The outstanding popularity of *Pamela* suggested that there was a new "Pleasure of the Town", of a kind Fielding had ridiculed and parodied during the last ten years of his career.<sup>17</sup> His farces and burlesques of such entertainments brought Fielding a sizable income throughout the 1730s. Moreover, Richardson's novel featured a variation of the courtship plot that Fielding had both mocked and adopted in his plays. Read from the viewpoint of Fielding's own productions, *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* are not so much negative reactions to Richardson, but continuations of the playwright's previous work, in an alternative literary medium. As this thesis will show, readings across different genres can open new exciting paths for enquiry not only into Fielding's own work, but into broader questions about the development of the modern English novel.

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<sup>17</sup> As will be explained in Chapter One, "The Pleasures of the Town" is a comic puppet show in Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730) in which he mocked the popular entertainments of his time.

## Historical contexts

As the implications of marital regulations and practices in Fielding's time are fundamental to my discussion, I will provide a brief historical contextualization of marriage in the first half of the eighteenth century, followed by a short biographical account of the author's own experience in domestic matters.

### I. Eighteenth-century marriage in England, a brief overview

Matrimony in Fielding's time was a key social institution. From a Christian perspective, it was the only legitimate medium for the exercise of sexuality among all social levels, in theory if not always in practice.<sup>18</sup> In social terms, the married state was perceived as a microcosm of the nation; in Maureen Waller's apt words, it was "a little commonwealth, whose good order would contribute to the whole".<sup>19</sup> Marriage was also a crucial unit of economic organization. According to Lawrence Stone, for the aristocracy, the lower gentry, and the merchant classes, it was "the single most important method for the transmission of property".<sup>20</sup> It is hardly surprising that, for couples belonging to these social strata, unions were carefully calculated to assure the continuity of the male line and the preservation of inherited property, to increase wealth, and to generate useful commercial and political alliances. Lower down the social ladder, marriage and marital stability were also of central importance. As Joanne Bailey's study on marital conflict shows,

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<sup>18</sup> According to Lawrence Stone "there was a high level of prenuptial pregnancy", which does not seem to have been too severely frowned upon so long as actual marriage followed consummation. Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England 1660- 1753* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Maureen Waller, *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery* (London: John Murray, 2009), 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, 15.

household disarray could bring disastrous economic consequences for families of low income, a fact that worried the parish authorities concerned with the administration of poor relief.<sup>21</sup> Broadly speaking, then, a successful marriage was a symbol of prosperity in general, across the social scale.

Marriage in the eighteenth century has sometimes been regarded as primarily a female pursuit.<sup>22</sup> According to some commentators of the period, marrying well was the ultimate aspiration for women. The writer of *An Essay on Modern Gallantry [...] with a Seasonable Admonition to the Ladies of Great Britain*, for example, introduces his disquisition on the importance of female modesty casually declaring that “it will not be thought any Affront to suppose that the chief Aim and leading Passion of every young Lady in *Great Britain* is to get herself a *good Husband* [...] you do not, generally speaking, think yourselves perfectly happy till you are *married*”.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as Marcia Pointon has shown, weddings and engagements were occasions for portraiture for wealthy women, just as the Grand Tour was a favourite event to be visually recorded for elite men.<sup>24</sup> However, as historians have pointed out in recent years, marrying and having children were also aspirations for eighteenth-century men. According to Amanda Vickery, a man’s family and the successful management of his household were displays of power and competence in society. In that sense, marrying a suitable bride and running a harmonious

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<sup>21</sup> Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), quotation from 31.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the first item in Stone’s notorious list of ten commandments for historians of women: “Thou shalt not write about women except in relation to men and children. Women are not a distinct caste, and their history is a story of complex interactions”. “Only Women”, *The New York Review of Books* 32.6 (11 April 1985): 21.

<sup>23</sup> Anon., *An Essay upon Modern Gallantry, Addressed to Men of Honour, Men of Pleasure, and Men of Sense. With A Seasonable Admonition to the Ladies of Great Britain* (London: A. More, 1726), 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

home were confirmations of his masculinity.<sup>25</sup> As illustrated in the self-explanatorily titled pair of prints *The Pleasures of a Married State* and *The Miseries of a Single Life* (c.1774) (figures 1 and 2), in a society still profoundly shaped by Christian values, marriage was recommended as an ideal state for both men and women, as well as their offspring.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 8-10, see also Chapter 2, "Men Alone". See also Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, "Childless Men in Early Modern England", *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 158-183.

<sup>26</sup> For a wide-ranging collection of eighteenth-century prints illustrating the gratifications and pitfalls of conjugal life see Jennifer Ramkalawon, ed. *Love and Marriage* (London: British Museum Press), 2009.



Figure 1. Anon., *The Pleasures of a Married State*,  
c. 1774  
©Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 2. Anon., *The Miseries of a Single Life*,  
c. 1774  
©Trustees of the British Museum

The history of marriage and the family in the eighteenth century has received much recent critical attention. In the 1970s, influential family historians including Lawrence Stone, Edward Shorter, and Randolph Trumbach argued that marriage had undergone a dramatic shift between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. According to them, it had passed from being an essentially mercenary institution, with marked detachment between spouses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to a smaller nucleus of interaction with an “intensified affective bonding [...] at the expense of neighbours and kin”, around the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The change was mainly attributed to improvements in living conditions and ideological developments that generated a tendency toward affective individualism. They used the phrase “companionate marriage” to refer to this alleged increased interest in love and friendship among eighteenth-century couples. For Stone, Fielding’s *Tom Jones* provided an apposite illustration of the shifting views of marriage at mid-century, with Allworthy’s opinions on the matter, quoted above, representing the “companionate marriage”, and the Westerns’ insistence that Sophia choose Blifil to bring together the biggest estates of Somerset epitomising the “old” view of mercenary marriage.<sup>28</sup>

These claims have been contested and qualified in more recent studies. In the 1980s, historians of the early modern period such as Keith

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), quotation from 22. Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976); and Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), present a similar argument.

<sup>28</sup> Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 187-88. For Stone’s complete discussion of this ideology see his Chapter 8, “The Companionate Marriage”.

Wrightson and Ralph Houlbrooke argued that excessive pursuit of material gain through marriage had also been regarded as undesirable and old-fashioned in previous centuries. Moreover, they pointed out that marriageable youths did not necessarily base their choice exclusively on attraction and love. Their work drew attention to the heterogeneous nature of marital behaviour—noticeable even among members of the same family—which was largely dependent on gender, and matters of inheritance.<sup>29</sup> In recent decades, the contentious account of an abrupt transition from mercenary and cold marital relationships to more affectionate interactions between spouses has been replaced by case studies and more closely focused analyses, which seek to illustrate the tensions and contradictions inherent in such notions as the companionate marriage and domesticity.<sup>30</sup> Yet, the idea that sex, marriage, and the family underwent an important process of change over the long eighteenth century is still commonly accepted,<sup>31</sup> and Stone's work can still be a useful reference for the history of marriage, and it is indeed used as such, in literary studies.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The most notable proponents of these arguments are Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); and Ralph A Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (New York: Longman, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> For example: William Horne, *Making a Heaven of Hell* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1993); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson Education, revised edition, 2002); Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*.

<sup>31</sup> Two recent examples are Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012). As Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster aptly put it, "in his selective use of sources, Stone was less than a model historian, but his hypothesis about the evolution of the modern family has proved to be 'good to think with'". Introduction to *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Berry and Foyster, 8.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 207, 254n27; Mary Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses* (London: National Maritime Museum Publishing, 2007), 25; Roulston, *Narrating Marriage*, 6n29.

A point on which historians generally agree is the instability of marital regulations and practices before the Marriage Act of 1753.<sup>33</sup> Until this bill was introduced at mid-century, marital conventions in England and Wales largely followed medieval practices.<sup>34</sup> There were notorious incongruities between ecclesiastical law, common law, and personal belief, which sometimes generated confusion between the betrothal and the actual marriage, and allowed for a number of irregular practices. According to Stone, until the mid-eighteenth century there were three different ways of entering into the married state: official marriages, contract marriages, and clandestine marriages.<sup>35</sup> An official marriage was the one validated both by common and ecclesiastical law. It comprised a written legal contract concerning finances and property, the proclamation of banns for three subsequent services—or the purchasing of an official licence—and a public ceremony in church, performed by an ordained priest in front of witnesses, during canonical hours. A contract marriage consisted in the declaration of espousals, or vows, which could be *per verba de futuro*—an oral pledge to marry in the future—or *per verba di presente*, a paradigmatic performative

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<sup>33</sup> A notable exception is Rebecca Probert, who argues that the Marriage Act was not necessarily a watershed in the history of marriage. According to Probert, clandestine marriages and other irregular matches were not as common as historians usually describe them. See *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> For Catholic countries, the Council of Trent in 1563 marked the beginning of stricter regulations on weddings. It was henceforth decreed that only marriages celebrated by priests in consecrated venues could be considered valid in the eyes of the Church. However, as the Church of England had rejected any link with Rome following the Reformation, although ceremonies in church were preferred, until the late seventeenth century the mere declaration of matrimonial vows before witnesses was widely recognized as a valid form of solemnization. Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, 79-80.

<sup>35</sup> The account that follows is based on Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 29-34; and *Uncertain Unions*, 15-32. Unless otherwise stated, Stone's views represent current standard opinion on the subject.



utterance, which carried out the action as it declared it.<sup>36</sup> According to Jacob Giles's *New Law-Dictionary* (1729)

if a Ring be solemnly delivered by a Man, and put on the Woman's Fourth Finger; if she accepts and wears it, without any Words, the Parties are presumed to have mutually consented to *Marriage*.<sup>37</sup>

Although Rebecca Probert has recently argued that contract marriages were not, for legal purposes, actual marriages, her study suggests that such promises and rituals did play a significant role in social practice, as uneducated people (particularly women) could be seduced under false assurances of the validity of a contract marriage, and abandoned afterwards.<sup>38</sup>

Lastly, a clandestine marriage<sup>39</sup> was that performed by a "man who at least purported to be a clergyman", following the rituals prescribed by the *Book of Common Prayer*, but which failed to comply with one or more of the requirements.<sup>40</sup> These types of ceremonies did not need to occur in a licensed church, could be held at any time of the day or night, did not require either banns or regular licence, and, more importantly, despite their illegal nature, in matters of property they were as binding in common law as official

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<sup>36</sup> See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered in Harvard University in 1955*, Second Edition, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 6-7, 12-13, and passim.

<sup>37</sup> "Marriage" in, Jacob Giles, *A New Law-Dictionary: Containing, the Interpretation and Definition of Words and Terms Used in the Law; and Also the Whole Law, and the Practice Thereof, Under all the Heads and Titles of the Same* (London: E. and R. Nutt, and R. Gosling, 1729), 455.

<sup>38</sup> Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, 26, and 34-35.

<sup>39</sup> The terms "clandestine marriage", "irregular marriage", and "informal marriage" are used as if synonymous by modern historians, but, as Probert has pointed out, the only term used in the eighteenth century was "clandestine". Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, 7-8. See also R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500-1850* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1990), 96.

marriages.<sup>41</sup> As Stone points out, there were several reasons why clandestine marriages proved so attractive: they were generally less expensive than regular marriages and considerably faster; no parental consent was required (which made them a good option in case of disagreement between families); and, since no banns were read, they were suitable for couples seeking privacy.<sup>42</sup> There were many unlicensed churches and places where clandestine marriages were routinely performed, such as St. James's Duke Place and St. Marylebone, but eighteenth-century accounts and modern historians coincide in their assessment of the Fleet debtor's prison as the clandestine venue *par excellence*.<sup>43</sup> According to Stone, early in the century it was even common to find advertisements in the vicinity of the Fleet inviting passers-by to get married within.<sup>44</sup> John June's set of prints *A Fleet Wedding Between a Brisk Young Sailor & his Landlady's Daughter at Rederiff* (1747) and *The Sailor's Fleet Wedding Entertainment* (1747) (figures 3 and 4), exemplify the popularity of such ceremonies, especially among the lower classes.

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<sup>41</sup> Although these marriages were not legal, since for resolving disputes concerning property the common law only required that a priest had witnessed the union, clandestine marriages carried weight in this, the most important legal aspect of marriage. For a detailed discussion on the subject see Roger Lee Brown, "The Rise and Fall of Fleet Marriages", in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. R.B. Outhwaite (London: Europa, 1981), 117-36, esp. 118.

<sup>42</sup> Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, 24-25.

<sup>43</sup> According to Brown, between 1694 and 1754 "between two and three hundred thousand marriages were solemnized within the Fleet prison and its rules". "The Rise and Fall of Fleet Marriages", 117. For an extensive collection of eighteenth-century examples of Fleet marriages see John Ashton, *The Fleet, Its River, Prison, and Marriages* (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1888), Chapter XXVI, "Fleet Marriages".

<sup>44</sup> Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 32.



Figure 3. John June, *A Fleet Wedding Between a Brisk Young Sailor & his Landlady's Daughter at Rederiff*, 1747  
©Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 4. John June, *The Sailor's Fleet Wedding Entertainment*, 1747  
©Trustees of the British Museum

While Stone's account and June's prints provide an amusing caricature of the sordidness of such matches, as Probert has observed, there was a wide variety of marriages that were considered clandestine:

at one end of the spectrum there were the more disreputable couplings celebrated within the rules of the Fleet prison; at the other, there were marriages actually celebrated in church that were only clandestine in that they did not comply with all the requirements of the canon law.<sup>45</sup>

Between those two extremes were all the weddings that did not observe any of the specifications of official marriages. Strictly speaking, then, a ceremony performed in a private house by a clergyman, or in church but at unseasonable hours, was as clandestine as a Fleet marriage. In social practice, however, they had different degrees of respectability. For example, the marriage that Mr B. proposes to Pamela in Richardson's first novel, to be performed "within these Fourteen Days, from this Day, at this House", hovers on the fringes of irregularity, which is why the protagonist has reservations about its validity. Her religious beliefs moreover lead her to insist that the "*Holy Rite*" should be held at a "*Holy Place*". When Mr B. concedes that it be performed at his "own little Chapel", Pamela happily accepts, after having casually enquired whether "it has been consecrated".<sup>46</sup> Mr B., however, prefers this type of ceremony for the sake of discretion, not only as he fears that his sister or his friends could frustrate his plans, but also because, as Stone has argued, it was customary for the upper classes to have more private marriages.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, 166.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 276 and 277.

<sup>47</sup> Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 102.

Lord Hardwicke's *Act for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriages* in England and Wales (approved in 1753, enforced on March 25, 1754) put a halt to irregular marriages by decreeing that only official weddings be considered valid for all legal purposes. After the passing of the bill, nuptials had to be performed exclusively in authorised churches, during canonical hours, in a parish where at least one of the contracted parties claimed residence. It also made either three-week banns or dispensation licences absolutely necessary, and stipulated the need for parental approval for persons under twenty-one. Finally, it contemplated the severe punishment of fourteen-year transportation to the American colonies for clergymen who persisted in practising illegal marriages.<sup>48</sup> In the end, the Act was not entirely infallible, for it did not apply to Scotland, so that, for many couples, eloping to the North became an easy, if not very cheap, alternative. After 1754, Gretna Green, the nearest town across the border, replaced the Fleet as a byword for clandestine marriage.<sup>49</sup> Although the implementation of the new law was highly controversial, for practical purposes it brought order and coherence to the laws of marriage, as it finally bridged the gap between civil and religious legislation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> 26 Geo c. 33. *An Act for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriages* (London: Thomas Baskett, Printer to the King's most Excellent Majesty, 1755), 471-474.

<sup>49</sup> After 1754, several plays and novels featured elopements across the border, including David Garrick and George Coleman's *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), and Frances Burney's *Camilla* (1796). For an extensive list of works depicting such elopements see Lisa O'Connell, "Gretna Green Novels", in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 476-81.

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed analysis of debates over the Marriage Act in the eighteenth century see David Lemmings, "Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century: Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753", *Historical Journal* 39.2 (1996): 339-360. For the main lines of modern debate about the impact of the Marriage Act see Eve Tavor Bannet, "The Marriage Act of 1753: 'A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex'", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30.3 (Spring 1997): 242-43; and Rebecca Probert, "The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753: Was it really 'A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex'?", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.2 (Winter 2005): 247-62.

While marrying before the Marriage Act of 1753 was relatively easy, divorce as we understand it nowadays was practically non-existent. As Stone has pointed out, separation of bed and board without right to remarry could be granted by civil courts, on the grounds of adultery or extreme cruelty.<sup>51</sup> However, as adultery was predominantly a male prerogative, and cruelty was a notoriously elusive term,<sup>52</sup> few people actually resorted to this option, and when they did, they had little chance of winning. Separation by private deed was another alternative for dissolving failed marriages, for couples of moderate income that could afford it. In these cases the couple agreed to live apart, the husband assured his wife an allowance and, in return, she indemnified him against suit by creditors.<sup>53</sup> Although in theory this amounted to a tacit permission to take a new consort, as Stone observes, this clause was not actually established by any law.<sup>54</sup> Full divorce could only be acquired by very wealthy men, by means of a private Act of Parliament, and it was extremely rare.<sup>55</sup> Although it has sometimes been suggested that the very poor resorted to unorthodox ways such as wife selling, others such as Anne Laurence have argued that wife sales were “a curiosity rather than a numerically significant phenomenon”.<sup>56</sup> In summary, as Joanne Bailey has demonstrated, among the middle and lower classes marital breakdown over the course of the eighteenth century was essentially of two kinds: consensual

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<sup>51</sup> Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 33-34.

<sup>52</sup> For a useful discussion of the semantic and legal instability of terms associated with violence and cruelty see Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. 39-46.

<sup>53</sup> On this type of separation see Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed account of parliamentary divorce see Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 301-46.

<sup>56</sup> According to Anne Laurence “only sixteen recorded sales took place before 1760 in England”. *Women in England, 1500-1760: A Social History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1994), 54.

separation (often temporary), and unilateral desertion, neither of which was socially encouraged.<sup>57</sup> For the majority of the population real divorce remained unattainable until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.<sup>58</sup>

The importance of marriage for matters of inheritance and sexuality, alongside its easy availability (and legal instability) before the Marriage Act of 1753, contrasted to its virtual indissolubility at a time when divorce was nearly inaccessible, often caused matrimony to be perceived as an extremely dangerous venture. The paradox of an institution that was crucial, and at the same time remarkably easy to enter into but almost impossible to leave, underpins Fielding's earnest guidelines to his friend "On the Choice of his Wife", and indeed his almost obsessive concern with marriage in his plays and novels. If, as Tony Tanner has argued, the "narrative urgency" of literature often comes from "an energy that threatens to contravene that stability of the family on which society depends",<sup>59</sup> the tensions inherent in the possibility of an unfortunate marital choice—"the first fatal Error" as Fielding put it—rendered narratives of courtship particularly attractive before the Divorce Act of 1857, and the more so before the Marriage Act of 1753.

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<sup>57</sup> Joanne Bailey has argued that in most of the cases separation was granted so as to provide a truce for the couple, with the hope that the marriage resumed at a later stage. *Unquiet Lives*, 30-60, especially 30-32.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed account of the events and debates leading to the Divorce Act 1857 see Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 368-82. As Elizabeth Foyster points out, the Divorce Act was still not fully effective, and favoured men. In theory it was available for everyone, but it could only be solicited on the grounds of adultery. Definite divorce was not always granted. Depending on the reason presented at the divorce suit, the court could choose to approve full divorce—with right to remarry—or simply grant separation of bread and board. See Foyster, *Marital Violence*, "Conclusion: The Divorce Act and its Consequences", esp. 236-37.

<sup>59</sup> Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel*, 4.

## II. Fielding and marriage

On a personal level, Fielding's own wide experience in domestic matters no doubt influenced his interest in and approach to marriage. His parents, Sarah Gould and Colonel Edmund Fielding, had married against the wishes of his maternal grandparents, and it is possible that the couple had eloped to Ireland to avoid detection.<sup>60</sup> After the death of his mother, when Henry was ten years old, his father married a Catholic widow who had several children by her first husband; it was a match of which Henry's maternal relatives openly disapproved. Henry, his four younger sisters and a two-year-old brother were left to the care of his maternal grandmother, Lady Sarah Gould, and her sister, Katherine Cottington. Fearing that her son-in-law would raise the children as Catholics, Lady Gould brought a suit against him in the chancery courts, fighting for the legal custody of Henry and his siblings. This dispute, which took over a year before resulting in a favourable verdict for Lady Gould, appears to have been particularly vicious. According to Martin C. Battestin, the records of servants and relatives testifying for and against the members of the Fielding family offer a "disturbing impression of the enmity that poisoned the atmosphere in the household".<sup>61</sup> This grim episode of his life provided Fielding with first-hand knowledge about the legally tangled domestic quarrels that he depicted so vividly in his plays and novels. Eight years later, Edmund became a widower again, and soon remarried. Shortly

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<sup>60</sup> The most thoroughly researched biography of Fielding to date is that by Martin Battestin and Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989). The account that follows is primarily based on that volume. For the courtship of Fielding's parents see 10-12; for the domestic strife and legal suit that followed the death of his mother see 16-23, and 30-34.

<sup>61</sup> Martin C. Battestin, "Fielding, Henry (1707-1754)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9400>> [accessed 6 June 2013].



after his third wife died, in March 1741, the sixty-one-year-old Edmund Fielding, now a general, contracted nuptials for the fourth, and last time, with a woman believed to have been his servant.<sup>62</sup> This certainly must have rendered the public celebration of the plotline of *Pamela* (1740, second edition 14 February 1741) particularly irritating for Henry. His sneers at the foolish Squire Booby in *Shamela* (2 April 1741) may have been motivated, at least to an extent, by his father's latest indiscretion.

Henry Fielding also had personal experience of the vicissitudes of romantic life, and the venal considerations of the marriage market. When he was eighteen years old, he tried to elope with an heiress from Lyme Regis, where he was visiting after graduating from Eton. The thwarted elopement resulted in a street fight; Fielding's footman was imprisoned and he narrowly escaped. His intended was eventually forced to marry one of her rich cousins.<sup>63</sup> This incident probably registered in his warnings against elopement in his plays, as will be shown in Chapter One, and in his general aversion for mercenary matches. In 1734 he married Charlotte Cradock, whom he would describe as the person "from whom I draw all the solid Comfort of my Life" (*Misc. I*, 13). They were married for ten years and had five children. Only one survived to adulthood.<sup>64</sup>

After the demise of Charlotte, he shared a house with his younger sister, the novelist Sarah Fielding (1710-1768), with whom he established a

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<sup>62</sup> Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 300-1.

<sup>63</sup> For this episode see Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 49-51.

<sup>64</sup> His daughter Henrietta Eleanor, who was born in 1743, lived until 1766. See Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 617.

fruitful literary collaboration.<sup>65</sup> Even before they lodged together, Sarah had arguably supplied the letter “from Leonora to Horatio” in Henry’s *Joseph Andrews*, and the fictional autobiography of Ann Boleyn in her brother’s *A Journey from this World to the Next* (*Misc. II*, 1743).<sup>66</sup> He provided a preface for the second edition of Sarah’s first novel, *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), along with several alterations to the text itself.<sup>67</sup> In the preface he wrote for Sarah’s *Familiar Letters Between the Principal Characters in David Simple* (1747), Henry praised the literary qualities of his sister, acknowledging her “True Genius”, and declaring that “sensible Writers of [her] Sex” had talents inaccessible to men, especially when writing about women.<sup>68</sup> Fielding’s close relationship with his wife Charlotte, his sister Sarah, and his second cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (the dedicatee of his first play, with whom he collaborated in some early satires and exchanged letters on literary matters) seem to have rendered him more aware of the intellectual capacities of women, and more sensible to the difficulties with which the double standards of his time presented them.<sup>69</sup>

Sarah moved out of Henry’s house in 1746, when he married Mary Daniel, his cook maid, who was pregnant with his child. With the benefit of

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<sup>65</sup> On the collaborations of Sarah and Henry see Linda Bree, “Henry and Sarah Fielding”, in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754)*, ed Rawson, 145-172. For a short biographical account of Sarah Fielding see Clive Probyn, “Fielding, Sarah (1710–1768)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9405>> [accessed 6 June 2013].

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of evidence supporting these attributions see *Misc. II*, xxxiv-xxxvi and 113.

<sup>67</sup> For Henry Fielding’s preface and additions to his sister’s first novel see *The Adventures of David Simple* and *Volume the Last*, ed. Peter Sabor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), Appendices I and II, 343-66.

<sup>68</sup> Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters Between the Principal Characters in David Simple*, in *Two Volumes* (London: printed for the author, 1747), “Preface”, 2-20, quotations from xv.

<sup>69</sup> For an example of his depiction of the double standard of class for women see my discussion of *The Welsh Opera* in Chapter One. There I also provide some examples of Fielding’s relationship with Lady Mary.

hindsight, it is highly ironic that the author of *Shamela*, who had claimed that *Pamela* taught servant maids “that if the Master is not a Fool, they will be debauched by him; and that if he is a Fool they will marry him” ended up first debauching and then marrying his own servant (*Shamela*, 158). Fielding’s contemporaries, however, seem to have been more eager to highlight the irony that he had followed in his father’s footsteps,<sup>70</sup> and to comment on his breach of decorum in having married below his class.<sup>71</sup> Ironies notwithstanding, Fielding chose marriage to his servant over bastardy for the children of this union, two of whom lived to adulthood and followed respectable professions.<sup>72</sup> Fielding’s diverse experiences in matrimonial matters and domestic conflict would have informed his strong views on the subject of marriage as a reflection of moral value. The marriage plot of his plays and novels allowed him to rationalize and idealize what he knew had important repercussions in real life.

### Critical contexts

After a long period of neglect, Fielding’s theatre has at last begun to gain critical attention in recent decades. In the late 1980s Peter Lewis, Albert

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<sup>70</sup> In *Old England* (24 September 1748) a poem maliciously remarked that “The Kitchen Maid is coupl’d with the *Squire*,/Who copy’d that for which he curs’d his Sire”. “Scurro, Devil in Ordinary to the Press, to ‘Squire Trotploid, Informer-Extraordinary Against it” *Old England*, no. 229 (24 September 1748): 1212 <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/5880549?accountid=15181>> [accessed 6 June 2013].

<sup>71</sup> In an earlier number of *Old England*, a writer concluded a lengthy slander on Fielding by remarking that he and his wife had been denied admission to a box at the theatre because “the Boxkeeper had the audacity” of denying “his conjugal Capacity, by averring she was his *Maid*”. “Untitled Item” *Old England*, no. 208 (23 April 1748): 1084, <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/5890146?accountid=15181>> [accessed 6 June 2013]. In *Peregrine Pickle* (only in the first edition of 1751) Tobias Smollett mocked the lowly “Spondy”—a fictional nickname for Fielding—who was “inclined to marry his own cook-wench”. *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, ed., James L. Clifford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), IV, 660.

<sup>72</sup> William became a lawyer and a magistrate like his father, and Allen studied at Oxford to become a clergyman. See Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 618.

Rivero, and Robert Hume wrote the first—and, apart from biographical approaches, still the only—comprehensive examinations of Fielding’s plays, which drew attention to the importance of his contribution to eighteenth-century drama. Lewis examined Fielding as a major practitioner and innovator of burlesque.<sup>73</sup> Hume’s historical survey helped situate Fielding’s work in the context of English theatre in the late 1720s and 1730s.<sup>74</sup> Rivero’s close readings of individual plays demonstrated that Fielding “was not [...] writing plays with novelistic features”, and that his was a prosperous career well before he began writing novels.<sup>75</sup> The work of these critics laid a foundation for further study by acquainting readers with texts that were, and to a great extent still remain, obscure. Their analyses are invaluable for scholarship on Fielding and early eighteenth-century theatre. However, since they were breaking new ground, these studies omitted a number of crucial themes. Such is the case with Fielding’s handling of marriage plots. Hume and Lewis generally discard Fielding’s intriguing concern with marriage, as they estimate his treatment of domestic issues to be fairly standard and little more than an excuse for developing more interesting arguments. While Rivero does suggest that there is a genuine interest in portraying the intricacies of love and marriage, even in Fielding’s most imitative early plays, his study is not concerned with exploring the broader implications of Fielding’s discovery of the marriage plot as a highly effective medium for moral and social scrutiny.

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Lewis, *Fielding’s Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987).

<sup>74</sup> Robert Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre 1728-1737* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>75</sup> Albert Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding: A Critical Study of His Dramatic Career* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), quotation from x.

Although studies of Fielding's novels have sometimes dealt with marriage, particularly in *Tom Jones*, and occasionally in *Amelia*, the relevance of this theme to that author's *oeuvre* is still underestimated.<sup>76</sup> The only book-length study on this topic is Murial Brittain Williams's *Marriage: Fielding's Mirror of Morality* (1973). Valuable though it is in offering some insightful close readings of matrimonial motifs in Fielding's novels, especially in *Amelia*, this work is essentially dated. It is also necessarily limited, as it did not benefit from later critical tools, such as the thoroughly researched compilation of Fielding's complete plays, edited by Thomas Lockwood (2004-2011), or the ground-breaking studies of Fielding's dramatic career mentioned above. Significantly, Williams is generally dismissive of Fielding's theatrical productions. As she considers the plays to be "so completely formalized" within "the basic patterns in the Restoration love-game comedy", she believes that they "require no detailed analysis, play by play", and thus focuses only on *The Modern Husband*.<sup>77</sup> Her exploration of gender relations is similarly reductive and it tends to be frustratingly conservative (*The Female Husband*, for instance, is disappointingly absent from her discussion). Although I find a reviewer's assessment of Williams's work as "an

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<sup>76</sup> Studies approaching the topic of marriage as part of a broader discussion of Fielding's works include George A. Drake, "Historical Space in the 'History of': Between Public and Private in *Tom Jones*", *ELH* 66.3 (1999): 707-37; and Tiffany Potter, *Georgian Libertinism and the Plays and Novels of Henry Fielding* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1999). Three essays in *Henry Fielding in Our Time*, ed. J.A. Downie (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) explore matters of love and marriage in the major novels: Scott Black, "The Adventures of Love in *Tom Jones*", 27-50; George A. Drake, "Ritual in *Joseph Andrews*", 133-46; and Christina Lupton, "Marriage as a Literary Problem in Fielding's *Amelia*", 287-302. Two seminal studies on Fielding's plays and novels, which have suggested the importance of man-woman relationships in his *oeuvre* are Angela Smallwood's *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate 1700-1750* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); and Jill Campbell's *Natural Masques*.

<sup>77</sup> Murial Brittain Williams, *Marriage: Fielding's Mirror of Morality* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1973), quotation from 24.

insignificant book which says virtually nothing about an important topic”<sup>78</sup> rather unfair, I do believe that the study leaves a number of intriguing points insufficiently investigated. My thesis, then, seeks to make a timely contribution to an arena of Fielding studies that has been neglected.

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The aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which the plays and early novels of Henry Fielding engaged with the institution of marriage, and its literary expression, the marriage plot. The main argument is twofold: that Fielding presented marriage not only as symptomatic of moral and social evils, but also as a potential agent in their redemption; and that he imported and adapted the conventions of the theatrical marriage plot into his prose fiction. As I explore in more detail in Chapter Two, in this transposition we can see the compromise Fielding sought to achieve between tradition and novelty, as the theatre had a classical pedigree of respectability, while the medium of prose fiction provided a fertile ground for experimentation.

The thesis is divided in two sections. The first, containing one long chapter, focuses on Fielding’s theatrical production between 1728 and 1737. The second, consisting of four chapters, features contextualized close readings of Fielding’s novels before *Tom Jones*, starting with *Shamela* (1741) and ending with *The Female Husband* (1746). A longer study would perhaps want to pay close attention to all of Fielding’s novels including *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, but this thesis is restricted by space and time limitations to a more modest scope. Moreover, I have sought to privilege more obscure works,

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<sup>78</sup> Douglas Brooks, “Review of *Marriage: Fielding’s Mirror of Morality*, by Murial Brittain Williams”, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 7 (1977): 265.

which have not been studied sufficiently, as is the case with the plays, *The Female Husband*, and *Jonathan Wild*. It has also been one of my aims to provide unconventional readings of well-known pieces like *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, by exploring them from a perspective other than as responses to Richardson's *Pamela*. Connections are made, however, between the plays, the early novels, and the later novels whenever pertinent. In the chapter on *Jonathan Wild*, for instance, I include a brief discussion of the romantic subplot of the Heartfrees as an interesting antecedent to Amelia and Will Booth.

Chapter One features an examination of Fielding's nine-year dramatic career, concentrating on ten representative plays. It explores the author's first discovery of the theatrical marriage plot, and the ways in which he appropriated and experimented with it. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the London stage of the 1720s, as a context for understanding Fielding's response to the perceived stagnation of early eighteenth-century theatre. It then points out at the intriguing convention of having a marriage finale as a tacit rule for stage comedies in Fielding's time. Departing from these contexts, the rest of the chapter traces the development of Fielding's interest in the social aspects of marriage and the literary possibilities that the marriage plot provided. Throughout this section I argue that Fielding gradually steers away from the expediency that the standard courtship plot afforded, making it an integral part of his writing experiments. In the conclusion of the chapter I point to some of the tensions inherent in Fielding's paradoxical rejection of the sentimental mode employed by Cibber

and Steele earlier in the century, and his aspiration to become a cultural and moral judge as a playwright.

Section Two follows the argument that Fielding transposed some key conventions of the theatrical marriage plots of his time into his novels. The chapters of this section trace the development of theatrical motifs in Fielding's early novels, namely *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *The Female Husband*. Chapter Two explores the transition between the theatre and prose fiction, providing a brief introduction to some of the historical and ideological changes operating behind it. It examines the possibilities that prose fiction offered Fielding in the early 1740s, which rendered it an attractive genre through which to relaunch his writing career after the Licensing Act of 1737 had effectively put him out of business. It then provides a short background for Fielding's new concerns, including the popularity of the Methodist movement, and his new approach to legal matters. Finally it offers a rationale for applying the term "novel" to his early works of prose fiction.

In Chapter Three I contend that Fielding's response to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* is to a great extent driven by the former's concern with what he saw as a simultaneous degradation of cultural standards and morals, which had been a powerful drive behind his dramatic experiments. The chapter explores theatrical aspects of *Shamela*, which respond not only to the contents of Richardson's text, but, more importantly, to the media phenomenon it provoked. It argues that the vogue for *Pamela*, along with the publication of Cibber's autobiography and the rising popularity of Methodism provided Fielding with an opportune excuse to return to the themes that had



interested him as a playwright. As this suggests, the chapter challenges the Richardson-Fielding dichotomy, and offers an alternative reading of the domestic plots of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, considering them as independent novels that are more indebted to their author's theatrical past than to the factual, but frequently overstated, rivalry with Richardson. The second section of the chapter explores the marriage ceremony at the end of *Joseph Andrews* as Fielding's implementation of what he regarded as a felicitous merging of form and content: a proper marriage ceremony of a virtuous couple, as the adequate finale of his "comic epic poem in prose".

Chapter Four draws attention to the significance of the domestic subplots in *Jonathan Wild*, a work that has usually been analysed from the perspective of its equation of heroes, criminals, and tyrannical national leaders, which is often interpreted as either a direct or veiled satire on Walpole's corrupt administration. As my reading reveals, the novel's moral message, and even the structure of its plot, are both greatly dependent upon Jonathan Wild's tampering with the idealized marriage of the Heartfrees. The amorous subplots of this novel, moreover, suggest an intriguing link both with the stage and with Fielding's last and bleakest novel, *Amelia*.

Looking at a prurient piece of prose fiction entitled *The Female Husband*, which Fielding published anonymously in 1746, the last chapter of the thesis explores a more whimsical—and largely unfamiliar—side of the author. This sensationalist, semi-pornographic fictionalization of a newspaper report about a female transvestite who married three different women before being discovered and convicted under a clause on the laws of vagrancy, accommodates the conventions of criminal biographies within a

bizarre version of a marriage plot. Although the text has been unanimously acknowledged to be his for the past five decades, it has not yet found its place in the Fielding canon. In my chapter I explore the ways in which the writer played with the conventions of rogue lives and comic marriage plots, to produce a piece that in spite of its defiance of decorum and its light-hearted contemplation of various social transgressions, ultimately offers a conservative defence of heterosexual matrimony.

In titling this thesis “Errors and Reconciliations” I have sought to highlight Fielding’s diverse approach to marriage in his works, alluding to what he perceived as the “first fatal Error” that could condemn one to a lifetime of unhappiness—as in his didactic poem “To a Friend on the Choice of his Wife” (*Misc.* I, 43)—as well as to that “usual Reconciler at the End of a Comedy” (*Plays* III, III, 284), to which he so frequently resorted, both for comic and serious purposes, in his plays and novels.

## Section I

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### Chapter 1. Fielding's staging of marriage, 1728-1737

Although he is now mainly remembered as a novelist, Henry Fielding was a prolific dramatic author, writing twenty-eight plays in total, twenty-five over a span of nine years. As Thomas Lockwood, editor of the only modern compilation of Fielding's complete plays, observes, this "is a remarkable record [...] unlike any other in the period and almost without parallel from the Restoration to the nineteenth century" (*Plays I*, xvii).<sup>1</sup> Between 1728, when *Love in Several Masques* premiered in Drury Lane, and 1737, when the Licensing Act drove him away from the stage, Fielding alternated two types of plays: regular comedies in five acts with a socio-intellectual edge—which were not as successful as he would have liked—and farcical burlesques of sentimental comedies, operas, tragedies, and pantomimes—which were usually applauded. Despite his ambition to become a serious author, he resorted to burlesque and farce when he became fully aware of the comparatively little success that regular comedies could bring him, and realized, as one of his dramatic alter egos put it, that "a Farce brings more Company to a House than the best Play that was ever writ [...] who would not rather Eat by his Nonsense, than Starve by his Wit" (*The Author's Farce*, 1730, in *Plays I*, III, i, 256). As a farcical playwright Fielding learned to make a living by way of mockery, something which would bring him as much popularity as derision. As a regular dramatist he learned that marriage was a repository of

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<sup>1</sup> This figure includes the twenty-four plays Fielding saw staged between 1728 and 1737, another written in that period—but which was never staged—two others written later and published in the *Miscellanies* (1743), and a piece for which there is evidence of production in 1733, but which was never printed.

moral values and that the marriage plot was an apposite vehicle to tell stories that could instruct and entertain. The consolidation of these lessons, as will be detailed in the second section of this thesis, left a remarkable legacy in his novels.

This chapter explores Fielding's first incursion into literature, that is, his nine-year career as a dramatist, investigating it as a departing point for what would become a lifelong fascination with marriage plots and domestic themes. My close reading of ten representative plays follows the argument that his capacious and diversified development of love intrigues, courtship negotiations, and marital conflict suggests an interest in domestic topics that goes far beyond the expediency that scholars have often found in these pieces.<sup>2</sup> While formulaic marriage plots may indeed have been little more than convenient models for the early comedies, Fielding gradually appropriated the structure and started developing more singular versions of it—often for didactic purposes—by making parallels between failed romantic relationships and other types of human interactions that he perceived as erroneous. As I hope will become evident by the end of the chapter, the author's persistent interweaving of household conflict with the social and literary concerns that proved fundamental throughout his artistic career reveals an interest in the social and moral implications of marriage, rather than just an expedient resort to an established convention. By

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<sup>2</sup> As I pointed out in the Introduction, recent studies of Fielding's theatrical production, including those by Peter Lewis, Robert D. Hume, and Albert Rivero are either dismissive or silent about Fielding's intriguing concern with marriage, partly because they find his treatment of domestic issues fairly conventional; but also because their work is oriented toward different aims. Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987); Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre 1728-1737* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); and Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding: A Critical Study of His Dramatic Career* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

contextualizing Fielding's work within the larger picture of early eighteenth-century theatre and eighteenth-century cultural milieu, I hope to contribute to his reassessment as a central figure of the early eighteenth-century stage.

### **1. The early eighteenth-century stage: a bird's-eye view**

Before proceeding to a textual analysis of Fielding's dramatic production, it is useful to have a broad panorama of what the London stage offered to playwrights and audiences in the late 1720s, to have a better sense of the author's cultural context. When the twenty-year-old Fielding arrived in London in 1728 with the ambition of becoming a dramatist, the theatre was an activity at the very centre of English society. William Hogarth's *The Laughing Audience* (1733, figure 5), for example, testifies to the diversified audience of the 1730s playhouse: flirtatious aristocratic beaus in the expensive boxes, attentive middle-class men and women in the cheaper seats of the pit, and working-class orange sellers busily attempting to engage the attention of potential clients. Missing from Hogarth's image was the upper gallery of Drury Lane theatre—also known as the footmen's gallery—a space that was not only inexpensive enough to be accessible to the lower ranks, but also a prerogative of servants for nearly a century.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> From the Restoration—when aristocrats sent their servants to hold their places before the play—and until Garrick abolished the practice in 1759, the footmen were given free seats for plays and theatrical entertainments in Drury Lane's upper gallery. See Kristina Straub, "The making of an English audience: the case of the footmen's gallery", in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131-43.



1733. Rec<sup>d</sup> Jan 9 of His Grace the Duke of Queensborough  
 Half a Guinea being the first Payment for Nine Prints, 8 of which  
 Represent a Rakes Progress & the 9<sup>th</sup> a Fair; Which I Promise to  
 Deliver at Michaelmas next, on Receiving one Guinea more, the  
 Print of the Fair being Deliver'd at the time of Subscribing.

Figure 5. William Hogarth, *The Laughing Audience*, 1733  
 ©Trustees of the British Museum

Due to its popularity and alleged influence on people's manners and morals, the theatre was a recurrent subject of theorising and debate.<sup>4</sup> By the time Fielding began writing for the stage, the moral laxity of staple characters and plots of the Restoration had been steadily attacked. At the turn of the century, for example, Jeremy Collier berated the leading playwrights of the time in his influential *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). This moralising tract met with strong rebukes, such as John Dennis's *The Usefulness of the Stage* (1698). Critics continued to feel the need to defend the theatre from Collier's attack for years, as can be read in Edward Filmer's *A Defence of plays; or the stage vindicated* (1707). The struggle in print about moral and legal control of the stage continued over the first three decades of the eighteenth century, until the Licensing Act of 1737 finally managed to institutionalize censorship.<sup>5</sup> In the 1710s Richard Steele and Joseph Addison dedicated several *Tatler* and *Spectator* numbers to the instruction of their readers on how to appreciate the theatre.<sup>6</sup> The following decade, popular texts such as the anonymous *The Conduct of the Stage Consider'd* (1721) and Dennis's *The Stage Defended* (1726) discussed the importance of drama as a medium for cultivating manners and promoting moral values. In the 1730s, Aaron Hill and William Popple regularly dedicated attention to the world of the theatre in *The Prompter*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For an extended discussion of dramatic criticism in the Restoration and early eighteenth-century see Paul D. Cannan, *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England From Jonson to Pope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Also Richard Bevis, *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1789* (London: Longman, 1988), 117-20.

<sup>5</sup> See Emmet L. Avery, ed. *The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces. Part 2: 1700-1729* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), Introduction, xvii.

<sup>6</sup> For example, *Tatler* 3, (14 April 1709), 4 (18 April 1709); *Spectator* 39(14 April 1711), 40 (16 April 1711), 42 (16 April 1711), 44 (20 April 1711), and 65 (15 May 1711).

<sup>7</sup> Cannan, *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism*, 202.

The old metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, moreover, had remarkable currency in the period. In *Spectator* 10 (12 March 1711), for instance, Mr Spectator recommended the paper to “everyone that considers the World as a Theatre, and desires to form a right Judgement of those who are the Actors on it”.<sup>8</sup> Long after he had ceased to be a practising playwright, Fielding himself frequently returned to this idea of the world as a theatrical presentation, as in his *Champion* article from 19 August 1740,<sup>9</sup> his “Essay on the Knowledge of Characters of Men” (1743),<sup>10</sup> the parallel between puppeteers and politicians in *Jonathan Wild* (1743),<sup>11</sup> or his juxtaposition of diverse theatrical audiences and people from different social backgrounds in *Tom Jones* (1748-49).<sup>12</sup>

Despite its prominent role in eighteenth-century culture, by the late 1720s the English stage was in a state of crisis.<sup>13</sup> The prospect for new

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), Vol. I, 45-46.

<sup>9</sup> In this Swifitean piece Mr. Job Vinegar, one of Fielding’s personae, travels to the land of the Ptfghsiumski, where he encounters a religious sect who believe “Men to be Comedians, or rather Puppets, who are created only to act on the Theatre of this World for the Entertainment of the Gods”. *Champion*, 431-32.

<sup>10</sup> Fielding claims that when politicians, “the crafty and designing Part of Mankind”, cheat others to their advantage “the whole World becomes a vast Masquerade, where the greatest Part appear disguised under false Vizors and Habits”. *Misc.* I, 155-56.

<sup>11</sup> Midway through the novel, the narrator discusses the only difference between “the Stage of the World” and “that of *Drury-Lane*”, namely “that whereas on the latter, the Hero, or chief Figure, is almost continually before your Eyes [...] on the former, the Hero, or GREAT MAN, is always behind the Curtain. [...] He doth indeed, in this *grand Drama*, rather perform the Part of the *Prompter*, and instruct the well-drest Figures [...] what to say and what to do”. *Jonathan Wild*, III, xi, 124-26.

<sup>12</sup> When trying to predict the readers’ responses to Black George’s stealing of Tom’s money, the narrator makes a parallel with the way different spectators react to the same scene in the theatre. His conclusion is that the most morally objectionable people are the keenest to condemn what they see. *Tom Jones*, VII, i, 323-29.

<sup>13</sup> On the early eighteenth-century theatrical crisis see John Loftis, *Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959); Eugene Hnatko, “The Failure of Eighteenth-Century Tragedy”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11.3 (1971): 459-48; Robert D. Hume, *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama 1660-1800* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983); and Bevis, *English Drama*, 162-67.



playwrights during those years was very bleak.<sup>14</sup> As the only two theatres with royal patent, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields constituted a duopoly that could and would impose its own rules. In the 1720s Drury Lane was controlled by actor-managers Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks, and Barton Booth, notorious for their entrepreneurial approach and reputed neglect of artistic merit.<sup>15</sup> Richard Steele had also received a patent for Drury Lane in 1715 and remained a shareholder of that theatre until his death in 1729, although he was not as directly involved in the management.<sup>16</sup> Lincoln's Inn Fields was under the administration of John Rich, who favoured pantomimes over regular plays and was no less money driven than the others.<sup>17</sup> In the late 1720s, prior to the construction of Goodman Fields and before the Little Theatre in the Haymarket presented serious competition, the managers of the patented playhouses rarely staged new productions.<sup>18</sup> As evidenced by Robert Hume's survey of mainpieces from the 1726-27 season—a year before Fielding's debut—new plays were virtually absent from the stage and those written between 1660 and 1710 were the managers' favourite choice.<sup>19</sup> According to Hume, by 1727 “the one post 1720 play in the repertory was *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), whose author was, of course, the patentee at

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<sup>14</sup> For a survey of the history and politics of the royal patents from the Restoration to the 1730s see Robert Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 1-33. Also, Bevis, *English Drama*, 33-36 and 117-20.

<sup>15</sup> On the triumvirate of Drury Lane see Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 11-21.

<sup>16</sup> Frances M. Kavenik, *British Drama, 1660-1779: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 118.

<sup>17</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Goodman's Fields did not open until 1729, and the New or Little Theatre on the Haymarket, built in 1720, was neither prestigious nor popular at that time. For fifteen years after its construction it “ran on a less regular schedule than the two major theatres, with no permanent company and little continuity from season to season”. See Lockwood's introduction in *Plays I*, xx.

<sup>19</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 15.

Drury Lane”.<sup>20</sup> Apart from favourite comedies by George Farquhar, John Vanbrugh, William Congreve, Colley Cibber, and Susanna Centlivre,<sup>21</sup> the repertoire in those years included a few plays by Shakespeare, which were amended at will to suit contemporary taste and morals.<sup>22</sup>

A crucial motive behind this reluctance to innovate was, of course, money, or what George Stone calls “the basic economics of theatre”.<sup>23</sup> Presenting new plays was expensive and potentially risky, for, as Hume points out, “few new plays lasted more than a week”.<sup>24</sup> Income was a major issue, given that the actor-managers, as Emmet Avery observes, “had modest personal resources and depended upon the prosperity of their playhouses for their livelihood”.<sup>25</sup> It was not just the managers who preferred to stage proven hits, actors were similarly resistant to new productions, as they had to learn and rehearse new parts for which they did not receive additional

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Farquhar’s *The Beaux Stratagem* (1707), *The Constant Couple* (1700), and *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) also featured regularly, along with John Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* (1696) and *The Provok’d Wife* (1697). Congreve’s most conspicuous success was *Love for Love* (1695), followed by *The Old Batchelor* (1693) and *The Way of the World* (1700). Cibber’s *The Careless Husband* (1704), *Love Makes a Man* (1699), and *Love’s Last Shift* (1696); and Centlivre’s *The Busy Body* (1709) and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718) were very popular as well. For precise dates and places of production of these plays in the 1720s see Emmet L. Avery, ed. *The London Stage, Part 2: 1700-1729*. For a concise study of the dramatic repertoire up to mid-century see George Winchester Stone, Jr. “The Making of the Repertory”, in *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*, ed. Robert Hume (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1980), 181-209.

<sup>22</sup> As Tiffany Stern points out, “the most famous ‘Shakespeare’ plays of the day were Colley Cibber’s *Richard III* (1699), William Davenant and John Dryden’s *Tempest* (1667), Tate’s *King Lear* (1681), Thomas Shadwell’s *Timon of Athens* (1678), William Davenant’s *Macbeth* (1664), and the adaptation of *Henry IV* that was published in 1718 as ‘Alter’d from Shakespear, by the late Mr. Betterton’”. “Shakespeare in Drama”, in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Fiona Ritchie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 143-44. During the eighteenth century—especially in the first half—Shakespeare was mostly known through adaptation. For instance, the ending of *King Lear* in Nahum Tate’s version of 1681, which continued to be the standard finale for several decades, was modified so that Cordelia lived and married Edgar, in keeping with the notion of decorum and (divine) justice. See Jenny Davidson, “Shakespeare Adaptation”, in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Sabor and Ritchie, 185-203.

<sup>23</sup> Stone, “The Making of the Repertory”, *The London Theatre World*, ed. Hume, 181.

<sup>24</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Avery, ed. *The London Stage, Part 2*, lii.

economic compensation.<sup>26</sup> Later in his life, Fielding would describe this practice ironically as the “Theatrical Politics, of never introducing new Plays on the Stage, but when driven to it by absolute Necessity” (*Misc. I, 5*). Given that without the aristocratic patronage characteristic of the Restoration, early eighteenth-century theatre had become much more of a business, it is not surprising that box-office numbers entirely governed what was produced.<sup>27</sup>

It was also logical that aspiring playwrights, theatre critics, and more sophisticated theatregoers complained about the venality of theatrical managers and clung to the notion that old times had been better.<sup>28</sup> Hogarth’s *A Just View of the British Stage* (1724, figure 6) provides an illuminating visual summary of such perceptions. The centre of the image features the three notorious managers performing as puppet masters. Statues representing the classical modes of comedy and tragedy frame the composition, but they have been literally defaced by advertisements of “Harlequin as Dr Faustus” and “Harlequin as Shepherd”, popular pantomimes. Meanwhile title pages of plays by Shakespeare and Congreve hang from a wall, ready to be used as toilet paper. A similar criticism is advanced in *Masquerades and Operas* (1724, figure 7), which portrays a rapturous crowd queuing to attend fashionable entertainments: some line up for a masquerade, others for a pantomime. A banner in the opera house—

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<sup>26</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 21-28.

<sup>27</sup> On this see Bevis, *English Drama*, 118-19.

<sup>28</sup> Modern theatre historians often endorse this perception. When John Loftis remarks that “compared with the distinguished comedies of Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, most of the comedies of the period 1690-1710 seem poor copies cut to a common pattern by semiskilled artisans” he exemplifies standard scholarly opinion on the topic. Loftis, *Comedy and Society*, 44.

featuring a delighted aristocrat pouring a heap of gold at the feet of two Italian singers—makes a self-explanatory point about the type of audience associated with Italian opera. Meanwhile in the street, plays by “Congrav [*sic*]”, “Dryden”, “Ben Jonson”, and “Shakespeare” are transported in a wheelbarrow to be sold as “Waste paper for Shops”. As these images suggest, mercenary theatre managers were only partially to be blamed; the craze for foreign models of theatrical entertainment was another conspicuous culprit.



Figure 6. William Hogarth, *A Just View of the British Stage, or Three Heads Are Better than One*, 1724

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 7. William Hogarth, *Masquerades and Operas*, 1724

©Trustees of the British Museum

Early in the century with the addition of afterpieces and entr'actes, theatrical audiences were offered new kinds of entertainments such as grotesque dancing, tightrope walking, and pantomime, which proved remarkably popular. At first these shows were intended as supplements for the main play, but soon they became mainpieces in their own right.<sup>29</sup> John Rich, who immediately saw the comic potentials of music, dancing, elaborate scenery, and whimsical costumes on stage, adapted the conventions and characters of Italian *commedia dell'arte* into English pantomimes,<sup>30</sup> which brought sizable crowds to his theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.<sup>31</sup> Italian opera was another imported novelty of the beginning of the century that became very fashionable.<sup>32</sup> As a medium combining musical virtuosity and visual sumptuousness, it catered to the taste of aristocrats and other wealthy spectators for luxury and majestic display.<sup>33</sup> Within a few years of its first introduction to England in the 1700s, as John Brewer points out, Italian opera "had become all the rage, replacing plays as the preoccupation of the court and fashionable society".<sup>34</sup> By the 1720s there were attractions to suit each set of audiences: while less sophisticated crowds were drawn to the

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<sup>29</sup> For a brief account of these developments see Bevis, *English Drama*, Chapter 10 "Sister Arts: Operatic Drama 1689-1737", 179-83.

<sup>30</sup> Although adaptations of Italian *commedia dell'arte* had been known on the English stage since the Restoration, it was at this point in the eighteenth century that they became well established as part of a night's entertainment at the playhouse. Ibid, 182.

<sup>31</sup> For a list of pantomimes staged by Rich and his estimated profit see Phyllis T. Dircks, "Rich, John (1692-1761)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23486>> [accessed 4 March 2013].

<sup>32</sup> On how Italian opera came to replace the Restoration musical play in the first decade of the eighteenth century see Curtis A. Price, "Music as Drama", in *The London Theatre World*, ed. Hume, 210-35.

<sup>33</sup> See David Thomas, ed. *Theatre in Europe: a Documentary History: Restoration and Georgian England, 1660-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 84.

<sup>34</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 363 and 368. Brewer also points out that George I "showed no interest in subsidizing spoken drama but was happy to pay for Italian opera, especially of the composer he most admired, George Frederic Handel" (364).

pantomimes of Rich, the aristocracy and other wealthy spectators avidly pursued the visual and musical lavishness of Italian opera.<sup>35</sup>

The sudden vogue of these new types of shows became a significant source of anxiety among those who partook of a more traditionalist approach to theatre.<sup>36</sup> Authors, critics, and social commentators—especially those whose careers had been directly affected by these novelties—often took their ascendancy as an unmistakable symptom of the decline of English theatre. Italian opera was a ubiquitous subject of criticism. In *Spectator* 18 (21 March 1711) for instance, Joseph Addison complained about “the gradual Progress which [Italian opera] has made upon the English stage”. “Our great Grand-children”, he claimed,

will be very curious to know the Reason why their Forefathers used to sit together like an Audience of Foreigners in their own Country, and to hear whole Plays acted before them in a Tongue which they did not understand.<sup>37</sup>

From the point of view of critics like Addison, the problem with Italian opera was not only its foreignness, but also the notion that it appealed more to the senses than to the intellect. As Mr Spectator put it: “the *English* have a Genius for other Performances of a much higher Nature, and capable of giving the Mind a much nobler Entertainment”.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth considering as a caveat the degree of *hubris* that operated behind Addison’s attacks on Italian opera, being the librettist of *Rosamund*, an opera unsuccessfully

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, ed. *Theatre in Europe*, 174.

<sup>36</sup> Those who would have followed the Aristotelian notion that the “spectacle”, which included decoration, music, and performance, had little literary merit: “the Spectacle though an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts. [...] Getting-up of the Spectacle is more a matter for the costumier than for the poet”. Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry*, trans. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), 39.

<sup>37</sup> Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, Vol. 1, 78-79.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

staged in 1704.<sup>39</sup> Another good example of standard early eighteenth-century criticisms about the vogue for foreign music, pantomimes, Italian strollers, and puppet-shows can be found in *The Touch-stone: or, Historical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological Essays on the Reigning Diversions of the Town* (1728), a collection of mock-scholarly essays attributed to Fielding's friend James Ralph.<sup>40</sup> Fielding, a dramatist with a classical education and an affinity for intellectual display—who moreover struggled to build a niche for himself within the competitive theatrical market—shared these negative perceptions.<sup>41</sup> In his dedication of “The Intriguing Chambermaid” (1734) to the actress Kitty Clive, for instance, he complained about “the Folly, Injustice, and Barbarity of the Town” who would “finish the Ruin of the Stage” by “sacrific[ing] our own native Entertainments to a wanton affected Fondness for foreign Musick”, while “our Nobility seem eagerly to rival each other, in distinguishing themselves in favour of *Italian* theatres, and in neglect of our own” (*Plays*, II, 580). As we will see later in this chapter, Fielding also looked down on pantomimes and farces, which he parodied with the dual purpose of deriding and capitalizing from them.

Apart from these attacks on the vogue for imported spectacles, some said that the improbable intrigues and predictable plots of the so-called

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<sup>39</sup> On this see Derek Alsop, “‘Strains of New Beauty’: Handel and the Pleasures of Italian Opera, 1711-1728”, in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), 144.

<sup>40</sup> Ralph's authorship of *The Touch-stone* has been recently challenged; the translator Robert Samber has been proposed as a more likely author. See Laird Okie, “Ralph, James (d. 1762)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23060>> [accessed 23 November 2011].

<sup>41</sup> Fielding's biographers argue that it was due to his acquaintance with James Ralph that he first thought of using the theatre as vehicle for improving the taste of the town. Martin Battestin with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 82.



sentimental<sup>42</sup> or reform<sup>43</sup> comedies that Colley Cibber popularized at the turn of the century also lowered dramatic standards. Cibber's remarkably successful first play, *Love's Last Shift* (1696), had made it customary to emphasise the moral dimension of a rake's conversion to monogamy at the close of comedies. Although reformed libertines were stock characters long before Cibber, as Aparna Gollapudi has recently pointed out, "never had a married rake shown so much remorse for his debaucheries or celebrated matrimony with so much fervor. [...] Cibber's plotline became a favorite formula in drama; reform comedy was born".<sup>44</sup>

Cibber was one of the most controversial theatrical figures of the first half of the century. As his biographer Helene Koon has observed, two competing views were predominant. On the one hand he was regarded as "a brilliant comedian, a popular playwright who introduced a new mode into English drama", and on the other he was reviled in literary circles as "a vain pretentious fool, a writer of worthless plays and the worst poet laureate in history, whose sole claim to recognition was his coronation by Pope as King

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<sup>42</sup> Definitions of "sentimental comedy" are unfortunately sparse. Frank Ellis defines it as "the kind [of play] that makes you laugh and cry at the same time, like certain sequences in Charlie Chaplin films". *Sentimental Comedy, Theory & Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), i. To Ellis, the best examples of sentimental comedies early in the century are: Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* and *The Careless Husband*; and Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). The term "sentimental comedy", nonetheless, has been contested. Hume, for instance, considers "the whole concept of sentimental comedy [...] a distraction and a herring". Robert Hume, "The Multifarious Forms of Eighteenth-century Comedy", in *The Stage and the Page: London's "Whole Show" in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre*, ed. George W. Stone (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 12. In a later text he proposes the alternative "light happy-ending plays" to describe comedies by Cibber and Steele. Hume, *The Rakish Stage*, 196-97.

<sup>43</sup> Aparna Gollapudi has recently advocated the term "reform comedy" as a distinct subgenre of early eighteenth-century comedy. Her work draws on Hume's ground breaking *Rakish Stage*, referenced above. For an outline of her argument see the introduction to *Moral Reform Comedy and Culture, 1696-1747* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1-19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

of Dunces”.<sup>45</sup> Cibber had first received praise as an actor for his ability to play hilarious fops, such as Sir Novelty Fashion in his own *Love’s Last Shift*, and Lord Foppington in Vanbrugh’s parodic sequel, *The Relapse* (1697). As Koon points out, Cibber “knew precisely how to mince across the stage with peacock gravity, how to lift an eyebrow or flip the ruffles at his wrist to emphasize a point, how to turn an inflection for a laugh, and his timing was flawless”.<sup>46</sup> But as a theatrical manager, as we have seen, he had gained a reputation for unabashed commercial-mindedness. At the same time, despite the success of his early plays—the very authorship of which was eventually called into question<sup>47</sup>—his literary skill was usually disparaged. In *Reflections on the Principal Characters in a Late Comedy Call’d The Provok’d Husband* (1728), for example, a “private gentleman” details what he saw as the inconsistencies in dialogues and characterization of Cibber’s latest comedy.<sup>48</sup> The attacks against Cibber’s flamboyance, egomania, and alleged stupidity increased when he was made poet laureate in 1729; and they had a new surge after the publication of his notorious memoirs *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian, and Late Patentee of the Theatre-Royal [...] Written by Himself* (1740). If in *Dunciad Variorum* (1729) Alexander Pope had ridiculed

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<sup>45</sup> Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber: a Biography* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), ix.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. On Cibber’s successful playing of fops see also Eric Salmon, “Cibber, Colley (1671–1757)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5416>> [accessed 10 August 2013].

<sup>47</sup> In a letter to his friend Henry Cromwell in 1720, John Dennis wondered how Cibber could, “at the Age of twenty” write a comedy “with a just Design, distinguished Characters, and a proper Dialogue, [when] now at [the age of] forty treats us with *Hibernian Sense and Hibernian English?* Could he, when he was an arrant Boy, draw a good Comedy, from his own raw uncultivated Head, who is now at forty able to do nothing but what is poor and mean?” *Original Letters: Familiar, Moral and Critical. By Mr. Dennis. In two volumes* (London: W. Mears, 1721), Vol. I, 140.

<sup>48</sup> *Reflections on the Principal Characters in a Late Comedy Call’d The Provok’d Husband. By a Private Gentleman* (London: J. Roberts, 1728), 5-32.

Cibber by listing him among other inept playwrights who were only able to produce “a vamp’d, future, old, reviv’d, new piece”,<sup>49</sup> by the 1742 edition of *The Dunciad, in four books*, the laureate had become a chief satirical target, proclaimed “king” of dunces.<sup>50</sup> Early on, Fielding joined the chorus of anti-Cibber satirists, mocking the manager in plays like *The Author’s Farce* (especially in the 1734 version), *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register* (1737). Cibber would remain a perennial target of Fielding’s satiric humour in prose (fictional and factual), from articles in *The Champion* (1739-1740), his *Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* (1741), and *Joseph Andrews* (1742), to *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (published posthumously in 1755).

Cibber’s comedies were not the sole targets of dramatic critique in the period. The plays of Richard Steele and Joseph Addison were also subject to reproach, despite the prestige their authors had acquired as essayists and social commentators through their lastingly popular periodicals *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1712 and 1714). Some argued that Steele’s comedies and his notions of dramatic quality were compromised by his insistence on decorum and manners. In *A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter* (1722), the influential critic John Dennis attacked Steele by refuting the latter’s objections to Etherege’s *The Man of Mode* (1676). “What is it to the Purpose whether ‘tis a genteel Comedy or not? Provided that ‘tis a good one”, asked Dennis rhetorically, proceeding to enumerate the virtues of “True” comedy as opposed to the type of “genteel” comedy Steele had endorsed in

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<sup>49</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad, Variorum* (London: A. Dob, 1729), I, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Pope, *The Dunciad, in Four Books* (London: M. Cooper, 1743), I, 320.

his *Spectator* essays.<sup>51</sup> The following year, upon the production of Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, Dennis resumed the attack, refuting the idea of a sentimental play that mingled comedy with tragedy.<sup>52</sup> The tragedies of Addison (and to an extent those of Nicholas Rowe) were also criticised for their excessive concern with propriety and their over-elaborate rhetoric.<sup>53</sup> An outline of the alleged inconsistencies of style and structure of Addison's most famous tragedy can be found in Dennis's *Remarks upon Cato, a Tragedy* (1713). Despite the obvious personal spite that motivated Dennis to write against Steele and Addison,<sup>54</sup> his opinion was shared by others, including Samuel Johnson.<sup>55</sup>

Criticism of the apparent decadence of contemporary theatre also came directly from within. The sentimental strand of comedy had been challenged from its outset: Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* offered a riposte to the unconvincingly sudden reformation of Loveless in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, the epitome of that mode of comedy. In the first decade of the century, in *The*

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<sup>51</sup> John Dennis, *A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter* (London: T. Wagner, 1722), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Dennis, *Remarks on a Play Call'd The Conscious Lovers* (London: T. Warner, 1723). The most celebrated scene in Steele's play featured Mr Sealand's recognition of his long-lost daughter Indiana, which reputedly caused general weeping among spectators. In the preface Steele defended his new style of comedy, wherein he had introduced "a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" which caused tears that "flow'd from Reason and Good Sense", and hopefully would "have some effect upon the goths and vandals that frequent theatres, or a more polite audience may supply their absence". *The Conscious Lovers. A Comedy* (Dublin: G. Risk,) ii.

<sup>53</sup> See Bevis, *English Drama*, 123-45.

<sup>54</sup> Dennis quarrelled with Addison and Steele around 1711, after a series of *Spectator* articles with dramatic guidelines in which Dennis's views and practice as a playwright had been implicitly criticised. The feud with Steele endured for years, on account of the former's relationship with the managers of Drury Lane, whom Dennis despised. See Jonathan Pritchard, "Dennis, John (1658-1734)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7503>> [accessed 9 November 2011].

<sup>55</sup> See Samuel Johnson's entry on "Addison" in *The Lives of the English Poets* (Dublin: Whitestone, Williams, Colles, Wilson, 1779), Vol. 2, 22, 24-27, 59, 62, and 64. Johnson had earlier written about the decadence of early eighteenth-century tragedy in general: "crush'd by rules, and weaken'd as refin'd,/For years the pow'r of tragedy declin'd;/From bard, to bard, the frigid caution crept,/Till Declamation roar'd, while Passion slept". Johnson, *Prologue and Epilogue, Spoken at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane 1747* (London: E. Cave, 1747), 5.

*What D'Ye Call It?* (1716), John Gay burlesqued what he perceived as an objectionable mingling of extant dramatic genres. In *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717), a collaboration with Pope and John Arbuthnot, he ridiculed the improbable plot devices and sudden discoveries of reformation comedies. Years later Gay mocked the genre of opera, while exposing governmental corruption through a juxtaposition of the political scene with the underworld of crime, in his immensely popular *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), which premiered at Lincoln's Inn Fields some weeks before Fielding's debut at Drury Lane with *Love in Several Masques*. As we shall see, Fielding would also position himself against the wearied recipes of reform comedies and domestic tragedies, and he would write most of his plays with a view to improving the taste of theatrical audiences.

## 2. "What's a Play without a Marriage?"<sup>56</sup>

The promise of at least one happy marriage was the expected ending of stage comedies in Fielding's time. Although weddings had signalled the finale of plays in different historic periods, by the early eighteenth century the marriage ending had become somewhat of a tacit rule for comic plays. As Misty Anderson persuasively argues

after Shakespeare, most writers of stage comedies turned to the Greek New Comedy for their plots, which placed a greater emphasis on courtship and marriage than Aristophanic, satiric, or Jonsonian comedies had.<sup>57</sup>

Surveying the ways female playwrights from Aphra Behn to Elizabeth Inchbald navigate through the established conventions of the courtship plot,

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<sup>56</sup> John Gay, *The What D'Ye Call It?: A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce*, Final scene, line 32, in *John Gay, Dramatic Works*, ed. John Fuller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), Vol. I, 204.

<sup>57</sup> Misty Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Marriage on the London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 9.

Anderson's study provides valuable insights about the motivations operating behind the repetition of plots about marriage on the eighteenth-century stage, and the way the certainty of a marriage ending allowed dramatists to introduce their own viewpoints within a contained format, that is, in the space between the opening of the play and the forgone conclusion. Given that genres establish implicit contracts between authors, works, and audiences, which generate expectations to be fulfilled or subverted, according to Anderson "the most likely promise" made to spectators of stage comedies over the eighteenth century was "the guarantee of a play that culminates in a marriage that affirms the community".<sup>58</sup> This was so pervasive an attribute of plays that authors themselves commented upon it, as a matter of fact, very often for satirical purposes. As Mr Lyric, a character in George Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (1698), puts it: "as the Catastrophe of all Tragedies is Death, so the end of Comedies is Marriage".<sup>59</sup> Endings are so predictable that Mr Lyric finds more amusement in observing the reactions of the audience than from the plays staged.

In *The What D'Ye Call It?*, Gay elaborated on the generic expectations of his contemporaries, hinging the key incident of the plot on the customariness of the comic finale. Featuring the rehearsal of a play within the main play, his "Tragi-Comi-Pastoral-Farce", introduces Sir Roger, a justice of the peace, resolutely set against the marriage of Squire Thomas, his son, and Kitty, his steward's daughter, whom the youth has made pregnant. At the request of Sir Roger, the members of his household are to stage a play, which

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 9. For the core of Anderson's argument see especially her Chapter One, "Funny Women", and Chapter Two, "Repetition, Contract and Comedy".

<sup>59</sup> George Farquhar, *Love and a Bottle*, IV, ii, 42, in *The Works of George Farquhar, in Two Volumes*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), Vol. I, 81.

contains “all sorts of Plays under one”, for his neighbours who “never saw a Play before”. In the said piece Kitty and Thomas are to perform as lovers. After a series of nonsensical events, including the apparition of five ghosts—intended as mockery of contemporary tragedies—the couple of the inset play are married on stage at Sir Roger’s insistence that “what’s a Play without a Marriage? and what is a Marriage, if one sees nothing of it?”<sup>60</sup> Finally, as the ceremony is performed by a real clergyman and the wedding vows are read in full, Sir Roger’s son ends up being *really* married to Kitty.

At one level, the climactic joke offered a comment on the instability of marital conventions before the Marriage Act of 1753, when contracts *per verba di presente* and marriage ceremonies performed by clergymen following the rites of the Church of England were regarded as valid as regular marriages in common law. In a broader sense, Gay’s juggling of dramatic genres underscored the significance of generic affiliation in the creation of expectations and the interpretation of plays. As Lisa Freeman has observed, “Gay’s object in confounding genres was precisely and paradoxically to critique such mixing”.<sup>61</sup> Through his parody of the motifs associated with different genres—supplemented with the title and the mock-erudite preface—Gay outlined what he considered to be the proper conventions of each.<sup>62</sup> In so doing, he provides us with an important indication of the extent

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<sup>60</sup> Gay, *The What D’Ye Call It?*, introductory scene, lines 56-57, page 180; and final scene, lines 32-33, page 204.

<sup>61</sup> Lisa Freeman, *Character’s Theatre: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 43.

<sup>62</sup> A lengthy mock-erudite preface justified the author’s “interweaving the several Kinds of the Drama with each other, so that they cannot be distinguish’d or separated”. His arguments about tragedy and comedy were circular: to the complaint that the wedding finale was customarily comic, he answered that the French sometimes used happy catastrophes in tragedies; to a potential objection about the incidents being too sad for a comedy, he

to which comedy and the courtship plot had become embedded by the early eighteenth century.

### 3. Fielding's theatrical debut

Such was the theatrical atmosphere that greeted the classically educated young Fielding, "a gentleman amateur",<sup>63</sup> with no real experience in the literary marketplace but full of energy and a great deal of ambition. Though dauntingly competitive, the English stage in the late 1720s was paradoxically a promising scene for a determined young author like himself. While it was extremely difficult to make a name and earn a place, the relative stagnancy of dramatic forms also meant that there was plenty of potential for the novelty of which Fielding was so fond. Thus, he arrived in London in 1728 to try his luck on the stage and make some money out of his knowledge and skill. Before venturing to make his work public, the budding author went to seek constructive criticism from a congenial and insightful source: his second cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. First he wrote her a letter offering his "unworthy Performances for [her] Perusal", stressing that her "Sentence" would be definitive for his appraisal of the work, yet hoping "it may meet as light a Censure from your Ladyship's Judgement" as last Spring, when he had sent her the first three acts.<sup>64</sup> When the play was finally produced and printed, he dedicated it to Lady Mary, praising her "accurate Judgement", and calling her "at once a living Confutation of those morose Schoolmen who

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countered that the wedding at the end was "truly comical". *The What D'Ye Call It?*, Preface, v-viii.

<sup>63</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 28 and 34.

<sup>64</sup> "To Lady Mary Wortley Montague" (London, Sept. 1727?), in Martin C. Battestin, ed. *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*. Electronic Edition (Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 2002), 3.



wou'd confine Knowledge to the Male Part of the Species, and a shining Instance of all those Perfections and softer Graces which Nature has confin'd to the Female" (*Plays* I, 20). Although critics usually assess Fielding's contact with his second cousin as purely a matter of self-interest,<sup>65</sup> I believe that securing an opening at Drury Lane was not the author's sole motivation. Lady Mary was indeed well connected in aristocratic and literary circles,<sup>66</sup> however, as Hume points out, it is improbable that she could have offered direct help to have his play staged, since "Drury Lane did not work that way".<sup>67</sup> It is not unlikely that Fielding wanted to please a wealthy and potentially influential patron, but as suggested by these and other communications with Lady Mary, the young author also sought his second cousin as a literary adviser. These first exchanges with her second cousin provide important insights about Fielding's youthful ambition and confidence in the value of his own work. They also suggest a sympathetic stance on the

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<sup>65</sup> The Battestins, for instance, argue that Fielding "had the good sense to understand" that his work "was never likely to see the light of day unless it had [...] the sponsorship of some astute and influential patron". Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 56. Rivero similarly hypothesises that it was "perhaps because of the good offices of Fielding's cousin" that Cibber "had agreed to stage *Love in Several Masques*". *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 9. Ronald Paulson maintains that Fielding "would have hoped that she could open for him the doors of patronage". *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 13.

<sup>66</sup> Although most of her work was published several decades later, by the late 1720s Lady Mary's poetry was already circulating among her literary acquaintances. She was well known for her travels to the East, and her wide array of literary and political friendships, including Mary Astell, Robert Walpole's second wife, Lord Hervey, John Gay, and Alexander Pope. Around 1716 some satirical court eclogues she had been writing, probably in collaboration with Gay and Pope, were surreptitiously published by Edmund Curll, which caused her a period of animosity in courtly circles. Later she had a falling out with Pope that caused her to be publicly berated in the first edition of the *Dunciad*. On this period of Lady Mary's life see Isobel Grundy, "Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley (*bap.* 1689, *d.* 1762)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19029>> [accessed 5 March 2013].

<sup>67</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 29.

debate about female agency and intellectual capacity, a matter hinted at in the work in question: *Love in Several Masques*.<sup>68</sup>

As a play revolving around courtship intrigues it is not particularly innovative. By venturing into the domain of stage comedy, as we have seen, the playwright was expected to dwell on the domestic skirmishes leading to marriage, and, of course, to include the customary ending. Moreover, like many first time writers, Fielding started by emulating the work of others. However, I believe that his imitative endeavours in this and other plays tend to be overstated.<sup>69</sup> Ronald Paulson, for example, straightforwardly identifies the models for *Love in Several Masques* in the energetic comedies of Wycherley and Congreve.<sup>70</sup> Yet, while some humorous exchanges between Merital, Malvil and Sir Positive Trap in *Love in Several Masques* to an extent recall the word-playing repartee of Wycherley's plays (for instance those of Manly and Lord Plausible in *The Plain Dealer*, 1676),<sup>71</sup> Fielding's are

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<sup>68</sup> Although Fielding was undeniably following the protocol of a flattering dedication, this type of praise is suggestive of his belief about the compatibility of female learning and proper femininity, a topic recurrent throughout his work, and also illustrated in the preface he wrote for the second edition of his sister Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744) and *Familiar Letters Between The Principal Characters of David Simple* (1747). In the latter, moreover, he spoke of "a Lady of very high Rank, whose Quality is however less an Honour to her Understanding", in all probability alluding to Lady Mary. *Familiar Letters Between the Principal Characters in David Simple, in Two Volumes* (London: printed for the author, 1747), xvi. On Fielding's stance on the debate about the socio-cultural position of women see Angela J. Smallwood, *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate 1700-1750* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

<sup>69</sup> Rivero provides a notable exception in acknowledging the "distinctive Fielding voice [that] begins to be heard in his first dramatic work". He has also noted an earnest social and moral commitment operating behind the seemingly formulaic plot of *Love in Several Masques*. *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding*, 16, 18-19.

<sup>71</sup> Wycherley's *The Plain-Dealer* was famous for its concatenated word games. See, for instance the opening scene featuring a pun-based dialogue between Manly and Lord Plausible:

*Man*. Tell not me [...] of your *Decorums*, supercilious Forms and slavish Ceremonies, your little Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World, do daily over and over [...]

*L. Plaus*. [...] they are the Arts, and Rules the prudent of the World walk by.

*Man*. Let'em. But I'll have no Leading-strings, I can walk alone.

[...]

definitely not as lewd and the humour is hardly as sharp. More than fifty years separated Fielding from Wycherley and theatrical taste had changed enormously: what was acceptable on stage in the 1670s was no longer so even as early as the 1690s. After the Glorious Revolution, the open libertinism associated with the Stuart court had receded dramatically. Collier's influential attacks on playwrights and actors in the late 1690s, in which Congreve became a favourite scapegoat, had caused managers, dramatists, and players to be cautious about the content and language of theatrical performances.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, although Helena's dependence on her aunt Lady Trap in *Love in Several Masques* recalls Lady Wishfort's control over her niece's dowry in Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), the fast-paced verbal battles characteristic of Congreve's plays—of which the proviso scene between Mirabell and Millamant offers a famous example—displayed a level of salacious wit that was no longer acceptable by the late 1720s.<sup>73</sup> Battestin and Hume also find Fielding's first performance essentially

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*L. Plaus.* What, will you be singular then, like no Body? Follow, Love and esteem no Body?

*Man.* Rather than be general, like you; follow every Body, Court and kiss every Body; though perhaps at the same time you hate every Body. *The Plain-Dealer* (I, i, 1-15), in *The Plays of William Wycherley*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 377-78.

Fielding attempts something similar, although clearly not as bitter in tone. When Merital describes Lady Matchless as a woman who “does as much Mischief among the men of Sense—”, his witty friend Malvil interrupts him to add “As some Beaus do amongst the Women of none” (*Plays* I, I, i, 26). Later when Merital complains of his inability to convince Sir Positive Trap to accept him as a suitor for Helena, because: “My Estate is too small, my Father was no Baronet, and I am—no Fool”. Malvil provides some cynical solutions to these “weighty Objections”: “To evade the first you must bribe his Lawyer, to conquer the second purchase a Title—and utterly to remove the last, plead Lover” (*Plays* I, I, i, 27).

<sup>72</sup> Actors were successfully prosecuted for obscenity during this period; sometimes they were fined, sometimes imprisoned, as happened in October and November 1700, and February 1702 at Lincoln's Inn Fields. See Matthew Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 48-49.

<sup>73</sup> In the late-seventeenth century, the moral reform movement, materialized in the societies for the reformation of manners, condemned Restoration wit as vicious and irreligious. Philosophers had also diminished its popularity judging it irrational and “intellectually irresponsible”. See Bevis, *English Drama*, 114.

unoriginal, though they locate his models in the humane comedy of Cibber, Steele, and Susanna Centlivre.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the milder, sexually innocuous humour of *Love in Several Masques* brings it closer to the most popular playwrights of his own time.

Yet, although he was certainly working within the standard moral tone set out by the sentimental comedies of the early eighteenth century, I believe that Fielding's first effort involved a conscious attempt to revive some of the sprightly social satire of the old masters. His attempt at lively witticism was not lost on his contemporaries, for it endured even after the author's demise. *The Beauties of Fielding* (1782), an alphabetically thematized anthology, contains several entries consisting of witty passages extracted from *Love in Several Masques*.<sup>75</sup> The preface to the play helps to illuminate Fielding's stylistic ambitions further:

I Believe few Plays have ever adventured into the World under greater Disadvantages than this. First, as it succeeded a Comedy, which, for the continued Space of twenty-eight Nights, received as great (and as just) Applauses as were ever bestowed on the English Theatre. And Secondly, as it is contemporary with an Entertainment which engrosses the whole Talk and Admiration of the Town. These were Difficulties which seemed rather to require the superior Force of a Wycherley or a Congreve, than of a raw and unexperienced [*sic*] Pen (for I believe I may boast that none ever appeared so early on the Stage)(*Plays* I, 20).

Despite the disadvantages listed, the implicit flaunting of his moderate success refers to the play being staged at Drury Lane, the more prestigious of the two theatres with royal patent, with a stellar cast that included the

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<sup>74</sup> Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 61. Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> According to Lockwood, *Love in Several Masques* "is quoted far more frequently than any other not because it was better known [...] but because for anthology reading purposes it supplied far more extractable witty bits than other Fielding plays". *Plays* I, 10.

managers themselves.<sup>76</sup> With four consecutive performances—one with author’s benefit—it fared tolerably well, considering that it was a new play by an unknown author.<sup>77</sup> The applauded comedy alluded to was Cibber’s *Provok’d Husband*, also staged at Drury Lane, and the talk-engrossing entertainment was Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, produced at the rival playhouse in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.<sup>78</sup>

In acknowledging the popularity of Cibber’s latest comedy, Fielding clearly sought to compliment the man upon whose verdict his career largely depended at this point, while attempting to make his own achievement the more meritorious. However, it is important to notice the author’s cleverly vague phrasing. Despite the alleged commendation, the fact that his youthful exercise had “succeeded” Cibber’s is acknowledged as a major disadvantage.<sup>79</sup> When Fielding complains about his comedy having come after Cibber’s (chronologically), and laments not having had “the superior force of a Wycherley or a Congreve” to surmount that difficulty, it is implied not only that the latter were the better comic playwrights, but also that he would have rather followed them (stylistically) than the actor-manager, had times and circumstances allowed otherwise. Fielding evidently knew that,

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<sup>76</sup> As announced on the title page, Robert Wilks was the attractive Merital, and Colley Cibber played Rattle, a hilarious fop. That these parts fitted the actor-managers like a glove is perhaps a significant factor in their decision to stage it.

<sup>77</sup> In Fielding’s day, author’s benefits were granted on a third-day basis. The profit comprised box-office receipts, minus house expenses. For details of the production and reception of this play see Lockwood’s introduction in *Plays I*, 6-9.

<sup>78</sup> *The Provok’d Husband*, first staged at Drury-Lane on 10 January 1728, was Cibber’s own version of Vanbrugh’s notes for *A Journey to London*. *The Beggar’s Opera* started its successful run on 29 January of that year at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, after having been rejected by Drury Lane. Lockwood, *Plays I*, 20, notes 1 and 2. Although Fielding complains about his timing, it was probably another positive factor for securing production at Drury Lane: Avery asserts that the success of *The Beggar’s Opera* fostered a resurgence of playgoing in that season. *The London Stage*. Introduction to Part 2, 931.

<sup>79</sup> Rivero has made a similar observation, describing Fielding’s tone as “diffident and defiant”. *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 8.

whether he liked it or not, he had to please Cibber—and like-minded audiences—in order to build his reputation. To have his work accepted and produced at Drury Lane, then, he would write a comedy that suited the taste of the time, but as he wished he could invoke the forces of the past, he would also try to restore the intellectually stimulating humour that early eighteenth-century comedy had abandoned. As he later put it, “the most dangerous fatal Enemies” comedians should dread are:

the Admirers of that pretty, dapper, brisk, smart pert Dialogue which hath lately flourished on our Stage [which] was first introduced with infinite Wit by Wycherley [...] till it last degenerated into such sort of Pleasantry as this, in *The Provoked Husband*.<sup>80</sup>

Although we could, as Hume does, dismiss Fielding’s first theatrical composition as a mediocre, clumsily designed, “rather overstuffed and very lightweight intrigue comedy”,<sup>81</sup> it is also worth considering his latent agenda. Moreover, as a work fully adhering to the pattern of intrigue and predictable marriage ending he would mock in other plays—but also replicate in most of his novels—it is highly significant for the purposes of this thesis. It provides a key to understanding Fielding’s familiarity with this type of plot, and to the reasons why marriage gradually became a favourite moral and aesthetic focus. *Love in Several Masques* should be read as an apprenticeship not only in formulaic and even exhausted conventions, but also in the potential inherent in works revolving around marriage.

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<sup>80</sup> Preface to Fielding and William Young’s translation of Aristophanes, *Plutus, The God of Riches*, in *Shamela*, 256. The mention of Cibber’s comedy was followed by lengthy quotation from it illustrating what Fielding considered to be the reason for audiences having their theatrical “Palate vitiated”.

<sup>81</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 30.

### 3. Discovering the courtship plot

As I have pointed out in the Introduction, in his plays as in his novels Fielding employed the two basic patterns of marriage plots: explorations of the difficulties arising during the process of courtship, and crises in the marriage state —usually involving impending or consummated adultery—which are, for better or worse, solved at the end. *Love in Several Masques* is Fielding's first exercise in exploring the social implications of love, courtship, and marriage. Dealing with the obstacles that stand between three men (Merital, Wisemore, and Malvil), three women (Helena, Lady Matchless, and Vermilia), and the altar, this play features a version of the first type of marriage plot, the courtship plot. It also touches on a favourite satirical theme of the period in general, and of Fielding in particular: the notion of the world as a masquerade, in which real feelings and motivations are disguised.<sup>82</sup>

The marriage ending implied in the portion of the title that identified it as a comedy is delayed by two different kinds of hindrances: first, a generational conflict in which money-driven guardians frustrate children's expectations of a loving partnership; second, ideological barriers between the intended themselves, like Lady Matchless's fear of marital subjugation and Wisemore's disenchantment with romantic love. The conflict between materialism and affection operates in the subplot concerning the courtship of Merital and Helena, of which her guardians, Sir Positive Trap and Lady Trap,

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<sup>82</sup> This is the central theme of "The Masquerade, a Poem" (January 1728), Fielding's earliest extant published work. Masquerades intrigued and irritated Fielding, as they did many of his contemporaries. He inveighed against them in various texts, including *Tom Jones*, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robbers* (1751), and *Amelia* (1751). On the ambiguous fascination with masquerades in eighteenth-century England see Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1986).

disapprove on account of the suitor's insufficient wealth and lack of knighthood; they prefer the rich, and self-explanatorily named Sir Apish Simple. Common to other cultural manifestations of the period, this dramatized struggle between mercenary guardians and enamoured youths reflected a broader concern with tyrannical oppression, a theme with strong political implications in a cultural milieu infused with parallelisms between parents and monarchs in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. As Michael McKeon notes, the dichotomy of loving children and oppressive parents is "a private version of the public confrontation between the liberty of the subject and the tyranny of the absolute sovereign".<sup>83</sup> Unlike *Centlivre* who, according to Anderson, "relished the idea of free markets and saw them as part of a larger project of liberating English society from arbitrary modes of power",<sup>84</sup> Fielding distrusted the commercial dimension of marriage and identified it directly with another form of tyranny. Yet, Fielding's ridicule of these tyrannical characters—who are rather easily prevailed upon—suggests that the type of authority they embody is laughable rather than terrifying. I return to this topic for the analysis of *The Welsh Opera*, in which the analogy between national and domestic government is more evidently exploited.

In *Love in Several Masques*, as in later plays, Fielding's line of reasoning is that as sincerity and love prove useless in obtaining permission to marry, young lovers are encouraged to devise unlawful strategies to overcome the unreasonable conditions imposed. In this first play the author does not ponder long on the subject and easily solves the problem by having

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<sup>83</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 132-33.

<sup>84</sup> Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, 6.



Helena and Merital elope. As we shall see, he would never again trivialize the matrimonial institution by endorsing an elopement between exemplary characters,<sup>85</sup> but this time he probably indulged the fantasy of what he had almost succeeded in doing two years before, when he attempted to elope with Sarah Andrew, an orphan heiress under the guardianship of her ambitious uncle.<sup>86</sup>

A larger concern permeating the play is the ostensible contamination of the domain of love and marriage with the rhetoric and practices of commerce. Lord Formal, an aristocratic Londoner and suitor of Lady Matchless is the first to juxtapose the two, claiming that “Beauty in the Hands of a virtuous Woman, like Gold in those of a Miser, prevents the Circulation of Trade” (*Plays I, I, v, 35*). The old-fashioned Sir Positive Trap, a country gentleman, is equally fond of the financial idiom, albeit in a slightly coarser form. To Helena’s request of getting to know her suitor before accepting a marriage proposal, he answers in outrage:

Addresses to you! Why I never saw my Lady there ‘till an Hour before our Marriage. I made my Addresses to her Father, her Father to his Lawyer, the Lawyer to my Estate, which being found a Smithfield Equivalent—the Bargain was struck. [...] I hope to see the time when a Man may carry his Daughter to Market with the same lawful Authority as any other of his Cattle (*Plays I, II, vi, 43*).

Helena has earlier voiced her indignation at being “put up at Auction! To be disposed of, as a piece of Goods, by way of Bargain and sale” (*Plays I, I, v, 41*).

Comically applying the language of commercial transactions to matrimony,

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<sup>85</sup> As will be discussed in the pertinent section of this chapter, as early as 1730, in *The Coffee-House Politician* Fielding hinged his plot on the potential dangers of elopements.

<sup>86</sup> The plan failed; his intended was removed and made to marry her cousin Ambrose Rhodes. When Fielding began writing *Love in Several Masques* (presumably in late 1726 or early 1727) the affair was probably still fresh in his mind. On this anecdote see Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 49-51.

Fielding critiques the symbolic and literal commercialization of people. This critical stance against strictly mercenary marriages—common to most late seventeenth and early eighteenth century comedies including Dryden’s *Marriage à la Mode* (1691), Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700), Cibber’s *Provok’d Husband* (1728)—would prove a recurrent trope in Fielding’s dramatic and novelistic works.

The other major subplot in *Love in Several Masques* concerns Lady Matchless, “a beautiful, rich young Widow” (*Plays I, I, i, 25*), who, despite her scepticism about second marriages, is besieged by a host of undesirable suitors. This energetic character, whose name, eloquence, and intelligence might well be a veiled allusion to the dedicatee of the play, Fielding’s cousin Lady Mary, is arguably the most noteworthy aspect of this piece. While, as Hume rightly points out, “Lord Formal, Rattle, Sir Apish, Sir Positive, and Lady Trap are all comic grotesques of a completely standard kind, and are presented without real bite”,<sup>87</sup> Lady Matchless falls into an entirely different category. She is witty and engagingly free; as Rattle puts it, she is thankfully “at her own Disposal” (*Plays I, I, ii, 32*). Her rank and widowhood grant her liberty of speech and action. This she seizes to her own advantage, but also to help her female friends, as when she frees her cousin Helena from her insufferable suitor by diverting his attentions to herself.

Lady Matchless has learned, from experience, the inconveniences of marriage. Being a widow, she considers herself “a Prisoner eloped”, whose greatest pleasure is “to reflect on her past Confinement, and present Freedom; freed from that Torment, an injurious Husband” (*Plays I, II, i, 37*).

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<sup>87</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 32.

Although malcontent wives were common to various late seventeenth century plays—for example Wycherley's *Country Wife* (1675), Thomas Southerne's *The Wives Excuse* (1691), and Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* (1697)<sup>88</sup>—the subject of women and marriage had received more thoughtful consideration by Fielding's time. Engaging in the question of female education and the role of custom in the formation of gender difference, Mary Astell's famous *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1696), and *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), for example, had called attention to the disadvantages of marriage for women in a society embedded in mercenary wooing practices and liberty-depriving marriages.<sup>89</sup> The debate was very much alive in the 1720s and 1730s, as evidenced by Sarah Chapone's complaint in 1735 that, for women, marriage was “more disadvantageous than slavery itself”, and “that Wives may be made prisoners for Life at the Discretion of their *Domestick Governors*”.<sup>90</sup> Lady Matchless's most memorable lines echo these notions. As she informs her foppish suitor Rattle:

Courtship is to Marriage like a fine Avenue to an old falling Mansion beautified with a painted Front; but no sooner is the Door shut on us, than we discover an old, shabby, out-of-fashion'd Hall, whose only Ornaments are a Set of branching Stag's Horns—lamentable Emblems of Matrimony (*Plays* I, III, v, 52).

Contempt of marriage was, of course, a stock motif of Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays. In most of the cases, however, it was the

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<sup>88</sup> Unlike the women of those plays, who either contemplate the prospect of adultery, wish to be separated, or stoically embrace their lifetime sentence, Fielding's dissatisfied wife has been conveniently set free before the start of the play by the death of her husband.

<sup>89</sup> Astell's text on marriage was reprinted during the 1710s and 1720s, reaching a fourth edition “with Additions” in 1730. Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage, with Additions*. The Fourth edition (London: William Parker, 1730).

<sup>90</sup> Sarah Chapone, *The Hardships of English Laws in Relation to Wives* (London: W. Bower, 1735), 4.

prerogative of rakes to rail against the confinements of a married life, and to seek relief in extramarital intrigues and similar schemes, while Fielding in this case opts for a depiction of the female side of the matter.

It is little more than a playful exploration, as Lady Matchless eventually complies with the expected outcome and happily (re)marries at the close of the play. Wisemore, earlier described as “the ghost of a departed Beau, in the habit of a Country Squire, with the Sentiments of an *Athenian* Philosopher, and the Passion of an *Arcadian* Swain” (*Plays* I, II, xi, 47), devises a plan to expose the insincerity of Lady Matchless’s train of suitors: disguised as a lawyer he informs the others of an alleged problem with her inheritance, which immediately results in their forsaking her. Meanwhile Wisemore is rumoured to be dead, upon which news Lady Matchless admits a secret passion for him, which had hitherto been masked with contempt. The dropping of her metaphorical mask is succeeded by Wisemore’s literal unmasking, and a consequent promise of marriage. Their impending union inspires Malvil and Vermilia to abandon their inane quarrels and do likewise.

These happy nuptials mark Fielding first implementation of what would be a favourite finale over the course of his literary career. *Love in Several Masques* is essentially an apprenticeship—an intellectual exercise in devising clever intrigues to reach a foregone conclusion. At the same time, it signals his discovery that a standard pattern could be moulded to make a personal stance, and that romantic relationships were repositories of moral values that could be both endorsed and subverted. This realization starts to come to fruition in his next two productions, which follow the courtship

plotline again, this time with a more confident appropriation of the structure, merged with nascent ideas of literary and social criticism.

### **3. Thickening and subverting the courtship plot: *The Temple Beau* and *The Author's Farce***

After a two-year hiatus, of which we know little except that he engaged in study at the University of Leiden, Fielding came back to London with new plays and fresh ideas.<sup>91</sup> Scholars estimate that by the time of his return to the stage in 1730 Fielding had already written *Don Quixote in England* and *The Wedding Day*, which were postponed for reasons which are not entirely clear.<sup>92</sup> *The Temple Beau*, then, was in fact his fourth attempt at drama, and in that sense, a more mature work. Presumably rejected by the patented playhouses, it was produced in the recently inaugurated Goodman's Fields theatre, with players of little renown.<sup>93</sup> Revolving around the courtship intrigues of young Londoners, this comedy revisits the obstacles that stand in the way of love and marriage.

Still featuring a standard courtship plot, *The Temple Beau* moves closer to Fielding's development as a biting social critic. Part of the satire is again directed at the commercialization of marriage. Two obnoxious parents, Sir Avarice Pedant and Sir Harry Wilding, voice cynical attitudes about the matrimonial trade. In conversation about marital prospects, Sir Avarice advises his son to be expeditious in his choice, otherwise "the Stock will be

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<sup>91</sup> The Battestins offer persuasive hypotheses about Fielding's study of literature in Leiden, a short continental tour, a possible encounter with Walpole—upon which Fielding snobbishly mocked the politician's bad taste—as well as some love disappointments. Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 67-72.

<sup>92</sup> *Don Quixote in England* was performed in 1734. *The Wedding Day* was performed and published in 1743, in the second volume of the *Miscellanies*. On this see Lockwood, *Plays I*, 99.

<sup>93</sup> Lockwood, *Plays I*, 103.

sold to another Purchaser” (*Plays I, I, iv, 120*). When Sir Harry Wilding is confronted with arguments about the feeble moral principles of his prospective daughter-in-law, he responds with the stringently pragmatic observation that “she has twenty thousand pounds—very good Principles, I think”; and to a hint about her flaws, he answers “if she had as many [flaws] as she has Pounds, and if I were to receive a Pound for every Flaw, the more she had the better” (*Plays I, IV, iii, 153-54*). Clearly these parents come from the same mould as Lord Formal and Sir Avarice Trap in *Love in Several Masques*. But there is another critical dimension to these uncongenial characters: they are remarkably contemptuous toward knowledge.

Through its two interrelated plotlines, *The Temple Beau* depicts a world in which love and learning are similarly marginalized. The first subplot involves Sir Harry Wilding, a country gentleman, and his son, a law student who has neglected his education in favour of city pleasures. Believing his son an industrious scholar, the father comes to the city to work out a marriage arrangement with Bellaria, an heiress under the guardianship of Sir Avarice Pedant. As a contrast, another set of father and son are presented in a similar predicament. In the second subplot Sir Avarice also wants Bellaria for his son, who unlike Wilding junior, is assiduous in his studies. Despite his diligence, Young Pedant has also disappointed his father by devoting too much time to philosophy, instead of “that useful Part of Learning, the Arts of getting Money” (*Plays I, I, iii, 116*). Young Pedant’s erudition, however, is far from commendable for it has caused him to become arrogant and incapable of love. Thus valued in terms of profit, learning, like marriage, is either a source of contempt or a cause of folly.

This initial parallelism between the mercantilist approach to marriage and the pursuit of learning as a speedy route to financial success gradually develops into an examination of the notion of filial duty. Discussions about the reciprocal responsibilities between parents and children, masters and servants, and husbands and wives were recurrent throughout the period.<sup>94</sup> The negative characterization of the Wildings and the Pedants invites reflection on the degree of obedience that children owe to their parents when parental figures are morally unsound guides, solely driven by ambition. Young Wilding's disobedient profligacy is tempered by the caveat that his father's only interest in his law degree is to acquire social status—"I shall see the Rogue a Judge" (*Plays* I, I, vi, 118)—and to secure a rich bride, "a fine young Lady with twenty thousand Pound" (*Plays* I, III, iii, 141). The rhetoric of filial duty is similarly challenged by the uncongenial characterization of Young Wilding. As he informs Bellaria, he courts her not for love but out of duty: "Matrimony is a Subject I have little revolved in my Thoughts: but Obedience to a Parent is most undoubtedly due" (*Plays* I, III, vi, 145). Moreover, not only have the father's unscrupulous motives for this match already been established, but, as Bellaria's guardian, Pedant senior is equally nefarious: rather than looking after her wellbeing, he seeks to secure his own financial situation. These ruthless parents clearly put the obedience paradigm under stress.

Being a courtship comedy, *The Temple Beau* must end in a marriage. However, rather than reforming young Wilding and Pedant junior, who

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<sup>94</sup> For eighteenth-century views of childhood see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1990), 254-300. For the relationships between servants and their masters see Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), especially 64-92.

neither desire to get married nor deserve a happy ending, Fielding decides to resolve the plot so that love and true merit are more evidently rewarded. Bellaria is finally betrothed to the penniless Veromil, who has always professed a sincere passion for her. Their impending union is rendered the happier when Veromil—who had previously lost his fortune in a case of mistaken identity—has his inheritance restored. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, this type of marriage, in which money comes explicitly after love, but nevertheless arrives, is reworked in *Joseph Andrews*. In another subplot, Valentine, who was been previously faltering in his courtship of Clarissa, finally proves his moral worth through a gesture of disinterested friendship toward Veromil, a heartfelt promise to atone for his faults, and a legal skirmish that allows the couple to keep the bride's dowry (*Plays I, V, xxi, 177*).

Fielding's next play, *The Author's Farce*, marks a turning point in his dramatic career. Not only was it his first real commercial success and his first production at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, but it was also his first experiment in the farcical mode that would make him famous.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, it features some of Fielding's most memorable fictional characters. The play begins, once more, with the longing for an unattainable match. Harry Luckless, a starving young playwright clearly modelled on Fielding himself, daydreams about marrying Harriot, his landlady's daughter. The youth's financial situation, of course, stands in the way of the ultimate happiness promised by marriage. Mrs Moneywood, a conventionally greedy and sexually eager widow, dislikes Luckless as a potential son-in-law because

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<sup>95</sup> For the reception of this play see Lockwood, *Plays I*, 193-94.



he is poor. Yet this does not prevent, but rather encourages, her sexual solicitations. For the first time we see one of Fielding's favourite ironies: according to a Christian ethical code, marriage is the only lawful medium for the exercise of sexuality, but in a world where money is the reigning value, marriage is just a vehicle to attain wealth and status. As with Joseph in *Joseph Andrews*, Luckless's social destitution disqualifies him as a candidate for marriage, but renders him sexually available to the eyes of older and wealthier women.

While Fielding depicts merit and love as the only sound basis for a lifelong union, he is also interested in exploring the validity of social caveats about marriage, as well as in justifying some practicalities. Harriot loves Luckless despite his poverty, but she is also concerned about social standing and morally respectable codes of conduct. Hence, she refuses her lover's offer "to marry you this instant" (*Plays* I, I, iii, 233). Luckless's *carpe diem* impetuosity gestures dangerously in favour of either an elopement or a clandestine marriage, equally improper options for a woman of good reputation. Harriot's rejection of the proposal makes a point about respectability and the observation of social protocol. Nevertheless, lest a mere *status quo* rationale proves insufficient, Fielding adds more practical reasons for waiting in a song sung by Harriot (which Luckless has earlier taught her):

Wou'd you the charming Queen of Love,  
 Invite with you to dwell;  
 No Want your Poverty shou'd prove,  
 No State your Riches tell.  
 Both Her, and Happiness to hold,  
 A middle State must please;  
 They shun the House that shines with Gold,

And that which shines with Grease (*Plays I, I, iii*, 233).

According to social commentators, the balance between wealth and friendship was a desirable prerequisite for happy marriages. As Mr Spectator put it, “a Marriage of Love is pleasant; a Marriage of Interest easie; and a Marriage where both meet, happy”.<sup>96</sup> There is nothing unusual, then, in these lines. Yet, it is worth noting that having validated standard courtship recommendations, the song ends with the undignified word ‘grease’, which deliberately demystifies the romantic context. Moreover, while the joke trivializes the crude realities of poverty, it also paints a frightful picture of the dingy household that awaits lovers who do not attend to their parents’ mercenary (or in this case perhaps prudent) advice.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the formulaic complaints of an impoverished lover longing for an unattainable match develop into a critique of greed in other areas of contemporary life. Taking the marriage predicament as a case in point for the perversion of modern values, Fielding proceeds to illustrate the adversities suffered by those who try to find economic sustenance by writing good literature, the other major theme of this play. Reproducing standard raillery against marriage, Luckless’s friend Witmore admonishes him about his chosen lifestyle:

Matrimony clenches Ruin beyond Retrieval [...]
 Was it not enough to follow those nine ragged Jades the Muses,  
 but you must fasten on some Earth-born Mistress as poor as  
 them? (*Plays I, I, v*, 236)

Succinctly and wittily, Fielding pairs the fashionable contempt toward idealistic marriage with the widespread disregard for artistic merit.

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<sup>96</sup> *Spectator* No. 261, 29 December 1711, in Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, Vol. 2, 516.

Ironically, following the logic of his own remark, Witmore's disdain for romance is akin to the booksellers' derision of good literature. The parallel between thwarted marriage expectations and bleak prospects for literary success is developed in the next act of the play, which features a denunciation of the venality of theatre managers. Sparkish and Marplay, dramatic portrayals of Wilks and Cibber,<sup>97</sup> provide a list of silly alterations to Luckless's draft of a play, which would allegedly render it suitable for popular taste (*Plays* I, II, i, 242-243). Next, a conversation between the obnoxiously pragmatic bookseller Bookweight and several impoverished hack writers exposes the greedy attitudes of another side of the literary business: the book trade.

Just as the play grows into a criticism of the decadence of the stage and of literature in general, Fielding quite abruptly and unpredictably introduces the most memorable part of the farce, "The Pleasures of the Town", a ludicrous puppet show in which "the Goddess of *Nonsense* is to fall in love with the Ghost of Signior *Opera*" (*Plays* I, III, i, 257).<sup>98</sup> Using real players dressed as puppets he personifies "all the Diversions of the Town", including Murder-text (a Presbyterian Parson), Curry (an avaricious bookseller), Signior Opera (an Italian Castrato), Don Tragedio and Sir Farcical Comick (inane dramatists), Dr. Orator (the preacher John Henley), Monsieur Pantomime (John Rich), and Mrs Novel (Eliza Haywood). For the first time, we can see Fielding's successful stage formula: a simultaneous criticism of

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<sup>97</sup> For a thorough account of Fielding's fictional ridicule of Cibber and Wilks in *The Author's Farce* and the revised versions see Lockwood, *Plays* I, 242.

<sup>98</sup> The fact that "The Pleasures of the Town" was extracted from the main play to be presented on its own as an afterpiece suggests that it was the most celebrated part of the show. See Lockwood, *Plays* I, 195.

and indulgence in the frivolous entertainments of the time.

This idea of an utterly absurd world, along with the attempt to readapt the pleasures of the town for legitimate literary purposes are preoccupations Fielding shares with the established satirists, Pope, Swift, and Gay. Indeed, the setting of the scene in the court of the Goddess of Nonsense clearly echoes Pope's Court of Dullness in the *Dunciad*. Whether the reference is ironic or deferential is not very clear, however. Just before the show begins, Luckless announces his intention of bringing most of the crazy "Diversions of the Town [...] together in one" (*Plays* I, III, i, 258). By remarking that his own mockery, which follows a design similar to that of the *Dunciad*, is in fact a "Diversion of the Town", it is obliquely implied that Pope's text can be listed among the nonsensical entertainments he wants to expose. We should also take into account that Fielding was never on good terms with Pope, and that he had probably helped his cousin Lady Mary to get back at the poet through a mock-*Dunciad* a year earlier.<sup>99</sup> It is likely that Fielding seized the opportunity to extend his ironic depiction of popular diversions to Pope's very famous satire.

Fielding's allegiance to the so-called Scriblerian writers, furthermore, is a contested matter. He did sign *The Author's Farce* and four other plays of the following year—*Tom Thumb*, *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, *The Letter-Writers*, and *The Welsh Opera*—as "Scriblerus Secundus", which has led some

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<sup>99</sup> According to Paulson, during the Spring of 1728 Fielding helped Lady Mary to exercise revenge on Pope, who had just attacked her in a poem "To a Lady who father'd her Lampons upon her Acquaintances" and had also made compromising insinuations about Lady Mary's relationship with a Frenchman in *The Dunciad*. The result was a draft of three cantos of a mock-*Dunciad*, which Paulson attributes to Fielding on account of the handwriting and to Lady Mary on account of her initials on the manuscript. *The Life of Henry Fielding*, 22-23.

critics to discover an unmistakable “association with the great Augustans”, or to claim that in these plays he “engaged on the truly Scriblerian enterprise of exposing the contemporary debasement of standards”.<sup>100</sup> It is risky, however, to interpret this *nom de plume* as a wholehearted affiliation with the Scriblerians, considering Fielding’s penchant for flippancy and his use of other pseudonyms evidently in jest.<sup>101</sup> As Ashley Marshall suggests in a recent article, Fielding’s “Scriblerus” signature is probably ironic rather than deferential, especially in connection with Pope. In Marshall’s view, the playwright “is far likelier to have been mocking the gloomy and self-righteous severity of the *Dunciad* than declaring his allegiance to Pope’s cohort”.<sup>102</sup> Marshall, moreover, persuasively questions the actual significance of the Scriblerian enterprise and the absolute commitment of its members.<sup>103</sup> She reads the concept of “Scriblerian Satire” as a modern construct based on overstatements and anachronistic interpretation, which “has taken on a powerfully influential life of its own—but it is a creation and phenomenon of the twentieth century and not the eighteenth”.<sup>104</sup> It is perhaps more pertinent, then, to note individual affinities. If Fielding felt any particular

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<sup>100</sup> J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (Boston: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 9-10; and Lewis, *Fielding’s Burlesque Drama*, 87.

<sup>101</sup> For example “The Great Mogul” for the advertisement of *Pasquin* (1736), “Mum Budget” in an anti-Walpolean essay for *Common Sense* (1738), “Capt. Hercules Vinegar” in *The Champion* (1739-40), and “John Trott-Plaid, Esq.” in *The Jacobite’s Journal* (1747-48).

<sup>102</sup> Ashley Marshall, “The Myth of Scriblerus”, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31.1 (2008): 86. Robert Hume is of a similar opinion. See his discussion of “The Scriblerians” in “Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?”, *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010): 239.

<sup>103</sup> Others have argued a similar case. Philip Harth, for instance, shows that Pope and Swift had crucial points of disagreement among themselves. “Friendship and Politics: Swift’s Relation to Pope in the Early 1730s”, in *Reading Swift: Papers from the Third Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift* (Munich: Fink, 1998), 239-48.

<sup>104</sup> Marshall offers a persuasive discussion of the works that have traditionally been identified as Scriblerian, noting that most of them were published individually by their authors and that they were not necessarily part of a joint project. “The Myth of Scriblerus”, 96.

connection with these writers, it was probably with Swift. Fielding's first poem, "The Masquerade" (1728), written under the persona of "Lemuel Gulliver, Poet Laureat to the King of Lilliput", clearly recycles some of Swift's favourite motifs. The subject matter and jokes in *Tom Thumb*, as we shall see, are evidently ingrained in a Swiftean vein. In the *Covent-Garden Journal* (4 February 1752), he includes Swift (along with Cervantes and Lucian) in the "great Triumvirate" of authors, whom he held in "the highest Degree of Esteem" on account of their mastery of wit and humour (*Covent-Garden*, 74). That this empathy was reciprocal, at least to an extent, can be guessed from the famous anecdote that Fielding's *Tom Thumb* occasioned one of the two sole instances of laughter that Swift claimed to have experienced in his whole life.<sup>105</sup>

Let us now return to the puppet show inside Fielding's play, which features a bizarre courtship plot. While Pope has his Goddess of Dullness choose a king of fools, Fielding has his Goddess of Nonsense select a husband. As the choice is to be made solely based on the suitor's musical talents, Goddess Nonsense favours the ghost of Signior Opera (*Plays* I, III, i, 271-272). A complication suddenly arises: the intended bridegroom is revealed to be already married to Mrs Novel, who angrily claims him for herself. The problem, however, is quickly overturned by Nonsense, who reminds the plaintiff that death do the couple part: "tho' he were your Husband in the other World, Death solves that Tye, and he is at Liberty now to take another" (*Plays* I, III, i, 272). In the end Nonsense rejects the ghost of Signior Opera as

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<sup>105</sup> According to Swift's close friend Laetitia Pilkington, the Dean reported having laughed, for the second time in his entire life, at the absurdity of a ghost being killed in Fielding's *Tom Thumb*. On this anecdote see Hunter, *Occasional Form*, 23; and Lockwood, *Plays* I, 370.

husband—on account of an unfortunate comment he makes against marriage—and he returns to Mrs Novel, who gladly forgives and embraces her “new-found Bud!” (*Plays* I, III, i, 273). As this brief outline suggests, Fielding finds this playful subversion of a standard marriage plot a convenient vehicle for multitasking: not only does he satirize managers, opera singers, booksellers, orators, and romance writers, but the sudden and unconvincing reconciliation between Mrs Novel and the ghost of Signior Opera mocks Cibber’s farfetched reformation of Loveless, the formerly estranged husband of the faithful Amanda, in *Love’s Last Shift* (1695).<sup>106</sup>

Having abandoned the courtship plot of Harriot and Luckless for most of the play, Fielding summons it back for the closing scene of *The Author’s Farce*. The puppet show is abruptly interrupted by the surprising news that Luckless is in fact heir to the throne of the distant kingdom of Bantam, a revelation that immediately renders him an ideal candidate for marriage. Mrs Moneywood is similarly discovered to be the wife of the king of Old Brentford,<sup>107</sup> when Punch, one of the puppets of the show, recognizes her as his long-lost mother. This sequence of recognition scenes constitutes a mockery of the improbable happy endings of popular comedies by Steele and others.<sup>108</sup> By overlapping fictional planes and extratextual parody—bringing

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<sup>106</sup> Cibber’s first comedy remained part of the repertoire in Fielding’s time. It had been performed several times between 1728 and 1730, when Fielding drafted *The Author’s Farce*. Moreover, in the very season when *The Author’s Farce* premiered, *Love’s Last Shift* was offered on four different occasions: 4 April, 14 April, 24 April, and 4 May, 1730. See: Avery, ed. *The London Stage, Part 2*: 989-1024; and Arthur H. Scouten, ed. *The London Stage, Part 3: 1729-1747* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), 16-57.

<sup>107</sup> A character from George Villiers’s, second duke of Buckingham, *The Rehearsal* (1672).

<sup>108</sup> It is particularly reminiscent of Steele’s recognition scene at the end of *The Conscious Lovers*, in which a golden bracelet makes Mr Sealand recognize Indiana as his long-lost daughter. For a detailed account of the sources for Fielding’s burlesque see: Lewis, *Fielding’s Burlesque Drama*, 106; Lockwood suggests that the recognition mocks Dryden’s closing scene in *The Rival Ladies*. (1664). *Plays* I, 286.

together reality, fiction, and fiction inside fiction—these series of recognitions allow Fielding to underline the absurdity of celebrated contemporary plays. His deliberate intersecting of real and fictional dimensions, moreover, suggests a vivid awareness of the artificiality of the stage, which Lisa Freeman has identified as a defining characteristic of early eighteenth-century drama. As Freeman rightly points out, the conscious parade of artificiality drew a distinction between Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre.<sup>109</sup> However, her contention that this is also what separates early eighteenth-century theatre from eighteenth-century novels, which were often based on the illusion of presenting the life of real people,<sup>110</sup> seems less persuasive when applied to Fielding, whose essayistic prefaces and conspicuously present narrators purposefully break this fantasy. This is partly because, as I will explore at greater length in the following chapters, theatrical conventions shaped Fielding's novels in ways that have not yet been sufficiently studied.

The nonsensical conclusion of *The Author's Farce*, moreover, underscores the pervasiveness of the happy marriage finale in the most celebrated comedies of the time. But, while burlesques like Gay's *The What D'Ye Call It*, as we have seen, had also drawn critical attention to the ubiquity of weddings in plays,<sup>111</sup> I believe that Fielding's denouement was not so much a comment on the marriage ending per se, as a critique of the awkward

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<sup>109</sup> She argues that by relishing “its contrivances and celebrating the process of being watched”, eighteenth-century drama is radically different from Restoration drama, which “influenced by the discursive necessities of a new monarchist imperative, concerns itself with the reconstruction of both political legitimacy and the authority of language”. Freeman, *Character's Theatre*, 5.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 14-18, and 45.

<sup>111</sup> It is indeed probable that Gay's play was in Fielding's mind when writing *The Author's Farce*, as it had just been performed in April 1729, at Lincoln's Inn Fields. See: Avery, ed. *The London Stage, Part 2*, 1027.



and implausible intrigues devised to provide financially advantageous circumstances for a marriage that could be considered happy. In other words, by exposing the absurdities of the plot devices that were used to arrive at marriages between affluent, yet loving, couples, Fielding highlighted their improbability. As Freeman has argued, eighteenth-century plays often “reflect ironically on the ideal of romantic love by dramatizing the social labour required to produce an appearance of motivated disinterest”.<sup>112</sup> According to Freeman, the fact that couples surmount several obstacles—such as stingy parents, mercenary guardians, or deceitful suitors—before securing the love marriage to which they aspire, underscored the ambiguity embodied in the very notion of romantic marriage. By making such an effort to have couples happily married in prosperous circumstances, plays obliquely implied that pure, disinterested love was rare, or perhaps even illusory. Fielding’s overtly illogical series of recognition scenes in *The Author’s Farce* makes this irony even plainer by exposing the paradoxical nature of a financially sound love marriage. According to the convention, happy marriages have to stem from love, but ideally they should also be financially comfortable. The farcical conclusion of his play makes these competing expectations clash in evident absurdity. Quite ironically, however, with his happy ending Fielding panders to the crowds giving them exactly what they want to see, albeit in jest. Despite his efforts to emphasise the genuine love that Harriot and Luckless profess for one another, his submission to the customarily rich marriage finale muddles the potential moral. This provides a clear example of the “Frolick Flights of Youth” from

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<sup>112</sup> Freeman, *Character’s Theatre*, 9.

which Fielding excused himself in the preface to the more morally earnest *Modern Husband*, as we shall later see.

#### **4. Laughing tragedy, dwarfish heroism, and eager wives: the *Tom Thumb* plays**

The success of *The Author's Farce* was very likely fuelled by *Tom Thumb, a Tragedy*, the afterpiece with which it was originally performed.<sup>113</sup> This play, which Fielding later rewrote and expanded into *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb, the Great* (1731),<sup>114</sup> is a ludicrous mockery of modern tragedy and musical entertainments. Its combination of burlesque, farcical incidents, and songs situates it in the generic model of English ballad opera, epitomised in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.<sup>115</sup> Of all of Fielding's plays, this is perhaps the one that has received the most extensive critical attention.<sup>116</sup> On account of the hero's size in explicit contrast to the use of the

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<sup>113</sup> Lockwood conjectures that without *Tom Thumb* as afterpiece *The Author's Farce* would have probably been "payable and well liked but not an instant great success." Lockwood, *Plays I*, 194.

<sup>114</sup> The revised afterpiece eventually became a mainpiece with a printed edition wrapped in mock-scholarly annotation. For detailed analyses of the changes between the editions of *Tom Thumb* see T.W. Craik, "Fielding's Tom Thumb Plays", in *Augustan Worlds: New Essays in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. J.C. Hilson (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1978); and, more recently, Lockwood's introduction to *Tom Thumb (Plays I, 357-76)* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies (Plays I, 499-588)*.

<sup>115</sup> This is the more evident in Eliza Haywood's collaborative re-writing of the piece in 1733, comprising minor changes and extra songs, titled *The Opera of Operas; or Tom Thumb the Great*. See Eliza Haywood, *Selected Fiction of Eliza Haywood*, ed. Paula Backscheider (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>116</sup> J. Paul Hunter, for instance, studies its visual parody of *Hamlet*. *Occasional Form*, 24-34. Lewis explores the ways in which the critical apparatus of the revised version of *Tom Thumb* was designed to make explicit the burlesque of heroic tragedies by Dryden, Otway, Lee and Banks, while mocking the pedantry of respected critics such as Richard Bentley and John Dennis. *Fielding's Burlesque Theatre*, 112-114. Rivero notes that by justifying the use of a British folk tale as subject matter, the prologue teasingly elaborates on the type of tragedy advocated and practised by Addison and James Thomson. *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 61. Jill Campbell uses it as a major example of the concern with gender instability she sees as distinctive of Fielding's drama. *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 19-26. Lockwood follows the stage history of *Tom Thumb* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies* to illuminate the significance of Fielding's years as a dramatist to his overall artistic career. Lockwood, "Fielding from stage to page", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 22-25.

epithet “the great” in the title of the revised versions, the *Tom Thumb* plays have sometimes been read as satires on Robert Walpole, whose detractors satirically nicknamed “the great man”.<sup>117</sup> This interpretation has been challenged by some,<sup>118</sup> and partially accepted by others.<sup>119</sup> In my view, though by no means the primary aim of the play, the Walpole quip offered a virtually effortless addition too humorous to be left out.

Despite the relatively ample critical attention that *Tom Thumb* has received, the pervasiveness of its domestic motifs and the complexity of its marriage plot have not been sufficiently considered. Toying with the generic conventions of tragedies and comedies, the title of this hilarious piece identifies it as a tragedy, a category ostensibly confirmed by the slaughter with which it closes.<sup>120</sup> However, not only is the valedictory sequence of murders absolutely comic, but the whole play revolves around a humorous courtship intrigue. It begins with Tom Thumb’s return to the court of King Arthur and Queen Dollalolla after having slain twenty giants. As a reward for his public service, the king offers the tiny hero the hand of his only daughter,

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<sup>117</sup> For example, L. J. Morrissey, “Fielding’s First Political Satire”, *Anglia* 90 (1972): 325-48. Cited in Lewis, *Fielding’s Burlesque Drama*, 111.

<sup>118</sup> The Walpole link has been forcefully refuted by Bertrand Goldgar and Hume. They point out the scantiness of evidence for this allegation, and note that Fielding was not yet systematically attacking the ministry. Bertrand Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 104-105. Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 70. Brian McCrea makes a similar point in *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1981). Extant samples of eighteenth-century criticism of Fielding’s work, moreover, show that his contemporaries did not find Walpolean innuendo in this piece. See *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 22-23.

<sup>119</sup> Paulson considers that although the play is not a sustained allegory, the epithet could have been a small wink at the audience who would be alert to any mention of the word greatness. *The Life of Henry Fielding*, 50. Joseph Roach is of a similar opinion. “The Uncreating Word”, in *Henry Fielding (1707-1734)*, ed. Rawson, 44.

<sup>120</sup> The prologue to the first version of the play essays a brief explanation about the jumbling of genres, hinged on complaints against contemporary authors and audiences. It declares that since talentless writers have turned the stage to farce, and spectators “to laugh, to Tragedies [...] come”, the author had to provide a hero “whose very Name must Mirth incite” (*Plays* I, 381).

Princess Huncamunca, in marriage. A complication soon arises: both the queen and the princess are in love with Tom Thumb. That this odd courtship intrigue is the focus of Fielding's play becomes the more evident in the revised version, in which the love entanglement is expanded. In *The Tragedy of Tragedies* Glumdalca—a giantess brought back as prisoner from the reign of the giants—is also infatuated with Tom; the king has passionate feelings for this colossal woman; and the courtier Grizzle pursues Princess Huncamunca.

The fact that the hero is absurdly small for the deed he is reputed to have performed is the main source of humour in the *Tom Thumb* plays, according to critics like Rivero.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, Fielding resorts to all sorts of Swiftean jokes about size-merit ratio. While Tom Thumb is a sort of Lilliputian, minuscule in size but absurdly conceited and self-righteous, the king, queen, and princess—who are gigantic in comparison to Tom Thumb—are endowed with hyperbolised human weaknesses, like the giants in Brobdingnag in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Treasured by the giantess Glumdalca, Tom Thumb is also akin to Gulliver, nursed by Glumdaldich, of suspiciously similar name and size.<sup>122</sup> It is the courtship intrigue and marriage conflict, however, which allows for a thorough exploitation of the comical potentials of these incongruities of stature.

Taking the famous passage from *Gulliver's Travels* where the Lilliputian Flimnap accuses Gulliver of the physical impossibility of having had sex with his wife as a thematic prompt, Fielding renders the incongruous disjunction between size and sexual proficiency in *Tom Thumb* a chief target

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<sup>121</sup> Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 61.

<sup>122</sup> On this parallel see Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama*, 119.

of laughter.<sup>123</sup> The “great” Tom Thumb is obviously too small to be the source of passion squabbles between the women in court. As Mustacha the maid acknowledges, Tom Thumb is “One properer for a Play-thing, than a Husband” (*Plays* I, II, iii, 397). To make quite clear that what makes a man a proper husband is his sexual prowess, at least to a female mind, in *The Tragedy of Tragedies* Glumdalca implores “Oh! stay, *Tom Thumb*, and you alone shall fill that Bed where twenty Giants us’d to lie” (II,vii,572). While (chiefly male) characters in other plays seek marriage for financial and social aggrandizement, the women in *Tom Thumb* are only worried about sex.

The disassociation of physical smallness from sexual inadequacy amusingly enhances the portrayal of a heroic world turned upside down. Throughout the long eighteenth century, the idea of heroism underwent important transformations. Robert Folkenflik, for instance, has pointed out that a “characteristic metamorphosis” of this period is the replacement of “heroic fury” with wars of passion.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the heroic idiom mocked in *Tom Thumb* draws from allegories of man-woman relations as a state of war, a favourite literary topos of the time. Fielding’s love plot in the *Tom Thumb* plays, however, teasingly revisits and reverses the values commonly endorsed by such texts. While in popular poems of this kind, such as Samuel Wesley’s *The Battle of the Sexes* (1723), “Chieftain Lust” is “a Giant Man”, temporarily held back by “Modesty” with “her Angel Form”, and finally defeated by a loving marriage, which “over Lust perpetual Triumph gain'd”,

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<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In four parts. By Lemuel Gulliver* (London: Benj. Motte, 1726), I, viii.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Folkenflik, ed. *The English Hero, 1660-1800* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982), Introduction, 17. For a thorough documentation of the transformation of the notions of heroism in the period see all the essays of this volume.

in the *Tom Thumb* plays it is the women who are characterized as powerful and lustful, while the men are shown to be either ludicrously small like Tom Thumb, submissive like the king, or inept schemers like Grizzle.<sup>125</sup> In fact, in *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, “modesty” is explicitly presented as an attribute of the hero. When Tom Thumb refuses to boast about his extraordinary deeds, the king praises his “Modesty” for being “a Candle to thy Merit” (*Plays I, I, iii, 554*). Playing with the two main connotations of the term, which, as in the play can signify lack of ostentation, but also, as in the poem, that decorous restraint of the passions which was a desirable female attribute, Fielding discretely hints at the emasculation of his hero. Meanwhile, the queen is lustfully delighted to hear that the giantess Glumdalca had twenty husbands, simultaneously: “Oh! happy State of Giantism—where Husbands/Like Mushrooms grow, whilst hapless we are forc’d/To be content, nay happy thought, with one” (*Plays I, I, iii, 555*). *The Battle of The Sexes* champions the idea that men should be conquerors: “For Heaven made Man to win, and Woman to be won”.<sup>126</sup> Fielding also inverts this conventional principle by having princess Huncamunca make a marriage proposal. Although like the rest of the female characters Huncamunca is infatuated with Tom Thumb, she offers not just a regular but a clandestine marriage to Grizzle: “lest some Disaster we should meet/’Twere better to be marry’d at the Fleet” (*Plays I, II, v, 569*). He rejects the plan for fear that “a Princess should/ By that vile Place, contaminate her Blood” (*Plays I, II, v, 569*). Due to his absurd observation of

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<sup>125</sup> Samuel Wesley, *The Battle of the Sexes, A Poem* (London: J. Roberts, 1723), XIX, 3; XXII, 3-4; and XXXVI, 8-9.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, XLI, 10.

decorum in a world that quite obviously does not care about such minutiae any longer, he loses his opportunity to marry her.

Fielding's playful disruption of social order finds its greatest expression in the contemplation of polygamy, or more specifically, female polygamy. Not only is Glumdalca reported to have had twenty husbands in the kingdom of giants—a prospect that fills queen Dollalolla with joy—but also Huncamunca, the youthful heroine, cheerfully flirts with the idea of bigamy. Having already married Tom Thumb, the princess proposes Grizzle double nuptials: “My ample heart for more than one has Room/A maid like me, Heaven form'd at least for two/I married him, and now I'll marry you” (*Plays* I, II, x, 576). Polygamy was an attractive taboo of eighteenth-century British society. As Faramerz Dabhoiwala notes, it was a prominent subject of debate, encouraged by some on the grounds that it could curb pernicious seduction and promote a desirable demographic growth. The advocates of polygamy endeavoured to justify it using examples from the Old Testament and Oriental cultures.<sup>127</sup> These arguments, however, did not manage to persuade the majority of social commentators, who continued to associate polygamy with licentiousness. A few years before Fielding's *Tom Thumb*, for example, the historian Thomas Salmon dedicated several pages of his *Critical Essay Concerning Marriage* (1724) to demonstrate why polygamy went against Christian principles even when in ancient times “the practice of a Man's taking more Wives than one has been almost universal, and has more

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<sup>127</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), “Polygamy and Population”, 215-25.

Advocates than the other Sort of polygamy [the female polygamy]".<sup>128</sup> If it was morally objectionable for men, it was virtually unthinkable for women. It was generally the plurality of wives, not husbands, which was discussed. In *Tom Thumb*, however, we can see a rare example of a sympathetic portrayal of female polygamy. Although Huncamunca is certainly not intended as an exemplary character, the gaiety with which her arguments are presented, the good-hearted humour of the play in general, and the astounding reception it had, show on the one hand an author willing to portray these kinds of disruptions, and an audience willing to tolerate the fantasy, at least on the stage. The fact that Huncamunca, the Giantess, and the queen invite sprightly laughter rather than scorn indicates that Fielding considered excessive female lust a lesser vice than the mercantilism that governed both intellectual and sexual activity in *The Temple Beau* and *The Author's Farce*.

The figurative inversion of gender markers became literal in the staged play, since a "Miss Jones", a child actress, played the role of Tom Thumb.<sup>129</sup> The visual joke achieved through cross-dressing enhanced the appeal of the absurd and the reversal of conventions. To preserve part of this performative humour in print, Fielding commissioned Hogarth to illustrate the 1731 edition of *The Tragedy of Tragedies* with an engraving of the scene where Huncamunca and the gigantic Glumdalca fight over the tiny and finely

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<sup>128</sup> Thomas Salmon, *A Critical Essay Concerning Marriage* (London: Charles Rivington, 1724), 84. A few years later, in 1737, Patrick Delany, an Irish clergyman, and member of Jonathan Swift's social circle in the 1720s, published a 200-page treatise devoted to an analysis of the advantages and objections to polygamy, titled *Reflections upon Polygamy, and the Encouragement Given to that Practice in the Scriptures of the Old Testament* (London: J. Roberts, 1737). On Delaney see Andrew Carpenter, "Delany, Patrick", *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James McGuire, and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). <<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a2511>> [accessed 14 May 2013].

<sup>129</sup> Lockwood, *Plays I*, 367.



featured Tom, who passively stares at them (figure 8). Jill Campbell has observed how, by having a frontispiece of that particular scene, Fielding disapprovingly foregrounded the contrast between fading masculine heroism and the growing interest in domestic squabble.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, the play is partly a nostalgic mockery of changing modern values; but, at the same time, by choosing that passage to be illustrated, and thus rendered more memorable, Fielding also betrayed a latent admiration for women of gargantuan size and sexual appetite. Moreover, it is worth taking into account that, as Dror Wahrman has pointed out, categories of identity such as gender had greater flexibility during the first half of the eighteenth century. Wahrman has suggested that early in the century fictional depictions of powerful women were not necessarily a threatening challenge to the patriarchal social order, as they became in the later decades. Furthermore, the theatre, “where identities were self-consciously constructed and reconstructed” was, according to Wahrman, the cultural manifestation that more evidently engaged in experimentation and displayed greater leniency toward gender fluidity.<sup>131</sup> Given that cross-dressing and playful inversion of gender were common features of the stage in Fielding’s time, I believe that his depiction of powerful, Amazonian, even masculine, women should be understood as a lighter attack on social mores than his critique of the commercialization of love and culture in other plays.

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<sup>130</sup> Campbell, *Natural Masques*, 22.

<sup>131</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 7-15, and 48.



Figure 8. William Hogarth and Gerard Vandergucht, *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, 1731  
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University

Apart from his exploration of courtship, in *Tom Thumb* Fielding also deals with the other side of the marriage plot, marital conflict. The love triangle of Tom, Huncamunca, and Glumdalca is set against the fractious marriage of the king and queen. If in the first version of *Tom Thumb* King Arthur is just mildly submissive to his wife, admitting that “Rather than quarrel, you shall have your Will” (*Plays* I, I, ii, 389), in the revised play the motif of petticoat government became greatly expanded for comic purposes. This is clearly exemplified in one of the opening scenes of the play, where the queen questions the suitability of Tom as a husband for her daughter. In *Tom Thumb* the king confidently rebukes his wife: “When I consent, what Pow’r has your Denyal?/ For, when the Wife her husband over-reaches,/Give him the Petticoat, and her the Breeches” (I,iii,390). In the same episode in *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, however, the queen storms out “in a Passion” (*Plays* I, I, iii, 558) and only after she has left, does the king inform Tom that he is the one in charge. The domineering aspect of the queen is a source of humour for the *Tragedy of Tragedies* even before the start, for the *Dramatis Personae* introduces her as:

Wife to King *Arthur*, and Mother to *Huncamunca*, a woman entirely faultless, saving that she is a little given to Drink; a little too much of a *Virago* towards her Husband, and in Love with *Tom Thumb* (*Plays* I, 547).

As noted above, in both versions of the play the transposition of man-woman roles in courtship and marriage is a strategy to boost humour. Another implication of this insistence on the potential for comedy, and even ridicule, inherent in strong heroes (and husbands) in a world that no longer observes heroic values, is that modern society perhaps needs something different. As J.

Paul Hunter points out, Fielding wrote at a time when the figure of the hero had been tattered by the older satirists Pope and Swift. However, according to Hunter, Fielding's vision was far less pessimistic than theirs, for "temperamentally he is unable to feel as bleak as he thinks he ought to".<sup>132</sup> Fielding's good-humoured substitution of powerful heroes for dominated husbands, then, suggests that there could be a positive side to the ascendancy of domestic conflict over military heroism. This is something he developed at greater length in his novels, in which the values commonly associated with strong masculinity come under stress. The male protagonists in *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia* are all unconventionally weak and effeminate to various degrees.<sup>133</sup> As a corrective endeavour, nonetheless, the *Tom Thumb* plays fail to advance an alternative model of desirable behaviour, which partly explains why Fielding eschewed irregularity and light-humour when attacking what he perceived as greater breaches of social order, as will be seen later on.

Lastly, it is pertinent to consider the role of the original casting in the *Tom Thumb* plays for the enhancement of domestic related humour. The long eighteenth century marked a turning point in the matter of theatrical celebrity. Kristina Straub, for instance, observes that at the turn of the century there was a change in the way theatre goers perceived actors and actresses: "instead of the anonymous individual whose name seldom, if ever, appeared on a playbill, the actor was emerging as a personality, an object of

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<sup>132</sup> J. Paul Hunter, "Fielding and the Disappearance of Heroes", in *The English Hero*, ed. Folkenflik, 120.

<sup>133</sup> A useful exploration on the gender ambiguities of these characters can be found in Jill Campbell's *Natural Masques*.

public curiosity and enquiry”.<sup>134</sup> According to Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, from the Restoration onwards there emerged “an apparatus for disseminating fame”, which made it increasingly possible for audiences to follow closely the romances, marriages, quarrels, and affairs going on between players, dramatists, and theatre managers.<sup>135</sup> Like modern day gossip magazines, eighteenth-century playbills, newspaper reviews, and *dramatis personae* with listed casts gave spectators information about the people they saw on stage and their families.

For the original production of *Tom Thumb* at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, the leading roles were given to married couples. William and Elizabeth Mullart, husband and wife, were cast as King Arthur and Queen Dollalolla.<sup>136</sup> Mr and Mrs Jones played Princess Huncamunca and Lord Grizzle, while the tiny hero was performed by a “Miss Jones”, ostensibly Mr Jones’s daughter.<sup>137</sup> The fact that actors and actresses who were married in real life played onstage couples no doubt enriched the jokes about henpecked husbands and bossy wives. Crucial moments in the play, such as the quarrel between Huncamunca and Glumdalca over the miniscule Tom, were surely rendered the more hilariously absurd, given that the child actress playing the hero was, in real life, daughter to the woman playing his purported lover. Not

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<sup>134</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 24.

<sup>135</sup> Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, ed. *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3-6.

<sup>136</sup> See “Mullart, William” and “Mullart, Mrs William, Elizabeth”, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, & other Stage Personnel, 1660-1800*, Sixteen Volumes, ed. Philip Highfill Jr., Kalman Burnim, and Edward Langhans (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), Vol. 10, M’intosh to Nash, 374-78.

<sup>137</sup> There were various married couples of actors with the last name Jones. One such couple worked for the Little Theatre in the Haymarket during the 1730s. Records suggest that “Miss Jones” was a young actress, daughter of a Mr. Jones, who also performed in the Haymarket Theatre at the time. See “Jones, Mr.”, “Jones, Mrs.”, and “Jones, Miss”, in *A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Highfill, Burnim and Langhans, Vol. 8, Hough to Keyse, 219-29.

only would the already weak heroic masculinity of Tom have been effectively nullified by his being played by a young girl, but also—if members of the audience knew that the actress was the daughter of the man playing Grizzle—Tom’s fight with the courtier would have been equated to a power struggle between a father and his rebellious daughter. Similarly, the threat of polygamy in the scene where Huncamunca wants to marry Grizzle after she is already the wife of Tom Thumb would have been simultaneously downplayed—taking into account that the actress playing the princess was already married to the actor playing the courtier—and foregrounded—by having a real-life wife speak very lightly about taking a second husband. Fielding clearly exploited every available resource to enhance the comic appeal of the intricacies of domesticity in this play.

## **6. National and domestic (petticoat) government: *The Welsh-Street Opera***

As we have seen, Fielding’s early plays tapped into the moral and comic potential of marriage to explore a number of either closely or indirectly related debates. The *Tom Thumb* plays, moreover, provide a first instance of the author’s interest in topicality, which became more fully developed in the plays to follow.<sup>138</sup> Although neither *Tom Thumb* nor *The Tragedy of Tragedies* are overtly political in subject matter, the submissiveness of King Arthur obliquely alludes to contemporary rumours about King George II being dominated by Queen Caroline.<sup>139</sup> This light insinuation is more explicitly

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<sup>138</sup> On Fielding’s affinity for topical satire as a distinctive characteristic of his dramatic style see Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire*, 67-68 and 72.

<sup>139</sup> Queen Caroline reputedly favoured Robert Walpole and was regarded by many as the powerful ally who had helped the prime minister to retain his place after the death of George I. Caroline was also granted power in other areas of government, including the administration of ecclesiastical affairs. According to a modern biographer, she “exerted

expounded in *The Welsh Opera; or the Grey Mare the Better Horse* (1731), an afterpiece to the *The Tragedy of Tragedies*,<sup>140</sup> in which the inability of a man to govern his household is explicitly used as a comic metaphor for political weakness.

Having written it hurriedly in just twenty-nine days, Fielding revised and expanded the two-act afterpiece into a feature-length piece entitled the *Grub-Street Opera*.<sup>141</sup> Jestingly called “Operas”, both versions feature various songs and dialogues consisting of crude similes clearly intended to mock contemporary operas.<sup>142</sup> While the form and dialogues burlesque that very popular theatrical mode, the plot and characters clearly satirize the Royal Court of George II. Although open, the political satire of these plays is neither too severe—as the light, humorous tone renders most characters droll, not despicable—nor explicitly partisan—for the mild ridicule is distributed equally among all the main figures of the Royal Court.<sup>143</sup> The king and queen

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herself vigorously and had a crucial role in the appointment of at least four, and possibly as many as eight of the thirteen bishops consecrated between 1727 and 1737”. Stephen Taylor, “Caroline (1683–1737)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4720>> [accessed 12 April 2013].

<sup>140</sup> *The Letter Writers* (1731) had been Fielding’s original afterpiece for *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, but after four not so successful performances the author decided to substitute it with *The Welsh Opera*. See Lockwood, *Plays* II, 11.

<sup>141</sup> *The Welsh Opera* was performed at the Haymarket in April 1731, but was only published in a pirate edition. Fielding revised the original afterpiece into *The Grub-Street Opera*, which for some reason was never performed, and only published posthumously in 1755. For composition and publication details see Lockwood, *Plays* II, 24-30. Some critics believe that Fielding was bribed by Walpole to suppress the play. See Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding*, 52. Hume and Lockwood suggest that Fielding was angry after the piracy episode and decided not to produce the revised version, although they do not completely rule out the possibility of bribery. Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 103; Lockwood, *Plays* II, 20-21.

<sup>142</sup> As Lockwood points out, many of the exchanges between couples in Fielding’s play parody the form and content of one of the staple components of operas in the first half of the century: the so-called simile aria, which can be found in pieces like Handel’s *Lotharius* (1729), and *Porus* (1731). See *Plays* II, 81, note 1. A good example of this parody occurs in Act I, Scene vi of Fielding’s piece.

<sup>143</sup> However, I find Paulson’s suggestion that Fielding was even “showing sympathy, if not flattery” to Walpole unpersuasive, for Robin is still portrayed as an unfaithful, crudely misogynistic, and essentially foolish butler who tricks his masters. Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding*, 53.

of England are fictionalized as Squire and Mrs Apshinken, with their lewd and unruly son Master Owen representing Frederick, Prince of Wales. Straightforwardly, Robin the butler is meant to stand for Robert Walpole, and William the groom for William Pulteney, the leader of the opposition in the House of Commons, with whom Walpole had a bitter exchange of written abuse over the course of that year, which eventually culminated in the removal of Pulteney's name from the privy council in July 1731.<sup>144</sup>

The play once again centres on amorous intrigues. Worried that her lascivious son will seduce, impregnate and eventually be compelled to marry one of the maids, Mrs Apshinken requests Puzzletext, the family chaplain, to arrange nuptials among her servants.<sup>145</sup> Robin is to marry Sweetissa, and William is to wed Susan. So far, everyone is content. But Owen, fearing that the maids will not like him after they are married to other men, "for when once a woman knows what's what, she knows too much for me" (*Plays* II, I, iii, 75), forges a couple of letters that crisscross the affairs, causing enmity among the male servants and jealousy between the lovers. As in *Tom Thumb*, the original cast of *The Welsh Opera* intensified the comedy of the romantic plot by means of games between onstage and offstage couples. William Mullart played the part of Robin, while his wife, Elizabeth, took the role of Susan, William the groom's sweetheart. The onstage bickering of lovers about

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<sup>144</sup> See Stuart Handley, M. J. Rowe, and W. H. McBryde, "Pulteney, William, earl of Bath (1684–1764)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22889>> [accessed 3 December 2011].

<sup>145</sup> For a detailed discussion of prince Frederick's domestic quarrels with his parents see Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), 40.



the butler having an affair with the maid, then, was lent additional spice by the fact that the performers were a couple in real life.<sup>146</sup>

Oblivious to the machinations and quarrels taking place in his household, Squire Apshinken delegates all power to his wife. As he admits to Puzzletext: “if she interfereth not with my Pipe, I am resolv’d not to interfere with her Family” (*Plays* II, I, ii, 75). Through this comic depiction of the disorganized country household of a henpecked squire, Fielding finds an opportunity to comment on the problems that emerge when a monarch, the metaphoric father of the nation, neglects his duties. Parallelisms of conjugal and political society were well established in this period. Analogies between parents and monarchs had been key to late seventeenth-century debates about the divine right of kings. While Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha, or the Natural Power of Kings* (1680) held that the king as a symbolic father of the nation had a natural right to govern without questioning, John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) endorsed the notion of a contractual relationship between monarchs and subjects, akin to that of husbands and wives, wherein the governed had the right to rebel if the government turned tyrannical. As he put it in the *Second Treatise*:

The Power of the Husband being so far from that of an absolute Monarch, that the Wife has in many cases, a Liberty to separate from him; where natural Right, or their Contract allows it, whether that Contract be made by themselves in the State of Nature, or by the Customs or Laws of the Country they live in.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> On the casting of *The Welsh Opera* see Scouten, ed. *The London Stage*, Part 3, 131.

<sup>147</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1698), Second Treatise, Chapter VII, part 82, 226. I use the first edition, as it is the one Fielding owned and in all probability resorted to as reference. See Frederick G. Ribble and Anne G. Ribble *Fielding’s Library: An Annotated Catalogue* (Charlottesville: The Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1996), item L23, 199-200.

After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which James II had been forced to step down in favour of William and Mary, contractual ideas about national and domestic government frequently drew on Locke's model. By Fielding's time, the father as monarch (and the monarch as father) was a familiar trope. It required little more than a veiled allusion for audiences to associate the conflictive household of the Apshinkens with the court of George II and Caroline.

An ironical rendering of the comic marriage plot in this case allows Fielding to tackle marital conflict and politics simultaneously. On one level, he deflates the role of the monarch by showing that rulers, like ordinary husbands, suffer similar domestic problems. As Puzzletext informs Apshinken "Petticoat Government is a very lamentable Thing indeed—but it is the Fate of many an honest Gentleman" (*Plays* II, I, i, 73). At another level, the parallel also suggests that George II's feebleness of character was perhaps a minor fault, being a trait he shared with other men, even among members of the audience, or their acquaintances. Fielding likewise reduces the notorious pamphlet war between Pulteney and Walpole to a domestic squabble between a butler and a groom over love letters. The immediate suggestion, which is a key source of humour, is that seemingly important political affairs are as absurd and inane as household quarrels. As Rivero has observed, Fielding was following the lead of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in lowering the politics of the state to the level of everyday life.<sup>148</sup> Another implication, which is largely absent from Gay's work (and from Rivero's assessment), is that Fielding aims to explore the idea that domestic affairs

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<sup>148</sup> Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 91-96.

can sometimes be as important as public matters, for the ostensibly trivial love entanglements of *The Grub-Street Opera* are of the greatest consequence for the characters of the play, especially the women of little or no fortune.

Leaving the domineering Mrs Apshinken aside, the rest of the female characters are depicted as either victims of social prejudice, subject to the caprices of unfaithful lovers, or potentially easy prey for male social superiors. For example, Molly, daughter to one of Apshinken's tenants, is assailed by Master Owen, whose intentions are far from honourable, and who tries to convince her that "marriage is but a dirty road to love—and those are happiest who arrive at love without travelling thro' it" (*Plays* II, II, ii, 94). As a man of higher rank, Owen purports to instruct Molly in the fashionable ways of the world, telling her that bad reputations are in vogue. But she voices a justified alert about a pervasive double standard:

Ladies of quality may wear bad reputations as well as bad cloaths, and be admir'd in both—but women of lower rank must be decent, or they will be disregarded: for no women can pass without one good quality, unless she be a woman of very great quality (*Plays* II, II, ii, 94).

The passage echoes the *Essay upon Modern Gallantry* (1726), whose anonymous author advises women to be cautious, for

Ladies of Rank, Fortune and Distinction, may do a thousand irregular Things, without Censure, or at least with no other bad Consequence, by the very Circumstance of their being *above the World*; [...] Whereas the World will not make the same Allowances to Women of an inferior Rank, but exacts the severest Account of their Actions, under Pain of Infamy and Reproach.<sup>149</sup>

This scene between Molly and Owen—featuring some of the few serious exchanges of the play—reveals Fielding's awareness about the significance of

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<sup>149</sup> Anon., *An Essay upon Modern Gallantry* (London: A. More, 1726), 44-45.

seemingly unimportant matters of seduction and marriage. Through Molly, Fielding voices his mistrust of the sudden reformation of rakes,<sup>150</sup> an idea upon which he would elaborate in his novels.<sup>151</sup> Although he toys with the marriage plot for the sake of humour and to vent political criticism, Fielding does not completely cast aside the idea that meritorious characters should be rewarded with worthy spouses and happy unions.

As in the *Tom Thumb* plays, variations between first and revised versions were concerned with expanding domestic and marriage motifs, providing more coherent conclusions, and in this case offering a tentative moral.<sup>152</sup> *The Welsh Opera*, like the first *Tom Thumb*,<sup>153</sup> ends rather absurdly: Goody Scratch, a witch arisen from nowhere, stops the quarrel between Robin and William by revealing that all the servants are heirs to very rich Estates and titles, and that the letters were forged (*Plays* II, II, v, 60). In the revised *Grub-Street Opera* Fielding extended his parallelism of politics and domestic life by having the love intrigue unfold upon the servants' confessions of their respective thefts and schemes, which restores friendships and results in double nuptials. When Puzzletext admits that "if Robin the butler hath cheated more than other people, I see no other reason for it, but because he hath had more opportunity to cheat" (*Plays* II, III, xiv,

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<sup>150</sup> Upon hearing Owen's sneering at marriage she becomes convinced that men of fickle hearts are incapable of change: "henceforth I will sooner think it possible for butter to come when the witch is in the churn—for hay to dry in the rain, for wheat to be ripe at Christmas, for cheese to be made without milk, for a barn to be free from mice [...] as for a young man to be free from falsehood" (*Plays* II, II, ii, 95).

<sup>151</sup> See, for instance, *Tom Jones*, VIII, i, 406.

<sup>152</sup> For a thorough comparison of versions see Lockwood's introduction to *The Welsh Opera* in *Plays*, Vol. II, 16-19.

<sup>153</sup> The first version of *Tom Thumb* has a farcical ending: having been eaten by a cow Tom Thumb returns as a ghost, to be killed again by Grizzle in a squabble where all the characters murder each other. This is the episode that provoked Swift's rare instance of laughter. See above. The farce was nuanced for *Tragedy of Tragedies*, in which Tom dies swallowed by the cow, but does not return. The rest of the characters die in the end in a less ostentatious series of murders.

123), Fielding essays an early attempt to depict shared characteristics of human nature, as he famously set out to do in his novels. This is clearly indicated in the song that closes the scene of the robbery revelations:

In this little family plainly we find,  
A little epitome of human-kind,  
Where down from the beggar, up to the great man,  
Each gentleman cheats you no more than he can (*Plays* II, III,  
air lx,124).

Finally, by having the king in very good humour excuse the servants' embezzlements, which is answered by a unanimous "Heavens bless your good honour" (*Plays* II, III, xiv, 124), it is suggested that a henpecked husband, or king, can very well be a source of mockery, without this being entirely disadvantageous for the family, or his subjects. Fielding usually presents such husbands as agreeable characters, minor transgressors at the most. In later plays humouring the wife is even recommended as an efficient strategy to achieve marital concord, as in *The Universal Gallant; or the Different Husbands* (1735), in which the husband's behaviour is revealed to have no influence over the disposition of the wife.<sup>154</sup>

### **7. The elopement plot of *Rape upon Rape/The Coffee-House Politician***

While the henpecked husband is a source of humour in lighter comedies, abuse of power is more seriously derided in Fielding's grimmer *Rape upon Rape; or the Justice Caught in His Own Trap* (1730), re-staged and published

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<sup>154</sup> In *The Universal Gallant* Fielding contrasts a pair of sisters-in-law of opposite character: Mrs Raffler, an adulterous coquette, and Lady Raffler, a morally impeccable wife. They are married to similarly contrasting men: Colonel Raffler, a gullible simpleton, and Sir Simon Raffler, an unreasonably jealous husband. After a series of intrigues where the virtuous wife is doubted while the coquette is trusted, the solution proposed is for husbands to trust their wives regardless of their behaviour (*Plays* III, V,i,214).

months later as *The Coffee-House Politician*.<sup>155</sup> The prologue to this regular comedy in five acts announces the author's intention of reviving a method from "ancient Greece, the Infant Muse's School", in order to expose truly hideous characters not often shown on stage—for "Vice [is] cloath'd with Pow'r"—promising to spare "The Uncorrupt and Good" (*Plays I*, 426-7). This evidences a side of Fielding which already could be glimpsed, but had not yet fully materialised: an explicit social commitment, rooted in classical notions of satire as a means of instruction. It also illustrates Fielding's recourse to topicality, for it is likely that the original title of the play sought to tap into the publicity of a recent rape scandal, as critics have remarked.<sup>156</sup>

In the first act of the play, Hilaret and Constant decide to escape in the middle of the night to get secretly married, but "a Scuffle happening in the street" separates the lovers and causes the drunken Ramble to make sexual advances to Hilaret, taking her for "either a Woman of Quality, or a Woman of the Town" (*Plays I*, I, ix, 440-441).<sup>157</sup> Playing with the commonplace idea that

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<sup>155</sup> Lockwood observes that despite the change of title, both plays are essentially the same. Although some have interpreted the alteration as an effort to tone the play down, Lockwood believes that it was rather a matter of advertising it as a new production. For a discussion of versions see Lockwood, *Plays I*, 415-21.

<sup>156</sup> The rape trial and objectionable pardon of Colonel Francis Charteris—popularly known as "Rapemaster General of Great Britain"—had just taken place between February and April of 1730. He was accused of raping Ann Parson, one of his maids. In his defence, he tried to accuse her of prostitution and theft, but his witnesses were soon proved spurious. In the end, he used his influence to have the judges acquit him. The affair became a scandal and people from all social ranks were outraged. Antony Simpson has argued that the rape incident was the last straw for the public, who despised Charteris's long-lived reputation for dishonesty, and embezzlement (even of people from the lowest classes). For an extensive discussion of the case and its reception see Antony Simpson, "Popular Perceptions of Rape as a Capital Crime in Eighteenth-Century England: the Press and the Trial of Francis Charteris in the Old Bailey, February 1730", *Law and History Review* 22.1 (2004): 27-70. After a careful survey of scholarly opinion on Fielding's allusion to the Charteris affair, Lockwood concludes that although "the public event most obviously registered in the play, [...] the application may go no further than [a] halter-cutting line and the prurient 'rape' title". *Plays I*, 413.

<sup>157</sup> The humour of this scene also depended to some extent on casting, at least in the original production, in which Ramble and Hilaret were played by Mr [William] and Mrs [Elizabeth] Mullart, a married couple of actors. It must certainly have been comic to see a husband

women of very high rank are as indecorous as prostitutes, as in *The Welsh Opera*, Fielding succinctly derides the reputedly debauched ways of the aristocracy. Matters worsen when, in an effort to attract the attention of the nightwatch and be freed from Ramble's inappropriate approach, Hilaret cries "Help there! a Rape, a Rape!" (*Plays I, I, ix, 442*). The screw is given yet another turn when Ramble, seeking to preserve his life, charges Hilaret "with threatening to swear a Rape against me", an offence punishable by whipping (*Plays I, I, x, 443*).<sup>158</sup> The puzzled nightwatch and a zealous constable bring them both before a magistrate. Rather than disentangling the confusion, the corrupt and avaricious Justice Squeezum, who believes that "the Laws are Turnpikes, only made to stop People who walk on Foot, and not to interrupt those who drive through them in their Coaches" (*Plays I, II, ii, 447*), tries to seduce, and later ravish, Hilaret. Meanwhile Constant has also been imprisoned after a woman has apparently sworn "Rape against [him] for having rescued her from a Ravisher" (*Plays I, III, ii, 460*). As the plot progresses it becomes increasingly clear that good actions are mistaken for bad, in a society whose priorities are turned upside down.

Hume has argued that in *The Coffee-House Politician* "the 'story' is really only an excuse on which to hang the double-barrelled satire and a way

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mistake, on stage, his real-life wife for a prostitute. For casting information see, Scouten, ed. *The London Stage*, Vol. 3, 68.

<sup>158</sup> Like many offences in the early eighteenth century, rape was a crime punishable by death. As Staff, a nasty constable belonging to a Society for the Reformation of Manners, warns Hilaret before impeaching her: "If you are a Woman of Virtue, the Gentleman will be hanged for attempting to rob you of it. If you are not a Woman of Virtue, why you will be whipped for accusing a Gentleman of robbing you of what you had not to lose" (*Plays I, I, xi, 443*). As this dialogue indicates, Fielding exposed the hypocritical piety of people from the reformation societies, suggesting that they were only eager to punish and not necessarily to seek justice. The relationship between people in the theatrical business and the societies for the reformation of manners was extremely tense. See above, note 73.

of engineering situations”.<sup>159</sup> However, as in other plays by Fielding, the romantic plot here is given too prominent a role to be merely a convenient structure upon which to build a play. Although the aborted elopement serves the author to measure a minor disruption of social rules against serious breaches of the law—which according to the prologue go largely unpunished in life as on the stage—the mishaps of the nocturnal escapade also constitute a persuasive warning for young lovers about the potential dangers of a clandestine marriage. As I pointed out in the Introduction, clandestine marriages, taking place without parental consent and at improper hours, were a constant presence in the collective imaginary of the first half of the eighteenth century. Their secrecy, easy availability, and relative affordability on the one hand made them very attractive, especially for young people. On the other hand, they were a source of concern for society at large, as they were unregulated transgressions of the social order, which endangered the transmission of property and the circulation of money among all ranks except the very poor. The fact that Fielding chooses to have a planned clandestine marriage gone awry as a main plot device is revealing of a didactic drive that goes beyond expediency. In this case, the social menace implicit in a secret marriage is followed by a more immediate threat of risking physical imprisonment, with the consequent loss of reputation.

Although the admonition about the dangers inherent in the violation of social norms is ostensibly directed to youngsters, especially women, from early on in the play it is clear that Fielding’s satirical finger is pointing out somewhere else. Politick, the coffeehouse politician alluded to in the title, is

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<sup>159</sup> Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 71.



Hilaret's father, a man so absurdly mindful of foreign affairs mediated by local newspapers that he pays no attention to the management of his own household. His behaviour is clearly resented by his daughter, who, just before the disastrous elopement, accosts her father thus: "I wish you would not perplex yourself with Cardinals or Kingdoms, I wish you would mind your own Business, instead of the Publick's; [...] it would have been better for me that you had been less a Politician" (*Plays I, I, ii, 432-33*). Indeed, because Politick is busy fussing about what is presented as pointless speculation about inconsequential news, he has not seen to his daughter's marriage. When informed that Hilaret is missing, he is in the midst of an inane discussion about the size of Tuscany (*Plays I, I, v, 436*), which he reluctantly interrupts, not without complaining that "the Loss of twenty Daughters would not balance the Recovery of the *Dauphin*" (*Plays I, I, vi, 437*). As this and other exchanges make clear, Politick's neglect of his family is clearly behind Hilaret's agreement to the indecorous proposal that puts her reputation and integrity at risk.<sup>160</sup>

So-called "coffeehouse politicians" were stock figures of ridicule in Post-Restoration and early eighteenth-century England. As Brian Cowan points out, men who spent too much time at coffeehouses and turned news into gossip were common causes for complaint, not only among coffeehouse detractors, but also among more sophisticated coffeehouse goers, who considered that such a behaviour "contributed to the degradation of the

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<sup>160</sup> In the last act he goes so far as to protest openly about his duties as a husband and father, lamenting that, unlike other animal species "when once a gambling Priest hath chattered a few mischievous words over [man], is bound to have and to hold from that Day forward all the Brats his Wife is pleased to bestow on him" (*Plays I, V, i, 486*).

quality of the coffeehouse discourse itself”.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, Addison and Steele, the success of whose periodicals largely depended upon coffeehouse culture, endeavoured to differentiate between commendable men who participated in the sociability of coffeehouses but were also “good Fathers, generous Brothers, sincere Friends and Faithful subjects”, and those “Newsmonger[s]” who were “more inquisitive to know what passed in *Poland* than in [their] own Family” and eventually brought ruin to their families.<sup>162</sup>

By means of the negative characterization of Politick and Squeezum in *The Coffee-House Politician*, Fielding parallels faulty management of households with a malfunctioning legal system, which shows negligence of duties to be pervasive. Just as Squeezum, in his role as administrator of the law, injures society by using his power for selfish and dishonest purposes, Politick causes harm to his family by being absurdly concerned about foreign affairs, which are insubstantial to him since he is not a real politician. Whilst private men are futilely absorbed by public affairs, public figures use their power to serve their private interests. The emphasis on the domestic dimension of the story is also evidenced by the characterization of Justice Squeezum as a defective head of his household. At first he is presented merely as a dominated husband, abused and cuckolded by his wife (*Plays* I, II, iii, 447). Soon it is revealed that he only indulges her caprices because she knows all his dirty little secrets and has it in “her Power to hang [him]” (*Plays* I, II, iii, 449); later it is discovered that he even promotes her extramarital

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<sup>161</sup> Brian William Cowan, *Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 242.

<sup>162</sup> *Spectator* No. 49, 26 April 1711, in Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, Vol. 1, 210; and *Tatler* No. 155, 6 April 1710, in Addison and Steele, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), Vol II, 369.

affairs because he hopes he can cheat her out of her dowry by suing her for adultery (*Plays* I, IV, i, 472). Thus worked in tandem with an exploration of the inefficiency and corruption of London's judicial system, the failed elopement, by way of comparison, illustrates an imbalance between the harsh punishments that eloping lovers risk and the way powerful men escape detection and retribution.

In a recent article, Simon Dickie argues that Fielding's light treatment of rape and sexual jokes in this play suggests a normalization, and even a celebration, of sexual violence. He concludes that "*Rape upon Rape* portrays a world of innocent men being framed by corrupt JPs and meddling constables, in which women are assumed to be using rape accusations as forms of vengeance".<sup>163</sup> Although his argumentation is persuasive at first glance, I essentially disagree with Dickie's view. As sometimes happens with Fielding and other satirists of the period, ironic remarks tend to be literalized, and characters presented as objects of mockery are judged to be spokespersons of the author. *Rape upon Rape* portrays a world in which all sense of justice is virtually absent. Both male and female characters are depicted as victims. For instance, Hilaret, a virtuous woman, is mistaken for a prostitute and almost raped; Constant, an honest man, tries to save a woman from actual rape and is charged with rape himself. Disagreeable characters are both male and female: Squeezum is an unprincipled administrator of atrocity; Mrs Squeezum is an adulteress explicitly driven to such behaviour by the venality of her husband; the constable is idiotic and hypocritically pious; Politick is as self-absorbed as absurd; Ramble is an arrogant and drunken sailor, not a

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<sup>163</sup> Simon Dickie, "Fielding's Rape Jokes", *The Review of English Studies* 61.251 (2010): 580.

model of morality. Dickie is right to point out Fielding's resort to a theatrical convention of rape jokes—completely unacceptable by modern standards—as well as the author's delight in “the pliability of the words rape and ravish” (just as he was fascinated by other puns), but he overstates his point, I believe, by making a generalization from particular cases. The notoriety of the Charteris affair that year made rape related vocabulary ubiquitous among Londoners. As Lockwood points out, “in its slightly misleading title, its preoccupation with the subject of rape, and especially in its attack on bribery and corruption in the administration of justice, the play seems hardly distinguishable from other comments on the case”.<sup>164</sup>

As promised in the prologue, vice is exposed and ultimately corrected in the end. The honest Justice Worthy commits Squeezum for his villainies (*Plays I, V, x, 496*); Constant is acquitted from the charge of rape by the woman he had rescued—who had not actually accused him of rape;<sup>165</sup> that woman is revealed to be Ramble's wife, whom he believed had drowned (*Plays I, V, xi, 497*); Ramble discovers himself as Politick's long-estranged prodigal son and is readily pardoned by the father; and Constant and Hilaret are to be married with parental consent and a proper ceremony (*Plays I, V, xi, 497-498*). Tying up all loose strands, the finale shows Fielding embracing the conventions of the courtship plot. As Lewis notes, this “almost perfect example of sentimental denouement” displays Fielding's serious resort to the devices he energetically mocks elsewhere.<sup>166</sup> At the same time, the

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<sup>164</sup> Lockwood, *Plays I*, 413.

<sup>165</sup> At this point theatrical audiences and readers learn that it was not the woman who had accused Constant of rape, but Squeezum's assistant Quill, who had been bribed to commit an innocent man instead of the real culprit, Fireball.

<sup>166</sup> Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama*, 104.

respectable marriage granted at the end, which brings to a close the earlier objections against the elopement, suggests Fielding's growing seriousness about the observation of marital decorum.

### **8. Tyrannical husbands: *The Letter Writers* and *The Modern Husband***

In *The Letter Writers; or a New Way to Keep a Wife at Home* (1731) and *The Modern Husband* (1732) Fielding turns his attention away from the courtship plot, concentrating on the marriage state as a locus of tyranny, exploring two of its guises and essaying possible solutions. In *The Letter Writers* he illustrates a case of failed despotism, presented in the form of irrational jealousy, which is laughed away as an instance of silliness that makes husbands look foolish, not fearful. *The Modern Husband* investigates a darker side to marital tyranny when jealousy is replaced by greed-driven adultery, concocted through the manipulation of marital laws.

*The Letter Writers* revolves around the contrivances of two mistrustful husbands who painstakingly—but futilely—attempt to prevent their wives from meeting other men. The wealthy, but irretrievably old, Mr Wisdom and Mr Softly, afraid that their younger wives will cuckold them, forge blackmailing letters and send them to each other's consorts, hoping it will scare them from ever leaving the house. As we learn very soon, their plot entirely backfires. Although Mr Wisdom finds peace of mind in his wife's apparent compliance, Mrs Wisdom finds the scheme advantageous for her love intrigues. As she informs her lover Raket:

Sure never any thing was so lucky for us as this threatning Letter: While my Husband imagined I should go abroad, he was almost continually at home; but now he thinks himself secure of my not venturing out, he is scarce ever with me (*Plays* I, I, iv, 631).

The plan is also ineffective for Mr Softly, whose wife “swears, she’ll go abroad the more now to shew her Courage” (*Plays I, I, vii, 633*), and is also having an affair with Rakel.

*The Letter Writers* has received little critical attention. It is indeed neither a particularly memorable piece, nor Fielding’s finest.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, if viewed as part of the author’s concern with the tyrannical aspect of the marriage state, as an example of his handling of the second type of marriage plots, and finally, in explicit juxtaposition to the more complex and critically interesting *Modern Husband*, it stands out as a work deserving further analysis, especially within the purpose of this thesis. It is another good instance of Fielding’s fascination with topicality, as the letter ploy openly alludes to a series of blackmailing attempts occurring throughout England during the winter of 1730.<sup>168</sup> It testifies to Fielding’s resourcefulness in turning a piece of news into a story about marriage, to explore a larger concern about domestic tyranny. While in *Love in Several Masques* and *The Temple Beau* the negative criticism is aimed at parents and guardians, whose unreasonable interference with their children’s freedom of choice in marriage is shown to have an ulterior materialistic motivation, *The Letter Writers* presents jealous husbands as embodiments of domestic authoritarianism. This idea was hardly original; as McKeon has pointed out, “once the focus is on the married state itself rather than on how it comes

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<sup>167</sup> Rivero dismisses it as “the uninspired *Letter Writers*”, which was sensibly replaced by *The Welsh Opera* as afterpiece to the *Tragedy of Tragedies*. Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 88. Hume believes that “the gimmick is a good one”, but “alas, it is ineptly handled”. Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 91-92.

<sup>168</sup> On this see Lockwood, *Plays I*, 610.

about [...] the husband becomes a prime candidate for the epithet ‘tyrant’”.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, tyranny in marriage was a major topic of eighteenth-century social commentary. An interesting example can be found in *Spectator* 236 (30 November 1711), composed of three letters addressing the topic suggested by the Latin motto of the article *Dare Jura Maritis* (“to prescribe laws for husbands”). In the first letter, an anonymous correspondent who admonishes Mr Spectator for not having “spoken in so direct a Manner upon the Subject of Marriage as that important Case deserves”, pronounces against husbands who “grow Tyrants that they may seem Masters”, a “clownish Behaviour” that only reveals their bad breeding. An even closer analogue to the main argument of *The Letter Writers* can be found in the very short second letter, where “*Tristissa*” complains of having married “a Fool”, whose “Cunning and Suspicion, the inseparable Companions of little Minds”, prevent her from exercising sociability.<sup>170</sup> Fielding’s focus on these foolishly jealous husbands addresses these preoccupations, presenting a comic picture of marriage and providing instruction by way of negative example.

Just as it seems that the affairs will be finally disclosed when Wisdom and Softly find letters written by their wives in Rakel’s pockets, they are deceived again by Commons, their nephew (and Rakel’s good friend), who claims the letters were directed to himself. Thus, despite all their anxieties and foolish schemes, the husbands are prevailed upon and their credulousness is exposed to onstage and offstage witnesses. The play closes with a libertine moral from Rakel, who counsels the ladies “If you ever should

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<sup>169</sup> McKeon, *Secret History of Domesticity*, 135.

<sup>170</sup> Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, Vol. 2, 417-18 and 419.

write a Love-Letter, never sign your Name to it”, and the gentlemen “that you may prevent it—Think not by any Force or sinister Stratagem to imprison your Wives. The Laws of England are too generous to permit the one and the Ladies are generally too cunning to be outwitted by the other” (*Plays* I, III, x, 666). The cursory solution proposed by the *Letter Writers* suggests that extreme jealousy amounts to little more than a failed tyranny, which does not represent a grave danger.

Conversely, in *The Modern Husband* a combination of greed, tyranny, and twisting of the law for financial aggrandizement is presented as a genuine threat, deserving more thoughtful consideration. Dealing with what he assesses as an example of the decadence of modern society, this play became, up to that moment, Fielding’s most open criticism of contemporary vice, focused on marriage. The argument of the play is as follows: having lost most of his fortune in the South Sea Bubble, Mr Modern makes his wife support them both by gambling and sleeping with rich men. Their *modus vivendi* is jeopardized when Mrs Modern’s wealthiest lover, Lord Richly, tires of the affair and threatens to take his financial bounty away. Mr Modern then devises a scheme to secure a new gallant for his wife in Mr Bellamant, while helping Lord Richly to seduce Bellamant’s virtuous wife. His wicked machinations do not end there; he also intends to trap either of his wife’s lovers in *flagrante delicto* with her, so he can blackmail them with the threat of a lawsuit. After much tension, neither of his plans succeeds. Mrs Bellamant is absolutely incorruptible; Mr Bellamant and Mrs Modern’s affair is



discovered and pardoned by Mrs Bellamant; and in the end Mr Modern is exposed as the mastermind behind the mischievous designs.<sup>171</sup>

Due to its disturbing subject and manifest sobriety of tone,<sup>172</sup> *The Modern Husband* has rightly been assessed as Fielding's first "serious and morally earnest play", and one which depicts "a world where evil is all-pervasive, potent and nearly ineradicable".<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, in its stringent condemnation of the corruption of the marriage state and its manifest didactic drive, *The Modern Husband* is, I believe, a first instance of what Battestin argues "might well be called Henry Fielding's campaign to reform public attitudes toward the institution of marriage".<sup>174</sup> The author's correspondence with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu once more proves a good departure point for analysis. As he had done with *Love in Several Masques*, before trying his *Modern Husband* on the stage Fielding wrote to his cousin asking for her judgement:

I hope your Ladyship will honour the Scenes which I presume to lay before you with your Perusal. As they are written on a Model I never yet attempted, I am exceedingly anxious lest they should find less Mercy from you than my lighter Productions. It will be a slight compensation to the modern Husband, that your Ladyship's Censure will defend him from the Possibility of any other Reproof, since your least Approbation will always give me a Pleasure infinitely superior to the loudest Applauses of a Theatre.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Two minor subplots unfold the main one, providing the customary happy marriage ending: Bellamant's son, Captain Bellamant, marries Lady Charlotte Gaywit, Lord Richly's daughter. Emilia, the Bellamants' virtuous and sensible daughter, marries Mr Gaywit, Lord Richly's nephew.

<sup>172</sup> Hume describes it as a "genuine satire", offering "one of the darkest comic visions of society since Otway's bitter *Friendship in Fashion* (1678)". Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 122.

<sup>173</sup> Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama*, 132; and Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 114.

<sup>174</sup> Martin C. Battestin, *A Henry Fielding Companion* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 240.

<sup>175</sup> Fielding, "To Lady Mary Wortley Montagu", London, 4 Sept. (1730?), in *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, ed. Battestin, 4. That Fielding continued to seek the advice of his second cousin after he had succeeded in making a theatrical reputation

This declared breakaway from lighter humour also registers in the Prologue, where the author apologises for his “Frolick Flights of Youth”, announcing his intended turn to a “serious page”, through which he can defend virtue and “vicious as it is [...] draw the Town”, in order to “Restore the sinking Honour of the Stage!/The Stage which was not for low Farce design’d,/ But to divert, instruct, and mend Mankind” (*Plays II*, 214). Although the playwright was in fact less than two years older when writing this prologue than when he was happily cashing in on the farcical humour of *Tom Thumb* and *The Author’s Farce*, his excuse reveals uneasiness about this darker approach to comedy. As box office numbers would prove, these fears were not entirely unjustified.<sup>176</sup>

A transgression Fielding consistently presents as endangering the moral frame of society is the corruption of its basic foundation: the marriage state. In the *Modern Husband* he distinctly shows a variation in degree. Read against the two paratexts quoted above, the argument of this play suggests that while the mercenary pursuits of parents and guardians during courtship, debasement of literary standards, extreme jealousy, and even adultery are minor vices in Fielding’s eyes (suitable for youthful frolicking), purposefully defiling the marriage state through voluntary cuckoldry, with a view to profit,

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suggests again that he regarded her as a literary guide rather than as merely an influential patron.

<sup>176</sup> *The Modern Husband* was moderately successful, with thirteen consecutive presentations, including one attended by the Royal Family. After the fourteenth show was cancelled due to the indisposition of one of the actresses, it was never staged again. According to Lockwood, of Fielding’s original five-act comedies this was the one favoured with most consecutive presentations. The accolade, however, was reticent compared to that for *Tom Thumb*, or for *The Mock Doctor* (1732), one of Fielding’s most enduringly popular adaptations from Molière. For an outline of *The Modern’s Husband* stage history see Lockwood, *Plays II*, 195-98. That Fielding immediately returned to farcical mode with *The Old Debauchees* (1732) and the remarkably lewd *Covent Garden Tragedy* (1732) suggests a pessimism about his ability to engage audiences in serious morality, or about the capacity of theatre-going crowds to appreciate his efforts.

is an inexcusable misconduct, meant to be corrected. What worries Fielding, then, is not so much that husbands and wives may fantasize about or actually take a lover. He is willing to tolerate such behaviour to some extent, as becomes clear in his light treatment of the polygamy-fantasizing queen of *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, or his good-humoured depiction of the sneaky wives in *The Letter Writers*. The Moderns' commercialization of their marriage, then, calls for a more serious approach.

Underlying Mr Modern's nefarious plot is the fear that the culture of commerce caused all aspects of life to operate under the principle of gain, so that matters of love and honour became subservient to financial interest. This is an anxiety voiced by early eighteenth-century social commentators such as Daniel Defoe, who in his influential *Conjugal Lewdness; or Matrimonial Whoredom* (1727) enumerated and condemned the ways in which marriage could be degraded into a commercial transaction. In *The Modern Husband*, Fielding is specifically interested in exploring the role of social and legal practices in permitting, and even encouraging, the commercialization of the marriage state, or what in *Tom Jones* he ironically calls "the Wisdom of legal prostitution for hire" (XVI, viii, 866).<sup>177</sup> While in *The Letter Writers* the schemes of jealous would-be tyrants are easily laughed away—for according to Rakel the laws of England prevented husbands from imprisoning wives—*The Modern Husband* seriously investigates how the law could be pernicious in matters of adultery, when it seemed to allow or even invite the matrimonial whoredom that authors like Defoe dreaded.

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<sup>177</sup> This is how the narrator describes Aunt Western's advice to Sophia regarding Lord Fellamar's marriage proposal.

As Rivero and Hume point out,<sup>178</sup> the main plot of *The Modern Husband* features a negative critique of the laws of “Criminal Conversation”, or “crim. con.”, an action that emerged in the late seventeenth-century, by which a cuckolded husband could sue his wife’s lover, demanding monetary compensation for emotional distress and the loss of honour.<sup>179</sup> Although actual suits for criminal conversation seem to have been infrequent in the first half of the eighteenth century,<sup>180</sup> as David Turner notes, the “cultural importance of criminal conversation as both a legal action and a term for labelling vice, far outweighed the number of cases in this period”. According to Turner, it was precisely the uncommonness of these trials in the first few decades of the century that rendered them a focus of attention. The hack writers of the day were keen to cash on crim. con. cases, producing salacious reports of the court proceedings in the form of individual pamphlets and compilations of interesting cases. The publicity that these trials attracted soon raised questions about whether adultery ought to be solely a matter of private shame, or an issue of public concern.<sup>181</sup> That crim. con. seemed to be so closely linked with profit on all fronts suggested that financial interest, rather than the redress of conjugal grievances, was perhaps a more powerful motivation and a more frequent outcome of this legal procedure. It is hardly surprising then, that Fielding would choose to examine this controversial type of marital litigation in his socially committed play about modern

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<sup>178</sup> Rivero, *The Plays of Henry Fielding*, 117-119; Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 121.

<sup>179</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22-23.

<sup>180</sup> According to Stone, there is evidence of only fourteen trials in the period between 1692 and 1730. *Road to Divorce*, 246.

<sup>181</sup> For a useful overview of the laws of criminal conversation in the first half of the century, in the context of social debates around the issue of adultery see David Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Chapter Six, “Criminal Conversation”, quotation from 173.

marriage. It is also possible that topicality played a role in his conception of the plot of *The Modern Husband*, since two years earlier a famous trial had rendered the topic of criminal conversation particularly fashionable among Londoners.<sup>182</sup>

The laws of criminal conversation, however, are not the sole targets of Fielding's satire in *The Modern Husband*. I believe that the common law doctrine of coverture, whereby a woman after marriage became a "*Feme covert*" and "all Things that are the Wife's, are the Husband's; nor hath the Wife Power over her self, but the Husband", is also singled out for examination.<sup>183</sup> As Joanne Bailey points out, whether coverture was beneficial for women, or whether it was a form of marital tyranny was an important subject of controversy throughout the period.<sup>184</sup> This debate is very much at stake in Fielding's play. The prologue introduces the Moderns as "*A pair of Monsters most entirely new! [...] A willing Cuckold—sells his willing Wife!*" (*Plays* II, 213), implying that both are equally wicked and complicit in the scheme. The degrees of liability, however, are subsequently problematized within the play itself. In the first act, husband and wife argue about who is to blame for their dire current state of affairs. While Mr Modern complains that it was his wife's "Extravagances [...] unbridl'd Pride, and Vanity" which sank him into debt—for which he was nearly imprisoned—she argues that it was him who coerced her into exchanging sexual favours for money (*Plays* II, I, iv, 222-23). Their quarrel plays on the notion that under

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<sup>182</sup> See Lockwood, *Plays* II, 190.

<sup>183</sup> Jacob Giles, *A New Law-Dictionary: Containing the Interpretation and Definition of Words and Terms Used in the Law* (London: E. and R. Nutt, and R. Gosling, 1729), 190.

<sup>184</sup> Joanne Bailey, "Favoured or Oppressed: Married Women, Property and 'Coverture' in England, 1660-1800", *Continuity and Change* 17.3 (2002): 351-372.

coverture wives renounced to their claims to property and legal agency, but were, in exchange, protected against suits for debt. Because a wife's credit was given under her husband's name, if the couple were unable to pay the debt, it was the man who went to debtor's prison.

As Bailey points out, the doctrine of coverture went hand in hand with the idea that husbands were, or ought to be, providers. However, as Bailey also shows, wives often understood their right to maintenance not as a privilege but as a compensation for their loss of property rights, as well as a *quid pro quo* for the money they had brought to the marriage.<sup>185</sup> The plot of Fielding's play presents a complication to these assumptions by offering a husband who is an unsuccessful provider, and a wife who, by being forced to sell her own body to support the family economy, simultaneously becomes a breadwinner, consumer, and object of consumption. Still, because Mr Modern is selective in his understanding of the doctrine of coverture, he assumes that, since after marriage the wife is his own property, he should be entitled to profit from her prostitution. Thus, when Mrs Modern refuses to cooperate with his plan for ensnaring her lover in a crim. con. suit he claims she "shall not drive a separate Trade at my Expence. Your person is mine, I bought it lawfully in the Church, and unless I am to profit by the Disposal, I shall keep it all for my own use" (*Plays* II, IV, i, 256). While there is no explicit sympathy in the characterization of Mrs Modern, she is shown to be caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of marital compliance and the demands of morality and social decorum.

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<sup>185</sup> Joanne Bailey, "Favoured or Oppressed: Married Women, Property and 'Coverture' in England, 1660-1800", *Continuity and Change* 17.3 (2002): 361.

All of this seems to suggest that Mr Modern is finally to blame, for he has been using his position as head of the household for wrongful purposes, without fulfilling his financial and moral responsibilities. Yet, the first act of the play also suggests that he may have been driven to such extremes by his wife's extravagant expenses and the legal doctrine that made him answerable to them. In the end, although vicious characters are ultimately punished, Fielding does not reveal a clear stance in the controversial issues he presents. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of his critical exploration of the laws of criminal conversation and the doctrine of coverture is that, in the wrong hands, these legal figures favoured the corruption and commercialization of the marriage state. From Fielding's perspective then, unscrupulous couples like the Moderns were the more dangerous within a society—and a legal framework—that tolerated, and even encouraged their conduct.

Ironically, some years later the baleful plot of *The Modern Husband* was partially reproduced in real life by one of the play's original performers: Theophilus Cibber, the son of Fielding's enduringly despised rival. Theophilus and his first wife, Jane, were cast as Captain Bellamant and Lady Charlotte Gaywit in the original production of this play in 1732.<sup>186</sup> Some months later Jane passed away, and the following year Theophilus contracted second nuptials with the actress and singer Susanna Maria Arne. According to Theophilus's biographers, theirs was an extremely unhappy marriage.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> The *Dramatis Personae* lists Mr Cibber (Colley) in the role of Lord Richly, Mr Cibber Junior (Theophilus) as Captain Bellamant, and a "Mrs Cibber" in the part of Lady Charlotte Gaywit. Since Colley Cibber's wife Catherine had retired from the stage in 1699, the only possible Mrs Cibber at the time was Theophilus first wife, Jane, who was an actress and singer. She died during childbirth a year later. See "Cibber, Theophilus", in *A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, Vol. 3, 244.

<sup>187</sup> See "Cibber, Mrs Theophilus the second, Susanna Maria, neé Arne", in *Ibid.*, 267.

Cibber junior exploited his wife's talents on stage, while he squandered the money on gambling, drinking, and mistresses. Around 1736 he virtually sold his wife Susanna to his friend William Sloper, whom he sued for criminal conversation three years later.<sup>188</sup> Clearly, the didactic aim of Fielding's play was lost on the actor, an irony that probably rekindled his contempt for the Cibber males in the early 1740s. Before moving forward to that period of Fielding's career, however, it is worth pausing to consider the satirical plays of his last season as a practising dramatist and theatre manager of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket.

### 9. Fielding's "scandal-shop"

Fielding's political plays of the 1736-37 season have received an important portion of recent critical attention devoted to his dramatic career.<sup>189</sup> It was during this season that the playwright became increasingly interested in politics and devoted his creative energy to expose corrupt practices of electioneering, especially those of Robert Walpole.<sup>190</sup> Produced at the Little Haymarket, or Fielding's "scandal-shop", as Eliza Haywood called it,<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> See "Cibber, Theophilus", in *Ibid.*, 249-52.

<sup>189</sup> In *Fielding's Burlesque Drama*, Lewis dedicates two of his four chapters to these plays. A fifth of Hume's *Fielding and the London Theatre* is devoted to this year in Fielding's career. *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register* are two of the ten plays selected by Rivero in *The Plays of Henry Fielding*.

<sup>190</sup> On Fielding and Walpole see Bertrand Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), and "Fielding, Politics, and 'Men of Genius'", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754)*, ed. Rawson, 257-71; Jerry Beasley, "Portraits of a Monster: Robert Walpole and Early English Prose Fiction", *Eighteenth Century Studies* 14.4 (1981): 406-31; and Thomas Lockwood, "Fielding and the Licensing Act", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 50.4 (1987): 379-93.

<sup>191</sup> In *Betsy Thoughtless* the narrator complains about a time in the late 1730s when "there were no plays, no operas, no masquerades, no balls, no public shews, except that little theatre in the Haymarket, then known by the name of F\_\_\_\_g's scandal-shop; because he frequently exhibited there certain drolls, or more properly, invectives against the ministry: in doing which it appears very probable, that he had two views: the one to get money, which he very much wanted, from such as delighted in low humour, and could not distinguish true satire from scurrility; and the other, in the hope of having some post given by those whom he



*Pasquin*, *Tumble-Down Dick*, *The Historical Register of the Year 1736*, *Eurydice* and *Eurydice Hiss'd* are the notorious satires that famously contributed to Walpole's enforcement of the Licensing Act of 1737, whereby non-patented theatres were banned and every new play had to pass the strict censorship of the Master of the Revels before being performed.

As Fielding became obsessed with the relationship he saw between the corruption of the state political and the state theatrical he relegated the marriage plot to second place, although he did not completely abandon his interest in romantic relationships as fundamental indices of morality. In *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register*, for instance, he explicitly linked political and sexual corruption, as Jill Campbell has shown in detail.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, while *Tumble-Down Dick* (1736) and *Eurydice* (1737) are primarily intended as burlesques of popular pantomimes of the time, Fielding chose to emphasise marital conflict in his humorous revision of two classical myths.

*Tumble-Down Dick; or Phaeton in the Suds: A Dramatick Entertainment of Walking, in Serious and Foolish Characters* is a short afterpiece in one act featuring an onstage playwright overseeing the production of a tragic play, interspersed with gratuitous dances. In a tradition of casual mockery of pantomime that had been developing since the ascendancy of that genre in the 1720s, as Lockwood notes, Fielding specifically parodies William Pritchard's *The Fall of Phaeton*, produced at Drury Lane earlier that year.<sup>193</sup> Through a domestic reworking of the myth of Phoebus and Phaeton, the play also offers a critique of the decadent morality of family values in a world

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had abused, in order to silence his dramatic talent". Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, ed. Christine Blouch (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1998), I, viii, 67.

<sup>192</sup> See Campbell, *Natural Masques*, 26-49.

<sup>193</sup> Lockwood, *Plays* III, 317-19.

where a son is proud to think of his mother as the kept mistress of a powerful man.

In the outer frame of *Tumble-Down Dick* the playwright Fustian and the critic Sneerwell discuss the production of the former's tragedy.<sup>194</sup> In the play within, Phaeton is mocked by the boys of the parish because his mother—"an oyster wench"—claims to have been the mistress of the Sun. Phaeton's distresses are twofold: he dislikes having to work as a cobbler, when his father is a God; and although being considered "the Son of a Whore" does not bother him, he is incensed that "They all believe That, but believe nothing more" (*Plays* III, I, air I,337). His mother, Clymene, who considers herself more fortunate "To be a great Man's Whore, than a poor Man's Wife" (*Plays* III, I, ii, 337), sends her son on a quest to meet his father Phoebus in order to confirm her testimony and clear her reputation. After a comic recognition scene between father and son, Phoebus agrees to let Phaeton drive his carriage for a day. Near its climax, the parody of the myth is interrupted by a series of incoherent musical and dancing numbers that made a satirical point about the inanity of such entertainments.

Here, once more, Fielding creates a parallel between faulty domestic morality and the decadence of the stage, overlaid with a critique of greed, through an ironic rendering of a marriage plot, a burlesque of pantomimes, and a satire of the Cibbers and John Rich.<sup>195</sup> By using a distortion of the myth of Phaeton to present a morally defective household, Fielding suggested that

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<sup>194</sup> As *Tumble-Down Dick* was offered as afterpiece to *Pasquin*, Fielding engages here in a metatheatrical game. For a more detailed explanation see *Plays* III, 318.

<sup>195</sup> As *Tumble-Down Dick* parodied the latest pantomime produced at Drury Lane, part of the satire was directed at the managers of that venue. Since it meant to burlesque pantomimes in general, and John Rich was the man most commonly associated with that genre, the ridicule was also partly directed at the new manager of Covent Garden.

pantomime adaptations of classical stories were as objectionable as the prevalent corruption of family values. The following year he repeated the experiment with his mirthful burlesque of another theatrical mode, grafted upon another mythological tale.

*Eurydice, or the Devil Henpecked*, is a mockery of contemporary opera, filtered once again through the rehearsal structure of an onstage author presenting his play to a critic. Staged only once, and not in full, it was finally published in the second volume of the *Miscellanies* in 1743.<sup>196</sup> It presents the conflicted interactions of two married couples, through a satirical rendering of the classical story of Orpheus and Eurydice. As related in Littleton's *Latin Dictionary*, from where the author of the play within claims to have taken the story, Orpheus descends to the underworld to retrieve his beloved wife, who was killed by a snake. The musician so delights Proserpine and Pluto with his harp that Eurydice is liberated, provided that Orpheus does not look back while still in the underworld, at which task he fails and she is returned to Hades forever.<sup>197</sup> In Fielding's version the attempted rescue is doomed to fail from the beginning due to an implied sexual failure on the part of the husband. The eponymous heroine rejects Orpheus because his musical talents, like those of an Italian castrato, are insufficient to keep her happy as a wife. As she explains to Captain Weazle: "I do not think the Merit of a Man,

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<sup>196</sup> It was staged as an afterpiece to Addison's *Cato* at Drury Lane. Fielding did not publish the play until 1743, in his *Miscellanies*, from where the quotations in this chapter are taken. See *Misc.* II, 129-51. On the day of its premiere the play was interrupted by a riot in the footman's gallery, which was probably ongoing before the show but was rendered worse by Fielding's mockery of the army in the character of Captain Weazel, a drunken beau. On this see Lewis, *Fielding's Burlesque Drama*, 182. Conversely, Goldgar suggests that the audience was probably incensed on account of an ironic reference to the Gin Act of 1736. *Misc.* II, xxxix-xliii.

<sup>197</sup> See "Eurydice", in Adam Littleton, *Linguae Latinae Liber Dictionarius Quadripartitus*. Dr. Adam Littleton's Latin Dictionary, in Four Parts (London: D. Brown, 1723), Vol. 1, 1314.

like that of a Nightingale, lies in his Throat [...] though it is possible my Heart may have its weak Sides, I solemnly protest no one will ever reach it through my ears" (*Misc. II, I, 135*). The relationship between Orpheus and Italian castrati is hinted at earlier in the play, when Spindle and Captain Weazle refer to him as "Signior Orpheo", "a very fine singer" (*Misc. II, I, 134*). The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice was a popular plot for opera, and Orpheus was a role in which castrati were frequently cast.<sup>198</sup> Fielding's insistence on the castrati's inadequacy as husbands also rested on the undertones of homosexuality that the character of Orpheus historically invoked. In Ovid's version of the myth in the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, after having lost Eurydice for the second time, Orpheus is said to reject women in favour of boys.<sup>199</sup> This was a side of the story that had been exploited during the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern period.<sup>200</sup> Such associations seem to have waned in Fielding's time. Apart from a few casual comments on the matter of emasculation—for instance Swift's remark about the musician having castrated himself<sup>201</sup>—early eighteenth-century renderings of the story of Orpheus often downplayed or entirely omitted the homosexual dimension of

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<sup>198</sup> On the role of castrati in European opera in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Roger Freitas Freitas, "The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato", *Journal of Musicology* 20.2 (2003): 236-37.

<sup>199</sup> Genevieve Liveley, *Ovid's 'Metamorphoses': A Reader's Guide* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011), 100.

<sup>200</sup> On the association of Orpheus with misogyny and sodomy in these periods see Richard Rowland's "The Tribe of Orpheus", in *Thomas Heywood's Theatre, 1599-1639* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 123-37, especially 126 and 127.

<sup>201</sup> In "A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit", citing Bacchanalian rites as early examples of religious fanaticism, Swift briefly mentions the story of Orpheus, claiming that he had "castrated himself upon Grief, for the Loss of his Wife". See *A Tale of a Tub: Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind. To Which is Added, An Account of a Battel Between the Antient and Modern Books in St. James's Library* (London: John Nutt, 1704), 317.

the character's metamorphosis.<sup>202</sup> Fielding, who was well versed in Latin, and later translated Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, might have wanted to revive this aspect of the myth to enhance what he saw as the incongruence of opera in casting a castrato as an attractive, even heroic, husband.<sup>203</sup> Fielding's nervous joking about the castrati, and his eagerness to characterize them as contemptible men and defective husbands carried on to his fiction, as we will see in more detail in the chapter dedicated to *The Female Husband*.

Also, as indicated in the subtitle, the plot allows Fielding to return to his favourite comic motif of the henpecked husband, depicting an underworld ruled by a Pluto who is dominated by his wife Proserpine. In the popular version of the myth it is Proserpine who falls victim to Orpheus's charms and grants him his petition, while in Fielding's play it is the sovereign of Hades who melts in raptures over the voice of Orpheus, and even admits to his wife "Should he desire thee, my Dear, I could hardly deny him" (*Misc.* II, I, 137). As in *Tom Thumb*, Fielding exploits images of weak masculinity and the inversion of social values as a source of light-hearted humour. Although the onstage author justifies his portrayal of a subjugated devil, asking "how could Hell be better represented than by supporting the People under Petticoat-

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<sup>202</sup> In a popular translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* the loss of Eurydice causes Orpheus to "fle[e] the Face of Womankind" but there is no mention of further amorous liaisons with boys or men. *Ovid's Metamorphoses in Fifteen Books. Translated by the most eminent hands* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1717), Book X, "The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice", 335. The hint of homosexuality was equally absent from other theatrical and musical productions of the first three decades of the century, such as Henry Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus. A Collection of the Choicest Songs, for One, Two, and Three voices* (London, 1702); John Weaver's *The Fable of Orpheus and Eurydice, with a Dramatick Entertainment in Dancing Therupon; Attempted in Imitation of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (London: W. Mears, 1718); Paolo Rolli's *Orpheus: An opera by Paul Rolli, F.R.S. Perform'd at the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market* (London: Charles Bennet, 1735)—in this version Orpheus even manages to successfully rescue Eurydice from the underworld; and Lewis Theobald's *Orpheus and Eurydice; An Opera. As it is performed at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden. Set to musick by Mr. John-Frederick Lampe* (London: Wood, 1739).

<sup>203</sup> His *Ovid's Art of Love Paraphrased, and Adapted to the Present Time* was published (anonymously) in 1747.

Government?" (*Misc. II, I, 145*), Spindle later acknowledges that Pluto and his way of living are "not quite so wicked [...] as we used to be in the other World" (*Misc. II, I, 149*). As in *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and *The Grub-Street Opera*, the henpecked husband is a congenial character.

In contrast, the apparently happy marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice is gradually revealed to be deeply flawed. The author inside the play claims that Eurydice is a good wife, entirely devoted to Orpheus, and that he "intend[s] this Couple as a Contrast to the Devil and his Wife" (*Misc. II, I, 139*). However as the plot unfolds it becomes clear that the major difference between these couples is the degree of sincerity. While Proserpine openly upbraids her husband, Eurydice labours to conceal her disdain for Orpheus, at least in public. On the journey back, however, she admits to him that their marriage was worse than hell itself. She exposes Orpheus as hypocritical, enumerates their endless quarrels, and discloses his fickleness of character, asking "how was it possible you could come hither to fetch me back when I was dead, who had so often wished me here, while alive?" (*Misc. II, I, 142*).<sup>204</sup> Hypocrisy was, of course, one of Fielding's favourite targets. As he would claim in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, it was one of the two causes of "affectation", which was for him "the only source of the true ridiculous" (*Joseph Andrews, 4*). Orpheus is given all possible negative characteristics. The marriage plot proves, once more, an effective structure for Fielding to develop a palimpsest of classical

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<sup>204</sup> It is worth noting another ironic correspondence between Fielding's work and the domestic life of the Cibbers. Upon the death of his wife Jane, Theophilus Cibber, who played the role of Spindle, made a public spectacle of his remorse for having been a defective husband. As mentioned above, he soon relapsed into misconduct with his second wife, Susanna. See "Cibber, Theophilus", in Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, ed. *A Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 3, 244-46. Although it is tempting to read this line as an allusion to Theophilus's inconstancy, lack of evidence within the play to support this claim inclines me to believe it an unfortunate coincidence.

mythology, lessons in domestic morality, and theatrical criticism.<sup>205</sup>

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The main aim of this chapter has been to map out Fielding's diversified approaches to the theatrical marriage plot, tracing some of the key motifs and concerns that proved persistent in his later works. For all the remarkable variety of dramatic forms he attempted, a pattern of idealization of a loving marriage emerges from the details accumulated in the plays examined here. Indeed, despite all his quips, Fielding's didacticism in most of the comedies (where love and moral worth are rewarded, while vice is exposed and punished) reveals a latent affiliation with the sentimental plays he ostensibly disliked. Moreover, as Matthew Kinservik has recently observed, even though Fielding did not consciously imitate Steele after his first two plays—and has even been considered the “antithesis of Steele” in his resort to punitive satire and ostensible contempt for propriety—he shared with the periodical writer and late patentee of Drury Lane the determination of becoming “the moral censor of the times”.<sup>206</sup> This purpose endured and continued to be felt in Fielding's works, in different ways. For instance, as Bertrand Goldgar has pointed out, in *The Covent-Garden Journal* (1751-2), Fielding's last journalistic venture, he adopted the pseudonym of “Sir Alexander Drawcansir, Knt. Censor of Great Britain”, evidently invoking Steele's “Isaac Bickerstaff, Esquire, Censor of Great Britain”, from the *Tatler* (*Covent-Garden*,

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<sup>205</sup> The domestic moral of the play is stressed again in the didactic closing aria, sung by Eurydice: From lessons like these/You may, if you please,/Good Husbands learn to be civil./For you find 'tis in vain /To wish for us again,/When once we are gone to the Devil (*Misc. II, I, 150*).

<sup>206</sup> Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire*, 77.

xxviii- xxxii). Fielding's resolution of looking after the moral health and good taste of literary audiences, which emerged and developed in the 1730s, determined his first incursion into the domain of prose fiction, as we will see in the next two chapters.

Yet, despite these points of similarity with Steele, and Fielding's arguable inheritance of the sentimental model, in his plays—unlike those by Cibber and Steele—there is an evident critique of the social milieu in which couples quarrel and are finally reconciled. As Hume has rightly noted, for all its ostensible concern with propriety and morality, early eighteenth-century sentimental drama failed to advance serious social criticism; even though authors laboured to present couples happily married and to solve marital discord, “the real issue is evaded: adultery or extravagance are forsworn, but the marriage itself is left unexamined”.<sup>207</sup> Conversely in Fielding's plays, as I hope to have shown, there is a clearer attempt to explore the social dynamic operating behind courtship and domestic conflict, as evidenced in the close intertwining of marriage plots with lively discussions about the commercialization of private life, decadence of artistic taste, inversion of modern values, double standards of class and gender, and political corruption.

This change can be at least partially explained by what Kinservik has assessed as a temporal fading of moral and governmental censorship during the 1730s, until the government judged it necessary to enforce a law to curb the increasing proclivity toward topical satire. As we have seen, the censorious atmosphere created by moral reformers early in the century had

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<sup>207</sup> Hume, *The Rakish Stage*, 197.



caused authors to be particularly cautious about introducing characters, scenes or situations that could be judged offensive. According to Kinservik, this had changed noticeably by the early 1730s—partly thanks to the inspiration brought by Gay’s unprecedented success with his indecorous *The Beggar’s Opera*<sup>208</sup>—and Fielding had exploited the relative laxity of the government and the non-patented theatres for developing his critical thoughts and building his position as moral and cultural judge.<sup>209</sup>

In the plays Fielding wrote over the first nine years of his literary career we can clearly see that he appoints himself as a moral authority. We can also witness the formation of his methodical foregrounding of matrimony as an ideal state of human happiness—the most desirable reward for real merit. Finally, we can observe the emergence of an intricate relationship between marriage plots and theatrical conventions, which, as I argue in subsequent chapters, plays a crucial part in his contribution to the novel as a genre. In the next section of this thesis, I look at the marriage plot in Fielding’s early works of prose fiction, pieces which—by repeatedly drawing on dramatic techniques—forge intriguing bridges between two major literary genres of the period.

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<sup>208</sup> Other significant factors for this laxity include the fact that the most furious scourge of stage immorality, Jeremy Collier, had died in 1726. Also, the societies for the reformation of manners had begun to wane around that time. See Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, 59-64.

<sup>209</sup> Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire*, 9-14, especially 13.

## Section II. Fielding's early novels

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### Chapter 2. The "Great Mogul" turned novelist

In the following pages I briefly explore Fielding's transition from playwright and theatrical impresario to prose fiction writer, as an introduction to the subsequent chapters in this section. First I provide a short account of what the writer lost when his career on the stage ended upon the passing of the Licensing Act of 1737, and what the novel as a genre offered him in the early 1740s, which rendered it an attractive alternative. Next, I point at two key themes, closely related to his interest in the social and moral dimensions of marriage, which have a stronger presence in his prose fictions than in his plays: religion and the law. Finally, I attend to some considerations of terminology, addressing potential problems and advantages of referring to his early works as novels.

#### 1. Seizing momentum

A number of circumstances changed for Fielding between the mid-1730s, when he was producing satiric plays for and managing a company of actors at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket under his business persona of "The Great Mogul", and 1741 when he penned *Shamela*, his first piece of prose fiction.<sup>1</sup> In 1736 Fielding advertised *Pasquin*—which soon became one of his most commercially successful pieces—as a play "by the Great Mogul's Company of

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<sup>1</sup> It has sometimes been suggested that *Jonathan Wild* (published in 1743 in *Misc. III*) was in fact Fielding's first attempt at prose fiction writing, which he chose not to publish until the Walpole regime was effectively over. See, for example, Martin Battestin with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 280-82; and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 383. The Wesleyan editors of Fielding's *Miscellanies*, however, persuasively contest this hypothesis. See *Misc. III*, xxxii-xxxviii.

English Comedians, Newly Imported”.<sup>2</sup> Resorting to a commonplace Orientalism that played on the reputedly tyrannical behaviour of the leader of the Persian Mughal Empire, the playwright alluded ironically to the authoritarianism and absurd pomposity of theatrical managers, as well as to the craze for foreign spectacles. However facetious Fielding’s self-proclamation as “emperor” of the Little Haymarket theatre may have been, this new pen name is also suggestive of an important degree of pride and confidence about his mounting success as a dramatist and theatrical impresario. *The Judgement of the Queen of Common Sense* (1736) (figure 5), a satirical print supporting Fielding’s latest hit, plays on this when it shows the Queen of Common Sense pouring gold at the genuflecting author, who extends her the title page of his *Pasquin*, while Shakespeare enthusiastically contemplates the scene from his desk. According to the caption, “ye Great Mogul a Bard is come” to restore “banished Exiles to their homes”. Surely such prospects of approval and commercial prosperity rendered the establishment of official censorship the following year all the more disheartening for Fielding.

On 24 June 1737, the law that became known as the Licensing Act was finally passed. Among its main provisions, it made it mandatory to submit all new productions to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain before being performed, and made it illegal to stage any play at the non-patented

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<sup>2</sup> *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* (London, Tuesday, 24 February 1736), Issue 410. For the stage history of *Pasquin* see Robert D. Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 209-220.

theatres.<sup>3</sup> The passing of this Act left Fielding suddenly without an income. Not only would the type of political satire he was writing at the time have been rejected automatically, but also, with the playhouse duopoly effectively reinstated, there was little room for the topical experimentation that had characterized his most successful pieces. As usual, economics worsened matters. Spendthrift as he reputedly was, and with little hopes for securing a portion of his maternal estate in the near future, by the late 1730s Fielding was in great need of money.<sup>4</sup> Following the steps of his maternal grandfather, in November 1737, the thirty-year-old Fielding matriculated as a law student of the Middle Temple with a view to earning his living as a barrister. It would take some years, nonetheless, for his legal practice to flourish. Thus, in a matter of months, he passed from being a thriving playwright, with a promising career as a manager, and even plans for “beautifying and enlarging” the Little Haymarket theatre “and procuring a better Company of Actors”,<sup>5</sup> to being an impoverished gentleman with a growing family.<sup>6</sup> The “Great Mogul” had lost his newly conquered theatrical empire and, like young Wilding, had become a “Temple Beau”.

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of the causes, provisions and short-term effects of this regulation see Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> For this period of Fielding’s life see Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 234-56. Unless otherwise stated, the biographical information offered in this chapter is based on this thoroughly researched volume.

<sup>5</sup> From the “Dedication to the Publick” affixed to the printed edition of the *Historical Register* and *Eurydice Hiss’d* (1737). *Plays*, III, 410.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Battestins, it is difficult to know with certainty the amount of children Fielding had at this time, but possibly a second and even a third child were born during this period. Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 235.



Figure 9. Anon., *The Judgment of the Queen of Common Sense*, 1736  
©Trustees of the British Museum

In 1739, in collaboration with his friend and former theatre colleague James Ralph, Fielding turned to journalism, writing and editing pieces for *The Champion*, under the pseudonym of “Capt. Hercules Vinegar”.<sup>7</sup> It has sometimes been argued that he had embarked upon a journalistic venture earlier, contributing anonymously to the *Craftsman* and other anti-ministerial papers.<sup>8</sup> Most of these attributions, however, have been persuasively refuted in recent years.<sup>9</sup> What the writer did and how he managed to survive financially between 1737 and 1739 are also matters of controversy. While his leading biographers contend that “doubtless supported by his friends in Opposition, on whose behalf he had suffered the consequences of Walpole’s ire”, he lived from his contributions to the *Craftsman*,<sup>10</sup> the Wesleyan editor of his complete plays argues that it was probably Robert Walpole who paid Fielding for his silence.<sup>11</sup> Strangely, but also characteristically for a writer who actively engaged in political debates throughout his life but who “failed to articulate any straightforward statement of his political beliefs *in propria persona*”, both claims are plausible, and it is indeed possible to find evidence to support either of them.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This name was another of Fielding’s playful juxtapositions of popular culture and the classics. At one level, it was a facetious self-appointment as defender—or champion—of the causes his paper addressed. In the context of mid-eighteenth-century London, however, it was also an allusion to a disreputable master of ceremonies in a popular London venue for impolite entertainments such as bear baiting and prize-fights. On the historic Vinegar and the pugilistic associations of Fielding’s persona see John Edwin Wells, “Fielding’s ‘Champion’ and Captain Hercules Vinegar”, *The Modern Language Review* 8.2 (1913): 165-72.

<sup>8</sup> See Martin Battestin, *New Essays by Henry Fielding: His Contributions to the Craftsman (1734-39) and Other Early Journalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Lockwood, “Did Fielding Write for *The Craftsman*?”, *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008): 86-117.

<sup>10</sup> Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 235.

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Lockwood, “Fielding and the Licensing Act”, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 50 (1987): 384-86.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed account of Fielding’s political beliefs, providing plausible explanations for his apparent changing of allegiances, see J.A. Downie, *A Political Biography of Henry Fielding* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), quotation from 1.

Despite resemblances in format and content with the periodicals of Addison and Steele,<sup>13</sup> the title and editorial persona of Fielding's paper announced it as a publication more overtly political and confrontational than the *Tatler* and *Spectator*.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as J.A. Downie persuasively argues, notwithstanding Fielding's occasional denials of partisanship, the *Champion* was openly anti-ministerial from the very beginning.<sup>15</sup> Apart from politics, the paper devoted attention to some of Fielding's favourite topics, including the ambition and incompetence of theatrical managers (especially Rich and the Cibbers),<sup>16</sup> marriage,<sup>17</sup> the human passions,<sup>18</sup> and the debasement of modern culture.<sup>19</sup> As we will see, it also explored some ostensibly newfound concerns, such as the duties—and proper roles—of clergymen. Whatever intellectual pleasure and economic advantage (which does not seem to have been much<sup>20</sup>) Fielding obtained from this new literary project, it did not prove long lasting. Less than eighteenth months after launching, his contributions to *The Champion* came to an end.<sup>21</sup> Although he was not

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<sup>13</sup> The *Champion* purported to offer informed opinions on a range of subjects of everyday life.

<sup>14</sup> On this see Coley, *Champion*, lii. Bertrand Goldgar has argued that Fielding's model for this and other early journalistic ventures might best be located in Joseph Addison's political paper *The Freeholder* (1716-17). See *Covent-Garden*, xxxi and xxxiv. Coley voices a similar opinion in *Jacobite Journal*, lvi.

<sup>15</sup> Downie, *A Political Biography*, 89-95.

<sup>16</sup> See the leaders of 20 November 1739, 22 April 1740, and 12 August 1740.

<sup>17</sup> See the concluding section of 8 December 1740, as well as the leaders of 21 June 1740, and 5 August 1740.

<sup>18</sup> See *Champion*, 1 July 1740.

<sup>19</sup> The best examples are provided in his series of twelve (Swifitean) essays on the travels of Mr. Job Vinegar to the fictitious land of the PTFGHSIUMGSKI: 20 March 1739, 28 June 1740, 17 July 1740, 22 July 1740, 5 August 1740, 9 August 1740, 16 August 1740, 19 August 1740, 26 August 1740, 4 September 1740, 13 September 1740, and 2 October 1740.

<sup>20</sup> According to Lockwood, the *Champion* brought Fielding about fifteen shillings a week. See "Fielding and the Licensing Act", 385.

<sup>21</sup> There is uncertainty about the exact date of Fielding's last contribution to the *Champion*. In the Preface to his *Miscellanies* he declared he had not written for that paper since June 1741 (*Misc.* I, 14-15). But evidence from the minutes of the board of trustees' meetings suggests that Fielding may have ceased contributing regularly to it at least six months earlier. *Champion*, lxxxiv. It is also unclear why Fielding stopped writing for the paper. The Battestins assert that he might have decided to rely on his income as shareholder, to pursue

precisely jobless, in 1741 Fielding was free from his latest literary venture, and ready to embark upon new pursuits.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from having deprived him of his main source of income, the Licensing Act had also left the “Great Mogul” at the Little Haymarket without a platform for displaying his intellectual credentials, for advancing his social criticism, and for experimenting. Writing commercially successful plays, after all, had not been Fielding’s only goal. As pieces such as *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731) made clear, the author sought to capitalize on what he regarded as the bad taste of the town by offering what they wanted to see—a tragedy that made them laugh—while using an elaborate critical apparatus to show critics and more sophisticated spectators that he knew and purposefully rose above the conventional rules of drama.<sup>23</sup> The theatre thus gave Fielding the opportunity to parade his gentlemanly education and erudition, while also expressing his irreverent creativity. By the same token, even when he found it necessary to stage several plays at his “scandal-shop”<sup>24</sup> in the Haymarket, Fielding also chose to add the suffix “Esq.” to his name—concisely displaying his social rank—on the title pages of all the plays he published after 1734. When his career as a dramatist was over, the literary arena seemed to have little room for Fielding’s characteristic

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“other literary ventures that would augment” his income. *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 289. Downie, on the other hand, argues that Fielding finally relinquished “his futile—and fruitless—attempt to topple Walpole” and accepted the government’s money. *A Political Biography*, 109-10.

<sup>22</sup> As I shall mention in the next section of this chapter, Fielding was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in June of 1740, although according to the Battestins he supplemented his income with the profession he liked the most: writing for money. See Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 271-73.

<sup>23</sup> For more on *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and of Fielding’s mock-erudite experiments, see above, Chapter One.

<sup>24</sup> Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, ed. Christine Blouch (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1998), I, viii, 67. See above, Chapter One, note 186.



combination of learned authorship and experimental farce. This was something that hackney journalism for a politicized newspaper could hardly replace.

At the beginning of the ensuing decade, however, Fielding glimpsed an alternative outlet for pursuing his didactic and creative endeavours, as well as for satisfying his more pragmatic needs, in the aftermath of Samuel Richardson's successful publication of *Pamela* (November 1740). The widespread acclamation that this novel received on account of its promotion of moral values suggested to Fielding the possibility of using prose fiction as an efficient platform for instruction. Crucially, he did not react to the first hints of approval for *Pamela*; he chose to write *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* when a second edition (and the advertisement of a third) filled with lavish praise made it clear that Richardson's ingenious concoction of romance and high-minded morality had hit the mark on what the mid-century reading public wanted.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, as we will see in the next chapter, Richardson's first novel had important thematic affiliations with Fielding's own theatrical experiments, especially in its marriage plot, which made this model of writing the more compelling to the former dramatist.

In 1740, prose fiction suddenly offered itself as a promising medium for a writer in search of fame, money, and respectability. Novel writing had, of course, been a lucrative venture long before Richardson's *Pamela*, as evidenced by the numerous reprints of Daniel Defoe's *Robison Crusoe* (1719)

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<sup>25</sup> As I will explore in greater detail in Chapter Three, Richardson's self-promotion was one of the elements in *Pamela* to which Fielding objected. Ironically, however, a similar charge was laid against the author of *Shamela* a decade later, when he used his own *Covent-Garden Journal* (1751-2) as a vehicle to promote *Amelia* (1751) and his Universal Register Office, as well as to commend his own abilities as a magistrate. See Goldgar, *Covent-Garden*, xxxvi

and *Moll Flanders* (1722), or Eliza Haywood's amorous novels of the 1720s.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, as scholars of this period have argued, it was around mid-century that prose fiction started to develop into a more legitimate way for writers to earn a living.<sup>27</sup> This was a long process in which Richardson and Fielding were active pioneers, as J. Paul Hunter has pointed out.<sup>28</sup> After the widespread accolade for *Pamela*, Fielding saw the potential inherent in that genre for influencing the morals and literary standards of his time, as he had done from the stage. In the novels, as in the plays, Fielding catered to the contemporary taste for originality, while he also asserted his regard for tradition by parading his knowledge of the classics. The relative shapelessness of the novel provided him with a particularly apt vehicle to return to the experimentation that had driven most of his theatrical pieces, while making use of his literary background, in an attempt to reconfigure the genre so that it could be at once admired for its novelty and respected for its heritage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Robinson Crusoe* underwent ten editions between 1719 and 1753, four in the year of its first publication. *Moll Flanders* was reprinted three times in the year it was first published. Eliza Haywood's first and most popular novel *Love in Excess* (1719-1721) reached a fifth edition by 1725. For a perspective on the popularity of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* see Paul A. Scanlon "Introduction to Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*" (Toronto: Broadview editions, 2005). For a discussion of prose fiction before mid-century see John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson, Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), especially 1-23.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, William B Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Writing in Britain, 1684-1750* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); and, more recently Carol Stewart, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel and the Secularization of Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> For an exploration of the ways in which Fielding foregrounds the paradoxes of modernity see Scott Black, "Anachronism and the Uses of Form in *Joseph Andrews*", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 38.2/3 (2005) 147-64. For an illuminating discussion of the tensions between originality and familiarity upon which Fielding's "new species of writing" was founded see Hunter, *Before Novels*, 18-22.

As I will explore in the chapters to follow, in prose fiction Fielding found a medium in which to rework many of his social, political, and aesthetic preoccupations, which the Licensing Act of 1737 had threatened to silence. Furthermore, he came across a space where he could rewrite theatrical situations, adding what Lockwood describes as the “unstageably and unrepeatably vulgar” language that had not been admissible on stage even before the Licensing Act.<sup>30</sup> For example, even at the time when he was writing plays for the unlicensed and often scandalous Little Theatre in the Haymarket Fielding would have hardly found a pair of actors willing to perform such scenes as the one where Booby calls Shamela “a d\_\_\_\_d, impudent, stinking, cursed, confounded Jade [...] I have a great Mind to kick your A\_\_\_\_”, to which she retorts he should better “kiss [her] \_\_\_\_\_”; or another in which Booby “fell a kissing one of [Shamela’s] Breasts as if he would have devoured it”, a manoeuvre she counteracts with an attack to his genitalia, “which soon brought him to Terms” (*Shamela*, 164 and 177). *Shamela* is full of such amusingly bawdy passages, which would have been deemed extremely offensive on the stage of the early 1730s, and absolutely unthinkable after the Licensing Act. Indeed, according to Matthew Kinservik, Fielding’s comparatively innocuous *The Wedding Day*, which at David Garrick’s entreaties he prepared for production in 1743, proved to be “the most heavily altered of the Larpent manuscripts approved for performance in the decade after the Licensing Act”.<sup>31</sup> When, after considerable

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Lockwood, “Fielding from Stage to Page”, in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate, a Double Anniversary Tribute*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew J. Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 112-14,

emendation, the play was finally staged later that year, it was generally disliked, only managing to survive the sixth performance, despite the fact that the much-beloved Garrick had a major role in it.<sup>32</sup>

Written, as opposed to performed work no doubt granted writers more freedom in many respects. For example, in prose fiction authors could choose to conceal their names, to serve diverse purposes. Richardson, for instance, cleverly exploited anonymity in his first novel. By claiming to be merely an editor of Pamela's letters, he enhanced the appeal of her story through a claim of authenticity; he generated an illusion of detachment that allowed him to guide the readers' interpretation (through prefatory and concluding remarks); while he also felt freer to promote his own work without seeming too vain, at least before the anti-Pamelist attacks began.<sup>33</sup> Fielding also used concealed authorship to his advantage, in different ways. For instance, he found it very convenient not to attach his name to texts like *Shamela* or *The Female Husband*, as neither of these were likely to increase the respectability of prose fiction as a genre, or of himself as a writer. Whereas his decision to publish the first two editions of *Joseph Andrews* anonymously was very likely motivated by the fear that the reputation that

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quotation from 112. The "Larpent manuscripts" refers to a collection of official copies of plays submitted for examination between 1737 and 1824. It was compiled by John Larpent (1741-1824), who acted as Examiner for forty-six years (1778-1824). See Dougal MacMillan, compiler, *Catalogue of the John Larpent Plays* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1939).

<sup>32</sup> For details of production and printing history see Goldgar's "General Introduction", in *Misc. II*, xliii-xlix. See also Amory's careful collation of the text of the play as published in 1743 in the *Miscellanies* against that of the Larpent manuscript in *Misc. II*, 159-224, and Appendix A, 295-375.

<sup>33</sup> For a fuller discussion of Richardson's motivations in his resort to anonymity see McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 412-13.

preceded him as the author of scandalous satires could contaminate the reception of his new material.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. New interests

Most of the themes that had engaged his attention for the previous decade, such as the debasement of culture, the commodification of human relationships, public and private instances of power abuse, or the idea that marriage was both a potential source of moral improvement and of moral corruption, remained foremost in Fielding's agenda as he turned to prose fiction. Some of his favourite satirical targets, such as the intellectual inadequacy of Colley Cibber or the sexual corruption of Walpole's minions, would likewise continue to play a prominent role in his early novels, especially in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*. New concerns and characters would also populate his subsequent works.

### a) Matters of religion

It is often noted that the early 1740s awakened in Fielding a heightened religious sensibility.<sup>35</sup> According to Martin Battestin, although the author flirted with deism in his youth,<sup>36</sup> his novels (written after the 1740s) became

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<sup>34</sup> For more on Fielding's attempt to disassociate *Joseph Andrews* from his scandalous dramatic career see *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Paulson and Lockwood, 6. On his resort to anonymity in that novel see Allen Michie, *Richardson and Fielding: The Dynamics of a Critical Rivalry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 53.

<sup>35</sup> The first full discussion of this was provided by Martin Battestin in *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: a Study of 'Joseph Andrews'* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959); and *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 141-61. This is a position shared by more recent critics, such as Roger D. Lund, "Burlesque and the Genesis of *Joseph Andrews*", *Studies in Philology* 103.1 (2006): 96; Robert D. Hume, "Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?", *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010): 233; and Lockwood, Introduction to *Pasquin, Plays III*, 228.

<sup>36</sup> Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 151-60.

clearly permeated by the still liberal but more socially respectable principles of latitudinarianism, illustrated in the writings of Isaac Barrow and John Tillotson in the late seventeenth century, and Samuel Clarke and Benjamin Hoadly closer to Fielding's time.<sup>37</sup> Ronald Paulson disagrees with this view, arguing that Fielding espoused deist beliefs for a considerably longer period, extending to the publication of *Amelia* (1751).<sup>38</sup> Fielding's religious affiliations are almost as hard to determine as his political allegiances, since he never expressed them straightforwardly. What can hardly be denied, however—indeed Paulson does not deny it—is that in his writings from the 1740s onwards Fielding devoted a more conspicuous and careful attention to religion than he had done in his plays.

It is entirely plausible to think that Fielding regarded latitudinarianism as a positive model of religious practice. Yet, it is worth taking into account that, as John Walsh and Stephen Taylor point out, it is difficult to provide an exact definition of latitudinarianism, as it was not precisely a school or a movement, and “the word itself seems to have been very rarely used among contemporaries”.<sup>39</sup> According to these historians, from one perspective it can be argued that “the defining characteristic of Latitudinarianism is not a set of beliefs, but moderation; the practice of Christian charitableness and tolerance”. From a different viewpoint,

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<sup>37</sup> Battestin, *Moral Basis*, especially 12-22.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), xiii and 105-26. Compelling though Paulson's argument is, it often relies excessively upon the contentious notion that Fielding and Hogarth had a very close friendship based on crucial ideological affinities.

<sup>39</sup> For a concise discussion of the implications of latitudinarianism in the eighteenth century see John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, “The Church and Anglicanism”, in *The Church of England c.1689 - c. 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36-43, quotations from 36 and 37.

however, it can be said that it was a current of “liberal theology” grounded on belief

in the sufficiency of the Bible alone as the standard and rule of faith; in the right of private judgement; in the simplicity and accessibility of biblical teaching; in the essentially moral and practical nature of Christianity as a faith founded on the truths of natural religion, though elevated above them by revelation; in the need to be charitable to fellow Protestants but ever vigilant against the threat of sacerdotalism.<sup>40</sup>

It is indeed likely that Fielding identified himself with these principles. Furthermore, latitudinarian values were also part of his ancestry. His paternal grandfather, Dr John Fielding, prebendary of Salisbury and archdeacon of Dorset, was an eminent latitudinarian divine, who, in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution had served for a while as chaplain to King William.<sup>41</sup> In light of this, it is hardly surprising to find many points of agreement between eighteenth-century latitudinarianism and Fielding’s approach to Anglicanism in his novels.

The earliest source of evidence of Fielding’s more serious interest in religious matters can be found in his “Apology for the Clergy”, a series of four essays published between 29 March and 19 April 1740 in the *Champion*. In these articles Fielding explored the functions of the clerical profession and the moral qualifications that clergymen ought to possess, if they were to infuse the established church with the respect it was due. Because in his ostensible eulogy of the clerical function Fielding also implied that most clergymen of his time did not in fact have the qualities that their profession required, it has sometimes been argued that he was not entirely sincere in his

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<sup>40</sup> Walsh and Taylor, “The Church and Anglicanism”, in *The Church of England*, ed. Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> For a biographical sketch of Dr John Fielding and hints of his influence upon the writer see Martin Batestin, *A Henry Fielding Companion* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 13-14.

commendation of religion.<sup>42</sup> It seems to me, however, that Fielding's defence of religion was in earnest, which does not exclude the possibility that he wanted to "capitalize on the contempt of clergy issue", or to provide more respectable contributions "with which to fulfil his obligations as principal 'author'".<sup>43</sup>

Compared to the vigour with which Fielding satirized cultural debasement, the commercialization of love, and political corruption, religious matters received a rather desultory treatment in his plays. Although some of his stage comedies featured clergymen, these were not particularly memorable characters. For instance, his wittily named Murdertext in *The Author's Farce* (1730), and Puzzle-Text in *The Welsh Opera* (1731), contributed to the overall comicality of the plays to which they belonged, but were of little consequence to the main plot. Even in *The Old Debauchees* (1732), where Father Martin—a Jesuit Priest—has a major role, Fielding contented himself with using standard anti-Catholic formulae to ridicule this character, while he directed most of his creative energy to the characterization of Isabel, the clever heroine played by Kitty Clive.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, although Firebrand, the "Priest of the Sun" who aids Queen Ignorance in her rebellion against Queen Common-Sense in *Pasquin* was playing on contemporary debates "about the deism or freethinking supposedly lurking at the heart of attacks on church or clerical authority",<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange*, 108-09.

<sup>43</sup> Coley, *Champion*, lxviii.

<sup>44</sup> For a useful discussion of this play see Hume, *Fielding and the London Theatre*, 130-132.

<sup>45</sup> Lockwood, *Plays III*, 228.



this character is by no means the main villain, nor a particularly compelling one.<sup>46</sup>

In the prose fictions explored in subsequent chapters, religious matters acquire greater prominence, and abusive or wicked divines become more serious sources of detestation. In *Shamela*, for instance, Fielding blames the protagonist's misbehaviours first on her mother's recommending her to read "one of Mr. Whitefield's Sermons, and also the Dealings with him" (*Shamela*, 163), and then on Parson Williams, who is endowed with all the blemishes that anti-Methodist commentators ascribed to Methodist preachers: sexual licentiousness, self-righteousness, and the wielding of faith as an excuse for sin.<sup>47</sup> In *Joseph Andrews*, Parson Abraham Adams—the epitome of a good cleric—is one of the main, and most noteworthy, characters; he is arguably the "moral and religious centre" of the novel.<sup>48</sup> Some famous episodes of this text, moreover, play on Biblical stories and characters; for instance, Parson Adams's first name pays homage to Abraham the patriarch; Joseph's attempted seduction by Lady Booby alludes to the temptation of his Biblical namesake by Potiphar's wife; and the passage where Joseph is denied common charity by the passengers in a stage coach reworks the parable of the Good Samaritan. In *The Female Husband*, Methodism is satirised as a form of religious fanaticism causing the first sexual indiscretions of the protagonist.

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<sup>46</sup> Queen Ignorance has three accomplices in her conspiracy against Common Sense, all of whom represent perversions of their professions: 'Firebrand', 'Law', and 'Physic'. It is worth noting that Fielding explicitly avoids naming his character 'Religion' or 'Church'.

<sup>47</sup> For a useful analysis of anti-Methodist perspectives in the eighteenth-century see Albert M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked: The Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960).

<sup>48</sup> Lisa O'Connell, "Vicars and Squires: Religion and the Rise of the English Marriage Plot", *The Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation* 52.3-4 (2011): 397. For an extensive discussion on the religious dimension of *Joseph Andrews*, see Battestin, *Moral Basis*.

As evidenced by the examples mentioned above, the spread of Methodism played a key role in Fielding's religious concerns in the 1740s.<sup>49</sup> Founded by John Wesley, and initially supported by George Whitefield, the Methodist movement started in Oxford in the 1730s. By mid-century, even though it was still a sector within the Church of England—it ceased to be so only upon John Wesley's death in the 1790s—Methodism became a frequent target for satirists and mainstream Anglicans, for reasons that were often ostensibly contradictory. As Emma Major points out, the “theological complexity of Methodism” caused it to be attacked from several fronts and diverse perspectives within the Church of England. For instance, while some claimed that it was dangerously puritanical, others linked it with Roman Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> Anti-Methodists feared that it could cause disruption within families, which could, in turn, escalate to villages, parishes, and the nation itself.<sup>51</sup> As an alarmed observer wrote in 1740, “I have been [...] myself an Eye-witness of this monstrous Madness, and religious Frenzy, which, like a rapid Torrent, bears down every thing beautiful and uniform before it”, which, he claimed, would soon bring “a total Ruin and Destruction of all

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, Methodism is depicted negatively in all of Fielding's novels. In *Joseph Andrews* it is one of the forms of corruption within Anglican ministers that Parson Adams rejects. *Joseph Andrews*, I, xvii, 82. In *Tom Jones* Fielding draws from the anti-Methodist cliché of using religious fervour as a screen for lust in his negative characterization of the Blifils. Captain Blifil, who is suspected of Methodistical inclinations, seduces Bridget Allworthy appealing to her piety. *Tom Jones*, I, x, 63. In the end of the novel, the unreformed Blifil is “turned Methodist, in hopes of marrying a very rich Widow of that Sect”. *Tom Jones*, XVIII, xii, 979-80. In *Amelia* amidst the parade of Newgate inmates, Booth meets a Methodist pickpocket who robs him, and later justifies his thefts through an overstatement of the doctrine of grace. *Amelia*, I, iv, 36-38, and I, v, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation, 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially 130-34. See also David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 31-34, on John Wesley's own feelings toward Catholicism see 34-39.

<sup>51</sup> See David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially 18.

Religion and Virtue".<sup>52</sup> The immense popularity and rapid expansion of the movement caused it to be a subject of much debate.<sup>53</sup>

Because Methodist rituals included night gatherings, love feasts, spiritual trances, and separate congregations of men and women, among the most persistent attacks on Methodism were those related to its alleged negative influence on sexual behaviour. Although these charges, as Misty Anderson points out, "were unoriginal and built on the battle-tested strategies for mocking religious figures" from Catholic and Puritan traditions,<sup>54</sup> the importance that the Methodists gave to the body, especially before their separation from the Moravians in the 1740s, increased their reputation for heightened eroticism.<sup>55</sup> Thus, just as Fielding exploited the formulaic comicality of allegedly lecherous Catholic priests in plays such as *The Old Debauchees*, he turned to Methodism as an expedient resort to rationalize the sexual impropriety of his title characters in *Shamela* and *The Female Husband*.

At the same time, the contemporary associations of Methodism and the stage must have made the movement especially irksome to Fielding. This is evident in his preference for George Whitefield over the Wesley brothers as his favourite satiric butt in religious matters. While John Wesley and other Methodist priests were sometimes linked to the theatre due to their itinerant

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<sup>52</sup> William Bowman, *The Imposture of Methodism Display'd: in a Letter to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Dewsbury. Occasion'd by the Rise of a Certain Sect of Enthusiasts (among them) Call'd Methodists* (London: Joseph Lord, 1740), 2.

<sup>53</sup> For an extensive catalogue of anti-Methodist texts see Clive D. Field, "Anti-Methodist Publications of the Eighteenth-Century: A Revised Bibliography", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University of Manchester* 76.1 (1994): 153-69.

<sup>54</sup> Misty Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 29.

<sup>55</sup> Major, *Madam Britannia*, 136.

preaching and their use of former playhouses as spaces for preaching,<sup>56</sup> it was Whitefield who had the most evident links with the theatre. As Harry Stout persuasively argues,

more than any of his peers or predecessors, he turned his back on the academy and traditional homiletical manuals and adopted the assumptions of the actor [...] he provided pulpit performances so powerful and compelling in their emotional intensity that none—including his greatest enemies in the church and the theatre—could stay away.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, the theatrical bent of Whitefield was famously satirized by dramatists such as Charles Macklin and Samuel Foote in their plays of the 1750s and 1760s.<sup>58</sup> Although Fielding did not comment on this connection so explicitly, his animosity against Whitefield is clear in allusions to this Methodist preacher scattered in his novels, such as the one in *Shamela* mentioned above. That Methodist preachers were seemingly immune to the law,<sup>59</sup> while many actors and dramatists had just been driven out of business by the Licensing Act of 1737, was undoubtedly a further irritant for Fielding.

## **b) The law**

Fielding's professional training as a lawyer from the late 1730s onwards also had a notable influence on his writing. As I mentioned above, he matriculated as a student of the Middle Temple in November 1737, and after what his biographers describe as "an unusually short probationary period of a year an

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<sup>56</sup> See *Ibid.*, 142-43.

<sup>57</sup> Harry, S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), xix-xx.

<sup>58</sup> See Misty Anderson, "'Our Purpose is the Same': Whitefield, Foote, and the Theatricality of Methodism", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2005): 125-149. Anderson shows how even Garrick himself claimed to envy the histrionic talents of Whitefield. *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>59</sup> As Anderson notes, "as an itinerant minister, he was in violation of the Conventicle Act, a Restoration-era act restricting non-Anglican worship". "Whitefield, Foote, and the Theatricality of Methodism", 132.

a half", he was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in June 1739.<sup>60</sup> It is not surprising, then, that legal matters receive greater consideration in his novels than in his dramatic productions. As we have seen in Chapter One, in his plays Fielding often satirized lawyers, as in *The Temple Beau* (1730), in which a student of the Middle Temple neglects his education and squanders (his father's) money in the pursuit of frivolous fashions.<sup>61</sup> He also hinted at the harmful effects of the abuse and perversion of the law in *Rape upon Rape* (1731), where a corrupt magistrate selectively applies justice to his own advantage, or *The Modern Husband* (1732), in which Mr. Modern attempts to manipulate the laws of Criminal Conversation and Coverture to obtain financial gain from cuckoldry.

While the author by no means turned into an apologist for the legal profession, allusions to the workings and misapplications of contemporary legal machinery became more elaborate, and of greater consequence for the characters in Fielding's subsequent work. The implications of Fielding's familiarity with legal matters constitute an extensive theme in its own right, which has been explored at some length in recent decades,<sup>62</sup> and is largely beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth noting a few relevant examples from the novels explored in subsequent chapters as part of the

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<sup>60</sup> Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 271.

<sup>61</sup> Lawyers are also depicted negatively in *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735), in which the venal attorney Wormwood, one of Lucy's suitors, is described as one whose "Profession has made a Knave of whom Nature meant a Fool" (*Plays* III, 128). In *Pasquin*, "Law", yet another avaricious representative of the profession, is an accomplice to the murder of Queen Common-Sense.

<sup>62</sup> For instance Robert Merrett, "The Principles of Fielding's Legal Satire and Social Reform", *Dalhousie Review* 62 (1982): 238-53; Raymond Stephanson, "Fielding's 'Courts': The Legal Paradigm in *Tom Jones*", *English Studies in Canada* 14 (1988): 152-69; Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, Part III "Politics, novels, and the law"; Glen McClish, "Henry Fielding, the Novel, and Classical Legal Rhetoric", *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 14.4 (1996): 413-40; and, more recently, Pat Rogers, "Poacher and Gamekeeper: Fielding, The Law and the Novels", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754)*, ed. Rawson, 233-256.

context for understanding Fielding's transition from dramatist to novelist.

Near the climax of *Joseph Andrews*, Lady Booby conspires with Mr. Scout, her attorney, to find a corrupt magistrate who would "stretch [the law] as far as he is able" to commit Joseph and Fanny to Bridewell, in order to prevent their marriage (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, iii, 286). But instead of railing against lawyers in general (as he had done in *Pasquin*), here Fielding takes pains to observe that Scout is not a real lawyer but "one of those Fellows, who without any knowledge of the Law, or being bred to it, take upon them, in defiance of an Act of Parliament, to act as Lawyers in the Country, and are called so" (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, iii, 284). In *Jonathan Wild*, the main plot is built around the protagonist's dealings with the law. As a "thief-taker" he is an enforcer of the legal apparatus, but in his selective denunciation of some and protection of others he is actually the law's corrupter, who ultimately winds up as its victim, hanged on the gallows. Ironically, as I will argue in Chapter Four, compared to the importance attributed to it in previous accounts of the life of Wild, in Fielding's novel the law itself plays a secondary role in bringing down the rogue.

Based upon real-life events that culminated in a court trial, *The Female Husband* is also closely linked to Fielding's legal profession. At the most basic level it is a text that deals with crime and ends with punishment. Yet, as we will see in Chapter Five, just as it displays a profound ambivalence toward sexual transgressions—alternatingly relishing and condemning irregular behaviour—*The Female Husband* betrays a degree of uncertainty about the legal process that secures the narrative conclusion the author ostensibly regards as appropriate. While it has been persuasively argued that from

*Jonathan Wild* onwards the figure of the “good magistrate” increasingly became “a model for the author’s own stance as the benevolent narrator”,<sup>63</sup> it is also likely that Fielding resorted to this anonymous, irreverent, and prurient piece as a vehicle to vent some of his latent complaints about the incapacity of the legal system to effectively prevent and remedy illicit behaviour.

It is remarkably ironic that the law itself—in the form of the Licensing Act of 1737—would alienate Fielding from the stage, and lead him to pursue a family profession he had hitherto shunned. Indeed, according to the Battestins “the incongruity of England’s leading comic playwright turning from the writing of licentious political farces to the business of preparing himself for the Bar was not lost on the hackney authors of the day”, who compared him to the infinite-headed Hydra that could not be killed.<sup>64</sup> Yet, though the moralising tone of his most famous novels seems to suggest that after been driven away from dramaturgy into the law and prose fiction Fielding shifted from law-breaker to magisterial regulator, if such a change actually occurred, it was not necessarily free from anxiety and vacillation. This is something to which the novels examined in this thesis testify.

### **3. An observation on terminology**

I would like to conclude this chapter with a brief rationale for referring to Fielding’s early prose fictions as novels. With works like *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* one may feel reasonably comfortable using such a

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<sup>63</sup> McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 393.

<sup>64</sup> Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 238. It is tempting to read Fielding’s contrivance of his journalistic persona for the *Champion*, “Capt. Hercules Vinegar”—the frontispiece of which featured Hercules slaying the Hydra—as a cynical response to this attack, which was published six months before the launching of the paper.

designation, as critics generally do.<sup>65</sup> Their length and complexity in characterization and plot easily inserts them into a modern understanding of what novels are, or at least what novels look like. *Shamela*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *The Female Husband*, on the other hand, are more difficult to define. Although some have uncomplicatedly characterized the first two as novels,<sup>66</sup> others have eschewed the problem of genre definition, calling *Shamela* a “satire”, or *Jonathan Wild* a “black comedy”.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, although comical enough in its own right, *Shamela* is incomplete if read in isolation from *Pamela*, Cibber’s *Apology*, or the rest of its satiric targets. *Jonathan Wild* is at times so permeated by the narrator’s ironic diction, and so embedded in a binary opposition of good and evil (represented by Wild and the Heartfrees, respectively) that, at least at first glance, it seems to lack that “fuller, subtler development of characters and themes”, which according to a modern definition is one of the characteristics that distinguishes novels from short stories and novellas.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, in offering different voices and perspectives (by means of the letters between *Shamela* and her mother), and resorting to a narratorial guide (in the prefatory and concluding remarks of Parson Oliver), *Shamela* is

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Angela Smallwood, *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding’s Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Nina Prytula, “‘Great-Breasted and Fierce’: Fielding’s Amazonian Heroines”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.2 (2002); and Hume, “Fielding at 300”.

<sup>66</sup> For *Jonathan Wild* see *Misc.* III, xxii-xliv; and William J. Farrell, “The Mock-Heroic Form of *Jonathan Wild*”, *Modern Philology* 63.3 (1996). For *Shamela* see Morris Golden, “Public Context and Imagining Self in *Pamela* and *Shamela*”, *ELH* 53.2 (1986); and Earla A Wilputte, “Language and Ambiguous Gender: The ‘Bisexual’ Text of *Shamela*”, *The Modern Language Review*, 89.3 (1994).

<sup>67</sup> Linda Bree, “Fielding’s Life”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>68</sup> Chris Baldick, “Novel”, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford University Press, 2008). <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-788>> [accessed 18 November 2012].



also a fascinating example of Fielding's transition from the performative language of the theatre to the self-consciously omniscient narratives of his later (canonically accepted) novels. Similarly, in *Jonathan Wild*, as will be seen in Chapter Four, the binary opposition of good and evil is complicated by elements of mixed character both in Wild and in the Heartfrees. Moreover, following McKeon's argument that by the middle of the eighteenth century "the increasing acceptance of 'the novel' as a canonic term [...] signals the stability of the conceptual category and of the class of literary products that it encloses", texts such as *Shamela*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *The Female Husband* can certainly be considered examples of the type of "novelistic usage" that preceded the "abstraction of the category".<sup>69</sup> Fielding's parodic endeavours in *Shamela*, along with his merging and transformation of conventional historical biography, criminal biography, and marriage plots in *Jonathan Wild* and *The Female Husband* are apposite examples of the way different narrative conventions and genres fed into the eighteenth-century novel, at a key moment when its reputation and form were not yet as securely established as they would become in the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, as Hunter rightly concludes, "the term 'novel' is a particularly apt one historically because of the central conflict in the eighteenth century over the whole question of ancients and moderns, tradition and the past versus originality and innovation".<sup>71</sup> This point is

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<sup>69</sup> McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> For a concise survey of critical debates concerning the aptness of the term "novel" through history see Nicolas Dames, "The Novel", in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Vol. 4, 103-112. For a fuller discussion about the vagaries of reputation and the contentious nature of the word in the eighteenth-century see Hunter, *Before Novels*, Chapter One, "What Was New About the Novel", 3-28, and Chapter Two, "Novels and 'the Novel': The Critical Tyranny of Formal Definition", 29-58.

<sup>71</sup> Hunter, *Before Novels*, 26.

crucial for the works I explore in subsequent chapters. For example, in *The Female Husband*—by far his most salacious piece—Fielding juxtaposes indecorous subject matter (the sexual adventures of a female transvestite) and a popular modern genre (criminal biography), with moralizing disquisitions (in the framework of the story), allusions to classical authorities (for instance, an epigraph from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), and the invocation of a traditional storyline (the marriage plot). As I mentioned above, in prose fiction Fielding found a site from which to continue to pursue the path of experimentation he had fruitfully discovered in his dramatist days, and he did so by merging modern and ancient modes, disreputable themes and lofty didacticism.

Grouping *Shamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *The Female Husband* together under the label of “novels” in this thesis will be done to highlight the status of the novel of the 1740s as a genre in formation, one that was built from various types of popular writing, which were transmuted and amalgamated into a form that became dominant at a later stage. It will also be used to foreground the fact that “the novel” was not a homogenous term in Fielding’s time, as it arguably became afterwards. From this point on, then, I will refer to these texts as novels, well aware of the historical irony—which would probably have annoyed Fielding enormously—that his prose fictions, which he so forcefully endeavoured to differentiate from the work of “the Authors of immense Romances, or the modern Novel” (*Joseph Andrews*, III, i, 189), became eventually remembered, and admired, as novels. Perhaps the greatest irony is that, if we could call upon Fielding as authority on the matter, he would probably be more willing to accept the designation of novel

(which, as we will see in the next chapter, he used as a derogatory term) for his bluntly indecorous *Shamela* and *The Female Husband*. Conversely, he would in all probability reject the nowadays largely incontestable application of the term to *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*.

### **Chapter 3. From “sham marriage” to *Shamela* and the proper marriage ceremony in *Joseph Andrews***

This chapter explores Fielding’s sustained attention to courtship and marital practices in *Shamela* (1741) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742), with particular emphasis on his approach to the marriage plot and the wedding ceremony in these novels. While the conventional story follows that the immense popularity of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) prompted Fielding to express his objections in print, first with a direct parody in *Shamela*, and then with an alternative version of morality and prose fiction writing in *Joseph Andrews*, my analysis seeks to complicate this often overstated critical commonplace. I suggest that Fielding’s reaction to the *Pamela* phenomenon was more significantly inspired by the concerns he had explored and developed during his time as a playwright, than by a deeply entrenched rivalry with Richardson. This is closely linked to Fielding’s overall interest in marriage and the marriage plot as sources for the reformation of moral and literary standards.

#### **1. *Shamela* and the *Pamela* phenomenon**

Four years after the Licensing Act of 1737 had deprived the “Great Mogul” at the Little Haymarket of his theatrical empire, he returned to the spotlight of controversy with his publication of *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (2 April 1741). This hilarious epistolary narrative of a fraudulently virtuous servant maid who tricks her employer into marriage by manipulating his lust is famous as the first retaliation in print to Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (7 November 1740). More specifically, Fielding’s parody was a response to the second edition of *Pamela*

(14 February 1741) with Richardson's augmented prefatory encomia, which included a letter by Aaron Hill recommending the book as "the *Soul of Religion*".<sup>1</sup>

As critics have often noted, it was not only the blatant self-promotion of the author of *Pamela*, but also the public craze for the novel—to the degree that influential writers and clergymen advocated it as a major source for moral instruction—that provoked Fielding's antipathy.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, letters from "the EDITOR to *Himself*", from "JOHN PUFF, *Esq; to the EDITOR*", and from an enraptured Parson Tickletext celebrating "Little *Pamela*" as "the Soul of *Religion*, Good-Breeding, Discretion, Good-Nature, Wit, Fancy, Fine Thought, and Morality", preface the correspondence between Shamela and her mother (*Shamela*, 154). From Fielding's perspective, that a morally objectionable—and inexpertly written—novel should receive such lavish praise, must have been interpreted as another proof of the decadence of modern society. As a writer having recently experienced the devastating effects of censorship on the stage, Fielding was also probably outraged to learn that a novel like *Pamela*—which had several potentially erotic passages—could be deemed worthy of encomium, while plays had to be verbally and situationally innocuous to be judged fit for performance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Appendix I, "To the Editor of *Pamela*", 506.

<sup>2</sup> For useful discussions of Fielding's response to the second edition of *Pamela* see Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, ed. *The Pamela Controversy: Criticisms and Adaptations of Samuel Richardson's Pamela 1740-1750*, Six volumes (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), Vol. 1, xxxix; and Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace: Literary Controversy and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 31.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of censorial practices on the London stage in the aftermath of the Licensing Act of 1737 see Matthew J Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), esp. Chapter 3.

Moreover, as I suggested in the Introduction, at a personal level, the storyline of *Pamela* was particularly irksome to Fielding at that time, since his prodigal father had just married one of his servants, becoming an object of mockery of malicious scandalmongers.

Given that the theatre was no longer an option for a playwright of scandalous reputation like himself, the commercial success of *Pamela* suggested a convenient venture upon which Fielding, famously pragmatic as he was, could capitalize.<sup>4</sup> His *Shamela* was the first in a long list of texts and objects drawing from the popularity of Richardson's novel. The following months saw an impressive number of prose adaptations, poems, plays, illustrations, and translations, variously attacking and commending *Pamela*. Notable examples include *Pamela Censured* (25 April), a fan representing scenes from *Pamela* (advertised on 28 April), John Kelly's *Pamela's Conduct in High Life* (28 May), Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (16 June), James Parry's *True Anti-Pamela* (27 June), George Bennett's *Pamela Versified* (24 July), the first authorized French translation (23 October), Henry Giffard's *Pamela, A Comedy* (first performed on 9 November), and Charles Povey's *The Virgin in Eden* (23 November). Richardson produced his own sequel, *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition*, in December of the same year. Fielding published *Joseph Andrews* at the beginning of 1742 (with a third edition by 1743), famously making his protagonist the brother of Richardson's heroine. The *Pamela* rage did not abate quickly. As Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor have observed, by 1750, "*Pamela* was everywhere and still selling".<sup>5</sup> And as late as the 1790s,

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<sup>4</sup> On Fielding's capacity to adapt to changing prospects see J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form: Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 49.

the *Pamela* debate was still alive in France in the aftermath of the Revolution, with stage adaptations that played on the ambiguity of a text that could be invoked both for the subversion and preservation of class hierarchies.<sup>6</sup>

Variouly labelled as a “media event”,<sup>7</sup> a “craze”,<sup>8</sup> a “vogue”,<sup>9</sup> and, more aptly, a “controversy”,<sup>10</sup> this extraordinary cultural phenomenon has received a good amount of critical attention. Bernard Kreissman’s *Pamela-Shamela* (1960) was the first detailed survey of the broad-ranging reactions to Richardson’s novel that followed Fielding’s parody. In *Licensing Entertainment* (1998), William Warner argued that the lack of historical precedent in the degree of enthusiasm and curiosity that *Pamela* provoked, as well as the simulations and repetitions that it inspired, amount to the first “media event” in English history.<sup>11</sup> Catherine Ingrassia, Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor have recently anthologised key responses to Richardson’s first

<sup>6</sup> Voltaire’s *Nanine; ou le préjugé vaincu* (originally published in 1749) became a very popular play on the post-revolutionary stage of the 1790s, in contrast to Neufchâteau’s more conservative *Paméla; ou la vertu récompensée* (first performed in 1793), which had to be rewritten a couple of times, before being ultimately removed from the theatres, with its author and actors imprisoned. For a fuller account of post-revolutionary adaptations see Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 210-11.

<sup>7</sup> William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Writing in Britain, 1684-1750* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), Chapter Five, “The *Pamela* Media Event”, 176-230.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Ingrassia, ed. *Anti-Pamela; or Feign’d Innocence Detected* by Eliza Haywood, and *An Apology For the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* by Henry Fielding (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>9</sup> T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Chapter VII, “The *Pamela* Vogue and *Pamela* Part II”, 119-154; and Richard Gooding, “*Pamela, Shamela*, and the Politics of the *Pamela* Vogue”, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7.2 (1995): 109-30.

<sup>10</sup> Keymer and Sabor, ed. *The Pamela Controversy*. In *Pamela in the Marketplace*, Keymer and Sabor discuss whether the output of *Pamela* in the 1740s should be described as a vogue (a passing fashion) or a controversy (a more significant and enduring event, implying ideological struggle). They conclude that both terms are apt for describing the phenomenon from the perspective of an eighteenth-century audience, for whom “vogue and controversy were two sides of the same coin”. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 177-78. Warner argues that while Richardson set out to cure readers from the frenzy for amatory fiction (typically represented in the work of Aphra Behn, Delarivière Manley, and Eliza Haywood), he paradoxically promoted the writing of more novels with amatory plots, as the parodies and tributes to *Pamela* often exposed and exploited the latent eroticism of the original. John Richetti makes a similar point in *The English Novel in History, 1700-1780* (London: Routledge, 1999), 84-99.

novel with meticulous headnote analyses and helpful chronologies.<sup>12</sup> Their carefully annotated collections draw attention to the way the *Pamela* phenomenon responded to and helped to reformulate ideological structures such as “the relationships between virtue and class, or between virtue and gender; the rival claims on the Christian soul of faith and good works; the vague and troubled borderline between moral and immoral discourse”.<sup>13</sup>

Recent critical work on this subject has sought to complicate the ostensibly antithetical position of the two *Pamela* factions. Richard Gooding, for example, maintains that “Pamelists and anti-Pamelists end up opposing Richardson’s novel on largely the same grounds”.<sup>14</sup> Exploring apparently sympathetic appropriations of the novel, as well as Richardson’s own sequel, Gooding persuasively argues that the cross-class element of the original story was often downplayed or even omitted in subsequent versions—either by making the heroine’s family of higher rank or by elevating her language and behaviour—thus sanctioning what is traditionally viewed as the quintessential anti-Pamelist objection against the transgression of social hierarchies.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Keymer and Sabor suggest that some of the most vocal advocates of *Pamela*—like Reverend Slocock, who famously advertised the novel from his pulpit in Saint Saviour’s—may have been bribed, while

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<sup>12</sup> Catherine Ingrassia first collected Fielding’s *Shamela* and Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* together, as the two leading examples of the interrogations about class, work, generic expectations, and sexuality prompted by *Pamela*. In their six-volume *Pamela Controversy*, Keymer and Sabor reproduced facsimiles of Richardson’s own preliminary matter and amendments to subsequent editions of *Pamela*, along with verse responses, newspaper reviews, illustrations, parodies, and tributes.

<sup>13</sup> Keymer and Sabor, ed. *The Pamela Controversy*, Vol. 1, xix.

<sup>14</sup> Gooding, “*Pamela, Shamela, and the Politics of the Pamela Vogue*”, 130.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-22. Terry Castle makes a similar point about Richardson’s elevation of his heroine’s behaviour and language in his own sequel. See *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 139-51.



others —like Alexander Pope, who allegedly claimed that *Pamela* was likely to do more good than sermons—may have been misinterpreted.<sup>16</sup> It has also been argued that some detractors of the novel, such as the author of *Pamela Censured*, may have resorted to reverse psychology marketing by highlighting all the sensual passages while ostensibly condemning them, in order to stimulate lustful readers into buying *Pamela*.<sup>17</sup>

While much has been written on *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* as parodic responses to Richardson,<sup>18</sup> there are still crucial connections to be made between these and other works by Fielding—especially his plays. Scarlett Bowen, for instance, reads the anti-Pamelist novels of Henry Fielding and Eliza Haywood as conservative critiques of Richardson’s more socially liberal agenda. According to Bowen, Fielding makes *Shamela* sexually eager because that is how working-class females were traditionally portrayed.<sup>19</sup> Persuasive though this argument is at first glance, it becomes less so when set against Fielding’s plays, many of which featured women from diverse social backgrounds as lustful. It is worth remembering the queen and princess of *Tom Thumb* (1730), who fantasise about having multiple husbands; as well as the wives of tradesmen and military officials of *The Letter Writers* (1731) and *The Universal Gallant* (1735), who cheerfully

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<sup>16</sup> Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 23-25.

<sup>17</sup> Kreissman suggested as much in *Pamela-Shamela: a Study of the Criticisms, Burlesques, Parodies and Adaptations of Richardson’s Pamela* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 67. Keymer and Sabor provide a fuller discussion of this possibility in *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 34-36.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the texts cited above see, for example, Morris Golden, “Public Context and Imagining Self in *Pamela* and *Shamela*”, *ELH* 53.2 (1986): 311-29; Earla Wilputte, “Language and Ambiguous Gender: The ‘Bisexual’ Text of *Shamela*”, *The Modern Language Review* 89.3 (1994): 561-71.

<sup>19</sup> Scarlett Bowen, “‘A Sawce-box and Boldface Indeed’: Refiguring the Female Servant in the Pamela-Antipamela Debate”, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28.1 (1999): 257-85, especially 268.

engage in various extramarital intrigues. Fielding had also depicted men seeking to profit from sex and marriage in plays such as *Rape upon Rape* (1730), and *The Modern Husband* (1732).

Furthermore, Fielding's involvement in the *Pamela* controversy is virtually analogous to his participation in what has been described as "the theatrical renaissance of the 1730s".<sup>20</sup> As I have shown in Chapter One, the perceived stagnation of early-eighteenth-century theatre, along with the popular craze for operas, musical numbers, and pantomimes prompted Fielding to write *Shamela*-like burlesques and parodies, which he interspersed with his own alternative models of more serious comedy (as he did in *Joseph Andrews*). Moreover, the marriage plotline of Fielding's first two novels, as I shall explore in more detail later in this chapter, is reminiscent of his plays, evidencing a tangible link between his drama and his prose fiction.

## **2. Steering away from the Richardson-Fielding dichotomy**

Before moving forward to textual analyses, I would like to provide a brief rationale for the reading of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* that I present in this chapter, which consciously disengages these novels, particularly the latter, from Richardson's *Pamela*. Although the conventional rhetoric of opposition between Fielding and Richardson has been sometimes challenged,<sup>21</sup> it is still a pervasive commonplace of literary studies. In *The Providence of Wit* (1991),

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<sup>20</sup> J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Angela Smallwood, for instance, dedicates the first part of her brilliant study to urge "abolition of the Richardson-Fielding polarity by casting doubt on some of the means used to perpetuate it". *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate, 1700-1750* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 3 and 16-27; Similarly, Jill Campbell questions the prevalence of harmful dichotomies that oppose Fielding's allegedly "masculine" novels to Richardson's allegedly "feminine" ones. *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), especially, 3-6.

for instance, Patrick Reilly writes that “Richardson and Fielding provide perhaps the most striking example from literature of twinship and reciprocity”. “It is impossible”, he continues,

to discuss the one without recourse to the other. *Joseph Andrews* is a direct response to *Pamela*. [...] *Tom Jones* succeeds *Clarissa*. Two years later Fielding gets in first with *Amelia*, to be almost instantly countered by *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*.

As he strives to make the undeniable case that *Tom Jones* is “the masterwork of a master novelist”, he builds the unconvincing argument that Fielding is great precisely because he is categorically unlike Richardson.<sup>22</sup> As Robert Hume has recently pointed out, “seeing Fielding mostly in juxtaposition to his great rival severely distracts us from his greater social and generic range, his originality, his socio-political agendas, and his consistently adventurous experimentalism”.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this kind of binary argumentation ultimately distorts the individual work of both authors.

On the other hand, it has been recently suggested that the body of criticism on *Pamela*, *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* does not need swelling;<sup>24</sup> that *Joseph Andrews* sadly “sells more copies [than *Tom Jones* or *Amelia*] partly because it satirizes Richardson”; and that “*Shamela* [...] has more readers than all his dramas and essays combined”.<sup>25</sup> There is, however, a

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<sup>22</sup> Patrick Reilly, *Adventure and Providence* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 3. For a thorough documentation of the origins and terms of the dichotomized critical perception that located Richardson and Fielding perennially as contraries see Allen Michie, *Richardson and Fielding, the Dynamics of a Critical Rivalry* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1999). Disappointingly, however, Michie’s study offers little post-Ian Watt’s *Rise of the Novel* (1957) material.

<sup>23</sup> Robert D. Hume, “Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?”, *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010): 236.

<sup>24</sup> In *Pamela in the Marketplace*, Keymer and Sabor declare their intention to study neglected works “rather than swell the existing body of criticism on *Pamela*, *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*”, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Michie, *Richardson and Fielding*, 194.

substantial gap in critical examinations of these novels in relation to Fielding's literary production as a whole, other than as early rehearsals in fiction before achieving narratorial mastery with *Tom Jones*, or in direct relation to Richardson's production. The relationship between Fielding's first two novels and his theatrical pieces, for example, remains nearly unexplored. Thomas Lockwood has suggested as much in a recent article, arguing that "*Shamela* belongs equally to the history of Fielding's theatrical work" as it does to the history of the novel. He traces the origins of the saucy protagonist of Fielding's first novel back to the clever and rebellious female characters that outsmarted inept villains, which he composed in the 1730s for his friend and collaborator, the actress Catherine Clive.<sup>26</sup> Lettice, the title character of *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734) and Lappet from *The Miser* (1733), cunning female servants with unusually prominent roles, are obvious candidates for the models of Squire Booby's maid turned bride.<sup>27</sup> In Lockwood's apt words, *Shamela* "is not a coarsened Pamela but a coarsened Lappet or Lucy Goodwill—and not just coarsened but ideally, heroically coarsened until finally emerging as the irresistible princess of vulgarity and self-seeking that readers have loved."<sup>28</sup> Although *Pamela* supplied Fielding with a story outline, the mischievous and irreverent *Shamela* came directly from the plays.

Taking my cue from these critical prompts, in the remainder of this chapter I offer fresh readings of *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* contextualized

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Lockwood, "Fielding from Stage to Page", *Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate, a Double Anniversary Tribute*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 28-31, quotation from 28.

<sup>27</sup> Also, Chloe in *The Lottery* (1732), Isabel in *The Old Debauchees* (1732), Dorcas in *The Mock Doctor* (1732), and Lucy in *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735).

<sup>28</sup> Lockwood, "Fielding from Stage to Page", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754)*, ed. Rawson, 31.

by Fielding's work as a dramatist, as well as by his recurrent concerns as a writer. And though a certain degree of comparison between Fielding and Richardson is, of course, necessary when dealing with these novels, specially with *Shamela*, my reading of their courtship plots lays greater emphasis on the thematic and structural continuities between the mode in which Fielding specialized for nearly a decade and his recently found province of prose fiction.

### 3. The new "Pleasures of the Town"

As I suggested above, three considerations were crucial in eliciting Fielding's response to *Pamela*. He was annoyed to find that a work as flawed as he thought *Pamela* to be could induce such popular acclaim, and (up to that moment) no censure; he was incensed by the vanity of a writer who would go to such lengths to promote his own work; and he was in desperate need of money, since all evidence indicates that he wrote *Shamela* from a sponging house where he was confined for a fortnight while settling a suit for debt.<sup>29</sup>

Memorably, Fielding condensed in *Shamela* a collection of complaints against what he considered as the erroneous elements of his contemporary society. It has been argued that since Fielding regarded *Pamela* as "incoherent, unintelligent, ungrammatical and morally fraudulent", he took it to be "an index of the woeful credulity of the times", which he felt obliged to correct.<sup>30</sup> Also, as Eric Rothstein and Hugh Amory pointed out long ago,

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<sup>29</sup> See Battestin's introduction to *Shamela*, 137. For a fuller account of this period in Fielding's life see: Martin Battestin and Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 301-08.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Bell, *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority* (London: Longman Group, 1994), 65.

Fielding's artful merging of Colley Cibber and Conyers Middleton's<sup>31</sup> name into "Conny Keyber", the alleged author of *Shamela*, as well as his dedication of the text to "Miss Fanny" (a satirical appellation for Lord Hervey, the sexually ambivalent favourite of Robert Walpole), were meant to expose the intimate link he saw between all forms of degeneration: cultural, spiritual, and political.<sup>32</sup> This is a notion Fielding expanded in the narrative proper through the insinuation that Parson Williams's teachings, grounded upon Methodist tenets, provided *Shamela* with a religious justification for her morally reprehensible actions. By summarizing contemporary attacks against Methodism in the paratexts of *Shamela*, and in the story itself, Fielding suggested that George Whitefield, the famous Methodist leader, was the spiritual representative of modern decadence; or, in Rothstein's apt phrase, "the Cibber of piety".<sup>33</sup> Fielding's ingenious conflation of seemingly unrelated satirical targets implied that, deep inside, all of them were virtually interchangeable, and that the extraordinary popularity of *Pamela* was merely symptomatic of their dangerous grip on society.

A crucial aspect that has been overlooked, however, is that all these features of *Pamela* are comparable to what Fielding ridiculed as "The Pleasures of the Town" in his human puppet show at the core of *The Author's*

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<sup>31</sup> Conyers Middleton (1683- 1750) was a clergyman who dedicated his major work, *Life of Cicero* (1741) to Lord Hervey (1696-1743), a prominent aristocrat favoured by Robert Walpole, whose ambiguous political loyalties and sexuality rendered him a favourite satirical target for authors like Pope and Fielding.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Rothstein, "The Framework of *Shamela*", *EHL* 35.3 (1968): 381-402; Hugh Amory, "Shamela as Aesopic Satire", *ELH* 38.2 (1971): 239-53. Rothstein and Amory have also associated Fielding's belief in a complicated network of corruption, with the Scriblerians Pope, Swift, and Gay. This notion is echoed in more recent criticism. See, for example, Thomas Keymer's introduction to *Shamela and Joseph Andrews*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), xxii. However, as I mentioned in Chapter One, Fielding's ostensible subscription to Scriblerian ideas is a contested matter.

<sup>33</sup> Rothstein, "The Framework of *Shamela*", 392.

*Farce* (1730), his first theatrical hit. For Fielding, the “pleasures” were entertainments of scant literary merit and dubious morality, whose arrogant authors and promoters were more worried about money than quality, sacrificing the latter to please and perpetuate the bad taste of audiences. They were the formulaic sentimental comedies and tragedies that the managers of the patented theatres staged over and over again, the dancing numbers they introduced between performances, operas in foreign languages, nonsensical pantomimes, the wordy sermons of pompous clergymen, amatory novels charged with sexual innuendo, public lotteries and auctions, and even perhaps, as I argued in Chapter One, Alexander Pope’s lofty burlesques of nonsense and pedantry, *The Dunciad* (1728) and *Dunciad Variorum* (1729). Fielding had consistently mocked these forms of popular entertainment in several other plays, including *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731), *The Lottery* (1732), *Pasquin* (1736), *Tumble-Down Dick* (1736), *Eurydice* (1736), *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737), and *Eurydice Hiss’d* (1737).

The resemblance between *Pamela* and other fashionable diversions, for which Fielding ostensibly felt utter contempt but which also clearly excited a compulsive fascination, was plainly observed by contemporaries. In January 1741, for example, Edward Cave, editor of *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, wrote that it was “as great a Sign of Want of Curiosity not to have read *Pamela* as not to have seen the French and Italian Dancers”.<sup>34</sup> A popularity that appealed to the “curiosity” of audiences was not the only feature *Pamela*

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<sup>32</sup> “Advertisement”, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 11, (1741): 56. <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/8381964?accountid=15181>> [accessed 20 May 2012].

had in common with spectacles of this kind. As Fielding's *Shamela* and other anti-Pamelist tracts such as *Pamela Censured* evidenced, there were scenes in Richardson's novel that were heavily charged with sexual overtones. These passages recalled the passion-inflaming fictions of earlier writers, such as Eliza Haywood, whom Fielding had rendered into "Mrs. Novel" in his satiric puppet show. At the same time, Pamela's almost sanctimonious insistence about her religious devotion, and the constant allusions to pious texts in that novel, hinted at a link with Methodism, a religious movement that Fielding despised and which, on account of its rapid growth, he must have interpreted as a recent moral pleasure of the town.

The marketing strategies of Richardson, which Keymer and Sabor aptly gloss in *Pamela in the Marketplace*,<sup>35</sup> certainly recalled Cibber's entrepreneurial management of Drury Lane in the 1720s and early 1730s, in the sense that both suggested a pervasive commodification of culture by flamboyant social upstarts. From this perspective, Fielding's simultaneous attack on Richardson,<sup>36</sup> Cibber, Middleton, Hervey, and George Whitefield in *Shamela* echoed his argument in *The Author's Farce* that all the silly, supercilious, and ideologically dangerous amusements of the times attracted each other and should be discarded together. This argument is significantly illustrated in Shamela's little library, described halfway through the story, which consists of:

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<sup>35</sup> See especially their Chapter One.

<sup>36</sup> Some have argued that Fielding did not know who the author of *Pamela* actually was, and that he may even have entertained the possibility that Cibber had written it. See, for instance, Battestin, *Shamela*, 137; and Ian Bell, *Authorship and Authority*, 72. This argument has been persuasively challenged by Keymer and Sabor. They estimate that Fielding, who was usually well aware of literary gossip, certainly knew that Cibber was not the author and in all probability he knew that it was Richardson, since the authorship of *Pamela* was an open secret just a few months after its publication. *The Pamela Controversy*, Vol. 1, liii.



*A full Answer to a plain and true Account, &c. The Whole Duty of Man, with only the Duty to one's Neighbour, torn out. The Third volume of the Atalantis. Venus in the Cloyster: Or, the Nun in her Smock. God's Dealings with Mr. Whitefield. Orfus [sic] and Eurydice. Some Sermon-Books; and two or three Plays, with their Titles, and Part of the first Act torn off (Shamela, 181).*

Her readings—ranging from a response to a controversial piece of theology,<sup>37</sup> a respectable conduct book (but with a crucial passage missing), a couple of erotic novels, a Methodist spiritual biography, one of the pantomimes Fielding hated the most, scattered sermons, and plays with titles and beginnings violently removed—clearly signal not only her bad taste and utter contempt for literature and morality, but also her undiscerning consumerism of fashionable cultural products, that is, her mindless indulgence in the pleasures of the town. The anxieties that motivated Fielding to write *Shamela*, then, distinctly echo those of his plays, especially his irregular pieces.

In his years as dramatist Fielding made it his business to look after the intellectual and moral wellbeing of audiences. It was a good business indeed, for he found he could simultaneously ridicule, profit from, and rise above debased cultural manifestations by means of parody. As Luckless, his alter ego in *The Author's Farce*, explained: “who would not rather Eat by his Nonsense, than Starve by his Wit?” (*Plays* I, III, I, 256). This was a lesson the author learned well and put in practice throughout his career. In 1741, *Shamela* would do what *The Author's Farce*, *Tom Thumb*, *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register* did for Fielding in the 1730s: furnish his pockets, while helping to position him as a guardian of cultural and moral standards.

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<sup>37</sup> According to Ingrassia, *A full Answer to a plain and true Account, &c.* “is likely one of the many works written in reply to *A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (1735)”, written by Benjamin Hoadly. *Anti-Pamela and Shamela*, note 2, 260.

#### 4. The sham-marriage plot of *Shamela*

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, at the turn of the 1740s, prose fiction suggested to Fielding a number of attractive possibilities for using novels as new literary outlets, after the Licensing Act of 1737 put a sudden halt to his dramatic career. Novel writing would also prove to be such an apposite medium for Fielding because it gave him the occasion to rework a storyline with which he had familiarized himself and experimented for almost a decade: the courtship plot. I want to argue that Fielding was able to adapt the romantic narrative of *Pamela* so easily into *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* because it constituted a direct thematic link between the stage and prose fiction. At the same time, it allowed the writer to continue his literary crusade against morally and socially corrupt marital practices.

As we saw in Chapter One, courtship plots in which one or more couples were happily espoused in the end, bidding farewell to the audience only with a hint of the happiness that would follow, were so ubiquitous in the early eighteenth-century stage that they had been ridiculed in plays such as John Gay's *The What D'Ye Call It?* (1714), in which a character's insistence on having a wedding performed onstage, because "what is a Play without a marriage?", causes a hilarious catastrophe at the very end.<sup>38</sup> Fielding had also exploited the comicality of this commonplace in his own plays. For instance, in the comedy rehearsed within *Pasquin*, when Fustian the tragedian demands to know "the Action of this play [...] the Fable, the Design?", Trapwit the comedian answers: "Oh! You ask who is to be married! Why, Sir, I have a

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<sup>38</sup> John Gay, *The What D'Ye Call It?: A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1714), 39. For more on this play see above, Chapter One.

Marriage; I hope you think I understand the Laws of Comedy better than to write without marrying somebody" (*Plays* III, I, 263). Similarly, *The Fathers* (written in the mid-1730s, published posthumously in 1778) closes with an ironic comment about "the strange events of the day" breaking "a constant rule, that comedies should end in a marriage" (*Plays* III, V, v, 617-18).<sup>39</sup>

Yet, this type of marriage ending had also been Fielding's choice in fourteen of his plays, including all of his regular five-act comedies.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, over the course of his nine years as a playwright Fielding learned to weave broader aesthetic, social, and moral concerns into the romantic and domestic situations that fascinated the theatrical audiences of his time. For nearly a decade, he had experimented with the theatrical marriage plot, which he had variously adopted, adapted, and burlesqued. Given that the insinuation of one or more weddings was the conventional ending of stage comedies in his time, Fielding reproduced this model unquestioningly in early plays like *Love in Several Masques* (1728) and *The Temple Beau* (1730). Soon, however, as in *The Author's Farce*, he assumed a more sceptic stance, indulging his audiences in the marriage finale, while evidencing and questioning the artificiality of the well-endowed matches that were routinely presented as the most natural of happy endings. His romantic farces often invited the theatrical public to see that, if closely considered,

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<sup>39</sup> According to Lockwood, Fielding wrote the play around 1735 and offered unsuccessfully to John Rich at Covent-Garden. He revised again in 1742, "but then set aside again, later lost, and finally revised for production and publication a quarter-century after Fielding's death". Lockwood, *Plays* III, 504.

<sup>40</sup> *Love in Several Masques* (1728), *The Temple Beau* (1730), *The Author's Farce* (1730), *The Coffee-House Politician* (1730), *The Welsh Opera* (1731), *The Modern Husband* (1732), *The Old Debauchees* (1732), *The Mock Doctor* (1732), *The Miser* (1732), *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734), *Don Quixote in England* (1734), *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735), *The Universal Gallant* (1735), and *The Wedding Day* (probably written in 1729, published and performed in 1743).

most of the ostensibly affectionate marriages of sentimental comedies were as much inspired by convenience as the mercenary matches they seemingly condemned. It was as a playwright, then, that Fielding had developed considerable expertise in probing the themes and the structural conventions of marriage plots.

Richardson's *Pamela* was a work deeply concerned with the social and religious implications of matrimony. Its central element, the "reward" alluded to in the complete title, was the marriage between the protagonist and her master, offered as the ultimate happy ending for all the characters. This novel, however, did not follow the conventional finale of theatrical courtship plots, as the narrative of the heroine's distresses was prolonged after the wedding for around one third of the total length of the book, showing some instances of domestic conflict between the couple and the groom's family. As we have seen, from a theatrical viewpoint nuptials with the promise of everlasting happiness were the appropriate ending. The author of *Pamela* was, of course, not attempting to emulate a dramatic formula. In fact, it has been argued that Richardson's depiction of confined spaces and immersive reading was deliberately anti-theatrical,<sup>41</sup> and that the author's "personal attitude to the stage was at best unenthusiastic".<sup>42</sup> From Fielding's perspective, however, the romantic plot of Richardson's first novel must have suggested itself as a prose reformulation, or rather a perversion, of the theatrical convention with which he had worked for so many years. It was

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<sup>41</sup> Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*. For Pamela's anti-theatricality see 224-26. For the argument that Richardson's models can be best located in the traditions of conduct books and novels of amorous intrigue, which he merged with a view of developing a story that could be entertaining and morally edifying see 192-203.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Keymer, "Shakespeare in the Novel", in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Fiona Ritchie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 126.

sufficiently close to what he knew and different enough so that he could feel competent to burlesque the work in *Shamela*, and to gradually abandon the parody in favour of a more independent story in *Joseph Andrews*.

Pamela's union with Mr. B., offered as the tangible reward for the heroine's preservation of her sexual virtue, presented a perfect opportunity for Fielding to revisit his old arguments. Not surprisingly, he devoted an important portion of his parodic energy in *Shamela* to the ridicule of the courtship plot, foregrounding it in two crucial ways. First, he transformed the name of the protagonist so that it was at once cleverly ironic, and reminiscent of the marriage episode in the original. Second, he chose to omit the wedding ceremony altogether. Calling his protagonist "Shamela", Fielding ingeniously rendered Pamela's insistence that her nuptials to Mr. B. should follow the appropriate formalities—lest hers should be a "sham-marriage"—into a presentation of the character herself as a sham. Famously in Richardson's novel, just before being finally set free by her master, Pamela has an encounter with a "Gypsy-like body", later revealed to be Mr. B.'s lawyer, who informs her about the squire's latest scheme to seduce her: he would hire someone to impersonate a parson, who, taking care to omit key passages of the solemnization, would convince her that their marriage is legal, so that she yields her long preserved virginity. The ever suffering Pamela is outraged and frightened to hear about this "sham, wicked marriage" and from this point, until the very moment of her wedding, she is continuously mistrustful of Mr. B.'s resolution to make her his wife.<sup>43</sup> The repetition of the word "sham" in *Pamela* (it is used 17 times in the episodes immediately before and

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<sup>43</sup> Richardson, *Pamela*, ed. Keymer and Wakely, 223-25, and 226.

after the marriage) must have resonated in Fielding's mind,<sup>44</sup> suggesting an easy and memorable pun.

Paradoxically, the deliberate omission of this episode in *Shamela* highlights the relevance of the marriage plot, and what Fielding deemed Richardson's inept use of it. Claiming that the letter "which contained an Account of all the Proceedings previous to her marriage" is now "unhappily lost", Parson Oliver finishes the story with another epistle that "seems to have been written about a Week after the Ceremony was perform'd" (*Shamela*, 183). From a practical point of view, this clever prolepsis saved Fielding time while allowing him to preserve the mockery. By skipping the wedding, the author of *Shamela* implied that, though ostensibly crucial, Christian matrimony was in fact irrelevant in works like *Pamela*. It was merely the formalization, the contract signing, in a commercial transaction. At the same time, moving on directly to the domestic quarrels in *Shamela* suggested that *Pamela*, like earlier novels with amatory content such as Delarivière Manley's *New Atalantis* (1709), Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719), *Idalia* (1723) and *Fantomina* (1724), did not follow the conventions of traditional courtship plots because they were more interested in portraying romantic and domestic intrigues as means of amusement. Hence, by suppressing the details of the story, which had gained *Pamela* its famous

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<sup>44</sup> Not only is the phrase "sham-marriage" repeated many times in *Pamela*, but the possibility of betrayal into a false marriage is the heroine's greatest source of anxiety throughout this climactic episode, even after the ostensible conversion of Mr B. This is partly why she insists that "the Holy Rite" should happen "in a Holy Place". To appease her, Mr. B. agrees to have the ceremony performed in his private chapel, and he counsels her to memorize the words from the Book of Common Prayer, so she can be certain that the wedding is real. *Pamela*, ed. Keymer and Wakely, 276. For a brief discussion of the irregularity of the marriage that Mr B. originally proposes to Pamela see my Introduction.

accolade, Fielding managed to distort its moral, dismissing the work as one among a host of disreputable novels.

An important implication of the use of the adjective “sham” in the title of Fielding’s novel, along with the omission of the actual wedding, was that Richardson’s text had two sham-marriage plots: a diegetic one, that is, the scheme Mr. B. devised in order to seduce Pamela without having to marry her; and a structural one, meaning a storyline that did not comply with the traditional configuration of a comic plot orbiting around courtship and ending, neatly, in marriage. The word “sham” in *Shamela*, then, became a versatile metonymy: it signified Pamela’s latent duplicity, ironically obscuring the fact that it recalled her justified fear of deception; and it foregrounded what Fielding regarded as the defective framework of the original novel. Moreover, as Jennie Batchelor persuasively argues, given that at the time “sham” as a noun meant false sleeves used to adorn a plain dress or conceal the dirtiness of a shirt, and that “One Sham” is among Shamela’s few possessions, the word also made a point about Pamela’s duplicitous dressing as a country girl to attract Mr B. in the famous “tricking scene” of Richardson’s novel.<sup>45</sup> As Fielding fully subscribed to the notion that all forms of corruption were related, it was only logical that morally erroneous courtship plots were also structurally wrong. This is what he suggested as a farcical playwright, when he parodied what he saw as the artistic deficiencies of theatrical pieces that featured morally uncritical depictions of rich marriages as happy endings. *Pamela*, in Fielding’s view, was just as flawed in

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<sup>45</sup> Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 35-36.

its moral instruction as it was in its aesthetic design. Following the story very closely, making some minor alterations to key passages, Fielding laid bare what he considered to be the feeble scaffolding of the original text. He showed how easily the innocently virtuous protagonist could be transformed into a scheming seducer, completely reversing the moral of the story, or rather, disclosing what he believed were the hidden motivations of its author.

Moreover, the idea that a woman with too strict a regard for her virtue is really a latent coquette—that coquettes and prudes were “Nusances, just alike; tho’ they seem very different: The first are always plaguing the Men; and the other always abusing the Women”<sup>46</sup>—was a theatrical cliché of the early eighteenth-century stage, which Fielding easily transposed into his first novel. Colley Cibber’s coquettish Lady Townley and prudish Lady Grace, for instance, provided much comic fuel to his widely applauded *Provok’d Husband* (1728), quoted above. Fielding also resorted to the prude-coquette dichotomy in his plays. In *The Temple Beau*, for example, he characterized Bellaria as the golden mean between the flirtatious Lady Lucy and the priggish Lady Gravely. In a song in that play, furthermore, Fielding compared these feminine stereotypes to politicians from opposite parties, neither to be trusted:

Like the Whig and the Tory,  
Are Prude and Coquette;  
From Love these seek Glory,  
As those do from State.  
No Prude or Coquette  
My Vows shall attend,  
No Tory I’ll get,  
No Whig for a Friend (*Plays*, I, II, vii, 182).

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<sup>46</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Provok’d Husband; or a Journey to London. A Comedy, as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal, by his Majesty’s Servants* (London: J. Watts, 1728), III, 42.



This clearly anticipates Fielding's offer to expose "all the matchless Arts of that young Politician" in the title page of *Shamela*.

Similarly, Fielding's famous transformation of Pamela's pious "virtue" into Shamela's naughty and marketable "vartue", which testifies to the close link he saw between moral and linguistic corruption, was another self-loan from the drama. A decade before *Pamela*, in the epilogue to the original version of *Rape Upon Rape* (1730) the playwright had already altered the spelling of that word for comic purposes, ridiculing the affected diction of some contemporaries, while calling attention to the pervasive but ultimately vacuous use of high-minded terms:

Our modern Beaus in Vigour are so hearty,  
And modern Dames so very full of Vartue,  
So scarce immodest Women, Men so urging,  
A Rape's almost as common as a—— Virgin.<sup>47</sup>

Fielding's *Shamela* was clearly fuelled by a number of theatrical anxieties for which Richardson's *Pamela* provided a timely igniting spark.<sup>48</sup> Above all, its matrimonial theme offered the former playwright an apposite opportunity to return to his first literary passion while looking forward to what would be remembered as his most successful venture: novel writing.

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<sup>47</sup> Fielding, *Rape upon Rape; or the Justice Caught in his Own Trap* (London: J. Wats [sic], 1730), 4.

<sup>48</sup> Other theatrical echoes in *Shamela* include the use of the bawdy connotations of "etcetera" in *Shamela* (making a pun of Richardson's incautious use of the term in his first preface to *Pamela*) to which Fielding had first resorted in *The Coffee-House Politician* (*Plays*, I, I, ii, 432); and Shamela's pompous rhetoric after her marriage to Booby, which recalls the comic affectation of ladies of fashion such as Lady Trap in *Love in Several Masques* and Lady Lucy Pedant in *The Temple Beau*.

### 5. The proper marriage ceremony in *Joseph Andrews*

In a recent article, Lisa O'Connell argues that religious and political discrepancies between Richardson and Fielding were crucial in shaping the English marriage plot into its modern form. In her essay, she maps out the church-state tensions that bore upon what she reads as Richardson's "particularly successful attempt to harness the technology of the novel to a High Church Anglican outreach project designed to disseminate practical Christianity and moral reform in resistance to Whiggish secularism". Conversely she assesses Fielding's "revision of the marriage plot" in *Joseph Andrews*, with its climactic parish wedding, as a resistance against "the state-endorsed resacralization embraced by Richardson in the name of a populist rural Anglicanism, centred on Adams and in effect presented as the essence of country Englishness itself".<sup>49</sup> According to O'Connell, by emulating the marriage ending characteristic of romance, Fielding simultaneously indulged his nostalgia for old values and foregrounded the utopianism of his argument.

Indeed, over the course of the four books of *Joseph Andrews*, as it has been frequently remarked, Fielding emphasised the importance of community, extolled the virtues of the English countryside as opposed to the vices of the city, rendered his country Parson as the centre of morality, and, by means of the idealized nuptial finale, as well as through the constant interpolations of the narrator, he foregrounded the artificiality of his work.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Lisa O'Connell, "Vicars and Squires: Religion and the Rise of the English Marriage Plot", *The Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation* 52.3-4 (2011): 392, 397, and 399.

<sup>50</sup> On these aspects of *Joseph Andrews* see, for example, Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), Chapter Two, "The role of the reader in Fielding's *Tom*

But, partly because hers is a work in progress,<sup>51</sup> partly because the main focus of her article is *Pamela*, and partly because she relies too much on the Richardson-Fielding dichotomy, O'Connell overlooks crucial aspects of Fielding's development of the marriage plot. Significantly, there is nothing in her article about Fielding's nine-year career as a dramatist, which, as I have been suggesting throughout, first acquainted him with the structural and moral potentials of the courtship plot, leading him to experiment with a literary vehicle into which he wove his most fundamental religious, social, and literary concerns. Fielding's resort to the marriage plot in *Joseph Andrews* answers to the socio-political and religious agendas that O'Connell aptly delineates—but upon which she does not elaborate—while it also responds to a generic concern that is absent from her study.

Fielding's allegiance to dramatic conventions in *Joseph Andrews* is hinted at in its celebrated preface, the beginning of which is worth quoting at length:

As it is possible the mere *English Reader* may have a different Idea of Romance with the Author of these little Volumes; and may consequently expect a kind of Entertainment, not to be found, nor which was even intended, in the following Pages; it may not be improper to premise a few Words concerning this kind of Writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our Language. The EPIC as well as the DRAMA is divided into Tragedy and Comedy. *Homer*, who was the Father of this Species of Poetry, gave us a Pattern for both of these, tho' that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which *Aristotle* tells us, bore the same relation to Comedy which his *Iliad* bears to Tragedy (*Joseph Andrews*, 3).

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*Jones and Joseph Andrews*"; Hunter, *Occasional Form*, Chapter Five, "Some contexts for *Joseph Andrews*"; Bell, *Authorship and Authority*, Chapter Three, "Making the novel"; Scott Black, "Anachronism and the Uses of Form in *Joseph Andrews*", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 38.2/3 (2005): 147-64; and Roger D. Lund, "Burlesque and the Genesis of *Joseph Andrews*", *Studies in Philology* 103.1 (2006): 88-119.

<sup>51</sup> Her article is part of a forthcoming book on the political origins of the English marriage plot. <<http://www.emsah.uq.edu.au/dr-lisa-o-connell>> [accessed 12 January 2013].

Famously, Fielding set out to create a type of writing that was, paradoxically, new but modelled upon recognizable literary patterns. There is no further commentary on this respect, for the author moves on to an elaborate dissertation upon the difference between burlesque mode and burlesque diction, and a definition of the ridiculous. However, the implicit argument of this paragraph—one which has consistently been overlooked—is that in the absence of an epic model for comedy, drama would supply a chief generic foundation for his “comic Epic-poem in Prose” (*Joseph Andrews*, 4). As Fielding sought to elevate the cultural status of prose fiction—while also being caught in a paradoxical reverence for the classics and an enthusiasm for novelty, characteristic of his time—his ostensible sources should be respectable and familiar, but also new and exciting.<sup>52</sup> From this point of view, the established conventions of comic theatre suggested a suitable compromise. By embedding a number of dramatic formulas into the novel he could seek to reaffirm and renew the tradition.

Fielding’s quest for respectability and originality helps us to understand his ostensible detachment from “those voluminous Works commonly called *Romances*, namely, *Celia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astrea*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*, and innumerable others which contain, as I apprehend, very little Instruction or Entertainment” (*Joseph Andrews*, 4), which were usually cast off as silly diversions for well-meaning but amateurish women,<sup>53</sup> and

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<sup>52</sup> For a brief discussion of Fielding’s engagement in the conflict between tradition and originality, sober erudition and facetiousness, see above, Chapter Two. Also see J. Paul Hunter *Occasional Form*, Chapter One, “What Was New About the Novel”.

<sup>53</sup> Fielding reproduces the titles found in the library of “Leonora”, a lady of fashion, in *Spectator* 37 (12 April 1711). Even when Mr Spectator praises the lady for spending her time in reading rather than playing cards or visiting friends, he ironically remarks that these

which *Joseph Andrews* could very well resemble on account of its form and subject matter. Midway through the novel, a similar claim is repeated. While he concedes that “the Authors of immense romances, or the modern Novel and *Atalantis* writers” are commendable in their exercise of imagination and as an “Example of the wonderful Extent of human Genius”, Fielding carefully indicates that his work is of an entirely different kind (*Joseph Andrews*, III, i, 187). With a standard eighteenth-century patronizing attitude, the narrator groups together and then discards French romances, modern novels and Delarivière Manley’s famous collection of politically scandalous stories of seduction and lust, ironically effacing the distinctions that some of their authors strived to make.<sup>54</sup> Although their titles are not directly referenced, Fielding’s allusion to the “modern Novel” implicitly invokes the works of Eliza Haywood, who was the most prolific writer of amorous novels in the 1720s and 1730s, and probably those of Penelope Aubin, and Mary Davys, who were also very popular in their time. Significantly for the purposes of my argument, although such works sometimes concluded with one or more weddings, a happy marriage ending cannot be said to be their norm.

Because their writers were less interested in the legitimation of a genre than in examining the various outcomes of unrestrained passion,

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romances have “given her a very particular Turn of Thinking”, which causes her to decorate her house “like a little Enchanted Palace”, and to be extremely troubled about the killing of birds. In the end Mr Spectator promises to try his best at educating her in good books, for the improvement of her mind. Addison and Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. I, 152-59, quotation from 158.

<sup>54</sup> Manley’s narratives were overtly political, while the fiction of Haywood (perhaps the most prolific and popular novelist of the time) was more concerned with passion, betrayal and domestic strife, often set in remote or unidentifiable locations. Contrastingly, writers such as Penelope Aubin, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Jane Barker and Mary Davys, set out to emphasise the moral qualities of their work, differentiating their productions, implicitly or explicitly, from those of Haywood and other female predecessors. For a useful discussion of these novels see Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 32-33.

seduction and intrigue, in these texts there was little sense of conforming to recognizable generic boundaries, and there was no agreement about a conventional finale. In the passages of Manley's *New Atalantis* women are usually left in despair and disgrace after being seduced and abandoned by their suitors; sometimes death follows, sometimes they are wedded to men they do not love, and occasionally the narrative is abruptly interrupted in the climactic moment with the heroine imploring the aid of goddesses Astrea and Virtue, and of Lady Intelligence. The endings of Haywood's novels are similarly diverse. In *Love in Excess*, her earliest novel, D'Elmont marries Alovisa towards the end of volume one, an event that does not conclude the story but signifies, as the narrator ironically puts it, a "Glorious beginning".<sup>55</sup> In the second volume, which was published some months later, the protagonist falls in love with—and repeatedly attempts to rape—Melliora, whom he marries in the third volume, after the death of his first wife and of two other women who fall victim to his charms. In spite of the marriage finale, the succession of love intrigues to which Haywood has treated her readers in the previous volumes casts doubt on its definitiveness as a plausible closure. In *Fantomina* (1724), when the heroine ends up pregnant after having proved unable to keep the love of Beauplaisir in her multiple disguises, she is sent to a convent in France to expiate her guilt. In *Anti-Pamela* (1741) after the increasingly merciless schemes of Syrena Tricky are discovered, she is sent to a distant estate in Wales. As evidenced from these examples, the focus of these stories was not marriage as an idealized goal, but the operations of transgressive sexual relations within the social

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<sup>55</sup> Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess* (London: Chetwood, 1719), 53.

prescriptions of a culture rife with double standards, usually concentrating on the emotional and physical vulnerability of women, which allowed for their seduction and betrayal.<sup>56</sup>

Although, as we have seen, Fielding denied any influence of that sort, *Joseph Andrews* not only shares major themes, but also specific motifs and situations with this type of prose fiction. For instance, Lady Booby's famous attempt at the seduction of her footman Joseph in Book I, to a great extent recalls a crucial turning point at the beginning of Mary Davys's *The Accomplish'd Rake* (1727). In that text, the recently widowed Lady Galliard entangles herself in a sordid sexual adventure with her handsome footman, activating the misogynistic attitudes of her son, who, after the discovery of what he interprets as an irrefutable proof of female inconstancy, devotes his life to earthly pleasures and causes the ruin of several women.<sup>57</sup> In this episode, then, Fielding may not only have been ironically commenting on *Pamela*, but also recycling material from other famous stories, tinting such references with biblical overtones, in order to produce his own version of masculine chastity, which was simultaneously comic and serious, similar to yet ultimately different from these hypertexts.

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<sup>56</sup> For illuminating discussions on early eighteenth-century amatory fiction see Richetti, *The English Novel in History 1700-1780*, 18-48; and Paula Backscheider and Paul Richetti, ed. *Popular Fiction by Women 1600-1730, an Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), ix-xxiii.

<sup>57</sup> *The Accomplish'd Rake* features a marriage at the end, which, at first sight, would seem to indicate another link with Fielding's work. Yet, the conclusion of Davys's text can hardly be considered happy. Although Sir John Galliard, the rake alluded to in the title, finally espouses Nancy Friendly, the woman he has raped, he does so explicitly out of duty to her father. Nancy likewise takes him for reasons other than love, as she clearly puts it: "I do not want a Husband for myself but a Father for my Child [... and] I would have him acknowledge the Favour I have done him, in making him a Man of Honour at last". Davys's finale is clearly surrounded by an air of resignation, not glee. Mary Davys, *The Accomplish'd Rake; or Modern Fine Gentleman. Being an Exact Description of the Conduct and Behaviour of a Person of Distinction* (London, 1727), 193 and 196.

While amorous novels dealt with many of the domestic topics that interested Fielding, they lacked respectability. Conversely, theatrical comedy had a pedigree that stretched as far back as the classical stage, and a structure with which Fielding—and his readers—were well acquainted. Not surprisingly, for the ending of *Joseph Andrews* he devised an extended version of the happy conclusion he used in his theatrical courtship plots. In the last chapter of his novel, then, Joseph and Fanny are finally married; Mr. Booby provides a dowry for Fanny, with which money Joseph buys a little estate in his father's Parish, and an annuity for Mr Adams that reinstates the dignity proper to his profession; the unrepentant Lady Booby forgets Joseph with “a young Captain of Dragoons” and her “eternal Parties at Cards” (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, xvi, 343-44). In a manner clearly reminiscent of his regular comedies, which was also common to other plays in the early eighteenth-century repertoire, Fielding restores social order through a blissful match that, though much anticipated, is possible only after obstacles have been sorted, identities have been clarified, and virtue and love have triumphed over worldly interests.<sup>58</sup> Veromil's final reflection in *The Temple Beau* that “after so many Tempests, our Fortune once more puts on a serene Aspect; once more we have that Happiness in view, which crowns the Success of Virtue, Constancy and Love” (*Plays*, I, V, xx, 179), can very well be applied to *Joseph Andrews*. Like Merital and Helena in *Love in Several Masques*, Veromil and Bellaria in *The Temple Beau*, Constant and Hilaret in *The Coffee-House Politician* (1731), and Fairlove and Dorothea in *Don Quixote in England*

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<sup>58</sup> For instance, William Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700); Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718); and Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722).



(1734), Joseph and Fanny have to negotiate a number of adverse circumstances before arriving at the ultimate state of felicity promised in a marriage founded on love. Also, like the comic antagonists of those plays, Lady Booby continues in her selfish pursuit of pleasure, largely unmoved by the events and reversals of the story.

At the same time, the marriage at the end of *Joseph Andrews* is an important indication of Fielding's sustained attention to the social and moral implications of marriage, and a development of the ideas that he had begun to sketch in his theatrical pieces. In *Shamela*, he exposed the mercenary motivations behind the alleged virtue of a woman who weds her would-be rapist, only because he has the means to elevate her social condition. In *Joseph Andrews* he sought to present an idealized match, whose sole incentive was love—understood as a convergence of desire and friendship—and in which Anglican principles and rituals were properly followed. One of the ways he accomplished that was by shifting the moral and religious centre of his narrative away from the participants of the love-plot, placing it in the figure of the country clergyman, as O'Connell has observed.<sup>59</sup> It is Adams, therefore, who insists on the importance of a proper marriage service, in which banns are read and the community is involved. Ultimately this event develops into a symbolic trial for all the characters, an illustration of the practical importance of religious tenets, and a display of Fielding's careful architecture of the text.

After the adventurous journey from London, the much-expected wedding of Joseph and Fanny is further delayed by Adams's resolution to

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<sup>59</sup> O'Connell, "Vicars and Squires", 397.

follow Church proceedings to the letter, that is, publishing banns for three religious services instead of purchasing a licence. Having characterized Adams as the epitome of a good clergyman, Fielding aims to show that he not only practices good Christian principles, but also complies with the regulations of the Church of England. By having Adams insist on the publication of the banns, he endeavours to differentiate his ideal parson from “surrogates”—“beneficed clergy scattered over the countryside who were authorized to issue marriage licenses”, which they sold to the intending spouses— and also from some impoverished rural priests who were willing to risk the three-year suspension stipulated by ecclesiastical law and performed clandestine weddings for a small fee.<sup>60</sup> By having Adams persist in his adherence to this convention, then, Fielding emphasizes that his parson, poor though he is, does not make a trade out of marriage.

The first reading of the banns alerts Lady Booby to the impending loss of her beloved Joseph. She tries to coerce the parson into obedience to her capricious will with threats of dismissal (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, ii, 280). But, as Fielding wants to emphasize that this man is a worthy keeper of the moral authority that his job entails, he persists in his resolution of marrying them. Accordingly, “to [Lady Booby’s] surprize, Mr. *Adams* published the Banns again with as audible Voice as before” (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, iv, 287). In a way, this second reading of banns becomes an act of rebellion against the unreasonable and selfish whims of the powerful.

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<sup>60</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1990), 102-06, quotation from 102.

Yet, far from calling for insurrection, Fielding simply replaces one source of authority with another, although he immediately labours to rationalize the practical motivations behind the set of rules that Adams vehemently enforces and to which Joseph reluctantly acquiesces. Between the second and third reading of the banns one of the most memorable passages of the novel takes place. To the couple's horror (and to the morbid joy of Lady Booby) Joseph and Fanny are feared to be brother and sister (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, xii, 325). As in *The Coffee-House Politician*, where he took the dangers inherent in an elopement to the extreme for comic and didactic purposes, here Fielding hyperbolises a possible consequence of marrying without the participation of the community.<sup>61</sup> In the end, because the affair is made public, identities are clarified to the protagonist's advantage, as Joseph is finally revealed to be the heir of Squire Wilson (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, xv, 337). This passage cleverly criticises and exploits the inconsistency of contemporary marital regulations, suggesting that formal rituals of the established Church, such as the calling of banns, were crucial for the prevention of irretrievable mistakes. Fielding thus strived to provide a practical justification for the apparent stubbornness of Adams's avowal of Church protocols.

Plot twists produced by timely clarifications of mistaken identities were also a favourite theatrical formula, which Fielding had ridiculed in his mindboggling recognition scene at the end of *The Author's Farce*, but which he also had used without irony in *The Coffee-House Politician* and *The*

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<sup>61</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, the failed elopement of Constant and Hilaret results in the near rape of Hilaret and the incarceration of both characters.

*Wedding Day*. With the final disclosure of identities at the end of *Joseph Andrews* Fielding set out to demonstrate that, if carefully contrived, such narrative devices could be rendered into plausible and useful plot props. Thus, he invited readers to see that, on close perusal, the retrieved identity of Joseph was not arbitrary, for signals had been provided throughout. For example, with a casual tone aimed to conceal his meticulousness, at the beginning of the novel the narrator informs readers that Joseph “was esteemed to be the only Son of Gaffar [*sic*] and Gammer Andrews” (*Joseph Andrews*, I, ii, 20, emphasis mine), and upon leaving Wilson readers are warned about that character’s return for a crucial part at the end (*Joseph Andrews*, III, v, 233). The ending of *Joseph Andrews*, then, artfully brings together all the loose strands of plot and characters. Characteristically, Fielding merges social and literary concerns into his narrative, through a detailed analysis of contemporary marital practices and regulations designed for simultaneous diagnosis and remedy.

Lastly, Fielding’s implementation of the theatrical marriage plot in *Joseph Andrews* brought about a detailed expansion of an idea that came from the plays. As we saw in Chapter One, after ridiculing the customary presentation of love marriages as financially prosperous in *The Author’s Farce*, Fielding pandered to the taste of the town by ending the piece precisely with such a match—with the mitigating fact that Harriot and Luckless loved each other even when they were poor. In *Joseph Andrews* he decided to be more explicit in his disengagement of matrimony from materiality. While Joseph and Fanny are ultimately rewarded with the financial means necessary for a leisured happiness, this occurs strictly after

the wedding. The dowry Mr. Booby provides for Fanny (now his sister-in-law), which allows Joseph to purchase a small estate in his father's parish, is never mentioned until the bride and groom are literally wedded and bedded (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, xvi, 344). Fielding thus aimed to separate the domains of love and money, while also indulging the readers' (and his own) taste for financially prosperous matches more plausibly than he had done before. The theatrical convention of having a marriage as the obvious finale was perhaps worn out, but it could be transformed by, for instance, inserting it into a new genre.

As I hope I have shown in this chapter, in the marriage plot Fielding found an expedient bridge between the theatre and the novel. While the wedding is conspicuous by its absence in *Shamela*, it is the carefully contrived, slowly developed climax of *Joseph Andrews*. In the explicitly disinterested marriage presented as the neat happy ending of this novel we see a more mature version of his offering of marriage as the usual reconciliation at the end of a play. The finale of *Joseph Andrews* is one in which social and poetic justice meet, and Fielding's aesthetic and moral outlooks converge. In *Jonathan Wild* and *The Female Husband*, as we will see in the next two chapters, he continued to focus his literary, social, and moral concerns in marriage plots while flirting with other, less reputable, characters and genres.

#### Chapter 4: The marriage (sub)plot of *Jonathan Wild*

*The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, published in 1743 as the third volume of the *Miscellanies*, is, at first glance, the least marriage-oriented of Henry Fielding's novels. Its subject matter, the life and exploits of Jonathan Wild, a thief-taker and gang leader notorious for his highly successful double-dealing with the criminal underworld and the law, has seemingly little relation with the courtship plots of the plays and novels discussed so far in this thesis. Drawing on the familiar equation of heroes, military leaders, and petty criminals that had been exploited for nearly two decades by the numerous criminal biographies, pamphlets, and ballads dedicated to the character of Wild, Fielding embarked upon a literary experiment in genres, using sustained irony as his main rhetorical device. As he made evident through allusions and rhetorical flourishes, the author conflated such diverse genres as ancient epic, modern and classical biography, political satire, and picaresque novel, in order to explore the hidden motivations of great men and common rogues, emphasising their shared humanity. These being the most prominent aspects of *Jonathan Wild*, criticism often focuses on the novel's political dimension,<sup>1</sup> its emulation of serious historical biographies of ancient and modern conquerors<sup>2</sup> (along with the humorous superimposition of this lofty genre over popular criminal

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<sup>1</sup> An important discussion that has recently regained currency in that area is the "Machiavellian aura discernible in *Jonathan Wild*", which results from Fielding's engagement with the Wild-Walpole-Machiavelli equation that was frequently invoked in his time. See Thomas Keymer, "Fielding's Machiavellian Moment", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 58-90, quotation from 79. Keymer's argument is a post-Pocock reformulation of Bernard Shea's "Machiavelli and Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*", *PMLA* 72.1 (1957): 55-73.

<sup>2</sup> For example: William Farrell, "The Mock-Heroic Form of *Jonathan Wild*", *Modern Philology* 63.3 (1966): 216-26; and, more recently, Claude Rawson, "Avatars of Alexander: *Jonathan Wild* and the Tyrant Thug, from Voltaire to Brecht", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754)*, ed. Rawson, 91-114.

biography),<sup>3</sup> or on Fielding's satire of the corruption of language by statesmen and their flatterers.<sup>4</sup> Two interrelated debates touching on these themes have proved prevalent: first the extent to which the analogy Fielding drew between Wild and corrupt statesmen was meant to be read as a direct satire on Robert Walpole's controversial administration, which had come to an end the year before the publication of the *Miscellanies*, in February 1742;<sup>5</sup> and secondly, whether *Jonathan Wild* (or at least a substantial draft of it) already existed before the publication of *Joseph Andrews* in February 1742.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, though not as conspicuous as Shamela's artful duping of the gullible Squire Booby into marriage, or the eventful courtship of Joseph and Fanny, domestic matters do play a crucial role in Fielding's rendering of the criminal progress of the illustrious rogue hanged eighteen years before, and this is an aspect of the novel that has not received due attention. As I will show over the course of this chapter, Wild's marriage of convenience to Laetitia Snap, contrasted with the idealized matrimony of the Heartfreeds,

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<sup>3</sup> Although Fielding's sources of information on the historical Jonathan Wild evidently included criminal biographies, most critics agree that he did not attempt to parody any of them directly and that "the primary genre which Fielding chooses for his account was not narratives of criminal lives but serious history and biography". Bertrand Goldgar, "General Introduction", *Misc.* III, xxv. As I discuss in the next chapter, Fielding did flirt with the popularly notorious genre of criminal biography, but he chose to do so anonymously in his bawdy *Female Husband*.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Glenn Hartfield, *Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968), 102-08.

<sup>5</sup> For defences of the Walpole-Wild specificity see Gerald Howson, *It Takes a Thief: The Life and Times of Jonathan Wild* (London: The Cresset Library, 1987), 143 and 284; Martin C. Battestin and Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 281-82; Claude Rawson, "Introduction to Henry Fielding's *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*", ed. Hugh Amory, notes by Linda Bree (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xvi-xvii. For the view that the analogue Wild-Great Man was generic rather than specific see David Nokes, "Introduction to Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild, The Great*" (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 18; Bertrand Goldgar's general introduction to *Misc.* III, xxvii-xxxv; Hugh Amory's textual introduction to *Misc.* III, 197-208.

<sup>6</sup> Those who argue for the centrality of Walpole as a satirical target generally support the hypothesis that *Jonathan Wild* was written before *Joseph Andrews*, while the challengers of this notion consider that *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* came first.

serves multiple purposes within the text, while it also works as a powerful link between *Jonathan Wild* and Fielding's theatre, as well as with his last and bleakest novel, *Amelia* (1751).

As we shall see, the romantic subplot is not only key to the negative characterization of the protagonist, but it also acts as a catalyst for the climax of the main plot, namely Wild's execution. At the same time, as in *Shamela*, in the humorous portrayal of a deceitful courtship followed by a quarrelsome marriage state, we see Fielding relying upon theatrical conventions and stock characters, while the domestic ideal embodied in the Heartfrees looks forward to the depiction of Amelia Booth as the perfect wife and mother. In the context of Fielding's concern with marriage as an index of the virtue of society and as a potential cure for social evils, and his recourse to the (theatrical) marriage plot as a favourite vehicle for literary expression, the implications of the amorous storyline of *Jonathan Wild* merit more attention than they have so far received.

### **1. Jonathan Wild and the theatricality of crime**

As has been frequently observed by critics, Fielding's parallel between the corrupt ways of statesmen and the criminal underworld in *Jonathan Wild* had a theatrical antecedent in a box-office hit from the same year he debuted as a playwright: John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728).<sup>7</sup> A fictionalization of Wild also features in this play, though he appears not as the roguish hero, but as a secondary character. In *The Beggar's Opera* the scheming thief-taker becomes

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Claude J. Rawson, *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal under Stress* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and Boston, 1972), 123-25; and "Introduction to *Jonathan Wild*", ed. Amory, xiv. Also David Nokes, "Introduction to Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*" (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 12.



Mr Peachum, whose daughter, Polly, marries Macheath, a womanizer highwayman, in secret. Worried that, by means of Polly, Macheath will now have access to information that can compromise them, Peachum and his wife decide to have him prosecuted. This way they can also claim a reward, keep Macheath's money, and set their daughter to a more advantageous match.<sup>8</sup> Although Polly attempts to prevent her husband's impeachment, he is betrayed by one of his mistresses and ends up in Newgate prison. There, Macheath encounters Lucy Lockit, another former mistress and the jailer's daughter, who upbraids him for having married another when they were officially betrothed. He escapes only to be soon recaptured. Back in jail, when Polly, Lucy, and various other putative spouses fight over the highwayman, he decides he cannot bear so much domestic conflict and begs his execution to be hastened, though he is farcically saved at the last minute, because "an Opera must end happily".<sup>9</sup> As evidenced from this brief plot outline, Gay exploits the comic possibilities of love triangles and marital difficulties in a satire that by making a parallel between people from low and high social spheres raises awareness about the workings of power, justice, and heroism in the modern world. All this is, in many ways, also true of *Jonathan Wild*. However, in Fielding's novel, as we shall see, the marriage plot is a more manifest attempt to explore the links between what the author perceived as the perversion of marital practices, and social corruption in a wider sense.

Genre is evidently a key factor in this change. Prose fiction offered Fielding possibilities of authorial control and an ability to guide the

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<sup>8</sup> Since Polly is married to Macheath, the Peachums expect her to inherit his fortune when he dies, thus becoming a wealthy (and re-marriageable) young widow.

<sup>9</sup> John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, III, xvi: 9-10, in *John Gay, Dramatic Works*, ed. John Fuller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), Vol. II, 64.

responses of his readers that was harder to achieve in pieces written for performance. The choice of a third person narrator, for example, allowed him to have various degrees of mediation and to generate clearer ironic distance from the characters. As I will show in the following section, by introducing asides and casual comments, or by pausing the narrative for vivid descriptions, the narrator laboured to direct interpretation, and to emphasise certain aspects to suit his moral agenda. It is important to bear in mind, nevertheless, that genre is only the medium that grants Fielding the possibility of making his didactic endeavour plainer; his attentive exploration of marriage as an index for social corruption and as a source of redemption, as I have suggested in previous chapters, had been developing since his time as playwright. Moreover, as in his plays—and unlike *The Beggar's Opera*—in *Jonathan Wild* readers are provided with an alternative model of good behaviour: the Heartfrees, to whom I return later.

Coming back to the theatricality that fed into Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, it is worth considering, briefly, some significant associations there were between the stage and the world of crime in Fielding's time. Criminals, like actors and actresses, were becoming celebrities in the context of what Faramerz Dabhoiwala describes as “the growing fame of types of people previously regarded as disreputable” over the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as both were popular forms of entertainment, the trials of criminals were somewhat akin to theatrical performances. At the time of Wild's execution, before the building was partially remodelled in 1737, the

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<sup>10</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 334.

Old Bailey Courthouse was an open-air venue (figures 10-11). The proceedings, therefore, were essentially public spectacles. As historians of the building point out, “the trials attracted a mixed audience of London's more and less respectable inhabitants”,<sup>11</sup> which was also true of the theatre. Even after the Old Bailey became a closed space—very likely in an effort to limit the audience—“spectators frequently came to see the trials, and courthouse officials had the right to charge fees for entry to the galleries”.<sup>12</sup> Like plays, operas, and farces, the trials followed standard protocols that audiences could recognize and anticipate (reading of charges, defendant's plea, evidence from witnesses, verdict). They also featured stock characters (prosecutors and defendants, witnesses, judges and jurors).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock, and Robert Shoemaker, “Historical Background-History of the Old Bailey Courthouse”, in *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* <[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0> [Accessed 10 October, 2012].

<sup>12</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>13</sup> For a study of the criminal procedures in the eighteenth century see Howson, *It Takes a Thief*.

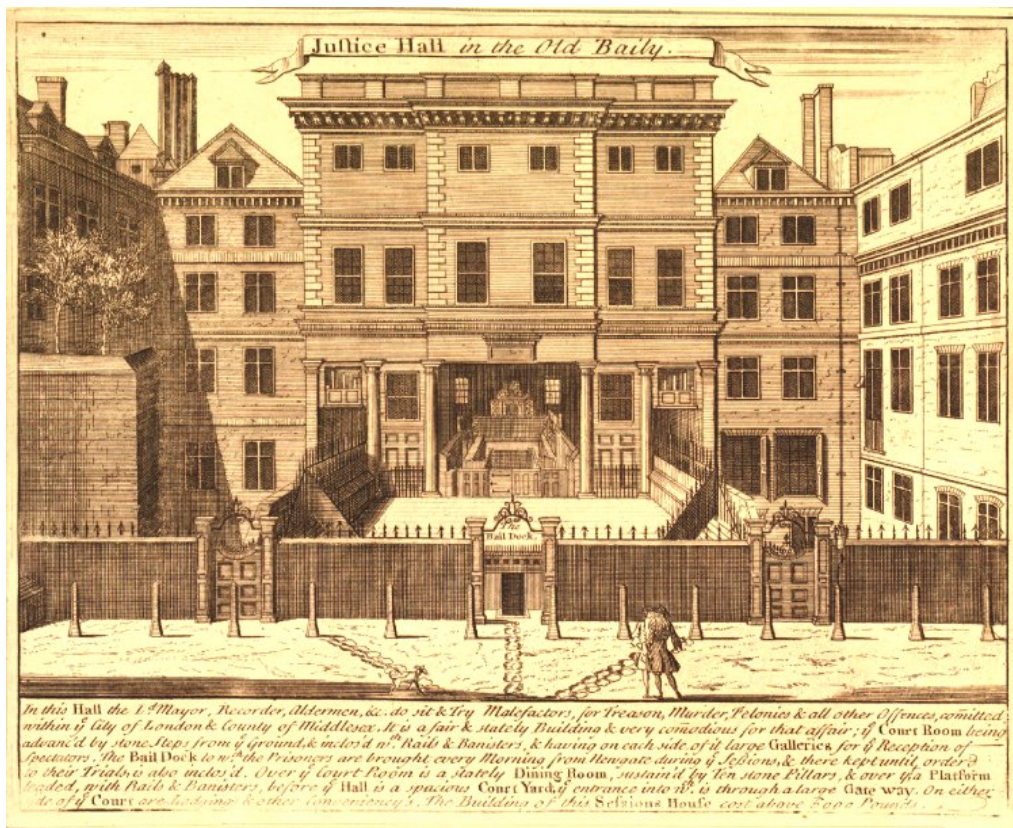


Figure 10. John Bowles (?), *Justice Hall in the Old Bailey* [sic], 1723-24  
©Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 11. Anon., *The New Sessions House in the Old Bailey*, 1748  
©Trustees of the British Museum

Given these popular associations between plays and trials in general, and with the figure of Jonathan Wild in particular, the life of this criminal would have certainly appealed to Fielding's theatrical and lawyerish sides when experimenting with his recently found province of prose fiction. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that *Jonathan Wild*—and its amorous plot specifically—should be shaped by theatrical conventions. What may be less expected is the manner in which the dramatized marital storyline comes to operate in such powerful and complex ways as to become essential for the moral and artistic unity of Fielding's novel.

## **2. Scenes of ominous courtship and modern marriage**

Matrimonial matters take hold of the novel almost from its outset. Early on readers are introduced to Laetitia, the protagonist's future wife, in a chapter titled "*Mr. Wild's first entrance into the World*". There, we learn that the hero

had been educated from his Infancy with the Miss *Snaps*, and was, by all neighbours, allotted for the husband of Miss *Tishy*, or *Laetitia*, [...] for though, being his Cousin-German, she was perhaps, in the Eye of a strict Conscience, somewhat too nearly related to him; yet the old People on both Sides, tho' sufficiently scrupulous in nice Matters, agreed to overlook this Objection (*Jonathan Wild*, I, iv, 18).

Though short and seemingly trivial—for the narrative moves on to explore Wild's acquaintance with the world of deceit under the guidance of Count La Ruse—the passage is fraught with strange details that suggest greater significance and merit further examination. Intriguingly, the casual narratorial remark about the possible unsuitability of the match on account of alleged ties of kinship between the lovers contradicts a previous explanation about the protagonist's ancestry. Two chapters earlier we have

been told that the only bond the Snaps and the Wilds share is the marriage of one of Wild's uncles to one of Laetitia's aunts (*Jonathan Wild*, I, ii, 12), which would not make the youngsters actual cousins. Coming from an author prone to flaunt the careful architecture of his writings, it is difficult to believe that this inconsistency could be simply a temporary memory lapse on the side of Fielding, as the Wesleyan editor suggests,<sup>14</sup> especially when after a rigorous revision of the novel in 1754 he chose not to correct it.<sup>15</sup> The haziness of Wild and Laetitia's kinship here, I believe, is quite deliberate. One of the possibilities is that Fielding intends the mistake as a joke at the expense of historians and biographers, the point being that all accounts are fallible, for facts (both trivial and consequential) may be inadvertently lost, or purposefully altered.<sup>16</sup> This argument, however, loses power in relation to this particular passage, because it lacks the complacent addresses with which Fielding customarily explains his erudite games to his readers.<sup>17</sup> Another possibility is that the author seeks to emphasise, obliquely, the relevance of his amorous subplot. He may be relying simultaneously on the inattentiveness of some readers, which would cause them to assume that Wild and Laetitia are indeed first cousins, and on the attentiveness of others, which would lead them to ponder longer over the matter.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Goldgar, *Jonathan Wild*, 18-19 n.1.

<sup>15</sup> The equivalent passage in the 1754 version can be found in Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, ed. David Nokes (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), 49. Most modern reprints are based on this revised version; but the Wesleyan edition reproduces Fielding's original text of 1743.

<sup>16</sup> Examples of such jokes can be found in *Jonathan Wild*, I, i, 9; I, viii, 27; II, xiii, 87; III, vi, 108-09; and IV, xvi, 189.

<sup>17</sup> For recent explorations of Fielding's intrusive narrative voice see Jill Campbell, "Fielding's Style", *ELH* 72.2 (2005): 407-28; and Henry Power, "Henry Fielding, Richard Bentley and the 'Sagacious Reader' of Tom Jones", *The Review of English Studies* 61.252 (2010): 749-72.

<sup>18</sup> On Fielding's catering for different types of readers see Ian Bell, *Henry Fielding: Authorship and Authority* (London: Longman Group, 1994), 78-100.

The question about the degrees of affinity is another oddity worth considering. The thief-taker's alleged kinship to his wife has no basis either in eighteenth-century accounts or in twentieth-century reconstructions of the historical Wild, which indicates that it is wholly an invention by Fielding.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, neither the Church of England nor common law prohibited nuptials between first cousins in this period,<sup>20</sup> which is why the narrator remarks that only "a strict Conscience" would object to such a match. Rather than solving the problem, the ironic diction Fielding has employed so far further complicates the meaning of his strange sentence. A reading filtered through irony would suggest that Wild and Laetitia's nuptials are indeed inadequate, but the fact that marriages between cousins were sanctioned by ecclesiastical and common law undermines the alleged censure. As Fielding himself acknowledged elsewhere, irony is "so liable to be mistaken" that it is a risky vehicle for moral instruction (*Jacobite's Journal*, 26 March 1748, 211).

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<sup>19</sup> Primary sources for the life of Jonathan Wild—which say nothing of a possibly incestuous match—include Anon., *An Authentick Narrative of The Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild Citizen And Thief-Taker Of London) With the Crimes He Stands Charg'd with, upon a Commitment Sign'd by Twelve of His Majesty's Justices Of The Peace* (London: A. Moore, 1725); Anon., *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild; Not Made Up of Fiction and Fable, but Taken from His own Mouth, and Collected from Papers of His own Writing* (London: Applebee, 1725); H.D., late Clerk to Justice R\_\_\_, *The Life of Jonathan Wild, Thief-taker General of Great Britain and Ireland. From his Birth to his Death* (Dublin: Pressick Rider, 1725); Alexander Smith, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild, Together with the History and Lives of Modern Rogues* (London: Sam. Briscoe, 1726); "Jonathan Wild, For Felonies, May, 1725" in *Select Trials at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey, for Murder, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, Bigamy, and Other Offences*. (London: J. Applebee, 1742), Vol. II, 212-88. For modern biographies of Wild see Howson, *It Takes a Thief*; Andrea McKenzie, "Wild, Jonathan (*bap.* 1683, *d.* 1725)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29394>>, [accessed 8 October 2012]; and John Van der Kiste, *Jonathan Wild, Conman and Cutpurse* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> As Giles Jacob informed students of law at mid-century: "all Persons may lawfully Marry, that are not prohibited by the Levitical Degrees, or otherwise by God's Law: The Son of a Father by another Wife, and the Daughter of a Mother by another Husband, &c. May Marry with each other; and also Cousin Germans". *The Students Companion: or, Reason of the Law. Containing Readings on the Common and Statute Laws of this Realm, Alphabetically Digested under Proper Heads* (London: H. Lintot, 1743), 157. First cousins were not included in the the "Table of Kindred and Affinity" forbidden to marry in The Book of Common Prayer.

However, despite its ambiguity, the suggestion that first cousins should not marry functions as an anticipatory motif about the problems the match of Wild and Laetitia would produce. The strangeness of the passage, furthermore, quietly brings domestic matters to the fore at the very onset of the novel.

As I mentioned earlier, the amorous storyline in *Jonathan Wild* is strongly inflected by theatrical conventions. Wild and Laetitia's venal courtship and troublesome marriage are presented through a series of dramatic scenes and dialogues. When Wild first calls on his intended prior to their official engagement, he finds her "in the most beautiful Deshabille", which the author proceeds to describe in highly visual terms:

her lovely Hair hung wantonly over her Forehead, being neither white with, nor yet free from Powder; [...] some Remains of that Art which Ladies improve Nature with, shone on her Cheeks, Her Body was loosely attired [...] so that her Breasts had uncontrouled Liberty to display their beauteous Orbs, which they did as low as her Girdle; a thin Covering of a rumpled Muzlin Handkerchief almost hid them from the Eyes, save in a few Parts where a good-natured Hole gave Opportunity to the naked Breast to appear, and put us in Mind by its Whiteness of the Fault in the Handkerchief, which might have otherwise past unobserved (*Jonathan Wild*, I, ix, 32-33).

Laetitia is made to pose for her spectators, who include both Wild and the readers. Her conscious posture brings to mind an actress walking onstage, preparing herself to perform a scene of seduction in front of her audience (perhaps just before her lover enters). The voyeuristic invitation of the partial nudity caused by her ragged clothes invites the type of lust and coarse mockery that would have been judged indecorous on the stage by the 1740s, but which could be very well exploited in prose fiction, as Fielding clearly does in this passage.



Laetitia's performativity also recalls a woman sitting for a portrait. This association rests not only upon the graphic qualities of the description, but also on the popularity of paintings and prints of actresses (with various degrees of sexual enticement) that were produced in this period.<sup>21</sup> Examples include the provocative portraits of Nell Gwyn in the late seventeenth century—some of which were reproduced over the course of the eighteenth century—(figures 12-14) and, closer to Fielding's time, those of his friend and collaborator Kitty Clive (figures 15-16).<sup>22</sup> The hint of portraiture, along with the libidinous ugliness of the scene (an artful combination of sex appeal and the grotesque that Fielding loved), also invokes a specific print: the third plate of William Hogarth's famous *Harlot's Progress* (1731-32) (figure 17). In that image the harlot is explicitly linked with the underworld of crime: her room is decorated with a picture of Macheath, the rogue-hero of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*; and on top of her bed she stores the wig box of James Dalton, a notorious real-life highwayman.<sup>23</sup> The juxtaposition of Laetitia with Hogarth's harlot boosts the visual appeal of the description, while it

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<sup>21</sup> On the operations of the theatre and print culture in the growth of celebrity see Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, 382-48.

<sup>22</sup> These and many other relevant examples have been recently brought together in "The First Actresses: Nell Gwyn to Sarah Siddons", an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in London (20 October 2011 - 8 January 2012) sampling a variety of portraits of Nell Gwyn reproduced throughout the eighteenth century and up to the beginning of the twentieth. See its accompanying book: Gillian Perry, Joseph Roach, and Shearer West, ed. *The First Actresses: Nell Gwyn to Sarah Siddons* (London: National Portrait Gallery and University of Michigan Press, 2011); it can also be seen online at: <[http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/the-first-actresses/first\\_actresses\\_exhibition.php](http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/the-first-actresses/first_actresses_exhibition.php)> [last accessed 21 August 2013]. For a study on the influential presence of celebrated actresses over the course of the eighteenth century see Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). William Hogarth's *A Scene from The Beggar's Opera* (1731), featuring the actress Lavinia Fenton as Polly Peachum, could have also lurked in the imagination of Fielding and his readers, though in this painting the woman is not the sexualized focus of the composition.

<sup>23</sup> That this image was very much present in Fielding's mind is corroborated in a remark by the narrator of *Tom Jones* that Mrs Partridge "exactly resembled the young Woman who is pouring out her Mistress's Tea in the third Picture of the Harlot's Progress". *Tom Jones*, II, iii, 82.

introduces yet another hint of corruption in Wild's courtship by emphasising the commercial nature of their (sexual) relationship. It also works to suggest that Laetitia may have nearly been caught red-handed (in Hogarth's image a group of constables is just entering to arrest the harlot), which indeed she has, as is revealed in the ensuing chapter of the novel.





Figure 12. Simon Verelst, *Eleanor ('Nell') Gwyn*, c. 1680  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 13. Thomas van der Wilt, *Nell Gwyn*,  
1687  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 14. James Macardell after Sir Peter Lely,  
*Nell Gwyn*, Mid-eighteenth century  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 15. John Faber Jr, after Peter van Bleeck, *Catherine ('Kitty') Clive as Phillida in Cibber's 'Damon and Phillida'*, 1734  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 16. Alexander van Aken, after Jeremiah Davison, *Catherine ('Kitty') Clive*, 1735  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 17. William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*, Plate 3, 1732  
© Trustees of the British Museum

Laetitia (*Jonathan Wild*, III, vi, 108).<sup>26</sup> After an insincere courtship, the marriage of Jonathan Wild and Laetitia quickly develops into a relationship of mutual contempt, exemplified by means of a comic “dialogue-matrimonial” in which the couple exchange various degrees of verbal abuse before agreeing to grant each other liberty to “converse with whomsoever I please” (*Jonathan Wild*, III, viii, 113). This chapter, as Goldgar points out, parodies the genre of matrimonial dialogues, which was popular in the first half of the century.<sup>27</sup> But it is also highly reminiscent of the witty repartees of couples in marriage comedies from the early eighteenth-century repertoire, such as the quarrel of Mr and Mrs Pinchwife in Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1674), Lady Betty Modish and Lord Morelove in Cibber’s *The Careless Husband* (1704), and Mr and Mrs Modern in Fielding’s own *Modern Husband* (1732). Moreover, the temporal setting of the dialogue in *Jonathan Wild*, “the Day Fortnight on which his Nuptials were celebrated”, echoes the remark of Blister in Fielding’s *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735) about fashionable marriage being merely a performance implying no more than a fortnight of interaction, after which period the man may follow his “Business” and the woman her “Pleasure”, because “hating one another is the chief End of Matrimony” (*Plays*, III, I, 113-14). As in the plays, Fielding thoroughly exploits the comic possibilities of domestic conflict in *Jonathan Wild*.

These comic depictions of Wild’s domestic failures also serve as examples about the universality of human nature, or, as the narrator puts it,

to shew [...] that GREAT MEN are subject to the same Frailties

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<sup>26</sup> As I discuss it in the next chapter, as a reference for badly spelled love letters, Fielding had in mind the opening scene of Congreve’s *Old Batchelor*, which seems to have been one of his favourite plays.

<sup>27</sup> Goldgar, *Jonathan Wild*, n. 9, p. 112.

and Inconveniences in ordinary Life, with little Men, and that Heroes are really of the same Species with other human creatures, notwithstanding all the Pains they themselves, or their Flatterers take to assert the contrary (*Jonathan Wild*, III, ix, 118-19).

The insistence on a detailed illustration of Wild's "Inconveniences in ordinary Life" is also a way of measuring up the moral value of the character. Like Justice Squeezum in *The Coffeehouse Politician* (1731), Wild is an example of Fielding's favourite depiction of morally corrupt men with disastrous domestic lives.<sup>28</sup> In Fielding's novel Wild is not the thriving businessman and charismatic womanizer of other accounts, but a mock-gentleman whose Grand Tour consists in being transported as a felon to the American colonies (*Jonathan Wild*, I, vii, 27), and a high-minded scoundrel whose impatient knocking recalls that of a surly footman (*Jonathan Wild*, II, iv, 61).

Of all Wild's failures, however, the most conspicuous are those related to his love conquests. While in most of the criminal biographies of the historic Wild he was depicted as equally successful in his criminal as in his love affairs—usually making him blatantly polygamous<sup>29</sup>—in Fielding's novel women constantly abuse and cheat on him. Apart from Laetitia, who only agrees to his courtship when he brings her presents (*Jonathan Wild*, I, ix, 33), the protagonist pursues Molly Straddle, a prostitute who during their "amorous caresses" robs him of the jewels he has stolen from Heartfree, even

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<sup>28</sup> Justice Squeezum is a tyrannical and corrupt magistrate who is also henpecked and cuckolded by his wife. See above, Chapter One.

<sup>29</sup> In *The True and Genuine Account*, by an anonymous writer generally conjectured to be Daniel Defoe, Wild is said to have had many wives, "six of them in all" (5). In Wild's trial from *Select Trials at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey* it is said that "Jonathan had five other Wives, (or at least Women who supplied the place of Wives) besides the Mother of that boy: Nor did he always wait till one was dead before he took another" (287). In *An Authentick Narrative*, the thief-taker has three marriages, which are increasingly luxurious: of the last one it is said that "the Wedding was kept for several Days successively, with the utmost Splendour and Magnificence" (14).



though her fee has already been covered (*Jonathan Wild*, II, iii, 58). He also attempts (unsuccessfully) to seduce and later to rape Mrs Heartfree (*Jonathan Wild*, II, x, 79). Fireblood, his insubordinate accomplice, sleeps with his wife behind his back (*Jonathan Wild* IV, iii, 143 and IV, xi, 170). Finally, towards the end of the novel, we learn that he had no teeth because he had lost them in “a Battle with an *Amazon of Drury*”, that is, another prostitute (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, xii, 170). This pervasive romantic inefficacy is evidently Fielding’s way of punishing the dishonest ploys of the thief-taker. It also suggests a relation of cause and effect: tampering with other people’s lives brings defeat in marriage. This, as I will show next, also works the other way around.

### **3. The “silly” Heartfrees and the downfall of Wild**

As I mentioned earlier, Fielding enhanced the didactic focus of his novel by providing a model of good behaviour in the Heartfrees, introduced at the beginning of the second book in a chapter titled “Characters of silly People, with the proper Uses for which such are designed”. This couple’s idealized marriage mirrors all the negative qualities of the Wilds. Each character in the Heartfree storyline is an inverted reflection of every personage of Wild’s world. Both Wild and Heartfree are businessmen: Wild dealing in stolen goods and other crimes, Heartfree in legitimate jewels. Laetitia gladly indulges in sexual intrigues with every man she encounters except for Wild, while Mrs Heartfree is solicited by many, yielding to none but her husband. Moreover, Laetitia’s sexual affairs never bring her any offspring—which, of course, make her sexual life the more unchristian—while Mrs Heartfree has

two loving young children. Finally, Wild is cuckolded by his disloyal accomplice Fireblood, whereas Heartfree's faithful assistant Friendly wholeheartedly takes care of his master's family in their time of need.

Critics have often regarded the Heartfree subplot as the least compelling aspect of *Jonathan Wild*. Allan Wendt, for example, argues that in the weak characterization of the Heartfree Fielding meant to expose their shortcomings, incidentally showing domestic virtue to be defective. In Wendt's view, Heartfree is purposely made tediously sanctimonious so that he "may then be taken as a portrait of unsatisfactory temperament".<sup>30</sup> Though Claude Rawson disagrees with this argument, believing that "the celebration of the Heartfree is very definite", he considers Heartfree and his family to be "the novel's main failure".<sup>31</sup> According to Rawson, the "failure" of the Heartfree lies in Fielding's latent suspicion of merchants as exemplars of good morality. This contention, however, has been obliquely challenged by Battestin and Goldgar, who believe that Fielding modelled the character of Heartfree on his friend the jeweller and playwright George Lillo, author of the celebrated tragedy *The London Merchant; or the Fatal Curiosity* (1731).<sup>32</sup>

To a certain extent, the characterization of the Heartfree is indeed flat and the advocacy of their stern morality is somewhat strange, the more so because it is directly at odds with the biting irony of the piece in general. I believe that this is partly because the author is caught in the conflict of

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<sup>30</sup> Allan Wendt, "The Moral Allegory of *Jonathan Wild*", *ELH* 24.2 (1957): 307-08.

<sup>31</sup> C.J. Rawson, "Fielding's 'Good' Merchant: The Problem of Heartfree in *Jonathan Wild* (with Comments on Other 'Good' Characters in Fielding)", *Modern Philology* 69.4 (1972): 299 and 297. Jenny Davidson endorses this view in "Jonathan Wild", in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71-72.

<sup>32</sup> See Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 203-205; and Goldgar's "General Introduction" to *Jonathan Wild*, xl.

showing the advantages of good behaviour, and depicting a protagonist that could be simultaneously compelling and contemptible. The juxtaposition of Wild and Heartfree is perhaps too straightforward and allegorical, lacking the customary ironic zest that tinges even Fielding's most morally righteous characters in other pieces.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Fielding resorts to a similar parallelism, albeit more nuanced and elaborated, in his characterization of Blifil and Tom in *Tom Jones* (1748-49). Furthermore, as Linda Bree has pointed out, this juxtaposition of good-bad characters is a crucial thematic link between the novels of Henry and those of his sister Sarah Fielding, which suggests that some careful consideration had been applied to the matter.<sup>34</sup>

It is likewise important to consider that Fielding does labour to individuate the Heartfrees from one another, and to provide them with qualities and flaws, following his own observation that "no Mind was ever yet formed entirely free from Blemish, unless peradventure that of a sanctified Hypocrite" (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, iv, 149). Heartfree is a loving husband and father, "good-natured, friendly, and generous to an Excess" (*Jonathan Wild*, I, ii, 51). But this causes him to be gullible and passive, noticeably more so than his wife. Wild easily prevails on him, without arousing suspicion until it is too late. It takes the merchant a long time to see through the thief-taker's plots: even after he has been committed to Newgate and his trustworthy wife has deserted him for no apparent reason, he is "unwilling to condemn him,

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<sup>33</sup> It will be recalled that even Parson Adams has some aspects that invite laughter: for instance, his inappropriate quotations from the classics, his misunderstanding of bawdy puns, and his clumsiness at riding.

<sup>34</sup> Linda Bree sees a "clear line of progression" from Heartfree-Wild, through David-Daniel (in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, 1744), to Tom-Blifil. "Henry and Sara Fielding: A Literary Relationship", in *Henry Fielding (1707-1734)*, ed. Rawson, 155. Captain and Dr Blifil, at the beginning of *Tom Jones*, and Amelia and her wicked sister Betty in *Amelia*, are other good examples of rivalry between siblings in Henry's novels.

without certain Evidence, and laid hold on every probable Semblance to acquit him" (*Jonathan Wild*, III, ix, 119). Mrs Heartfree, on the other hand, mistrusts the schemes of her husband's acquaintance from the beginning, and when Count La Ruse robs them of their jewels she "vent[s] the most violent Execrations on *Wild*" (*Jonathan Wild*, II, viii, 74). She is presented as a good wife, "who confined herself mostly to the care of her Family, placed her Happiness in her Husband and her Children; followed no expensive Fashions or Diversions" (*Jonathan Wild*, II, i, 51). However, like all of Fielding's virtuous women, including Amelia, she is a little too proud of her physical beauty (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, xii, 173). Moreover, even though she manages to hold her composure throughout two months of continuous misfortunes and the uninvited sexual solicitations of at least six different men,<sup>35</sup> near the end of the novel she annoyingly swoons twice without uttering a word, at the moment when her husband is to be taken to the gallows and there is no time to spare (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, v, 152). As I will show later, in her superior discernment, her maternal skills, and even in her constantly assailed chastity, Mrs Heartfree is an intriguing antecedent to Amelia Booth.

Despite the characters' minor flaws, which as we have seen are in keeping with Fielding's notion about the mixture of good and bad in human nature, there is indeed a certain reluctance to make the story of the Heartfrees funny. This, I believe, evidences a conflict about laughing at the expense of an idealized marriage. Since, as I have suggested throughout this thesis, a loving marriage is for Fielding an ideal state, one of "Bliss scarce

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<sup>35</sup> In order of appearance: Wild (II, x, 79), the French captain (IV, vii, 155), the drunkard English captain (IV, vii, 156-58), La Ruse (IV, x, 166), the French hermit (IV, x, 169), the African Mayor (IV, xii, 174).

ever equalled" (*Joseph Andrews*, IV, xvi, 343), the author finds it difficult to poke fun at the Heartfrees without rendering them, or their relationship, contemptible. Most importantly for the purposes of my argument, towards the end of the novel it becomes evident that plotting against the Heartfrees is a deadly serious business.

In a significant passage often overlooked by critics, the narrator explicitly associates Wild's demise with his shameless ruining of Heartfree:

The *Catastrophe*, to which our Hero had reduced this Wretch, was so wonderful an Effort of Greatness, that it probably made Fortune envious of her own Darling; but whether it was from this Envy, or only from that known Inconstancy and Weakness so often judiciously remarked in that Lady's Temper [...] certain it is she now began to meditate Mischief against *Wild*. [...] In short, there seems to be a certain Measure of Mischief and Iniquity, which every GREAT MAN is to fill up, and then Fortune looks on him as of no more Use than a Silk-Worm whose bottom is spun, and deserts him (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, i, 138).

In this playful uncertainty about the inaccessible motivations of Fortune, the main plot and the romantic subplot of the novel become linked together in terms of cause and effect. While eighteenth-century biographies of Wild generally suggest that it was the effectiveness of the legal system, or the thief-taker's recklessness, or both, which ultimately caused his downfall, Fielding presents the malicious ruin of Heartfree as one of the two causes — the other being sheer capriciousness— that make Wild fall from Fortune's good grace. Later on, the narrator does mention a "Clause in an Act of Parliament", which serves "as a Trap for *Wild*" (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, i, 139), but whereas other accounts make this the main cause of Wild's defeat,<sup>36</sup> in

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<sup>36</sup> For example: *An Authentick Narrative, The True and Genuine Account*, H.D.'s *The Life of Jonathan Wild*, Smith's *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Famous Jonathan Wild*; and the transcription of Wild's Trial in *Select Trials*.

Fielding's novel this is merely the means employed by Fortune to bring Wild down, not the cause.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore Fielding entirely omits the anecdote of Wild's returning a piece of stolen lace for a fee while in prison, which all of the accounts enumerate as the final nail in his coffin, the ultimate mistake that allowed the magistrates to find him guilty straight away. Characteristically, in a single sentence Fielding jokingly complains about the unpredictability of Fortune, while he suggests that wicked actions are eventually punished. As in his marriage plays and his other novels, Fielding resorts to a domestic theme to introduce his moral lesson in *Jonathan Wild*.

On close perusal it is evident that Wild's "wonderful Effort of Greatness", that is, his malicious tampering with the morally blameless marriage of the Heartfrees, sets up a chain reaction that eventually results in his demise. Early in the novel, after Wild has caused Heartfree's imprisonment and has conveyed away his wife, Friendly convinces his master to issue a warrant to capture the rogue and bring him to a Magistrate (*Jonathan Wild*, III, ix, 120). The impeachment is momentarily delayed, however, due to the protagonist's honeymoon, "the only Moon indeed in which it is fashionable or customary for the married Parties to have any Affection for each other" (*Jonathan Wild*, III, ix, 120). But he is finally captured upon his visiting Heartfree in prison with a view to entangle him in a robbery that would secure his total ruin. Wild then decides to strike the definitive blow against Heartfree by charging him "with having conveyed

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<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that the clause in the Transportation Act of 1718 had existed for six years prior to Wild's impeachment in 1725. As Howson points out, criminal biographies and trial reports overemphasized the role of the law in an effort to downplay the legal neglect that had allowed Wild's illegal office for retrieving lost property to operate for 16 years. *It Takes a Thief*, 94-95.

away his Wife, with his most valuable Effects, in order to defraud his Creditors”, an act of felony punishable by death (*Jonathan Wild*, III, xi, 124). Though he has a moment’s hesitation upon the arrival of Heartfree’s death warrant in a chapter aptly headed “Wild *betrays some human Weakness*”, after some deliberation with his conscience he manages to “banish away every Degree of Humanity from his Mind” and resolves not to intervene (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, iv, 147). After this, the thief-taker is beyond redemption. Tampering with the (married) life of innocent characters has to be punished in Fielding’s fiction.

#### **4. Mrs Heartfree and Amelia**

Before moving on to the last part of this chapter, which comprises a brief analysis of the ending of *Jonathan Wild*, I want to pause for a moment to consider the Heartfrees in relation to Fielding’s last work of prose fiction. Despite their unpopularity among modern critics, and the fact that, as I mentioned above, they have sometimes been considered *Jonathan Wild*’s main failure, their idealized marriage is a clear antecedent to that of the Booths in *Amelia*, a novel that Fielding’s contemporaries generally disliked,<sup>38</sup> but which the author described as his “favourite Child” (*Covent-Garden*, 28 January 1752, 65). In the Heartfrees Fielding delineates a rough draft of his later project for investigating “the various Accidents which befell a very worthy Couple, after their uniting in the State of Matrimony” (*Amelia*, I, i, 15).

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<sup>38</sup> On the reception of *Amelia* see Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 533-38. For a sample of eighteenth-century responses to this novel, see *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), items 106-23. For an analysis of ambiguities within the novel itself, which may explain such negative responses see Simon Dickie “Amelia, Sex, and Fielding’s Woman’s Question”, in *Henry Fielding (1707-1754)*, ed. Rawson, 115-42.

In some ways, it is as if in *Amelia* the author had expanded the domestic subplot of *Jonathan Wild* into a full novel.

As a naïve, goodhearted man, Mr Heartfree is somewhat akin to William Booth, Amelia's husband, whose readiness to provide financial relief for friends (and strangers), along with his reckless drinking and gambling, and the unjust system of commission purchasing in the army,<sup>39</sup> cause his family to be constantly debt-ridden. However, as this brief character sketch suggests, there are also telling differences between Booth and Heartfree: while the latter is deliberately duped by an evil schemer, the former is simultaneously constrained by the failure of society to reward its members for their merits not their money, and by his own flaws, which have a direct impact on the unhappiness of his household.<sup>40</sup>

Mrs Heartfree, on the other hand, has a more evident affiliation with Amelia, a character Fielding famously modelled on his first wife Charlotte.<sup>41</sup> Both Amelia and Mrs Heartfree are exemplars of wifely virtue, and maternal care. Just as Amelia reassures her husband that whatever his misfortunes "he hath one Friend, whom no Inconstancy of her own, nor any Change of his Fortune, nor Time, nor Age nor Sickness, nor Accident can ever alter; but who will esteem, will love and doat on him for ever" (*Amelia*, IV, v, 175), when Mr

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<sup>39</sup> Not only is Booth on half-pay at the beginning of the novel (despite having fought bravely in war at Gibraltar), but he never manages to obtain a commission because he has not enough money to purchase it and the few powerful friends he has do not help him.

<sup>40</sup> Apart from the gambling and drinking, Booth cheats on his wife once, which fills him with guilt (and anger) throughout the novel.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter to her daughter, Lady Bute, Fielding's cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu claimed that in *Amelia*, Fielding "has given a true picture of himself and his first Wife in the Characters of Mr. and Mrs. Booth (some Complement to his own figure excepted)". "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, letter of 23 July 1754", *Critical Heritage*, ed. Paulson and Lockwood, 379. Richardson made a similar claim, albeit in a bitterer tone, complaining about Fielding's resort to autobiography as a way of compensating his lack of imagination: "Booth in his last piece, again himself; Amelia, even to her noselessness, is again his first wife". "Letter of 22 February 1752", cited in *Amelia*, xvii.



Heartfree is defrauded and imprisoned, his wife does “her utmost to lessen [his concerns] by endeavouring to mitigate the Loss”, and by “assuring him that no State of Life could appear unhappy to her with him, unless his own Sorrow or Discontent made it so” (*Jonathan Wild*, II, vii, 71). Moreover, both characters are active preservers of their marital vow of chastity. Just as Amelia triumphs over a series of trials of her faithfulness through her own resourcefulness (as when she has Mrs Bennett take her place in the masquerade where she is to be ensnared by the nobleman), Mrs Heartfree repels the sexual advances of six different men by means of her own astuteness (as when she inebriates the English captain so she can defeat him despite his physical strength in *Jonathan Wild*, IV, vii, 156-58).

Although the parallels between Mrs Heartfree and Amelia are numerous, it is not my intention to detail them all here. What this brief juxtaposition reveals, however, is Fielding’s persistent interest in a serious exploration of domestic problems. Evidently, and significantly for the purposes of this thesis, the Heartfrees—and Mrs Heartfree in particular—are more than “needless padding on Fielding’s part”, which according to Goldgar is the most positive judgement many readers are willing to bestow on their story.<sup>42</sup>

### **5. A hanging and a wedding: the (happy) ending of *Jonathan Wild***

Midway through the novel Fielding explains that happy marriage, that “State of tranquil Felicity”, with which “Most Histories as well as Comedies” close, is not the lot of his hero (*Jonathan Wild*, III, viii, 111). Although in the general

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<sup>42</sup> Goldgar, “General Introduction”, *Jonathan Wild*, xl.

Preface to the *Miscellanies* he had warned readers that his rendition of Wild's story "is rather of such Actions which he might have performed, than what he really did" (*Misc.* I, 9), the fact that the historical Wild was actually hanged for his crimes was a felicitous coincidence between life and artistic purpose he could not afford to ignore.<sup>43</sup>

This, however, did not mean he completely renounced his favourite finale: marrying off a worthy couple at the very end. Hence, after "Jonathan Wild was, what so few GREAT Men are, though in all Propriety ought to be—hanged by the Neck 'till he was dead" (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, xvi, 194), the narrator relates that Heartfree's fortune was restored and that "Friendly married his eldest Daughter at the Age of nineteen, and became his Partner in Trade", and now they all "live together in one House; and that with such Amity and Affection towards each other, that they are in the Neighbourhood called *The Family of Love*" (*Jonathan Wild*, IV, xvi, 195).<sup>44</sup> So in the end, the

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<sup>43</sup> Rawson points out that Fielding "almost festively celebrates this convergence of the real with the due order of things" in the case of Jonathan Wild, "whose real-life end happened (happily!) to be morally deserved and appropriately grand". Rawson, *Augustan Ideal under Stress*, 123.

<sup>44</sup> The phrase "Family of Love" has some strange historical resonances worth considering. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it alluded to a secret religious fellowship originally founded by Hendrick Niclaes in Holland, which gained adepts in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It is likely to have faded in the late seventeenth century as a consequence of the Toleration Act of 1689, whereby minor dissenting communities were absorbed into larger ones. See Christopher W. Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 247-48. It is unlikely, then, that Fielding wanted to invoke the Familists in his text. Furthermore, "Family of Love" seems to have been a favourite expression for the writer, to which he resorted without noticeable irony or religious innuendo in *The Author's Farce* (1730) (*Plays* I, I, vii, 238), *Champion* (26 February 1740, 202), and *Tom Jones* (xiv, vi, 765). In these works, as in *Jonathan Wild*, it is merely used for describing an affectionate family. As W.B. Coley points out, Fielding "may have been unaware of or indifferent to" the religious connotations of the phrase. *Champion*, n. 5, p. 202. Thomas Lockwood (*Plays* I, n.3, p. 238) and Linda Bree (*The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, ed. Amory, note to page 181, p. 295) share this view. Henry's sister, Sarah, also uses the phrase without irony in *Volume The Last* (1753), her sequel to *David Simple* (1744). See *The Adventures of David Simple and Volume the Last*, ed. Peter Sabor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), VI, 293. Henry Fielding may have become aware of the potentially problematic allusion at a later stage, as he effected a typographic quieting down for the revised version of *Jonathan Wild* in 1754, removing the italics and capitalization.

history of the life and exploits of the most notorious criminal of Fielding's time has strangely closed with a wedding and a hint of marital bliss, just like *Joseph Andrews* and all his regular marriage comedies. It is tempting to read this plot twist at the end as a pun on the different meanings of knot tying, a phrase that was already current in his day.<sup>45</sup> By meddling with the Heartfrees, Wild had attempted to untie their nuptial knot, which ultimately ties the knot of the noose around his neck. By the end of the novel the metaphor has come full circle, and a new couple is joined together.

As I hope to have shown, the romantic subplot of *Jonathan Wild* is in fact crucial not only to the moral purpose of the novel, but also to its structure. Moreover, by the very end, the subplot has supplanted the main plot, and while the protagonist is left forever, as in a frozen picture, with his body hanging on the gallows, the Heartfrees bid farewell to the readers in their tranquil felicity. As in the other works examined so far, Fielding produced an example of positive behaviour at the end of *Jonathan Wild*, with a triumphalist view of good marriage conquering over vice. Yet, uncertainty about his own reverence for the married state is sometimes betrayed in his work, and perhaps nowhere more evidently than in his prurient *Female Husband*, the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>45</sup> See Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: W. Strahan, 1755-56), Vol. I, 1158.

### Chapter 5: The criminal marriage plot of *The Female Husband*

On 12 November 1746 Fielding anonymously published a sixpenny pamphlet entitled *The Female Husband*.<sup>1</sup> This story, which, for the reasons explained in Chapter Two, I shall call a novel, is Fielding's fictionalization of the events leading to the trial and conviction of Mary Hamilton, a real-life transvestite who married three different women before being detected and punished for imposture under a clause of the laws of vagrancy. Taking a few factual details from the case—which was reported in some local newspapers, and for which his cousin Henry Gould served as legal consultant—Fielding transformed the piece of news into a tantalizing narrative of impersonation, deceit, jealousy, love, and punishment.<sup>2</sup> With a narrative that moves between the conventions of criminal biography and marriage plot, *The Female Husband* is among Fielding's most strange—yet fascinating—generic experiments, one that offers a peek into a series of taboo practices, while purporting to provide a moral instruction that is often as ambiguous as the genre of the piece and the gender of its protagonist. It is also, as I will show in this chapter, another illuminating window into Fielding's attitudes toward marriage, which complicates his endorsement of conventional Christian matrimony as the most desirable outcome in life and in fiction.

Little critical attention has been paid to *The Female Husband*, particularly by Fielding scholars. Although it was believed to be Fielding's

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<sup>1</sup> Announced in the *General Advertiser* (London, England, Wednesday 12 November 1746), Issue 3759.

<sup>2</sup> Two short notices of the case appeared in *The Bath Journal* (22 September and 3 November 1746), which were later reprinted in the *General Advertisement* and the *General London Evening Mercury* (2 October 1746). For details of composition see Battestin, *Female Husband*, 356-59.

since at least 1918,<sup>3</sup> the authorship of this novel remained controversial until 1959 when, through a meticulous cross examination of source materials (including trial records, newspapers and other works by Fielding), Sheridan Baker successfully managed “to demonstrate beyond all doubt that *The Female Husband* is Fielding’s”.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even though more than five decades have passed since its definitive attribution to Fielding, this novel is still seldom studied. Apart from short allusions to it in biographical accounts of the author,<sup>5</sup> most of the few scholarly references there are to *The Female Husband* come from studies of gender and sexuality,<sup>6</sup> or are made in relation to the correspondences between its subject matter and the life of Charlotte Charke, the controversial cross-dressing daughter of Colley Cibber, whose acting in Fielding’s political satires of the 1730s—in which the laureate was explicitly ridiculed—caused her an irrevocable falling out with her father.<sup>7</sup> Terry Castle’s “Matters Not Fit To Be Mentioned” (1982), an article dealing with aspects of sexual ambiguity, cross-dressing and masquerades, and Jill

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<sup>3</sup> Wilbur Cross, one of Fielding’s early twentieth-century biographers, suggested that this “piece of hack-work [...] may have come from the pen of Fielding”. Wilbur L. Cross, *The History of Henry Fielding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), Vol. 2, 51-52.

<sup>4</sup> Sheridan Baker, “Henry Fielding’s *The Female Husband*: Fact and Fiction”, *PMLA* 74.3 (1959): 213.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Martin Battestin and Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 412.

<sup>6</sup> Fielding’s fictionalization of the case of Mary Hamilton is often cited briefly as a rare example of accounts of lesbianism in eighteenth-century England. See, for instance, Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women’s Press, 1985), 52; Randolph Trumbach, Terry Castle, and Lynne Friedli’s essays in *The Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. Rousseau, G.S. and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 75, 170, 238-40; Madeleine Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 39-40; Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700-1830* (London: GMP Publishers, 1992), 239-42; and a two-line allusion in Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 258.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Kristina Straub, “The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke”, in *Introducing Charlotte Charke: Actress, Author, Enigma*, ed. Philip E. Baruth (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 124-25. I return to Charke on the penultimate section of this chapter.

Campbell's four valuable pages on *The Female Husband* within her extensive study on gender and identity in Fielding's plays and novels, are rare examples of close readings of this novel as a work by Fielding.<sup>8</sup> The first scholarly version of this text, with a short introduction about its composition and reception, was published not long ago in *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, Shamela and Occasional Writings* (2008), one of the last volumes of the recently completed Wesleyan edition of Fielding's works.<sup>9</sup>

Critical examinations of *The Female Husband* often concentrate on evaluating Fielding's attitudes to female transvestism and homosexuality, behaviours that were rarely portrayed in eighteenth-century England.<sup>10</sup> Until recently, most of these analyses concluded that *The Female Husband* is permeated by an utterly misogynistic and homophobic tone. In her 1982 article, Castle described the text as "a piece of antifeminist propaganda", arguing that in Hamilton's cross-dressing Fielding found "a target not only for his general critique of dissimulation and hypocrisy, but also for some of his more revealing antifeminist sentiment";<sup>11</sup> in a later piece she called it an "anti-lesbian satire".<sup>12</sup> In 1991 Madeleine Kahn asserted that Fielding's "little pamphlet" conveys a feeling of "outrage against the violation of sexual and

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<sup>8</sup> Terry Castle, "'Matters Not Fit to Be Mentioned': Fielding's *The Female Husband*", *ELH* 49.3 (1982): 602-22; Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 55-60.

<sup>9</sup> Despite Battestin's unrivalled knowledge of Fielding's life and work, his tone in the Wesleyan introduction to *The Female Husband*—as in his biography of Fielding—is disappointingly apologetic, emphasizing the author's economic necessity, which drove him to produce "the shoddiest work of fiction he ever wrote" (*Henry Fielding: A Life*, 411); "the biography of the infamous Mary Hamilton" (*Female Husband*, 355); and "the perversion of the lesbian Mary Hamilton" (*Female Husband*, 386).

<sup>10</sup> For a compelling discussion about lesbianism having been "'ghosted'—or made to seem invisible" throughout history see Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian, Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), quotation from 4.

<sup>11</sup> Castle, "Matters not Fit to Be Mentioned", 611 and 603.

<sup>12</sup> Castle, "The Culture of Travesty: Sexuality and Masquerade in Eighteenth-Century England", in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. Rousseau and Porter, 170.

social categories”.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, in her 1996 study of gender in Fielding’s work, Campbell maintained that *The Female Husband* offers the author’s “most direct, extended, and violently defensive account of gender impersonation”.<sup>14</sup> This is a view now ostensibly shared by Castle, who in her recent anthology of *The Literature of Lesbianism* (2003) labels it “a kind of lesbian ‘rogue biography’”, remarking the ambivalence of Fielding’s treatment of the “charming” title character.<sup>15</sup> As will become clear over the course of this chapter, I disagree with viewing *The Female Husband* as a straightforward anti-lesbian invective. Rather, I consider it as a remarkable instance of Fielding’s anxious awareness about the shortcomings of masculine empowerment—especially in its sexual dimension—as well as an example of his fascination with the potential for mutability inherent in gender roles.

While critical explorations of whether Fielding was sympathetic or antagonistic to female transvestism and same-sex desire are certainly illuminating, they overlook a crucial aspect of this novel, namely, that *The Female Husband* is about a woman who repeatedly (and almost successfully) attempts to usurp a major role of mid-eighteenth-century men: being a husband. Fielding’s Mary Hamilton is more than a female transvestite; she is a woman who manages to marry three different women, first for money, then for lust, and finally for love. The novel indeed has female same-sex desire at its core, but I believe it also ought to be read against the broader context of

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<sup>13</sup> Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, *Natural Masques*, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Terry Castle includes *The Female Husband*, with a brief introduction, in her recent anthology *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 272-85.

Fielding's concern with marriage as a key institution for either the preservation or destabilization of the *status quo* in eighteenth-century society. It is no coincidence that Fielding chooses to entitle his account *The Female Husband*, rather than resorting to similarly eye-catching possibilities from the repertoire of eighteenth-century lexicon for female homosexuality.<sup>16</sup> Matrimony, as the oxymoronic title suggests, is absolutely essential to the story.

### 1. From criminal biography to marriage plot

The generic experimentation of *The Female Husband* is apparent from the start. Its title page appears in the guise of a criminal biography: "THE Female Husband: OR THE SURPRISING HISTORY OF Mrs. MARY, ALIAS Mr. GEORGE HAMILTON, Who was convicted of having married a YOUNG WOMAN of *WELLS* and lived with her as her HUSBAND. TAKEN FROM Her own MOUTH since her Confinement" contains all the usual elements of rogue lives: the allurements of the transgression, the supplanted identity, the claim to authenticity, and the legal action. Criminal biographies were a popular genre of Fielding's time, one with which he was well acquainted, though had not yet seriously attempted to emulate.<sup>17</sup> During the late seventeenth century and over the course of the eighteenth, as Phillip Rawlings points out, "crime provided one of the principal subjects for popular literature".<sup>18</sup> According to Peter

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<sup>16</sup> For example, "passing woman", "tribade", "Sapphist", "fricatix", and "the Game of Flats". Useful accounts of early-modern and eighteenth-century terminology for lesbianism can be found in Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*; Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*; and Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*.

<sup>17</sup> As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Fielding was familiar with the criminal biographies of Jonathan Wild, but he shunned this genre in favour of serious history as the ostensible generic model of his own version.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices: Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1.



Linebaugh, the dramatization of crime punished was endorsed by the social establishment as a way of introducing new forms of property relations.<sup>19</sup> Publications such as the Ordinary of Newgate's *Account*,<sup>20</sup> printed several times a year, after each hanging day in London, or *The Newgate Calendar* later in the century,<sup>21</sup> attracted a vast readership, judging by the number of editions that certain pamphlets reached, as well as the several different versions inspired by notorious cases.<sup>22</sup> Like *The Female Husband*, most of these accounts purported to be taken *viva voce*, frequently emphasising the fact that criminals had received the retribution they deserved, as the complete title of the *Account* indicates: *The Ordinary of Newgate, His Account of the Behaviour, Confession, and Dying Words of the Malefactors, Who Were executed at Tyburn*.<sup>23</sup>

The opening remarks of *The Female Husband* are not unlike those of a criminal biography either. Since stories of crime, as Rawling observes, “were

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> The Ordinary of Newgate was the prison's chaplain. He acted as a spiritual middleman between the judge and the hangman. His main duty was to support the decisions of the judge and to justify to the public the Christian purpose of the punishment. The *Account* was a written testimony of this duty, as well as an important source of income for the Ordinary. Due to the profit he made, he was often criticised for what was perceived as mercenary motives coated in religious righteousness. See Linebaugh, “The Ordinary of Newgate and His Account”, in *Crime in England, 1550-1800*, ed. J.S. Cockburn (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1977), 246-69.

<sup>21</sup> The first *Newgate Calendar* was edited anonymously in 1779, although it often included famous cases from earlier decades. See Lucy Moore, ed. *Con Men and Cutpurses: Scenes from the Hogarthian Underworld* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 2001), xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>22</sup> See Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices*, 1-2, 4-7. Apart from the Ordinary's *Account* and the *Newgate Calendars*, interesting examples of popular collections of criminal biographies in Fielding's time include the three anonymous volumes of *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals, who Have Been Condemn'd and Executed; [...] from the Year 1720 to the Present Time* (London: John Osborn, 1735); and J.W., *A Full and Compleat History of the Lives, Robberies, and Murders, of all the Most Notorious Highwaymen, that Have Been in England, Scotland, France and Ireland, from the Reign of William the Conqueror to this Time* (London: James Hodges, 1742).

<sup>23</sup> The *Accounts* had always the same title—*The Ordinary of Newgate, his Account of the Behaviour, Confession, and Dying Words of the Malefactors, Who Were Executed at Tyburn*—changing only the date, number of executions, and the name of the current mayor of the city.

designed not to encourage emulation but to deter”,<sup>24</sup> the writers attempted to balance the morbid pleasure they stimulated with prefatory and concluding commentary about the causes for the criminal behaviour and the purpose of their accounts, using a terminology and a structure akin to Fielding’s. A popular anonymous collection of 1735 provides a good example. In “The life of J\_\_\_ D\_\_\_, a highwayman”, before proceeding to enumerate the misdeeds of his protagonist, the biographer remarks that “when once Men have so far plung’d themselves into sential pleasures, as to lose all sense of any Other Delight than what arises from the Gratification of the Senses” and “Want all virtue”, they “easily drew on the Loss of all other principles”.<sup>25</sup> Correspondingly, Fielding commences his story with a warning about the dangers inherent in letting our “carnal appetites” loose, lest we forget “that propense inclination for very wise purposes implanted in the one sex for the other”, which “govern’d and directed by virtue and religion,” causes “corporeal delight” as well as “rational felicity” (*Female Husband*, 365). Similarly, Fielding’s didactic farewell to the reader hoping “that this example will be sufficient to deter all others from the commission of such foul and unnatural crimes” (*Female Husband*, 381), echoes the criminal biographer’s declaration that “by the Example of his punishment I intend to deter others from such crimes”.<sup>26</sup> At first glance, then, *The Female Husband* is remarkably

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<sup>24</sup> Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Anon., *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals*, Vol. III, 259-60.

<sup>26</sup> Anon., *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals*, Vol. I, i. Another good example can be found in an Ordinary of Newgate’s *Account* from August 1746, published a few months before *The Female Husband*. Samuel Rossell, the ordinary, justifies his chronicle of crime by claiming that his account will provide “matters of speculation for the years to come” that “may give lessons to posterity,” and “may be of service to particular persons, or of general use to mankind.” *The Ordinary of Newgate, His Account, of the Behaviour, confession, & Dying Words of the Seven Malefactors who Were Executed at Tyburn on Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> of August*,

similar to standard rogue lives of the period. On closer inspection, however, as we shall see, its subject matter and plot gradually drift away from the ostensible model.

After a brief moral disquisition, the narrator begins the narrative proper with some biographical details about his “heroine in iniquity” (*Female Husband*, 365). We first learn that Mary Hamilton “was born in the Isle of Man, on the 16<sup>th</sup> Day of August, 1721”, and that her father, “formerly a serjeant of grenadiers,” had purchased his discharge with the money he had obtained from marrying her mother, “a widow of some estate in that island” (*Female Husband*, 365). Soon afterwards, the father dies, leaving the mother pregnant with Mary. Following the conventions of the criminal biographer, Fielding adopts a casual tone to provide formulaic details about the character’s birthplace and progenitors, which were generally of little relevance to the story.<sup>27</sup>

In this compact introduction, however, he quietly introduces some unusual elements worth considering. Unlike Fielding’s Manx protagonist, the real Mary Hamilton was born in Somerset—the author’s own place of birth,

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1746. *Being the Fourth Execution in the Mayoralty of the Right Honble Sir Richard Hoare, Knt. Lord-Mayor of the City of London. Number IV. For the Said Year* (London: T. Parker, 1746), 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> An Ordinary’s *Account* of 1739, for instance, relates the life of “Robert Onion, 32 Years of Age, born of honest Parents in London, who gave him good education at School, in Reading, Writing, and cast Accompts, fit for Business, and was likewise instructed in the Principles of the Christian Religion”. James Guthrie, *The Ordinary of Newgate, his Account [...] Wednesday the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1739* (London: John Applebee, 1739), 6. Another one in 1740 narrates the case of “Mary Young, alias Jenny Diver, about 36 Years of Age, born in Ireland”, who “lived with her parents and did not go to Service”. James Guthrie, *The Ordinary of Newgate, his Account [...] Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 1740* (London: John Applebee, 1740), 7. Similarly, an anonymous biography of “Jane Griffin, a murderer”, introduces her as “the Daughter of honest and substantial Parents, who educated her with very great Tenderness and Care, particularly with respect to Religion, in which she was well and rationally Instructed”. *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals, Who Have Been Condemn’d and Executed*, 2.

and the county in which he set his fictional Paradise Hall in *Tom Jones*.<sup>28</sup> This, as we have seen elsewhere in this thesis, is characteristic of Fielding. The apparently incidental—but indeed carefully planned—shift of location in his ostensibly factual account tackles various tasks at once. By toying with the idea that a woman born in the Isle of Man may have masculine traits, he offers an anticipatory motif and a joke, while he protects his own beloved Somerset from contamination.<sup>29</sup> Immediately afterwards, with the same unceremonious tone, the narrator tells us that Hamilton’s mother, a second-time widow and mother-to-be, “tho’ she had not two months to reckon, could not stay till she was delivered, before she took a third husband” (*Female Husband*, 365). As in *The Coffee-House Politician* (1730) and *Shamela* (1741), Fielding draws attention to the share of blame that parents have in the false steps of their children. Clearly, Hamilton’s mother is not as innocent as the parents of standard criminals like Robert Onion, Mary Young, or Jane Griffin, of whom the Ordinary of Newgate remarked that they were poor but honest, and had given their children the best education they could.<sup>30</sup> It is no coincidence that this mother, who does not observe proper mourning and is so eager to take another husband—presumably to savour the pleasures of conjugal life—marries three times, just like Mary Hamilton. With the comic element lurking behind the image of a lustfully impatient pregnant woman also comes the author’s warning: matrimony should not be taken so lightly. A

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<sup>28</sup> On the differences between the historical Hamilton and Fielding’s see Baker, “Henry Fielding’s the *Female Husband*”, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Altering the place of birth of the offenders for sensationalist or moralizing purposes was not the common practice of criminal biographers like the Ordinary of Newgate. Linebaugh’s cross-examination of 150 accounts with parish registers and newspapers leads him to conclude that, “on the whole, the Ordinary told the truth about the malefactor’s origins”. Linebaugh, “The Ordinary of Newgate and His Account”, in *Crime in England*, ed. Cockburn, 261-62.

<sup>30</sup> See above, note 26.

final revealing change between Fielding's account of Hamilton's origins and her actual biography is the absence of siblings. According to a modern biographer, Mary Hamilton had a brother, whose clothes she borrowed for deceiving,<sup>31</sup> but in *The Female Husband* the narrator painstakingly remarks that "tho' [Hamilton's mother] had three husbands, she never had another child" (*Female Husband*, 365). Read, as they were in Fielding's time, within the context of the Christian purposes for marriage, these infertile nuptials are explicitly presented as unproductive.<sup>32</sup>

Being the story of a female transvestite, *The Female Husband* recalls the well-known criminal biography of another Mary: Mary Frith, or Moll Cutpurse, a "famous Master-thief and an Ugly, who dressed like a Man, and died in 1663". But unlike Cutpurse, who distinctly betrays a masculine behaviour from her infancy, delighting "only in boys' play and pastime, not minding or companying with the girls",<sup>33</sup> Fielding's protagonist does not "in her younger years discover the least proneness to any kind of vice, much less give cause of suspicion that she would one day disgrace her sex by the most abominable and unnatural pollutions" (*Female Husband*, 365). Two major

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<sup>31</sup> Allyson N. May, "Hamilton, Mary (fl. 1746)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, electronic edition (Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65520>> [accessed 15 January 2012].

<sup>32</sup> As the form of the solemnization of matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer reminded people, "the procreation of children" was the first cause for which Christian marriage was ordained.

<sup>33</sup> *The Complete Newgate Calendar*, ed. J.L. Rayner and G.T. Crook (London: Navarre Society Limited, 1926), 169-78, quotation from 170. This early twentieth-century edition is a compilation of famous criminal biographies from 1719 to 1841. The story of Moll Cutpurse is taken from *Captain Alexander Smith's Compleat History of the Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highwaymen, Foot-Pads, Shop-Lifts and Cheats, 1719*. An almost verbatim version of the biography of Mary Frith/Moll Cutpurse can be found in a collection of stories of crime attributed to Daniel Defoe titled *A History of the Lives and Actions of the Most Remarkable Pirates, Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, &c. Interspersed with Several tales, and Pleasant Songs* (Birmingham: T. Aris, 1742), 192-95. In these versions, the cross-dressing transgressions of Mary Frith/Moll Cutpurse are not predominantly sexual. For instance, she uses her masculine attire to rob, to be admitted to places where women would not normally go (such as taverns and tobacco shops), and to have an independent business.

implications can be derived from Fielding's clearing of Hamilton's childhood from any trace of transgressive deportment. First, he aims to emphasise the universality of the threat, suggesting that almost anyone is liable to fall into vice—although attentive readers will remember that not everyone has a mother who marries three times for the sake of sexual enjoyment. Second, as becomes evident in the next part of the novel, Hamilton's unremarkable childhood prepares the ground for introducing Methodism as the first source of corruption.

It is worth noting that in this passage, as in the rest of the novel, Fielding makes such an intricate use of irony that it is difficult to determine whether his condemnation of Hamilton's behaviour as "abominable and unnatural" is earnest or facetious. As has been pointed out in relation to John Cleland's simultaneous reprobation and vivid depiction of the homosexual scene in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748), moralizing statements were standard excuses for pornography, which enabled readers "to avoid feeling guilty about lingering over depictions of wickedness".<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the comic narrative that ensues seems to suggest that Fielding's sanctimonious remarks—which anticipate his unmistakably ironic condemnation of Tom Jones's innocent childhood pranks as "atrocious Wickedness" (*Tom Jones* III, ii, 119)—are intended to raise expectations about Hamilton's deeds.

## **2. Discovering (criminal) love: Methodism**

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, in the 1740s Methodism—particularly in the Calvinistic strand of George Whitefield—became one of Fielding's favourite

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<sup>34</sup> David M. Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 50.

religious targets. *The Female Husband* is no exception in this respect. Early on, the narrator presents Hamilton's seduction as an unfortunate by-product of a Methodism epidemic:

she was first seduced by one *Anne Johnson*, a neighbour of hers with whom she had been acquainted from her childhood [...] This *Anne Johnson* going on some business to *Bristol* [...] became acquainted with some of the people called *Methodists*, and was by them persuaded to embrace their sect. At her return to the *Isle of Man*, she soon made an easy convert of *Molly Hamilton*, the warmth of whose disposition rendered her susceptible enough of Enthusiasm. [...] These two young women became now inseparable companions, and at length bed-fellows (*Female Husband* 365-66).

While in *Shamela* the author invoked some Methodist tenets as convenient justifications for sexual laxness of a heterosexual kind, in *The Female Husband*, as exemplified in this passage, he drew from contemporary anti-Methodist clichés to offer an easily digestible rationale for the cross-dressing and sexual preference of his protagonist.

The busy and populous port of Bristol was one of the chief launching places of the Methodist movement. Whitefield had started preaching there in 1737, and by the 1740s it had become one of the permanent bases of the Wesley brothers' Methodist campaign.<sup>35</sup> "Enthusiasm" and "warmth" were also terms customarily associated with the Methodists. Enthusiasm, understood as the misapprehension of being directed by divine inspiration, was routinely linked with Methodism by hostile commentators, who presented it as a dangerous extreme of Christian fervour recalling the excesses of the Civil War.<sup>36</sup> For instance in a pastoral letter in 1739 Edmund

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<sup>35</sup> On the importance of Bristol for the Methodists' field preaching see John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans: Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52, 68, 104-05.

<sup>36</sup> As Emma Major has shown, enthusiasm could be invoked by champions of standard Anglicanism as a negative characteristic of religious fanatics both of a Puritanical and of a

Gibson, the Bishop of London, denounced enthusiasm as a “delusion” into which “well-meaning Christians are apt to be lead”, linking it specifically with Methodism by quoting from George Whitefield’s diary to exemplify the type of assurances that needed to be questioned for evidence, lest they “would open a door to endless Enthusiasm and Delusion”.<sup>37</sup> The association of “warmth” with spiritual revelation was another commonplace used negatively against Methodists. The term drew on John Wesley’s conversion narrative, in which he described how, while listening to a description of “the Change which God works in the Heart thro’ Faith in *Christ*”, he had felt his heart “strangely warm’d”.<sup>38</sup>

As notions of physically-manifested revelations proved deeply troubling for anti-Methodists, Fielding cleverly exploited the comic and moral potentials of formulaic attacks on Methodism, to simultaneously laugh away what he perceived as a dangerous form of religious extremism, and to offer what in this context becomes a plausible explanation for Hamilton’s eccentric conduct. Indeed, in blaming Methodism, Fielding implicitly claims that her unusual sexual preference can be suppressed by eliminating what he presents as its source. However, while it has recently been argued that Methodism is the main drive of Fielding’s “picaresque narrative”, and that “the broad joke

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Catholic tradition. *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation, 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127-128.

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Gibson, *The Bishop of London’s Pastoral Letter to the People of his Diocese; [...] By way of Caution Against Lukewarmness on One Hand, and Enthusiasm on the Other* (London: S. Buckley, 1739), 10 and 16-17. Another example of anti-Methodist depictions of enthusiasm can be found in William Bowman’s *The Imposture of Methodism Display’d in a Letter to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Dewsbury* (London: Joseph Lord, 1740).

<sup>38</sup> John Wesley, *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley’s Journal From February 1, 1737-38 to His Return from Germany* (London: W. Strahan, 1740), 34.



of the story [is] that Hamilton has become the ‘new man’ of Methodism”;<sup>39</sup> *The Female Husband* is not precisely an anti-Methodist satire, for Methodism is not a sustained target in the novel, but a first door into sexual misconduct.

Fielding soon complicates his scapegoating of Methodism as a cause for homosexuality. First, while same-sex attraction is presented as a common feature among Methodists, not all the sympathisers of this religious sect are or remain attracted to members of their own sex. Although Anne Johnson had been initiated into “impurity” by “her methodistical sisters” (*Female Husband*, 366), she renounces such preference when Rogers, another “very zealous *Methodist*”, who is described as “very jolly and handsome”—and whose very name has connotations of virile sexual prowess<sup>40</sup>—gains her heart and marries her (*Female Husband*, 367). Also, even when Methodism is presented as a prime source of sexual debauchery, Fielding’s condemnation of this first affair is nuanced by his suggestion that Mary is sincerely in love, as she “conceive[s] a very great affection for her friend”, which is at first “totally innocent” (*Female Husband*, 366). Lastly, less than halfway through the narrative, the religious fervour of the protagonist suddenly vanishes, but her fondness for women does not. After Johnson abandons her, Hamilton dons male clothing for the first time and sets off to Ireland to become a “Methodist teacher” (*Female Husband*, 368). As soon as she touches harbour, however, a cold caught in the voyage makes it “impossible to put that design

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<sup>39</sup> Misty Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & The Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 71 and 72. For her full argument see her Chapter Two, “The New Man: Desire, Transformation and the Methodist Body”.

<sup>40</sup> According to the *OED*, “Roger” as a noun is a slang word for penis. As a verb, it is slang for sexual intercourse. Both senses of the term were current in the eighteenth century.

in practice" (*Female Husband*, 369).<sup>41</sup> From that moment on Methodism is never mentioned again, whereas Hamilton's masculine self endures and gradually develops.

### **3. Becoming a husband**

Hamilton's first voyage also signals a turning point in the generic affiliations of the text, for the criminal biography starts dissolving into a series of courtship plots. Immediately upon her arrival in Ireland, Mary meets an attractive woman, who becomes the first in a sequence of amorous conquests. The motifs of courtship (letters, visits, kisses, dances, love-rivals, and reluctant parents) quickly supersede the former narrative of crime. The language of romance takes hold. And so the protagonist becomes "our adventurer", "the gallant", and "the female gallant". These romantic quests become a departing point for Fielding to explore some of the recurrent concerns of his novels, including the material motivations that corrupt human relations, the instabilities of gender, as well as the sexual, moral and social aspects of marriage. As in the plays and novels discussed so far in this thesis, the author resorts to his favourite vehicle of a romantic plot to address these matters. At this stage of the account, for instance, Hamilton's feminine and masculine identities come and go in direct relation to her amorous liaisons. Significantly, although she has been presented in masculine attire for more than one page during her ship journey to Ireland, the narrator

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<sup>41</sup> Fielding depicts Methodism as a screen for homosexuality one last time during Hamilton's voyage to Ireland. Aboard a ship, dressed as a man, she is molested by a "He Methodist", who, in an ecstasy of prayer (and thinking she is indeed a man) makes sexual advances to her. Although Methodism is again the butt of Fielding's humour in this passage, there are no explicitly homophobic comments on the side of the narrator; incontrollable lust is normalized as an instance of excessive enthusiasm.

uses the pronoun “he” for the first time when describing Hamilton’s first love conquest, that of “a brisk widow of near 40 years of age, who had buried two husbands, and seemed by her behaviour to be far from having determined against a third expedition to the land of matrimony” (*Female Husband*, 369).

This first romantic undertaking is a fiasco, as the widow soon discovers the biological sex of the inexperienced Hamilton. The adventure is presented as an apprenticeship that helps the protagonist perfect her wooing techniques. This brief episode, however, is also the crucial moment for the construction of Hamilton’s masculine self, and competence as a lover, in relation to the phallus. Dressed as a man, Hamilton sets off to pay courtship to the widow, but “as he at present wanted tongue to express the ardency of his flame, he was obliged to make use of actions of endearment, such as squeezing, kissing, toying, &c.” (*Female Husband*, 369). The “tongue” Hamilton lacks is symbolically made to stand for a penis, which is, as becomes clear later on, what allows her to succeed in the affairs that follow. The widow rejects Hamilton’s “formal declaration of his passion,” conveyed in a letter, because it reminds her of an opera song and finds a great resemblance between her suitor and Farinelli, the superstar eunuch singer who captivated London operatic audiences between 1734 and 1737.<sup>42</sup>

In the next section of this chapter, where I examine some conspicuous links between *The Female Husband* and Fielding’s theatrical career, I return to this passage in relation to the author’s obsession with opera and Italian

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<sup>42</sup> His real name was Carlo Broschi (1705-1782). He performed in London in the King’s Theatre for the company of Porpora, Handel’s rival. For a biographical account of this singer see Ellen Harris, “Farinelli”, in *The Grove Book of Opera Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337655.001.0001/acref-9780195337655-e-478>> [accessed 22 July 2013].

castrati. For now, it suffices to note that by equating Hamilton with a castrato, Fielding invites readers to consider the deficiency of a masculine exterior that lacks sexual potency, while simultaneously tapping into the eroticism associated with the androgynous castrati.<sup>43</sup> Due to their hormone deprivation, the castrati had boyish and androgynous features, just like the cross-dressing Hamilton, even though, anatomically speaking, they were men. Nonetheless, as Jill Campbell has observed, since a penis is not necessarily a phallus—that is, “an erect, potent sexual instrument”—by juxtaposing Hamilton with a famous castrato Fielding also invites readers to view her masculinity as odd and incomplete.<sup>44</sup> By identifying phallic sexual capacity as a definite marker of masculine identity Fielding tries to find a solution to his gender appropriation conundrum. This, however, as we will see, is later rejected when Hamilton finds a way to supplement the phallus, which allows her to become an accomplished lover, and almost a successful husband. At the same time, in associating Hamilton with a castrated man the author also introduces the possibility that her apparent harmlessness may in fact be a very effective tool for approaching the women she wants to conquer, similar to Horner’s alleged emasculation in Wycherley’s salacious and

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<sup>43</sup> Roger Freitas Freitas discusses the eroticism of these singers as a result of their being “viewed as temporally extended boy[s]” in a time when boys were an important locus of sexual desire both for men and women. “The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato”, *Journal of Musicology* 20.2 (2003): 218. Similarly, Thomas A. King considers the desirability of the castrato as an effect of his being perceived as “a hyperbolic boy singer”, who had the “power [...] to ravish his lover through eyes and ears”. “The Castrato’s Castration”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.3 (2006): 573. I come back to these arguments in my analysis of the theatrical aspects of Fielding’s novel later in this chapter.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell, *Natural Masques*, 58.

enduringly popular *The Country Wife* (1675), with which Fielding and the theatrical public of the time were well acquainted.<sup>45</sup>

As he had done with Anne Johnson, Fielding has the widow reject Hamilton in favour of the option he aims to promote: heterosexual marriage. She weds “one Jack Strong” (*Female Husband*, 370), a man whose name—like that of Anne Johnson’s lover—suggests the physical vigour Hamilton lacks. In presenting these women who flirt and experiment with members of their own sex before reforming and reaching out for supposedly competent men, Fielding aligns himself with standard eighteenth-century portrayals of female homosexuality as a preparation for heterosexual sex and marriage. Lillian Faderman, for instance, argues that in pre-modern and eighteenth-century texts, lesbian sex was sometimes tolerated provided that the women appeared feminine, and that it were “an activity in which women indulged when men were unavailable, or as an apprenticeship or appetite-whetter to heterosexual sex”.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, this is how Cleland depicts lesbian encounters in his popular *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, in which Fanny Hill is initiated

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<sup>45</sup> *The Country Wife* was still part of the repertoire of the London stage in Fielding’s time. According to the modern editor of Wycherley’s plays, this comedy “was performed at least twice each season until 1747: notable years were 1726-27 (nine times), 1727-28 (seven), 1730-31 (seven), 1731-32 (six), 1732-33 (six), 1733-34 (six), and 1742-33 (twelve)”. William Wycherley, *The Plays of William Wycherley*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 243. Fielding was certainly familiar with the play, which by 1746 had been given four times with afterpieces by him (in 22 April 1731, 4 May 1732, 7 May 1745, and 28 November 1745). See Arthur H. Scouten, ed. *The London Stage, Part 3: 1729-1747* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), 131, 214, 1173, and 1198. Although *The Country Wife* later on became sanitized beyond recognition, Horner’s impotence hoax was still preserved in Fielding’s lifetime. According to Friedman it was last acted in its original form on November 7, 1753. Friedman, ed., *The Plays of William Wycherley*, 243.

<sup>46</sup> Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 17.

into the sexual arts by an older prostitute, a “foolery” she later exchanges for “more solid food”.<sup>47</sup>

Ironically, however, what Fielding offers as morally safe escape routes are rendered ineffectual by the negative characterization he builds around the personages who take them. Anne Johnson is presented as an unfaithful opportunist who corrupts Hamilton and then marries Rogers, in secret. The Irish widow is another unsympathetic character. Like Hamilton’s own mother, she has a lax attitude toward marriage: twice a widow she longs to be a wife again, as fast as possible. Furthermore she is as duplicitous as Johnson, because even if she informs Hamilton that, for the regard she owes “to the memory of the best of men” she is never to wed again, “a few days afterwards, she was married” (*Female Husband*, 370). Throughout the novel, there is a manifest uncertainty about using matrimony solely as a safe alternative or as a source of regeneration. Even when Fielding offers heterosexual unions as the adequate solution, there is an evident disapproval of any marriage that is entered into lightly.

Hamilton’s next conquest is no longer presented as an inadequate substitution but as a very real challenge to men as sexual partners. Still in Ireland and in male attire, she meets Mrs Rushford, a wealthy sixty-eight-year-old widow, whose forwardness and preference for young boys recall Fielding’s Mrs Moneywood (*The Author’s Farce*), Mrs Slipslop and Lady Booby (*Joseph Andrews*) and Lady Bellaston (*Tom Jones*). This time Fielding follows the model of a marriage of convenience, comically invoking an image

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<sup>47</sup> John Cleland [published anonymously], *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (London: printed by Thomas Parker for G. Fenton, 1749), Vol. 1, 90.

of mutual exploitation (money for sexual gratification) that recalls the fifth plate from Hogarth's famous *Rake's Progress* (1735) where Tom Rakewell marries a rich crone to pay off his gambling debts. Hamilton marries old Rushford for her money, at the expense of a great-grand son who is disinherited.<sup>48</sup> Though the earlier objection of Hamilton's barren marriage is rendered immaterial—since old Rushford is past the age of procreation—because this match interferes with matters of family inheritance, the narrator once more presents their union as inadequate.

In this amorous adventure Hamilton nearly becomes a successful man and husband, for she is able to complete her masculine identity with the phallus that was missing both in her relationship with Anne Johnson and with the first widow. Using a device, which the narrator does not describe due to an alleged regard for decency, Hamilton satisfies the concupiscent widow so well during the first three days of their marriage that it provokes the envy of another old lady (*Female Husband*, 372). Hamilton's lovemaking here is not treated as a preparation for heterosexual enjoyment any more, since it manages to please the sexually experienced Rushford. The possibility that an artificial phallus may effectively supplant men—especially in a

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<sup>48</sup> This episode also recalls Thomas Middleton's play *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (published 1653). In the main plot, a cross-dressing woman marries a rich widow with the intention of recovering the lands and money she had lost to the widow's late husband. The deception, however, does not involve sexual activity between the women, for in the wedding night the "gallant gentleman" switches places with her brother, who is actually in love with the widow. A more misogynistic version of the play, *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or the Defeated Widow* (1677), probably by Aphra Behn, appeared in the Restoration stage. Early in the eighteenth-century this plot was reworked in William Taverner's *The Artful Husband* (1717). See Marston Stevens Balch, *Thomas Middleton's No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's and The Counterfeit Bridegroom (1677) And Further Adaptations* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1980). It is unlikely, however, that Fielding knew these plays, as there are no records of reprints or performances of either *No Wit No Help* or *The Counterfeit Bridegroom* in his lifetime, and Taverner's *The Artful Husband* was performed only six times between 1711 and 1721, when Fielding was still a boy and did not live in London. See Scouten, ed. *The London Stage*, 465, 482, 486, 497, 624, and 628.

marriage in which nature has discarded the issue of procreation—is deeply problematic for Fielding. The efforts directed to render this amour ridiculous, which result in a sort of nervous joking about the ugliness of the widow and the wasted youth of the bride/groom, are revealing of Fielding’s distress.

Fielding was not alone in voicing this anxiety. The Rushford episode to a great extent recalls “The Dildoides”, a bawdy a poem from the beginning of the century, often attributed to Samuel Butler, which features a public discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of letting women keep a cargo of dildos imported from France. Among the negative effects listed there is the fact that these devices put “th’ Action of the Tool/(Whence we all come) in Ridicule”.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in a later version of the poem, as an argument against the dildos, it is said that lovers may “with false Heart and Member too/Rich Widows for convenience woo”.<sup>50</sup> What in the poem is easily solved—in the end the lewd instruments are simply cast into the fire—is trammelled by more complex tensions in *The Female Husband*.

At first, the narrator gestures toward containment by making the artificial sexual instrument inconveniently absent at times, which in the end leads to Hamilton’s discovery by the widow. In depicting the dildo as inefficient, Fielding seems to align himself with other eighteenth-century approaches. For instance, in “The Discovery”—another piece from the bawdy collection cited above—a manly speaker describes a dildo as a “lifeless,

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<sup>49</sup> Dildoides: A Burlesque Poem. By Samuel Butler, gent. With a Key Explaining Several Names and Characters in Hudibras. Never Before Printed (London: J. Nutt, 1706) 10. A note to the imprint of the text remarks that the attribution to Samuel Butler is debatable.

<sup>50</sup> The Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon and Dorset; the Dukes of Devonshire, Buckinghamshire, &c With Memoirs of their Lives, The Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, and Dorset; the Dukes of Devonshire, Buckinghamshire, &c. With Memoirs of their Lives. Second Volume (London: [s.n.] 1739), 7. This collection of poems was very popular throughout the century, judging by the number of reprints it had. In Fielding’s lifetime alone, six different issues can be found: 1714, 1718, 1731, two in 1739, and 1752.



sapless, frozen, stubborn Tool”, before confidently reaching the conclusion that “No one that ever knew the Worth of me,/ Will after take up with unjuicy thee”.<sup>51</sup> Both this example and Fielding’s emphasis on the instrument used by Hamilton to deceive her sexual partners ostensibly confirm Tim Hitchcock’s argument that the eighteenth century witnessed a turn in sexual practices in which penetrative sex gradually supplanted other forms of sexual exchange, fostering a phallogentric culture that discarded other forms of behaviour as either non-existent or unnatural.<sup>52</sup>

However, as the ensuing episodes make clear, in the particular case of *The Female Husband*, the apparent defence of penetrative heterosexuality is fraught with anxiety.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in an earlier passage Fielding has established a sympathetic comparison between the female husband’s intermittent possession of the artificial phallus with a case of masculine impotency, by means of a quotation: “*The doctor understood the call/But had not always wherewithal*” (*Female Husband*, 372). The couplet comes from Matthew Prior’s “Paolo Purganti and His Wife: An Honest, but a Simple Pair” (1709), a comic poem depicting the intimate idiosyncrasies of a married

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>52</sup> Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998). Hitchcock takes as point of departure and elaborates on Thomas Laqueur’s argument about the late eighteenth-century replacement of the early Galenic “one sex” model of sexual difference (whereby women and men were understood as having essentially the same sexual organs, that could develop or not depending on the balance of the humours), by a “two sex” model (whereby women and men became understood as radically and irredeemably different from each other). Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990). Hitchcock’s monograph is more focused on and more relevant to an English context than Laqueur’s broader study of sexual mores in Western culture.

<sup>53</sup> Kristina Straub, for instance, points out Fielding’s ambiguity in his advocacy of phallogentric sex during the courtship of Hamilton and her last wife, in which the women’s amorous caresses, which include squeezing “many soft things” with each other’s hands (*Female Husband*, 376) “certainly do not reflect a particularly firm notion of a phallic sexuality invested in the penis”. Straub, “Guilty Pleasures”, in *Introducing Charlotte Charke*, ed. Baruth, 125.

couple. Purganti is a doctor, whose wife censures lewdness in others but, because she has over-interpreted the scriptural stipulation “That Husbands should give Wives their Due,” sexually demands more of her husband than he can offer. The doctor, in despair, invents a sickness for his wife, warning her that one last sexual exploit could cause her death. Indifferent to the caution, the woman concludes: “So do it therefore and Adieu;/ For I will die, for Love of you”.<sup>54</sup> This poem—which according to Battestin was one of Fielding’s favourites<sup>55</sup>—conveys a tolerant approach toward sexual quirks, while it also invites empathy for the impotent husband who cannot live up to his wife’s expectations. This seems to suggest that Fielding, unlike the speakers of “The Dildoides” and “The Discovery”, finds it difficult to define masculinity exclusively by phallic sexual performance, when even biological men can be ineffective in such matters. The juxtaposition of Hamilton to Purganti, moreover, betrays an attitude of sympathy toward the female husband, which permeates the narrative in general. Finally, the allusion to a poem with a very private instance of domestic discord as subject once more brings matrimonial matters to the fore, and further distances the text from its initial affiliations with chronicles of crime.

Another important implication hinted at in Hamilton’s romantic adventure with Rushford is the complementarity—and performativity—of gender roles. Throughout the story, in keeping with eighteenth-century

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<sup>54</sup> Matthew Prior, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709), 117, 119, and 125.

<sup>55</sup> Based on evidence from Fielding’s burlesque of the *Dunciad* (1729-30), *Tom Jones*, *Amelia* (1751), and *The Covent Garden Journal* (1752), Battestin concludes that Fielding “regarded Prior as a poet of the first order” and that “his favourite among Prior’s poems appears to have been ‘Paolo Purganti and His Wife.’” Martin C. Battestin, *A Henry Fielding Companion* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 200), 120.

standards, leadership and aggressive conduct are foregrounded as markers of masculinity, while coyness and passivity are presented as attributes of femininity.<sup>56</sup> But in this passage it is also implied that these practices are contingent upon social interaction and, as such, they can be easily, if only temporarily, reversed. This is particularly apparent in Hamilton's first marriage where, significantly, the narrator refers to the female husband as "Mrs. Hamilton".<sup>57</sup> Although Hamilton is supposedly the male partner, it is Rushford who sets the pace and takes the initiative, both in courtship and in bed. First, readers are informed that, in contrast to Mary Hamilton's beardless face, Rushford has a chin "pretty well stocked with bristles" (*Female Husband*, 372). Then, it is revealed that Rushford gives the first "hints of her passion" to Hamilton (*Female Husband*, 371). And in an awkwardly comic scene that echoes the attempted seduction of Joseph by Mrs Slipslop in *Joseph Andrews*, we are shown how the widow "fell upon [Hamilton] in a rage of love like a tygress, and almost murdered her with kisses" (*Female Husband*, 372).<sup>58</sup> This passage suggests, then, that it is not only the female husband's intermittent possession of the phallus that makes

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<sup>56</sup> Another evident example of this can be found in the description of Hamilton's rebuff of the sexual advances of the "He Methodist" in her journey to Ireland, whom she rejects meekly at first, with the coyness of a woman, but then "recollecting the sex she had assumed" repels violently, with the strength of a man (*Female Husband*, 368).

<sup>57</sup> Fielding does use the pronoun "he" for Hamilton once in this episode, but he does so only to avoid confusion about who does what in the already muddled scene where Rushford discovers the deception: "He found her in the midst of it in her shift, with a handful of shirt in one hand, and a handful of hair in the other, stamping and crying, I am undone, cheated, abused, ruined, robbed by a vile jade, impostor, whore" (12).

<sup>58</sup> When Mrs Slipslop tries to seduce Joseph she is described as "a hungry Tygress, who had long traversed the Woods in fruitless search, and sees within the reach of her Claws a Lamb, she prepares to leap upon her prey", *Joseph Andrews*, I, vi, 33. For more similarities between Mrs Rushford and Mrs Slipslop see Baker, "Henry Fielding's *The Female Husband*", 216. In light of Campbell's persuasive argument about the emasculation of the eponymous protagonist in the first book of *Joseph Andrews*, the link established between Joseph and Hamilton through the juxtaposed characterization of Mrs Rushford and Mrs Slipslop, reinforces the relevance of my observation about Fielding's highlighting Hamilton's incomplete masculinity in this episode. See Campbell, *Natural Masques*, 69-71.

her masculine identity incomplete, but also the fact that her complementary partner, having appropriated the male role, has left her no other option than to be the “Mrs Hamilton” of that matrimonial relationship. To a great extent, the issues raised by the text in general, and this passage in particular, prefigure Judith Butler’s seminal argument that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results”.<sup>59</sup> Unlike Butler, however, Fielding is as much fascinated as worried by the instability of gender roles, and he labours to find what shortcomings he can in Hamilton’s performed identity.

After this failed first marriage Hamilton flees to England and establishes herself in Totnes as “a doctor of physic” (*Female Husband*, 374). There she has her second marriage, which features another minor but highly revealing transgression. Making an “easy conquest” of a young girl, Hamilton convinces her to elope to a neighbouring town, where they marry. As I mentioned in the Introduction, an official marriage in Fielding’s time was one that included a proclamation of banns or the purchasing of an official licence, and a ceremony performed by an ordained priest, during canonical hours. The narrator painstakingly remarks that the couple escaped to get married “very early in the morning” and that they used a “regular Licence which the doctor had previously obtained” (*Female Husband*, 374). Fielding’s insistence on the regularity of this wedding is intriguing in the context of the misbehaviours he is presenting. Implicit in this brief passage is a warning for

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<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25. The discussion that has ensued Butler’s problematization of crucial constructs in feminist and gender studies may have influenced the more positive recent reassessments of Fielding’s *Female Husband* referenced at the beginning of this chapter.

youngsters and parents about the dangers of marrying in secret, away from the community, even when observing other regular measures such as the licence and the proper hours. As we saw in previous chapters, Fielding voiced similar concerns in *The Coffee-House Politician*, in which he illustrated the risks of an elopement, and in *Joseph Andrews*, where Parson Adams's insistence that Fanny and Joseph should not to be married through a licence but by banns results in a financially beneficial clarification of identities. By highlighting the importance of parental involvement for the preservation of social order, Fielding clearly presents marriage as an institution that is central to a stable and prosperous community.

The female husband and her second wife live happily "above a fortnight", until the wife discovers the deception while Hamilton is asleep (*Female Husband*, 375). After failed attempts to convince his wife to accept a marriage that would have "all the pleasures [...] without the inconveniences", Hamilton is forced to hasten her way to Wells, in Somersetshire, where she is to have her third and final adventure (*Female Husband*, 375). Before attending to her last marriage, however, it is worth pausing for a moment to note that Hamilton's impersonation of a medical doctor is not treated as a crime in Fielding's novel. Unlike her gradual transformation from naïve prey, to failed suitor, to attractive lover, and, ultimately to (an almost) successful husband, the adoption of her medical profession is presented as automatic. By normalizing this aspect of Hamilton's imposture, Fielding suggests that pretending to be a doctor is perhaps neither as hard nor as criminal as pretending to be a husband. This drew on popular eighteenth-century preconceptions against the medical profession. In Fielding's time, doctors not

only had a reputation of inefficiency, but also of sexual laxness and lechery, since they had contact with people's (especially women's) bodies, and often recommended sexual pleasure as a cure for certain maladies.<sup>60</sup> Doctors who used their profession as a cloak for lasciviousness, moreover, was a theatrical commonplace, to which I return later in this chapter.

Let us now come back to Hamilton's romantic adventures, the last of which is permeated by a number of intriguing ambiguities. The narrator reports that, after escaping from Totnes, Mary Hamilton

became acquainted with one Mary Price, a girl of about eighteen years of age, and of extraordinary beauty. With this girl, hath this wicked woman since her confinement declared, she was as much in love, as it was possible for a man ever to be with one of her own sex (*Female Husband*, 375-76).

This is the first relationship explicitly depicted as based on love on the side of Hamilton, which is later reciprocated to the same degree by her female partner. But, as speaking of love between women is problematic for Fielding—and for the censorious audience for whom he writes—he cleverly exonerates himself from judging her feelings as such. First, it is not the narrator but Hamilton who speaks of that sentiment. Second, Fielding takes care to call her “the wicked woman” in that sentence, although in previous sections he had referred to her as “our adventurer,” “the doctor,” “Mrs. *Hamilton*,” or even more sympathetically, “our poor bridegroom”.

The relationship between Mary Price and Mary Hamilton is also depicted as uneven in terms of class. Hamilton uses her social ascendancy as “doctor” to court Mary, whose dreadful spelling in a letter she sends to her

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<sup>60</sup> On the bad reputation of the medical profession in the eighteenth century see Roy Porter “A touch of danger: the man-midwife as sexual predator”, in *Sexual Worlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. Rousseau and Porter, especially 206-208.

female lover indicates a near illiteracy, associated with the poorer classes.<sup>61</sup> At one level, these elements are aimed at exposing the marriage between them as inadequate, and to suggest that Hamilton takes advantage of the girl. Yet, Fielding constantly betrays ambivalence toward his disapproval of the affair. It is to be recalled, for instance, that Fanny, the virtuous and good-natured heroine of *Joseph Andrews*, “could neither write nor read” (*Joseph Andrews*, I, xi, 49), which does not affect the sincerity of her passion for Joseph nor his esteem for her. Moreover, we are informed that Hamilton receives the girl’s letter “with all the ecstasies any lover could be inspired with, and, as Mr. Congreve says in his *Old Batchelor*, Thought there was more eloquence in the false spellings, with which it abounded, than in all Aristotle” (*Female Husband*, 377). This would seem to suggest that Hamilton is genuinely infatuated with Mary and not simply preying on her naivety. However, through the slightly misquoted line,<sup>62</sup> Fielding also establishes a link between Hamilton and Congreve’s paradigmatic rake Bellmour, a sexual

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<sup>61</sup> On the relation of literacy, class, and sex see John Brewer, “Readers and the Reading Public”, in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), 167-97; and J. Paul Hunter, “Reader’s Reading”, in *Before Novels* (New York: Norton, 1990), 61-88.

<sup>62</sup> In Congreve’s *The Old Batchelor* (1693) Bellmour claims he has “a Hawks Eye at a Woman’s hand—There’s more Elegancy in the false Spellings [...] than in all Cicero” (I, i, 29-31). William Congreve, *The Works of William Congreve*, ed. D.F. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Vol. I, 17. Fielding was presumably well acquainted with Congreve’s first comedy. It was performed 61 times between 1728 and 1737, the years when Fielding was active as a playwright, and six times in the 1745-46 season, when he wrote *The Female Husband*. See Scouten, ed. *The London Stage*, Part 3, 7-641 and 1182-1266. Furthermore, *The Old Batchelor* had been given four times with afterpieces by Fielding between 1732 and 1733. On 7 January 1732 it was presented with Fielding’s *The Lottery*. On 3 October 1732, 27 April 1733, and 25 October 1733, it was followed by *The Mock Doctor*, Fielding’s adaptation of a piece by Molière. Ibid., 181, 235, 293 and 330. While Aristotle appears to have been one Fielding’s favourite classical scholars—to whom he alluded frequently in other works—it is also possible that in changing the original “Cicero” to “Aristotle” in this line Fielding could be invoking *Aristotle’s Master-piece: or, the Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Parts Thereof* (1684), which according to Tim Hitchcock was “the most common sexual manual of the eighteenth century”. *English Sexualities*, 49.

predator in a comedy of reputed lewdness.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the allusion to the play hints at the possibility that Hamilton's behaviour may not be the product of real feelings, but merely the appropriation of a literary model, or a theatrical role. The passage, like the rest of the story, is fraught with contradiction and multiple-layered meanings.

In terms of structure and motifs, this is the episode that most evidently follows the conventions of a courtship plot: Hamilton becomes enamoured with a beautiful girl; the lovers go to a dance; they exchange letters; the girl "behaves with great coldness towards him" but when no one is present "kisses [Hamilton's letter] eagerly" (*Female Husband*, 376); Hamilton pays the girl a visit at home; the lovers become engaged. Being the one most closely inserted in the context of romance and affection, this is the relationship that Fielding explores at greater length. It is also the one that presents the greatest threat to Fielding's conservative side. As Hamilton and Mary's marriage ostensibly stems from love, "the only Foundation of matrimonial Felicity" (*Tom Jones* XVII, iii, 886), it anticipates the type of union that the writer presented as ideal in *Tom Jones*, a novel he was writing

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<sup>63</sup> As suggested above, Congreve's first play was a popular piece in the theatrical repertoire in Fielding's time. But it was also one singled out for sexual immorality throughout the century. McKenzie, for example, notes that from the very beginning influential critics such as George Meriton and Jeremy Collier had attacked *The Old Batchelor* on account of its coarse language, causing Congreve to suppress and change several words and expressions for the revised edition of his works in 1710. *The Works of William Congreve*, ed. McKenzie xxvi-xxxiii. Examining a Drury Lane promptbook for this play, Leo Hughes and A.H. Scouten found that "Congreve's naughtiest comedy" was heavily edited for performance during the first half of the century, until it ceased to be presented around 1760. It was revived in 1776, but the amount of insertions and annotations from that time suggests a desperation that has led these scholars to conclude that "*The Old Batchelor* had long since failed to command a wide audience in a steadily 'improving' century". Leo Hughes and A.H. Scouten, "Congreve at Drury Lane: Two Eighteenth-Century Promptbooks", *Modern Philology* 79.2 (1981): 152.



at the time.<sup>64</sup> However, as matrimony was also an “Institution” that Allworthy “esteemed [...] to be of the most sacred Kind”, for which “he thought every preparatory Caution necessary to preserve it holy and inviolate” (*Tom Jones*, XVI, vi, 859), Fielding finds it deeply troublesome to sanction a marriage so far removed from his Christian codes of morality.

Not surprisingly, Fielding directs his severest criticism toward Hamilton on the one hand, and toward the bride’s family and the community that allows their marriage to be consummated, on the other. Price’s mother is strangely absent for most of the wooing process. Her older sister is portrayed as envious and disobliging, making sneering comments about the effeminacy of Hamilton, but failing to raise a serious alert (*Female Husband*, 377). And finally, an accident happening just before the wedding makes it clear that the community is equally unhelpful. In a public dance, where Mary Price’s mother is also present, a scuffle between Hamilton and a man causes “all her breast [to be] discovered”, which the narrator describes as beautiful and feminine (*Female Husband*, 378). By underlying the fact that this event does not produce “absolute suspicion” but merely “caused some whispers” (*Female Husband*, 378), Fielding draws attention to the degree of responsibility that this community have in the deception. He clearly depicts them as useless for the prevention of illicit practices, as he will later show them to be extremely eager to punish the couple when the discovery finally occurs.

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<sup>64</sup> According to the Battestins, the composition of this text was one of the “two literary projects that interrupted Fielding’s progress on his masterpiece [*Tom Jones*]” in the winter of 1746-47. Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 409-11.

The negative characterization of the community persists during the three months of Hamilton and Price's marriage, which is described as an unusually happy one of "increased [...] fondness" for one another (*Female Husband*, 378). Incredulous, "the other young married women of the town" laugh at Mary for the stories she tells of her marriage, presumably about her sexual life but also perhaps about their growing affection (*Female Husband*, 378). The deception is at last discovered when Hamilton, on a professional trip to Glastonbury, is recognized by an old acquaintance. When gossip spreads, the unhelpful family and community turn vicious, verbally and physically attacking Hamilton on the street, until she is apprehended and taken before a magistrate. As female homosexuality was not classified as a criminal offence in English law at the time<sup>65</sup>—very likely because, as Castle has argued, throughout history "the law has traditionally ignored female homosexuality, not out of indifference, [...] but of morbid paranoia"<sup>66</sup>—the magistrate consults a lawyer on the manner of proceeding. "Mr. *Gold*, an eminent and learned counsellor at law"<sup>67</sup> advises them to prosecute Hamilton "on a clause in the vagrant act, *for having by false and deceitful practices endeavoured to impose upon some of his Majesty's subjects*" (*Female Husband*,

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<sup>65</sup> The laws of sodomy, by which homosexual men were persecuted and tried, did not apply to women. See Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, 232-42; Netta Murray Goldsmith, *The Worst of Crimes: Homosexuality and the Law in Eighteenth-Century London* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), especially 34-75; and George E. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 55-58. Lesbianism was occasionally condemned in pamphlets such as the anonymous *Satan's Harvest Home* (1749), which in "The Game of Flatts" presented an allegedly rare case of women who fell in love with other women. The story was accompanied by the sanitizing claim that such behaviour only happened among the Turks. *Satan's Harvest Home; or the Present State of Whorecraft, Adultery, Procuring, Pimping, Sodomy and The Game at Flatts* (London, 1749) 60-61.

<sup>66</sup> Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> In actual life it was Fielding's cousin, Henry Gould, who gave advice on the matter. See the transcription of Thomas Hughes' letter to Henry Gould, 9 October 1743, in *Female Husband*, 384.

380). In the process leading to the conviction and punishment of his heroine, Fielding the barrister ostensible sides with the law.

It is tempting, however, to read a degree of irony in Fielding's endorsement of this particular legal process. Although by 1746 he was a respectable lawyer—who less than two years afterwards was appointed as Magistrate of Westminster—this anonymous piece of sensationalist fiction could have very well provided Fielding with an opportunity to introduce an ironic comment on the protean nature of the vagrancy laws, which the government had used to intimidate actors and playwrights when he was actively involved in the theatre.<sup>68</sup> In 1730 and 1731 Fielding witnessed this type of harassment first hand, as actors of the company at the Little Haymarket theatre—where he had just produced *The Author's Farce, Tom Thumb* and *The Welsh Opera*—were impeached under a clause of the Vagrant Act of 1714.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, as Vincent Liesenfeld observes, the original plan for the Licensing Act of 1737 itself was hinged on the vagrancy laws, extending the definition of vagrancy “to apply to managers, prompter, and anyone else who might have a hand in dramatic performances” that were not licensed by the Lord Chamberlain.<sup>70</sup> It is not unlikely then, that Fielding had a latent aversion and distrust for a law that a decade earlier had left him without an income, and had forced him to turn his career around.

The most conspicuous target in this final episode of *The Female Husband* is the brutal conduct of the irrational element of society epitomized

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<sup>68</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the vagrancy laws as antecedents to the Licensing Act of 1737 see Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 17-19, and 21.

<sup>70</sup> Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act*, 128.

in “the mob”. No longer a bridegroom, but soon to become a Bridewell inmate, Hamilton is insulted by the crowd and, what in the eyes of the narrator is even “more unjustifiable,” the “the poor innocent wife” is cruelly mocked (*Female Husband*, 380). It is worth noting that Fielding’s contempt for the mob goes beyond classism, since, as he later explained in *Tom Jones*, this category included “Persons without Virtue, or Sense, in all Stations, and many of the highest Rank are often meant by it” (*Tom Jones*, I, ix, 59). While Fielding certainly does not justify the transgressive behaviour of the female husband, he aims to expose the hypocrisy of those who are passive accomplices in the deception (unable or unwilling to see the obvious) and then zealously react against the offenders. This echoes an argument he had voiced more plainly in *Jonathan Wild*, where he claimed that deceivers—in that case corrupt politicians—were able to impose upon others only because the people, like theatrical audiences and readers of romances, “though they know the whole to be an entire Fiction, nevertheless agree to be deceived; and as these find Amusement, so do the others find Ease and Convenience in this Concurrence” (*Jonathan Wild*, III, xi, 125). If deception can only occur when someone is willing to permit it, perhaps deceivers are only half to blame.

#### **4. Shifting genders, eschewing genres**

As I mentioned in the Introduction, marriage plots usually either focus on the process of courtship stopping at the threshold of matrimony, or deal with moments of crisis in the marriage state, which are ultimately solved. *The Female Husband*, however, moves between the conventions of criminal

biography and marriage plot without settling for either. It evidently features marriage as a central theme. However, while it narrates several processes of courtship, it does not end in happy nuptials. And, although moments of marital discord are depicted—as when Hamilton quarrels with her wives upon discovery of the deception—the story does not end in reconciliation. As a criminal biography it is also deficient, for its conclusion is neither death nor sincere Christian repentance.<sup>71</sup> Even when the heroine receives physical punishment, Fielding clearly underscores her lack of reformation. We last see her with her flesh flayed after a severely inflicted first whipping, cheekily trying to bribe the gaoler to bring her “a young girl to satisfy her most monstrous and unnatural desires” (*Female Husband*, 380). The ending of Fielding’s piece is also different from Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), a novel that is likewise underpinned by the conventions of rogue lives and marriage plots, but which closes with an appropriate ending for both genres. In Defoe’s novel the protagonist receives legal punishment (she is transported to the American colonies); her imprisonment and the threat of death induce a spiritual revelation that leads her to repent from her crimes; she is reunited with her son; and finally she enjoys a happy (and wealthy) married life with her Lancashire husband, the one she loved the most.

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<sup>71</sup> The offenders in criminal biographies were usually portrayed as repentant after conviction. A typical example can be found in “The Life of Richard Oakey, &c”, whose end assures the readers that “after Condemnation his Behaviour was such as became his Condition; getting up often in the Night to pray, manifesting all the Signs of a sincere Repentance”. *The Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals*, Vol. I, 224. Even when, once in a while, in the Ordinary’s *Accounts* malefactors were portrayed as rebellious and unrepentant, readers were given the reassurance that, because they were dead, they were no longer a threat to society and that their judgement and further punishment were already in the hands of God. See Linebaugh, “The Ordinary of Newgate and his *Account*”, in *Crime in England*, ed. Cockburn, 252. This was also true of other criminal biographies that narrated the lives and crimes of felons long convicted and dead.

Fielding's *The Female Husband*, by contrast, explicitly rejects both generic identification and closure, and in so doing it flaunts its novelty.

Hamilton's manifest lack of repentance invites various (and at times competing) interpretations. From a Christian perspective it implies that the transgressive heroine is beyond redemption, for contrition is an essential requisite for absolution. This reading is reinforced by the moralising remarks of the narrator, who in the penultimate paragraph reassures readers that crimes such as Hamilton's, if undetected in this world, "will certainly meet with their full punishment in the next" (*Female Husband*, 381). From a juridical perspective, her recurrence to "vice" after a first whipping, which leaves her "lovely skin scarified with rods" (*Female Husband*, 381), suggests that this sort of physical punishment is essentially inefficient.

On the other hand, Hamilton's persistence in her ways after having been detected and punished is in keeping with Fielding's disapproval of last-minute transformations of character. As he argued in *Tom Jones*

Our modern Authors of Comedy have fallen almost universally into the Error here hinted at: Their Heroes generally are notorious Rogues, and their Heroines abandoned Jades, during the first four Acts; but in the fifth, the former become very worthy Gentlemen, and the latter Women of Virtue and Discretion: Nor is the Writer often so kind as to give himself the least Trouble, to reconcile or account for this monstrous Change and Incongruity. There is, indeed, no other Reason to be assigned for it, than because the Play is drawing to a Conclusion; as if it was no less natural in a Rogue to repent in the last Act of a Play, than in the last of his Life (*Tom Jones*, VIII, i, 406).

This suggests another, more positive reading of Hamilton's lack of reformation: her lack of hypocrisy. As Patrick Reilly points out, in a slightly different context, for Fielding "it is better to be a sinner than a hypocrite; only

the hypocrite, the Pharisee, stands obdurately outside the pull of salvation".<sup>72</sup> For the author, as for his audience, Hamilton is, no doubt, a sinner, but since her masculine identity has been so carefully and gradually constructed, it would be implausible for the narrator and hypocritical for the character to have a last minute repentance. In Fielding's view, hypocrisy is a characteristic shared by the Methodist who corrupts and abandons Hamilton, the first widow who marries after having sworn against marriage, and the community who turns a blind eye toward Hamilton's deception and later enjoys her suffering, but it is not among the protagonist's failings. This carries over to yet another implication of *The Female Husband's* ending as a critique of, and disassociation from Methodist conversion narratives, which often celebrated the spiritual reformation of formerly sinful characters and were becoming particularly popular around that time.<sup>73</sup> The anti-Methodist Fielding suspected and objected to both their theological content and their form, and left this clear in his salacious novel.

### **5. Theatrical roots: cross-dressing, castrati, and the wherewithal**

Fielding's interest in the cross-dressing adventures of Mary Hamilton also looks back on the author's first literary passion in significant ways. Some have remarked the parallels between his account of a female transvestite and the real-life of Charlotte Charke, the scandalous youngest daughter of Colley

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<sup>72</sup> Analysing Fielding's apparently incongruent tolerance toward the rebellious behaviour of the protagonist in *Tom Jones*, Patrick Reilly argues that Allworthy, the moral judge inside the story, finally forgives Tom because he has remained innocent of hypocrisy. Reilly presents a persuasive case about Fielding's reworking of the biblical parable of Jesus and the Pharisees in *Tom Jones*. Patrick Reilly, *Adventure and Providence* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 27.

<sup>73</sup> On the proliferation of conversion narratives between the mid-1730s and the mid-1780s see Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Cibber, who became famous for her cross-dressing roles on stage before the Licensing Act, and notorious afterwards for dressing as a man outside the playhouse, travelling throughout the country as a strolling actress, and living with one “Mrs Brown” under the name of “Charles Brown”.<sup>74</sup> Charke became friends with and worked alongside Fielding at the Little Haymarket Theatre in the mid-1730s. In Fielding’s *Pasquin* (1736) she played Lord Place, imitating some of her father’s affectations and postures, which gained her popular applause at the expense of quarrelling with her family and losing her inheritance. She was also “Mr. Hen”, a satirical portrayal of the auctioneer Christopher Cock, in Fielding’s *Historical Register* (1737).<sup>75</sup> Almost a decade after Fielding’s *The Female Husband*, between 1755 and 1757, Charke published her autobiographical *Narrative*, which was to a great extent modelled on her father’s *Apology* (1741).<sup>76</sup>

As we saw in Chapter One, Fielding was fascinated by and played with the comic possibilities of cross-dressing in plays such as *Tom Thumb* (1730), in which the part of the tiny hero—who arouses the passions of all the women in court—was performed by a child actress. Fielding’s interest in the inversion of gender roles and the performativity of gender dovetailed neatly

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<sup>74</sup> For instance Friedli, “Passing Women”, in *Sexual Underworlds*, ed. G.S Rousseau and Roy Porter, 239-42; Straub, “The Guilty Pleasures”, in *Introducing Charlotte Charke*, ed. Baruth, 124-26; Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly House*, 239-43; and Campbell, *Natural Masques*, 56.

<sup>75</sup> On Charlotte Charke’s life see Phillip E. Baruth, “Who is Charlotte Charke?”, in *Introducing Charlotte Charke*, ed. Baruth, 17-33.

<sup>76</sup> The full title of her memoirs was *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke (Youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.) [...] Written by Herself*. There, Charke wrote about the several years she lived with Mrs Brown as Mr Charles Brown. In her memoirs, however, unlike Fielding’s *Female Husband*, there is no hint of a sexual relationship between the women. This led critics like Sallie Minter Strange to argue vehemently that Charke could not have been a lesbian. “Charlotte Charke: Transvestite or Conjuror”, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 15 (1976): 554-59. Strange’s argument is persuasively refuted by more recent critics like Lynne Friedli (“Passing Women”, 239-42) and Kristina Straub (“The Guilty Pleasures”, 124-26), who contend that Charke had to downplay the erotic elements of her life to avoid censure.



with Charke's penchant for cross-dressing. This is something Campbell explores at length in her study of gender and identity in Fielding's works, in which she aptly points out the playwright's ambiguities in capitalizing from the mutability and instability of gender roles, while presenting their inversion as testimony of the decadence of contemporary society.<sup>77</sup> According to Campbell, the fact that Charke later dressed and worked as a man outside the theatre as well presented Fielding with "the difficulty of framing impersonation within a giving theatre", a conflict that carried over to his fictional account of *The Female Husband*.<sup>78</sup> Although it is difficult to determine whether Fielding actually knew about Charke's off-stage cross dressing and her cohabitation with another woman—as she led an itinerant life after the Licensing Act and her *Narrative* was published after Fielding's death—it is indeed possible that his earlier acquaintance with the actress resonated in his mind when writing his own story of a female impersonator. This might also account for Fielding's sympathetic treatment of Hamilton as a character, in spite of his ostensible censure of her "crime".

Yet, even if he did not know of Charke's adventures in full, the tension between impersonated and real identity—which he investigated and exploited as a dramatist—permeates *The Female Husband* in important ways. As we have seen in this chapter, throughout the different episodes of the novel Fielding explored the various scenarios in which, by means of impersonation, a woman may substitute for a man with various degrees of success. Ultimately he conceded the possibility that men could be supplanted

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<sup>77</sup> Campbell, *Natural Masques*, especially Chapter One, "When Men Women Turn".

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

in the field of sexual achievement, especially when focused exclusively on the phallus, which, as he showed, could be artificially substituted. Also, as hinted at in the last of Hamilton's conquests, Fielding was, albeit reluctantly, willing to accept that a male impersonator could elicit and feel love for another woman. It was in the role of husband, however, with its social and religious implications as administrator of property and money, moral head of the household, and procreator, that Fielding found a locus wherein to assert more forcibly that men should not, and could not, be fully replaced.

Apart from the writer's evident interest on the implications of cross-dressing and the resonance of Charlotte Charke's real life in the story of Mary Hamilton, *The Female Husband* is also highly reminiscent of other favourite themes and techniques of Fielding as a playwright. In expanding a recent piece of news into a fascinating novel dealing with uncontrolled desire, deception, crime and punishment, Fielding returned to that technique which has been accurately labelled as "dramatic journalism".<sup>79</sup> As in *The Letter Writers* (1731), where popular rumours about threatening letters became the playwright's departing point for a hilarious afterpiece; or in *The Register to the Year 1736* (1737), in which he presented a satirical summary of the events of the previous year; the few facts Fielding knew of Mary Hamilton's case were transformed into a comic, erotic and, by the end, tragic story about courtship and marital conflict.

Also, as we saw in the previous chapter, the merging of crime and love plot had a crucial theatrical antecedent in John Gay's enduringly popular *The*

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Woods, introduction to *The Author's Farce*, by Henry Fielding (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), xiv. Also, Lockwood, *Plays* I, 192; and *Plays* III, x.

*Beggar's Opera* (1728), which also dealt with social transgression, deceit, and polygamy. In *Jonathan Wild* Fielding expanded the matrimonial theme introduced in Gay's play and addressed it more earnestly than it had been presented in criminal biographies of the historical Wild. In *The Female Husband*, by conflating Hamilton's criminal profession with her matrimonial adventures, Fielding delved even deeper into the implications of flawed marital practices, producing a text that drew from the conventions of rogue lives and theatrical cross-dressing, but ultimately renounced to the script of criminal biography and did not comply with the tacit rule of comedies ending in marriage.

Moreover, by using Hamilton's almost automatic impersonation of a medical doctor as a strategy for approaching women (which, as we saw earlier, drew on the usual preconceptions of his time about doctors) Fielding was also appealing to a theatrical convention of having physicians (real and bogus) attempt to seduce their (female) patients. Fielding himself resorted to such stock characters in his own plays, the most evident example being Gregory from *The Mock Doctor* (1732), a jealous husband who, disguised as a medical man, tries the fidelity of his wife by soliciting her sexual favours in exchange for his fee. The wife, immediately seeing through the ruse, rejects his advances retorting—Pamela like: “Do you dare affront my Virtue, you Villain! D'you think the World should bribe me to part with my Virtue, my dear Virtue?”, after which protestation she snatches the money from him, concluding—Shamela like: “The Gold I'll keep, as an eternal Monument of my Virtue” (*Plays* II, XIII, 452). Significantly, although Fielding's play was an adaptation from Molière's *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1666), this scene of

attempted seduction between the mock doctor and his wife did not appear in the original.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps the strongest connection between *The Female Husband* and Fielding's theatre is with *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*, the last of his successes as a playwright and theatre manager. The play, which follows a rehearsal structure with an onstage author presenting his material before a critic and a Lord, opens its second act with four aristocratic women speaking about the opera. Their conversation revolves around their admiration for Farinelli, and the titillation he provokes in his audience. Unlike the Irish widow who first rejects Hamilton on account of her resemblance to a castrato, one of the enraptured ladies in the play claims "He's everything in the World one could wish", an observation another lady quickly amends to "Almost everything in the World one could wish" (*Plays* III, II, i, 423). Playing with the idea that the enormous wealth of these singers was perhaps a powerful cause behind their desirability as husbands,<sup>81</sup> while simultaneously invoking contemporary controversies about their sexual capacity,<sup>82</sup> Fielding attempted to devalue the appeal of the castrati as mercenary and absurd.

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<sup>80</sup> For the changes between Molière's original and Fielding's version of the play see Lockwood, *Plays* II, 409-411.

<sup>81</sup> The enormous income the famous castrati obtained from rich patrons was a stock criticism at the time. A good example can be found in Hogarth's *Masquerades and Operas* (1724), (fig. 7), which features a nobleman pouring 8,000 pounds in gold at the feet of an opera singer. Farinelli was one of the wealthiest and most famous of the castrati. According to Joseph King, during the time he spent singing for the aristocratic opera in London between 1734 and 1737, he earned "as much as 1500 guineas per season, with gifts from patrons his income could have been 5000 pounds a year". King, "The Castrato's Castration", 565.

<sup>82</sup> The castrati's capability for sexual performance was, and still remains, a matter of speculation. A thorough survey of early modern and eighteenth-century sources, modern medical literature and parallelisms with experiments on other mammals, leads Freitas Freitas to conclude that it is still difficult to assert whether the castrati were capable of sexual intercourse or not. Eighteenth-century accounts are unhelpful as they often conflate sexual urge, potency and fertility. Evidently, the castrati were infertile, but whether they retained sexual function remains, as it was then, a controversial matter. See Freitas Freitas, "The Eroticism of Emasculation", 226-28.

Next, he problematized the debate about the sexual and reproductive capacity of the castrati even further, having the women discuss a rumour about Farinelli's children, "all in Wax", which they eagerly want to possess in great numbers, or as one of them puts it, "as many as I can cram into a Coach with me" (*Plays* III, III, i, 423). Due to lack of evidence for considering these waxen children as miniature dolls of the singer, Lockwood concluded that "the not so hidden suggestion is that these are dildos, figuratively if not literally".<sup>83</sup> As in *The Female Husband* the dildos here become a potential substitution for husbands, for the last lady to speak in the scene remarks "If my Husband was to make any Objection to my having'em, I'd run away from him, and take the dear Babies with me" (*Plays* III, II, i, 424). In the play, as in the novel, Fielding voiced a concern about the possibility that persons of incomplete masculinity (such as the castrato or the female husband) could effectively substitute men in a key social role. In *The Historical Register* he endeavoured to solve the problem by claiming that Farinelli's waxen babies—cleverly made to stand simultaneously for an instrument of sexual

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A good summary of eighteenth-century debates about the nature of castrati, conjectures about their sexual performance, and disquisitions about their legal, social and canonical standing can be found in Charles Ancillon, *Italian Love: Or, Eunuchism Displayed. Describing all the Different Kinds of Eunuchs; Shewing the Esteem They Had Met with in the World, and How They Came to be Made so. Wherein Principally is Examined, Whether They are capable of Marriage, and if They Ought to be Suffered to Enter into that Holy State. The Whole Confirmed by the Authority of Civil, Canon, and Common Law, and Illustrated with many Remarkable Cases by way of Precedent*, trans. Robert Samber (London: E. Curll, 1740).

<sup>83</sup> Lockwood, *Plays* III, 423. Speaking of dildos as Italian products brought to England for the frantic delight of English women was not new. "Seigneur Dildoe", an anonymous poem frequently attributed to John Wilmot, Lord Rochester, for instance, satirized the court of James II by having all the ladies in Whitehall palace desperately seek "a noble Italian call'd Seigneur Dildoe" to satisfy their sexual needs. *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 248-57, explanatory notes 475-76. Closer to Fielding's time, an anonymous bawdy poem entitled *Monsieur Thing's Origin* (1722) again attributes their source to Italy, and credits the French with their transportation to Britain. In the poem the dildo travels all around London and is finally exhausted after having been used by women from all ranks. There is no hint, however, of any relationship between castrati and dildos. *Monsieur Thing's Origin: or Seignior D\_\_\_\_o's Adventures in Britain* (London: R. Tomson, 1722).

gratification and for children—can be sold and purchased in mass. Taking the absurdity of discussing the children of a castrato to hyperbolic proportions Fielding drew attention to the inadequacy of thinking about these men as husbands, since the sexual pleasure they could provide, as well as their sole possibility of reproduction, was artificial and market-bound.

The story of Mary Hamilton, however, as we have seen throughout this chapter, posed more troubling questions for the writer and presented him with the opportunity of exploring them at greater length. Fielding's anonymous publication of the account suggests a fear of criticism derived from an awareness of his ambivalent treatment of a potentially disturbing subject. As a playwright who had been driven away from the theatre by censorship, he must have been aware of the absolute unstageability of the situations depicted in *The Female Husband*. This greater freedom, as I have suggested in chapter two, was one of the advantages that prose fiction presented for him. Even more than in *Shamela*, in *The Female Husband* Fielding exploited the possibilities of the novel form to explore his lewder sides.

### **6. Hamilton as Caeneus; or Fielding's modern metamorphosis**

By way of conclusion I want to examine briefly a paratext that has important repercussions for the romantic adventures of Mary Hamilton. As epigraph for *The Female Husband*, Fielding chooses a passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which in John Dryden's English translation reads:

But what did most his Martial Deeds adorn,  
(Though since he changed his Sex) a Woman born.  
A Novelty so strange, and full of Fate,

His listening Audience ask'd him to relate.<sup>84</sup>

The passage is part of the story of Caeneus, a great hero “whose Body not a thousand Swords could bore” and who, significantly, had originally been born a Nymph. Nestor narrates to his enthralled listeners how Ocean, infatuated with the Nymph’s beauty, ravishes her, and later grants her the wish of becoming a man, so she can no longer be sexually abused. With her metamorphosis comes an asset she did not intend: immunity in war.

Although it was customary for authors to adorn their pieces with ancient Greek and Latin epigrams to display gentlemanly erudition, as Addison and Steele did in their influential periodicals, the choice of that particular passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is evidently used to complicate the operations of transexuality in the novel. In resorting to a classical authority as antecedent, Fielding clearly attempts to provide a justification both for Mary Hamilton’s generic transformation and for his own interest in what was surely perceived as utterly impolite subject matter.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, by comparing his potential readers with Nestor’s attentive audience, Fielding obliquely relates himself to the Argonaut and showcases his story-telling ability. Moreover, by setting Hamilton’s adventures against

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<sup>84</sup> Ovid, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses in fifteen books. Translated by the most eminent hands. Adorn’d with sculptures* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1717), XII, 415. The twelfth book is translated by John Dryden. This translation was popular in Fielding’s time, and it was reissued four times between 1717 and 1734.

<sup>85</sup> As David Robinson points out, European writers have reworked the stories of sexual transgression in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* throughout the centuries, in order to explore and toy with possibilities of gender fluidity, and particularly to address concerns with male and female homosexuality, sex-change, and cross-dressing. As in Fielding’s *The Female Husband*, Ovid’s tales and later adaptations convey ambiguous and often contradictory attitudes toward the topics they present, sometimes subverting, sometimes reaffirming patriarchal conventions. For an illuminating reading of Caenis/Caeneus, alongside the myths of Iphis and Ianthe, Narcissus and Echo, Hermaphroditus, Orpheus, and Tiresias, as well as three early modern theatrical adaptations of the story of Iphis and Ianthe, see David M. Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature: Classical, Early Modern, Eighteenth-Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 163-251, especially 169-87.

Caeneus's "Martial Deeds", he insinuates an intriguing relationship between powerful ancient heroes and modern husbands, which is complicated by the fact that in his story the husband is not a man. As was characteristic of the eighteenth-century conflict between modernity and antiquity with which the novel as a genre engaged so forcefully, Fielding's juxtaposition of a classical allusion and a recent anecdote is at once ironic and deferential to the ancients. Hamilton's "Martial deeds" in the story are nothing more than sexual accomplishments, attained by means of an artificial (and unspeakable) device.<sup>86</sup> Yet, as we have seen throughout this chapter, Fielding's attitude toward Hamilton's adventures is often good-humoured and sympathetic, which grants the protagonist a certain degree of heroism not intended as mockery. After all, Mary Hamilton's transformation from innocent beauty to male impersonator and would-be husband is, like that of Caeneus, a compensatory gift after an abusive seduction.

There is a fascinating ambiguity to this novel, where, once again, an unusual marriage plot is Fielding's choice for examining concerns that are fundamental to his literary career. Among the few certainties readers are offered is that good husbands, who not only provide sensual pleasure, but who are also affective companions, procreators and, implicitly, moral guides, could not be so easily replaced. *The Female Husband* shows that Fielding's perception of marriage as an essential component for social and moral

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<sup>86</sup> It is also tempting to read Hamilton's "marital deeds" as a playful anagram on Caeneus' "martial deeds". This interpretation, however, is contingent upon the speculative matter of whether Fielding knew (and indeed agreed with) Dryden's translation or not. Unfortunately there is no evidence about the edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Fielding owned or may have used. See Frederick G. Ribble and Anne G. Ribble, *Fielding's Library: An Annotated Catalogue* (Charlottesville: The Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1996), xvi-xvii.



stability can be found even in his most obscure, prurient, and seemingly unimportant texts.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to point out some of the crucial ways in which marriage as a subject and the marriage plot as a structure shaped the plays and early novels of Henry Fielding. The first section complicated assessments of Fielding's plays as either continuations of the sentimental mode of stage comedy, championed by Richard Steele and Colley Cibber in the early eighteenth century, or as negative reactions against such comedies in the so-called Scriblerian tradition of Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and John Gay. As I have shown, there is an intriguing tension in Fielding's recourse to happy marriage as the recurrent finale for his regular comedies, and his mockery of this convention in his parodic and more experimental pieces. Fielding's alternating ridicule, implementation, and amendment of the standard marriage plot of his time suggests that while he sought to tap into the moral and aesthetic potential of offering marriage both as a reward for merit and as the logical diegetic closure, he believed that sentimental plays perverted moral values by promoting a connection between love and money (even when they seemed to endorse disinterested love), and hindered literary achievement by persistently employing conventional formulae implausibly and unimaginatively. My reading of his dramatic pieces suggests that Fielding aimed to make use of the marriage ending in a way that was skilfully crafted and morally edifying, as well as entertaining, innovative, and topical. I argue that this was something he continued to pursue in the next phase of his career.

In the four chapters dedicated to Fielding's early novels, I have investigated the ways in which he adapted the most recurrent storyline of the

comic theatre of his time to his prose fictions, after the Licensing Act of 1737 put him temporarily out of business. Mapping out these generic interrelations I have suggested that in the conventions of stage comedies—chiefly the marriage plot and its related motifs—Fielding found an apposite foundation to developing his own version of novel writing. In *Shamela* he responded to what he regarded as the latest “Pleasures of the Town” (as he called them in *The Author’s Farce*), in the form of a parody that recycled some of his favourite plot and characterization devices from the plays. In *Joseph Andrews* he incorporated the courtship plot of the theatre into the novel—seizing the momentum that the genre had gained in the early 1740s—in an attempt to legitimize his new literary venture by drawing from the well-established traditions of drama and epic poetry. In *Jonathan Wild* he turned to a historic figure, the subject of many criminal biographies, to produce not another rogue life but a mock-history, which unlike other accounts of this character offered an alternative model for good behaviour. While he reproduced the tragic outcome of Wild’s real life, Fielding also chose to close his text with the accustomed ending of stage comedies: a hint of domestic bliss. In his anonymous *The Female Husband* he indulged his appetite for impropriety and marriage plots, producing a piece that contemplated, but ultimately rejected, a partnership that could have “all the pleasures of marriage without the inconveniences” (*Female Husband*, 375).

Although valuable reassessments of Fielding’s theatrical career have emerged in recent years, the continuities between his plays and his novels have not yet been explored in sufficient depth, and the significance of his dramatic career to the development of his influential model of novel writing

has not been analysed in detail. My investigation of Fielding's plays and early novels, contextualized by his recurrent recourse to the marriage plot, then, gestures toward an exciting new path in Fielding studies. The next step would be to pursue more integrative analyses of the plays and the novels, which will shed new light on even the best known and most extensively researched of his works. For instance, although some dramatic echoes in *Tom Jones* have been noted—especially in passages alluding explicitly to the theatre, as when Tom and Partridge attend a performance of *Hamlet* (*Tom Jones*, XVI, v)<sup>1</sup>—little attention has been paid to Fielding's characterization of his hero as a possible reworking of the reformed rakes of the comedies in the theatrical repertoire of his time. In this respect, it would be worth considering the ways in which Fielding might be engaging with Benjamin Hoadley's immensely popular *The Suspicious Husband* (premiered in 1747, when he was writing *Tom Jones*), which was the first definitive theatrical hit after the Licensing Act of 1737. Ranger, the celebrated philanderer played by Fielding's friend David Garrick, who is continuously remorseful about his mild debaucheries, made it clear that, compared to the libertine heroes of the past, by mid-century the rake was, in the words of Matthew Kinservik, "a pretty tame creature".<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, it could be argued that in *Amelia* (1751) Fielding is writing in response to Colley Cibber's enduringly popular *The Careless Husband* (1704), a play that continued to be part of the repertoire in the late 1740s

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<sup>1</sup> For instance John Allen Stevenson, "Fielding's Mousetrap: Hamlet, Partridge, and the '45", *SEL* 37.3 (1997): 553-71; and Manuel Schonhorn, "Heroic Allusion in *Tom Jones*: Hamlet and the Temptations of Jesus", *Studies in the Novel* 6.2 (1974): 218-27.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 124.

and was strongly praised in mid-century companions to the theatre for offering wives an acceptable model for coping with adultery. In the key scene of Cibber's comedy, *Lady Easy* signalled her awareness of her husband's infidelity by covering his naked head with her handkerchief, thereby activating his guilt (and subsequent reformation) while positioning herself on the moral high ground by avoiding direct confrontation. Because of this, *Lady Easy* was recommended as "the perfect Model of what a Wife should be" and it was said that no woman could witness her behaviour "without endeavouring at least to imitate the bright Example which brought about so happy a change" in the husband.<sup>3</sup> Fielding's last novel is also concerned with defining what an ideal wife ought to be, as well as with offering an alternative for dealing with infidelity. What it recommends, however, goes in direct opposition to Cibber's ideal. In *Amelia*, although the heroine learns about Booth's extramarital affair early on, she conceals this knowledge from her husband—so as to avoid increasing his self-reproach. The narrator likewise chooses not to disclose this information to the readers until the very end, so they can marvel at the moral fortitude of the heroine. Given Fielding's lifelong investment in dramatic issues, such inter-generic appraisals would certainly enrich our understanding of his work.

Also, as I have argued in the introduction, Fielding's sustained attention to the theme of marriage can prove to be an attractive constant in

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<sup>3</sup> *A Companion to the Theatre: or, the Usefulness of the Stage to Religion, Government, and the Conduct of Life* (London: printed for F. Cogan, 1736), 51 and 55. This assessment was reproduced in subsequent *Companions*, which were updated to reflect changes in popular taste and the current repertoire. For instance: *A Companion to the Theatre: or, A Key to the Play* (London: printed for F. Cogan, 1740), 51 and 55; *A Companion to the Theatre: or, A View of Our Most Celebrated Dramatic Pieces* (Dublin: printed by S. Powell for Sam Price, 1751), 37 and 40.

his oeuvre, suggesting a new pathway between the competing views that have often informed criticism of this author. In a recent article about the current state of Fielding studies, Robert D. Hume observes the critical divide that prevails in modern times: Fielding as “the risqué writer suggested by his early reputation, or [...] as moral as the Wesleyan editions of the novels make him seem”.<sup>4</sup> As I hope this thesis has shown, these ostensibly paradoxical sides of Fielding often meet in his treatment of love, sex, and marriage. As we follow the matrimonial thread through the labyrinth of his works it becomes evident that Fielding is indeed a “risqué writer”, even at the highpoint of his moral earnestness, while he is also strangely moralistic, verging on deeply conservative, when dealing with the most improper of subjects. Exploring Fielding’s interest in domestic topics and his development of the marriage plot, then, enriches and nuances our understanding of his works.

Furthermore, Fielding’s lasting interest in the enjoyments and shortcomings of marriage, and his insistence on becoming a guardian of cultural and moral standards, suggest that in many ways he saw eye to eye with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, who devoted several *Spectator* essays to demonstrating that “Marriage enlarges the Scene of our Happiness and Miseries”.<sup>5</sup> This has intriguing implications, and points to other compelling topics for further research. For instance, it not only hints at an interesting literary relationship that is not frequently remarked, but also points to the ways in which the enormously powerful potential of marriage (in a pre-Marriage Act and pre-Divorce Act period) determined the ubiquity

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<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Hume, “Fielding at 300: Elusive, Confusing, Misappropriated, or (Perhaps) Obvious?”, *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010): 226.

<sup>5</sup> *Spectator* No. 261, 29 December 1711, in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), Vol. 2, 516.

of the courtship plot on the stage and in prose fiction. At a time when so much depended upon marriage, as Fielding feared, “the first fatal Error prove[d] the last” (“To A Friend on the Choice of his Wife”, *Misc. I*, 43). Yet, as he also wrote in one of his plays, being the desired outcome in romantic relationships, marriage was “the usual reconciler at the End of a Comedy” (*Pasquin, Plays III, III*, 284), and, hence, the proper happy ending of novels.

Lastly, taking Henry Fielding as a case in point, my research touches on the broader field of generic permeability, particularly on the relationships between the early eighteenth-century stage and the mid-century novel. This thesis suggests that further explorations of generic interrelations can be helpful to understand the work of contemporaries who also had theatrical interests—such as Delarivière Manley, Eliza Haywood, and Tobias Smollett—as well as of those whose works indirectly touch on theatrical subjects, such as Laurence Sterne, for instance.<sup>6</sup> Reading Fielding and other eighteenth-century novelists through the double lens of the theatre and the marriage plot, then, can reveal new ways of thinking about the wider development of the novel form in the period.

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<sup>6</sup> I am thinking, specifically, about Sterne’s invocation of Yorick, a very minor figure in *Hamlet*, which he transformed into a memorable character in *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) and used as literary alter ego in *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), as well as in his sermons. It would be worth reading this in the context of the surge in Shakespearean reappraisal at mid-century.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Unless stated otherwise, all references to Henry Fielding's works are from the editions listed here, and will be provided in brackets within the main text. In the case of the plays, act and scene—when available<sup>1</sup>—will be included (in Roman numerals), followed by page number (in Arabic numerals). For the novels, book and chapter numbers will precede pagination.

- Amelia** *Amelia*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)
- Champion** *Contributions to The Champion and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003)
- Covent-Garden** *The Covent-Garden Journal and A Plan for the Universal Register-Office*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- Female Husband** *The Female Husband: or, the Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, Alias Mr George Hamilton in The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, Shamela and Occasional Writings*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008)
- Jacobite's Journal** *The Jacobite's Journal and Related Writings*, ed. W.B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974)
- Joseph Andrews** *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend, Mr. Abraham Adams*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)
- Jonathan Wild** *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, in *Misc. III*
- Misc. I-III** *Miscellanies, by Henry Fielding, Esq.; Volume One*, ed. Henry Knight Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); *Volume Two*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar and Hugh Amory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); *Volume Three*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar and Hugh Amory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
- Plays I-III** *Plays; Volume I: 1728-1731*, ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); *Volume II: 1731-1734*, ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); *Volume III: 1734-1742*, ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011)
- Shamela** *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews in The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, Shamela and Occasional Writings*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008)
- Tom Jones** *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, ed. Martin Battestin and Fredson Bowers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)

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<sup>1</sup> Not all of Fielding's plays are divided by scene.



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