

UNSHAP'D MONSTERS:
POLITICAL FARCE ON THE LONDON STAGE, 1717-1737

by

Melissa Ann Bloom

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2005

UMI Number: 3159201

Copyright 2005 by
Bloom, Melissa Ann

All rights reserved.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3159201

Copyright 2005 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346


©2005

MELISSA ANN BLOOM


All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

18 Jan 2005
Date


Prof. Rachel M. Brownstein
Chair of Examining Committee

20 January 2005
Date


Prof. Steven Kruger
Executive Officer

Prof. David Richter

Prof. Judith Milhous

Prof. Richard McCoy

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

UNSHAP'D MONSTERS:
POLITICAL FARCE ON THE LONDON STAGE, 1717-1737

by

Melissa Ann Bloom

Advisor: Professor Rachel M. Brownstein

This dissertation reexamines the role of John Gay's and Henry Fielding's anti-government satirical farces during the politically contentious 1720s and 1730s in London. Although their plays were and still are considered, variously, burlesques, entertainments, farces, and satires, I call them satirical farce for two reasons. First, contemporaries used the term farce as much to signify political and social stances as dramatic type or function. Those political and social stances are the central focus of this dissertation. Second, I see in this collection of plays—Gay's *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717) and *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730), *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731), and *Pasquin* (1736)—a shared structural or functional set of characteristics, suggesting that generically they are all closer akin to one another than any of them are to traditional five-act comedy or prose satire. These characteristics relate directly back to social attitude, as they give farce its ability to spread beyond its plot and the borders of the stage, and to absorb cultural dynamics into its narratives and structures—to both reflect and affect the public sphere. Rather than attempting a comprehensive survey of the political

content of Gay's and Fielding's farces, this method elucidates their culturally embedded social context in order to discuss the productions as public events. I contend that farce as a genre is inherently social and interactive, and as such is always potentially political, with the ability to instigate and enhance the circulation of ideas and tropes throughout the public body.

This reevaluation has three goals: First, discussing farce as it was perceived in the culture illustrates underlying assumptions about the rising mercantile sensibility and attendant anxieties about class, concerns that infiltrate contemporary aesthetic disputes. Second, it establishes the participation of satirical farce in the transformation of English culture, countering the prevailing idea that theater failed its public mission during this turbulent period. Third, taking the popular culture seriously puts theater back into the larger social context from which current scholarly preoccupations often abstract it, and revalidates the question of what theater *does* in a culture, not only what it *says* to that culture.

Acknowledgments

Many faculty members at the Graduate Center have contributed to this project. The support and faith of Provost William Kelley and Professor Jacqueline DiSalvo during crisis moments in my early years in the program meant so much more than they could have known. I am grateful to Professor Richard McCoy for conversations about masque and English folk theater and for his willingness to step in at the last moment and provide a thoughtful response to the finished dissertation. Professor David Richter's own fascination with the politics and criminals of the eighteenth century energized my own exploration. Professor Judith Milhous has always made time, from the inception of this project in an independent study in 1998, to explain the finer points of theatrical history and answer all of my many questions. Most of all, I am indebted to my advisor, Professor Rachel Brownstein, whose enthusiastic responses and willingness to suspend disbelief allowed this project to grow into its proper dimensions. Rachel's guidance and advice have shaped this project, my scholarship, and my approach to writing more than I can acknowledge, and I am proud to be one of her students.

For financial support, I thank the Graduate Center of CUNY for awarding me a University Dissertation Award in 2001, and the Law School at Queens College for a Writing Fellowship which provided two years of thinking about writing and law.

There are also those whose support was unofficial (and unpaid). Tali Noimann fed me chicken soup and moral support on many a Friday night, and Vincent Bissonette has been friend, editor, critic, tutor, and training partner. The two generations of the dissertation group—Richard Santana, Gregory Erikson, and Kimberly Engber, Tanya Radford, Vincent Bissonette, Jennifer Lemberg, and Elizabeth Hollow—have kept a tight

rein on my monstrously mixed metaphors, preventing mutant strains from tainting the integrity of the whole. Their tireless searches for a thesis, a paradigm, an unintended pun, or a misplaced comma have made our weekly gatherings as academically rigorous as they have been funny.

I am grateful to all of my family, especially my brother, Dr. Jeffrey Bloom, who first showed me it could be done—and showed the rest of our family that it can take a very, very long time to finish. I am most grateful to my mother, Marilyn Saltiel, whose daily love and support I will forever try to repay.

Contents

Introduction	1
Henry Fielding and the Licensing Act	1
Fielding and Farce	15
History of English Theater, 1712-1748	23
<i>The What D'ye Call It</i>	39
Chapter I. The Right to Write; or, Colley Cibber and <i>The Drury Lane Monster</i>	48
Colley Cibber's Career and Reputation	48
<i>Three Hours After Marriage</i>	58
Aftermath: Pope vs. Cibber	69
Fielding vs. Cibber: <i>The Author's Farce</i> , <i>Eurydice Hiss'd</i> and the <i>Apology</i>	85
Chapter II. Poetical Justice; or, The Audience as Jury	98
<i>The Beggar's Opera</i>	98
Prime Minister Robert Walpole	107
Ballads	115
Justice and Outlawry	118
Charlotte Charke as Macheath	143
Chapter III. The Politics of Grub Street; or, The Romance of Roast Beef	154
Introduction	154
Grub Street	160
Eliza Haywood and Amorous Fiction	167
<i>The Author's Farce</i>	172
<i>The Grub-Street Opera</i>	178
Rice Ap Shinken and "The Roast Beef of Old England"	188
Chapter IV. Wearing the Trousers; or The Travesties of Charlotte Charke at the Haymarket	201
Charlotte Charke on Stage in Breeches	201
<i>Pasquin's</i> politics	210
<i>Pasquin's</i> family politics	219
Lady Skimmington	225
Mr. Hen and Mr. Spatter	229
Conclusion: Reforming the Age	237
Afterpiece: Punch in Petticoats	242
<i>The Covent Garden Tragedy</i>	243
Bibliography	250

Unshap'd Monsters: Political Farce on the London Stage, 1717-1737: Introduction

The Great Mogul: Henry Fielding, the legend

This project began as an exploration of Henry Fielding's responsibility for the passage of the Licensing Act of 1737, which placed a number of restrictions on the London theaters and effectively ended Fielding's theater career. The most prolific and daring playwright of the 1730s, Fielding relentlessly attacked abuses of power, via stage representations of theater manager Colley Cibber and Prime Minister Robert Walpole. The theater satire was more than an "all the world's a stage" metaphor, for Fielding explicitly conceived of the spectators as a public body and through them continually engaged the larger world. Especially in 1736 and 1737, Fielding wrote and produced political farces at an unlicensed theater attacking the theatrical and political establishments. In the eyes of many contemporaries and subsequent scholars, he single-handedly forced Prime Minister Robert Walpole to curtail the liberty of the stages.¹ That he later became the "Father of the Novel" as well as a respected and judicially innovative magistrate retrospectively suggests interpretations of those plays as part of a coherent ideal of righteous liberty and narrative experimentation.

Attractive as is this vision of a crusading young talent, it does not stand up to historical biographical, cultural, and theatrical realities. Fielding was neither an

¹ Throughout the 1730s, Fielding had written "several frank, and free Farces, that seem'd to knock all Distinctions of Mankind on the Head: Religion, Laws, Government, Priests, Judges, and Ministers, were all laid flat at the Feet of this *Herculean* Satyrist... who, to make his Poetical Fame immortal ... set Fire to his Stage, by writing up to an Act of Parliament to demolish it" (Cibber I.287). Martin Battestin writes, "That the satiric and theatrical skills he had acquired by his thirtieth year were considerable may be judged from the intensity of Walpole's ire, who was goaded into applying the most extreme methods of silencing him—not only filling his theatre with bricks and lumber, but bringing down on him the full weight of Parliament. For no one either in or out of the government doubted that, whatever other convenient uses the minister might put it to, the Theatrical Licensing Act was instituted to put a stop to Fielding's play-writing" (234).

unwavering crusader nor a furious force of one. He was less loyal to parties and more loyal to individuals, and while he generally acted according to his beliefs, he was also guided by his interests. In the same prosaic manner, the Licensing Act was not a reaction to a concentrated year of insults but the culmination of an anti-theatrical movement forty years in the making with goals beyond putting one satirist out of business.

And yet the fact that the question—Did Fielding cause the Licensing Act?—continues to be asked by theater and literary historians and biographers suggests that there is some unease with the question itself. That history and politics intersect with literature and the arts is an academic commonplace, but whether, and how, they *interact* is a more vexed question. Do and can the arts, in this case a popular theater, participate actively and noticeably in the process of social and political change, and if so, how do they do so? How does this effect differ from that of newspaper articles, speeches, or propaganda?

After the materialist theories of Raymond Williams and Pierre Bourdieu there can be no doubt that historical and political conditions affect access to creating and enjoying art, and that such restricted access necessarily shapes the kinds of art any society produces.² That wary skepticism helps inform discussions of the cultural limitations within which any artist worked. Historical forces influence individual artists and larger artistic developments, as much of the “rise of the novel” scholarship attests. Robert D. Hume’s examination of Fielding’s theatrical career lays a heavy

² I am thinking particularly of *Culture* and *Distinction* respectively, which address the seeming transcendence of “high” art and reveal the “direct social processes of cultural production” (Williams 86). Bourdieu states it quite simply; “To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (1-2).

emphasis on the economic and political conditions of the London theaters during the 30s. Yet it is more difficult to determine how particular pieces of art or more general art experiences affect history and politics. And to ask whether Fielding's plays in particular or the political farce in general *caused* the Licensing Act is to ask just that question. Paradoxically, the law can seem on its face primarily one to do only with the theater, and not the larger socio-political world, if the idea that art can proactively affect politics is seen as a presumptuous one. If, on the other hand, we suppose rather that the arts have a peculiar ability to mediate or moderate between the people and their world—that they sometimes reflect, sometimes agitate, and sometimes negotiate³—then the Licensing Act, in closing off a communication which the government could not control, was a social, political law beyond the aesthetic community it affected economically. To ask, now, if Fielding's works precipitated, or rather *how* Fielding's works precipitated this law is to ask how farce, theater, and the arts in general interact with their world. And once we begin examining the world in which Fielding wrote and presented his farces, in all its historical particularity, we see that he identified and enhanced techniques that John Gay's theatrical works began to develop a generation earlier. Fielding's audience had already been conditioned by Gay's works to be more self-conscious as an audience. Fielding is deeply indebted to Gay's method of equating questions of aesthetics with those of justice and to his

³ J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne write in the introduction to their New Historicist collection on eighteenth-century drama that, "Formerly, to read the plays 'in context' meant to relate them either to the history of ideas or to the history of politics. In both instances, the drama was perceived as passively reflecting specific philosophies or topical events, a historical reading that assumes a grounding in a 'prior' reality. Recent theory, historiographical as well as aesthetic, challenges this mimetic assumption. Raymond Williams, for instance, would insist that drama is as constitutive of 'reality' as any other form of discourse. Moreover, to limit political meaning to specific topical references is to fail to analyze the broader ideological implications embedded in the plays" (6).

exploitation of the permeabilities farce enables (between stage and public, most notably) for political effect.

And so I rephrase my original question: at the apex of an already heightened political era, what did John Gay's and Henry Fielding's satirical farces actually do? How did their method of contributing to that atmosphere differ from the journals and pamphlets? How did it elicit different responses from its audience, and how did their reaction affect that method? And centrally, if contemporaries had the impression that these plays *did* cause the Licensing Act, how did those plays seem to threaten—not simply insult—the government?⁴

That works of art affect individuals is, paradoxically, as common as the idea that they only reflect, not shape, history. From Plato to Strom Thurmond the arts have been seen as deceptive, seductive, emotionally coercive distractions from rational and moral thinking.⁵ The question I ask is not if theater affects individuals—as certainly it does—nor whether it affects groups of individuals—as again, undoubtedly, it does. My question is rather how theater, here satirical farce, shapes the concepts by which a society thinks of itself, how it articulates the terms of a

⁴ Because of their plays, John Gay was the “terror of Ministers” and Henry Fielding the “scurrilous” author who “set Fire to his Stage” (respectively: John Arbuthnot in a letter to Swift, March 19, 1729; Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* 45; Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* 1.287).

⁵ In Jonas Barish's paraphrase of Plato, artists “pour fuel on the most combustible part of our nature... By fomenting our irrational selves, they carry us away from the true, the good, and the beautiful” (9-10). Barish discusses the anti-theatrical controversy begun by minister Jeremy Collier in 1698, and considers William Law's tone representative of the anti-theatricalists of the turn of the century. Law claimed that the discourses of the stage “entertain the Heart, and awaken and employ all our Passions” to “more fatally undo all that Religion has done, then several other Sins... Corruption and Debauchery are the truly natural and genuine Effects of the *Stage-Entertainment*” (234).

discussion national in scope, and how it becomes part of the intellectual experience of an age.⁶

The concept of a “legitimate drama” or a “legitimate stage” is understandable only by reference to that which is “illegitimate,” though that word is never used.⁷ That the term came to mean genres and performances that are both authorized and self-evidently superior—claiming while disowning the unnamed legitimating authority—is a peculiarity overlooked by generations of scholars. The pretence of a purely aesthetic distinction justifies the exclusion of politics and current events as subjects and of the talents of individual actors as elements in the experience; it also masks a social agenda. Rather than an inherently stable category, the legitimate—as a category—is deeply implicated in a particular legal, partisan action to discredit an aesthetics of community protest and popular opposition: the Licensing Act of 1737. The kind of theater thereby outlawed—physical, political, temporal, and social—would be relegated to the lower classes only by the century’s end, further dividing the public into discrete and controllable societies. Only at the end of the century, when London had largely forgotten about the Licensing Act and the plays which gave rise to it, could the term “legitimate” be used with a straight face to describe an apolitical theater.⁸

⁶ Habermas notes that later in the century the European theater was central to the blossoming public sphere; Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* attempts to recreate a theater that represented greatness before the people, but “was out of step, as it were, with the bourgeois public sphere whose platform the theatre had meanwhile become. Beaumarchais’s *Figaro* had already entered the stage and with him, according to Napoleon’s famous words, the revolution” (14).

⁷ Nor, according to the OED, was the term “legitimate drama” used until the end of the eighteenth century.

⁸ On some levels those plays not legitimate were literally illegal or somehow extralegal, but until the Licensing Act of 1737, their status was more vaguely understood. “Entertainment” rather was the word for all that was physical (rope-dancing, bear-baiting, physical farces, musical interludes, spectacles).

Historians of the early eighteenth century, especially new historicists, frequently draw on contemporary arts for metaphors or illustrations of dynamics central to their concern. Linda Colley repeatedly has recourse to ballads and to Hogarth's prints as emblems of a newly conscious national identity between 1720-1760, and E. P. Thompson inevitably returns to the language of theater to describe important social and legal activity.⁹ Colley both acknowledges and sidesteps Hogarth's role as more than an illustrator of a historical process, but part of its making, insofar as he is consciously forming those ideas and urging his visual shorthand on his contemporaries.¹⁰ By the same token, theater appeals to Thompson for its active, public character as much as for its tendency toward pageantry and exhibition.¹¹ Neither Colley nor Thompson addresses the usefulness of the arts to

John O'Brien discusses the "indeterminacy at the center of the concept" of entertainment, describing it as "a general term for diversions... as something that is provisional... and resistant to hard-and-fast definitions or excessive specificity" ("Harlequin Britain" 488). While most scholars now simply call them "irregular," as the creators themselves often did, many still insist on hierarchical distinctions between farce and dramatic satire, burlesque, and entertainment. Ronald Paulson asserts that "In the action of a farce events are presented solely for amusement and literally have no meaning; ... reality is distorted to the point of sheer nonsense" (*Life* 46) and then suggests that Fielding's farces are actually parodies of bad farces, and so not farces at all. Theater historian Robert D. Hume, in a discussion of Fielding's farces versus his more regular comedies, writes that they are "not great literature, but they are brilliant theatre, and superlatively effective performance vehicles" and still needs to justify saying "His genius was for burlesque" with the follow-up "In saying this I do not mean to denigrate Fielding in any way" (61, 62). The denigration, however, is not only assumed but not reversed. John Loftis, Albert Rivero, and Peter Lewis, who along with Hume have done the closest examinations of Fielding's irregular plays, share this bias, but with far less struggle than Hume.

⁹ The ballads Colley cites are invariably written for and first performed in plays, though she does not remark on the role of the theater in fostering and propagating the ideologies she describes.

¹⁰ For a more articulated discussion of the process by which Hogarth interacted with his world, see Jonathan Conlin, "'At the Expense of the Public': The Sign Painters' Exhibition of 1762 and the Public Sphere." Hogarth stood as representative of "the British artist" who "was characterized as self-taught and forthright—one whose talents, though frustrated by treacherous connoisseurs, were equal to the challenge offered by Rembrandt, Michelangelo, and other justly revered masters" (9).

¹¹ Thompson speaks of law courts, hangings, and class hierarchies in terms of theater frequently; he justifies it here: "if we speak of it as theatre, it is not to diminish its importance. A great part of politics and law is always theatre; once a social system has become 'set', it does not need to be endorsed daily by exhibitions of power (although occasional punctuations of force will be made to define the limits of the system's tolerance); what matters more is a continuing theatrical style"

their discussions, but they share an approach which would, I think, welcome its inclusion. Both interpret the political trends of an era via the writings, worship, and changing habits of every-day people, tracing both how people are influenced by more powerful forces and how their responses affect those forces. Gerald Newman, in his exploration of British nationalism, amends Thompson's theater metaphor, writing that "[t]he 'theatre of greatness' was not just 'imposed' on the body of the people but also actively supported by them. It was theater-in-the-round, and mass participation was what gave it such a long run" (26). Newman is throughout more conscious of the arts as a kind of mediation or communication between the government and its people, saying that "*the artist-intellectual... creates and organizes nationalist ideology, the machinery at the heart of the nationalist movement*" (56) which he dates as beginning, in England, in the middle 1740s.¹²

Building on the awareness among historians that art is a force in the intellectual and emotional lives of the people, we must then ask how the people and the government responded to the arts or to any particular art work. Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) and Fielding's satirical farces are most suitable for such an exploration, as being overtly political, widely discussed by contemporaries in both aesthetic and partisan terms, widely imitated both as formal innovations and political viewpoints, and legally restricted. Almost all of the plays in the following study were

(*Customs in Common* 45, 46). Here theatricality is an "exhibition;" in other places community action is "public theatre."

¹² Nonetheless, until the 1790s, "the world of art was a mere Punch-and-Judy show on the corner of the great stage of daily existence and historical reality" (74). Although Newman argues that a nationalist movement in England begins in the 1740s and offers Fielding's fiction repeatedly as a source, he does not include the plays of the 1730s, and suggests that farces, prints, and ballads offer "strong evidence, evidence of a very primal sort ... [from] the 'folk mind,' a primitive half-conscious world of tribal dramas and fantasies" (79). We will see that this biased, class-based distinction between kinds of art carries over into literary and theater scholarship.

specifically prohibited or discouraged by the government or were followed by related government suppression. These aspects, which gave rise to the Fielding legend in the first place, must be accounted for in readings of those plays.

Bertrand Goldgar addresses the question most directly, reminding us that before mid-century—before the rise of the novel and before the Licensing Act—the attitude that “literary figures... have no special role in political life, and [that] literature itself is concerned with the private, not the public self” would have been foreign (8).¹³ To Swift, Pope, and Gay, “political discourses did not seem ... inevitably separated from literary modes of expression, and political events were clearly a fit topic for treatment in a literature that looked outward to society rather than inward to the self” (8).¹⁴ Rather, until the generation of his study, 1722-1742, which is roughly equivalent to my focus, writers not only wrote *about* politics but were themselves politicians; to call the age Augustan is to remember that Horace was an advisor to the Emperor, not a subordinate panegyricist. Or at least, that was the claim made by Pope and others in opposition to the Walpole administration.

Goldgar illuminates the actions of (and reactions to) the opposition journals which appeared with vigor and purpose around 1725 with the avowed purpose of deposing Walpole, and argues that they were responsible for the clamor one might

¹³ Goldgar’s work, first published in 1976, presupposes a New Critical norm. The rise of New Historicism takes the impact out of his observations, yet his work remains the most thorough examination of the relationship between the literary and political worlds during the 1720s and 1730s.

¹⁴ Susan Staves, discussing Restoration drama, notes that the government had long kept a stern eye on political content in plays. “We know, moreover, that the government took the political implications of plays seriously enough to censor and to prohibit quite a number of them. At one time or another many Restoration writers had difficulty with the politics of a play they had written, either because their intention had been to touch upon a dangerous issue or to satirize a prominent political figure or because the censors had seen fit to discover a dangerous implication or parallel history” (50). Staves lists plays by Buckingham, Dryden, Lee, Tate, and Cibber that were stifled, harassed, or altered by the government.

think was caused by particular works of art. After the success of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and the suppression of its sequel *Polly* (1729), these newspapers flooded London with "opposition propaganda ... that helped make Gay's opera a political touchstone to an extent he doubtless had not intended...it is claiming too much to attribute a train of prosecutions and new journals to the effects of *The Beggar's Opera*" (70, 71). According to Goldgar, Gay is responsible for the political *content* but not for the political *effect*. Goldgar's reading, which notes the conventional metaphors in the content of these plays, illustrates an entire socio-political sphere inflamed with a discussion of politics and aesthetics surrounding a play, following and confirming a Habermasian stress on the text-based coffee-house culture.¹⁵ Yet his assumption that the art and artist were somehow insulated from the debate, even while participating in it, is confusing.

In a time of such political bitterness it is not surprising that antigovernment innuendoes were again discovered in areas not overtly political. As a writer for *Fog's* complained, "Some People indeed will make us believe, that all the Farces in dumb Shew are so many political Satyrs; as if the Disaffected had a Notion that what they dare not speak they may venture to *dance*." But "some people" were quite correct in their suspicion, and the summer of 1731 saw the suppression of a number of minor theatrical performances. ... The real men of letters, of course, had no part in all this..." (88, 91)

¹⁵ Habermas's theory, broadly, is that a recognized "public opinion" arose from debates and discussions of national and international news which circulated in the papers, mostly read (in small groups) at the coffee houses. For Habermas, the growth of news journals was the necessary starting point for this development. See *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

One of the “real men of letters” he refers to is Swift, quite famous for his own antigovernment innuendo. Why it should be beneath him when on the stage, rather than in print, raises a different area of the original question. If prose writing—the essays in the *Craftsman*, the allegories in *Common Sense*—can be unquestioned as effective salvos, why not the dance and the ballad?¹⁶ Indeed, John, Lord Hervey, an intimate of Robert Walpole and Queen Caroline during the late 20s and early 30s, famously referred to Gay’s *Polly* as a “theatrical Craftsman” in his memoirs (20). As that play was not performed, perhaps the analogy was apt. Yet it was rehearsed and scheduled and intended for performance; it was not a political journal, an essay, or a treatise, and plays engage audience apprehension in an already social mode and situation.¹⁷

The arts, and particularly perhaps political theater, frequently mix strategies. They evoke emotional responses with love scenes as that between Macheath and Polly, whose pseudo-sentimental duet at the end of the first act was long considered by legend as the determining factor in the success of *The Beggar’s Opera* (Nokes 417-8). They deploy iconic images or satiric shorthand (the ubiquitous references to the Great Man), and often provide interpretation through a central speaker, such as Cato’s call for national liberty in Addison’s Whig *Cato* (1713). Such a mixture does not mean the play bypasses a spectator’s intellect, for the strategies and the mixtures were transparent to spectators of the time, who read the vocabulary of these strategies

¹⁶ O’Brien notes that “entertainments... have often functioned as loci of cultural conflict and confrontation; they are activities in which cultural values are contested, negotiated, and legitimated, and through which those values may become ... intelligible to contemporaries” (“Harlequin Britain” 488).

¹⁷ As Paulson notes, Fielding’s work is deeply involved with “the immediacy of a theatrical experience – the interplay of the actors on the stage and the audience as both live individuals and as volatile mob” (*Life* 92).

with more or less consciousness. Paula Backscheider, Susan Staves, and J. Douglas Canfield, in their readings of Restoration drama, take into account the ability of theatricality and the playhouses to consciously engage with ideology and to become themselves topics of informed conversation among all strata of society.¹⁸ Their work expands that of Jürgen Habermas, for whom the coffee houses provided “a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion” (Habermas 20).¹⁹ The citizen, formerly a relatively passive “receiver of regulations from above” became “the ruling authorities’ adversary” during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (25-6). Backscheider demonstrates that the culture of the coffee house and of the playhouse were both part of the larger “evaluative, critical, political public” whose increasing self-awareness as a public led to dramatic political upheavals later in the century (xv). Open to all classes, not just the bourgeoisie, the theaters (and the puppet shows, pageants, and parades) provided a much more accessible space, and a more representational sampling of the “public,” than the coffee houses.²⁰

¹⁸ Backscheider’s *Spectacular Politics* and Canfield’s *Tricksters and Estates* both elucidate the ideologies expressed in Restoration theater. Susan Staves’s *Players’ Scepters* more particularly explicates the allusions in “the Restoration political play” to contemporary legal questions as part of their overall response to the changes in government.

¹⁹ Michael Warner notes that “a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. It is not texts themselves that create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and a responding discourse be postulated, can a text address a public” (62).

²⁰ “It has become customary, in the wake of arguments over Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, to lament or protest the arbitrary closures of the publics that came into being with the public sphere as their background. The peculiar dynamic of postulation and address by which public speech projects the social world has been understood mainly in terms of ideology, domination, or exclusion. And with reason—the history of the public sphere abounds with evidence of struggle for domination through this means and the resulting bad faith of the dominant public culture” (M. Warner 77).

The theatrical moments Backscheider and Staves examine involve the alterations of familiar tropes in order to communicate ideologies of dominance. I follow Backscheider in examining the language of pageantry and symbols of power, although I look at intentional travesties of their use (Gay continually disrupts tropes of power and Fielding repeatedly inverts them). In Gay's and Fielding's choices—not only of plot, but of structure, device, and mode—we see a conscious manipulation of images of power which highlights the artificial and conventional nature of their legitimate use. Their almost deconstructive games shaped the way people thought about power itself. The overt consciousness and the enthusiastic public response to Fielding's increasingly political farces indicate that the theater itself generated the kind of critical discourse necessary for a self-actualizing public voice.

Backscheider's materialist approach resonates throughout this work. One part of her study focuses on the "spectator-text" (xiv) of Lord Mayor's Day pageants and Royal Processions, in which she discusses the surviving scripts and production notes along with the history of the tropes deployed, the intended effect, and contemporary records describing the actual effect. Going beyond content to the functions of these processions, Backscheider highlights the interaction and conversation implied, allowing her to situate the emergence of a public sphere a generation earlier than Habermas does. Canfield and Payne point out that "the drama has always been something of a foster child within the family of eighteenth-century studies, especially by comparison with such 'legitimate' progeny as satire and the novel" (*Cultural Readings* 1) specifically because of the difficulty reading what Backscheider calls the "spectator text," Jones DeRitter calls the playtext, and Gerald Newman the "dumb

rhetoric of the scenery”: the social, temporal, physical context of theatrical productions that cannot be seen in scripts.²¹ In his study of the rise of the novel, J. Paul Hunter writes of a “structural tendency ... to bridge levels of discourse (with at least as much influence from below as above) and to blur the distinction between oral and written discourse” that came to characterize the coffee-houses (*Before Novels* 173). Theater, by its nature, blurs “distinctions between oral and written,” which makes it difficult to study using only the tools of literary analysis. In their *Producible Interpretations* Judith Milhous and Robert Hume outline a method of reading late Restoration plays specifically in the context of performances, past and future. They emphasize knowledge of original performance conditions to unearth as much as possible all the play communicated non-verbally, especially as playwrights had enormous influence over casting and other production choices. “A play demands both intellectual comprehension and emotional response... To agree that theatre is communication does not commit us to a procrustean demand for message/meaning; nor should it inhibit us from studying subjective and variable response in the audience. We must not refuse to recognize, however, that a significant part of the meaning is added in performance” (13). Along these lines, Hume’s own examination of Fielding’s *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731) pays considerable attention to what singers he had at his disposal, what their ranges and abilities were, and what the audience’s previous associations of them were. “[T]he theater,” as Hunter writes, “rather than being another world where one can contemplate in tranquility the symbols of the

²¹ What O’Brien writes of pantomime applies as well to the more stage-y elements of these farces; as indexes of a deep ambivalence, they “entertained their audiences, and scandalized their critics, by exploiting the theatre’s potential as the literary institution most thoroughly implicated in the material world” (“Harlequin Britain” 491).

active life, becomes a creative, live experience... Themselves part of the action, viewers must at once respond, and distinguish various responses, involving themselves in whatever evaluations they arrive at" (*Occasional Form* 66). By situating political critique within the context of the larger cultural world populated by ballads, masquerades, hanging "carnivals," and monster-mongers, Gay's and Fielding's farces replicate and enact the fullness of a "public sphere" where private persons gather to discuss and oppose the actions of the state.

Fielding in particular participates in some of the critical and political discussions of his time largely by confounding the terms of those discussions as he challenges the idea that the patent theaters are culturally "legitimate." We see the intense struggle for cultural legitimacy in the very dismissal of Fielding's irregular plays not only by contemporary critics but Fielding scholars throughout the critical history. As my exploration followed both political and unpolitical readings of Fielding's plays and career, and into the intricacies of the passage of the Licensing Act, it became clear to me that taking notice that the plays at issue were "irregular"—unconventional farces, burlesques, and afterpieces—becomes part of psycho-biographical readings or characterizations of the Haymarket and Drury Lane theaters and their respective audiences. That he sometimes had to "stoop" to farce devices in order to convey his transcendently important message, for example, is presented as evidence of the aesthetic paralysis of his age.²² In none of the scholarship—or, it must be said, contemporary reaction—has the *form* of these plays been explicitly connected to the reaction they fostered and their ability to contribute to the political foment of

²² See Albert Rivero 35. This was also the language some contemporaries used; see Battestin 171.

what were already highly partisan years. When Fielding himself calls them “Unshap’d monsters” he points to what I argue is the most important element of the farce—its ability to absorb a multitude of incongruous elements and its tendency to spread, grow, and expand itself beyond decorous boundaries (stage/audience, comedy/tragedy, male/female). This expansiveness *is* the threat this monster poses to polite society, aesthetically, socially, and politically. I have taken the phrase “Unshap’d Monsters” as the title for this study because it reflects both the expansiveness of the form and the social ambivalence it attracted, both of which kept it vibrant and dangerous. I suggest that the public perception that these farces caused the Licensing Act reflects the real social anxieties and instabilities attending their performances. The form Gay and Fielding developed and deployed, with its peculiar ability to mobilize large audiences of all ranks, was the only form of theater effectively banned by the 1737 law; it was this form, and not the particular playwrights or their political positions, that raised concerns among lawmakers, and it was this form that the law was intended to silence.

Unshap’d Monsters of a Wanton Brain: Dismissing farce as farce

Fielding is best known now as a novelist, and many scholars bring a novel-reading sensibility to his plays.²³ The distinction between reading and experiencing was one his contemporaries were much preoccupied with. For them it was morally inflected. Reading allowed reason to guide, whereas participating in a crowded theater audience was physically engaging and emotionally coercive. Jonas Barish, in

²³ For example, J. Paul Hunter writes that the self-reflexive element of Fielding’s farces raises “direct, self-conscious questions about the self-sufficiency of fictional worlds,” but it is Hunter, not Fielding or his contemporaries, who assumes such self-sufficiency (*Occasional Form* 49).

his exploration of anti-theatrical attitudes across the centuries, cites Samuel Richardson's concern that actors could, "by heighten'd Action and Scenical Example, to an *underbred* and *unwary* Audience... have fatal Effects on the Morals both of Men and Women" (238). The visual stimulation and the excitement of the crowd would completely overwhelm what little moral compass this audience might have. Colley Cibber, actor, playwright, and powerful theater manager, looked back from the vantage point of 1742 to remark that

I doubt it will be very difficult, to give a *printed* Satyr, or Libel, half the Force, or Credit of an *acted* one. The most artful, or notorious Lye, or strain'd Allusion that ever slander'd a great Man, may be read, by some People, with a Smile of Contempt, or at worst it can impose but on one Person, at once: But when the Words of the same plausible Stuff, shall be repeated on a Theatre, the Wit of it among a Crowd of Hearers, ... may unite, and warm a whole Body of the Malicious, or Ignorant, into a Plaudit[.] (I.294-5)

Ignorance and the heat of the moment feed the contagion as people are affected by those around them with and without agendas, and the pressure of the community of spectators alters the effect of the bare content. This distinction is crucial for understanding why purely textual readings of Gay's and Fielding's plays are insufficient. Without taking into context the performance space and how people of all classes experienced each other and the play concurrently, one cannot properly account for the plays' influence on social and political realities.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, theater was still the center of popular entertainment for all but the poorest Londoners. The mixing of classes, the noise and crowding, occasional riots and showers of fruit, and the variety of entertainments found there all contributed to the experience.²⁴ Theater was not “drama” insulated from the world, but rather a space within which disparate voices, in disparate registers, expressed a wide range of political and aesthetic positions and competed for popularity, acclaim, and money. Fielding addresses the literary idea that a playwright writes for what Byron would later call “the theatre of the mind” rather than the live theater of his age in his 1730 *The Author's Farce*. A bookseller makes a distinction between two kinds of play:

Your acting play is entirely supported by the merit of the actor, without any regard to the author at all. In this case, it signifies very little whether there be any sense in it or no. Now your reading play is of a different stamp and must have wit and meaning in it. These latter I call your substantive, as being able to support themselves. The former are your adjective, as what require the buffoonery and gestures of an actor to be joined to them to show their signification. (I.vi.24-32)

Yet neither type of play has any value, in the bookseller's eyes, until it has been successful on stage, where it will depend enormously upon the “merit of the actor.” Moreover, the young poet who is trying to interest the bookseller in his untested tragedy may have high aspirations, visions of a drama unsullied by orange sellers and

²⁴ Leo Hughes's *The Drama's Patrons* provides a rich description of audience behavior and material conditions throughout the century. See also Langhans, Hughes, Highfill Jr., and Pedicord in *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800* for more on the culture of the playhouse.

“buffoonery,” but his ignorance of production realities bodes ill for the playable quality of his tragedy.²⁵

The Author's Farce was Fielding's reaction to the failures of his own early dramatic attempts. The young poet, discouraged by the degraded popular taste, simultaneously entertains and chastises the “Town” with a farce. In large part an autobiographical portrait, the satire indicates how conscious Fielding was of his own conflicting desires for respectability and popular acclaim, and for the tools with which to lash out at respectability and popular acclaim.²⁶ The irony of the play's success and his audience's willingness to “laugh at him who laughs at you,” as he wrote in its prologue (37), revealed to him the communicative power of meta-theatrical self-consciousness. In place of the hierarchical and static practice of dedications to patrons and the financial approval of author's third night profits as models of communication, this method created a vigorous conversation between audience and author, between the house and the stage. However unpolitical *Author's Farce* was, it established for Fielding the potential of aesthetic instability to reflect society back to itself.

The central defining factor of farce, that it is what Fielding calls an “acting play” as opposed to a “reading play”, causes problems for most literary scholars, as it did for Fielding's contemporaries. The discourse about the growth in productions and popularity of irregular theater posits them literally as growths—abnormal impositions,

²⁵ The satire on the hopeful poet is generally overlooked in the greater mercenary motives of both bookseller and theater manager and the poet's transparent representation of the young hopeful Henry Fielding, but his expectations are absurd and his tragedy long-winded.

²⁶ John O'Brien's recent *Harlequin Britain* argues that the pantomime afterpiece, rather than being universally considered a degradation of the stage, had roots in Roman theater and was promoted in part as a purification of the stage.

symptoms of constitutional weakness, signs of corruption. Fielding's own words help illustrate the sometimes disparaging attitude that prevailed during the 1720s and 1730s. In *The Author's Farce*, the playwright Luckless only half defends his puppet show from the charge that it is "beneath the dignity of the stage" by asking, "Who would not ...rather eat by his nonsense than starve by his wit?" Yet he still admits, "I heartily wish... that my puppet show may expel farce and opera as they [farce and opera] have done tragedy and comedy" (III.5, 9-10, 14-16). This declaration of disdain precedes the puppet show, which is itself a disparagement of such things as puppet shows, leaving the modern critic unsure to what degree Fielding is "stooping to conquer" in Albert J. Rivero's phrase. In the 1728 preface to his failed *Love in Several Masques*, Fielding sullenly refers to *The Beggar's Opera* as an "Entertainment," one among many appealing to spectators' senses rather than their understandings, but perhaps this was sour grapes, as Gay's play drew away what audiences he might have expected. In a 1734 bid for respectability, writing for The Royal Theatre at Drury Lane, Fielding apologizes for the "Unshap'd monsters of a wanton brain," his earlier Haymarket farces, as unworthy his decent British audience (Preface to *The Modern Husband*); as he was uncharacteristically offering a serious comedy, he would need to alert his audience to his intentions. All three comments reflect a consciousness of genre Fielding shared with his audience, as well as his acknowledgement of the power of their expectations. These comments cannot be taken at face value as Fielding's genuine attitude,²⁷ but are useful indicators of the rhetoric of "entertainment" used by practitioners and critics alike.

²⁷ Hunter notes, of the difficulty in pinning Fielding down to any one attitude, that his characteristic use of rhetoric was one of "the many masks expected of eighteenth-century writers" (5). "Good

Modern critics have also passed over the farce as a necessary evil, seeking to salvage its ideas from its form. They frequently dismiss the farce as a deviant form or smaller cousin to the comedy, aesthetically and politically unimportant regardless of, or perhaps because of, its popularity. Scholarly resistance to reading the plays as live productions has been evident even in recent positive examinations of Fielding's drama, and that resistance reinforces a devaluation of the farces. Focusing on formal choices and requirements, J. Paul Hunter's book on Fielding devotes two chapters to Fielding's irregular plays, rightly noting that they contain his most energetic and creative theatrical writing. His bias is clear from the beginning, seeing Fielding as a writer "trapped" between two literary eras, the Augustan and the Romantic.²⁸

Besides the fact that such a view emphasizes continuities or prophetic choices, the terms are more appropriate to literary than theatrical eras. This bias leads him to devote a full chapter to *Tragedy of Tragedies; or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb* (1731), the printed, Scriblerian version of the staged farce. Hunter thoroughly lays out Fielding's relationship in this early play/text to the worldview inherited through Pope from the early Augustan satirists. He insightfully articulates Fielding's repeated focus on the audience's reactions (7, 46, 66), though he applies this not to his readings of the plays, their popularity, or their political effects, but rather to the way Fielding addresses and manipulates the "Reader" in his novels. Both of these angles of interpretation tautologically lead him to conclude that drama was an "unsuitable

rhetoric is perhaps never the flight from honesty that its enemies have always charged, but it is by definition highly self-conscious in its choice of what to reveal and what to hold back, and its guarded calculation of effect has always made work difficult" for biographical critics (6).

²⁸ Too late for the "heroic balance of the Augustan moment, too early to celebrate the adequacy of a landscape in the imagination" (13), "trapped between ages and ideals," between Pope and Wordsworth (19).

mode” for Fielding, and that the novel was a “more appropriate form” (70, 74).²⁹

Even Jill Campbell’s thoughtful work on Fielding’s plays and his conscious theatricality privileges a more genuine interior, the values of the domestic novel as it developed twenty and thirty years later.³⁰ Fielding’s plays as a whole, the moral comedies as well as the political farces, have been misunderstood as the products of his apprenticeship, during which he polished his command of irony and learned to create characters and moral situations.

Beyond its significance for understanding Fielding’s theatrical work specifically, the problem with that retrospective theory is two-fold. It privileges private experiences, as if private experience were cut off from public life, and although these plays were experienced in crowds. Moreover, the bias toward a character’s interiority makes political ramifications seem extraneous distractions, rendering thoughtful re-evaluations of the Licensing Act more difficult. Second, by stressing the interiority of the novel, these scholars underestimate the degree to which theater influenced its development. As Michael McKeon, Hunter, and others have suggested, the Cervantic, self-conscious, and mockingly literary novelistic style has been a strong but undervalued current in the history of the English novel. Many novel scholars trace the “development” of the novel via descendants of Fielding’s meta-literary, pseudo-classical, ironic and earnest *Tom Jones*, crediting Fielding with the paternity of an alternative to the sentimental Richardsonian novel. Yet his own

²⁹ Robert Hume argues that the cliché that Fielding’s plays were his apprenticeship work is “based on misleading criteria and inadequate knowledge of the London theatres in the 1730s ... what Fielding accomplished as a dramatist was by no means a false start in a genre with which he was uncomfortable” (vii).

³⁰ Campbell argues that “the drama of gender reversal” in the farces is “Fielding’s personal paradigm for the betrayal of authentic interiority” (25). While her reading of *Shamela* accordingly is revealing, the presence and usefulness of such a paradigm in the plays is less convincing.

experiences writing and producing anti-sentimental theater, which drew on the political and social experiences of his community and used the external tools of costume, music, and staging. A greater understanding of his plays, how they worked, what he was accomplishing in them, and how they were experienced by a set of spectators who became his readers can only enrich our readings of Fielding's novels.

Rejecting the reading of the plays as precursors to the novels and as “chapters in [Fielding's] political biography” (Rivero 92), both Rivero and Peter Lewis focus on the question of form. Yet repeatedly Rivero asserts that the theatrical devices upon which the plays are structured undercut the moral messages and intellectual challenges Fielding aimed for, demonstrating only how superior Fielding was to his audience (35, 73). Disregarding those devices—ballads, puppets, cross-dressing—Rivero limits his readings to the textual, not the performed plays; only in the moral comedies *Rape upon Rape* (1730) and *The Modern Husband* (1732) does he find positive innovation and uncompromised moral vision. Like Rivero, Lewis objects to the “Fielding as novelist” tradition of reading Fielding's plays, noting that he was “one of the most important figures in London theatrical life, and in any history of eighteenth-century English drama he must loom large as an outstanding playwright” (1). His review of the literary and theatrical traditions of burlesque satire and its contemporary popularity contextualizes Fielding's meta-theatrical zeal within the realms of classical and neoclassical concerns and current theatrical practice. But his focus throughout is on texts, not productions, and gives almost no account of productions of these burlesques. Fielding's later turn to novels, then, seems to be an extension of an already textual preoccupation.

The traditional emphasis on the literary heritage has led scholars to focus on *Tragedy of Tragedies* and the political content of *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*. My focus on the structural elements of the farce (especially as employed by Fielding and Gay) allows me to avoid undue emphasis on Fielding's satirical precursors or his novelist future, and has also led me toward less well-trodden areas of his theatrical oeuvre.

These Degenerate Days: Theater history and overview, 1712-1748

Discussions of Fielding's theatrical career generally divide it into four phases: his initial conventional attempts; his first successes with irregular plays at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket; his mid-decade stint at Drury Lane, writing conventional farce and moral comedies; and last, his return to the Haymarket and the spectacular successes of the explicitly partisan farces of 1736 and 1737, those to which some scholars attribute Fielding's responsibility for Licensing Act. Robert Hume warns us against theories that Fielding's movement between theaters (Haymarket and Drury Lane) reflects conscious political shifts, and that in those transfers Fielding took articulated pro- or anti-ministerial positions.³¹ Hume's exhaustive history of the managements and companies with which Fielding worked, factually rich with financial records, attendance records, and performance dates, puts to rest the idea that Fielding and the Haymarket were the sole source of political theater. "Between the end of January and late May [of 1737] approximately 100 performances of plays openly hostile to the ministry were staged at three of London's four theatres—an

³¹ See *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre, 1728-1737*, 55.

average of nearly one per night” (240). Within such a heated political environment, audiences were eagerly attuned to the slightest anti-ministerial allusion, and it becomes unfeasible to attempt to separate the multiple influences on their behavior. In order then to determine a clearer narrative of the development of his kind of political farce, I begin before the clamorous opposition years of the 20s and 30s that dominate most discussions of Fielding and the Licensing Act.³²

As many as sixteen years before Fielding’s theatrical debut, Gay was writing farces that tapped into turbulent currents in the London theater world and the larger culture. The innovations of *The Beggar’s Opera* have been widely recognized but its connections to Gay’s previous farces have not. Gay’s farces continually align the thematics and structure of the English farce to English justice. This enables not only satiric devaluation of the government, but also a unique emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of the audience as a representative public.

Gay has too often been considered in thrall to Pope and Swift, indebted to the one for his enmity to literary pedants and to the other for his political satire.³³ Gay’s most recent biographer David Nokes addresses the characterization of Gay “not

³² In this I follow John Loftis, whose history of political theater spans several generations. Loftis argues that the Licensing Act was really the culmination of objections to the growing freedoms of theater across three reigns; during the years of Queen Anne, the call was for more moral control; during that of George I, for more aesthetic control (limiting non-rational entertainments); and during that of George II, against the idea of theater as a vehicle for propaganda (128). See also Barish, who comments that “The clamors of the citizenry against the lewdness of the playhouses [from 1698 on] must have made it relatively easy for the authorities to step in and pass the terrible Licensing Act of 1737, which killed the free theater and drove its most gifted writer, Fielding, from the stage altogether” (235).

³³ Perhaps the most well-remembered characterization of Gay as “Pope’s ally, ... his alias, his willing scapegoat” is Johnson’s assessment, in his *Life of Gay* that the poet was “the general favourite of the whole association of wits; but they regarded him as a playfellow rather than a partner, and treated him with more fondness than respect” (Nokes 3). See Nigel Wood for a defense of *The Shepherd’s Week* as “generated... by Gay’s own preoccupations” (97) and not as a subsidiary part of Pope’s campaign against Ambrose Phillips’s *Pastorals*.

merely as Pope's ally, but as his alias, his willing scapegoat" (2). Gay seems to have presented himself as Pope's "aide-de-camp or acolyte" and Pope referred to him as "one of my élèves" (Nokes 3). Nokes differentiates between his "acute social diffidence" and his political opportunism and satirical independence (4).³⁴ J.A. Downie notes that traces of Gay's political stance are evident as early as the 1708 *Wine*, its strong vein of libertarian mock-panegyric consistent with the opposition writing he did after becoming friends with Swift.

Gay was, however, very much a Scriblerian, and shared their prejudices and preoccupations.³⁵ Formed to deflate the pretensions of self-proclaimed literary experts, the Scriblerians were conservative in their respect for time-tested genres and works.³⁶ Using a mock-heroic style, they characteristically apply Miltonic rhetoric to the pedestrian details of modern London life and express political uncertainties "through the displacement of jest" (Noble "Light Writing" 26). Like his famous friends, Gay employed new literary styles in order to ridicule them as results of ignorance. His early farce *The Mohocks* (1712) is a mock-heroic topical farce which borrows from Shakespeare and parodies Milton. Sympathetic to Jacobites, Gay trusted in the superiority of the aristocracy, while lamenting their too-frequent failures to live up to their important role in society. *The Mohocks* features aristocrats as criminals, at war with community and law, intent on serving only themselves. It sets

³⁴ "Even his most dutiful literary allusions and *hommages* to honoured friends like Pope and Steele are not without subconscious hints of parody" (Nokes 8).

³⁵ The Scriblerus Club, made up of Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, Robert Harley, and John Arbuthnot, was formed in 1713 to ridicule false learning through the persona of a pedant, Martinus Scriblerus.

³⁶ The unique circumstance of the Scriblerians—respected literary figures whose satire places them beyond personal squabbles and creates a parallel aristocracy—appealed enormously to Fielding and was his primary model throughout his literary career.

the pedants of literature and of the legal system beside each other, demonstrating how crucial a role literature and the arts play in the proper and stable functioning of society. Legend lays the responsibility for *The Beggar's Opera* to Swift's suggestion in 1715 that Gay follow up his mock-pastoral *Shepherd's Week* with a "Newgate Pastoral." Nokes asserts that "*The Beggar's Opera* itself was undoubtedly inspired" by Swift's hint (372), but the 1728 play has far more in common with Gay's earlier judicial farce than with his raw pastoral cycle.³⁷

Socially a conservative man, Gay was less likely to exploit the democratic tendencies of his dramatic method than Fielding would later be.³⁸ Both his first farce, *The Mohocks*, and his last, *The Rehearsal at Goatham* (1730), emphasize the immense power the reader/spectator has over the meaning and subsequent life of a play, and both align that interpretive power explicitly to a juridical domination. Both highlight the tyranny and irresponsibility of that power.³⁹ Both are cutting social indictments, and neither was produced. There is some evidence that Gay never meant for either to be produced, but that they were written rather for the amused perusal of like-minded and knowing friends, not for the masses.

In 1715, however, Gay brought his second farce, *The What D'ye Call It*, to Drury Lane, where Sir Richard Steele was patentee. He entered the theater at a

³⁷ Nokes himself later writes that "while Swift's hint many years earlier... may well have provided an initial inspiration, it was the popularity of more recent 'Newgate' works... which confirmed his choice of subject. It is clear Gay was not short of advice from those around him, all seeking to influence the form and style of *The Beggar's Opera*... But it is equally clear that ... Gay was determined to have a will of his own, and to create a work which, for good or ill, was the unique product of his own imagination" (416).

³⁸ Where Gay wished for something of an aristocratic oligarchy, with his friends ruling the nation, Fielding's opposition to an increasingly centralized government led him closer to an inclusive, democratic ideal.

³⁹ *The Rehearsal at Goatham* allegorizes Walpole's political prohibition of *Polly* through the puppet-show scene from *Don Quixote*; *Polly* was Gay's sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*.

turbulent time, just after the coronation of George I. For forcing the government restrictions of 1737, Loftis points to the actions of Steele in 1715 as having more reverberations than those of Fielding in the 30s. Armed with a patent that did not explicitly require that the Master of the Revels review new plays (an expensive tradition for generations) Steele declared himself his own censor, and henceforth Drury Lane (at least) no longer submitted to government control.⁴⁰ From this point until the Licensing Act of 1737, the government would find that its laws were unenforceable and theater increasingly outside the law.⁴¹ Loftis outlines the political themes and influences on the London stages throughout the rise of partisan politics in the 1710s. Steele's motivation was in large part financial, for theaters were expected to pay per script for pre-production censorship, and with renewed competition between two theaters in 1714, his theater was pressed for profits. As both Leo Hughes and Jessica Milner Davis have noted, during these years of heightened competition, irregular theater—spectacles, farces, musical performances—always part of an evening's performance, began to dominate over traditional comedies as significantly more profitable.⁴²

⁴⁰On Steele's refusal to submit to the Master of the Revels, see Loftis 64.

⁴¹ Beside the custom of pre-production censorship by the Master of the Revels, theater was restricted by an Act of Anne (12 Anne 2, Ch. 23), a variation of 39 Eliz., Ch. 4, which included the decree that "Common Players of Interludes" as well as other wandering performers or beggars "shall be deemed Rogues and Vagabonds" and could be whipped or sent into an apprenticeship either in Britain or overseas (Liesenfeld 163).

⁴² Jessica Milner Davis remarks that from 1714, "the entertainment power of farce acquired a new significance. The farce-afterpiece became a regular part of the theatrical bill. Although many kinds of dramatic novelties were used for the afterpiece – acrobatic and scenic spectacles, comic and pastoral operettas, for example – farce provided the mainstay" (19). Cibber, in his *Apology*, defends his own role in producing what he calls "monstrous medlies," emphasizing the financial pressure: "I did it against my Conscience! and had not virtue enough to starve, by opposing a Multitude, that would have been too hard for me" (II.182). See also Lowell Lindgren for a discussion of the English operas produced by Lincoln's Inn Fields during 1716 and 1717.

The commercial motive, and the public consciousness of it, marks the class-based roots of the assumed aesthetic monstrosity of farce itself, before Walpole's rise, before aesthetic judgment and partisan politics were as closely intertwined as they would become. I begin my discussion of the "Unshap'd Monsters" of Augustan farce in 1717, after three years of the increased promotion of entertainments and after three years of increasing rhetoric against it.⁴³ Such rhetoric is in part a reaction against mercantile pressures, on the theater and in the culture. John Gay's farce/comedy *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717), full of monsters, caused an uproar that focused on the personalities involved and the perversity of its composition. Reading this play, popular plays successful with the same audiences, and the surrounding commentary, I explore the socially-loaded language and class-coded condemnation descending on the farce and extricate from it the formal distinctions between comedy and interactive, social farce.

Around the bickering on *Three Hours* we see the emergence of two monstrous entities: the farce defined as a debased and socially destabilizing entertainment, and the stock character of "Colley Cibber," the ignorant tyrant of the stage. Cibber, an actor who had risen to become manager, had the power to accept or refuse new scripts, and became quickly hated by writers more genteel than himself over whom he wielded what seemed an absolute power. As a pretentious upstart who eventually became Poet Laureate, Cibber came to represent the destabilizing influence of money and despotism in the arts, in the culture, and in the government. Eventually Fielding would be able to simply evoke Cibber as emblem of cultural illegitimacy rather than

⁴³ See below for a brief discussion of Gay's 1715 farce *The What D'ye Call It*, which significantly did not encounter the class or partisan or aesthetic outcries his later plays did.

having to create that persona. We can see the fusing of the “unnatural” excrescences of the form of farce (in this case revealed and represented by its inclusion of monsters as characters) to an unnatural abuse of power. The argument in 1717 paired aesthetic and class concerns, presuming the superiority of text over performance and of writers over performers. Practitioners and critics alike henceforth used the language of monsters to discuss exactly the conjunction of farce and power which underpins the rest of the works in this study.

The outcry against farce and irregular entertainment notwithstanding, both houses found them enormously profitable. In the years between 1723 and 1725, the spectacle, the dance, and the sung interlude increased in popularity and blended to create the pantomime or harlequinade. As the name suggests, the blended form was a combination of Italian *commedia dell'arte* and a masque-like (frequently French) dance of a classical allegory.⁴⁴ The Italian opera also found a passionate audience in the second half of the 1710s and the early 20s, although costs associated with production kept it from being financially successful.⁴⁵ Collectively, with entertainment increasingly in non-native, non-traditional forms, aesthetic and nationalist concerns began to be voiced together.⁴⁶

Gay's theatrical response to these trends, the ballad opera *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), would be heralded as a native English form and castigated as morally and aesthetically corrupting. *The Beggar's Opera* exploits popular anti-ministerial

⁴⁴ See O'Brien for a positive evaluation of the pantomime as a form.

⁴⁵ Opera had several phases of popularity, but the trend, from 1710, *not* to translate the operas into English “virtually guaranteed its status as a primarily higher-class entertainment in London” and alarmed theater traditionalists (Lindgren 52).

⁴⁶ See Hogarth's 1724 print “A Just View of the British Stage, or Three Heads are Better than One,” where the Drury Lane managers create a harlequinade at the expense of Shakespeare and Jonson.

sentiment, so that ballad opera, the ballads themselves, and “native Englishness” became associated with opposition satire. I add to the plentiful scholarship on *The Beggar’s Opera* by focusing on its dynamic and the methods it created and exploited to recruit the audience in both overt and covert ways. My discussion focuses on two related devices. The least commented on is the model the play provides for its audience to react explicitly as a jury. This is seen most concretely in the concluding scenes of *The Beggar’s Opera*, where the audience, their expectations voiced by the Player, grants Macheath a reprieve. But the audience is drawn in in participatory ways throughout the play, most clearly in its abundant use of popular ballads with new and often comically conflicting lyrics. As audience members conjured up the original words in their own memories, contrasted these traditional melodies with Italian arias, and articulated to themselves what kind of entertainment they were watching, they became actively invested in the process of the play. Gay transforms the traditional prologue trope of the audience as a jury from a stale convention into a figure for an active relationship of the audience with not the playwright but with the play itself. By highlighting their social and artistic judgment, Gay directs the audience’s attention to itself. Placed in a context of thinly veiled political allegory, and surrounded by “native English” music, the audience is led to consider its own behavior, as English citizens, outside of the playhouse as well.⁴⁷ This nationalism, in content, context, devices, and effect, left the insulted administration with no valid way to respond.

⁴⁷ See Yvonne Noble’s discussion of the ballads in “The Beggar’s Opera in its Own Time.” See also her “Light Writing from a Dark Winter: The Scriblerian *Annus Mirabilis*” for the effect of Cibber’s opera parody, in Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers* in 1722, on the audience’s later perception and experience of opera.

Government loyalists decried it on aesthetic levels, claiming that Gay was degrading the English stage, insulting English music, and corrupting the English audience.⁴⁸ Henry Fielding, impoverished gentleman and hopeful playwright, was one of those who felt that the enthusiasm for *The Beggar's Opera* reflected badly on London. Fielding's first play, *Love in Several Masques*, debuted at Drury Lane Theatre during the run of Gay's ballad opera. In the face of such competition, Fielding's conventional comedy ran only four nights.⁴⁹ If Fielding's dedication of his first play to Colley Cibber demonstrated his allegiance to the establishment theater, his pen name for *Tragedy of Tragedies; or the History of Tom Thumb the Great*—Scriblerus Secundus—announced a dramatic shift. Aligning himself with Pope's circle by the faux scholarly apparatus he attached to his play in publication, its pedantic ignorance, and the mock-heroic burlesque in the play itself, Fielding takes up the chastising and collusive style established so firmly by Gay and flirts quite openly with political opposition to the government.

In a series of popular farces at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, which he produced himself, Fielding castigates the reigning cultural stupidity infecting theater, literature, and government. The Haymarket was one of several theaters operating without a patent or license, and was generally hired out to troupes of acrobats and other non-dramatic performers. When it did house productions of more dramatic theatrical entertainment, it tended to stay carefully to the blind side of the patent

⁴⁸ See Bertrand Goldgar's discussion of aesthetic criticism as a covert political reaction, 71- 74.

⁴⁹ It might have failed in four nights anyway. "Not at all a bad play" the comedy was likely produced largely as a favor to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Fielding's cousin, who was a close supporter of Walpole (Battestin 61).

houses, which officially had a monopoly on spoken drama in London.⁵⁰ Fielding's two first "irregular" plays, *The Author's Farce* and *Tom Thumb*, were enormously successful and together brought Fielding—and the Little Theatre and the other unlicensed stages—to the notice of all London.

Increasingly daring, Fielding provoked some kind of official response. *Polly*, Gay's 1729 sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, had been banned by the Duke of Grafton, Lord Chamberlain, in an early step toward the Licensing Act, as a way of shutting down the expanding communication with the audience and culture that the earlier play had spawned.⁵¹ The play had been published without any legal difficulties, however, revealing an important difference between stage and page. One of the objections to the Stage Licensing Act was that it brought the government one step closer to reenacting the Print Licensing Act (which had lapsed in 1695), leaving a free press vulnerable. In his "Dedication to the Public" for his last plays, Fielding wrote that "If Nature hath given me any Talents at ridiculing Vice and Imposture, I shall not be indolent, nor afraid of exerting them, while the Liberty of the Press and Stage subsists, that is to say, while we have any Liberty left among us." Freedom of the Press and Stage is either a token of Natural English liberty or is necessary for it; in other places, Fielding argues the latter. The point is, though, that liberty of press and stage were seen as two sides of a coin, each necessary to the other, and both necessary for the health of the nation. This position is evident in the series of plays Fielding

⁵⁰ See Loftis 98-99 and Liesenfeld 15-17.

⁵¹ The Lord Chamberlain officially oversaw the Master of the Revels, who had the "right" of pre-production censorship which had been ignored for fifteen years. Although the Lord Chamberlain did not legally have the right to suppress the production of *Polly*, neither Gay nor Rich, who was to produce it, dared to challenge him.

wrote in 1731, plays which wrestle with the equation of print, stage, and liberty. In them we see that the more formally irregular they are, the more they call up English Law and Native Liberty. The play most critical to the Government, *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731), was “voluntarily suppressed” by Fielding on the eve of its debut; most likely he was bribed by Walpole.⁵²

In the play Fielding counters the creeping influence of French culture (emblemized by the figure of wildly popular and innovative romance novelist Eliza Haywood) with the native English (and opposition) ballad. *The Grub-Street Opera* illustrates what Newman describes as “a sort of symbolic logic, a chain of cultural-social-moral reasoning or rather association, which begins in the international sphere, ends in the national, and works through a vague notion of creeping contamination” (67). In the play’s plot, characters (caricatures of the royal family and administration) variously praise or bemoan the prevalence in England of French dress, French manners, and French food. In its form, the play sarcastically adopts the French romance in its local habitation, London’s Grub Street. Examining the way the play changes from its original incarnation as *The Welsh Opera* to *The Grub-Street Opera* to *Don Quixote in England* we see Fielding continually replaying the national implications of print culture through different theatrical forms and for different theatrical audiences. Before Fielding wrote his more overtly political farces, he was already capitalizing on the instability farce engenders, the audience involvement and

⁵² A series of contemporary articles and ads for printed edition claims *The Grub-Street Opera* was “stopt by Authority,” and anonymous counter-ads deny it was “suppressed” (quoted in Hume 97, 98). Hume concludes that Fielding was likely paid off (102).

native Englishness Gay had built into the form Fielding inherited,⁵³ so that the shift from romance to national character is a small one, cementing an association already present in the culture.

After the reprimand or bribe from the Walpole administration, Fielding brought his plays to Drury Lane. Unlike the metatheatrical burlesques and farces he wrote at the Haymarket, these are traditional light farces, translations of Molière, and several “moral comedies”—five-act social satires. Most were moderately successful, none spectacularly so. Fielding dedicated *The Modern Couple*, the most moral and satirical of these, to Robert Walpole, an act which has led many scholars to presume that his Drury Lane years represented a brief period of pro-administration politics. An equal number see in the dedication an ironic satire of Walpole, whose marital arrangements were somewhat loose.⁵⁴ Hume argues that a continued residence at the Haymarket would have been financially unfeasible and socially unthinkable for Fielding, especially as it became associated with a band of outlaw actors in 1732.⁵⁵

With a nationalistic tone associated now with the irregular farce, and irregular farce increasingly associated with the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, it makes sense that Theophilus Cibber, who led a band of rebel actors to the Haymarket, selected a

⁵³ In his work on the resonant images of the eighteenth century, Ronald Paulson writes that “Together, Gay and Hogarth showed Fielding how the Augustan elements of satire, irony, allusion, and analogy, from the protected position of a social and intellectual elite, could be modified into a more generous and wide-ranging—in some ways more sentimental but in others more questioning and skeptical, perhaps more ‘democratic’—mode. They showed, at the moment of political and social disillusionment, when it had become clear that the ‘Augustan Age’ was a sham, the Stuarts gone for good, and the Age of Walpole... there to stay—new ways in which cultural forms could continue to develop in England” (*Popular and Polite Art* 121).

⁵⁴ Loftis sees the dedication as a genuine bid for patronage; J. Paul Hunter takes the other view.

⁵⁵ “The plain dull truth is that Fielding was a freelance writer who peddled his plays where he could get them accepted” (52).

repertoire of overtly nationalistic plays and farces.⁵⁶ Jones DeRitter reads Cibber's choice of plays as part of a public relations campaign to align his troupe with an old England of honesty and liberty, and therefore against tyrannous laws, such as those empowering Highmore as patentee (80). The foundation built by Gay and Fielding, to firmly associate a type of entertainment with this "patriotic" and democratic theatrical stance, has been completely overlooked. Their play with the farce form and its reliance on an informed audience/public lends itself to ever greater inclusivity. Legally the renegade troupe was rebelling against the service of the King, although practically it was only against the managerial policies of Drury Lane. Among other things, Cibber's rebellion demonstrated that the laws restricting the movement of actors and the number of playhouses were unenforceable. In 1734, one of his actors, Mr. Harper, was arrested for performing at the Little Theater in the Haymarket without any license or patent.⁵⁷ According to strict law, all actors were "vagrants and vagabonds" unless in the employ of the king, as indicated in the patents. However, the courts decided that as Harper was a homeowner and otherwise upstanding citizen, he could not be considered a vagrant. From that point until 1737, the laws could not seriously threaten actors or playwrights or protect patent holders.

In the aftermath of the actors' rebellion, and at the urging of local merchants opposed to the multiplication of small theaters, Parliament began to address the inadequate legal restraints on the theaters. John Barnard introduced *The Bill to*

⁵⁶ Colley Cibber retired from management in 1732 and, after promising his share in the patent to his son, sold it to John Highmore instead.

⁵⁷ The action was instigated by the owners and patentees at Drury Lane, who wanted the courts to order the troupe to return to their legal "home." To many historians, especially John Loftis, this indicates the degree to which the legal restrictions were intended to remedy a perceived economic, not moral, evil. The actors were the "property" of the managers, and the laws were used to protect the value of that property.

Reform the Stage in 1735, but when Walpole added a clause reinstating governmental censorship, even he voted against it. Primarily its opponents feared allowing Walpole or his minions the kind of power which would make this law, as Samuel Johnson pointed out in 1739, a regression in the process of judicial reform of the century, as it established a secret “tribunal from which there is no appeal permitted” (61).

Nonetheless, in the spring of 1737 Parliament did in fact pass the Licensing Act.

Even Barnard voted *for* the Licensing Act. To contemporaries, what changed Barnard’s mind, and the general tendency of Parliament, was the 1736-37 Haymarket career of Henry Fielding.

Whether the panegyric of the dedication of *The Modern Husband* was real and failed, or was oblique but rising political resistance, in 1735, for any number of reasons—political fervor, financial need, artistic frustration—Fielding returned to writing burlesque, political farces which were more blatantly opposition than those written during the earlier Haymarket phase.⁵⁸ Taking more control over his productions and his cast, Fielding recruited one of the rebel actors, Charlotte Charke. Sister to Theophilus and daughter to Colley Cibber, Charke was a minor actor with a famous family who had already played a number of small breeches parts. Her part in the rebellion, the rebellion’s own grounding in irregular theatric nationalism, and her public role as youngest daughter of Colley Cibber made her a rich source of allusion for Fielding when she came into his service in 1735. Charke’s cross-dressing is seldom seen as in any way political, and Fielding’s role in her life has been examined only as if he were a tool for her rebellion against her father, and then later, the

⁵⁸ Hume suggests this was largely due to the influence of “Boy Patriots” Lyttleton and Pitt, and their involvement in the Broad Bottom coalition (211).

impediment in her reconciliation with her father.⁵⁹ I argue here that rather than being simply a private matter, Charke's cross-dressing had public meaning and took place literally on the public stage. The parts Fielding wrote for her in these last plays—*Pasquin*, *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*, and *Eurydice Hiss'd*—are significant twists on traditional theatrical cross-dressing, whether in farce or the typical breeches parts of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. Cast as powerful, rather than effeminate, men, Charke the actress “positively was seen in the Street in Breeches” (Charke 206), obliterating distinctions between costume and dress, between on stage and off, between farce and life, and increasing her use both as a scandalous public persona and as an emblem of Cibberian, and therefore, Walpolian, perversion.

Emphasizing artificiality and burlesque of public taste more than ever, partially by the cross-dressing, partially by their relative incoherence and non-narrative structure, Fielding's 1737 openly opposition plays resemble less and less their precursors. There are echoes, in Charke's cross-dressed characters, of the mob-justice shivaree or skimmington, a kind of community justice frequently considered deeply English, still relatively familiar in villages and in parts of London. Though skimmington primarily punished sexual deviations (henpecked husbands, old men taking young wives), by the 1730s it was as often performed to revenge political transgressions.⁶⁰ When that cultural practice is placed beside Charke's roles in Fielding's last farces, we hear reverberations of the themes traced throughout this dissertation: the artificiality of farce, the Englishness of law and justice, the

⁵⁹ See Sidonie Smith, Phillip Baruth, and Felicity Nussbaum.

⁶⁰ See Ingram 108.

association of corruptions of stage and state, and fluid sexuality representing breakdowns in natural aesthetics. There is certainly sharp and overtly political satire in the content of these last plays, which scholars repeatedly recognize but find too thin to have caused as much clamor as they did. The full political dimension of the threat and the immense popularity of these plays comes from the evocative associations that accumulated around the farce, and around the Haymarket theater, over nearly twenty years. These associations relentlessly questioned the legitimacy of the Whig Ministry, asserted that Ministry's opposition to natural, healthy, Englishness, and urged the audience to reclaim their stolen liberty.

The Stage Licensing Act of 1737, which reinstated censorship of the stage and reinforced the restriction of spoken drama to the two patents (held then by managers at Drury Lane and Covent Garden theaters), ended the possibility of Fielding's brand of political farce, and effectively ended Fielding's dramatic career altogether. During the decades following, Fielding would struggle for respectability as a magistrate, bring an educated respectability to the emergent novel form, and write for the opposition journals, wherein as Hercules Vinegar he would "prosecute" his contemporaries for literary crimes. The preoccupations of his farces—cultural, governmental, and national corruptions—continue to be his focus as he moves into more "respectable" realms.

In an epilogue, I look beyond the Licensing Act not to Fielding's years as a novelist and magistrate but rather to his brief foray into puppet theater. In this episode we can see the real effects the Licensing Act had on the proliferation of satirical farce. For the Licensing Act did not end farce, or the opposition to Walpole,

or satire.⁶¹ If anything, 1737 and 1738 saw more satire, if less farce. The theaters saw numerous riots during the following years, one particularly against the permission given to a French troupe to perform at the Haymarket when English performers were prohibited (Hughes 45). But the peculiarly intellectual community interaction Fielding's farces fostered was reduced, leaving the theaters altogether. To the extent it continued to flourish in the coffee-houses it was a more select "public" than that of the playhouses, and to the extent the public continued to gather at the theaters and to argue aesthetics and politics, it was a subdued argument. The shaping ideas of public discourse were no longer those of public entertainment.

"This Something, or this Nothing of a Play": Gay's farce about farce

I wish to conclude this preview by returning to the beginning. The chapters of this dissertation focus on fairly radical changes in the culture—disturbances to the social order, new theatrical polemics and structures, the rise of print culture, an altered sense of the "public" role of ordinary citizens—but the next few pages will look at a farce, and a moment, that was not disruptive or considered corrupt, yet put in play many of the strategies that would later be turned to more consciously political uses. What we will see here is how important the potential of farce *as a form* would be for Fielding, specifically because it facilitates a communication of concepts between an audience-as-public and the stage-as-representation. It also demonstrates that the dynamic which was central to the effect of Fielding's late farces is intimately tied to its genre, that flexible monster of satirical farce. In his 1715 *The What D'ye*

⁶¹ Although after the death of Queen Caroline at the end of 1737, Walpole's power was on the decline.

Call It John Gay dramatized the playwright's awkward position between the conflicting demands of critics and spectators, and tied the consciousness of that quandary and its resolution to the active participation of the audience.

The characteristics of farce that signal its genre—artifice, absurdities, blurring of boundaries, interaction with the audience—enhance detachment and discernment in spectators, along with their consciousness of theater as theater. The puppet-show episode in *Don Quixote* in which the knight is so engrossed in the plot that he attempts to rescue the puppet princess Melissandra was a favorite of both Fielding's and Gay's. The presence of a gullible or impressionable spectator like Quixote, who cannot distinguish reality from performance, alerts audiences to the double meanings and irony of farce.

Gay's farces are structured on the double reality, creating a confusion on stage that only a judicious spectator can untangle. Characters who cannot distinguish between truth and performance, like Quixote, are marked. *The What D'ye Call It* traces out quite plainly how one is to recognize true from not true, explicitly through the audience-as-jury trope. To some extent this earlier play helped to train the London audiences and provided a base level of associations upon which the experience of *The Beggar's Opera* depends. Frequently restaged, *The What D'ye Call It* extended the reach and altered the experience of farce.

Gay's earlier play is not only a mixture of genres but is *about* the issue of the mixture of genres. This "Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce" focuses on the writing and perceiving of theater through its genre and by the actual people who make up its audience. In his parodic preface, Gay acknowledges that in previous English

tragicomedy, “the Tragedy and Comedy are in distinct Scenes, and may be easily separated from each other,” whereas in his play they are all so interwoven “that they cannot be distinguish’d or separated” (7-10). The preface answers the objections of critics who were unable to see the humor in a play so patently irregular, and pretends to claim that it is actually slavishly correct. Though Gay “boasts” of his dexterity in blending the styles and creating a new “Kind of Dramatick Entertainment” (1), he also claims to obey classical edicts, noting that the “Judicious Reader will easily perceive, that the Unities are kept as in the most perfect Pieces, that the Scenes are unbroken, and Poetical Justice is strictly observ’d” (139-141). Like *The Mohocks* and *The Beggar’s Opera*, *The What D’ye Call It* foregrounds literary squabbles and concerns, calling to mind Addison’s denunciation of tragic-comedy as a “one of the most monstrous inventions that ever entered into a poet’s thought” (*Spectator* 40) and of poetical justice as a “ridiculous doctrine” (*Spectator* 548).

Tragi-comedy is monstrous because it eradicates category separations, and in combining the two creates a new, unnatural form. The monstrous, the incongruous, and the unnatural are centerpieces of the political farce, as of all farce, for as Gay writes “the Nature of Farce [is] that it is made up of Absurdities and Incongruities, and ... those Pieces which have these Qualities in the greatest Degree are the most Farces” (106-108). Gay’s play is a farce in other simple and self-evident ways: it has only two, not five, acts. The story it tells is of a clever servant tricking his stupid master. Audiences, recognizing the absurdity and brevity *in* the play were meant also to understand the “incongruity” of its genre as part of its farcical expression. Gay’s ability to make this very literary subplot serve the spectator’s experience of the play

while remaining a subsidiary part of it goes to the heart of the form's multivalent power. Gay's and Fielding's farces were simultaneously intellectually engaged and patently absurd and were pleasurable entertainment for people of all kinds while championing ideological positions. Gay and Fielding don't simply use farce to say something but rather make farce itself part of what they're saying. It is in this vein that I argue with scholars like Rivero, for the unique strength of these plays comes *because* they are farces, not despite that fact.

The What D'ye Call It follows in the "rehearsal" tradition of theatrical burlesque, pioneered by William Davenant's 1663 *The Playhouse to be Let* and Lord Buckingham's 1671 *The Rehearsal*, both consistently popular into the eighteenth century. The rehearsal play ridicules contemporary fads (and personalities) in theater and provides an on-stage model audience, sometimes to mock audience expectations and behaviors, sometimes to flatter their judgment, sometimes to provide an ideal for their emulation. Gay's innovation was his development and emphasis of the relationship between the on and off-stage audiences. Prologues had compared the judgment of the audience to that of a jury for a generation, but Gay brought the metaphor on stage, making his on-stage audience quite literally a panel of magistrates.

Sir Roger, an uncultured country JP, asks his educated steward to write and produce a private theatrical (performed by the servants, the steward's daughter Kitty, and Sir Roger's son Thomas) for the entertainment of several neighboring magistrates who "never saw a Play before." He wishes it might be "all sorts of Plays under one," a comedy, a tragedy, a pastoral, farce, and "crown'd ... with a Spice of your Opera" (Introductory scene 46, 45). The performance of the steward's play, "The What D'ye

Call It,” and the magistrates’ reactions to it, form the primary plot. The steward’s contempt for his employer and his theatrical project is clear (to the audience, though not to Sir Roger) from his title. In shifting attention from traditional mockery of the playwright to that of his audience, Gay announces his theme of the sway of public demand.

Audience judgment predominates throughout. The permission implied in the play’s title is also an imperative. The prologue explicates: “The Entertainment of this Night—or Day,/ This Something, or this Nothing of a Play,/ ... / This Comick Story, or this Tragick Jest,/ May make you laugh, or cry, as you like best;/ ... / Criticks, we know, by antient Rules may maul it;/ But sure Gallants must like—the *What d’ye call it*” (1-2, 5-6, 11-12 italics reversed). The audience must either laugh or cry, must call it something, even if it chooses to call it a “Nothing.” Their aesthetic judgment is reflected on the stage by the panel of tasteless jurists who act as the jury in the trial scene in the inner play to which they are the sole audience.

The steward’s real objective is not entertainment but the marriage of the pregnant Kitty to Squire Thomas, father of her child. Sir Roger is horrified to learn that the staged wedding was real, even though acting as a magistrate *in* the play he had righteously decreed the punishment of a young man who refused to marry *his* pregnant mistress. The discomfiting shift between theatrical and real will become a hallmark of satirical farce where, as here, it places responsibility for the quality of the stage—and the government—on the audience’s demand for and patronage of nonsense. Overtly disrespectful of genre distinctions, by way of mocking current fads, blatantly artificial and proclaiming its own “irregularity,” the play insists upon the

relevance of its onstage interactions to aesthetic, moral, and legal choices made outside the playhouse by linking the aesthetic obtuseness of the magistrates to their unjust legal determinations.

Among other things, the initial and continuing success of *The What D'ye Call It* demonstrated the potential that theatrical burlesque had to involve the audience and take on larger targets than the purely aesthetic. Many spectators did not know what to make of it. Pope wrote that his partly deaf companion, "hearing none of the words, and seeing the action to be tragical, was much astonished to see the audience laugh" and imagined that the Prince and Princess of Wales, who understood little English, were in the same position. Gay himself thought of it as a practical joke, and was pleased to hear that "the galleries who did not know what to make of it, now enter thoroughly into the humour, and it seems to please in general better than at first" (March 3, 1715).⁶² "Entering into the humour" is active and participatory, literally involving the audience. Gay wrote further, in this same letter, that he was grateful that the Court entered "in a very particular manner... into the jest." One is either in on the jest, or is one of its dupes, like Pope's deaf friend and the footmen in the galleries. What intrigues Gay, and what provides the energy to this farce, is the mental movement the audience must make in order to apprehend the joke, and then react to the pressure to communicate to their companions *that* they understood. The focus turns away from the stage to the audience, just as the inner play is merely a conduit to the indictment of the magistrates, *its* audience.

⁶² Pope and Gay each wrote portions of this letter to Caryl (Correspondence of Alexander Pope I.282-3).

Familiar with the rehearsal tradition, Gay's audience already knew that the on-stage audience was a mirror of itself. By making the magistrates a collective, as a Quorum, instead of simply several spectators, Gay highlights the collective judgment of both audiences. The entire first act takes place in the "courtroom" where the Justices punish lovers and enforce the Press Act. In both cases they are acting against a custom of leniency, disturbing the traditional relations of the village. In return, the "Tyrant Justices" are condemned by five ghosts for inhumane application of the law. Each ghost (including the ghost of a fetus) moans out the cause of his or her own death, laying responsibility at the feet of the Justices. All of their crimes were sex and poverty, "crimes" of human nature traditionally resolved by communities. When the ghost-criminals/victims judge the judges, the hierarchies between inner and outer play, artistic and moral judgment, and object and subject of law are inverted. The inversion and the often unjust nature of law provide a cynical image of English culture, an image both Gay and Fielding would be accused of promoting. But what they really do is portray to the audience the consequences of their own passive acquiescence, making of the audience a responsible public body. During the whole of the second act of *The What D'ye Call It* there is no meta-audience. The judges are chased off stage in the first act and remain silent (and presumably unseen, as no stage direction indicates their return) through the second. Responsibility is restored to the community. The bad justices on stage are no longer necessary, since the real audience has replaced them. Only the audience that can properly distinguish between comedy and tragedy can distinguish between justice and convenience.

Justice is more than a metaphor for discernment. The reprieves, illogical and godly, may signal farce but were also a very real part of English justice as it was enacted. Monarchical mercy reinforced the King's power over life and death but rarely had to do with guilt, innocence, or justice.⁶³ Such authoritarian injustice, when practiced on the stage, came to represent an intentional affront to the power of the audience as an active public.

The gesture outward central to *The What D'ye Call It* becomes the cornerstone of the opposition farces both Gay and Fielding wrote with such success. In this play to some extent, and in the later plays more consciously and overtly, the narrative and structural necessity for audience "participation" enables and extends the larger metaphor of stage for state, so that meta-theatrical commentary is more and more firmly equated with political criticism—of the leaders and of the followers. In *The What D'ye Call It*, by equating his panel of bad judges with his audience, Gay suggests that bad governing must end when the audience/public becomes wise and self-determining.

By the same token, Fielding's farces continually create a consciousness in his audience of being simultaneously an active British public, responsible in some part for the corruption they tolerate in their government. The prologue to *The Author's Farce* chastises the audience for reacting as if they'd been trained; "Like the tame animals designed for show/ You have your cues to clap, as they to bow./ Taught to commend, your judgments have no share;/ By chance you guess aright, by chance

⁶³ See V. A. C. Gatrell for a thorough discussion of the relationship of the "Bloody Code," increased reprieves, and the role of the jury in petitioning for reprieves.

you err" (*The Author's Farce* Prologue 17-20).⁶⁴ Gay and Fielding together, over the course of twenty years, aimed to wake the judgment of the audience.

The following chapters show that the structural characteristics inherent to the farce intensify the dependence upon audience participatory comprehension that is already part of both theatrical performance and satire. They also reinforce native associations of English justice with ordinary citizens rather than leaders or kings by presenting it, through farce, as an organic outgrowth of a free public. Challenging the division of audiences into high and low, Gay and Fielding insist on the collectivity of the English public.

⁶⁴ E.P. Thompson notes the coded interpretations throughout the culture; "as we move backward from 1760, we enter a world of theatrical symbolism which is ... difficult to interpret: popular political sympathies are expressed in ... a language of ribbons, of bonfires, of oaths and of the refusal of oaths, of toasts, or seditious riddles and ancient prophecies, of oak leaves and of maypoles, of ballads with a political *double-entendre*, even of airs whistled in the streets" (67, 68). The airs were, frequently, from political plays, and as Hunter notes, the public had a reflex to opposition satires similar to their standard theatrical reflex; "a viewer or reader has only to hear the key word or see the stereotype to respond; but the response is meaningless because, being automatic, it has not passed through the mind at all" (*Occasional Forms* 72).

Chapter 1: The Right to Write; or, Colley Cibber and *The Drury Lane Monster*

“Ah! what a *Goût de travers* rules the Understandings of the Illiterate!”
(Three Hours After Marriage I.308-311)

Monster of Impropriety

During the eighteenth century, it was a matter of dispute whether Colley Cibber (1671-1757), actor, manager, playwright, and poet, had raised the business of theater to an art or lowered the art of drama to a business. The conflict between “art” and “commerce,” to put it in anachronistically modern terms, raged in all the arts during the early years of the Hanover reign, roughly 1714 through 1740, not just in the theater. Though officially the King’s servants, the Drury Lane actors and managers made their living by commercial success, not patronage. Yet Colley Cibber’s very public attempts to turn a profit, please the public, and still rise in stature among men of letters, made him repeatedly the focus and emblem of heated discussions of taste, propriety, and power.

In order to understand the political impact of later characterizations of Cibber as Prime Minister Robert Walpole, of the stage as a microcosm of the state, and of the “degradation” caused in the theater by corruption of the government, we must first understand the political implications of early characterizations of Cibber as an upstart. For the writerly ire he aroused is intimately connected to the often tenuous social position of a playwright in the early eighteenth century, with Cibber’s ambiguous social status, and with the growing unease concerning the mingling of commerce and culture. As more and more men of undistinguished birth entered the world of letters, as knowledge and taste seemed to become democratized, “experts” rose to prominence—professional critics, like John Dennis, took on in public the role that well-bred men of taste, like Burlington,

performed in private social circles.¹ Figures like Colley Cibber, who opposed such educated/expert knowledge with the marketplace, aroused outrage. The rise of the monster as a metaphor for farce reveals how farce disturbed orderliness throughout the literary and social worlds. In the growing rhetoric of class-based genre distinctions we hear concern that previous social distinctions are eroding and that parvenus are rising to prominence. The threat Cibber posed to the arts was that of the marketplace confronting tradition.

The significance of Cibber as an emblem altered over time, from his early years managing Drury Lane under the proprietorship of Christopher Rich (1704) through the peak of his years as a patent-sharer in his own right (1715-1728) and on past his ascent to the post of Poet Laureate (1730). At the final climax of the opposition to Walpole, Cibber replaced Theobald to become Pope's king of the Dunces, a man of little mind contributing to the general degradation of arts and letters in England.² To Fielding he was representative of self-serving tyranny, and so of Walpole. That both of these last figures—King and Tyrant—are national rulers reveals not only how supreme in dullness and vainglory Cibber seemed, but also how deeply imbued with consciously political imagery aesthetic conflicts had become by the end of the 1730s. Increasingly unpopular and satirized, in 1740 he wrote a defensive autobiography of his life—an audacious undertaking at a time when *Lives* were written only of major political and literary figures.

¹ Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, is most noted for his patronage of opera. To Pope, Burlington was “the symbol of all that is judicious and correct in artistic taste, combining natural good taste with an enlightened classical perspective” (Nokes 205). The world of painting underwent a shift similar to that in letters and music during the century. Painters separated themselves from craftsmen, in a new mindset that gave rise to the connoisseur. See “‘At the Expense of the Public’: The Sign Painters’ Exhibition of 1762 and the Public Sphere” by Jonathan Conlin and “Talking About Art: the French Royal Academy Salons and the Formation of the Discursive Citizen” by William Ray.

² *The Dunciad* with the addition of Book 4, and the shift of heroes from Theobald to Cibber, appeared in 1742, the same year Walpole stepped down.

Memoirs might be written by colleagues of famous men or by participants in important national events, and autobiography was at the time more a religious than an historical genre, either on the model of Augustine's *Confessions* or Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. Almost in parodic imitation, the only other class of men who wrote their "lives" was that of condemned criminals, whose tales were written partly in the form of the Spanish picaresque.³ When Colley Cibber wrote *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* he borrowed from both the high and the low, delivering careful descriptions of the styles of famous Restoration actors, investing the stage with the grandeur and petty politicking that characterized state affairs, and interspersing episodes of his own personal frolics and adventures. The unprecedented blend of high and low and the bald self-promotion define not only the decision to write his own life but also the tone of the book and of the life itself.⁴ Cibber's career had been uniquely varied and socially mobile, earning him enemies, honors, and a small fortune.

When Cibber entered the theater world in 1691, it was nearing the end of what had been a relatively stable period. Upon the reopening of the theaters in 1660, Sir William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew had been granted patents from the king awarding them exclusive rights to form companies (the Duke's Company and the King's Company, respectively) and present plays. In 1682, the two patents and companies merged, leaving no competition and only one source of employment for actors and for playwrights, and precipitating a regulatory mess. Henceforth, instead of the two competing patent theaters, London sometimes saw licensed companies (permissions

³ See Michael McKeon 98-100.

⁴ Fielding mocks the service Cibber has done to posterity in delivering such a Virtuous Life as the *Apology*, and writes that he "is by many thought to have lived such a life only in order to write it" (*Joseph Andrews* 8).

awarded by the Lord Chancellor which lasted a varying short period of time), sometimes saw separate patents (royal grants which lasted for the life of the patentee), saw patents parceled out in shares among investors, and, for a time, saw a patent not revoked but silenced.⁵ Cibber joined the united company, whose rehearsals were led by veteran actor Thomas Betterton. There he learned from, worked with, or simply admired from afar the stars of the Restoration stage.

By the time he was twenty-five, Cibber had begun his ambitious rise to dominance of London theater. In addition to acting, he wrote several successful comedies, most notably *Love's Last Shift* (1696), *She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not* (1702), and *The Careless Husband* (1704).⁶ During these same years, the senior actors of the company seceded and set up a rival company,⁷ whereupon Cibber became the advisor of the patentee, the “pettifogging lawyer” Christopher Rich, who “knew little and cared less about the drama: he was interested only in profits” (Barker 54). In the fight for audiences, Rich, with greater resources and fewer scruples, overpowered his rivals with spectacular productions of operas and processions, and by underpaying his actors.⁸ By 1709, in conjunction with several other actors, Cibber had also established a rival theatrical company.

Whether under Rich’s authority, under the actors’ own license, or (in 1715) under Sir Richard Steele’s patent, Cibber seems to have taken central responsibility of reviewing, accepting, rejecting, and altering new plays for production, and was,

⁵ For discussions of the upheavals in management between 1693 and 1709, see Avery and Scouten, and Milhous *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, 1695-1708*.

⁶ They would remain “the touchstone of genteel comedy for more than a hundred years” (Barker 53).

⁷ The Betterton company, hampered by a theater “small and out of the way... lacked space and means to compete” (Ashley 61) until it finally failed in 1706. See Milhous, *Thomas Betterton*.

according to one biographer, “ruthless (and tactless) in rejecting plays that did not offer him or one of the other principal actors a meaty part, or that were not ‘theatrical’” (Ashley 63). Accusations of high-handed vulgarity became more frequent as Cibber had more power over other—more genteel, more well-educated—playwrights and poets. Complaints about Cibber’s power were generated mostly during the years when there was little or no competition, and when Cibber, with an inordinate amount of control over the stage, presented an insurmountable obstacle to playwrights. Delariviere Manley belittled Cibber to the status of Rich’s lackey and complained that he suppressed any plays better than his own to avoid comparisons which would lower his own reputation. John Dennis wrote scathingly about an episode during the same years when “three peers of England, a duke and two earls, both the one and the other some of the most illustrious of their respective benches, wanted power to get one poor comedy acted; a certain insolent, impertinent actor... had ... power to withstand them all” (qtd. in Barker 59). Neither Manley nor Dennis comments on the quality of performances, the balance between regular and irregular plays, or the propriety of Cibber’s artistic judgments. Both present Cibber as inappropriately wielding power over his betters—those with more talent or those higher in society.

It is worth remembering that both Manley and Dennis were writing plays when they chastised Cibber, and that Dennis, at any rate, in part blamed Cibber for his repeated failures.⁹ Even an unsympathetic biographer acknowledges that Cibber “had to make

⁸ See Ashley 60, Milhous *Thomas Betterton* 109, and Cibber I.262.

⁹ Manley’s play *Almyra* failed after only three performances, competing against an opera at the other theater, in the years just before she made the remarks referred to in *The New Atlantis* (Lindren 50). In prefatory remarks, Dennis repeatedly blames particular actors, rehearsal conditions, and party prejudice for his failures. His last play, the 1709 tragedy *Appius and Virginia* failed after only four nights, and his adaptation of *Coriolanus*, called *Coriolanus, The Invader of his Country, or the Fatal Resentment* seems to

sure that every piece accepted for production was ‘theatrical,’” even those by established playwrights (Barker 112-113).¹⁰ Shirley Strum Kenny notes that the pace of regular publication of playtexts quickened in the 1690s, providing “small but reliable profits” to playwrights, though a play almost always had to be produced to secure a publisher (16). In this way, plays rose in literary stature just as Cibber gained more and more influence over what would be staged. Although inexperienced poets had always brought plays to the theaters, and had probably always taken rejection badly, as the opportunity for financial gain and literary renown increased, more writers, writers already established, writers who didn’t only need the money, began importuning the managers with their plays. Cibber accepted “theatrical” scripts, and often rejected unplayable dramas.

Yet until 1715, Cibber’s authority was qualified. He was either in Rich’s employ or in a very provisional independence, and always worked in conjunction with two and sometimes three other actor-managers. When Steele received a patent in 1715, he immediately made the triumvirate of managing actors—Cibber, Robert Wilkes, and Barton Booth—sharers in it. They were now part-owners, entitled by monarchical patent to perform and to profit from the performances of others. This gave Cibber’s actions a stamp of respectability and official approval that struck his many enemies as unseemly. Thereafter his decisions were more closely scrutinized and criticized. He was caricatured and satirized, disparaged and scorned. He was also respected and a little feared. His enemies argued that he abused his public and revealed his lack of education by promoting

have been refused in 1709, revised in 1718, accepted, postponed, and then finally damned. Dennis wrote the above complaint when this latest failure brought the earlier ones freshly to mind, and blamed all on Cibber (see Paul 38-45, Barker 119-124).

¹⁰ Barker continues, defining theatrical as having “effective situations, plenty of opportunities of stage business, good acting parts suitable for [the leading actors of the company]. If a piece met these requirements he accepted it, if not he either rejected it completely or demanded alterations” (Barker 113).

“entertainments” (a term given to any irregular performance, from dancing and spectacle to farce and, eventually, ballad opera). Both his critics and his supporters posit an ideal theater on the one hand and a theater degraded (by commercial pressures, by new technology, and by politicking) on the other, but of course there was a significant gulf between purely spectacular entertainment and highly literary drama. The vast majority of theatrical productions would have fallen somewhere between. For example, many plays, including Shakespeare’s, featured singing; advertisements trumpeted productions with new costumes; and some sound effects and machinery were used for all productions, not just spectacles and processions. All of these elements are part of a theatrical relationship between the theater professionals and the spectators, are part of what spectators expected, are part of the evening of entertainment they paid for. Yet that relationship is disregarded in contemporary discussions of the theater, though they are posited in terms of “the people”—whether those people ought not to be pandered to for their own good, or whether “the people” are being served substandard goods or otherwise being cheated.¹¹ Even before the argument is posited in explicitly political terms, which it was as early as 1713, it had this vaguely political tone to it. “Serving” the public and “pandering” to it represent different approaches to market forces, not necessarily different approaches to theater.

The conflict over the meaning of the marketplace—an impersonal force demanding quality and honesty or the voice of the lowest common denominator—is the starting point for this dissertation for two related reasons. First, the terms used to

¹¹ Kristina Straub explores the growth of the rhetoric of the actor as “the servant of a vaguely constructed ‘public’” noting that his freedom becomes by analogy the freedom of the audience (39). “By midcentury, theatrical pamphlets had begun to decry the despotism of aristocratic male patrons over the theater and to assert the rights of ‘the public’ as the actor’s ‘master’” (67).

describe it—the public, the multitude, the people—were loaded and politicized from the beginning of this period. Secondly, condemnations of the market—of Cibber, and of the farces he was associated with and equated to—were couched in aesthetic terms, as if the discussion were insulated from the realities of life and of the stage. The voices strongest in condemnation are also those that demand a very literary theater. What we see more clearly is a battle between the realities of theater on one hand, with its physical comedy, pacing and casting, audience interruptions, and potential profits, and the ideals of literature on the other, with the assumed social superiority and political status quo on the other. We must recognize, however, that competing theater owner John Rich¹² was *not* similarly attacked, nor, for all the hatred he aroused among literary men, was Edmund Curll ever abused for not upholding a higher standard for literature. Cibber was censured not only for promoting spectacle but for promoting himself. What separated Cibber from Rich and Curll was that he was himself a writer, and aggressively put himself on the level of literary men.¹³

There are other tensions at play during this transitional period than the rise of capitalism or a middle class. Throughout the century, people in the worlds of science and law, politics and religion, in the world of letters and in social commerce, erected or reinforced barriers and divisions. While this battle and these elements are perennial, I focus in this chapter on a moment when the rise of professionalism became, for a brief moment, starkly visible, in the worlds of science and art, in the rise of the virtuoso and of the critic. Both figures testify to the new specialized authority of judgment, and both

¹² Rich reopened his father's theater in 1714.

¹³ While Christopher Rich, son of Jonathan Rich, was also an actor, like Cibber, he restricted his performances to pantomime (where he became famous under his stage name of Lun); he sought profit, not respectability.

raised anxieties in more genteel intellectuals. Critics and scientists reinforced rules, categories, and divisions, devising an impersonal order to “reveal” a natural hierarchy. It became, in some views, a way to impersonate true breeding, in others a way to avoid cultivating judgment. The critic and the virtuoso were therefore frequently ridiculed for their accumulations of knowledge. These important cultural phenomena of the early eighteenth century find expression in John Gay’s 1717 *Three Hours After Marriage*, which links the class-inflected passion for definition with the fate of the farce itself. As the social stricture that encouraged gentlemen to write dramas but discouraged them from acting testifies, the business of theater was on the borderline between craft and art, skill and genius, making it very fertile ground for an exploration of these relatively new academic distinctions.

Cibber produced and acted in *Three Hours*, a short comedy which flouts the distinctions between farce and comedy. Gay, who wrote the play in association with Alexander Pope and John Arbuthnot,¹⁴ was not attempting to redefine genre or challenge the concept of a superior aesthetic, but was mocking the new miser of knowledge with his adulation of fact over wisdom. The play undermines claims to superior knowledge or taste and repeatedly reinforces common sense and public response. Yet partly because the play was rumored to be “really” written by Pope, it became the occasion for a cannonade of criticism about the propriety of works and of authors, a controversy that reenacted the conflict as between an ignorant, conceited, self-appointed expert and the wiser public opinion. The notoriety surrounding the play and the rhetoric of its critics mark a turning point in the reputations of both Cibber and farce. Both came to be seen as

¹⁴ See below for a more thorough discussion of the authorship of this play.

aberrations garnering an inappropriate amount of attention. Both occupied ambiguous positions in polite society as well as in the theater world and were difficult to define or precisely pin down; by their nature, an actor and a farce are continuously, maddeningly, fluid.

Unwittingly, the play put Cibber's editorial judgments at the center of the year's literary gossip. The play mocks the gullibility of amateur scientists and burlesques the aspirations of bad poets and arrogant critics, but after a successful run, foes "interpreted" it as a satire on the *audience's* gullibility, and then as a mockery of *Cibber's* arrogance.¹⁵ The run ended in a confusion of what Pope called "a tide of malice and party, that certain authors have raised against it" (*Correspondence* 395). Later in the season, Cibber mocked the play's conceit in an ad lib during a performance of Buckingham's 1671 *The Rehearsal*, a burlesque primarily of John Dryden and through him bombastic playwriting. According to legend, Pope, insulted, spoke harshly to Cibber, and when the actor repeated the references the following night, Gay went behind the scenes and exchanged blows with him. The breach was soon made permanent. In December, *The Non-Juror*, Cibber's anti-Catholic adaptation of *Tartuffe*, debuted to tremendous success. Henceforth, Cibber was openly supportive of the Whig Ministry, earning him the enmity of even those opposition wits who were not already one of the injured playwrights or on Pope's side.

What *Three Hours* itself says about farce, writers, and propriety has been all but erased from history. Because both farce and Cibber were later held in such low esteem, contemporary *intentional* misinterpretations have themselves been misunderstood. Many

¹⁵ The play ran for seven nights, the longest run at Drury Lane of that season (Nokes 235). It garnered two author's benefit nights and was a moderate success.

scholars—including Gay biographer David Nokes and Cibber biographers Leonard Ashley and Helene Koon—hold that the play was a failure and/or a satire on Cibber in the role he played himself.¹⁶ In reexamining the play and the events surrounding it, I demonstrate that these assessments originated as intentional devaluations of the play and the men involved on a social more than aesthetic basis.

The Drury Lane Monster

The perception of farce as “low” coincides with a dramatic increase in its popular appeal, as well as with increased competition between the theaters.¹⁷ That more voices were raised against it indicates that the public was more aware of it, not necessarily that farce actually became a different, more vulgar thing. After 1714, when the two licensed theaters, Lincoln’s Inn Fields and the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane, were again in competition, “the farce-afterpiece became a regular part of the theatrical bill. Although many kinds of dramatic novelties were used for the afterpiece—acrobatic and scenic spectacles, comic and pastoral operettas, for example—farce provided the mainstay” (J. Davis 19). The individual names for all those types (collectively “irregular” or “entertainment”) were not regularly agreed upon, and at one time or another all were called farces. Such a crisis of definition goes to the heart of the play at hand.

Three Hours after Marriage drew down a barrage of personal invective out of proportion to its faults. Such disproportionality was, paradoxically, appropriate, for it is a

¹⁶ Nokes is among several scholars who consider Gay’s “most audacious satiric stroke” in the play the “ridicule” of “the actor-manager Colley Cibber in the part of Plotwell, and then get[ting] Cibber to play the part himself” (241). For thorough discussions of this legend, see John Harrington Smith’s introduction to the play (1961) and John Fuller’s notes in his 1983 edition (435-443). Ashley and Koon accept it as truth, though Sherburn began to discredit it as early as 1926. Ashley refers to the play as “inconsequential” and an “unfortunate” failure “which Gay, Arbuthnot, and Pope had been stupid enough to write” (Ashley 108).

play bursting with category violations. Actors parade across the stage as various kinds of unnatural creatures: exotic monsters, unchaste wives, ink-stained nieces, cuckolds, bastards, and fraudulent authors. A mummy and a crocodile defy the boundaries of living and dead and human and animal, and provide the key for reading the other “monsters” in the play who defy the lesser and more conventional boundaries between virgin and mother, poet and woman, manuscript and scrap paper. The sins which earned the play the epithet “The Drury Lane Monster” were its own generic confusion, social indecorum, moral instability, and, ultimately and crucially, the perceived malice of its perpetrators. Colley Cibber, whose role in the play was intentionally misconstrued as a satire upon his own writing, was doubly condemned for aping his literary betters and being fool enough to ignorantly mock himself.

This misinterpretation was instigated by friends of the play’s victims. *Three Hours* lampoons Dr. John Woodward as Fossile, a collector, a cuckold, and an all-around fool, and John Dennis as Sir Tremendous, a thundering, hostile pedant. Woodward was a scientist and avid collector, Dennis a poet and critic; both men were widely satirized for years and were the particular enemies of, respectively, Arbuthnot and Pope. In the play, their expert opinions place them above or against general opinion but also beyond common sense. Both, in satirical characterizations, focus so intently on detail that they fail to comprehend meanings.

Combining the themes of bad science and bad writing, the play contrasts knowledge with wisdom. In the thin plot, physical disruptions mask social and intellectual ones. Fossile, an elderly doctor, is also a collector of scientific curiosities. In

¹⁷ See Leo Hughes *Patrons* 97-106.

his medical practice he applies purges to all patients, no matter what their complaint. He has secretly married young Mrs. Townley, who claims to be a virgin. Immediately her lovers Plotwell and Underplot begin their attempts on Fossile's house and bride. They first gain entrance by impersonating a learned scientist and a desperate patient respectively and later smuggle themselves into the house disguised as a mummy and a crocodile, "curiosities" Fossile has been impatiently awaiting. These interactions allow for satirical scenes highlighting Fossile's narrow focus on the purely physical, while he postpones nuptial contact with his bride. Though Mrs. Townley shows herself willing to entertain whichever of her lovers finds her alone, neither succeeds. The play ends in a whirl of chaos. The mummy and crocodile run out of the house fearing to be autopsied. A man appears with an infant, which, in a complicated series of events, is revealed to be Mrs. Townley's bastard child just as she escapes Fossile's house to return to a long-lost husband, never accounting for the child that is neither Fossile's nor her true husband's. Although his unconsummated marriage is null, Fossile is left with the baby as the heir for which he wished at the start of the play. The cuckold and the bastard replace the crocodile and mummy as aberrations.

Mirroring the central plot's questions of domestic truth and value, questions of literary and theatrical value form at the heart of the subplot. Fossile's niece Phoebe Clinket neglects the womanly cares of dress and housekeeping to write poetry. She invites the players to her uncle's house to hear her tragedy *The Universal Deluge* which she pretends is Plotwell's, since he is friendly with the actors. Plotwell, played by Cibber, also unites the two plots and reinforces the focus on fraudulent creations. He connects

the story of illicit sex to that of substandard writing, and his name alludes both to his schemes to win Townley and to his association with the theater.

As the pivot between the two plots, Plotwell translates monsters into meanings. He escapes Fossile's detection as the mummy only when Clinket claims that he is part of a masquerade that she designed and so he moves fluidly between the worlds of the curious, the licentious, and the theatrical. His fraud is redefined as questionable art and the rarity of a mummy is transformed into the banality of the lecher/adulterer; a physical monstrosity reveals a moral one. Plotwell rarely appears as himself, so intent is he on finding a way to be alone with Mrs. Townley. One of the few times he is in the house "in no body's Shape but his own," as Cibber later referred to himself in *The Apology*, is for Clinket's reading, and even then he is "posing" as the author of her play. The fluidity of the meaning of Plotwell's various characters, the open question of what or who he is, would later be paralleled in a critical struggle over the nature of the role itself and of Colley Cibber, who performed it.

Clinket's "deluge" parallels Fossile's universal purge, her poetry an injudicious outpouring. Her histrionic claim "If this Piece be not rais'd to the Sublime, let me henceforth be stigmatiz'd as a Reptile in the Dust of Mediocrity" (I.314-316) directs the audience to do just that. Her straining, hyperbolic language is matched by the poetically silly and theatrically absurd whale she strands in the treetops when the Deluge recedes. The players reject everything about it, and Plotwell, only present at the reading in hopes of seeing Mrs. Townley, cavalierly invites the players to "blot and insert wherever you please" (I.505), callously sacrificing Clinket's poetic offspring before her eyes.

Clinket's artistic mediocrity is inextricably linked to her disdain for the public. She believes her work transcends the public's limited capacity to appreciate and disparages the actors who determine whether to perform it or not as a prejudiced rabble. "Ah! what a *Gouût de travers* rules the Understandings of the Illiterate!" (I.308-311). Their "taste of travesty" is both the reversal of good taste and an enjoyment for travesty—for burlesque and farce, such as that Gay's present audience enjoys while watching *Three Hours*. Clinket disdains the very audience before her.¹⁸ The players, who are not gentlemen, have the power to decide whether to perform her play or that of any writer, based on the experience of their trade, not literary training. Her attitude is later mistaken as the play's own assessment and condemnation of Cibber.

The uneducated aesthetic, the overeducated aesthetic, and the mercantile motive contend here for primacy. The evaluations of the (financially disinterested) playwright and critic serve only their egos at the expense of public opinion. Sir Tremendous (John Dennis), the critic, dictates to the audiences; he is "a Gentleman who can instruct the Town to dislike what has pleased them, and to be pleased with what they disliked" (I.387-388). The critic commandeers a vocabulary and an encyclopedic knowledge that serves to awe the public at large. He, like the playwright, is isolated from stage realities, and he approaches drama as logic and numbers, defining it but not understanding it as drama.¹⁹ Dennis had made a respectable name for himself as a critic around the turn of the century, but when his own grandly poetic tragedies failed he became bitter, and some

¹⁸ "that injudicious *Canaille*" (I.375).

¹⁹ As Pope describes the type: "Thus Criticks, of less *Judgment* than *Caprice*,/ *Curious*, not *Knowing*, not *exact*, but *nice*,/ *Form short Ideas*; and offend in *Arts*/ (As most in *Manners*) by a *Love to Parts*" (*Essay on Criticism* 285-288).

of his later criticism was tinged with personal bitterness.²⁰ While Clinket's poetry is absurd—"Tho' Heav'n wrings all the Sponges of the Sky,/ And pours down Clouds, at once each Cloud a Sea" (I.488-489)—Tremendous's objections to the play address rules, not theatrical effect. He holds himself as the standard of value, discarding tradition and common sense, and claiming that all poets, back to and including Homer, are thieves of previous work (I.421-425).

On the other hand, the judgment of the two players concerns the needs of the theater and the demands of the audience. Plotwell and the players may agree with Tremendous's objection that a "whole Scene is monstrous," but less because it is "against the Rules of Tragedy," than because "it neither can take, nor ought to take" (I.501-502, 517). Audience taste is their only arbiter, and the projected audience in this case makes a respectable judgment. The scene does not defend what Cibber would later call "monstrous Medlies," irregular entertainments that did "take" with audiences of the day, but the representatives of the theater, and the imagined spectators, are the only reasonable characters in the scene—not the higher-class poet or critic.

Cibber was known and ridiculed for overuse of the word "theatrical,"²¹ which goes directly to the heart of performance realities and the place of farce. His attention to the craft of the stage—to casting and costuming and the cutting and alteration of speeches, as well as the selection of plays—frequently made him vulnerable to charges of egotism and to valuing sensation above sense. In *Three Hours*, for example, Plotwell "acts" as Dr.

²⁰ "In his youth Dennis had... been numbered among the wits, but... [p]overty and almost continuous literary warfare had soured him and by 1719 he was... an unscrupulous enemy. A slight, a pun, an unfortunate reference to his poverty or his plays was enough to make him lose his temper and produce those fulminations of rage which were at once the delight and terror of the town" (Barker 119).

²¹ See Barker 113 and Ashley 63.

Lubomirski, as Haemon (in Clinket's play), and finally the mummy. Fossile himself at one point dons the uniform of the footman to intercept his wife's love letters. The character of Clinket is an atypical female role and a rich comic figure, if an unflattering one. Clinket's tragedy, on the other hand, is "not in the least encumber'd with Episodes" but is rather "Three Hours" of "a rainy Day, and a Sculler in a Storm" (I.320-321, 462-463). Though she has no action, she imagines a spectacular—and unstageable—setting in which rain showers onto the stage and cattle swim in the fields, not to mention the whale in the treetops. More impractical, "almost all the Persons of [her] Second Act start out of Stones" that the main characters throw behind them (I. 477-478). A spectacular, if bizarre, entrance.

The players consult the marketplace, not their own egos, concluding "We shall lose money by it" (I.528-529). Their reductive evaluation of the play on the basis of projected receipts demonstrates the problematic situation of the theater at the intersection of commerce and culture. To some, the very connection of commerce and culture that allowed Cibber to decide what would be seen in London was itself monstrous. Dennis complained, in 1720, of the power in the hands of "a certain insolent, impertinent actor" (qtd. in Barker 59). The proper hierarchy of taste and power is completely inverted by Cibber's reign. Certainly, Dennis's attitude about Cibber is Clinket's attitude about the players. Dennis had earned the nickname "Tremendous" by his overuse of the word in his tragedies, as if the word alone could create the affect in spectators that his plays failed to do.²² Dennis's most recent failure, *Appius and Virginia* (1709), featured a storm for which Dennis had invented a machine to create thunder. Though the play failed, the

²² Pope also alludes to Dennis with the word Tremendous in his *Essay on Criticism* (585-586), as did other contemporaries.

thunder succeeded, and Cibber forthwith used it in other plays, further infuriating Dennis. Dennis is not only pedantic critic, he is simultaneously dreadful poet, as Clinket justifies her “rainy day” by reference to other authors who thunder. Identifying him with his failed tragedies reinforces the implication that his criticism was motivated by personal envy.

Later critics have assumed that the satire on Cibber was in Plotwell’s careless disregard for Clinket’s play. But to whatever extent Cibber as actor/manager is represented in this scene, his decisions and determinations are superior to those of Clinket and Tremendous.²³ The financial pressure of audience approval moderates personal vanity. Whereas Dennis and Tremendous expect those with titles to dictate to those without, the unnamed actors (1st and 2nd Player—nameless themselves until cast) obey the voice of the public.

Gay makes his point about public judgment when Tremendous refers to the theater-going public as a “*Sodom of Ignorance*” (I.391), as if their lack of knowledge automatically translates into a lack of taste. Tremendous attempts to take a stand as a moral, as well as an aesthetic authority, associating the enjoyment of farce with unnatural sin.²⁴ Regular plays breed regular morals. Yet this stance, already twenty years old, had become a mask for class prejudice.²⁵ Tremendous views the audience as an unwashed multitude, an unthinking mob. The triumph of the actors over Clinket recast the contest

²³ Elizabeth Inchbald wrote that, as opposed to critics who “boasted of knowing what kind of drama the public ought to like; Cibber was the lucky dramatist generally to know what they *would* like, whether they ought or not” (quoted in Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism” 11).

²⁴ In his *Letters to Sir John Edgar* of 1720, Dennis fulminates against Cibber not merely for ruining his *Invader*, but for the sake of the public good: Cibber had “a thousand times denied the very being of a God: he has made his brags and his boasts of that senseless infidelity” (quoted in Barker 123).

²⁵ See Jonas Barish (221-235) and Matthew J. Kinservik (24-33) on the Collier Controversy of 1698, which “reformed” the morals of the stage.

between a self-promoting authority and an anonymous public as one between a dictator and a democratic community, and so aligns theatricality with public spirit.

The conclusion of the play, restoring truth, affirms theatricality, which announces itself by what Raymond Williams calls its “system of social signals”²⁶ and so does not deceive. Misrepresentation and fraud, on the other hand, threaten and destabilize authority. The crocodile and mummy flee from the house of science to a public arena, Hockley in the Hole, moving from fraud to entertainment and so from threat (to marital stability, to patriarchy, to scientific truth) to plaything.²⁷ Like the absurdities which declare a farce, the very visibility of the straightforward monsters defuses their threat. Mrs. Townley’s revealed unchastity exposes her as monstrous. Fossile laments his fate; “Whom has thou married, poor *Fossile*? Couldst thou not divert thyself still with the Spoils of Quarries and Coal-pits, thy Serpents and thy Salamanders, but thou must have a living Monster too!” (I.142-145). She is a virgin who is no virgin, a bride who is no wife: a fraud and a hypocrite.²⁸ Hypocrisy destabilizes society, especially when the hypocrisy is sexual, since the monstrosity of the cuckold and the bastard is not visible. The social structure depends upon legitimacy, and all of the monsters point to generic, sexual, and physical illegitimacies.

²⁶ “This signal is so established and conventional that it hardly has to be noticed...At the margins of the practice, and especially in unfamiliar kinds of work, ... variable reactions between the signal and actual responses are quite common. But over a much wider range than we usually recognize, the signal works without question, because it is a conventional way of answering what would otherwise be (and may still really be) difficult or impossibly difficult questions, about the nature of the work and about the appropriate kind of response. ...Simple conventional signals depend, of course, on relatively stable forms, and on relatively settled places and occasions. This conservatism, however, often leads to conscious revolt, by artists with different purposes, who then either confuse or even omit the known signals” (Williams 131, 132, 133).

²⁷ They also go from a private exhibition, secluded from the public, to a public exhibition, accessible to all.

²⁸ “Early modern satirists... isolate hypocrisy as the preeminent human monstrosity. Hypocrisy is ingratitude rendered political, ambitious, and invisible: it epitomizes mobility for personal gain” (Benedict 33).

Gay connects death and life as well as monsters and sex when Fossile declares that he will “make some Reparation for the Mortality of my Patients by the Fecundity of my Wife” (III.334-5), and as soon as he finishes the line (“My Dear, thou shalt bring me the finest Boy!”), the man from Deptford does indeed bring him her son. His only concern, having learned nothing from the “three hours” that have passed, is whether the child is “monstrous” (III.336, 347).²⁹ Of course it is; it is a bastard. Wherever simple, visually obvious monsters are sought in this play, moral and social ones appear.

The sex hidden in the main plot bursts out in the subplot. Gay sexualizes the conversation between Clinket and Tremendous, linking their self-centered literacy to the frustrated sexuality of the main plot, and so to its monstrosity. In Gay’s most extended and obvious punning, the two engage in a breathy textual intercourse:

Clinket. I am so charm’d with your manly Penetration!

Sir Tremendous. I with your profound Capacity!

Clinket. That I am not able—

Sir Tremendous. That it is impossible—

Clinket. To conceive—

Sir Tremendous. To express—

Clinket. With what Delight I embrace—

Sir Tremendous. With that Pleasure I enter into—

Clinket. Your Ideas, most learned Sir Tremendous! (I.441-449)

Their ignorance of the sexual innuendo of their speech indicates their overall foolishness, the surface of their explorations never penetrating to the heart of truth. Though both have

²⁹ He is preoccupied by monstrous births, “Hermaphrodites, monstrous Twins” (II.275). By “monstrous Twins” he means conjoined, like the Hungarians Helena and Judith. These women, examined by Swift and

some breeding and learning, they misapply it to pursuits that can only be fruitless, sterile, or monstrous.³⁰ Like them, Fossile is voracious in his intellectual pursuits and impertinent in his goals. As in most virtuoso comedy, the “true” monstrosity is unnatural thought.³¹ He and his niece are both unable to participate in normal social bonds, their books serving only to exclude them from human intercourse.

The twin themes of illegitimate sexuality and inappropriate writing and writers immediately rebounded on to the author(s) of the play. The overheated sexual allusions in *Three Hours After Marriage* attracted much of the criticism, although those allusions frequently point to the failure, absence, or ignorance of sex and so the moral isolation of the speaker. On stage, however, those allusions, like the supposedly stuffed crocodile, came alive. Will Penkethman, a great comedic actor, played Underplot in the crocodile costume, and on the fourth night (and thereafter) had a number of mishaps while admiring the beauty and size of his own tail; he knocked actress Mrs. Bicknell (Phoebe Clinket) “flat upon her back, where she discovered more linen than other habiliments, and, more skin and flesh than linnen” (“A Letter, giving an Account of the Origin of the Quarrel between *Cibber, Pope, and Gay*”).³² The accidental peek-a-boo with Mrs. Bicknell’s unmentionables captures the tone of the dialogue’s gratuitous indecorum, but

Arbuthnot in 1709, appeared in the Scriblerian *Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus*, in composition from 1714.

³⁰ Clinket’s whole “System of the Reparation of the human Race” for after the flood is that the stones themselves become people (I.477-480).

³¹ See Benedict 59-68. Seventeenth-century philosophy considered metaphor and rhetoric to be simulations of and catalysts for monstrosity in ideas (Stillman, Kritzman), early scientists wrote that superstition alone was monstrous (Huet 65), and both Spenser and Swift created (female) monsters to represent producers and consumers of books of bad ideas in *Errour (Faerie Queene)* and the Goddess Criticism (*The Battel of the Books*).

³² Attached to the 1761 Dublin edition, reprinted in Smith.

that dialogue generally comes in Clinket's scenes in satires of writing, not the scenes with the adulterous Townley.

The literary indecency—both the burlesque of pedants and poets and the salacious innuendo—aroused a “hysterical chorus of complaints” (Nokes 243). Characterizing the play as obscene subverts its critique of literary critics, focusing attention on its “lowness” instead of its intellectual disdain. Evidence that the outrage was more personal and social than moral is that “those loudest in their protests at its alleged obscenity were Addison, Blackmore, Leonard Welsted, and Giles Jacob,” all aligned, politically and socially, with John Dennis (Nokes 243n). To complain about the characterization of Dennis would be to admit its aptness; to complain about the aesthetic indecencies would be to align themselves with Tremendous.

However anxious Addison and company were to take the high road, other writers were willing to get dirty.

Against all the Decorum of the Stage

It has been difficult to separate the events surrounding the run of *Three Hours* from the subsequent misinterpretation of them, legitimate criticisms from slander, and malicious gossip from real-life failure. Expectations that Pope planned a theatrical ambush of all the Moderns “provoked an instinct for retaliation and inspired a confederacy of the dunces to damn the play at birth” (Nokes 233). In the next three months “at least eight pamphlets appeared attacking its alleged obscenity and vindictiveness” (Nokes 233). Most notable among the many performed and printed reactions are “The Drury Lane Monster,” a poem published on the night of the sixth or

seventh performance, which figures the play itself as a bastard, mongrel monster, and *The Confederates*, a pamphlet-drama in verse, in which Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, and Cibber prepare for the opening night, each with his own self-serving agenda. These first two satires questioned Gay's authorship of the play (treating it as collectively composed or entirely Pope's, regardless of Gay's name on it) and emphasized the play's generic instability. Later in the year *A Key* to the play translated all of its insults and inserts many, such as the suggestion that Cibber was the target of the authors' satire in the role of Plotwell. A "Letter" describing a performance also relates gossip about Pope and Gay's relationship with Cibber later in that year.³³ There was more talk about the talk about the play—its genre, its aims, its fallout, and its authorship—than about the play itself.

Three Hours After Marriage opened on January 16, 1717, ran for seven nights, and was published during that run with prefatory remarks. In those remarks, Gay mentions that it was originally written in three acts, though performed in five, and that he received some assistance from friends, who did not wish to take credit. The authorship of *Three Hours* was and continues to be a vexed question. Before its production, it was widely rumored to be Pope's, and much of the subsequent commentary assumed Gay's name on the title page was simply a beard. Since Gay had admitted in the Advertisement to the play that his friends had "assisted," many considered it a collective production. A contemporary prologue notes disdainfully that "Such Wags have been, who boldly durst adventure/ To Club a Farce by Tripartite-Indenture" (quoted in Sherburn 109). Although deviations from the model of proprietary authorship were rare, the Scriblerus Club (Pope,

³³ "A LETTER giving an Account of the Origin of the Quarrel between *Cibber*, *Pope*, and *Gay*" was first published in the 1761 Dublin edition, but is assumed to have been written in 1718.

Gay, Swift, Arbuthnot, Thomas Parnell, and Robert Harley) was founded specifically for collective writing in 1713.³⁴ Gay later insisted that the offending crocodile was entirely his, included against the advice of his Scriblerian associates.³⁵ The question has been examined by Gay scholars since without much enthusiasm, some considering the play a collaborative whole, others addressing the “knotty problem of which author wrote precisely which parts of the play” (Smith 1). David Nokes maybe stands alone in taking Gay’s words at face value.

I believe that Gay is responsible for most of the play based on its compassionate attitude toward the players and the audience. As a whole the play lacks Pope’s characteristic disdain for farce and for public taste.³⁶ Certainly many sections resemble other Pope and Arbuthnot works, such as *The Dunciad* and the *John Bull* pamphlets, both of which satirize particular people and particular events, whereas Gay’s own work tends toward more general satire. These scenes (for example, the Wit-Combat of Act I and the Dr. Lubomirski scene of Act II) seem sharper and less theatrical than Gay’s customary manner. I am inclined to believe that Pope and Arbuthnot composed those scenes (not just inspired or suggested) them. Since the bulk of the work is Gay’s, however, I consider him “the” playwright. I am more interested in how the uncertainty became itself

³⁴ They began composing their greatest production, Martin Scriblerus’s *Memoirs*, in 1714. Arbuthnot and Gay co-wrote the poem *An Epistle to the most Learned Doctor W-d-d; from a Prude* in 1723, satirizing Woodward and castrati, characterizing monstrosity as displaced sexuality. As there are few other examples of conscious and sustained collective authorship so successful, collective authorship of this play is very plausible.

³⁵ Gay wrote to Pope “Too late I see, and confess myself mistaken, in Relation to the Comedy, yet I do not think had I follow’d your Advice, and only introduc’d the *Mummy*, that the Absence of the *Crocodile* had sav’d it” (*Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 1.388).

³⁶ As when he called the theater audience a “many-headed Monster” (*First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* 305).

part of the social disruption of the play, what it certifies in the play about theater, and how it marks paternity and so authority as always suspect.

The attacks on the abnormalities of the play attribute them explicitly to its unnatural heredity. "The Drury Lane Monster" dissects the play methodically, outlining its approach. "And such are the Marks of this Wonderful Creature,/ Each Parent is seen in each odd sort of Feature" (11-12). Each of the three parents, Pope, Arbuthnot, and Gay, contributes his own peculiar aberration. J. D. Breval wrote *The Confederates* under the name of Joseph Gay, claiming "Let *Brother Wits* impose on *JOHNNY GAY*;/ But *JOES*'s no Father for Another's *Play*" (Prologue, italics reversed). The accusation that Pope and Arbuthnot wrote the play entirely and simply passed it off on the genial Gay upon its failure³⁷ echoes the attempts of Plotwell and Underplot to father Townley's child and pass it off on Fossile.

A play with three authors, like a child with three fathers, is either a violation of nature or a fraud. The child in the play, whom Fossile so eagerly hopes is a monster, is both violation and fraud.

Fossile: It seemeth to me to be a Child unlawfully begotten.

Possum: A Bastard! who does he lay it to?

Fossile: To our Family.

Possum: Your Family, *quatenus* a Family, being a body collective, cannot get a Bastard. (III.385-391)

³⁷ "Pope" exults "I... Safe from the Cudgel, stand secure of Praise;/ Mine is the Credit, be the Danger Gay's" in the pamphlet farce *The Confederates* (scene i); "Most pamphlets adopted the familiar tactic of treating Gay's name on the title-page as a mere subterfuge by Pope" (Nokes 233-4).

Logical impossibility equals biological impossibility; a body collective, though a body, is sterile. The strange creature can only have been produced by unnatural means. Like the child bestowed on Fossile, the play itself is neither lawfully begotten nor socially acceptable.

The trope of authorship as paternity is suggested and ridiculed in the play itself. Phoebe Clinket describes her writing process as passively being impregnated by her female Muse, but then promotes the more active “steady, strong, strapping, stiff” quality of her animal spirits and phallic pen (I.103, III.483). As a writer, she resembles many sexual monsters, among them the lesbian, the Amazon, and the hermaphrodite.³⁸ Clinket frequently refers to her works as her offspring and to Plotwell as their father (since he’s given her play his name).³⁹ Her letter to Plotwell, intercepted and misinterpreted within the play, connects her “deluge” of writing with monstrosity and sex, as her reference is taken to be the (bastard) baby: “Sir, the Child which you father’d is retun’d back upon my Hands” (III.463-4). The language of paternity is traditionally used for authorship, but her offspring have a perverse parenthood, since she is sometimes their father, sometimes their mother, with Plotwell and the muse drifting in and out of her metaphors indiscriminately.

Pope became the center of questions of the paternity *of* the play specifically in the language of writing and paternity *in* the play. Pope is identified as the monster in *The Confederates*: “No far-fetch’d *Mummies* on this *Stage* appear, / Nor *Snake*, nor *Shark*, nor

³⁸ Susan Gubar, in her influential essay “The Female Monster in Augustan Satire,” argues that “[f]emale writers are maligned as failures because they cannot transcend their bodily limitations... A prototype of the female dunce, Phoebe Clinket ... is, ironically, as sensual and indiscriminate in her poetic strainings as Lady [sic] Townley in her insatiable erotic longings” (389).

³⁹ “This, Madam, is Mr. *Plotwell*; a Gentleman who is so infinitely obliging, as to introduce my Play on the Theatre, by fathering the unworthy Issue of my Muse” (I.300-302).

Crocodile is here; But, One *Strange Monster* we design to show,/ (His Fellow you ne'er saw in **Channel-Row*)/ On whom Dame Nature nothing good bestow'd,/ In *Form*, a *Monkey*; but for *Spite*, a *Toad*" (5-10).⁴⁰ The misshapen comedy, presumed Pope's, gave his enemies an opportunity to ridicule his misshapen body. Like Clinket's, Pope's body is antithetical to the classical ideal; he is not the model man, the model author, but rather a perverse, unmanly author. The story of Pope's reaction to Cibber's *Rehearsal* mockery insinuates this in two ways. He does not fight his own battle but sends John Gay to pummel Cibber for him—the story necessarily presumes that the play is Pope's, not Gay's, although the "assumption" may have been made partly *in order* to be able to ascribe an effeminate cowardliness to Pope, both in not putting his name to the play, and in not punching Cibber himself. Cibber's version of the backstage incident (in his *Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope* written twenty-five years later) caricatures Pope's supposed rage with hermaphroditic implication; when the poet comes behind the scenes of Cibber's *Rehearsal* in 1717, "his Lips pale and his Voice trembling... almost choaked with the foam of his Passion," Cibber gloats "Now let the Reader judge by this Concern, who was the true Mother of the Child!" (*Letter* 19). In the context of and in reference to *Three Hours After Marriage*, Cibber explicitly casts Pope as both failed female playwright Phoebe Clinket and whorish Mrs. Townley.

Not only was the identity of the author in question, the generic identity of the play itself was unclear. *Three Hours* was produced and published as "A Comedy," a main piece in five acts. Gay testifies to the importance of its form when he remarks that "It may be necessary to acquaint the Reader, that this Play is printed exactly as it is acted; for,

⁴⁰ The original footnote for "Channel-Row" is "Randal in *Channel-Row*, the famous Monster-monger."

tho' the Players in Compliance with the Taste of the Town, broke it into five Parts in the Representation; yet, as the Action pauses, and the Stage is left vacant but three times, so it properly consists of but three Acts" (Advertisement). The three hours of the title highlights the play's obedience to the conventional unity of time. However, aside from its artificial act division, it barely resembles a comedy at all. The confusion is deliberate, as part of the overall satire of the play, but this interpretation eluded most contemporaries—certainly the writers who attacked it in "The Drury Lane Monster" and *The Confederates*. As a three-act play it would have presented itself as a farce; in five acts it is a poor counterfeit claiming the space of comedy. While farce characteristically spills over its own borders, including real people in parodies and cameos, referring to real events and literally entering the audience spaces, comedy alludes more vaguely to contemporaries and contains the humor within the realistic logic of the play itself. They create different dynamics of interaction with their audiences, and audiences respond accordingly. The obvious lampooning and the excessive absurdity of *Three Hours* ought to have signaled its farcical intention, as its appearance as a three-act farce or afterpiece would have. Yet in five acts it sent a different signal, and so aroused different expectations.

As a farce, the play would have had far more success. Gay's play borrows its plot and devices from Aphra Behn's farce *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), which remained popular long past its debut, even with those same audiences that failed to support *Three Hours*. In this earlier farce about science, pretention, and artifice, Dr. Baliardo aspires to marry his daughter into lunar royalty. He is victim of the most blatant deceits, and is, by means of humiliation, reformed at the conclusion. Like Don Quixote, he believes against

common sense and imagines he interacts with royalty, and like the Don he concludes, “Burn all my Books and let my study blaze,/ Burn all to Ashes, and be sure the Wind/ Scatter the vile contagious monstrous Lyes” (III.iii). The lies of astrology and alchemy, like the plots of farce, are monstrous because they change the nature of the world, suspend natural laws, and transform wise men into fools. But the very absurdities ought to indicate, to a sensible man, that what he sees is only an amusement or a lesson, a fiction. Thus Behn’s farce uses artifice to reinforce natural common sense.⁴¹

Lincoln’s Inn Fields performed *The Emperor of the Moon* regularly throughout the 1715-1717 seasons, with a performance fewer than three weeks before *Three Hours After Marriage*. Drury Lane’s revival in the fall of 1714, “with new scenes, machines, and all other original decorations proper to the play,” had been successfully performed throughout that season, with Will Penkethman (the crocodile) as Harlequin, frequently along with Gay’s *The What D’ye Call it*, and had been again revived in the spring of 1716.⁴² London audiences were very familiar with the thirty-year-old farce.

In *Emperor*, the many deceptions practiced on Dr. Baliardo provided a great deal of physical comedy, a showcase for a talented farceur. Moreover, another successful entertainment at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, in April and May of 1717, entitled *The Jealous Doctor; or, the Intriguing Dame*, was a dance of the scene from *Three Hours* when Plotwell and Underplot appear as the crocodile and mummy; in this entertainment, Plotwell and Underplot are “played” by Scaramouch and Harlequin, the names of their originals in Behn’s play (see Nokes 236 and Sherburn 108). The production and these

⁴¹ In her dedication, Behn claims that the humility and triviality of farce has something natural in it, not in spite of but by virtue of the absurd.

⁴² See *The London Stage, 1660-1800* Part II, 332.

names indicate that the producers were fully aware of the popularity of the monsters as well as the resemblance between the two plays and the commedia dell'arte tradition they both borrowed from.⁴³ The *content* of Gay's play was not offensive to its audience. Gay's play is no more absurd than Behn's, certainly not more absurd than the Italianate dance extracted from its own climax. But neither *The Emperor* nor *The Jealous Doctor* claims to be a comedy. They know their place.

Gay's partial adaptation of Behn's farce, with its overt absurdities, has the sensibility of farce. Gay himself wrote to Pope, that "I can't help laughing myself, (though the Vulgar do not consider that it was design'd to look very ridiculous) to think how the poor Monster and Mummy were dash'd at their Reception" (*Correspondence* I.388). It was designed not only to *be* ridiculous, but to *look* ridiculous; like farce itself, the poor Monster and Mummy were meant to be too silly to offend. Consciously incorporating all the watermarks of farce but presenting them under cover of a regular comedy, Gay mocks the very conventions of the stage. The satire on writing according to rules is thus extended, as the proper three hours' duration and five-act division is revealed as yet another hypocritical mask. Without this layer and as a simple farce, it still would have annoyed Dennis and Addison, still would have insulted Woodward, and still would have struck some viewers as obscene. But as a comedy, it was presumptuous and fraudulent, an intentional insult to theatrical conventions, to audiences, and to critics.

"The Drury Lane Monster" begins with a hit at the "categorical effrontery" of the play itself.⁴⁴ "Near the Hundreds of *Drury* a Monster was shown/ For five Days together,

⁴³ Just as the stage business was all that survived of Dennis's *Appius and Virginia*, the slapstick in costume was all of *Three Hours* that lived on.

⁴⁴ Stephen Pender notes the moral symbolism of the monster. The "display was a talisman, an emblem Part of its power came from its categorical effrontery and the mingling of species... it was this emotive

the Talk of the Town,/ What Species it was, or what was its Frame,/Whether Human or Brute, or whence it first came,/ It puzzled the Criticks of *Gresham* to tell” (1-5). A similar accusation came in *The Confederates*, published two months later, which purports to tell the true story of the play’s authorship and opening night. In it, “Cibber” describes the script: “Here bawdy Prose, and there of Verse a Scrap;/.../ Such Monsters breeds your *Nile* (the Learned say)/ One half is Frog, and t’other Half is Clay” (24). The thrust of this attack is the play’s genre confusion. We note that Cibber is skeptical of the play’s value, as Plotwell is of Clinket’s, and that he only produces it after receiving financial security for it.⁴⁵ Like the players, he will produce only what “will take.” There is no hint in either of these satires that Cibber was a target, except insofar as his market philosophy allows him to be bribed, for money is money.

Overlooked by the legend is that all of these works—*Three Hours*, *The Rehearsal*, and *The Dunciad*—are about bad writers.⁴⁶ Class is central to all of the satires. All admonish literary presumption and address the question of who has the right to speak with a public voice. Before anyone had anything to say about Cibber, they were criticizing the play and its writers as exactly the kind of monstrosity Clinket tries to pass off. That too is about the class of the writers, their behavior, and the monstrous child they deliver.

resonance that accounted for the widespread attention to the anomalous” (149). The undeniably visible categorical effrontery of monsters and their already moral resonance transformed the language of monstrosity quickly and easily, in this Age of Reason, into a critical metaphor.

⁴⁵ Again, the rumor circulated (reflected in or begun by *The Confederates*) that three maids of honor gave 400 guineas to urge the actors to produce *Three Hours* (Nokes 239-240), but no one seems to have noticed that in the play itself, Clinket commits to “deposite a Sum... upon the Success of” her play (I. 530).

⁴⁶ And hovering behind *The Rehearsal* and *The Dunciad*, Dryden’s *MacFlecknoe*.

The transgression is patently a class transgression. The strange unidentifiable “three legged” beast in “The Drury Lane Monster” is examined by Dr. Woodward, who says it was engendered by “Three Mongrels ... who never were bred/ To any School-Learning, but to Write and to Read” (10, 7-8). They are not (this accusation runs) of good families. They are not socialized through the channels of power and learning.⁴⁷ But of course, Pope and Arbuthnot were gentlemen and men of letters. One could attack Pope’s body, or Arbuthnot’s behavior, or their misbegotten play, but their capacity as intellectuals and writers could not really be called into question. Here is where the turn to attacks on Cibber makes sense. Cibber could represent the lower instincts of these writers, since he was a writer, and simultaneously represent the manifestation of that instinct, the farce. As producer, promoter, and performer—and not a gentleman—he embodied the presumptions of the play itself.

The earliest misinterpretations read the scene with Plotwell and the players as a hit at Cibber as a writer, not as actor and manager. The *Key* offered later in 1717 by “E. Parker” says:

Plotwell’s fathering Clinket’s Play, is levell’d at Cibber, and the Satire bites, when he is told, That a Parrot and a Player can utter human Sounds, but neither of them are allow’d to be Judges of Wit. This is hard upon poor Colley, who has oblig’d the Public with The Bulls and the Bears a Farce. Perolla and Izadora, An original Tragedy of his own Composing; he has also Naturaliz’d the Cid of Corneille into an English Heroick

⁴⁷ The class basis of monstrosity parallels classes of writers and classes of plays, in which aesthetic considerations are secondary or predetermined. “The monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside this official geography is ... to become monstrous oneself” (Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 12).

Daughter. Which will see the Light, as soon as Mr. *Pope* has touch'd it up, who has it now for that Purpose, the Diction being somewhat *obnubilated*. (8)

While Cibber had written the above failed tragedies, his oeuvre included several extremely successful and respected original comedies. The identification of him as Plotwell was made solely in order to attack him as a writer. Cibber is, like Clinket, a “Monster of Impropriety” (I.81), and like Plotwell, a fraudulent and impotent father. By identifying his efforts to write with farces and failures only, the writer of the *Key* tries to put him back in his place, parroting the words of others, playing the roles he is assigned.

John Dennis, an enemy to Cibber before and certainly after *Three Hours*, wrote that “Good actors... ought to be encouraged and esteemed; yet to be encouraged and esteemed as *actors*, not as *gentlemen*, nor as *persons* who have a thousand times their merit; but even the best actors, with the most unblamable conduct, are never to be trusted with power” (*Two letters to Sir John Edgar* qtd. in Barker 123). His *Letter* to Sir Richard Steele in 1720 asks Steele to tighten the reins on his underling, striking the tone of most anti-Cibber writing until the late ‘20s. The problem wasn’t the quality of his writing but his social quality (an actor, not a gentleman). Cibber’s place was to serve his master (the patentees Rich or Steele) not to be a master; to speak the words (as a “parrot”) of writers patronized by dukes and earls, not to write them himself. Personally offended by Cibber’s actions (in the 1717 play) and his rise in esteem in the theater where Dennis had failed, the critic insists upon his position in society as higher than his enemy’s. He was offended not only by the events of 1717, but those of 1718 and 1719, when Cibber’s political *The Non-Juror* was widely acclaimed and Dennis’s equally patriotic *Invader*

failed. His response to a world in which Cibber's works, and Cibber's judgments, take priority over his, in which his *Thunder* is more popular than his poetry, is to insist upon his social and intellectual superiority to Cibber. This is a pattern we will see repeated with Pope and with Fielding in their attacks on Cibber; a gentleman with an uneasy grasp on his own public status lashes out at Cibber's uncertain class position.

Cibber, always aware of the power of image and public perception, capitalized on the notoriety of *Three Hours* and on this new rumour that he himself was mocked in it.

The Play of the *Rehearsal*, ... being by his present Majesty... commanded to be reviewed, the Part of *Bays* fell to my share. To this Character there had always been allow'd such ludicrous Liberties of Observation, upon any thing new, or remarkable, in the state of the Stage, as Mr. *Bays* might think proper to take. Much about this time, then, *The Three Hours after Marriage* had been acted without success; when Mr. *Bays*, as usual, had a fling at it, which, in itself, was no Jest, unless the Audience would please to make it one. (*A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope* 17)

Royalty, not the marketability of farce, demands the performance. The audience, not the resentful actor, applies the comment and makes it a biting jest. In his representation of the event, Cibber serves greater forces, unlike Pope, who insulted his actors and audience out of personal spite. As Bayes Cibber admitted a desire to have included a mummy and a crocodile in his play, but had been beaten to it by his brother wits.⁴⁸ If the reference did infuriate Pope as contemporaries claimed it did, one wonders whether the insult was in

⁴⁸ This incident, related also by contemporaries (see "A LETTER giving an Account of the Origin of the Quarrel between *Cibber*, *Pope*, and *Gay*"), demonstrates Cibber's willingness to accept failures, his good nature with his audience, and his public desire to appease them; it seriously calls into question the idea that

being equated with Bayes or Cibber (himself a playwright, playing a playwright, referring to brother playwrights).⁴⁹ Cibber's account continues, engaging in the same manipulative interpretation first done in 1717, when other poets learned that Pope was going to attack *them*.

When Pope appears behind the curtain enraged, Cibber scolds him. "Mr. Pope—you are so particular a Man, that I must be ashamed to return your Language as I ought to do: but since you have attacked me in so monstrous a Manner, This you may depend upon, that as long as the Play continues to be acted I will never fail to repeat the same Words over and over again" (19). Monstrous language belongs *in* a farce, but not *at* one. Cibber takes the high road. Since his joke had caused offence, as a gentleman he would retract it, but Mr. Pope's behavior—his monstrous language—shows him to be ungentlemanly and so unworthy of such considerations. As reprimand (for the monstrous language, for the monstrous comedy itself), Cibber perseveres with his satirical addition.

Written in 1742, twenty-five years after the events, this retrospective narrative is altogether too smooth and full of poetic justice. Pope's fury and Cibber's coolness are manufactured for this pamphlet. Cibber's narrative farcifies history, making mock-heroic what was likely an unpleasant encounter. We must read Cibber's description with two historical circumstances in mind: the events of 1717 and those of 1742, when, after becoming Poet Laureate, Cibber learned that he was to be the target of Pope's revised *Dunciad*. While the events seem to be corroborated by contemporaries, the tone here

the public perceived him, at that time, as forcing the play on them, as Ashley asserts. "Cibber himself had been foolish enough to inflict [*Three Hours*] on the public" (108).

⁴⁹ And being equated as a writer with Cibber makes him eager to vilify him. As David Brewer notes of Pope's treatment of Eliza Haywood in the *Dunciad*, "As with all scapegoats, the process of casting out involves an effort to establish (or reestablish) difference where sameness threatens, undeniable distinction

applies to events surrounding *The Dunciad*, not *Three Hours*. When he says Pope has attacked him monstrously, he is applying his present circumstance to the past. *The Rehearsal* was not the retribution he presents it as here, but the 1742 pamphlet describing it is. The *Letter* is a very personal pre-emptive strike for the fourth book of the *Dunciad*.

Pope attacks Cibber with “monstrous” language behind the scenes, but also by implication with the satire on Cibber in Plotwell, and in “real” time, with the approaching coronation of Cibber as Duncie. It is with this last in mind that Cibber claims here *not* to have been deceived in 1717; he knew who Plotwell “really” was, just as he knew that Pope was “really” the author. Cibber does know that Pope did not write the play, and that Plotwell was not a satire, but he banks on public misperception of both of these points. Moreover, by emphasizing the suggested satire on the *manager* in Plotwell, he obscures the suggested satire of himself as *writer*. Having retired from the stage but still selling his “stage” life in his *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740) and collecting a pension as Poet Laureate, Cibber recuperates himself as a writer at the expense of his character as a manager. Pope, in his tiny, ill-formed fury,⁵⁰ represents one kind of writer, whereas Cibber’s healthy, cool control of language, truth, and turf represents another. Cibber’s intelligence and Pope’s bad taste are both on display—in 1742. A battle ostensibly about theatrical legitimacy, one which the famous actor and powerful manager certainly wins, is used as a cover for one over poetic legitimacy, between the official Poet Laureate and the Catholic but widely acknowledged great poet of the age.

where boundaries seem disturbingly fluid” (230). With his own social status so marginal, it is all the more important to Pope to emphasize Cibber as bad writer, himself as good writer.

⁵⁰ In the same pamphlet, referring to a different occasion, Cibber calls Pope a “little hasty Hero, like a terrible Tom Tit” (48); in *The Confederates*, Pope is a Vain Pigmy and an Envious Urchin – Pope’s enemies frequently aligned his physical deformity with a deformed personality. No one denied he had an enormous mind, but rather pointed to the disproportion between that and his frequently mean remarks.

Monstrous Medlies

Authorship *in* farces, like Clinket's, subverts paternal and governmental authority. The equation of bad writing to illegitimate children gains currency during the ascendancy of political farce, pointing particularly to the analogy between patriarchy and government. The more farce unsettled the assumptions of a powerful administration, the more the government was figured in satires and farces as a fraudulent parent. The term "legitimate drama" does not come into being until the end of the century, beyond living memory of the 1737 law that determined which productions were on which side. But the sense of the term as an adjective descriptive of kinds of sexuality and their consequences quickly accrued around Cibber and around farce.

Audiences loved Cibber's *Rehearsal* and other farces with topical references. But although unbiased records of *Three Hours* show little general displeasure, and Drury Lane's receipts never dropped dangerously low, by the late twenties satirists regularly suggested that Cibber willfully abused audience intelligence and taste with his productions. Instead of abusing the audiences who disliked their plays, writers abused Cibber, whose success depended on gauging the tastes of that audience. Cibber would later defend himself against the charge that he was responsible for the flood of entertainments which enemies accused him of forcing on the public; "I did it against my Conscience! and had not virtue enough to starve, by opposing a Multitude, that would have been too hard for me" (*Apology* II.182). Cibber casts himself as a slave of the marketplace to counter the opposition vision of him as a tyrant. Each aesthetic position is

clearly aligned with a political one: Cibber, in favor of the strong centralized control characteristic of the Whig administration, his enemies wary of Walpole's growing power.

Cibber, once associated with farce as a kind of substandard theatrical pap, unworthy the notice of gentlemen, simultaneously grew wealthy and powerful (in his realm) and came to represent Walpole, one of England's richest and most powerful men. That both were suspected of coming by their money through dishonest or at any rate dishonorable means was part of the association. That Cibber declared himself pro-administration as early as 1718 and continued to reap benefits from it was another.⁵¹ But the class element, that neither man had the polish or the genealogy one wanted in a leader, but had instead the raw power of money, made the association an indictment of England's cultural degradation.

When Fielding revives the themes of *Three Hours After Marriage*—the clash between drama and theater, the monsters of modern culture, and unwholesome sexuality—he does so intentionally to mock Cibber in terms of farce. The strands of sexual and theatrical illegitimacy highlighted by *Three Hours After Marriage* and the social tumult surrounding it resurface overtly and cheerfully in *The Author's Farce* (1730). The manager-as-ogre appears most strikingly in this farce about farce, which includes an homage to, again, *The Rehearsal*. Fielding's conscious recruitment of recent farces and theatrical events invites his audience to join him in his mockery of their expectations.

⁵¹ Following his *The Non-Juror*, all of Cibber's plays were hissed off the stage by enemies of the Government, he says, who were too timid to actually boo that popular play. "[T]hat celebrated Author Mr. *Mist...* for about fifteen Years following, scarce ever fail'd of passing some of his Party Compliments upon me; The State and the Stage were his frequent Parallels, and the Minister and *Minheer Keiber* the Meneger were as constantly droll'd upon" (II.187).

Beneath the Tragick or the Comick Name,
 Farces and Puppet-shows ne'er miss of Fame.
 Since then, in borrow'd Dress, they've pleased the Town;
 Condemn them not, appearing in their own.
 Smiles we expect, from the Good-natur'd few;
 As ye are done by, ye Malicious, do;
 And kindly laugh at him, who laughs at you. (Prol. *The Author's Farce*
 31-7)

Luckless begins the play as the genteel author of a tragedy who is maltreated by a greedy and licentious landlady, a mercenary bookseller, and a manipulative and vulgar theater manager. In desperation, he writes and produces a puppet-play satire on contemporary theatrical taste. His puppet show/farce, "The Pleasures of the Town," is interrupted by the constable and the parson, whose prosecution is then interrupted by a messenger from the kingdom of Bantam, discovering that Luckless is the long-lost heir to that kingdom. The "author" of the farce is both Fielding and Luckless, a blurring and doubling strategy central to Fielding's development of farce.

Unlike in *The Rehearsal*, *Three Hours After Marriage*, and the 1728 *The Dunciad*, the bad writer in this play isn't to blame for his own ridiculous production. The marketplace—Cibber—is the true cause. Fielding satirizes Cibber in separate characters as a manager and as an actor, making a hero of the writer whose farce is the centerpiece of the play. Hence, Luckless is more sympathetic than Clinket or Bayes, although his production is no less monstrous than theirs. The "Man in the Moon, or some Monster" who stalks Luckless into the third act, the spectre of farce, causes the confusions at the

end (II.x.40-41): the gentleman who is sunk to a puppet-show master is really King of Bantam, his sweetheart really Princess of Brentford (the daughter of one of the Kings from *The Rehearsal*), and the puppet Punch is her brother. Farce confounds distinctions, like monsters that mix species and genders.

Fictional and absurd fatherhood conclude the farce and make farce unnecessary. Having discovered his nobility, and the wealth that accompanies it, Luckless will presumably stop writing. Earlier in the play, Luckless naively approaches the bookseller with his tragedy—before approaching the managers of the theaters, certain it will be accepted and desperate for money.⁵² The lesson he learns, from the mercenary attitude of the bookseller and the cruel stupidity of Marplay (Cibber, no longer one who plots well, but become one who mars plays), is to surrender to the “Monstrous Lyes” of the interconnection of commerce and culture. One can be a gentleman or one can make a living in theater, but not both.

Marplay represents market forces antagonistic to quality literary work.⁵³ Theatrical events of the late 1720s transformed this aesthetic relation into a very attractive metaphor for the opposition to use in its literary war on Walpole. In 1728, after several years of chasing after John Rich’s financial success with pantomimes, Drury Lane refused John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*. Presumably he thought it wouldn’t succeed.⁵⁴

⁵² Luckless’s naivete indicates his preference for printed literature over acted theater, and recalls Kenny’s observations about the rise in play publications at the turn of the century.

⁵³ In the same play, Bookweight represents the same forces at work in print culture; this aspect is further explored in Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ It was unlikely a continuing personal pique. In 1720 Gay had to obtain an order from the Lord Chamberlain requiring Drury Lane to produce his pastoral drama *Dionne* (which they didn’t), but in 1724 they produced his tragedy *The Captives*. The refusal of *The Beggar’s Opera* was probably a financial decision, but characteristically Cibber described it as a moral one. He wrote that *The Beggar’s Opera* set “Greatness and Authority in a contemptible, and the most vulgar Vice and Wickedness, in an amiable Light” (*Apology* I.244).

In the event, it was a theatrical hit and a political hit, and his refusal was interpreted as loyalty to Walpole. Subsequent events seemed to confirm this: Gay's sequel, *Polly*, was prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain just as Cibber's own ballad opera *Love in a Riddle* was about to debut. The inference was that *Polly* was prohibited as a favor to Cibber, to prevent competition that would inevitably sink *Love in a Riddle*. Cibber's ballad opera was sunk by the rumor. When, late in 1730, Cibber was selected as Poet Laureate, there remained no doubt among opposition writers that it was a reward from Walpole for trying to keep the stage free from overtly critical plays.

Fielding's 1734 revision of *The Author's Farce* strengthens the characterization of Cibber as actively campaigning *against* improvements in the state of the stage, discouraging writers of merit, and consolidating his tyranny over the audience. He has become an open enemy of public, specifically as a writer of farces.

Marplay, Jr. What shall be done with that farce which was damned last night?

Marplay, Sr. Give it to 'em again tomorrow. ... Let us see which will be weary first, the town of damning or we of being damned. (*Author's Farce* 1734, II.ii)

"Cibber" earlier in this scene responds to audience dislike of his plays by repeating the old repertoire, and if they object, "Then it shall be crammed down their throats." His artistic judgment blinded by self-interest, his talents as an actor overrun by his writer's ego, he mistakes the trust placed in him by his masters (the public and the king who granted him a patent) as real power and abuses poets whose skill and gentility threaten him. Both are old accusations originally meant to prevent Cibber from obtaining any

social benefit from his writing. But now, when Cibber is Poet Laureate of Great Britain and no longer involved in the management of Drury Lane, the theatrical satire reinforces his literary demerits and so strengthens the impression of political profit.

As the decade (and Fielding) grew more hotly partisan, Cibber became a useful figure beyond the dismissal of him as a court jester. The upstart actor who runs Drury Lane as his own personal kingdom is Robert Walpole, the commoner who rose to rule Great Britain as his personal stage, against the will of the public.⁵⁵ The caricature Cibber produces only travesties, pantomimes, afterpieces, and chopped-up selections from the great English playwrights. “Shakespeare was a pretty fellow, and said some things which only want a little of my licking to do well enough... no actors are equal to me, and no authors ever were superior,” the Cibber figure Ground-Ivy claims in Fielding’s 1737 *The Historical Register* (III.83-84, 99). His bald lust for power predominates, and the parasitic Ground-Ivy goes on to brag, “I can tell you... I have seen things carried in the House against the voice of the people before today” (III.104-106). This echoes Plotwell’s description of Tremendous as “a Gentleman who can instruct the Town to dislike what has pleased them, and to be pleased with what they disliked,” though such coercion of “the House” has become a partisan allusion to Parliament. Misplaced authorship leads to misplaced authority and false authority destabilizes society. “Cibber” abandons legitimacy, choosing power instead. One of Cibber’s most popular roles was Richard III, in his own adaptation—an unlawful king, physically deformed, in a truncated

⁵⁵ To Fielding and others, Cibber’s political comments in *The Apology* opened it up to misreadings as a far more calculated panegyric on Walpole’s rise, Walpole’s wise management, Walpole’s monopoly. Fielding wrote, in *The Champion*, “one would have thought such a book would be confined to matters theatrical, ... yet certain it is that this valuable Work hath much greater Matters in View, and may as properly be stiled an Apology for the Life of ONE who hath played a very comical Part, which, tho’ Theatrical, hath been acted on a much larger Stage than *Drury Lane*” (April 22, 1740).

version of Shakespeare's play.⁵⁶ Cibber, handpicked by Walpole as the writer to represent the government, reveals (through his monstrosity) the ethical perversions of that government, scavenging Old England for a profit. Fielding's Cibber confirms the inequation; he who has power draws that power from illegitimacy.

The afterpiece to *The Historical Register* carries that connection one step further. Among other things, this last farce is about the failure of Fielding's *Eurydice* at Drury Lane earlier in the year. The two theatrical events, complete with multiple authors, theater managers, and audience demands, translate into harsh criticism of Walpole. *Eurydice Hiss'd*, allegorically about Walpole's failed Excise Bill, pretends to blame the failure of *Eurydice* on its satire of Walpole's 1736 Gin Act. The Gin Act prohibited the sale of gin in small quantities in an attempt to limit access to it by the more indigent members of society, whose health and lives were being destroyed by it. Though well intended, the law overtly prescribed different sets of laws for the wealthy and the poor. Fielding and other opposition satirists used the Gin Act as a symbol of how blatantly money put one above the law. Fielding later fixes on his strike at the Gin Act in *Eurydice* as the cause of its failure:

Long 'twixt claps and hisses did succeed
 A stern contention: victory hung dubious
 So hangs the conscience, doubtful to determine,
 When honesty pleads here and there a bribe.
 At length from some ill-fated actor's mouth
 Sudden there issued forth a horrid dram,

⁵⁶ Cibber's version held the stage until well into the 19th century.

And from another rushed two gallons forth. (*Eurydice Hiss'd* 314-320)

Fielding aligns the Excise Bill, farce, and bribery even more overtly; the prime minister is “but perhaps the author of a farce,/ Perhaps a damned one too. ’Tis all a cheat,/ Some men play little farces and some great” (*Eurydice Hiss'd* 44-49). The Excise is Walpole’s “damned” farce.

In *Eurydice Hiss'd*, the audience “damns” the substandard farce/bill, overpowering private interest. The Public, anonymous and wise, is the public claimed by *Three Hours*, the public whose interests the players consult. In the intervening years, Cibber had been accused of forcing his works on them; in the *Apology* he reframes the equation to posit that Fielding has taken advantage of a weak but honest public. Cibber impugns Fielding as a farce writer for the vulgar within his defense of Drury Lane. Belatedly, Cibber distances himself from the popularity of “auxiliary Entertainments,” spectacles and farces, which he promoted during the competitive years of 1714-1717 and 1723-1728. He describes them as a “Succession of monstrous Medlies” which

have so long infested the Stage, and which arose upon one another alternately, at both Houses outvying, in Expense, like contending Bribes on both sides at an Election, to secure a Majority of the Multitude. But so it is, Truth may complain, and Merit may murmur with what Justice it may, the Few will never be a Match for the Many, unless Authority should think fit to interpose, and put down these Poetical Drams, these Gin-shops of the Stage, that intoxicate its Auditors, and dishonour their Understanding, with a Levity, for which I want a Name. (II.180-181)

Cibber attempts to reclaim the metaphors of bribery and elections, and to turn them against the farce-writer whose plays (which used them to such advantage) had become illegal in 1737. He reverses the terms, claiming that Public Approval ought to be discarded, as it is a drunken corrupted choice. After a digression on the honesty of admitting one's weaknesses rather than concealing them, he defends the digression in the same terms as he had the pantomimes. "I am afraid [readers] will be as hardly contented with dry Matters of Fact, as with a plain Play, without Entertainments: This Rhapsody, therefore, has been thrown in, as a Dance between the Acts, to make up for the Dullness of what would have been by itself only proper" (II.184). He confesses the fault by repeating it, extenuates it by the guilty pleasure he assumes his reader feels, and implicates his 1740 reader for his own actions in 1715 and 1725, demonstrating how demanding the multitude—the readers and the spectators—can be.

Again, on the surface Cibber is presenting a high-road aesthetic, unconcerned with particular people or political events. The Dance between the Acts, the Poetical Drams, the monstrous Medlies full of "*low, senseless, and monstrous things*" (emphasis mine, I.151) fell outside the limits of what was "regular." Their illegitimacy is further indicated by their association with bribes and their consequent namelessness. But Cibber encloses this passage in an argument against theatrical competition. His argument amounts to an insistence that market forces destroy artistic integrity. First he insists that "two Sets of Actors, tolerated in the same Place, have constantly ended in the Corruption of the Theatre" and afterwards that "the Error" of the flood of pantomimes should "stand among the silly Consequences of Two Stages" (II.179, II.184). Rather than acquiescing to the idea that the convergence of culture and commerce (in a figure like himself) creates

the monstrous, or to Gay's contention that public pressure keeps the stages honest, Cibber takes the nostalgically courtly position that commercial pressures only ensure mob rule. Were there no need actively to draw audiences, he insists, he would have strictly maintained the chastity of the stage, "though probably, the Majority of Spectators would not have been so well pleas'd" (II.184).

Yet this isn't simply a reversal of Fielding's terms, for the passage is filled with specific allusions to Fielding's plays. Although he is speaking of the historical moment in 1714 when Lincoln's Inn Fields reopened after five years of silence, he is writing only two years after the passage of the Licensing Act. His gracious account of being on the losing side of a battle fought more than twenty years earlier is simultaneously a cover for gloating over the closing of the unlicensed theaters, most notably Goodman's Fields and the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. From that angle, Cibber's condemnation of spectacle, an easy target much like himself, is actually a nasty attack on the beaten horse of the "unshaped Monsters" so popular at the Haymarket, just as his narrative of the events of 1717, in the 1742 *Letter*, was a cheap shot at Pope. Not only is the hero of Fielding's last long piece *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* a playwright named Medley, the phrase "these Poetical Drams, these Gin-shops of the Stage" more particularly points to the dialogue in Fielding's final production, *Eurydice Hiss'd*.

When Cibber calls Fielding's farces the gin shops of the stage, he points not only to these last two pieces and Fielding's comment on Walpole, but also to their effects on the poor.⁵⁷ As opposed to the healthy, respectable, and British ale houses of sentimental comedy, as opposed to Cibber's aristocratic friends and patrons, Fielding's farces

intoxicate spectators and “draw the Mob,” the Majority of Spectators (I.287).⁵⁸ Cibber contends that Fielding’s entertainments disturbed the peace. Twenty years earlier, farce was monstrous because presumptuous. In 1737, farce is monstrous because socially subversive. Just as Cibber’s enemies hid a socio-political agenda beneath an aesthetic one, Cibber hides his political distaste for Fielding under a “high road” concern for the masses, casting himself as the patriarchal caretaker and Fielding as the exploiting snake.⁵⁹

Fielding’s responses undercut this dignified pose by situating Cibber’s book in the language of monstrosity, of farce. Cibber wrote of his own career in the context of the older trope of authorship as paternity. “[M]y Muse, and my Spouse, were equally prolifick; the one was seldom the Mother of a Child, but, in the same Year, the other made me Father of a Play: I think we had about a Dozen of each sort between us; of both which Kinds, some dy’d in their Infancy, and near an equal number of each were alive, when I quitted the Theatre” (*Apology* I.264). Fielding sarcastically extended the metaphor in *The Champion* 69, 1740, suggesting that the *Apology* itself was stillborn, monstrous, or illegitimate:

⁵⁷ This recalls *Tom Jones*’s puppet master, who lectures on “the great Force of Example” of puppet shows on “the inferior Part of Mankind” (414); in Fielding’s novel, though, this lecture is immediately followed by a powerful, visual refutation.

⁵⁸ As penury, suffering, and oblivion overpopulate Hogarth’s 1750 *Gin Lane*, health, progress, and patriotic love dwell in its companion piece *Beer Street*.

⁵⁹ For his critics, Cibber’s evasion of responsibility in the memoir is further evidence of his duplicity and ambition. Throughout *The Apology*, Cibber is anxious to defend himself against the use of him as an emblem for corruption. As a writer, as a participant in the patronized theater, Cibber carefully names the various titled friends and patrons he acquired during his career, representing himself more as a courtier than a merchant. His persona throughout is that of the character actor watching the scenes of greater actors (theatrically and socially) and chronicling events of a bygone better time. Such passivity allows him to sidestep the questions of money and power that were all too obvious to his contemporaries; Cibber achieved his power not merely by luck and talent but through manipulation, and he controlled the value of theater by quite literally controlling the means of production.

the Midwife hath been seen to shake her Head, and ... complains that it lies in a heavy Lump in the Nursery, and cannot be carried abroad even this fine Weather: Nay, several Grammatical Physicians have not scrupled to say that the Child is produced from *Mala Stamina*, and instead of being born with all its Senses, hath indeed no Sense in it. As for the Vulgar, they are as incredulous with Regard to this, as to some other Births, and will not believe there was any Off-spring at all; to justify which Suspicion, they alledge that a Guinea hath been insisted upon for the Sight of it, a Price which it is improbable any one would give barely to *satisfy his Curiosity*.

Like other monstrous births and frauds, Cibber's production is a wonder to be seen, a spectacle, a curiosity, rather than a legitimate work.

Fielding's *Champion* allegory continues: "they pretend that the vast Difference between the pale Countenances of those Children, which at all resemble the Father, such as Master *Ceasar* in *Egypt*, the *Heroic Daughter*, the *Refusal*, and *Love in a Riddle*, all dead long ago, and the stronger Complexion of some others, have brought the Chastity of his Muse into Question." Again we hear the old charge from 1717 that Cibber's failures define him as a writer, and that he was not the father of the successes carrying his name but was instead the unwitting cuckold of a prostitute muse. And, once again, an attack on Cibber as a writer, in Fielding's series of articles critiquing the *Apology*, comes from a borderline gentleman whose gentility Cibber has tarnished or questioned, in this case in a subtle but devastating manner in the *Apology*, where among other snide remarks, he'd referred to Fielding as a "broken Wit" (I.286). To respond openly questioning Cibber's

gentility would be tantamount to admitting him as an equal, a brother wit. To ridicule his writing—that which reveals his class most surely, more surely than his clothes or his companions—seemed the best way to silence his impudence, as it had to Dennis and to Pope.

Despite strident voices like Dennis's, farce was not a diversion only of or only suited for the lower classes. Like Cibber, that multi-headed monster the audience crossed classes. Pender points to “[t]he notion that the monster was in some ways a ‘common ground’ between popular and elite cultures” (145) as the source of its power to disturb as well as its continual interest. The sudden and overwhelming presence of the monster in theatrical discourse from 1717 through the late 1740s as a metaphor for farce points to a new need to distinguish audiences and aesthetic values, or to distinguish them in a new way. The monsters at the center of Gay's play became emblematic of a new anxiety over generic instability, sexual immodesty, mob rule, and the ascent of the low: reptile to man, farce to comedy, Colley Cibber to patentee, Smithfield Muse to the Ears of Kings.

Theatrical monsters of impropriety—*Three Hours after Marriage*, Cibber's *Apology*—aroused an outrage expressed invariably in moral and national terms. It is bad for the masses. It is bad to please the masses. It degrades the English stage, the English Muse, the English language. In commentary, each side assumed a voice of superior taste and authority, declaring a disinterested aesthetic concern. But throughout the eighteenth century, neither *The Rehearsal* nor *The Emperor of the Moon* ever inspired such a response. Both farce and Cibber were acceptable in their proper place, as flavoring to an otherwise conventional experience. Both became disturbing once they attracted too much attention. Just as farce provoked no major outcry until it began to crowd more traditional

entertainments, causing financial losses for producers of comedies and operas, the social clamor against Cibber rose as he gained authority and official recognition. The struggle over the emblem of Cibber erupted into newspapers and pamphlets in 1717 enmeshed within a quarrel about the proper limits of farce and comedy, and of the writers who created them.

The battle for the high road was staged on “low” ground: on public stages and in penny pamphlets, not only in sight of the mob but by means of them. This reflects an increasing contempt for the traditional authorities—governmental, aesthetic, and social—during the Hanoverian years. In the attempt to create or authenticate an English voice, authority migrated away from court culture toward the masses. At the height of the opposition to Walpole’s administration, the popularity of Italian opera and German composers was countered by farce, increasingly posited as a native form, appealing to a peculiar English humor and political pride. As court culture became more foreign and distant from the English public, and the German king attended Italian opera and gave titles and fortunes to his Hanoverian mistresses, farce, instead of dividing, united the classes in opposition.

Chapter 2: Poetical Justice; or, The Audience as Jury

Peachum and *Lockit*, you know, are infamous Scoundrels. Their lives are as much in your Power, as yours are in theirs. (*The Beggar's Opera* III.xiv.11-13)

Throughout Unnatural

From 1728-30, William Hogarth finished, and sold, six paintings depicting the same moment in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.¹ The unusual demand for the paintings mirrors the unprecedented popularity of the play itself. *The Beggar's Opera* ran for sixty-three nights in a theatrical climate in which seven to ten nights meant success. For many of those nights the producer seated nearly twice the theater's usual capacity. Its unknown lead actress Lavinia Fenton became a celebrity and eventually a Duchess and its genial author "the terror of ministers" (Arbuthnot to Swift, March 19, 1729).² It was celebrated in prints and verses, received damning reviews in the government press, and inspired a rash of imitations. More than a play, more even than a political play with music, *The Beggar's Opera* was a public event, a cultural happening.

Mixing low and high—heroes and highwaymen, opera and ballads—Gay knew he would either please or offend greatly, in an Augustan London where "mixed" meant monstrous.³ Both its content and formal properties took London by surprise as unexpected amalgams of familiar elements. *The Beggar's Opera* combined styles and expectations from several genres and mocked conventions of others to create a new theatrical form, the ballad opera. It subverted social expectations associated with genre;

¹ They vary in light tones, depth of the stage, and the details of the margins (Uglow 136-140).

² *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift* III.326.

³ As Pope wrote to Swift: "John Gay's Opera is just on the point of Delivery. ... Mr Congreve... is anxious as to its Success, and so am I; whether it succeeds or not, it will make a great noise, but whether of Claps or Hisses I know not" (January 1728, Swift's *Correspondence* III.262). On the mixing of genres, Addison's 1711 comment was the most notable. He wrote that tragicomedy was "one of the most monstrous inventions that ever entered into a poet's thought" (*Spectator* 40).

in it, a beggar writes a wedding masque, which is an opera about thieves.⁴ Gay quite baldly breaks the rules of stage decorum while protesting his obedience to them. The play's intentional generic instability, conveyed only partly through its transposition of character social-status, broadcast its author's attitude toward literary camps and their political positions and continued the war on pedantic correctness that he been fighting for twenty years. Gay had ridiculed John Dennis in all three of his farcical plays of the 1710s (*The Mohocks* [1712], *The What D'ye Call It* [1715], and *Three Hours After Marriage* [1717]), as had his colleague Alexander Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), in the original *Dunciad* (1728), and in the Scriblerian *Peri Bathous*, composed during the same years as *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay's plays question slavish obedience to laws of composition while lampooning the vigilant keepers of laws literary and civil.

In keeping with his earlier alliance of the farce audience as a jury in *The Mohocks* and *The What D'ye Call It*,⁵ Gay exploits the analogy between the laws of the stage and the laws of the land to recruit the audience in the quarrels, condemnations, meaning, and even structural choices of *The Beggar's Opera*. The intentional confusion of genre provides an opportunity for audience members to demonstrate their ability to recognize and distinguish between types. Spectators recognize the irony of intentional indecorum

⁴ Each genre was associated with a set of appropriate character types who spoke through recognizable and accepted gestures. Just as one expected the costumes of servants to visually distinguish them from their betters (on and off stage), one also expected their language, their modes of expression, and their behavior to differ. In *The Dunciad*, just past its first peak of popularity when *The Beggar's Opera* debuted, Pope characterizes the "ductile dulness" (62) of popular entertainment as "motley" "half-form'd" "nameless somethings" (59, 54):

"There motley Images her fancy strike,
 Figures ill pair'd, and Similes unlike.
 She sees a Mob of Metaphors advance,
 Pleas'd with the Madness of the mazy dance:
 How Tragedy and Comedy embrace;
 How Farce and Epic get a jumbled race" (63-68).

⁵ See Introduction.

and understand that those aesthetic failures are morally inflected. The play validates the audience's good judgment and provides a template by which spectators distinguish themselves from each other. Invoking and refusing generic expectations, the play places the imagined morality of the rural poor (shepherds in pastoral operas) beside an idealized urban poor (Gay's thieves and whores), and by giving that urban poor the diction of the aristocracy, questions the assumed moral differences between them as well. The aberrations and blurred distinctions which begin in the aesthetic realm inevitably spread beyond it.

Gay's dramatic mixture obstinately highlights the distinguishing characteristics of multiple genres, forcing them to clash and drawing attention to conventions as conventions. *The Beggar's Opera* draws from and evokes contrary theatrical genres: comedy, "she-tragedy," farce, satire, pantomime, and primarily, as indicated in the title, opera. Italian opera had been popular in London for a generation, was patronized by the King and some of England's richest men, and was simultaneously ridiculed as nonsense and an enervating waste of money. Where English operas mingled spoken text, songs, and spectacular dance, Italian and Italian style operas were entirely sung and were performed entirely in Italian, a language few English spectators understood. Joseph Addison dismissed Italian opera as "Nonsense set to music" in his series of *Spectator* essays in 1711, as the Continental form pushed the native form off stage.⁶ Opera parodies were nearly as popular as operas themselves.

The Beggar's Opera parodies popular Italianate operas in its histrionics and dramatic plot twists, but primarily through the music itself; Gay substitutes English

⁶ Italian opera was introduced in England in 1705. See also *Spectator* numbers 5, 13, 18, 29, and 31.

ballads for Italian compositions. Ballads, sung on stage and in the streets, in the fairs and in the villages, were entertainment, news, and moral lesson to the majority of Londoners.⁷ Most of the popular ballads and ballad tunes had originated during the Elizabethan era, and so evoked a seemingly pre-partisan, pre-civil war era of a more “honest” England. Tunes were frequently recycled for new lyrics, which in contentious times, like the South Sea Bubble of the early 1720s, were often timely and satirical. Gay’s slate of ballads too set satirical lyrics to favorite tunes, many of which had already been used for popular satirical ballads. And so, while parodying Italian opera, an expensive entertainment of the elite, Gay also celebrates the English common man, his national cultural heritage, and his penchant for satire of his own “betters.” The opposition between the two, opera and balladry, was also current; where Addison called opera “Nonsense set to music,” he considered certain ballads as natural, beautiful, and noble as the world’s finest poetry. Of “Chevy Chase,” “the favourite ballad of the common people of England,” he wrote that, “the sentiments in that ballad are extremely natural and poetical, and full of the majestic simplicity which we admire in the greatest of the ancient poets” (*Spectator* 73, 74); those sentiments are the glory of England, the importance of national unity, and praise of the king. Aesthetics, political association, national identity, and social positioning are all subplots to Gay’s story of a highwayman, his loves, and his struggles with the law.

Although the characters and plot are themselves a ballad come to life, the style aspires to higher levels. This interplay of stylistic levels echoes the narrative. The play opposes Macheath’s grand visions and generosity to Peachum’s coin-counting view of

⁷ Dianne Dugaw recently wrote that “Eighteenth-century songs like the topical ballads considered here had additional functions [beyond entertainment]. More integrally tied to events, ballads were journalistic, both informing people about the news of the day and satirically commenting upon it” (“High Change in

life, the doomed Restoration ethos to rising mercantile values. Macheath, a highwayman and gambler, an aristocrat among thieves, depends upon Peachum, his fence, for cash and for protection from the law. When the play opens, Macheath has just secretly married Peachum's daughter Polly (whom he actually loves), thus ruining her "value" to Peachum. Upon discovering the marriage, Peachum determines to turn Macheath in to the authorities (to "peach" him) and collect the customary forty pounds. The rest of the play follows Macheath's several captures and escapes from Newgate prison, aided and betrayed by his cohorts and lovers, with an ignominious death at Tyburn looming ever nearer. As Macheath finally marches off to the gallows, having been repeatedly sold by those he trusted, he gloomily concedes that Peachum's mercantile inhumanity has defeated the world of nobility and honor.⁸ However, the play about Macheath is itself simply a wedding-masque/opera written by a Beggar-Poet for two beggar-singers, and when one of the actors protests that audiences will not accept sad endings to operas, the Beggar-Poet submits and allows Macheath a reprieve—specifically bending to the will of the audience. Instead of "dancing" at the end of a rope, Macheath dances away with Polly. The "audience" happily watches the result of its own power to save lives and effect justice.

As an event—a combination of the experience of the play with its tale of the manipulation of justice, the performances of its songs outside the theater, the mezzotints and engravings of its stars and scenes, the media flurry, the endless popularity—*The Beggar's Opera* invested the audience, the people of London, with an authority they had

'Change Alley'" 45). For more on ballads in the culture see Yvonne Noble "*The Beggar's Opera* in Its Context."

⁸ Many *Beggar's Opera* critics deal thoroughly with the questions of class and value raised in this play, most notably Spacks, Empson, and Fuller.

not hitherto claimed for themselves. It presented that authority as already their birthright as English citizens, and it promoted a sense that the government was encroaching on the very concept of English rights. *The Beggar's Opera* codified "popular opposition" to government as honest and true, as native to the British, as *civil*. The spectators were from all levels of society, were Tory and opposition Whig and pro-administration, were Country and Court, were women and men, but for all that divided them, they were British. But it *was* a partisan movement, and Gay's target was very much the Prime Minister Robert Walpole and his Whig administration. The play's frequent comparison of courtiers and statesmen with con men and thieves in its many songs is only one aspect that contemporaries would have immediately recognized as established opposition satire.

Swift indicates the importance of audience interpretation to Gay's work. In a letter from Ireland, before having seen or read *The Beggar's Opera*, Swift asked Gay whether "W___ think[s] you intended an affront to him in your opera" and followed with his own wish. "Pray God he may, for he has held the longest hand at hazard that ever fell to any Sharpers Share and keepe his run when the dice are changed" (February 26, 1728). Calhoun Winton argues that Swift's letter is picking up on recent suggestions of this interpretation, and that while Swift may have wished it intended an affront, Gay had not. This question has occupied scholars since. I want to argue that it is not the most useful question. Gay knew that his ballad opera would turn the audience gaze back on itself. Acknowledging the quixotic (though not unwarranted) paranoia of the government, Lockit the jailer sings, about midway through the play:

When you censure the Age,
Be cautious and sage,

Lest the Courtiers offended should be:
 If you mention Vice or Bribe,
 'Tis so pat to all the Tribe,
 Each crys — That was levell'd at me. (Air XXX, II.x)

The audience read this song—as they read the entire show—exactly as they were meant to, with a knowing glance and a wink. The story goes that Walpole, “in a brilliant tactical gesture, encored the song himself, a ploy which ‘brought the audience into so much good humour with him, that they gave him a general huzza from all parts of the house’”(Nokes quoting Macklin 435).⁹ He was participating in the way the play dictates. No one doubted that this song was in fact leveled at him. No one doubted that he knew it.

Walpole was part of the show they had come to see, whether in the flesh, as represented on stage, or as discussed, in reference to the play, in the papers. They wanted to see Walpole watching *The Beggar's Opera*; they wanted to see what he saw there. His encore was for the benefit not of the actors but the audience; Walpole was wooing them as an actor might, to bring them “into ... good humour with him.” With him, not at him; he was trying to enjoy the joke, not be the joke. He knew the importance of knowing.

None of the elements Gay employed were new, neither to theater nor to political discourse. Anti-opera discourse in England was as old as opera in England; traditional ballads had been given new life and circulation in the 1720s, when they were sung with satiric lyrics about the South Sea Bubble or the government cover-up which followed it;¹⁰ Walpole was associated in the opposition press with famous criminal Jonathan Wild at

⁹ Nokes continues, “Sadly, there is no reliable evidence to confirm this anecdote, though it has the ring of authenticity as an example of ‘Bluff Bob’s’ own skills in political theatre.”

least as early as 1725.¹¹ What was unique was: first, the way Gay gathered these elements together so that they spoke to each other and gave new life and meaning to one another, which gave spectators the sense that the ballad opera was confirming what they'd believed for years; second, that they did so in one of the few places where London's classes mingled freely and anonymously, each spectator's thoughts confirmed by the faceless community; and last, that the whole was placed both in the context and logic—and literal settings—of English justice.

The use of ballads, which already had a history of satirical use, here focused on government corruption. From 1720-1725 there had been a burst of popularity for ballads on the South Sea Bubble, ridiculing first the new craze for paper and wealth, and then reflecting a cynical suspicion of Walpole's resolution of the crisis.¹² As the music of an "opera," they associated the foreignness of the opera and the suspiciously large salaries earned by singers with the financial con of the South Sea and the recent history of Jonathan Wild, a con man in another realm who would be a significant presence in *The*

¹⁰ See Dugaw, "'High Change in 'Change Alley'." See also Dugaw's *Warrior Women* 43-64 for a discussion of the changes that the ballad tradition underwent with the lapsing of the Print Licensing Act, which increased the number of legal printers in London.

¹¹ A writer in *Mist's Weekly Journal* published a memoir of Wild which was transparently a description of Walpole. Wild was a Great Man, a Statesman, and a Politician; "it was his Opinion, that Men of Parts... should be maintained by the Publick, and whether it was done by picking their Pockets, or boldly by taking their Money by Force, he thought it much the same Thing" (June 12, 1725). Gay used the analogy in a 1724 pantomime ballad (see below).

¹² Walpole was not involved in the bribery and corruption that caused the outrageous inflation of South Sea stock. He was central however in its unsatisfying resolution, in which the most powerful and deeply implicated men in England were acquitted. See Malcom Balen, *A Very English Deceit: The Secret History of the South Sea Bubble and the First Great Financial Scandal* for a very anti-Walpole interpretation of the resolution to this crisis. John Carswell writes, of Walpole's ulterior motives in saving Sunderland (then First Minister) from being convicted by the House of Commons for his participation in the stock manipulation, that instead of taking an office in return for his help, Walpole "remained Paymaster—or, as people were now beginning to call him, 'Screen Master'—General. He was edging his way up the most dangerous, because the most exposed, passage in his climb to power, and there is something impressive, even when all allowances are made for the greatness of the prize, in the courage of such ambition" (235). Walpole hid centrally important witnesses and bribed opposing MPs, and Sunderland was acquitted.

Beggar's Opera. By their presence, the ballads evoked “concepts of heroic value and behavior” as well as the satiric rewritings they had undergone so frequently as they “emphasize[d] social changes... [and] observe[d] the shift to a world whose values, institutions, and stability rest upon pieces of paper with agreed-upon and manipulated worth” (Dugaw “High Change” 50). Macheath embodies the “heroic value and behavior” of the ballads in their original form; as Addison writes of “Chevy Chase,” it was the “favourite Ballad of the common People of *England*” because its poet “not only found out an Hero in his own Country, but raises the Reputation of it by several beautiful Incidents” (*Spectator* 70) and “majestic Simplicity” (*Spectator* 74). Dianne Dugaw notes that “Chevy Chase” was one of the most popular tunes for South Sea ballads, as Farquhar’s “Over the Hills and Far Away” was used for Jacobite and anti-Jacobite ballads.¹³ Gay used both, and at emotionally charged moments in the play. Air XVI, Macheath and Polly’s passionate farewell at the end of Act I, is to the tune of “Over the Hills and Far Away”; Airs LXI and LXVII, when Macheath is awaiting his execution, are to the tunes of “Chevy Chase” and “Green Sleeves”, respectively. In addition, Gay used “Lillibulero” for Air XLIV, in which Macheath expresses a cynicism many thought was Gay’s; “I am not a meer Court Friend, who professes every thing and will do nothing” (III.iv.4-5).

I have gone to great lengths to indicate the ubiquitousness of political balladry, of opera parody, and of the analogy of the Walpole administration as various criminals. Yet although the references and songs were so common, the play set off an enormous political outcry. This seeming paradox leads one to look to other elements for the play’s

¹³ See Dugaw “High Change” 46, 51.

power. I argue that its attention to its own theatricality continually reasserts the narrative as false and so continually reminds the audience of its presence, as a community, in a playhouse. The play's refusal to maintain an illusion elicits the more or less conscious cooperation of that audience in constructing its meaning and humor. In the dialogue and lyrics, characters verbally assume the fellowship of the spectators, as when Mrs. Peachum generalizes about "we women" (in and around Air III in I.iv) or Peachum equates his work with that of lawyers ("tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by 'em" [I.i.11-13]). The audience is also drawn into a dramatically different kind of relationship with the stage as their shared knowledge of topical issues and of traditional ballads is solicited to complete the suggestions offered, and as their collective expectations are overtly toyed with. In these ways, *The Beggar's Opera* creates a new kind of knowing community among its spectators, as well as tauntingly suggesting that there is only an artificial division between spectators and characters. Most crucially, it combines the multi-layered opera associations, the multi-layered ballad associations, the political allusions, and the judicial preoccupation to direct the audience to its own aesthetic and political judgment. In creating an ending in which audience judgment dominates, Gay creates an opening between the playhouse and the active social and political worlds outside its walls.

An Infamous Scoundrel

During the years of opposition to Walpole, political arguments and attacks were often conducted via or under cover of aesthetic criticisms. Discussions of the arts served as a method for some men to obscure their own social origins or personal biases and

allowed others to impugn them. The “taste of the town” so universally disparaged was variously blamed on the corruption of the government or the democratization of learning.¹⁴ Popular culture, because of its genesis in commercial forces, became a weapon with which ideologues attacked each other. Walpole rose to power during the same years as opera and pantomime did, and was further evidence, not only to the reactionary and cynical-minded, that market forces were destroying tradition.¹⁵

Walpole’s career, from Treasurer of the Navy to Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Minister was made up of episodes of financial maneuvers, suspicions, scandals, and controversies; even his significant accomplishment of keeping England out of war was denounced as a cost-cutting measure.¹⁶ In 1720, the English economy was devastated by the failure of the South Sea Company, and Walpole, who was not involved in the speculation, restructured England’s finances and helped cover for many of the powerful men who had taken bribes to continue government support for the Company. In exchange for his maneuverings, Walpole won the king’s confidence and eventually rose to become First Minister. Though he showed then that he could maneuver financial records for England’s benefit, he already had the reputation of being able to maneuver them for his own. In 1712 he had been convicted of corruption and imprisoned. J. H. Plumb writes that Walpole’s immense and sudden wealth, upon taking the position of Paymaster

¹⁴ It was Pope, aesthetic snob, who wrote in his *Essay on Criticism* that “a little Learning is a dang’rous Thing” (215), pointing to the greater number of men entering into fields of learning with only a brief introduction to them.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that Walpole consolidated the power of the First Minister of the Treasury (traditionally held by a peer) with that of the leadership of the House of Commons to become the most powerful man in the English government, and what we now call the Prime Minister. Surprisingly, contemporaries rarely comment upon this monopoly of power per se; they are more frequently disturbed by his methods of manipulating people for his own gain in all of his roles.

¹⁶ J. H. Plumb writes that “Peace was Walpole’s constant aim but it was not his deliberate policy” (*King’s Minister* 8). He “hated the thought of war” primarily for the destruction it would cause to the flourishing economy (121), and in 1726 and 1727 was blamed for his reluctance to go to war against Spain.

General in 1714, lead to “accusations of brazen-faced peculation [which] were soon circulating in private squibs or in the Press; malicious, exaggerated, but, perhaps, not without substance” (*Making of a Statesman* 209). Some skimming was not only acceptable but an expected perquisite of office. Walpole seems to have frequently tested the line between inappropriate and illegal in his financial dealings.

His questionable actions extended beyond the purely financial. In 1722, on information of a Jacobite plot, Walpole had Dean Francis Atterbury and several peers arrested and “subjected to harsh treatment” (Plumb *King’s Minister* 45). While Londoners still feared the invasion,¹⁷ Walpole demanded that Parliament suspend Habeas Corpus and impose a fine on Catholics of £100,000 to pay for the trials.¹⁸ In his zeal to convict, but lacking evidence, Walpole got the Whig majority to pass a law “inflicting criminal penalties on [Atterbury]. The trial, in other words, would be political rather than juridical, and... at bottom a charade” (Mack 399). His reputation for imposing his will despite the law and for sketchy dealings, for his own benefit or another’s downfall, grew only more frightening.

When the Prince of Wales, heretofore figurehead of the opposition to Walpole’s administration, assumed the throne on the death of George I in 1727, it was widely assumed that Walpole would finally lose his power. John, Lord Hervey, a colleague of Walpole’s and an intimate of George II and his wife, wrote in his memoirs that “Sir Robert Walpole, [and] ... the whole old administration at the death of the late King, expected themselves and were expected by the whole world hourly to be displaced. The

¹⁷ In line with “Walpole’s program for keeping public opinion in a chronic state of alarm” (Mack 397).

¹⁸ Plumb considers these actions to have been “ruthless and efficient” and results as much of Walpole’s paranoid fear of a Jacobite invasion as his desire for power (*King’s Minister* 49); Mack, biographer of

first of these the present King had, in the latter years of his father's reign, called rogue and rascal without much reserve, to several people, upon several occasions" (5). But Walpole wrangled a substantial civil list (the amount of money provided annually by Parliament as the king's allowance) for George II, gained his trust, and retained his hold on national power. It was thus "proved to all mankind" wrote Hervey,

that the little transient interruption that diverted the stream of Sir Robert's power was now borne down and that the current was brought back again and flowed quietly in its former channel. It was now understood by everybody that Sir Robert was the Queen's minister; that whoever he favoured, she distinguished; and whoever she distinguished the King employed. (9)

It was also proved to all mankind that money easily overrode principle. Walpole would remain prime minister of England through 1742. But he never shook his reputation for bribery. In the literary world alone he actively sought to quiet opposition voices—like Fielding's—throughout the 1730s with gifts of money. The analogy made by the opposition between Walpole and various famous criminals of the 1720s served to underscore and perpetuate the aura of illegality that clung to Walpole's political dealings. Correspondingly, in its surface story of a master swindler, *The Beggar's Opera* points directly at Walpole.

The political, though, was never really distinguished from the social. Walpole, the first commoner to hold such high office, was the ultimate Cit. He made his way in the world through money, elevating the commercial values of usefulness over abstractions

Alexander Pope, who was Catholic and close friend of Atterbury, describes them as not much more than a "cunning [and] sound political gambit" (393).

such as blood, honor, and wit. He exhibited the uneducated taste of the nouveau riche; he built an enormous estate (the decoration of which was widely derided as supremely vulgar), was devoted to his mistress, and grew extremely fat. More disturbing to the literati, Walpole, unlike ministers of the past, took no interest in literature or music. His only criterion was whether the art or artist was somehow useful to him.¹⁹ The “Augustan Age” was so called in reference to the government-sponsored flourishing of the arts under the Roman Emperor Augustus, sometimes as panegyric (George II was christened Augustus) on a new age of learning and letters, sometimes as ironic overstatement.²⁰ “The *Craftsman* argued that tyrants and wicked politicians have always been enemies to men of letters, whose calling it is to dispel ignorance and represent things in a true light; the government’s failure to encourage writers was thus linked to that favorite opposition cry, that Walpole posed a threat to liberty of the press” (Goldgar 14-15). Unlike Milton, Dryden, and Addison, writers after the ascent of Walpole were noticeably excluded from government circles and could not expect to take advisory roles. To Walpole, the arts were mere decoration to the real business of life.

There were few truly valuable places or patronage gifts available to any but Walpole’s sycophants. Gay, who spent years courting the favor of the King’s mistress in hopes of a place, was offered the post of Gentleman Usher to the two-year-old princess Louisa on George II’s ascension. He refused it. Many thought *The Beggar’s Opera* was

¹⁹ “The fact is that Walpole, in contrast to such ministers of the recent past as Godolphin, Halifax, Somers, and Oxford, refused to encourage or even to show much interest in men of letters, whose works he considered irrelevant to the serious affairs of government” (Goldgar 9).

²⁰ See Weinbrot’s *Augustus Ceasar in ‘Augustan’ England*. See also Pope’s *First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated: To Augustus* written “against the Taste of the Town... against the Court and Nobility, who encouraged only the Writers for the Theatre,” and “against the Emperor himself, who had conceived them of little use to the Government” (Prefatory note).

retribution for an offer Gay felt beneath him.²¹ Along these lines, Bertrand Goldgar attributes some portion of the vehemence of all opposition writers to Walpole's pedestrian attitude—insofar as it was reflected by his control of the royal purse strings. Supporting only those writers who had demonstrated loyalty, Walpole seems to have considered literature of use only as propaganda, and so in some measure is responsible for the decisive partisan split among writers. In this sense, opposition writers were able to claim disinterestedness as writers with sinecures could not, but were not necessarily more committed to an apolitical truth.²²

Walpole generally ignored the theater, but followed the king and queen in their substantial support for opera. Handel had an annual income from the court of £600, while the post offered to Gay was worth £150.²³ Lavish and expensive, Italian-style operas were introduced in England around 1705, and by 1710 had found a devoted core audience. Foreign opera singers commanded enormous salaries, however, which along with spectacular scenic effects made producing operas extremely expensive. Even with high subscription rates, the Royal Academy of Music, founded in part by Gay's friend

²¹ There's some discussion about whether the post was meant as an insult. As Gay had recently dedicated his *Fables* to the young prince, Nokes considers the post a genuine offer. "[D]espite the chorus of outrage among Gay's friends, it is not entirely clear why he should have regarded the offer of the usher's place as such an abject humiliation. From Queen Caroline's point of view it must have appeared an apt, even an imaginative appointment.... Courtier-like, he had sought to charm the Princess by flattering her children; monarch-like, she rewarded him with the offered post of poet-nanny in chief" (405).

²² In an allegory "The Opposition: A Vision" of 1740 Fielding complains about the little compensation he earned writing for *The Champion* and insinuates that he found financial relief by switching sides. He imagines himself as a starved ass driven by a confused and selfish opposition party wagon, until "a fat gentleman [Walpole]... with a countenance full of benignity, ordered his servants to unharness the poor beasts, and turn them into a delicious meadow, where they all instantly fell to grazing, with a greediness common to beasts after a long abstinence" (330-331).

²³ Handel had been the first King George's favorite composer in Hanover and had come to England at his pleasure. By and large, however, the favorite court musicians were Italian, not German. On Handel's pension, see David Hunter 42; on the offer made to Gay, see Nokes 401.

and patron the Earl of Burlington in 1719, was failing by 1728.²⁴ That the operas were in Italian, and so not understood by the vast majority of English fans, made it seem unBritish and ridiculous to many; that the leading stars were castrati, famous specifically as a result of emasculation, made opera even more unnatural and unmanly, and so again, antithetical to the English character.²⁵ Added to these criticisms, its extravagant costliness led one contemporary to write,

It is astonishing... to all *Europe*, that *Italian* Eunuchs and Signora's should have set Salaries equal to those of the Lords of the Treasury and Judges of *England*, besides the vast Gains which these Animals make by Presents, by Benefit Nights, and by performing in private Houses; so that they carry away with them Sums sufficient to purchase Estates in their own Country, where their Wisdom for it is as much esteem'd, as our Vanity and foolish Extravagance, laugh'd at and despis'd. (qtd. in Liesenfeld 28)

The equation between opera and the South Sea Company was frequently made during “that baneful year of horrific memory, 1720” partly because both had periodic “calls” for subscriptions when their coffers were low, and both were run by a “court of directors” (Rogers “Gay and the World of Opera” 157). To satirical observers, the Academy simply

²⁴ David Hunter observes that opera tickets were nearly three times the price of theater tickets and that the operas often played to half-empty houses. For all its purported threat to traditional theater, opera was never profitable in London during these years.

²⁵ Hunter writes that “From its introduction in the early eighteenth century, Italian opera was considered by the middling and labouring sorts, some intellectuals and disaffected members of the elite as encouraging effeminacy and vice... Its literal and metaphorical foreignness—of language, story, country of origin and religion of performers and composers, emasculation of singers, and musical content—made it a ready target for patriots. The extravagance, particularly in star singer salaries and production, enabled the political opposition easily to equate charges of ‘old corruption’—the operation of political patronage—with the opera” (41). See chapter 4 for a discussion for the popularity of the castrati from a gendered, rather than a purely nationalistic, perspective.

funneled English money out of the country, paralleling the fraud of the South Sea Bubble. Steele wrote that both opera and the South Sea Company meant to “impose upon the Stupidity of ... Admirers” who “who will part with their Cash, as well as their Understanding” (*The Theatre* 18, March 1720). Since Walpole was already linked to the South Sea Bubble, it was easy for his political opponents to combine all three: a parasite (the South Sea Directors, opera singers, and Walpole), draining the country of its money, its aesthetic character, and its honesty.

The Beggar's Opera replicates the cultural contradictions at the heart of opera. That both Burlington and Walpole patronized opera complicates any condemnation in the parody.²⁶ A more nuanced look finds that Gay's parody is of opera audiences, those who attend for reasons of sensory indulgence, of political expediency, or of social aping. The play recognizes some of the real strengths of opera, and though it might have tarnished Gay's friendship with Burlington, it did not affect his friendship with Handel, who, though German, wrote popular operas in the Italianate style.²⁷ *The Beggar's Opera* provoked not only political thought but, like opera, emotional attachment. The public fascination with actress Lavinia Fenton paralleled the celebrity of castrati, and the romance between Polly and Macheath captured the romantic imaginations of many spectators.

Neither the first parody of opera nor the first theatrical satire of Walpole, Gay's play was perceived as uniquely British. For over two months the London public continued to fill the theater; as Gay wrote to Swift late in March,

²⁶ “Gay was too intelligent to embrace all the narrow prejudices of anti-operatic polemic. If he was not, by the standards of men like Arbuthnot, especially musical, he was too close to the theatrical in his inmost being as a writer to miss the electric quality of the best Handelian opera, or to overlook its genuine roots in high artistic tradition” (Rogers “Gay and the World of Opera” 160).

The Beggar's Opera hath now been acted thirty six times, and was as full the last night, as the first, and as yet there is not the least probability of a thin audience; though there is a discourse about the town that the Directors of the Royal Academy of Musick design to sollicite against it's being play'd on the *outlandish* Opera days, as it is now call'd. On the Benefit day of one of the Actresses last week one of the players falling sick they were oblig'd to give out another play or dismiss the Audience; A Play was given out, but the people call'd out for the Beggar's Opera, & they were forc'd to play it, or the Audience would not have stayed. (March 20, 1728)²⁸

In neither this letter nor an earlier letter Gay wrote Swift shortly after the production began does Gay mention Walpole or politics. What he does mention—in both—is the Royal Academy of Music and the *outlandish*, foreign as well as exotic and extravagant, opera. He uses the same adjective in both letters, and both times he emphasizes the word to indicate that he is quoting popular opinion. The theater-going public saw *The Beggar's Opera* as a specifically English antidote to the foreign and excessive entertainment.²⁹

The nationalistic undertones that enriched both the opera and political satires enhanced the play's communal character, which the ballads themselves invoked. *The Beggar's Opera* stands apart from other opposition satire on Walpole and the arts particularly because it was experienced communally, in large, heterogeneous groups.

²⁷ Nokes 428, 432.

²⁸ III.272 in Swift's *Correspondence*.

²⁹ "In the early months of 1727... Italian opera became a subject of political controversy, with the *British Journal* (4 March 1726/7) defending it and the *Craftsman* (13 March) attacking it as sybaritic and inappropriate for the British national character" (Goldgar 45). These criticisms add partisan associations to Addison's earlier disparagement.

Other literary satire, even when read aloud among groups, was limited to a small circle of similar listeners. Theater audiences replicated the entire society in miniature, and ballads were already the domain of the public space. The music, the opera satire, became the locomotive for the political satire in its reinforcing circularity. Often Gay's lyrics give ironic shifts to the meanings of the original ballads' words.³⁰ A simple example is Air II, sung by young Filch, to the tune of "The bonny gray-ey'd Morn." The original ballad is in the sad voice of a woman seduced by a lying lover. In Filch's version, "'Tis Woman that seduces all Mankind" (I.ii.32), which is a fairly simple reversal. In Air XIV, Macheath asks Polly if she has been faithful to him, and she responds devotedly. In the original, "Pretty Parrot, Say—," a man asks the bird whether his wife has been faithful, which she has not. The tag line to each verse is, in both versions, "pretty, pretty Poll." Here then, one can easily imagine that when people heard the tune afterwards, they very likely thought of Gay's lyrics and of loyal Polly Peachum.

For months, traditional English ballads were given new life and whether sung with their original words³¹ or Gay's lyrics would have revived memories of the staged play, of particular scenes, and of the overall satire. Gay must have foreseen this effect.

"'T'was when the seas were roaring," the very popular ballad Gay wrote for his 1715 *The What D'ye Call It*, was transformed into a political song "When faction loud was roaring"

³⁰ At least 37 of the 69 songs can be found in Thomas Durfey's *Wit and Mirth; or, Pills to Purge Melancholy*, a collection of ballads written or popularized by him during the Restoration; it was published in several volumes from 1700 through 1720, when Dugaw notes that political ballads enjoyed a resurgence. Several of the remainder are from Durfey's plays.

³¹ Or at any rate, previous lyrics to the ballads. Many of the tunes Gay used had been reset over generations. Dugaw explains that many ballads went through a series of incarnations; in the mid-seventeenth century, they were cheap printed broadsides relating news and rumor to the "lower people"; around the turn of the century, they became vehicles for partisan politics written by the educated classes and inner circles, and were popularized in the theaters especially by Durfey, but also by Farquhar; and ballad lyrics written about the South Sea Bubble, in 1720, were written by and for a larger general public

in 1716. *The Beggar's Opera's* Air XXVIII uses "T'was" for its tune, evoking both the sweet ballad and the political one (Winton 186n). But Gay's theatricalized lyrics made more of an impact than the politicized songs in a non-narrative context. In calling up narrative associations, they imply the fictional relationships, but also Walpole-Peachum's effect on justice, on the world of the arts, on the character of the nation. In the double and triple meanings of the ballads, Gay situated the double-dealing of politicians and criminals. Formally, then, as well as thematically, Gay's satire of opera appropriated the whole world of English ballads and extended his political satire. In their introduction to the play, the editors of *British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan* write that "No other ballad opera approached the original popularity of *The Beggar's Opera*.... Gay, the first in the field, had ... chosen the best of the available tunes. His imitators had either to use less catchy airs or to repeat those which, by association, were regarded as belonging to the original opera" (529). Ballad opera itself became associated with Gay's story.

Many of the early ballads declare the freedom or honesty of the poor Briton or the primacy of English law, and their amenability to political revisions emphasized the association of balladry with dissent as an Englishman's birthright, and of criminals with politics. Yvonne Noble suggests that their "cumulative effect" was to call upon the English culture all Englishmen had in common, and so to create a community among them "partly by [the ballads'] immediate power to induce the solidarity that comes from an audience's recognizing together a shared norm and then the incongruities of deviation from that norm" ("*The Beggar's Opera* in Its Context" 11-12). *The Beggar's Opera* was

across classes. Ballad tunes were recycled more as a rule than exception, new ballads not necessarily commenting on earlier lyrics as Gay's do.

a British Opera; like the ballads it was the rightful property of all Englishmen.³² The “shared norm” which Noble suggests pre-dated the play became literally shared, in the playhouse, among Englishmen of different stations and origins; the play itself refined and redefined the very norm it calls upon. Englishness was Macheath’s loyalty (to men) not Peachum’s double-dealing; the hearty native ballad, not the “outlandish” Italian recitative; Macheath’s liberal sexuality, not the Italian castrated opera star. If Englishness was all that *The Beggar’s Opera* celebrated, then ballad satire was the acme of Englishness, and Walpole, who promoted everything *The Beggar’s Opera* attacked, a national perversion.

Strict Poetical Justice

In the Hogarth painting, Polly, luminous in white at center stage, pleads to her father (upstage left) for Macheath’s freedom while Macheath stands directly to her right, untended, in irons. Further right, a bit in shadow, are Lucy and her father, mirroring Polly and hers. Behind Peachum a collection of aristocratic spectators watch from a box on the stage itself. The spectators are recognizable people, most notably the Duke of Bolton, who, though already married, eloped with and eventually married the original

³² Todd Gilman argues persuasively that *The Beggar’s Opera* is meta-opera more than mock-opera, and connects it to a fledgling tradition of nationalistic English opera. English operas, from Davenant’s *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656) and *The Tempest* (adapted with Dryden, 1667), to Dryden’s *King Arihur* (1691) and Durfey’s *Wonders in the Sun* (1706), had spoken text instead of recitative between more elaborate musical sections. Like plays, they did have prologues, whereas the Italian operas did not. The Beggar poet calls attention to all the awkward conventions of Italian opera in his “Introduction” (in which he says he has refused to have a prologue, but which of course functions as a prologue). He has “introduc’d the Similes that are in all your celebrated Operas,” but has not made it “throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no Recitative.” He thereby indicates his parody of opera, clear to both contemporaries and modern readers. “[H]is work plays with genre in a way that others do not and in doing so becomes a British opera about the controversy over its own generic category... As a meta-opera it brings to the stage the long-standing generic/nationalistic controversy over the parameters of British opera that was previously confined to the background” (Gilman 545). Gilman argues that the *Opera* assumes its Englishness in its

Polly, actress Lavinia Fenton. As Polly-Lavinia kneels to her father, she seems to look directly at the Duke.³³

That sightline marks Hogarth's interpretation of the social moment, according to Jenny Uglow. "Hogarth's painting, which had been a 'stage' scene [in earlier versions of the painting], became a 'theatrical' scene, a comment on plays and playgoers and the wider world.... By highlighting her romance Hogarth added the piquancy of sex, class and topicality. The satyr gazing down on the couple suggested that in life, as in this satire, dukes and players really are on the same level" (138-140). Although I would argue that "the piquancy of sex, class and topicality" suffuses the play and scene without the Fenton/Bolton romance, the distinction between a stage scene and a theatrical scene is a useful one, and Hogarth's painting depicts some of the original audience experience. We are as conscious of the space, of people together in a room, as of the narrative tension in the story they are watching. The spectators and the actors are all living people, and this scene a small community. The theatrical scene—what I elsewhere call the playhouse world, which includes audience members, princes, poets, orange sellers, and actors—also contains the stage scene, which itself generally only includes characters. Gay's play persistently destabilizes that distinction, as Hogarth's representation of Polly's sightline illustrates.

Hogarth highlights the overt theatricality and artifice within the play world by the obvious and more natural transgression of boundaries of sexual behavior, social hierarchy, and theatrical illusion. The artifice accomplishes two of Gay's goals, the

conventions, its ballads, and its mild xenophobia and insinuates that unannounced Englishness as innate and natural.

³³ Uglow 139.

parody of the popularity of opera, “throughout unnatural” as the Beggar says in the Introduction, and the continual self-consciousness of the audience as audience. With the glance between Polly and Bolton, we see the permeability of boundaries allowing the interaction between stage and audience, fictional and real. The audience is a character in this play and painting, and the subject of both. The viewer’s eye is drawn from the central figure in white away from her fictional husband (Macheath) toward her actual lover (Bolton) in Hogarth’s visual rendering of the spectator’s double consciousness of the story on stage and its political referent in reality.

All of these elements are also contained by content. The scene depicted in Hogarth’s painting is the closest Macheath comes to a trial; he directly exits to an off-stage trial which is never referred to and which results in a predetermined sentence. In the painting, Polly begs her father, the witness, for mercy. She kneels directly in front of the audience seated on stage, evocative of a jury, at whom her appeal also seems to be aimed. The painting highlights Polly’s pathos and purity, even as she encourages her father to perjure himself, and encapsulates the highly subjective and performative nature of “justice” as actually practiced in eighteenth-century London. Before being marched off to the Old Bailey for trial, and after Peachum refuses Polly’s plea, Macheath sings “The Charge is prepar’d, the Lawyers are met,/ The Judges all ranged (a terrible Show!)” (III.xi.75-6). The judges “ranged,” the terrible show, could easily have been the panel to his left, those gentle audience members who, in Hogarth’s painting, are difficult to distinguish from the cast; they were also legal decision makers, MPs and JPs, peers, and jurors in “real” life.³⁴ A simple glance in that direction during this song would lay bare

³⁴ Douglas Hay points directly to the power of those gentlemen in his discussion of the ideology of justice in the eighteenth century. “[A]ll men of property knew that judges, justices and juries had to be chosen

that analogy. The audience is the show, if a terrible one, on stage, on view, and in the fiction of the play, acting.

Much has been written about the politics of this play, the ballad opera as a genre, and Gay himself, but the core of its political character comes out of the way its overt theatricality parallels the English public's interaction with law, and how that interaction defines itself as popular and inherently English. At its most intense, the interaction of public with law via theatricality produced Macheath, who stands as an emblem of the power of the public. Macheath as performed in 1728 riveted the city and tied Walpole's hands; he had to attend, had to applaud, for to disapprove of *The Beggar's Opera* was to oppose the People. On several levels, Macheath represented points of contact, of change, of interaction: between the individual and the law, between the spectator and the fiction, between the public and the administration.

The early eighteenth century particularly loved its elusive outlaws, especially those—Robin Hood, Jack Sheppard, and Macheath—who, having more integrity, are *less* criminal than the authorities they baffle. These fictional and historical figures are outlaws, more than criminals; our focus is less on their crimes than their evasion of the law. Their ubiquitous escape or reprieve is less a pardon than an admission that the system is not sound. This is the basis of contemporary complaints that Macheath made highway robbery appealing, for in his happy ending, or rather in the audience's deep satisfaction at his happy ending, law is spurned.³⁵ On some level, however, the conflict is

from their own ranks" and that the "operation of the law was often the result of an agreement on tactics between the JP and the prosecutor... the legal process... largely a secret between landowner and magistrate" (38, 51).

³⁵ A contemporary reports a sermon against the play, and continues to say that the minister "was not singular in this Opinion [that the play was "of a pernicious Consequence in regard to the Practice of Morality and Christian Virtue"]; and Experience afterwards confirmed the Truth of his Observations, since

between different systems of law, and although Macheath (and Robin Hood) defies institutional law, he is aligned with the tradition of common law. British Common Law, which was traditional and communal, was felt to have more integrity than the written Roman/Norman codes which over the course of the century dominated the courts and allowed the wealthy to dominate the land.³⁶ The outlaw represents an alternate justice, not anarchy, and promotes an essential, innate, if sometimes self-serving rightness against an institutional, inhuman, self-serving rightness.

Although critics complained that Macheath made highway robbery attractive, he breaks no laws on stage, except in breaking out of jail. Similarly, the flurry of press in 1723 about the criminal Jack Sheppard, Gay's model for Macheath, was on his jailbreaks, not his crimes. Sheppard repeatedly escaped from heavily guarded cells even loaded with chains. After Sheppard's second escape from Newgate, "the legal authorities concluded that no jail could hold him, and they made special arrangements to have him hanged almost immediately after he was recaptured" (Deritter 29), a haste which seemed to evade his rights (and recalled what many considered Atterbury's sham trial), and which Gay capitalized upon in the scene captured by Hogarth. Sheppard worked for Jonathan Wild, the "Thief-taker General" whose reign peaked in the early 1720s. Wild, the model for Peachum, created a system to re-sell stolen goods to the people from whom they were

several Thieves and Street-robbers confessed in *Newgate*, that they raised their Courage at the Playhouse, by the Songs of their Hero *Macheath*, before they sallied forth on their desperate nocturnal Exploits" (qtd. in Guerinot and Jilg 119-120). Dr. Johnson said that "There is in it such a *labefaction* of all principles, as may be injurious to morality" (qtd. in Guerinot and Jilg 155). For a good summary of the belief in the bad influence of *The Beggar's Opera*, see Patricia Meyer Spacks. "Newspapers and journals recorded the arrests of men disastrously influenced by Macheath and his friends... antagonistic commentators recorded many similar instances of corruptions supposedly caused directly or indirectly by the play" (122-123).

³⁶ Literally—Thompson notes in *Customs in Common* that the courts increasingly enforced landlords' claims to common grazing land. For the cultural preference for common law, see Hogue, *Origins of the Common Law*.

stolen. He protected his thieves as long as they were useful, offered the proper bribes to get them released from prison, turned them in when they became dispensable for any number of reasons, and collected his reward when they were duly hanged. Wild was considered a force of justice—and a Great Man—in a London with no police force, and in which “Great Man” was already a loaded term. The public only reluctantly came to view Wild as a law breaker; he stood rather at the intersection of honest and criminal worlds. The dynamism of *The Beggar’s Opera* borrows from the fascination these two criminals held for the public by their being, in the one case, uncontrollable by law and in the other, able to straddle legitimate and illegitimate worlds.

Gay also distills the meaning of the public shift in support from Wild to Sheppard. The polite world knew Wild wasn’t entirely honest, but they needed him to negotiate with the criminal world for them. Noble’s description of Wild points particularly to the durability of this space between knowing and not knowing: “By 1718 so notorious had [his] practices become that Parliament was obliged to enact a statute specifically against them. Even so, Wild was able to continue unchecked for another seven years—because the public were happy to conspire with his duplicity” (6). They needed Wild (as they needed Walpole) to negotiate between lawful and lawless for them, to maneuver the space of the outlaw.³⁷ When Wild “peached” Sheppard in 1723, the public, wearied by Wild’s system of extortion, fell in love with the betrayed Sheppard, admired his miraculous jailbreaks, and cheered him all the way to Tyburn. Wild’s dishonesty toward Sheppard was similar to his dishonesty toward the public. Celebrating Sheppard as the lesser of the two criminals, the public celebrated themselves as perhaps flawed but

³⁷ Peachum describes his own place in both worlds: “A lawyer is an honest employment; so is mine. Like me, too, he acts in a double capacity, both against rogues and for ‘em” (I.i.9-10).

essentially honest. In the same way, we exult in Macheath's reprieve, for we learn from the play that we are all criminal, if only to greater and lesser degrees. After raising questions of justice throughout the play, Gay provides an ending which leaves them not only unanswered but unanswerable, because he has shifted the focus from crime—clearly wrong—to criminal—only subjectively wrong, and so not always subject to institutional justice.

English legal rituals were thoroughly theatrical; their theatricality indicates the importantly *public* character of the interaction (public/criminal/law), as embodied in trials by jury, the ceremony and costumes of judges, the carnival atmosphere of hangings, and the *deus ex machina* of the royal reprieve.³⁸ Blackstone wrote of the importance of public trials in 1765; witness of the law was participation in it, insofar as “it is not merely of some importance but is of fundamental importance that justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done.” Only the performance of justice—justice not only done, but done as Justice in a black robe, justice capitalized and quoted, justice enacted for a viewing audience—ensures that it really is justice.

The entire playhouse is a courthouse in Hogarth's painting, and within this conceit lies much of the power of the play depicted. Since Macheath's trial takes place off-stage, this last scene is Macheath's public trial. It is a moment when he might be set free; his fate hovers over them all, awaiting the effect of Polly's words. Those words, that pathos, is directed toward the jury of peers, the audience, whose favorable verdict

³⁸ “A great part of politics and law is always theatre; once a social system has become ‘set’, it does not need to be endorsed daily by exhibitions of power (although occasional punctuations of force will be made to define the limits of the system's tolerance); what matters more is a continuing theatrical style. What one remarks of the eighteenth century is the elaboration of this style and the self-consciousness with which it was deployed” (Thompson *Culture in Common* 45, 46). Many a condemned man would have considered a panel of judges as “a terrible Show!” (III.xi.75-6).

carries the day. The Poet grants Macheath his life to satisfy the audience. "To make the piece perfect," the Beggar-Poet objects, "I was for doing strict poetical justice. Macheath is to be hanged" (III.xvi.3-5). Macheath is a criminal and a philanderer, and poetic justice entails the punishment of the vicious and the reward of the virtuous. Because it is an opera, however, it must end happily; the hero must live.³⁹ Certainly the author is a subject of the stage world and must follow its laws, whether they serve poetic justice or not. The generic objection, he admits, is "very just" (III.xvi.11). Though he sends the rabble to cry a reprieve, he laments his lost ending:

Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral. 'Twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich; and that they are punished for them. (III.xvi.19-28)

The point of the moral, that "they" are punished for their vices, clouds the subject and yet again shies off to the side of justice: are only the lower sort punished or both the lower and the better? If only the lower, do they hang for their vices or their poverty or their impropriety? Which of the endings, which of the meanings of the Beggar's last sentence, is the more just? He (Beggar-Poet/Gay) submits to the laws of the stage, but makes their flaws so obvious as to begin their reform.

³⁹ Most of the now well-known operas, with tragic endings, were composed in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Macheath is more hero than criminal because he doesn't threaten public stability. There are no Justices in this play, though its entire plot is the capture (and recapture) and punishment of a criminal. Justices are superfluous, primarily because Macheath isn't going to hang for being a highwayman, but for marrying Polly. The public of this play is destabilized by Peachum—a "businessman" who uses the justice system to rid himself of enemies (as did Walpole)—and so whether or not Macheath dies, justice will not have been done. This system simply serves whichever criminal pays best. Moreover, from the first song to the last, the emphasis is equally on the crimes of the world "out there," and those villains, Prime Minister Robert Walpole first among them, will be completely untouched by either ending. The play can only emphasize that there is no "poetical justice" outside the playhouse. It calls attention to a systematic manipulation of justice central to the London socio-political structure, and by rerouting that manipulation through a fantasy correction, a dream-like poetic improvement, marks its own solution as unreal. Though the audience can affect the play, the play cannot affect the outside world. But this very pose of inefficacy was part of its ability to do just that, to affect and infect the larger political and social world.

In addition to the fantasy elements that prevent the story from taking on its own reality, Gay's play takes advantage of conditions of the contemporary theater, of its own staging. It was not until late in the century that the house went "dark," and so audience members were almost as easy to see as actors. Gay enhances the understood but unremarked community this created. The custom of on-stage seating, a very obvious condition of theater in 1728, added an enormous impact to Gay's courthouse metaphor.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Calhoun Winton finds that on one night nearly two months into its run, 98 spectators were seated on the stage (102).

Aristocrats of varying degrees would pay well for on-stage seats, where they would be a more or less subtle part of the scene, would sometimes harass actresses or crack jokes, and be seen. The popularity of the rehearsal play, from Buckingham's 1671 *The Rehearsal* through Fielding's 1737 *The Historical Register of the Year 1736*, can be seen as a comment upon this kind of imposed and occasionally disruptive participant and his often callous disregard for the "integrity" of the play. In a rehearsal play, "spectators" deliver critical observations as a play is rehearsed. Their meta-theatrical commentary overlays a burlesque of contemporary theatrical style and parody of contemporary personalities, dividing the viewer's attention, intentionally distracting him from the "play" on stage. Increasingly after 1740, actors and spectators considered on-stage seating a tyrannical custom that interfered with the general public's experience of the theater, and it was ended by 1759. This physical, emphatic division between performer and spectator marks a stage in the erosion of the kind of interaction I am tracing throughout this dissertation.

Theatrical interaction was not only between stage and audience but within and among audience members. The division among audience members—footmen in the galleries, nobles on stage, fops in the pit, ladies in boxes—did not strike contemporaries as divisive. Collectively they represented the public, which was not expected to mix any more literally than this.⁴¹ Without a sense of segregation, it was rather a point of pride

⁴¹ In the middle decades, however, the rhetoric of theatrical and constitutional liberty accused aristocrats of impinging upon the rights of a "general" public. Partly this is evidence of the process described by Habermas, in which a domestic middle-class claimed to be "the public." As Habermas notes that this eventually political movement grew out of a democratic literary culture, Gerald Newman traces nascent English nationalism to a similar cultural shift. "[A] standard strategy of the mature nationalist movement [was] the subtle portrayal of the Ton [the Town, the World, the Beau Monde] as the enemy of domestic virtue as well as of domestic culture... an alien race polluting the tastes and morality of the people" (Newman 64). The people, here, as well, are the bourgeoisie, exclusive of the aristocracy. That in the

that the classes did mingle at the theaters in London. Contemporaries repeatedly alluded to the social spectrum of the spectators. “Many traits of the national character of a people may be observed in their public entertainments,” observed one German visitor,

and it appears to me, as if the English intended to shew that liberty, which they are used to glory in, no where more than in their playhouses. Persons of high rank, and others of the very lowest, are present; and it seems as if the latter were determined to intimate that they were as good as the former. (qtd. in Hughes *Patrons* 177)

The theater is a micro-cosmos of English society complete with ideological structure, not an equalizer.⁴² Persistently asking who makes the decisions in the theater, and overtly analogizing that to decision-makers in the government, *The Beggar’s Opera* calls attention to any coercion, aesthetic or political. When the decision makers who affect this play’s own ending, who subvert poetic justice, *are* those aristocrats sitting on stage, the on-stage audience represents the larger one, just as the behavior of those aristocrats in the world—and in the courts—was expected to be a positive model for the larger social world.

By calling attention to on-stage audiences and other material conditions of theater, the rehearsal-play tradition from which Gay draws exposed the fallibly physical base of the drama’s classical ideal.⁴³ Gay’s insistence upon distance and artificiality is partly a

theaters the audiences were literally separated would carry radically different connotations in the 1750s, with English culture undergoing the changes outlined by Habermas and Newman, than in the late 1720s.

⁴² Paula Backscheider and John O’Brien both argue that “the theater is an exemplary public-sphere institution” which negotiated, during the Restoration and early eighteenth century, between the monarchy, the market, and an absolutist state (O’Brien *Harlequin Britain* xvi).

⁴³ As I argue in Chapter 1, the increasingly bourgeois repugnance for the material conditions of theater was itself political.

counterweight to a new, absorptive sensibility that was rising in popularity and creating its own new set of stage laws. Gay had been mocking the sentimental drama since 1715, and was aware of the trend in theater, championed by his colleague Aaron Hill, that would culminate in the “naturalistic” acting of David Garrick. The sentimental aimed to touch the heart and affect the morals of the spectator. Sentimental plays abolished or downplayed vulgar subplots and often attempted to present only uplifting examples. Steele’s heroes refuse to duel; Cibber’s heroines refuse to scold. When Garrick rose to fame in the 1740s, he seemed himself to be absorbed in the character, in the story, and so encouraged spectators to “lose” themselves in the experience. By the time James Boswell (a big Macheath fan, incidentally) describes his theater-going experiences in 1763, it was *de rigueur* for a sensitive man to get “into a proper frame” before a play, and to “shed abundance of tears” during it (qtd. in Hughes *Patrons* 78). This isolated absorption, so widely derided in female readers, was antithetical to the theatrical experience Gay relied on and to the social response he sought. Sentimental plays tried to touch individual hearts, but satirical farce reached out for the collective mind.⁴⁴

Garrick’s naturalistic performances took place in a post-Licensing Act world.

The Licensing Act, passed in 1737 to silence political farce, reinforced the drive toward

⁴⁴ Hogarth’s 1749 painting of Garrick as Richard III usefully illustrates the difference between the two theatrical approaches and the power of the new acting style. The viewer of the *Beggar’s Opera* painting sees simultaneously the much-loved and pure Polly Peachum and the adulterous actress Lavinia Fenton, and in viewing the interplay between actors and audience, sees the scene as a theatrical scene. The later painting has no audience. Its stage scene is a complete reality and reinforces the division between stage and audience in contemporary theaters. The curtains of the tent suggest the curtains framing a stage, but the actor is alone, with the encampment in the background, reeling in his own horror. There is no outside of this scene. While this is traditional for theater painting it is still illustrative of the spectator experience. The portrait is “a roughly accurate picture of the actor on stage—his scattered armour..., his quasi-Elizabethan costume, his dramatic diagonal pose and powerful expression,” but Hogarth’s erasure of the audience, of the theater, is paradigmatic of the internal sensibility with which spectators were inspired (Uglow 400).

socially moralistic, rather than politically social, comedies.⁴⁵ The permeability characteristic of *The Beggar's Opera* and other political farces of this period was precisely the dangerous element in them that the law was formulated to eliminate.

Dividing the viewer's attention between actors and audience, or rather undividing the viewer's attention, the painting captures the degree to which *The Beggar's Opera* is a play about its audience, a play that refocuses the gaze of its audience back onto itself, not as individuals but as a society. Gay brings the judges literally onstage, which multiplies the implications for his judges in the audience; he turns them into not only judges of his play, aesthetic judges, but social critics, in a position to judge those who mete out "justice."⁴⁶ Gay flatters the audience that they are clearly superior to the characters while slyly equating the two. John Richardson notes rightly that though most critics agree that the play "articulates dissent through form as much as through content" they generally privilege one over the other (19). It is precisely through the interplay of these tropes of performance and justice—and not only the play's metonymic satire—that its political impact can be properly understood.

The trope of audience as jury inherently aligns aesthetic and moral judgment. Moreover, the history of the metaphor of the jury in the theater is closely related to the questions of patriotism that suffused the theater from the late seventeenth century. The English legal system was frequently touted as its citizens' bulwark against tyranny at

⁴⁵ Matthew Kinservik's *Disciplining Satire* argues that the threat of censorship acted as a guide rather than an obstruction, and that stage satire becomes more general and social, but remains nonetheless satire, after the Licensing Act.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, though this is also Brecht's goal in his adaptation *The Threepenny Opera*, he approaches the characters differently. His Macheath is a hardened criminal and a charmless bully, and in his hands Lockit becomes Brown, a pure representation of the struggle between Law and humanity. Macheath manipulates Brown. The ambiguity of Gay's play is removed or at least shifted; Brecht's audience is not Macheath's jury; rather Macheath seems to call down an unrighteous judgment on the society that created him.

home,⁴⁷ and by making use of that metaphor, playwrights and prologue writers had long tried to associate their plays with Good English Values: honesty, liberty, property. The obligation for playwrights to be identifiably “English” was partly created, partly intensified, in reaction to the late seventeenth-century pressure from critics and aristocratic aesthetes to imitate the Aristotelian French theater, rather than the faulty, Shakespearean one.

Indeed, that the laws of the English stage were dictated by France galled many English playwrights and critics. Dryden protested against the “illiterate Censors” who are “not qualified for Judges” that a playwright should be “try’d by the Laws of [his] own Country; for it seems unjust... that the French should prescribe here till they have conquer’d” (preface, *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost* 1677). The analogy of statecraft and stagecraft would gain strength post-Revolution. In 1705 Colley Cibber bemoaned the state of the English stage, “opprest,” “in chains,” and enslaved to French rules. “Oh, that your judgment, as your courage has,/ Your fame extended, would assert our cause,/ That nothing English might submit to foreign laws” (*The Careless Husband* Epilogue 16-18). The laws of the stage were French, just as the Roman code of law came in with the Norman kings. The mythos of British identity held that the Anglo-Saxon kings established the jury and the authority that became common law, and everything since was a foreign imposition.⁴⁸ On stage, culture and common law are but different expressions of the same concept of traditional custom.⁴⁹ Cibber’s language is

⁴⁷ See for example Gay’s *Epistle to William Pulteney, Esq.* (1720): “Happy, thrice happy shall the monarch reign,/Where guardian laws despotic power restrain!” (247-8).

⁴⁸ On the power of the nationalistic myth of the Anglo-Saxons, see Gerald Newman 117-120; on the origin of the common law and jury in England, see Arthur R. Hogue’s *Origins of the Common Law*.

⁴⁹ “If, along one path, ‘custom’ carried many of the meanings we assign now to ‘culture’, along another path custom had close affinities with the common law. This law was derived from the customs, or habitual

reactionary; a prior and pure English taste is imagined to have existed and supposed to be still accessible despite the present degradation. It is not a matter of wealth or education, but of nationality. Good taste is native to the soil.

The jury, central to the English/Saxon justice system and considered as the voice of the public, is related to the sense of the English theater as peculiarly English. “An extremely pervasive rhetorical tradition, with deep historical roots,” the sense that national identity depends on the jury goes along with the passionate defense of the rights of a Free-born Briton and the belief in equal protection under the law (Hay 35). “The law was held to be the guardian of Englishmen, of all Englishmen. Gentlemen held this as an unquestionable belief: that belief, too, gave the ideology of justice an integrity which no self-conscious manipulation could alone sustain” (Hay 35). These were the elements (and the rhetoric) that set the British above the Continental: the free-born Briton was protected—by history, and by the freedom of his fellow citizens—from Continental Tyranny and from internal absolutism.⁵⁰ Prologues which appeal to the whole (or a chosen) group as a jury assert by analogy that a play should be judged, as a criminal is judged, “by unprofessional representatives of public opinion.”⁵¹ The judgment of the

usages, of the country: usages which might be reduced to rule and precedents, which in some circumstances were codified and might be enforceable at law” (Thompson *Customs in Common* 3, 4).

⁵⁰ “In France, as in most European countries, with the notable exception of England, the entire criminal procedure, right up to the sentence, remained secret... not only to the public but also to the accused himself... The magistrate, for his part, had the right to accept anonymous denunciations, to conceal from the accused the nature of the action, to question him with a view to catching him out, to use insinuations. (Up to the eighteenth century, lengthy arguments took place as to whether ... it was lawful for the judge to use false promises, lies, words with double meaning – a whole casuistry of legal bad faith)... The secret and written form of the procedure reflects the principle that in criminal matters the establishment of truth was the absolute right and the exclusive power of the sovereign and his judges” (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 35).

⁵¹ Lord Halsbury’s definition of the jury (1907).

public, in the theater and in the court, was held to be supreme, because least likely to be influenced by private relationships and other personal influences.

The jury metaphor maintained its currency for well over a hundred years, from before the “bloodless” revolution until the time of the French Revolution. In the prologues to plays by authors from Aphra Behn through Samuel Johnson to Richard Brinsley Sheridan we hear the rhetoric of deference to the audience’s judgment as to that of a law court, as in Wycherley’s “To you, the judges learned in stage-laws,/ Our poet now, by me, submits his cause” (*The Plain Dealer*, 1676). The judgment of the audience determined the fate of a playwright in concrete terms, for their disapproval would end or extend a play’s run. Gay’s early farce about an aristocratic gang terrorizing London, *The Mohocks*, speaks to the conditions of live theater particularly in its epilogue. Addressing the critics of the pit, the actress begs for the author’s life:

If you condemn him, grant him a Reprieve,
 Three days of Grace to the young sinner give,
 And then—if his sad Downfal does delight ye,
 As witness of his *Exit* I invite ye. (italics reversed 17-20)

The “downfal” and “Exit” are, as can be guessed from the context of judgment, condemning, and reprieve, cant terms for hanging, which in some sense was an alternative entertainment for crowds of mixed classes. In the conclusion to the play then, this moment when the play world is open to the playhouse world, the gentlemen of the pit who might really be the aristocratic gang members, Mohocks, have the ability to judge and hang those beneath them, as they do in real life, and as the Mohocks in the play itself

do.⁵² The audience has real power, over the playwright, and in the world. The epilogue to *The Mohocks*, asking for a three day reprieve, begs the audience's mercy, as their reaction determined whether or not the play would run through a third night, the profits of which (and of every third night thereafter) were the author's only payment. Audience reaction could and did prevent, in some cases, even the third act. For reasons ranging from ticket prices and seating policies to personal spite and political circumstances, protests sometimes disrupted performances, often with devastating consequences to the play at hand. The jury analogy flatters the audience and allows the theaters to pretend to a kind of disinterested public service, a pure democracy, to mask what was otherwise pandering for profit.

The conflict—ideal, disinterested judgment and self-interested profit—plays out on Gay's stage in both realms. Peachum bribes witnesses, pays perjurers, and stands to benefit financially from Macheath's execution. With Peachum, Gay claims that ideal disinterested justice has been replaced by the secrecy and purchase power of the corrupt—in government, in society, in culture. In the two possible endings, Macheath hanged and Macheath reprieved, that world is opposed to the ideal, still existing in the audience (ideally).⁵³

The metaphor of audience as jury emphasizes the voice of the public in the theaters as one deeply English. As Blackstone wrote in 1765, “[t]he liberties of England

⁵² Lord Hinchbrooke, whom Neil Guthrie suggests took part in an attack that led to the rumors of gang violence, later became both a Member of Parliament and a Justice of the Peace (Guthrie 47).

⁵³ As Samuel Johnson wrote in a 1747 prologue “The stage but echoes back the public voice;/ The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,/ For we that live to please, must please to live” (*Prologue Spoken at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane* 52-54). For Johnson and most of his contemporaries, full democracy was tantamount to mob rule; the prologue above *apologizes* for the state of the stage, excusing it as *only* the servant of an imperfect public. England's profound identification with its public provided protection against the tyranny of an individual ruler, but left it vulnerable to the tyranny of the many.

cannot but subsist so long as [trial by jury] remains sacred and inviolate ... from all secret machinations, which may sap and undermine it.” For just this reason, trials and executions were public. The audience for justice not only confirms it but also authorizes it. Viewing the hanging of a criminal for the public good was an endorsement of that hanging.⁵⁴ The public hanged the man, and the public watched.

The spectacle was also meant to affect spectators, for as Gatrell notes, “courtroom pomp [and] executions ... were mounted *for* the people, and the crowd’s function was to bear witness to the might of the law and the wickedness of crime and to internalize those things” (90-91). In a London with no police force, hanging was supposed to act as a deterrence.⁵⁵ The gallows became the site of interaction between law and people, the only stage on which most people would see the law performed. That interaction was not always as contained and disciplinary as the authorities may have wanted it to be. Hanging day became a holiday celebration, with the condemned processing from Newgate Prison to Tyburn in a cart, stopping frequently to be offered free drinks and flowers, with balladeers and cartoonists glorifying his crimes, and the terminally ill sometimes storming the gallows to touch the corpse for healing.⁵⁶ Gay comments on the carnivalization by staging a “Dance of Prisoners in Chains” between Macheath’s exit to trial and his execution.

⁵⁴ This was the ideal. In reality, the public considered hanging day simply a holiday, and occasionally, as will be discussed below, intervened on behalf of the criminal.

⁵⁵ The British resisted establishing a police force, as they feared it could too easily become a standing army at the disposal of the government against the people. “Better a harsh penal code, affecting relatively few lawbreakers, than a Frenchified and centralized police system inimical to a free people which would affect countless more. A great commercial nation needed the protection of capital law; and anyway, given the English distaste for torture, alternatives could not be easily conceived” (Gatrell 498). A London police force would eventually be established under Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel in 1829.

⁵⁶ “The route of the hanging procession crossed the busiest axis of the town at Smithfield, passed through one of the most heavily populated districts in St Giles’s and St Andrew’s, Holborn, and followed the most-trafficked road, Tyburn Road, to the gallows” (Linebaugh 67).

Macheath's hero status is confirmed, rather than threatened, by his sentence. Condemned men became almost fetishized romantic heroes among all classes, who bought ballads or books about them.⁵⁷ Mrs. Peachum observes that women "are so partial to the brave, that they think every man handsome who is going to ...the gallows... Beneath the left ear so fit but a cord/ (A rope so charming a zone is!)/ The youth in his cart hath the air of a lord,/ And we cry, There dies an Adonis!" (I.4, Air III). Polly herself seems far more stimulated than fearful in her visions of Macheath's death:

Methinks I see him already in the cart, sweeter and more lovely than the
nosegay in his hand! – I hear the crowd extolling his resolution and
intrepidity! – What volleys of sighs are sent from the windows of Holborn,
that so comely a youth should be brought to disgrace! I see him at the tree!
(I.12)

The criminal's procession, which Polly's description traces out, is itself a demonstration of his between-ness: between law and lawlessness, between life and death, between the raucous crowds who came to witness his passage and the Law that demanded it.

As a community event, even before it spread beyond the playhouse walls, *The Beggar's Opera* took advantage of the accumulation of traditions and assumptions. More than anything else, for *The Beggar's Opera*, that meant concretizing the criminal world so that the customary metaphor of the audience as a jury would be literalized; their verdict would command. This gesture does not come only at Macheath's reversal of fortunes; it saturates the play. *The Beggar's Opera* naturalized and nationalized that

⁵⁷ Richard Holmes notes, in his book on poet Richard Savage, that "the greatest irony of [his] career [is] that the conviction for murder [in 1727], followed by the royal pardon, brought him exactly the fame and fortune he had so long and so deviously sought. ... London Society was in a mood for rakish figures" (133,

audience authority by continually associating it with English law, symbolically and structurally. The association suggests that such an audience already has the right to control its government. By being situated within a satire against Walpole, it distinctly lays the suppression of that right to the Walpole administration. It follows that all that is wrapped up in law, in the relationship of the people to its government, should be typified by Tyburn, and that that restless energy, once Gay had associated it with the farce, would seem so relentlessly political.

In the mocking preface to his earlier judicial farce *The What D'ye Call It*, Gay writes that “Poetical Justice [is] strictly observed” (140-141), yet it is specifically *poetical* justice that is observed, in direct conflict with real justice, which is neither done nor served. In that play, Peascod, the condemned man, wins a reprieve not because the system which shoots a deserter who was illegally pressed in the first place is revealed to be unjust, but because of the pity he has aroused in the audience with his “final” words at execution. Poetical justice, which rewards the virtuous and punishes the vicious, had led to productions like Tate’s *King Lear*, which famously allowed Cordelia to live, incurring the ire of such critics as Addison, who called it a “ridiculous doctrine” (*Spectator* 548). Poetical justice—in this case, the happy ending—is not the justice of Providence, to paraphrase Samuel Richardson, but of a fantasizing, escapist audience. In a 1726 letter to Pope, Gay mocked a spectacle performed at Bartholomew Fair, Elkanah Settle’s *The Siege of Troy*. “I think the poet corrected Virgil with great judgement in the poetical justice which he observed... for Paris was killed upon the spot by Menelaus, and Helen burnt in the flames of the town before the audience” (qtd. in Nokes 374). Poetical justice

134). See V.A. C. Gatrell for a discussion of the tales of the condemned as marketed to different segments of society (300-301).

here amounts to disfiguration for the pleasure of the uneducated. *The Beggar's Opera* also explicitly makes the reprieve of Macheath the responsibility of the audience; Macheath is reprieved "to comply with the Taste of the Town" (III.16). Gay points out that poetical justice is cried up in spectacles at both Bartholomew Fair and the opera, by the ignorant of all classes, neither kind of entertainment involving the rational human faculties. In making it ridiculous, he underscores how rarely those faculties are used in the execution of justice in real life.

Reprieves were, certainly, an important part of the justice system as it was practiced, and the juries often played a decisive part. From 1701-1725, of the 471 people who were convicted and sentenced to hang, only 156—less than one third—were actually executed (Gatrell). Although a reprieve was largely a display of monarchical mercy, juries played an influential role in urging the pardons of men and women they had found guilty, often out of pity for extenuating circumstances. Since at least the Black Act of 1723 juries also occasionally acquitted thieves rather than permitting, and so becoming responsible for, their executions, in protest against what were considered inhumanely harsh legal codes.⁵⁸ The Black Act, specifically aimed at those men who "blackened" their faces while poaching to escape detection, "at one blow raised an uncommon number of existing criminal offenses to capital offenses and created new ones" mostly vaguely defined crimes against public order (Mack 404). The Act was immediately extended to any anonymous "conspiracies."⁵⁹ Increasingly through the century, as the legislature

⁵⁸ "[A]s the punishments of the secular courts grew more brutal ... there was a search for ways to avoid them; we have an analog in the search by eighteenth-century juries and twentieth century judges for ways to avoid imposing capital punishment" (Rembar 74).

⁵⁹ E. P. Thompson suggests that the "emergency" that called the law into being was "the sense of a confederated movement which was enlarging its social demands... the symptoms of something close to class warfare" and notes that communities often prevented suspects from being arrested (*Whigs and*

accumulated what would come to be known as the Bloody Code,⁶⁰ juries more frequently handed down acquittals. There was a growing sense that the jury was to maintain justice, even when that meant setting a criminal free. Between *The What D'ye Call It* and *The Beggar's Opera*, the role of the jury had shifted from pitying supplicant of royal mercy to proactive arbitrator. Jury members had to decide whether a law was worth enforcing before deciding whether to find the criminal guilty. In associating his audience with a jury, Gay perhaps flatters them with a suggestion that their power is greater (both in and outside the theater) than it really is, but he also challenges them to use that power wisely. It is right to let Macheath live, since Peachum should not prevail; but then it is the responsibility of the audience to ensure that a Peachum never prevail.

The Black Act mixes property crimes with crimes against order.⁶¹ The law specifically targets anonymous gatherings, and was used to prosecute protesters as well as poachers. This mixture, seen as a sly way for Walpole to accrue more power, made Tyburn and hanging far more potent political metaphors than they had earlier been. Toward the end of 1724 Gay's ballad "Newgate Garland," about Jonathan Wild, was used in Drury Lane's pantomime "Harlequin Sheppard," both clearly containing the seeds

Hunters 190-191). In his biography of Pope, Maynard Mack calls the Black Act a "comprehensive disgrace to British justice" (404). Pope's brother-in-law and nephew were arrested under the Black Act in 1723.

⁶⁰ The "Bloody Code" was the set of laws that applied the punishment of execution to a swiftly expanding number of crimes, primarily forms of theft. The number of capital crimes went from about fifty in 1688 to one hundred and sixty in 1760 and kept increasing through the century (Hay 18). "There had been a mere 281 London hangings between 1701 and 1750; there were nearly *five* times as many between 1751 and 1800" (Gatrell 7).

⁶¹ "There is hardly a criminal act which did not come within the provisions of the Black Act; offences against public order, against the administration of criminal justice, against property... all came under this statute and all were punishable by death" (Sir Leon Radzinowicz qtd. in Thompson *Whigs and Hunters* 22).

of *The Beggar's Opera*.⁶² In the ballad, the death of Wild frees all thieves from his tyranny, and "every Man round me may rob, if he please." Most notable is the third verse:

Some say there are Courtiers of highest Renown,
 Who steal the King's Gold, and leave him but a *Crown*;
 Some say there are Peers, and some Parliament Men,
 Who meet once a Year to rob Courtiers agen:
 Let them all take their Swing
 To pillage the King
 And get a Blue Ribbon instead of a String. (19-25)

That the guilty "knaves" would hang if they were commoners, but because they "act" on a larger world stage are instead rewarded (the blue ribbon is the Order of the Garter) had already become an opposition standard. *The Beggar's Opera's* Air LXVII, to the tune of "Green Sleeves," strikes the same chord:

Since Laws were made for ev'ry degree,
 To curb vice in others, as well as me,
 I wonder we han't better company,
 Upon Tyburn tree!
 But gold from law can take out the sting;
 And if rich men like us were to swing,
 'Twould thin the land, such numbers to string
 Upon Tyburn Tree! (III.xiii.22-29)⁶³

⁶² It is unclear whether the ballad was written purposefully for the pantomime or simply appropriated by it; since *Harlequin Sheppard* was not particularly successful, Gay remained silent on this issue.

From this view, the poor hang for upsetting the order which establishes the privileges of the rich, and crime is defined not objectively but by the status of the criminal.

Such an interpretation, while not popular, was neither unique to Gay nor new in 1728. As Foucault notes, “executions could easily lead to the beginnings of social disturbances” as the inequalities became clear to some, and proximity to the power over death seemed to intoxicate others. It was at the Tyburn carnival, where the poorest “were called upon to act as witnesses and almost as coadjutors of this law, that they could intervene, physically: enter by force into the punitive mechanism and redistribute its effects; take up in another sense the violence of the punitive rituals” (Foucault 61). Since the execution is already a site of interaction between public and law via the criminal, the public can sometimes enlarge that space, acting themselves directly against law, by rescuing the criminal, destroying gallows, attacking guards, and otherwise physically inserting themselves.⁶⁴ These disturbances, though relatively rare in England, highlight the sense, however unarticulated, of an exchange. Executions were not simply the law acting upon the criminal before the passive public, but were also sometimes the occasion for an active public response to the powers of the law. V. A. C. Gatrell, discussing scholarship on the carnival atmosphere at Tyburn, downplays such a strong sense of agency, noting instead that the “only place where the scaffold could be truly parodied in an old language of mocking inversion was, significantly, outside the real arena of state-inflicted death, and that was in the Punch and Judy show” (94). The significance of the Punch and Judy parody is not only that it was “outside the real arena” but was an

⁶³ Fuller notes that the lyrics were sometimes attributed to Swift. But as Nokes argues, contemporaries repeatedly denied Gay’s authorship of many of his works.

⁶⁴ See Peter Linebaugh’s “The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons.”

artificial, already quixotic, already political public entertainment.⁶⁵ Both views suggest that the populace felt that the machine of execution was imposed upon them and felt a necessity—and an ability—to respond to it, to participate in its conversation about death and justice, whether they expressed that directly through riots at Tyburn or vicariously through Punch.

As his own death looms closer, Macheath the outlaw undergoes a shift in political mindset, articulating that murmur of resentment. Early in the play he is of the belief that all criminals are equal—to each other and in the eyes of the law. Though hunted by Peachum, he advises his gang to continue to “act under [Peachum’s] Direction, for the moment we break loose from him, our Gang is ruin’d” (II.ii.33-4). He and his comrades swear eternal loyalty to each other, and their utopian republic is ironically presented as the English ideal. After being betrayed twice and having been hounded nearly to his death, Macheath offers new advice: “Peachum and Lockit, you know, are infamous Scoundrels. Their lives are as much in your Power, as yours are in theirs” (III.xiv.11-13). Peachum and Lockit represent unjust laws written and enforced by the powerful for their own benefit; the gang, with their egalitarian harmony, represents native British justice. The Audience, the British, would clearly hear the message that the people should reclaim justice from corrupt administrators, high and low. Brecht would later take this up as a call to revolution. Given that *The Beggar’s Opera* is continually reaching across to comment about and to the audience, its “response to power” is neither “evasive” nor “limited” as John Richardson argues (28). Making the audience themselves the subject of

⁶⁵ The Punch and Judy show only took the form Gatrell refers to much later in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In that incarnation, Punch defies state authorities up to and including the hangman. See Speaight 183.

this play, Gay plainly urges them to turn against the villains whose lives are in their power.

The common Chance of a Criminal

The Beggar's Opera opened the way for Fielding's political farces, which also feed off a kind of audience participation. Its threat to the government was not a wishful interpretation of its friends—Walpole's suppression of Gay's sequel, *Polly*, demonstrates the smart he felt. Court insider Lord Hervey wrote that "rather than suffer himself to be produced for thirty nights together upon the stage in the person of a highwayman," Walpole had the Lord Chamberlain "put a stop to the representation of it. Accordingly, this theatrical Craftsman was prohibited at every playhouse" (20). That Gay subsequently published the play and earned a small fortune from it obscures the fact that *Polly* had no real effect on the public. The *banning* of *Polly* made Walpole look tyrannous and paranoid in opposition accounts and reinforced the idea that the opposition had a monopoly on freedom and truth, but the play itself was unable to interact with the public as a public, as the earlier one had. The public interaction which had made *The Beggar's Opera* an enormous success, which Walpole tried to foreclose by banning *Polly*, took on new life in Fielding's hands throughout the 30s, and ended only after numerous arrests and years of parliamentary debate in 1737 when Parliament enacted Walpole's Licensing Act.

A peculiarly vivid image of how dependent early productions of the play were on that sense of interaction, and how embedded its theatrics of interaction and responsibility in the legal mindset, is provided by the memoir of an actress who outlived her stage. In

her narrative of her adventures, Charlotte Charke relies on all the tropes of artifice, the leeway and charm of the outlaw, and the interaction of justice that drove the pre-Licensing Act political farce, unwittingly illustrating their failures as well as her own.

In the opening pages of her 1755 autobiography, actress Charlotte Charke (1713-1760) begs her readers to delay judgment of the book itself. “I ...humbly move for its having the common Chance of a Criminal, at least to be properly examn’d, before it is condemn’d” (14).⁶⁶ The time invested in reading a narrative, like the duration of a trial, creates a window for interaction, not just judgment. An examination is something of a conversation; at the least it presumes that the “accused” is heard. The condemnation which may follow (and Charke’s positioning of her book as criminal does predispose the reader this way) closes off the interaction, as the reader closes, discards, or publicly disparages the book.

Charke’s entire “life” takes place in the delay of judgment, the liminal space that defines both criminal and actor, the moment at the heart of Hogarth’s painting. As actor, daughter, and writer she is outside the legitimate boundaries, without being fully criminal.⁶⁷ The language of justice suffuses the *Narrative*—innocence and guilt, the plea, the pardon, and the punishment—and makes of the reader a spectator, a judge, or a jury member, just as it would in a prologue or an opposition farce. This association is a testament to the power of the link articulated by Gay and at the same time evidence of its

⁶⁶ Despite the knowing tone of the opening and her witty dedication to Herself, Charke’s *Narrative* varies between clever self-awareness, emotional manipulation, and unintentional psychological exposure. My reading of the central event in the narrative does not necessarily depend upon the truthfulness of the narrator.

⁶⁷ Actors not employed at one of the two patent houses had been considered vagrants since the time of Elizabeth, and had occasionally been detained or run out of town under 12 Anne 2, ch. 26: *An act for reducing the laws relating to rogues vagabonds sturdy beggars and vagrants into one act of Parliament and for the more effectual punishing such rogues vagabonds sturdy beggars and vagrants* (Liesenfeld 163).

failure. By 1755, nearly 20 years after the Licensing Act, the kind of interaction fostered by the opposition farces was either dead or relegated to the fairs and remote countryside performances.

Charlotte Charke was the youngest child of Colley Cibber, that emblem of establishment theater. An actress, she performed in Fielding's last few plays: *Pasquin* (1736) in which she parodied her father, and *The Historical Register for 1736* (1737) and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737), the two overtly anti-Walpole plays "that seem'd to knock all Distinctions of Mankind on the Head" and which Cibber, voicing public opinion, believed caused the Licensing Act (*Apology* I.287). In these three last, Charke played men's roles.⁶⁸

Before the Licensing Act, strolling players had been considered more outside the law than quite criminal. Much of Charke's life fits in this vague non-category, always just beyond the borders of legality but vaguely tolerated. She participated in her brother's rebellion against the patented theater managers, setting up an illegal theater company that went relatively unmolested for an entire successful season. She lived for a time in the Rules of the Fleet, the neighborhood surrounding the prison, within which debtors could not be arrested. Although outlaws of a kind, in this neighborhood debtors could freely live and try to work, and on Sundays they were free to go to church anywhere. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault calls allowances like this a margin of tolerated illegalities. These margins were increasingly policed across Europe throughout the century. The undefined spaces between legal and illegal were shrinking, and all that the

⁶⁸ Most scholarship on Charke discusses her work in terms of gender issues: on evolving concepts of gender on and offstage (Straub), cross-dressing as performance (Baruth), and a gendered narrative self (Nussbaum and Smith). My discussion of Charke's male roles in Fielding's farces is the subject of chapter 4.

Law had once managed to not notice, as the public had been “happy to conspire with [Jonathan Wild’s] duplicity,” it was noticing. The Licensing Act of 1737 essentially made the Act of Anne enforceable.

After the Licensing Act, with no access to the legitimate stage, Charke took up several different trades, some mercantile, some clerical, in which she passed as a man. She ran a small but fashionable puppet theater in London⁶⁹ and acted with strolling companies under the name of Charles Brown, during which time she took responsibility for her “friend” Mrs. Brown. Her penchant for cross-dressing, both on and off stage, made her an infamous figure, and precipitated a rift in the family. The autobiographical *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, Youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.*, which appeared in installments in 1755, was in large part intended to impress her father with how much his youngest had suffered, through no fault of her own, and to solicit his forgiveness and charity. The book’s intended exculpatory character harmonizes perfectly with its tone of suspended time, for while it rehearses events long in the past, it is actively seeking to influence its present. Sidonie Smith notes that “[t]he fact that her story is serialized over a period of eight weeks significantly enhances the very real drama of the ‘life.’ Both she and her readers await the outcome of her petition for absolution, await, that is, the father’s word” (86), just as Polly Peachum, her audience, and Hogarth’s viewers await Peachum’s word. As it appeared in print only over time, and as its subject still lived, its dénouement was hovering just in the future, just as the reader’s verdict awaited not only the passage of time, but also the experience of the future.

⁶⁹ See Epilogue.

Although the text quotes from Shakespeare and other staples of the legitimate stage, Charke's theatrical sensibility was formed by the irregular interactive theatrics of Gay and Fielding. Her epigraph is Gay's motto from *The What D'ye Call It*: "This Tragic Story, or this Comic Jest, / May make you laugh or cry—As you like best." The deferment to the audience's judgment which Gay jauntily professes becomes for Charke deadly serious. Her need for response left her ill-equipped for living and writing in a post-Licensing Act world, where audience interaction and the suspension of judgment—the source of Macheath's popularity in 1728—were progressively reduced and marginalized.

Charke's world view depends upon a subtle distinction she was unconscious of, between the law itself and its enforcement. Strolling players, she writes, are "VOLUNTARY VAGABONDS" and "itinerant Gentry, who are daily guilty of the Massacre of dramattick Poetry;" it is a profession which "not only the LAWS, but the Opinion of every reasonable Person" prohibits (214). The language is not that of sin or character flaw, but of crimes, both metaphoric (massacre of poetry) and real (vagabondage). The enforcement of the law, however, requires an interaction of a kind wholly different than that between actor and audience.

In the darkest moment of her life, though one of the most comical scenes in the *Narrative*, Charke attempts to recover the earlier manner in possibly the most earnest performance of Macheath ever recorded. Charke's troupe had been invited to perform at a great estate. A local magistrate has them waylaid and arrested as "sturdy beggars." Dressed and living as a man, Charke finds herself, with several other actors, arrested, arraigned, and held in jail overnight. The prison scene, in which she is both beggar and

criminal, actor and innocent victim, is the longest and most engaging scene in the book. Throughout her imprisonment Charke, outraged at the betrayal of the unspoken pact of allowances upon which she bases her life and upon which as a performer she bases her livelihood, becomes increasingly melodramatic and suicidal. When she becomes nearly crazed with despair, her companions persuade her to perform Macheath's prison scene from *The Beggar's Opera*. She complies.

Just as Macheath, a criminal, considers himself an aristocrat, Charke, classified as a beggar *because* she is an actor, is also part of the middle class who is to be protected from crime, not accused of it. To imply the equation between herself and Macheath is to elicit the active sympathy of her readership/audience. As they pardoned Macheath, they must now pardon her. Characteristically, she considers herself not criminal but victim, saying "we were not there for any Crime, *but that committed by those who informed against us*" (173) because "the Scheme was not intended to do Justice in regard to the Laws, but extort Money" (170). Her prosecutors are Peachums, interested only in money, not justice, and certainly not art. She, like Macheath, follows a code of honor higher than her enemies' pecuniary motivations.⁷⁰

Upon being arrested, the actors are brought to court, expecting to be given a light warning. "We were beckoned to the other End of the Court, and told, that the Keeper of the Prison insisted on our going into the Jail, only for a Shew, and to say we had been under Lock and Key" (170). There is no trial and no real justice, only the performance of it. Although actually lawbreakers, if they are imprisoned as part of a plan of extortion, as

⁷⁰ "Beggars and thieves are not bound by contract, but by paternalism, customs, ancient rights, a discretionary system of law" writes Michael Denning, about the clash of ideologies in *The Beggar's Opera* (115). Denning, following E. P. Thompson, argues that those ancient rights were an important part of

Charke claims, and not for public good, we have neither justice nor performance but flat deceit.

The reality of prison, when she expected only a performance, bends Charke's mind. "Rage and Indignation having wrought such an Effect on my Mind, it threw me almost into a Frenzy" (171). She is angry with her prosecutors, who she feels have acted unfairly. She experiences no remorse, nor does she have any sense of guilt. In the prison scene of *The Beggar's Opera*, III.xiii, Macheath "in a melancholy posture" tries to drink himself out of his dread. He sings first of his fear, then of his increasing intoxication, wistfully sings of the women he leaves behind, and ends with a political anthem. Visually the scene emphasizes the sadness of prison, and the fear of death, with the cascade of songs—eleven different ballad tunes each on the heels of the next—ratcheting up the pathos, and so the humor, of the scene. Charke also winds up the pathos, imagining what she will have to suffer throughout a night in jail:

to lie upon the bare Ground, and [to mix] among the Felons, whose Chains were rattling all Night long, and made the most hideous Noise I ever heard, there being upwards of two hundred Men and Boys under the different Sentences of Death and Transportation. Their Rags and Misery gave me so shocking an Idea, I begged the Man, in Pity, to hang us all three, rather than put us among such a dreadful Crew." (171, 2)

There is no sympathy for those suffering men and boys, for their rags and misery. They are the criminals law is supposed to protect her from, not companions. Dressed as a man, held in prison, Charke is indistinguishable from the felons. Her desperation is largely to

English custom, and more particularly, that *The Beggar's Opera* marked them as the property of every free-born Briton.

recover the definition of herself as an exception, as neither criminal nor wrongly accused. Worse, there is no humor.

The eighteenth-century prison was less a place of punishment than a holding space, for some between life and death, for others between home and exile. For Charke, it is a demonstration that there is no longer room between lawful and lawless, that the “margin of illegality” upon which she depended has vanished. And so she creates it artificially, throughout the night, dramatizing the verge of death and the potential for pardon. She not only begs the man to “hang us all three,” she expects to die of a fever, and she proposes that she and her fellow prisoners cut each others’ throats. She is awaiting not a trial, but a reprieve from fate. It is the charged moment of suspense at the center of Gay’s play, illustrated by Hogarth. Charke performs the play as much in recreating this suspense in her written narrative as she does when actually singing the songs in prison. She is, of course, both Polly and Macheath.

Charke does not die of cold in prison, or cut her throat or hang. The warder moves her and her companions away from the men and boys and into “the Womens Condemn’d Hole” as there were currently no women being held (172). She never acknowledges the ironic beauty, the appropriateness of the setting—that she is a woman in the Women’s Hole. The “shew” of being a “woman” “criminal” in “prison” is thoroughly real. It is the ultimate Macheathean moment, but it passes without comment. The double consciousness of the theater is collapsing into the single reality of text.

Denied the opportunity to pretend to go to prison, to perform “going to prison,” denied an audience who is aware of the “reality” that contradicts appearance, Charke is confounded. To humor her out of her “Melancholly,” one of the actors with whom she

was arrested insists that “as he had often seen me exhibit Captain *Macheath* in a Sham-Prison, I should, as I was then actually in the Condemned-Hold, sing all the Bead-roll of Songs in the last Act, that he might have the Pleasure of saying, I had once performed IN CHARACTER” (173). To some extent, the aesthetic satisfaction he promises himself from her performance is that of true Poetic Justice.

Charlotte Charke is fully in character here—a male impersonator, after a staged arrest, playing a con man, in a parody of opera. She is a “sturdy beggar” performing a beggar’s opera. She is trapped in a non-reflective world, a world whose boundaries cannot be crossed. She cannot voluntarily leave this prison, or remove it from the stage. She cannot hear her readership and they cannot see her. The models of legality and of performance that Charke adheres to both depend upon the existence of the margin as the space where decisions can be made, where interpretations happen. And both models have expired. The communication that failed in the courtroom fails in the performance. Macheath’s allure consists simultaneously of his individual charisma and his dedication to his community. He lives among his comrades and his women, and sees his restriction to the monogamous family unit as fatal as the noose. Macheath’s options seem illustrative of the experiences of theater (interactive, exuberant) and novel reading (private, domestic). Charke bemoans and celebrates her isolation from her community, vacillating between outlaw and outcast. Just as her performance in the courtroom failed, her autobiography failed to exonerate her with her father. Cibber did not forgive his daughter, speak to her again before he died, or provide for her in his will. Charke herself died penniless.⁷¹

⁷¹ See biographical treatments of Charke in Philip Baruth and Sidonie Smith.

Conclusion

The Common Law was essentially a collection of community standards that everyone understood. Beginning with Walpole's reign, written law increasingly came to limit the role of the community and became a contest between a powerful government and individuals (like Macheath, like Sheppard, like Charke). The Licensing Act, dismissing the traditional role of the audience in policing its own standards, declared that "it shall and may be Lawful to and for the said Lord Chamberlain for the time being from time to time and when and as often as he shall think fit to prohibit the acting performing or representing any Interlude Tragedy Comedy opera Play farce or Other Entertainment of the Stage or any act scene or part thereof or any Prologue or Epilogue" (Liesenfield 191). The law makes the subjective judgment of the Lord Chamberlain, with no boundaries or guidelines at all, the sole arbiter of acceptable standards and is vague enough to justify any of his actions, whether taken for political, personal, or moral ends.⁷² Before 1737, the audience itself acted as jury and policed the limits of artistic license. "Common to all [of the varieties of the jury metaphor] are the concepts of power, of right, of authority, ... for this was an age in which the English people led the world in a realization of emerging power and right vested in the people" (Hughes *Patrons* 5). Gay's explicit association between the judgment of a theater audience and the actions of a voting public is neither decorative nor unfounded.

When the Lord Chamberlain forbade the playing of the sequel *Polly*, eight years before the law that gave him that right, the Walpole administration declared its paralegal

⁷² Matthew Kinservik notes that "[t]he vague and arbitrary nature of the Lord Chamberlain's new authority was chilling" (95).

ability to do whatever it should "think fit." Although the actual power of law rested with Walpole, for the rest of his reign the claim of British justice belonged to the opposition. In the years that followed *The Beggar's Opera* the struggle over the definition of "British" would expand onto a third stage, would define the Haymarket theater, would become the domain of the opposition farce.

Chapter 3: The Politics of Grub Street; or, The Romance of Roast Beef

“Old English hospitality! Oh don’t name it, I am sick at the sound.”
(The Grub-Street Opera III.iii.32-33)

The more contentious discussions surrounding John Gay’s farces, to both contemporaries and subsequent critics, have concerned which characters represent real people, and how those representations are handled. Plotwell is or isn’t Cibber; “Gay” does or doesn’t stand for Pope and Arbuthnot; Peachum is or isn’t Jonathan Wild, is or isn’t Robert Walpole. Plays are or aren’t attacks on individuals or entire administrations. The indeterminacy of these identifications does not make them less compelling, for as Annabel Patterson writes of an earlier generation of political English theater, incomplete allegories are safer and equally intelligible to audiences as more clearly articulated ones. The “institutionally unspeakable makes itself heard inferentially, in the space between what is written or acted and what the audience, *knowing what they know*, might expect to read or see” (63, italics hers). That audience expectation, the missing element in Charlotte Charke’s late prison performance, was the ground upon which Fielding wrote all his political farces. He manipulated both expectations and representations more consciously than Gay, paid greater attention to the ambiguities of performance itself as already representation, and built upon the double-consciousness of theater already exploited by Gay. (Charlotte Charke is and isn’t a man in prison, is and isn’t performing.)

What begins as parody of an individual expands to a general indictment, transforming the persona caricatured into a representation of an entire cultural moment. Eliza Haywood, romance novelist, had already become part symbolic persona by the time

Fielding began to write. She had employed her own reputation, as an actress, mother, and somewhat scandalous writer, to win fame and an income; Pope had employed those same characteristics to denigrate her, and through her all women writers, in the 1728 *The Dunciad*. She haunts nearly all of Fielding's Haymarket farces, demonstrating not the moral denunciation of Pope but rather his reluctant fascination with print culture, and with the ways it, like the stage, interacted with its audiences. In his earliest success, *The Author's Farce* (1730), Haywood is caricatured in the puppet figure Mrs. Novel. In *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731), he parodies her trademark amatory fiction, transferring her passionate, sometimes exotic heroes and heroines to the Welsh countryside. Fielding's exploration of the contemporary print romance extends itself across several regular comedies as well, including *The Coffee-House Politician* (1732) and *Don Quixote in England* (1733). Haywood herself acted in Fielding's final Haymarket farces, *The Historical Register of 1736* and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (both 1737), participating in an ironic self-consciousness about her reputation. In the last play, she played the petulant, forsaken Muse, the mistress who has already produced several illegitimate "offspring" for the manipulative playwright. Mrs. Novel and the Muse represent her as an individual (an overtly sexual individual) and so have garnered the most attention, but in the middle plays (*The Grub-Street Opera*, *Don Quixote in England*, and *The Coffee-House Politician*, all written or performed between 1731-1733), Fielding makes most use of Haywood, her personal fame, and her relationship to print culture, to indict the corrupt Walpole administration. Through Haywood, Fielding focuses on the importance of production: of texts and of staged performances, but also of ideas, of ruling families, and therefore of power.

Grub Street, the physical location of most print shops in the early eighteenth century, became a byword for an irresponsible, irrepressible textual overproduction.¹ *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731) employs modern print culture as a trope for a mode of reproduction that is more potentially destabilizing than sexual reproduction. The figure of Haywood facilitates Fielding's transformation of this trope into a biting social critique. Although the play takes place miles from London's Grub Street, and although there are neither authors nor booksellers in the play, the significance of the title is in the collection of prejudices it gestures toward: sensationalism, political opportunism, anonymous scandal-mongering, ill-informed treatises, and clumsy translations, along with a seemingly endless proliferation of textual responses to textual responses.²

The licensing of the press had ended in 1695. In addition to a proliferation of subject matter and working printshops, the print world saw increasingly larger readerships. More than ever before, people from all stations of life, including women, were able to read. The related fears stirred up in 1740 by *Pamela* for some readers—that servants who could read and write caused trouble and that distinctions between social classes were eroding—had begun to be articulated long before Samuel Richardson's

¹ "In 1695, the Licensing Act was allowed to lapse for good, ending official pre-publication censorship and government restrictions on the number of master printers throughout Britain. This event, combined with ongoing political turmoil, contributed to another major period of growth in the London book trades. At the same time, the ongoing, gradual shift in the dominant mode of textual production in England—from courtly, manuscript literary culture to the print-based, market-centred system we know today—was giving rise to a recognizably modern literary marketplace, and to the emerging professional literary subculture that by the late seventeenth century in England was already popularly referred to as '*Grub-Street*'" (McDowell 4-5).

² William Warner describes the "open system of media culture" in terms evocative of *The Beggar's Opera*'s progress through the culture: "it begins with a media production.... [T]he atavistic interest in the media event, as demonstrated by purchases and enthusiastic critical response, feeds upon itself, producing a sense that this media event has become an ambient, pervasive phenomenon which properly compels the attention and opinions of those with a modicum of 'curiosity.' Finally, this media event triggers repetitions and simulations, and becomes the focus of critical commentary and interpretation" (178).

novel.³ Modern romances,⁴ which were short and cheaply produced, were reputed to appeal to less well-educated people (the archetypal maid reading in the stairwell instead of working), people who had only a little money and a little time, and in the imagination of people like Fielding at least, so little moral discrimination of their own as to regulate their real lives by those in the romances. In *The Grub-Street Opera* Fielding turns his attention to the expanded reading public the indiscriminate output created, fully ten years before *Shamela*.

The play was cancelled days before its scheduled debut, ostensibly by Fielding himself, but most likely after pressure from the same Administration that later passed the Licensing Act.⁵ Walpole's actual connection to and reasons for the silencing remain mysterious and unclear, raising more questions than historians have yet answered. *The Grub-Street Opera* is an expanded version of *The Welsh Opera*, an earlier, more blatantly satirical farce which had been all but ignored by the administration. Scholars typically argue either that the suppression of *Grub-Street* was a belated reaction to the earlier play

³ Warner notes that "the market's explosion... seemed... as early as 1680, to presage a 'barbarous' disorder in culture" (135), and that Shaftesbury expressed dismay at the lack of discernment in readers (136).

⁴ As opposed to the chivalric romances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which were very long and very expensive.

⁵ A series of contemporary articles and ads for printed versions claims *The Grub-Street Opera* was "stopt by Authority," and anonymous counter-ads deny it was "suppressed" (quoted in Hume 97, 98). Hume concludes that Fielding was likely paid off (102). Matthew Kinservik doubts that the government had any part in its withdrawal, writing that "The only play by Fielding that might possibly have been suppressed by the government was *The Grub-Street Opera*; and if it was, the grounds for suppression can only have been his transparent ridicule of George II, Queen Caroline, Prince Frederick, Sir Robert and Horatio Walpole, William Pulteney, and John, Lord Hervey. ... Nevertheless... there is no solid evidence that the play was censored by the government" (68). Goldgar writes that "compared to [*The Fall of Mortimer* and other anti-Walpole works] *The Grub-Street Opera* is innocence itself, and it is absurd to speak of it as 'violently pro-opposition' [as does Amory in 'Henry Fielding's *Epistles to Walpole*']. ...one's final impression of the play is more that of political cynicism than political commitment" (110-111). In his introduction, Edgar V. Roberts says that the ridicule of the royal family "most probably... made the Government particularly anxious to remove the play from public view" (xx).

or that various elements of the later play have been poorly understood.⁶ Relatively unremarked, however, is the fact that in this play Fielding first articulates a concern with the politics, finances, and aesthetics of Grub Street that would persist throughout his literary career. This concern is inextricably linked to the figure of Haywood.⁷

The Grub-Street Opera stages the Haywoodian amatory plot as a critique of a politics of power and money. I argue that the “Grub Street” element of the revised farce inserted a characterization of English culture as degraded by the romance into the already obvious anti-Hanoverian allegory of the previous version, *The Welsh Opera*. Equally important, in this farce Fielding experiments with modes of theatrical representation from allegory through levels of allusion that I am calling gestural.⁸ In *Grub-Street*, Fielding’s political message, social critique, and theatrical technique enhance and reinforce each other. This synergy of purpose is further integrated with farce’s unique ability to foster a communal experience and a collective response in its theatrical public.

This chapter does two interdependent things. It establishes Fielding’s method of employing Eliza Haywood’s persona as shorthand for aspects of print culture, in order to explicate the system of representation on which the meanings of the theatrical events of this dissertation are dependent. Tracing the evolution of Fielding’s representations of

⁶ Albert J. Rivero and Roberts both suggest that the later play was more politically aggressive than the earlier. Both point to the personal satire, which is actually less pointed in the later play (Rivero 89, 92). Roberts reads a central insult in one of the added songs, discussed below. Loftis and Hume consider the government’s action more a warning to Fielding and a signal of its growing annoyance than a particular response to *The Grub-Street Opera* (Hume 97; Loftis 105).

⁷ As Ros Ballaster notes, the name of Eliza Haywood “was synonymous with the most extreme excesses of romance” (158).

⁸ “The name of an author... is more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description... Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification... the name of the author remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence” (Foucault “What is an Author” 122, 3). For Foucault this phenomenon is the byproduct of a commercial process; I am suggesting that, in addition, it is here conscious and intentional.

Haywood from Mrs. Novel in *The Author's Farce* (1730) through the self-consciously forsaken Muse (1737), we see a deepening irony in the ways in which an historical person can be figured on stage, a multiplication of levels of representation between allegory and realism, and a new political subtlety in Fielding's practice of topical gesture.

Focusing then on *The Grub-Street Opera*, I argue that the anti-romance theme becomes a critical indictment of the British character, particularly as seen in the ballad "The Roast Beef of Old England." This ballad, which laments a lost "true" English character, was written for the expanded (and unstaged) ballad opera, and then altered for its debut in the more conventional *Don Quixote in England*. Both plays address questions of national identity through tropes of reading, but the latter does so with no real political bite. In the evolution of the song we see the profound interconnection between an indiscriminate outpouring of publications (the romance, the anti-romance, theological tracts, and unauthorized play-scripts as well as political pamphlets), a sexuality outside the control of the patriarch (fathers and government figures), and questions of national character.⁹ Fielding's use of gestural representation as a strategy, his positioning of Eliza Haywood, and his depiction of the British national character, both Britannia and John Bull, foster a heightened sensibility to political innuendo in contemporary audiences and bring to the fore farce's struggle for cultural status. I address first the general print and

⁹ John O'Brien discusses an anti-pantomime poem published in 1731, *Harlequin-Horace*, which makes a similar connection and in similar terms. "Correlating the history of British entertainment with the history of the nation as a whole, *Harlequin-Horace* claims that the introduction of politeness in the nation—an event it dates to the 'South-Sea Schemes' of 1720—has led to the corruption of its cultural productions. ... Miller invokes the hearty masculinity of English music before the recent onset of luxury: 'In Days of Old, when Englishmen were—Men,/ Their Musick, like themselves, was grave and plain' ... Miller's opposition between a decadent present and an authentic past maps onto a host of other distinctions that the poem assumes to be operative throughout: that between femininity and masculinity, between modern-day 'Britain' and traditional 'England'" (*Harlequin Britain* 26). O'Brien goes on to argue that the anxiety about Englishness in the 20s and 30s was raised by the Articles of Union incorporating Scotland in 1707. Though it is possible the Welsh in Fielding's play stand for Scots, it isn't the influence of either that he bemoans in the play, and so I do not think the union (almost as old as Fielding himself) was a factor.

theater cultures Fielding satirizes, including Haywood's place in each. I then turn to *The Grub-Street Opera*, addressing first its burlesque of romance conventions and then its nationalistic opposition of Old England to the present day. As with farce in general, each development echoes previous events, so that the whole is an accumulation of parts. Fielding draws on cultural memory, on familiarity with contemporary theater events, and on general stereotypes, adding always some element to the mix that heightens the political impact of the whole.

Pleasures of the Town

The success of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728 demonstrated how political farce could insinuate itself into the collective mind, as for months all of London sang its songs, purchased its souvenirs, discussed its allegory, and returned to see it again. Gay's sequel, *Polly*, was banned in an attempt to finally silence the popular play, but when Gay subsequently published it by subscription, he created another social event, another effective supplement to the original play. The opposition between farce/ballad opera and Walpole was thus more strongly etched on the national consciousness. *The Beggar's Opera* inspired dozens of other ballad operas, many produced and many only published, but all of which recalled *The Beggar's Opera* to viewers and readers, either by using the same songs or eliciting the same political convictions. Gay's imitators "had either to use less catchy airs or repeat those which, by association, were regarded as belonging to the original opera" (Nettleton and Case 529). More ideologically, Gay had quite firmly reinforced the idea that the ballads themselves were infused with the idea of a native British justice, in opposition to a commercial Whig administration.

When deciphering the political effects of Fielding's ballad opera, we must keep in mind the echoes of the original ballads, the ballad opera as a genre, and the previous authors with whom ballads and ballad operas were associated. Music had always had some part in theater, whether in entr'actes or interpolated within a play. Thomas Durfey, who wrote dozens of popular plays in the 1690s, pioneered the integration of ballads as part of the narrative.¹⁰ *The Beggar's Opera* took over half of its ballads from Durfey's multi-volume 1719-1720 *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, which collected traditional native ballads and contemporary, mostly theatrical ballads that had become part of the popular cultural consciousness. Fielding borrowed songs from Durfey and from Gay, although two of his most popular songs, Opera's Aria (Air XVIII of *The Author's Farce*) and "The Roast Beef of Old England," were either original or had not been previously used on stage.¹¹ Like Durfey and Gay, Fielding connects this musical technique with his indictment of the effeminate sexuality of both opera and the romance. The lyrics he wrote for these songs accomplish this, but so does their association with those two very British writers, Durfey and Gay. This is another way in which farce, in this case the ballad opera, accumulates associations. Early in his career Fielding would mock the popularity

¹⁰ Discussing any one of his plays "as if it were only a literary text overlooks an important point. By the 1690s Durfey had experimented so many times with incorporating musical sections in his plays that he was now almost on the point of considering turning out plays which could be described, in parts, as musical drama" (McVeagh 114). Some of Durfey's melodies were original and some were borrowed from older ballads, but he did not make ironic or political use of the ballads' original connotations, as Gay did.

¹¹ The music for "Roast Beef" was "The Queen's Old Courtier," (sometimes called "The King's Old Courtier") a popular broadside ballad from the early seventeenth century. Richard Leveridge, a singer who had performed many of Durfey's songs during original runs, later added several other verses and performed the longer song to popular acclaim for years after (see Roberts "The Songs and Tunes in Henry Fielding's Ballad Operas").

and techniques of *The Beggar's Opera* even while imitating them,¹² but in *The Welsh* and *Grub-Street Operas* he produced important descendants.

The Welsh Opera originally played alongside *The Fall of Mortimer*,¹³ which presented the Queen and her minister as dangerously overstepping their places to the detriment of the nation. But while a Grand Jury delivered a presentment against *Mortimer* and guards twice tried to arrest the lead actor, William Mullet, no action was taken against *The Welsh Opera* (Liesenfeld 19). Mullet, who played Mortimer (the Robert Walpole figure) in the serious play, played Robin (the Robert Walpole figure) in Fielding's farce. After *The Welsh Opera* had established itself as an audience favorite, Fielding began making additions to it, expanding scenes and storylines. Eventually he withdrew it from the stage and added a character central to its new focus on British character. He also doubled the number of songs.¹⁴ Farce's natural tendency to expand, to extend, almost to grow organically, mirrors the endless regeneration of Grub Street itself.

Fielding first published announcements that *The Grub-Street Opera* would open on June 11, 1731, but after postponing the opening for several days, the management announced that "we are obliged to defer the GRUBSTREET OPERA till further Notice" (qtd. Roberts, Introduction xv). *The Genuine Grub-Street Opera*, an apparently pirated version of the script, appeared on August 18 (for the "Benefit of the Comedians" though the actors denied having leaked the script or having received money from its

¹² "[T]he theaters are puppet shows and the comedians ballad singers, [and] fools lead the town" (*The Author's Farce* I.v.29-31).

¹³ *Mortimer* was anonymous, but seems to have been written by William Hatchett (Eliza Haywood's lover). It is what John Loftis calls an application satire, a serious tragedy that invites spectators to draw parallels between the historical characters and contemporary government officials, in this case Walpole.

¹⁴ He had similarly expanded the successful *Tom Thumb*, which would become popular in print and on stage for generations as the longer *Tragedy of Tragedies, or the History of Tom Thumb the Great*.

publication).¹⁵ Unauthorized piracy, another characteristic of Grub Street, was nearly impossible to prosecute. On the other hand, it is possible that with the lesson of *Polly* in his mind, Walpole pressured Fielding to neither produce nor publish, and that Fielding had himself leaked a copy of the play to a publisher to get around the prohibition.¹⁶ Whether or not it were done without his approval, this is exactly the kind of uncontrollable reproduction the play satirizes. No evidence ties Fielding to the original publication, and Fielding's actions and motivations in submitting to government pressure have garnered far more attention than the actions of the administration in wishing to silence it. The question remains, both unasked and unanswered, what was it about *The Grub-Street Opera* that made it seem subversive?

In its characterization of the English character as debased, even debauched by market forces, *The Grub-Street Opera* pits the (vaguely foreign) government against the (native-born) people. The earlier title teasingly hints at the foreignness of the royal family (the Welsh as technically British, but essentially "other"), while also mocking the transparency of partisan scandal allegories, set in foreign lands, "about" English court culture. The later title refocuses our attention less playfully on London print culture, still vaguely alien and vulgar but no longer foreign, just as the revised play reads the Welsh as (uneasily) British and reworks questions of nationality through the effects of a debased reading public. In the open market, voices of political and theological radicals, of thieves, of cranks, and of scandal mongers competed with men of letters for the ears and money

¹⁵ This historical outline, drawn from Roberts's introduction, is generally accepted and found in more or less the same form in Martin Battestin's biography of Fielding.

¹⁶ Pope published his own correspondence in outrage at a pirated edition, the leak of which he had engineered himself 1735. No authorized edition of *The Grub-Street Opera* was published during Fielding's lifetime. Rivero surmises that the posthumously published edition was "issued with Fielding's consent and presumably embodies the work as he intended it to be" because it was published by his friend Andrew Millar (89).

of the public. The print market is “a cultural as well as an economic space, allowing for plural, antagonistic, nondialectical forms of articulation... in a circuit that none fully comprehends, readers and writers reshape a culture they can never control” (Warner 139). An unrestrained, financially-driven print industry did not discriminate between better and less well-educated purchasers.

Although also subject to market forces, the theater at the Haymarket struck the chords of political opposition less opportunistically, or at any rate more transparently, than the similarly partisan Grub Street pamphlet wars and periodicals, and that difference lies at the heart of what theatrical and political meant and how they functioned in the culture of the 1730s. When the Licensing Act was proposed and passed, many objected that it was a first step back toward censorship of a free press.¹⁷ But contemporaries found a significant difference between the conveyance of ideas through performance and through print. Legally, the actor and the publisher, not the author, could be arrested for traitorous or otherwise transgressive words, for the actor and publisher were responsible for communicating them to a larger number of people. The danger was clearly in the spreading of ideas, not simply their voicing, and a theatrical performance communicated ideas to nearly a thousand people each evening. Spectators intensified the experience for one another. Colley Cibber expresses the general contemporary opinion that emotions are cooler and reason stronger in the closet than when incited by the presence of other spectators and live actors (*Apology* I.294-5), a belief that justified moral and legal

¹⁷ In his Dedication to the Public of *The Historical Register* Fielding defends a political theater, saying “If Nature hath given me any talents at ridiculing vice and imposture, I shall not be indolent, nor afraid of exerting them while the liberty of the press and stage subsists, that is to say, while we have any liberty left among us.” Lord Chesterfield, in a passionate speech against the Licensing Act, urged reformation of the stage, but argued that the bill would tend “toward a Restraint on the Liberty of the Press, which will be a long Stride towards the Destruction of Liberty itself” (quoted in Liesenfeld 146).

censorship of the stage. "It is the element of spectator complicity which makes the experience perilous.... On the part of its audiences [theater] requires a sustained imaginative collusion" (Barish 80, 81). Unlike other print forms, however, the modern romance elicited this same "complicity" and "collusion," heating the imaginations of young people, offering them vicarious, illicit, and "perilous" experiences. And unlike the publicity of the theater, which could both incite and police individual behavior, the privacy of novel reading was thought to intensify, without also moderating, its ill effects.¹⁸

Pope feminizes the influence of Grub Street and the debasing tendencies it could have on the republic of letters, not just individual readers. For Pope, Eliza Haywood embodies all authors of political scandal allegories as well as all female authors in *The Dunciad* (1728),¹⁹ where she is featured as the willing prize for the booksellers' pissing contest. In Richard Savage's *The Authors of the Town* (1725) and *An Author to Lett* (1727), and in Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730), author/whore Haywood stood as cultural shorthand for a host of related Grub Street evils: the corruption of impressionable youth (maids and apprentices, as well as young people from "good" families), sexual licentiousness, vindictive personal slander, and hypocrisy. Haywood's tremendous success in the marketplace earned her many rivals and disturbed those whose productions

¹⁸ Fielding's first novel *Shamela* attacked Richardson's *Pamela* as a lurid romance in moralistic garb. As he gained interest in the form, Fielding attempted to "instruct and delight" in his own novels; they convey an ethos of community responsibility, moderation, and education, very much in the vein of *The Spectator*, to which he acknowledges a stylistic debt.

¹⁹ In the text she is "yon Juno of majestic size,/ With cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes" who stands with "Two babes of love close clinging to her waste" (ii.155-6, 150). In his footnote, Pope famously calls her a prime example of "the profligate licentiousness of those shameless scribblers (for the most part of that sex which ought least to be capable of such malice or impudence) who in libellous Memoirs and Novels reveal the faults and misfortunes of both sexes, to the ruin of public fame" (ii. 157n). "Pope condenses female authorship, easy virtue, and cultural filth. Haywood's fecund posture and her position as a prize in a phallic display of profit-hungry booksellers allow Pope to offer an ironic celebration of her prolific production and spectacular popularity in the 1720s" (Warner 147).

garnered more respect, but fewer readers. When she turned her hand to scandal narrative (the political allegories of 1725 and 1726),²⁰ she entered the realm of the men of letters, and blurred distinctions between scandal narrative and amatory fiction, between political allegory and gossip, between titillation and information. As has already been noted throughout this study, the blurring of boundaries itself raised enormous anxieties in the Augustans, especially those who set themselves up as critical arbiters of taste. To Pope “Eliza” symbolizes “the profligate licentiousness of those shameless scribblers” (*Dunciad Variorum*, note to II.149), fully carnal, devoid of any intellectual or positive creative capability. Swift heard and repeated that “Mrs Heywood” was a “stupid, infamous, scribbling woman” whose “productions” he had never seen (October 26, 1731).²¹ Rather than speaking of her as a writer, or of her ideas, Swift demotes her to woman and her works to productions. This language plants Haywood firmly in the material world, the fecund world of messy physicality, and excludes her from any literary conversation. To both men she is not a writer, but a scribbler, not a profession but an action, and her works are not books, worthy of reading, but productions (like babies or plays), spectacles.

David Brewer suggests that Pope’s venom was in part an effort to defend Swift, in whose *Gulliver’s Travels* readers found insinuations of sexual liaisons and parallels to Haywood’s political fictions. In an important essay, Brewer traces the meaning, for Pope, of “Haywood” as a rhetorical gesture and opposes this to the image of “Haywood” current in the general public. He suggests that the “Haywood” of *The Dunciad* is “a

²⁰ *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia*. and *The Secret History of the Present Intrigues of the court of Caramania*. Most famously popularized by Delarivier Manley in the 1710s, scandal narrative was a “satiric mingling of erotics and politics” (Todd 18), set in a foreign or imaginary state, which depicted the sexual and financial manipulations of power-hungry courtiers and government officials. Manley’s favorite target was “Queen Zarah,” Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough.

²¹ *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift* III.501.

scapegoat, a figure pilloried in an attempt to distinguish categorically the kind of writing ‘she’ embodies from that engaged in by the Scriblerians” (230). To her rivals she is all bad writing, in the convenient shape of a woman. To her fans, Haywood was the “Great arbitress of passion” and “a champion for the sex;”²² she herself and represented by her texts possesses all the excellencies of woman.²³ Haywood co-opted the typical conflation of woman’s texts with her body to her own advantage. I follow Brewer’s lead in examining the use to which Fielding puts “Haywood,” including in my discussion the use to which Haywood employed her own persona.

Mrs. Haywood, the Author (or “Haywood” the “Author”)

Women writers frequently prefaced their texts with various kinds of apologia, vowing that they force themselves on the public only to feed starving children or at the insistence of Persons of Character. Both of these excuses figure the writer as a woman of modesty, although she is a writer, and in the latter case, a woman with important friends. Aphra Behn, who occasionally used this ploy in print, also wrote daring prologues and prefaces in which she cannily drew the audience’s attention to her own provocative “selling” of herself, setting up plays in which she and her characters have enormous fascination with and curiosity about prostitutes.²⁴ Behn, along with Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, made up the “fair Triumvirate of Wit,” women writers of plays and

²² From James Sterling’s “To Mrs. Eliza Haywood on her Writings” 1732 (Oakleaf 279); From “By an Unknown Hand, To the most Ingenious Mrs. Haywood,” a dedicatory poem affixed to Part II of *Love in Excess* (Oakleaf 87).

²³ David Brewer discusses the fluidity between her sex and her texts in panegyrics written by her male fans (223).

²⁴ Catherine Gallagher addresses “the theatrical representation of the author” and explores “why and how [Behn] staged her simultaneous presence and absence in the theater, audaciously using the metaphor of the author as prostitute to create distinctions between the obliging playwright and the withholding private person, the woman’s body and her self, the stage and real life” (7-8).

romances, narratives of power, all using their reputations and female bodies to publicize and popularize their work.²⁵

Eliza Haywood was thought to be the abandoned or widowed or runaway wife of a Reverend Haywood, and had two children which she either claimed or hinted were his. Biographers now generally agree that the first child was probably fathered by poet and playwright Richard Savage, who also parlayed a sordid personal history into literary fame, and the second by William Hatchett, a minor playwright.²⁶ Because I am concerned here with how she and Fielding exploited her public reputation, I am more interested in the myths than the realities of her life, but it is crucial to note that her personal sexual history is enmeshed within her public appearances, on stage and in print.²⁷

Haywood was firmly established in her career when Fielding was only twelve years old. She debuted as an actress in Dublin in 1715 and published her first novel, *Love in Excess*, in 1719. *Love in Excess* follows the romantic adventures of D'elmont from his return to Paris from the wars through a loveless marriage and across the continent in an effort to forget his passion for his young ward. Until *Pamela*, *Love in Excess* was one of the three most reprinted fictional works in England, alongside Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.²⁸ Throughout the 20s she wrote shorter

²⁵ The phrase is from Sterling's adulatory poem "To Mrs. Eliza Haywood on her Writings." All three women were politically involved as well.

²⁶ Biographers also doubt she was ever married to Reverend Haywood, positing that either her husband was some other Mr. Haywood or that there was no first husband at all. See Kristen T. Saxon's Introduction to *Passionate Fictions*.

²⁷ As Gallagher writes of Behn, "in the case of the female author, as in the case of the prostitute, self-sale creates the illusion of an unknowable authenticity by never giving anything away, both in the sense of refusing to give free gratification and in the sense of refusing self-revelation.... The theatrical inauthenticity of what can be seen implies the existence of some hidden woman directing the drama of her self-sale" (17).

²⁸ See Saxon. Notably, none of these three take place in England; the first is set in France and the other two in exotic undiscovered places. The foreign setting, as noted earlier with Manley, was often a transparent

tales in abundance with such titles as *The British Recluse; or, the Secret History of Cleomira, Fantomina; or Love in a Maze, Idalia; or, the Unfortunate Mistress*, and *Lasselia; or, the Self-Abandon'd*.²⁹ John Richetti characterizes her fiction as an iterated “fable of persecuted innocence, exploiting over and over again the same erotic-pathetic clichés and the same rhetoric of love’s power and the tragic and compulsive dramatic universe it implies” (*Popular Fictions* 208). Characters are stricken with love on sight, women are betrayed by mercenary lovers, young girls are undone by their guardians or misled by inappropriate reading (generally Ovid). Struggling between their virtue or pride and their passions, the heroines suffer dreadful pain.³⁰ In Haywood’s fictions, the fallen women often fail to consider themselves fallen, as in *Fantomina* and *The British Recluse*, both of which allow an ambiguous dignity to the heroines in the end, although the end can still only be pregnancy, isolation, or death.

Haywood wrote at least three plays during the 20s. She presented her first play, *The Fair Captive*, in 1721, as by “Eliza Haywood, the author” of the very popular *Love in Excess* (1719) and then appeared publicly in her own *A Wife to be Lett* (1723), so that to some extent she was performing both as Wife and as Author, author of this play and romance author. *A Wife* ran only three nights, with an advertisement announcing that “By Reason of the Indisposition of an Actress, the Part of the Wife is to be perform’d by

announcement of fictionality. Brewer points out that the political allegory of *Gulliver* was not clearly different in kind from that in the scandal narratives of Manley and, in the late 20s, Haywood.

²⁹ Cheryl Turner documents her output during these years. According to Turner, Haywood published in: 1719 (1), 1722 (1), 1723 (3), 1724 (6), 1725 (10), 1726 (5), 1727 (6), 1728 (3).

³⁰ “But with what Words is it possible to represent the mingled Passions of *Althea*’s Soul... Fear, Shame, and Wonder combating with the softer Inclinations made such a wild Confusion in her Mind, that as she was about to utter the Dictates of the one, the other rose with contradicting Force, and stop’d the Accents” (“The Mercenary Lover” 134). Women whose passions lead them to be the aggressor often do more physical violence to themselves.

Mrs Haywood, the Author,"³¹ again both author of the play and author of romances. I suspect the advertisement was a canny piece of self-promotion, an attempt to justify the unseemliness of appearing on stage. Because she was the playwright, the third performance translated directly into profit for her—almost as if people were directly paying her to show herself on stage.³² The fact that the play itself involves a series of money-for-sex transactions underscores eighteenth-century associations of textuality with sexuality, especially for women, and of actress with whore. Her novels, in which wealthy men and women debauch their social inferiors, were bestsellers; she herself wrote the play in which a man attempts to prostitute his wife. If women authors incite sexuality, and actresses satisfy it, Haywood was her own merchandise.³³

Haywood consciously used her own reputation as an author to boost ticket sales, for her plays and for Hatchett's.³⁴ She starred in Hatchett's *Rival Fathers*, which opened briefly at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket four nights into the run of Fielding's *Author's Farce*, a notable character in which is Mrs. Novel, an obvious caricature of Haywood. This simultaneity of productions was I think crucial for the direction her life

³¹ *The London Stage* II.731, August 12-14, 1723, Drury Lane.

³² None of the plays were particularly successful, which could lead one to suspect that her appearance—her exposure of herself on stage—was necessary for any profits.

³³ In *The Sign of Angellica*, Janet Todd does not discuss Haywood as playwright or as romance novelist, but her discussions of the dynamics underlying Behn's and Manley's self-representations apply as well to Haywood. She writes that "sexual impropriety in literature indicated it in life... The assumption was strengthened by ... the [author's] manipulation of scandalous images [of herself]" (41). Todd also discusses the "flamboyant association of courtesan and actress," and notes that for early women stage writers, "writing, deceiving and seducing coalesce" (44, 69).

³⁴ Unlike Cibber, who as an author is read through the characters he has played, Haywood's characters are all read through the stories she has written. More importantly, while Cibber contends that the public has only seen him in the guise of someone else, the public believes Haywood is always in metaphorical undress.

would take in the next eight years and also commercially intentional.³⁵ She attempted to exploit Fielding's exploitation of her. She and Hatchett (and possibly Fielding himself) took advantage of the opportunity to present the real Mrs. Novel on stage alongside the cartoonish one for greater public appeal. She and Hatchett later collaborated on *The Opera of Operas*, a successful mock-opera adaptation of Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies*, strengthening their association with Fielding's farces.³⁶ As usual, although she doesn't seem to have been a particularly talented actress, Haywood played the lead in *Opera of Operas*. She is always both author and actress, exploiting the prejudice that as a woman author she was already displaying herself, "publishing" herself.

The class differences between Fielding and Haywood would probably have prevented any significant friendship, but I suggest that she personally, and her work, influenced the direction of his mid-decade plays. This chapter will only touch on such an analysis, though I believe her influence extended beyond their years on the stage and into Fielding's career as a novelist. While much has been written about Haywood's imitation of Fielding (primarily in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*³⁷) almost no attention has been given to her influence on him, and their years of theatrical interaction have been largely ignored.³⁸ *The Grub-Street Opera* reveals a moment when Fielding, preoccupied

³⁵ Peter Lewis mistakenly asserts that "Mrs Novel ... ha[s] no connection with the theatre" (*Fielding's Burlesque Drama* 96) and Charles B. Woods notes Haywood's appearance as an actress on the same stage during the run of *Author's Farce* as only "a curious fact" (103).

³⁶ Polly Stevens Fields argues in an unpublished dissertation that Haywood and Hatchett collaborated on other works attributed only to Hatchett. I suspect that if this were true, he would have been eager to have her name join his as author, as her fame would have drawn greater attention; on the other hand, if she became less respectable by appearing on stage, acknowledging her publicly as co-author might have brought the wrong kind of attention.

³⁷ See, for example, John Richetti's "Histories by Eliza Haywood and Henry Fielding: Imitation and adaptation."

³⁸ Haywood has been "recovered" by recent scholarship. She is now central to discussions of the history of the novel and the history of female authorship. Excellent recent reevaluations by Paula R. Backscheider,

with questions of popular print culture and its effect on London (perhaps displacing the questions of a popular theater and *its* effect on London) moves beyond the cliché caricature of Haywood and begins a more sensitive exploration of the equation of gender inequality and economic exploitation.

Rather than looking at Haywood as an author, we are looking at “Haywood” as an “Author.” That is to say, we are going to see her in her most shallow persona, her reputation, the outlines that made her useful as a gesture, for this is how Fielding first saw her and how she first saw herself through his eyes in *The Author's Farce*. The first half of that play depicts the trials and tribulations of an earnest poet in a world of commercial pressures. The second half is the puppet satire he cynically produces in response and reaction to those pressures. As the only author satirized in the puppet show portion of the play, pathetic heroine Mrs. Novel makes a striking contrast to the male author who literally holds the strings.

In *The Author's Farce and the Pleasures of the Town*, Fielding depicts the opposition between commerce and culture as explicitly between prostitution and honesty. Luckless, a penniless poet, is besieged by his amorous and greedy landlady but is in love with her daughter Harriet. The bookseller and the theater manager whom he tries to interest in his tragedy disparage his talent as unmarketable. The landlady wants him to prostitute his person, the merchants his art; neither understands a man who cannot be bought. In this and many other works, Fielding points to the multiple meanings of the

Ros Ballaster, and Margaret Case Croskery demonstrate that, far less affected by Pope's slander in 1728 than was previously thought, she was active in creating partisan (Tory) symbolism in her works, experimental with the contents and boundaries of an otherwise formula fiction, and critical of the sexual double-standards that restricted women's political autonomy. Haywood's assumption of the role of the Muse with all its political and personal associations demonstrates the interrelatedness for her of writing, the figure of the Author, and political agency. These discussions will undergird any serious analysis of Haywood's influence on Fielding's work, and I hope portions of this essay can help begin that exploration.

“hack” as the man who hires out his pen and the woman who hires out her body. Introducing “Haywood” in the third act fuses the hack metaphor of these first two acts and displaces it from the male poet to the female novelist.

Grub Street is represented by Bookweight, the bookseller to whom Luckless brings his tragedy. As his name suggests, he cares more for quantity than quality; he chastises his “clerk of the libels”:

Do you consider, Mr. Quibble, that it is above a fortnight since your Letter from a Friend in the Country was published? Is it not high time for an Answer to come out? At this rate, before your Answer is printed your Letter will be forgot. I love to keep a controversy up warm. I have had authors who have writ a pamphlet in the morning, answered it in the afternoon, and compromised the matter at night. (II.iv.1-8)

Bookweight deals in fraud, not literature. He advises a newly-hired translator (who knows no language other than English), that “you will have more occasion for invention than learning here: you will be sometimes obliged to translate books out of all languages (especially French) which were never printed in any language whatsoever” (II.vi.38-41). Those “French” works would likely be scandalous romances and allegorical satires. None of these publications contribute to the world of letters. Instead they enrich Bookweight and impoverish public understanding. This is much the same characterization we see in the introductory dialogue of *The Grub-Street Opera*, between Scriblerus and the Player.³⁹ Remarking on the additions he has made to *The Welsh Opera* Scriblerus says “too much altercation is the particular property of Grub Street... Ah, ah,

³⁹ The name Scriblerus, the introductory dialogue between poet and actor, and the ballad opera form demonstrate Fielding’s debt to and sympathy with the Scriblerians and *The Beggar’s Opera*.

the whole wit of Grub Street consists in these two little words—*you lie*” (Introduction 25-29). Both scenes (Bookweight’s shop and *Grub-Street*’s Introduction) underscore the publisher’s manipulation of readers and the complete dishonesty and crassly pecuniary motives behind political pamphleteering.

The Author of the title, a victimized gentleman in the first two acts, takes control of his destiny in the third. Exploiting the Town’s own weakness to chastise it, Luckless writes and presents a puppet show.⁴⁰ His moral claim is undercut by the financial profit he hopes to make, reflecting Fielding’s own double motives in 1730. Luckless admits that farce is “beneath the dignity of the stage” but argues that “a farce brings more company to a house than the best play that ever was writ, for this age would allow Tom Durfey⁴¹ a better poet than Congreve or Wycherley” and concludes, “Who would not then rather eat by his nonsense than starve by his wit?” (III.5-10). Though prostituting his pen by writing a puppet show, Luckless satirizes the very audience that demands it. The MC, author, and puppet master of his own puppet world, Luckless takes control symbolically, presaging his eventual rise to real political power over all the forces that have hitherto stifled him (as the King of Bantam).

Corresponding to Luckless’s self-conscious, self-mocking, newfound agency, the play itself becomes overly self-knowing in structure/production. His puppet show ballad

⁴⁰ For “now, when party and prejudice carry all before them, when learning is decried, wit not understood, when the theaters are puppet shows and the comedians ballad singers, when fools lead the town, would a man think to thrive by his wit? If you must write,” advises his friend Witmore, “write nonsense, write operas, write entertainments... preach nonsense, and you may meet with encouragement enough. If you would receive applause, deserve to receive sentence at the Old Bailey” (I.v.28-36).

⁴¹ In a 1710 letter, Pope wrote sarcastically that Durfey is “your only Poet of tolerable Reputation in this Country. He makes all the Merriment in our Entertainments, & but for him, there wou’d be so miserable a Dearth of Catches.... Dares any one despise Him, who has made so many men Drink? Alas Sir! this is a Glory which neither You or I must ever pretend to” (April 10, in *Correspondence of Alexander Pope* I.81). Most of the ballads in *The Beggar’s Opera* and many in *The Author’s Farce* are taken from Durfey’s plays or his collections of popular ballads. Durfey’s influence will be discussed below.

opera, "The Pleasures of the Town," discards any pretence of realism. Figures representing various celebrities, and through them separate popular arts, compete for the favor of the Goddess of Nonsense.⁴² Luckless casts real actors as the puppets of his piece,⁴³ reducing the entertainments represented to puppetry while compounding the play's focus on representation. Like puppets, these artists react to public string-pulling instead of initiating creative or worthwhile productions themselves. In the absence of an on-stage audience, the spectators are incorporated into Fielding's play as the very audience whose taste was earlier disparaged. Restricting the ballad opera to the puppet-show,⁴⁴ Fielding alludes to the recent *The Beggar's Opera*, another chastisement of popular taste, and another entertainment which self-consciously treats the audience as an audience.

The puppet show signals a shift into overt theatricality. As Peter Lewis points out, all the characters in it represent performance types. By including Haywood, Fielding remarks on her specifically as an actress. He also figures the novel as a kind of public performance, ironically commenting on the ostensible privacy in which we read. Just as the communal experience lay at the heart of theater's potential to cause harm, the privacy of the closet led readers to texts and thoughts they would never publicly acknowledge. It is precisely this hypocrisy which Grub Street encourages, which Haywood seems to embody, and which Pope and Fielding fear are debasing the English as a nation.

⁴² Sir Farcical Comic (Colley Cibber), Don Tragedio (Lewis Theobald), Monsieur Pantomime (John Rich), Dr. Orator (John Henley), and Mrs. Novel's lover/husband Signor Opera (castrato Francesco Bernardi Senesino).

⁴³ Several comedies and farces cast actors in puppet roles, most particularly as Punch, throughout the 1710s and 20s (Jurkowski 182-3, Woods 111n).

⁴⁴ There are two songs in the earlier acts, but they feel occasional, as had been in comedy before, and not integrated into the narrative, as in Durfey's plays, in *The Beggar's Opera*, or in "The Pleasures of the Town."

Fielding's Mrs. Novel is a figure of pathetic virtue in distress, as she suffers for and loses her lover to the Goddess, who eventually relents and returns him. Novel embodies the two stock characters of amatory fiction; she is both virtuous and fallen, proclaiming her virginity but claiming Opera as her husband. Mrs. Novel is a hypocrite, but her love for Opera is genuine. Haywood is portrayed by Luckless sympathetically in the terms of her own romances. Conversely, when Murdertext and the Constable interrupt Luckless's play, they both treat Novel overtly as a whore. Their language is brutal and objectifying, as the first decides, "[I]t were a piece of charity to take her to myself for a handmaid" (III.725-6), while the other threatens her with Bridewell and a whipping unless she'll give him a good price (III.736-743). The treatment of Haywood here is reminiscent of Pope's treatment of her in the *Dunciad*, where "Eliza" is entirely a creature of sex, first seen with two "babes of love" in her arms or at her breasts, which are "cow-like udders" (*Dunciad* ii.156). The shift from Luckless's gentle if chastising view to the Constable's proprietary hostility signals the shift in "realities," for when the play is interrupted, Mrs. Novel becomes the puppet/actress(es) portraying Mrs. Novel. (Mrs. Novel is a puppet being performed, in Luckless's world, by an actress. That actress is itself a role performed, in Fielding's world, by an actress.) To the preacher and the constable, actress equals whore. And as actress who is also a hack writer, Novel is doubly a whore.

Fielding does not entirely accept the distinction between Mrs. Novel and the actress playing Mrs. Novel (who is not, again, the actress playing that actress). Haywood and "Haywood" are simultaneously writer and actress, initiator and performer, pretending to be manipulated but always in control of herself and of her image. The actress playing

the puppet Novel seduces the intruders into allowing the troupe to continue the performance, singing a song about “softer joys” (III.755) and, in Murdertext’s words, causing “Pity [to] prevail... over severity, and the flesh [to] subdue the spirit” (III.759-760). This is the language of surrender in the romance. The capitulation is explicitly sexual, not merely erotic: “Being thereto moved by an inward working,” he says, “I feel a motion in me, and whether it be of grace or no I am not certain” (III.763-764). The two intruders not only permit the concluding dance, but they dance together, a parody of the sexual dance in which they had begun as aggressors. Their lust emasculates them. Romance reduces men, in this case representatives of Church and State, to unmanly vassals, subject like puppets to a masterful physical control.

Although Luckless satirizes all of the pleasures of the town, the formulaic love triangle between Nonsense, Opera, and Novel becomes the central episode of the puppet show.⁴⁵ The episode parodies romance’s emotional paradox—that although it features the titillating spectacle of powerless maidens, it dramatizes the power of manipulative women. Recent scholars suggest that the romance had subversive effects, not only in promoting women’s sexual agency, but also in featuring a feminocentric world, dominated politically by women.⁴⁶ In “The Pleasures of the Town,” the importance of power relations between the women and the extreme passivity of the male are exemplified in the castrated hero. Before upbraiding Opera for his betrayal, Novel first begs the Goddess for mercy; “If all my romances ever pleased the ear of my goddess, if I

⁴⁵ “Thus, in spite of the satire directed at Mrs. Novel (Eliza Haywood), she acquires a pivotal role that implies the beguiling attractions of novel reading” (Warner 242).

⁴⁶ See Paula R. Backscheider’s “The Story of Eliza Haywood’s Novels: Caveats and Questions,” Kirsten T. Saxon’s “Telling Tales: Eliza Haywood and the Crimes of Seduction in *The City Jilt; or, the Alderman turn’d Beau*,” and Ros Ballaster’s “A Gender of Opposition: Eliza Haywood’s Scandal Fiction,” all in *Passionate Fictions* eds. Saxon and Bocchicchio.

ever found favor in her sight—oh, do not rob me thus!” (III.372-3). She tacitly accepts the complete passivity of Opera and the superior power of the other woman. David Oakleaf suggests that the romance “tells tales of transgressive sexual desire on the theme of ‘women beware women’” (23-24). Though Haywood suggested that her tales were intended to guard young women from the base motives of manipulative men, the men in her stories are as often slaves to women’s control as to their own passions. The stories can just as easily be read as guides to disable men as to arm defenseless women.⁴⁷ In Fielding’s view, women in romance, women reading romance, and women writing romance glory in the vagaries of power, in their ability to control men through sex.

Petticoat Government on Grub Street

In its recital of desire, pursuit, and betrayal, the generic romance establishes a series of tyrannies. Born in Continental, Papal, monarchical France, the English romance shares with the later Gothic the exotic displacement of passion onto a xenophobically imagined foreign force that recognizes only a violent, revengeful justice. Setting it within Britain, Fielding emphasizes romance’s foreign ideology. He highlights all its negative cultural associations and contrasts them with the English nationalism of the ballad opera, setting both within an allegory of the nation as a household completely out of control.

Most of *The Grub-Street Opera*’s heroines on the edge of ruin are servants, like Pamela and like her readerly counterpart on the stairs, but they are neither manipulative nor hypocritical. The effeminate villain baldly reveals his reliance on his financial power

⁴⁷ Critiques of *Pamela* took this form, most succinctly in Fielding’s *Shamela*.

rather than sexual allure, demystifying the power dynamics behind many of the seductions in Haywoodian fiction. Through its domestic tale, *The Grub-Street Opera* presents the mismanagement of the nation by the destructive self-interest of the ministers. The well-read and powerful Lady Apshinken gluttonously reads theological tracts and is extremely tightfisted with the household budget.⁴⁸ Sir Owen Apshinken, henpecked country squire, would be happy to “Let her govern” if she would leave him to enjoy his pipe in quiet (I.ii.58-59). Young Master Owen desperately pursues sexual adventure, though his effeminacy leaves him in peril of “dying half a maid” until he marries Molly, a tenant’s daughter (III.xii.17). Robin, the embezzling butler, has an inordinate amount of influence over his mistress, and is engaged to chambermaid Sweetissa. All of the characters transparently represent members of the royal household and the Walpole administration.⁴⁹ False love letters lead Robin and Sweetissa to quarrel, each thinking the other unfaithful. After challenging first William and then the Parson to duel, Robin is finally calmed by Lady Apshinken, the lovers are reunited, and all the servants’ petty thefts are exposed and pardoned.

⁴⁸ Most women writing at the time wrote radical theological-political pamphlets. “[C]ontrary to the impression given by otherwise invaluable anthologies and studies of early women’s writing, the overwhelming majority of British women’s ... published writings before 1730 consisted not of fiction or *belles-lettres* but of didactic and polemical materials and religio-political pamphlets and tracts [which were] the central print forms and concerns of the period” (McDowell 15-16); see also Todd 36.

⁴⁹ Lord and Lady Apshinken are King George and Queen Caroline, Owen is Prince Frederick, Robin is Robert Walpole. William the coachman is opposition leader Pultney and John the groom is Walpole loyalist Lord Hervey. Sweetissa, Robin’s betrothed, is often seen as Walpole’s mistress Molly Skerit, but I’ve yet to discover any explanations of this—Robin is not married, and Sweetissa quite specifically keeps her “virtue” until her marriage to Robin. Whenever I run into this assertion (i.e. in Roberts xviii), it is unsupported by evidence. I agree with Hume that the association makes no sense (97). Probably the attribution was first made by contemporary opposition writers over-eager to see satire, as so frequently during this period “Keys” were provided that intentionally amplified political meanings, in both obvious mis-readings and more plausible interpretations. What the attribution points to is that the tone of these courtships give the play a political, aggressive feel. The language of the amorous romance is a comment not only on Walpole but on Walpole’s England.

The subtitle to the first version of the play, *The Grey Mare the Better Horse*, which reappears in one of the play's more popular songs, emphasizes the incongruence of the romance-bred culture of female domination with the native British countryside.⁵⁰ "The grey mare" evokes Samuel Butler's definition of a "skimmington" from *Hudibras*: a skimmington "is but a riding, used of course/ When the grey mare's the better horse;/ When o'er the breeches greedy women/ Fight, to extend their vast dominion" (Second Part, Canto II, 697-700). A skimmington, or a shivaree, was the collective village humiliation of a couple for any number of social transgressions, most popularly where the wife wore the breeches.⁵¹ The greed, the power struggle, and the social imbalance punished by a shivaree are a central theme of *The Welsh* and *Grub-Street Operas*. Lady Apshinken's petticoat government has unbalanced the family. Sir Owen has relinquished all of his responsibilities; he keeps no order, maintains no traditions, contributes nothing to the household, not even, in the original version, a son and heir.⁵² While the aristocrats upend social roles, the servants, untouched by courtly manners, maintain theirs fiercely. William sings "The Grey Mare the Better Horse" to Susan, the cook.

Good Madam Cook, the greasy,

Pray leave your saucy bawling,

Let all your toil

Be to make the pot boil,

⁵⁰ Robert Hume observes that the subtitle did not appear in any of the theater bills or advertisements, and suggests that it was added by the printer (101-102).

⁵¹ The title and the song would also draw attention to cross-casting in the play, as cross-dressing was frequently part of a skimmington, to demonstrate that the woman wore the breeches or that the man was womanly. E. P. Thompson describes the occasion for skimmington as "the woman at odds with the values of a patriarchal society: the scold, the husband-beater, the shrew" (Thompson 476). The skimmington will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4.

⁵² Known to the audience but unknown to any of the characters except Sir Owen, Master Owen is really the tenant's son, and Molly is really the Apshinkens' daughter.

For that's your proper calling,
 With men as wise as Robin,
 A female judge may pass, sir;
 For where the mare
 Is the better horse, there
 The horse is but an ass, sir. (Air XXXIV, to *Of a Noble Race Was Shinken*)

The kitchen is the “proper” place for a woman, or at least this woman, who, in contrast to Lady Apshinken, is illiterate. This illiteracy preserves her from the forces that pervert both Molly and Lady Apshinken through their reading. As a result, she remains devoted to the spirit of Old England as embodied in its food and the mutual obligations of the different classes. Her role and its importance are both enhanced in the revised version of the farce, *The Grub-Street Opera*, in which the trope of general literacy replaces what had been a supernatural resolution of the plot.

Throughout *The Grub-Street Opera*, romance epitomizes the erosion of borders between classes, between sexes, and between nations. Instead of being concentrated in one Mrs. Novel,⁵³ romance elements are diluted amongst a number of characters, including both a lower class and an upper class couple. The courtships and skirmishes between Molly and Owen and between Robin and Sweetissa are greatly enlarged in the revision. Robin and Sweetissa are the focus of the revised play, both with evocative Anglo-Saxon names.⁵⁴

⁵³ Or one Tom Romance, a character in Durfey's *The Richmond Heiress* from which Fielding drew songs and characterizations, as I discuss below.

⁵⁴ His, along with being a nickname for Walpole, alludes to Robin Goodfellow, also called Puck, and sometimes confused with Robin Hood, both characters associated with Old England and a certain kind of

Fielding models the dialogues between lovers on romance. Just before they discover the phony love letters, Robin and Sweetissa swap sweet nothings that really are nothings. They begin in “conventional but spirited fashion to describe what they admit at once is indescribable,” in John Richetti’s description of typical Haywoodian romance dialogue; Sweetissa’s breast is as white as snow, she is an olio of perfections, a garden of bliss, etc. Yet it is “impossible to tell” how much she loves him (I.vi.15), and the scene degenerates into each contending that their love is as deep “as—as—as—I’gad I don’t know what” (I.vi.51-2). Richetti says that the fall into the indescribable “is *the* characteristic strategy of Mrs. Haywood’s rhetoric and is, in context, an essentially erotic device... suggesting the physiological effects of desire which Mrs. Haywood seeks to describe in her characters and provoke in her readers” (198-9). Haywood means to replicate a physical experience; words degenerate into panting. Correspondingly, in the farce, simile degenerates into song. The vacancy of vocabulary demonstrates the failure of the romance cliché to encompass real love. Robin sings, “No word for such a passion’s made/ For no one ever loved so well. Nothing, oh nothing’s like my love for you” (Air XII), paradoxically exposing the emptiness of romance rhetoric, for such passions are pure fiction. The following scene replays the confusion as Sweetissa tries to describe her “fit of love” to Margery. Her string of similes ends with “In short, it is like everything.” Margery responds “And like nothing at all” (I.vii.18-19).

“Everything” and “nothing,” both indescribable, reveal Robin and Sweetissa’s helplessness with language. When Robin reads aloud, in a later scene, his comprehension is halting and labored. Their literacy is limited, providing them with no basis for

British outlawry of the common folk. Robin Goodfellow was frequently a fertility figure, which certainly makes Robin a fitting contrast to the effeminate Owen. Sweetissa’s name, an Anglicized version of Dulcinea, recalls the tradition of romance heroines and alludes to Cervantes’s anti-romance.

comparison, evaluation, or judgment. Their susceptibility to the empty lies of romance is played out in the central plot of the play, their mistaken jealousies and estrangement.

Owen, attempting to seduce Sweetissa, plants two letters: one as if from Susan the cook to Robin, accusing him of abandoning her, one as if from an unidentified man to Sweetissa, also complaining of promises not kept.⁵⁵ In the place of no words are false words. In the place of Robin's love is Owen's lust; in the place of English heartiness is Frenchified deceit. The letters as seduction plot replicate both the epistolary form of much amorous romance and its character of social inequality. Owen uses his literacy, a privilege of his social position, to manipulate those beneath him. Although his social power is effectively threatening, Fielding makes clear that Owen cannot seduce the maid with charisma, but must resort to an unmanly deceit of the kind practiced in romance.⁵⁶

As women were the main producers and assumed to be the main consumers of romances, as Pope personifies Grub Street as the Goddess of Dulness in the *Dunciad*, and Fielding in Mrs. Novel in *The Author's Farce*, so in *The Grub-Street Opera* Fielding represents the English character in the serving girl. This is the new character of England. The maid reading in the stairwell, Sweetissa, the maid in *Don Quixote* who is passed off as Dulcinea, and Polly Peachum, in *The Beggar's Opera*, represent the new England better than John Bull. Particularly in *Grub-Street*, where the romance itself is the danger to Sweetissa's virtue, she represents England's own vulnerable character, for unlike John Bull, the serving girl can be bought. In her susceptibility to commercial forces, she (maid/Mrs. Novel/actress) is morally tainted, always potentially available for prostitution.

⁵⁵ In *The Welsh Opera*, no author is identified for the letters; in the *Grub-Street Opera*, they are part of the young squire's calculated attempt on Sweetissa's virtue.

⁵⁶ Owen admits that "I do not care to venture on a woman after another, nor does any woman care for me twice" (I.iii.5-6).

The romance itself posits financial considerations at the base of many seductions. Mrs. Novel's song, Air IX, parodies the language of the romances which, despite their self-characterizations as moral warnings, fell short:

May all maids from me take warning
 How a lover's arms they fly;
 Lest the first kind offer scorning,
 They, without a second, die.

Novel is warning against the vanity of squandering a lover, not of preserving one's chastity. She speaks the language of speculation, as Moll Flanders had, and as Fielding's Shamela later will.⁵⁷ In her, Fielding exposes not only the sexual but the financial impetus of the romance, the fine line between the heroine and the prostitute.

In her song, Sweetissa calls herself "a maid/ Skilled enough in the trade/ Its mysteries to explain" which she does with unintentional sexual innuendo. Sweetissa seems unaware of the unseemliness of describing herself as "skilled in the trade." Both she and Robin frequently refer to her virtue in terms of ownership, trade, and sale. They speak of it in Act I, scenes xi and xii, metaphorically in the terms of their occupations, of virtue corked up or locked up in a cupboard, or flawed like broken china.⁵⁸ The influence of the market expands beyond the serving class, as is pointed out in a scene which immediately follows this (of false words and broken china). Molly defends Owen for

⁵⁷ "I thought once of making a little fortune by my person. I now intend to make a great one by my virtue" (Letter X).

⁵⁸ This metaphor was commonplace, and possibly derivative of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. Fielding was undeniably dependent on various Scriblerian productions and conceits during this early phase in his career: "The Pleasures of the Town" is an imitation of *The Dunciad*, *Tom Thumb* in many ways drew from *Gulliver's Travels*, and *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* is deeply indebted, in content as well as genre, to *The Beggar's Opera*. In his later theatrical phase Fielding moves away from this dependence, but here it serves to emphasize the continuity of these plays with those discussed in earlier chapters.

seducing the fiddler's daughter: "That was the fiddler's fault; you know he sold his daughter, and gave a receipt for the money" (II.i.14-15). From Sweetissa's being innocently in "trade" to Robin telling her that her value has plummeted from "five hundred pounds" to nothing (I.xi.67) to the fiddler selling his daughter outright, Fielding's cynical view of the romance as masked prostitution is complete.

Owen's attempts to seduce the servants are financial negotiations. He accosts Margery bluntly; "Let us, I'gad, I don't know what. Let us kiss like anything," but she names her price.

Not so fast, Squire. Your mamma must give you a larger allowance before it comes to that between you and me. Lookye, sir, when you can produce that fine apron you promised me, I don't know what my gratitude may bring me to. But I am resolved, if ever I do play the fool, I'll have something to show for it besides a great belly. (III.xii.8-14)

Margery lacks the dangerous ideals that lead Sweetissa into danger, but which make her integrity characteristic of England. Keen in discriminating between audiences, Owen offers Molly no fine aprons, but many fine words.

Dearest charmer
 Will you still bid me tell,
 What you discern so well
 By my expiring sighs;
 My doting eyes?
 Look through the instructive grove,
 Each object prompts us to love,

Hear how turtles coo,

All nature tells you what to do. (Air XXV)

This is a seduction straight from the soft core pages of the amorous novel. “[A]ll nature seemed to favour his design, the pleasantness of the place, the silence of the night, the sweetness of the air, perfumed with a thousand various odours wafted by gentle breezes from adjacent gardens completed the most delightful scene that ever was, to offer up a sacrifice to love” (*Love in Excess* 63). Owen takes the libertine position that words uttered by a priest mean nothing and that nature never urges crime but rather encourages all animals to partake of love. Again, in the language of the romance, he sings, “How can I trust your words precise,/ My soft desires denying,/ When oh! I read within your eyes,/ Your tender heart complying” (Air XXVI), assured that her “no” is merely a prelude to a “yes.”⁵⁹ Molly also follows the romance script, protesting disgust at his illicit advances and vowing to die a virgin but prepared to surrender, fearing that “Love will find some weaker place,/ To let the dear invader in” (Air XLII). She later admits, “Alas, you know too well that I am as insincere in every repulse to you as you have been in your advances to me” (II.viii.9-10). Kirsten T. Saxon notes that Haywood frequently castigates “that naiveté that allows women to fall for stale lines and hackneyed pastoral *carpe diem* romantic logic.” Like many Haywood heroines, Molly’s “‘fall’ is predicated on her falling for the appealing, but ultimately sham, status of romantic heroine” (121). The romance is in the surrender itself.

⁵⁹ As in this famous passage from *Love in Excess*: “she had only a thin silk night gown on, which flying open as he caught her in his arms, he found her panting heart beat measures of consent, her heaving breast swell to be pressed by his, and every pulse confess a wish to yield.” In this scene, her “Vertue and pride [and] modest bashfulness... for a time made some defence, but with such weakness as a lover less impatient than D’elmont would have little regarded” (63).

Owen made a particularly ridiculous figure on stage in all his feathers, and the other characters describe him generally as a baboon and a scrawny feeble-looking boy. He assures Molly that “I have long been tired with variety, and I find after all the changes I have run through both of women and clothes—a man hath need of no more than one woman, and one suit at a time” (II.ii.2-5). His equation of women and clothes confirms his character as an aspiring beau, as women and clothes are both objects to be obtained primarily to polish his own appearance.⁶⁰ Although he has the reputation of having “rummaged all the playhouses for mistresses” (II.i.11), he suspects that “in all my amour, I never yet thoroughly knew what a woman was. I fancy it often happens so among us fine gentlemen” (III.xii.18-21). His assumption that all fine gentlemen are vaguely virginal recalls the castrato Opera, a feminized coward, with neither the male virtue of bravery nor the female virtue of constancy. The most popular song from “The Pleasures of the Town,” which Opera sings to avoid a duel, reads like a victimized heroine’s aria. “Barbarous cruel man,/ I’ll sing thus while I’m dying, I’m dying like a swan,/ I’m dying like a swan,/ A swan,/ A swan,/ With my face all pale and wan” (Air XVIII).⁶¹ His languid, feminine delicacy contrasts vividly with the threat of physical violence he ought to be defending himself from, just as Owen’s most precious moments come in scenes of intended seduction.

The actual productions corroborate this reading. Just as William Mullet played the Walpole figure in both the subversive *Fall of Mortimer* and in *The Welsh Opera*,

⁶⁰ It also confirms the association with D’Urfey’s *Richmond Heiress*, in which Tom Romance exclaims “I love all the Sex, gad take me, and can no more confine my self to one Woman, than to one Suit of Cloaths” (V.v). While Tom is a standard fop mouthing trite conceits, he is unique in being so explicitly connected to the romance.

⁶¹ Charles Woods notes that this was the most popular song from the play. (66n).

ensuring that audience members would associate the two crafty advisors, Mr. Stoppelaer (or Stopler), who played Owen, had earlier that year played Signor Opera. Calling himself “half a maid” (III.xii.17), Owen shares his half gender with Opera, who as a castrato would be half a man. The inability of either man to perform sexually confirms the parallel.

Leeks, Roast Beef, and Ragouts

Significant as the change of title is, *The Grub-Street Opera* is still in many ways a Welsh opera. Set in Wales, it both raises and dismisses questions of nationality. The Welsh are British, but not English, and this culturally and geographically marginal country serves to foster Fielding’s assessment of what is “native” and what is of “foreign” growth.

In *The Welsh Opera*, Molly is actually the Apshinkens’ daughter and only offspring. Though Owen marries Molly and might continue the Apshinken line through her, if he might in fact be impotent (as is often hinted); Fielding thus represents the royal line as exhausted, ending in a daughter. This insinuation is highlighted as the cause of government alarm by Edgar V. Roberts’s analysis of the song discussed above, “The Grey Mare the Better Horse,” which is set to the tune of Durfey’s “Of a Noble Race was Shinken.”⁶² Roberts’s argues that the song borders on treason. Shinken is a descendant of Owen Tudor,

⁶² “*Shinkin’s Song to the Harp*, in Act IV of *The Richmond Heiress*, sometimes referred to as ‘Of noble race was Shinken,’ was sung by John Bowman to the accompaniment of a harp. ... A variant form is printed in four editions of *Pills*. The tune is used in several ballad operas” (Biswanger lxxx-lxxxii) including *The Beggar’s Opera*, in which it is the melody for Air XXXI, when Lucy learns that Macheath is imprisoned and will hang.

a Welsh gentleman of the fifteenth century, [who] was the grandfather of Henry VII, from whom all subsequent British monarchs trace their origins (Fielding's giving the name "Owen" to both the father and son is therefore significant, as is also his laying the scene of the play in Wales). In the association of D'Urfey's original song and Fielding's lyrics (which claim that when the grey mare is the better horse, the horse is "but an ass") there is a profound insult of the royal family. To imply that the King of England was an ass, or to suggest that the "Renown" of the royal line of the Welsh Owen Tudor was "fled and gone," was certainly a joke that would have offended the king and his family. (*The Grub-Street Opera*, Introduction, xxi)

The song is important, with all of its many allusions, but ridicule of the king's lineage is not Fielding's primary aim, nor would audiences have been overly aware of such a hint. Rather, the original song would first have carried associations with the Durfey play for which it was written, the 1693 *The Richmond Heiress; or a Woman Once in the Right*. The original song mocks the speech patterns and rough cultivation of the Welsh. The singer, a Welsh fop named Rice ap Shinkin, continually strives to imitate his English cousin, Tom Romance. Fielding's Owen Apshinken is an amalgam of these cousins from Durfey's play. Though he's inherited the surname and nationality of the Welsh cousin, who is always protesting the fierceness and honesty of "Pritains," Fielding's Owen is the antithesis of that hot-blooded character, laughing at the idea of "the true spirit of English liberty" (*The Grub-Street Opera* II.vii.47). He follows more in the mode of the effeminate, anti-matrimonial, cowardly Tom Romance. In Durfey's play, Tom makes

love to a friend's French refugee wife, indicating Durfey's association and condemnation of romance, the French, and their collective licentiousness, especially in contrast with the ridiculous, but proudly British, ap Shinken.⁶³ By appropriating Tom Romance for his own Welsh comedy, Fielding aligns himself with anti-romance satire dating from romance's first appearance as an English form.

Welsh stereotype Rice ap Shinken sings "Of a Noble Race" and exhibits an obsession with leeks and cheese and a confused notion of English pronouns (he uses the pronoun "her" indiscriminately).⁶⁴ Fielding's audience would not have paid much attention to the very brief monarchical reference of the original ballad, but would have remembered its lyrics and context as a mockery of the Welsh as uncouth, earnest but vulgar. Where the romance engenders men who are feminized and unnaturally stylized, the Welsh figure exhibits an excess of masculine physicality and no culture at all. One minces, the other lumbers. The song includes this stanza, for example: "Her was the prettiest fellow,/ At Foot-ball

⁶³ Mrs. Stockjob, on throwing over Hotspur for new lover Tom, declares that "I have don vid hum now, and vill encourage dat fine young Gentleman, dat talk and boy, and rally so vel *en Francois*; me no endure de Huff de Bounce, de brutal way of Love no longer. Dear Monsieur *Romance*, is all French, all Talk, all Air, all Gallantry" (IV.i, page 68). Both Hotspur and the Welsh stereotype recall Shakespeare's Henry plays, with their emphasis on English national character.

⁶⁴ "Shinkin's love of cheese and metheglin is typical of these stock characters. So are his epithets of 'By St. Davy!' and 'By Cadwallader!' Other common traits are his use of plurals for singulars, *her* for other pronouns, *t's* for *d's*, *c's* for *g's*, *f's* for *v's*, and so on" (Biswanger lix). The name ap Shinken as part of a caricature is even older than Durfey; *The History of Sir John Oldcastle, the Good Lord Cobham*, 1664, which was included in *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* of 1685, opens with the capture of several rebels, which occasions the following dialogue:

2. *Jud.* What bail? what sureties?
Davy. Her Cozen ap Rice, ap Evan, ap Morice, ap Morgan, ap Lluellyn, ap Madoc, ap Meredith, ap Griffin, ap Davy, ap Owen, ap Shinken Shones.
2. *Jud.* Two of the most sufficient are enow.
Sher. And't please your Lordship these are all but one. (107-112)

Rather than suggesting that D'Urfey knew this play (which he might well have), or that Fielding did, the coincidences instead suggest that these were part of a general stereotype, as in Shakespeare's cheese-eating Welsh parson in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, who also mangles pronouns and verb tenses.

or at Cricket;/ At Hunting Chace, or nimble Race, /Cots-plut how her cou'd prick it." The shift from "noble race" (the purpose of mentioning the royal ancestor) to "nimble race" racially demeans the Welsh to animal, physical characteristics. The singer ends fearing that if his lovelorn suffering continues he will even stop eating cheese.

But now all Joys are flying,
 All Pale and wan her Cheeks too,
 Her Heart so akes, her quite forsakes,
 Her Herrings and her Leeks too.
 No more must dear Metheglin,
 Be top'd at good *Montgomery*;
 And if Love sore, smart one week more,
 Adieu Creem-Cheese and Flomery.

The character Rice ap Shinken is not really in danger of forsaking his cheese; he will forsake his lover as soon as she asks for marriage. The context of the song then is not the tragic end of a noble line, but the pairing of a standard comic figure, the raw Welsh caricature, with ridicule of the effects of romance, as embodied in the overly-refined Tom Romance.

Fielding translates this relationship (the raw, masculine honesty of "Pritains" and the Continentally-influenced effeminacy of Romance) into old and new Englands, centralizing the satire on British identity. Three romance triangles, enhanced in *Grub-Street*, highlight the importance of old England and attribute its degradation to the romance. Susan, Apshones, and Robin all triumph over those who would diminish their

dignity. All carry their point, and all represent age-old English traditions and customs.

Molly's father, unseen in the earlier version, is Mr. Apshones, a tenant of the Apshinkens' and a stout, honest yeoman, quick to resent an insult. He embodies the character first articulated by John Arbuthnot in the *John Bull* pamphlets, written in support of the Peace at Utrecht in 1713.⁶⁵ He forbids his daughter to see Owen, partly from suspicion of the young squire's motives, but also out of disgust for the young man.

⁶⁶ Owen's wealth and social position cannot compensate for his foppishness, his physical weakness, and his general unmanliness, all of which Apshones attributes to court culture in London. Setting the hearty English values of Mr. Apshones against feeble frightened Owen, Fielding points to the foreignness of his generic type. Mr. Apshones defies Owen's power: "I have not lost my spirit with my fortune; I am your father's tenant, but not his slave.... You should find that the true spirit of English liberty acknowledges no superior equal to oppression" (II.vii.18-19, 44-46). The spirit of English liberty predates and will outlast the beau and the romance, both borrowed from tyrannous France. Though Owen laughs at Mr. Apshones, he privately admits his fear of the older man.⁶⁷

Owen's behaving as if he were in a romance while living in England among those with the "true spirit of English liberty" further emphasizes the oxymoronic nature of the English romance, in Fielding's formulation. Where in the earlier play the deceiving

⁶⁵ Bull "in the main, was an honest plain-dealing Fellow, Cholerick, Bold, and of a very unconstant Temper... he was very apt to quarrel with his best Friends, especially if they pretended to govern him;... [but he was] a Boon-Companion, loving his Bottle and his Diversion; for to say Truth, no Man kept a better House than *John*, nor spent his Money more generously" (9).

⁶⁶ "I had rather have a set of fine healthy grandchildren ask me blessing, than a poor puny breed of half-begotten brats, that inherit the diseases as well as the titles of their parents" (II.vii.2-5).

⁶⁷ Kristina Straub discusses a shift in masculinity throughout the eighteenth century, noting that in general more effeminate behavior was associated (negatively) with the aristocracy. Gerald Newman argues that this trend was less economic than nationalistic, as the aristocracy was more likely to favor Continental fashions and behaviors.

letters were written by a witch simply to confuse the household, in the revision they are written by Owen, and so set up a typical romance triangle that becomes the central plot of the play. Owen, a sneaky effeminate Francophile, represents the spirit of “new” England, flailing impotently against the oldest spirit of England, Robin Goodfellow, legendary English trickster.

Robin and Apshones’s female counterpart, the illiterate nostalgic cook Susan, sings the most important of the added songs, “The Roast Beef of Old England,” which would come to be a standard of English patriotism. Unlike Margery, who bargains with Owen for an apron, and Molly, who bargains with him for marriage, Susan rejects Owen and all he represents resoundingly: “Give you a kiss! Give you a slap in the face, or a rod for your backside. When I am kissed, it shall be by another guise sort of a spark than you. ‘Sbud! Your head looks like the scrag end of a neck of mutton, just floured for basting. A kiss! A fart!” (III.xi.18-22). He gets, as Uncle Toby might say, the wrong end of the woman.

Disdaining him like the scrag end of a neck of mutton, Susan instead praises the mighty roast beef. The most popular of the songs written for *The Grub-Street Opera*, “The Roast Beef of Old England” became an unofficial national anthem. Since *Grub-Street* was not performed, however, Fielding recycled the song, with some changes, in *Don Quixote in England*.⁶⁸ Both plays deal with questions of literacy and nationality, and with the influence of the romance on national character, but the latter does so as a subplot.

Both versions of the song begin with the same stanza:

⁶⁸ Of all of Duffey’s plays and operas, his *Don Quixote* Parts I and II were produced most frequently during the decades of this study.

When mighty roast beef was the Englishman's food
 It ennobl'd our brains and enriched our blood
 Our soldiers were brave and our courtiers were good
 Oh the roast beef of old England, and old England's roast beef!

It is nostalgic, past-tense, elegiac. In the song's career as a popular ballad, it had a number of additional verses, but Fielding only wrote the two stanzas of the original version, and a different second stanza for *Don Quixote*. The differences between the second stanzas characterize how the two plays employ the romance. In *Quixote*, "The Roast Beef of Old England" ends with this rousing admonition to the audience:

Then, Britons, from all nice dainties refrain,
 Which effeminate Italy, France, and Spain;
 And mighty roast beef shall command on the main.
 Oh the roast beef of old England!
 And old England's roast beef!

The past tense of the first stanza here shifts to the future, emphasizing the continuity of old England. The nice dainties the singer refers to, in the context of *Don Quixote*, are romances which are linked with different progeny in each nation: the Italians are associated with opera (which features castrated men), the French with dancing usually, but also the scandal chronicle, mostly written by women and featuring powerful women, and Spain with the self-evidently feeble Don. The chivalric romance is simultaneously the ideal, golden age of the past and the poison that corrupted Europe and Quixote. Continental Sancho Panza pines for both the English food and its corresponding robust, healthy English character. "[T]o tell you the truth, madam, I am so fond of the English

roast beef and strong beer, that I don't intend ever to set my foot in Spain again, if I can help it" (I.vi). Though he is inherently a coward, Panza's honesty and earthiness incline him toward the England of John Bull.

In the song, Fielding heralds what opposition writers frequently mythicized as basic English values: hearty, honest physicality, and, though it isn't clear in this context, an ancient tradition of liberal generosity and camaraderie among the classes.⁶⁹ In *Don Quixote* the impediment to the central romance is the heroine's father's desire for greater wealth. Money and honesty are once again opposed, and the resolution is explicitly in terms of English justice. Ultimately Sir Thomas, Dorothea's father, recognizes not only the foolishness of forcing her to marry a wealthy boor instead of the honest but poor man she loves, but also the justice of following through on his original promise, though to a man apparently his social inferior: "Mr. Fairlove, can you forgive me? Can I make you any reparation for the injustice I have shown you?" (III.xiv). Whereas Sancho protests that "in Spain... men of [noble] order are above the law," the wronged innkeeper, like Mr. Apshones, insists that "I am an Englishman, where no one is above the law" (I.i). Sancho, amazed, relays to his master that "A man's quality here can't defend him if he breaks the laws" (I.ii). Justice is the basis of the liberty of true Englishmen.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ This is essentially the theme of Hogarth's 1745 print "O The Roast Beef of Old England: The Gates of Calais" as well. The ragged, emaciated French figures are all staring at food, either the side of beef which is at the center of the print, at the thin soup being carried, or at a basket of fish evocative of a nativity scene. Hogarth associates the women buying/praying over the fish in the bottom left corner with the supplicants before the cross seen at a distance through the gate, suggesting that the French Catholics take "real presence" instead of "real food." The suggestion that the Catholic church is partly responsible for their hunger is played out in the fat monk who obscenely fingers the beef. When first sketching the gate, Hogarth was apprehended as a spy; the print seethes with the association of Catholicism with official French tyranny, the French as frightened victims. The Englishman, Hogarth himself peeking around a column as he surreptitiously draws, is notably more human than any of his subjects. The roast beef itself is being sent for English visitors. See Jenny Uglow (464-465).

⁷⁰ Like Margery, however, the Mayor, who leads the corruption scheme of the play's subplot, determines not to be sold "by any but myself. I think that is the privilege of a free Briton" (I.viii). The association

The depiction of the English in *The Grub-Street Opera* is altogether more hopeless than in *Quixote*. The upper classes have abandoned their community obligations, and that ancient tradition of English liberty and benevolence has been replaced with tyranny on one end and theft on the other. The second verse of “Roast Beef” as we have it in *The Grub-Street Opera* presents no future, no continuity, only a noble past contrasted with a bleak present (as implicitly in Rice ap Shinken’s song):

But since we have learnt from all-conquering France
 To eat their ragouts as well as to dance
 Oh what a fine figure we make in romance!
 Oh the roast beef of England,
 And old England’s roast beef!

Where Dorothea claims that England’s roast beef shall command on the main, here France is all-conquering and England is a “fine figure”—a caricature—the Quixote. Unlike the chivalric romances Quixote reads, which make an old man think he possesses the strength of legendary warriors, modern romances turn robust young Englishmen into feeble dancers, proud of their own frailty. Like young Master Owen in *Grub-Street*, the new Briton “has more affectation than desire, or more desire than capacity” (I.iv.13-14). The new foppishness in England has a Francophilism in common with the old, but is particularly impotent and due to romance reading. Where young country gentlemen in Restoration comedies frequently have their heads turned by their shallow introduction to Continental culture on the Grand Tour, Owen lacks even this little interaction with the

here of prostitution with the male, John Bull figure, is safely subordinate to the central plot. There are two proudly English men in the central plot—one the brutish country lout who drinks and hunts and swears, and one the proper country gentleman Sir Loveland, who is *almost* seduced from Truth by Property, but repents and behaves with justice in the end.

world. His world is made up of servants and trashy books. And he represents the crop of England's future leaders—her MPs and her landlords.

In "Roast Beef," Susan complains about the stinginess of her mistress, who removes more than half of the menu with which Sir Owen was planning to entertain "several of the tenants" and which will result in a larder full of rotting food. "I wish I had been born... before we had learnt this French politeness and been taught to dress our meat by nations that have no meat to dress" (III.iii.34-37).⁷¹ Just as poets like Dryden complained that the French could command where they had not yet conquered, Susan despairs to see her country's food submissive to another nation's. But even more than the types of food, she complains about the attitude with which it is eaten or shared or served; the "true spirit of English liberty" championed and embodied by Mr. Apshones assigns certain privileges to tenants and responsibilities to landlords. Apshones, a guest for the dinner which Lady Apshinken is whittling down, was likely to consider the occasional dinner with his landlord less a privilege than a time-honored custom. Lady Apshinken opposes this social interaction far more than the cost of the dinner, stingy as she is. When Susan laments of the rotting food, "so as the smell of the old English hospitality used to invite people in, that of the present is to keep them away," Lady Apshinken responds "Old English hospitality! Oh don't name it; I am sick at the sound" (III.iii.30-33). Lady Apshinken, like Owen, does not mask her power, nor does she consider it well used if it is not obvious and a little threatening.

Partially because of her intimate connection to the powerful English Roast Beef, Susan has eluded the contamination of Grub Street. Her honesty, both in the sense of her

⁷¹ Susan later sings, "An Irishman loves potatoes... The Scotchman loves sheepsheads, sir; The Welsh with cheese are fed, sir" and vows to protect the integrity of the sirloin with her own body (III.ix, Air LVII).

sexual chastity and her truth telling, are “proven” fairly early in the play specifically by her illiteracy: as the jealous Sweetissa wisely deduces, “On horseback he who cannot ride, on horseback did not rob; and since a pen you cannot guide, You never wrote to Bob” (II.vi. 79-80).

Conclusion

As *The Welsh Opera* grew under his hands, as he saw his little parody deepen and broaden in its targets and modes, Fielding had a very clear sense of the impact it would have. In *Grub-Street Opera*, anxieties about sexual production and textual production find expression in romance, itself defined by excessive production in both senses. When critics feared that romance reading would ruin young girls, they feared literally the ability of romance to breed romance. That anxiety, that tendency, and its metaphoric and literal connection to Grub Street’s own tendency to breed text from text in pamphlet battles, continuations, and imitations gives meaning to the shorthand of Fielding’s cultural satire. Welsh oafishness, the French romance tradition, the British scandal narrative, and commercial pressures all work toward a breakdown of Old English values. When the source of this culture breakdown is under the king’s roof—is his family, his staff, his negligence—the effect is broad condemnation of the entire English government.

Foucault writes that “the name of the author remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence” (Foucault “What is an Author” 123). Fielding evokes the contours and politics of amatory fiction when he parodies Eliza Haywood in *Mrs. Novel*, but in a larger, more expansive mode, he evokes “Haywood” and teeming production and reproduction when he stages romance in *The Grub-Street Opera*. Spectators do not need to hear her name to

make the complex unconscious associations between the “modes of existence” Fielding invokes.

In contrast to the modern pressures (the novel, the market, French tastes), Fielding stages his critique using or alluding to two deeply British experiences. First, following John Gay’s lead in setting the chaos of a public state in a ballad opera, Fielding exploits a form inherently anti-continental and nostalgic, the native ballad (and the associations of the ballad with the opposition). When Fielding further alludes to the skimmington, in the subtitle of *The Welsh Opera* and in the song discussed earlier, he uses a traditional English form of community judgment intended to reassert order and harmony. In Fielding’s last plays, Walpole will clearly be the obnoxious element which needs to be expelled. However here, within the world of the romance, the two who represent Old England, Susan the cook and Mr. Apshones the tenant, are the ones out of harmony with the whole. Rather than the traditional community stability, this British norm is selfish, eviscerated, and impotent. The evocative language of the ballad and the subtly sinister function of the skimmington are communicated through cultural shorthand, just as “Grub Street” means not simply printers but dishonest, self-serving, manipulators of public opinion, and “Eliza Haywood” means not simply “Romance novelist” but socially outrageous, politically outspoken, too noticeable, ungentlemanly writer. Roast beef, ballads, and skimmington, moreover, have this force in Fielding’s farces partially *because* “Grub Street” and “Haywood” already are more than “a finger pointing.” Coming out of a tradition in which *The Beggar’s Opera* primed audiences for over-eager close readings, Fielding learned to guide his spectators’ understandings with unobtrusive gestures.

I will conclude by giving Eliza Haywood the final word, in her own gestural allusion to Henry Fielding. In the respectable novel *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), Haywood suggests that Fielding's plays became more abusive of the ministry as he attempted to bully his way into a bribe or a government post. She refers to the Little Theatre in the Haymarket as

F—g's scandal shop; because he frequently exhibited there certain drolls, or, more properly, invectives against the ministry; in doing which it appears extremely 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 him by those whom he had abused, in order to silence his dramatic talent. (45)

It is "extremely probable" that Fielding was bribed to silence his play. It is equally likely that Haywood here employs "Fielding" to represent all socially outrageous, politically outspoken, too noticeable, ungentlemanly writers, in order to distance herself from her own past. In what would have been a nightmare construction to him, "Fielding" and "Haywood" amount to the same gesture.

Chapter 4: Wearing the Trousers; or, the Travesties of Charlotte Charke at the Haymarket

“How is your political connected with your theatrical?”
The Historical Register for the Year 1736 (I.93-4)

The Want of a Pair of Breeches

Actress Charlotte Charke (1713-1760) was famous for two things: she was the daughter of Colley Cibber, and she spent the majority of her adult life dressed as a man. The two descriptions dovetail in the events which brought her most to the attention of the public, her appearance in Henry Fielding’s 1736-1737 Haymarket farces and the publication of her 1755 *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, Youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.* For Charke, trousers provided an irresistible shortcut to power, even though that power came at the expense of her relationship with her father, the most important man she knew, and for whose approval she yearned until his death, which occurred three years before her own.

[W]hen I was but four Years of Age... taking it into my small Pate, that by Dint of a Wig and a Waistcoat, I should be the perfect Representative of my Sire, I... paddled down Stairs, taking with me my Shoes, Stockings, and little Dimity Coat; which I artfully contrived to pin up, as well as I could, to supply the Want of a Pair of Breeches... I took... a Waistcoat of my Brother’s, and an enormous bushy Tie-wig of my Father’s... a monstrous Belt and a large Silver-hilted Sword, ...[and] one of my Father’s large Beaver-hats, laden with Lace, as thick and as broad as a Bickbat.... [T]he Oddity of my Appearance soon assembled a Croud about me; which yielded me no small Joy, as I conceiv’d their Risibility on this

Occasion to be Marks of Approbation, and walk'd myself in to a Fever, in
the happy Thought of being taken for the 'Squire. (*Narrative* 10-11)

The “want” of breeches characterizes Charke perfectly with its double meaning of lack and desire. Recalling the episode, Charke mocks her youthful blindness to the discrepancy between her imagined appearance and the reality, but not the desire to represent her sire nor to change her sex; the child carefully accumulates all the symbols of her father, even when these are her own altered dimity coat and her brother’s waistcoat; and her joy depends upon the approbation—and misconception—of her audience. This moment offers us a paradigm for Charke’s persistent fondness for cross-dressing. Charke emulates her father while parodying him with more or less hostility, from this early episode through her roles in Fielding’s plays, and even, as many have noted, in the tone of her autobiography.¹

Most of the scholarly interest in Charke focuses on the life she lived after the Licensing Act of 1737 which ended her legitimate acting career, and on the narrative choices—and lies—in her autobiography. The issues of her sexuality, her quest for autonomy, and her Cibber-like exhibitionism loom far larger in her life once she left her father’s sphere, the licensed theaters in London.² In this chapter, I focus rather on the strangely ambiguous personality she presented in 1736, when she first began to act for Henry Fielding.³ Her fascination with emblems of power and the ambiguity of gender

¹ Jean Marsden reads the autobiographies and autobiographical activities of Theophilus and Colley Cibber as the context in which Charlotte’s tale is told. “Such explicit use of dramatic parallels creates a narrative in which the publicity of autobiography represents an extension of that associated with the stage—both become public performance” (78).

² See especially Sidonie Smith, Kristina Straub, and Fidelis Morgan.

³ In the summer of 1734 Charke performed in some of Fielding’s plays, but he was not involved with these productions.

displayed in the anecdote above were already becoming evident in her career choices. By the time she entered Fielding's service, she had already rebelled against and mocked the theatrical authorities, and among the traditional breeches parts she played were several of ambiguous sexuality and at least one parody of Cibber himself. Fielding expanded the connection between the appearance of importance and false disguise; between the child's usurpation of her father's suit of clothes and the father's own costumed consequence. He transformed her persona, during the two years she performed in his plays, into a travesty of Cibber, literally a cross-dressed, anti-establishment, illegitimate Cibber.

In 1736, Fielding "ensured almost complete control over the production by turning manager himself" (Battestin 192) at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket.⁴ Announcing the debut of "*the Great Mogul's Company of English Comedians*," Fielding challenged the monopolies and the patriotism of the "Stage Tyrants" at the two patent houses (qtd. in Battestin 192). His control over all aspects of the production (advertising, staging, budget, and program) and his continued presence in periodical dialogues about the role of the stage made the impact of the openly opposition plays he produced here clear and powerful. In *Pasquin* (1736), *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737), and *Eurydice Hiss'd* (1737), Fielding attacked the theatrical and political establishments, and, in the eyes of many contemporaries and subsequent scholars, forced Prime Minister Robert Walpole to curtail the liberty of the stages. Martin Battestin writes that "Walpole ... was goaded into ... bringing down on him the full weight of Parliament.

⁴ Because *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731) was hushed by the government, and because Fielding dedicated *The Modern Husband* to Walpole, his short stint at Drury Lane has frequently been considered a temporary defection from the opposition. With this predisposition, his "return" to the Haymarket and his openly opposition plays of 1736 and 1737 have been considered a repudiation. See John Loftis, 131-132. Robert Hume dismisses this theory as inconsistent with theater history, and it is true that in 1733 and 1734, Fielding's plays were running at both Drury Lane and the Haymarket, and that Drury Lane also first produced his *Eurydice* in 1737, indicating no decisive break with either theater.

For no one either in or out of the government doubted that, whatever other convenient uses the minister might put it to, the Theatrical Licensing Act was instituted to put a stop to Fielding's play-writing" (234). Because of these plays, Fielding was remembered by enemies as the author of "several frank, and free Farces, that seem'd to knock all Distinctions of Mankind on the Head: Religion, Laws, Government, Priests, Judges, and Ministers, were all laid flat at the Feet of this *Herculean* Satyrist... who, to make his Poetical Fame immortal ... set Fire to his Stage, by writing up to an Act of Parliament to demolish it" (Cibber I.287).

Yet, as Hume and Goldgar have demonstrated, the content of these satirical farces alone would not have caused the Licensing Act. Hume points to other important changes in the business of theater during these years and Goldgar puts the plays in the context of a periodical culture which created and repeated many of the political analogies with which the plays are full. A significant part of the impression contemporaries had, then, that these plays transgressed the bounds of what was proper for the stage, must have come from their performances, and, as this chapter argues, specifically from the casting of Charlotte Charke.

When Fielding capitalized on Charke's public persona, her penchant for rebellion, and her gender "Oddity," he transformed cross-dressing from a "pleasantly grotesque but decidedly unsubtle" farce technique into a sharp condemnation of the corruptions, deceits, and inappropriate authority of the Walpole administration.⁵ Charke's Fielding characters are not the effeminate or otherwise unmanly men of standard farcical travesty, but men who hold substantial power either illicitly or indirectly. These characters—Lord Place (in

⁵ Hume, describing the effect of Mr. Harper playing Princess Huncamunca in Fielding's *Tom Thumb* (89).

Pasquin), Mr. Hen (in *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*), and Spatter (in *Eurydice Hiss'd*)—defy traditional divisions (male-female, and in most cases divisions of class as well), so that they—and she—remain troublingly uncategorizable. Charke's characters gesture away from gendered characteristics toward false assertions of power in the "legitimate" structures of government and theater.⁶ As a mockery of men and men's power, and as a mockery of her own father and his power, which stood for Walpole's, Charke-in-trousers also implicitly mocked the power of the government.

In his last Haymarket farces, Fielding repeatedly equates Cibber with Walpole, interchangeable with the Great Man in his corruption, vulgarity, and tyranny. In the transvested figure of Charlotte Charke, Fielding concretizes the metaphor of stage for state and embodies the transgressive impulse pervading his final, overtly political farces. Charke's roles are transvestic in this sense, rather than simply cross-dressed, as they spotlight the *relationship* between art and life, between the farce world and its techniques and the "real" political world and its techniques.⁷ With the theatrical transvestite, the stage becomes a public "space of possibility" in Marjorie Garber's terms, as the indeterminate body destabilizes expected relationships and enables others.⁸ Thus opening publicly questions of power to new configurations, to new resolutions, the plays

⁶ Speaking of the Elizabethan era of great changes, Marjorie Garber writes that "transvestism was the specter that rose up—both in the theater and in the streets—to mark and overdetermine this crisis of social and economic change" (17).

⁷ "[T]ransvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disruptive element that intervenes" (Garber 17 emphasis hers).

⁸ "The figure of the transvestite in fact *opens up the whole question of the relationship of the aesthetic to the existential*. This, indeed, is part of its considerable power to disturb, its transgressive force" (Garber 71 emphasis hers). This is true outside the playhouse as well. Terry Castle notes something similar about masquerade as a topos in eighteenth-century narrative. "[M]asquerade... is associated with the disruption, rather than the stabilization, of meaning. Befitting its deeper link with the forces of transformation and mutability, the masquerade typically has a catalytic effect on plot ... [but] almost invariably undermines whatever emblematic meaning the episode might otherwise be expected to carry ... [and] escapes any kind of moral reducibility" (117-8).

threatened to “unloose the fundamental Pillars of Society, and shake it from its *Basis*” (*The Daily Gazetteer* May 7, 1737).⁹

Focusing thus on the trousers, the vestment and not the body beneath, Fielding anticipated the modern sense of the phallus as the signifier of power, rather than the instrument of power.¹⁰ Detaching phallic power from the man who wields it, Fielding denaturalizes the possession of power and highlights the degree to which power is bestowed or taken or worn as a costume, the degree to which publics, and audiences, acquiesce in the appearance of power. Paula Backscheider has demonstrated how theatrical productions from the Restoration forward sought to transform familiar tropes of order, specifically domestic order and woman’s “place” in society, to communicate ideologies of dominance.

In the theater of the Restoration, Backscheider locates the pressures of a collective oral heritage that “charged the experience” of performance and “unleashed its potential for expressing” a national spirit (xvi). Open to all classes, not just the bourgeoisie, the theaters (and the streets—Backscheider includes parades and street theater in her exploration) spoke in a language of costumes, signs, and gestures to provide an accessible space and a representational sampling of the “public.”¹¹ Backscheider writes that

⁹ In Paulson and Lockwood *Critical Heritage* 100.

¹⁰ In the “Travels of Job Vinegar,” Fielding wrote about women’s customary position of disadvantage; “However, the Ladies ... by getting Possession of the BRCHS [breeches], a sort of Cabinet, wherein these superstitious People think they keep their Superiority of Power, as *Sampson* did his Strength in his Hair, frequently govern in their Turn” (qtd. in Smallwood 41). Jill Campbell attributes Fielding’s shock, disgust, and fascination with real transvestites to “the failure of the phallus to guarantee an organic masculine authority beyond the reach of appropriation” (55).

¹¹ “Inherent [in a popular or mass culture] is the demand for the recognition of the spectrum of opinions and aspirations held within each social class and of the impossibility of using any simply binary or even tripartite conception of social class” (Backscheider xv).

“[m]any Restoration and eighteenth-century plays took up problems not yet resolved in the culture, and many elided the lack of true resolution with a dance” (62).

Fielding’s plays too show a pattern of negotiating “a stabilizing ideology” (64) and taken together enact a process of sifting through and sharpening or discarding symbols and myths, so as to articulate the nature of authority in a way acceptable to the theater public. The overt consciousness and the enthusiastic public response to Fielding’s increasingly political farces indicate that the theater itself generated the kind of critical discourse necessary for a self-actualizing public voice. The satirical farces of the 30s, especially Fielding’s, *deliberately* illustrate their own lack of resolution (most end absurdly), and so their society’s lack of stability. Rather than seeking stable images of authority, Fielding’s plays destabilize authority by demonstrating its images to be merely masks. In the bizarre phallicism of Charke’s roles, we see a conscious manipulation of images of power which highlights the artificial and conventional nature of their “legitimate” use. Fielding’s last farces, all financially successful, all public events that entered and affected the vocabulary of symbolism in the larger social and political worlds, provide an auditorium for the voice of the public. The trouser roles he created for Charke are all characters who threaten the expression of that voice within the stage world, but give loose to it in the playhouse itself.

The three Haymarket farces I focus on are in some ways very different: *Pasquin* is a rehearsal of two different plays, a tragedy and a comedy, each with fairly coherent if shallow plots; *The Historical Register* is a series of unconnected scenes from high life and politics; and *Eurydice Hiss’d* is a self-referential afterpiece about a failed afterpiece. Yet each of the three is a rehearsal farce, each equates the “states political and theatrical”

especially through satire of Cibber and Walpole, and each features Charke, in trousers, playing Great Men.

Charke's role in the volatility of these plays has been almost completely ignored. As these plays "introduce[ed] POLITICKS on the Stage," critical discussion has been restricted to those politics.¹² Robert Hume suggests that Fielding became more political in 1734 because "his school friends Lyttleton and Pitt entered the Commons and joined the 'Broad Bottom' faction in the opposition" (211). Bertrand Goldgar hears echoes of "all the conventional opposition motifs" in these last plays, and defends the claim made by Fielding's enemies that the popular author was simply the "*Cat's Paw*" in the hands of the greater, and richer, men in the opposition (154). John Loftis is more inclined to see in Fielding's affinity for opposition themes a genuine political inclination rather than a bid for patronage. Hume, Goldgar, and Loftis equally recognize the power of his knitting together politics and arts. "After fifteen years of Walpole's supremacy, years during which (in the opposition view) men of literary and intellectual distinction had been systematically discouraged," Fielding's laying the decline of the arts at Walpole's feet in all three of these last plays "would have been roundly applauded by the audiences that crowded to the Little Theatre" (Loftis 134). The presence of Cibber's daughter, in satires on his power, and moreover in trousers, enhanced that critique, but neither Loftis nor Goldgar mention her at all, and Hume seems to consider her simply an added attraction.

The artistic strategies of these plays as part of the satire have been disregarded, except insofar as they represent specimens of the universal corruption of taste. Hume

¹² The pro-administration *Daily Gazetteer* published a letter on May 7, 1737 making the case for government regulation of the stage specifically in reference to Fielding's plays; "THE ELECTION, (a *Comedy in Pasquin*) laid the Foundation for introducing POLITICKS on the Stage" which his later plays took up to a fault, having as their goal to "make a *Minister appear ridiculous to a People*" (in Paulson and Lockwood *Critical Heritage* 99).

writes that “[t]he somewhat random nature of its satire notwithstanding, *The Historical Register* was viewed (and is now remembered) as anti-ministerial propaganda” (236). Like Rivero, he overlooks the particulars of the theatrical production in order to highlight its concepts.¹³ Only Jill Campbell examines Fielding’s structural and theatrical choices, specifically his use of ghosts and of cross-gender casting, as figures for identity in political and social life.¹⁴ “Fielding made the drama of transvestitism the physical context for his exploration of troubled relations between interior and exterior selves, private qualities and public actions ... raising also the threat of an exchange or collapse of the two into each other that turns both personal feeling and public action into mere dramatic acting” (Campbell 27). The drama of transvestitism was also the physical context for his exploration of troubled relations between the adventurous Charke and her well-connected father, and through that, between the English ideal of constitutional rule and the realities of its self-interested leaders in her roles as politically powerful men.

Through Charke, Fielding transforms the entire playhouse into a site dedicated to and fostering vocal community opposition. The figure of Charke-in-trousers embodies the deviation from the reversals that farce generally provides and precludes the expected return to normalcy. While the trouser roles in Fielding’s previous plays are two-dimensional portraits of men already powerless (the castrato, for example), Charke’s characters are relatively more human and in control. They are representative of various estates, but none of her characters is a caricature. None is easily dismissed as signifying

¹³ Both, however, generally appreciate Fielding’s formal innovations. But Hume seems to consider stage-business merely an artificial flavoring and not connected to the ideas, and Rivero notes one casting choice in *Pasquin* as an example of an “additional complication” that would have affected “the audience’s collective mind” but otherwise focuses on almost metaphysical ramifications of the plot elements (131).

¹⁴ She notes his self-identification as “an Author who dealt so much in Ghosts, that he is said to have spoiled the Hay-market Stage, by cutting it all into Trap-Doors” (qtd. 16).

one or another fault or attribute. All three are part of overt political satires, and all three control or depict the exchange of money—and therefore, in the public mind of 1736-7, all, in one way or another, represent Walpole.

A Squeeze of the Hand

Two weeks into the run of *Pasquin*, Charke took over the role of Lord Place from Richard Yates. The gender politics Fielding explores in *The Grub-Street Opera* continue to intrigue him, but in moving into intentional cross-casting, he exceeds oppositions (Welsh versus French, brutish versus effeminate, male versus female), transforming the either/or of traditional cross-casting into a both/and—the state of state and stage, a female husband, a strange man-woman. Campbell notes that Fielding's persistent concern with gender brings together “the political construction of gender and domesticity and ... more traditionally ‘political’ matters such as war, governance, and kings” (5). She reads in his fascination with such difficult figures as the castrato and the transvestite “a domain of ... values and powers... betrayed by a collapse into [their] opposite” (23). I agree with Marjorie Garber that the castrato and transvestite *absorb* the opposite (rather than collapsing into it) and so disquietingly contain contradictions.¹⁵

The cross-casting in Fielding's earlier farces illustrates the convention that Charke's roles subvert. In *Tom Thumb* and *The Author's Farce*, actresses played

¹⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis argues that “comic and festive inversion could *undermine* as well as reinforce ... the importance of the categories high/low, male/female” (130). She suggests further that such disruptions in the traditional gendered social divisions are “part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society. The woman-on-top might even facilitate innovation in historical theory and political behavior” (131). Marjorie Garber also stresses the energy released when categories are undermined; “The ‘third’ is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis—a crisis which is symptomized by *both* the overestimation *and* the underestimate of cross-dressing” (Garber 11).

respectively Tom and Signor Opera.¹⁶ The former is the tiny hero who, making love to his enormous bride, would be completely engulfed. The latter is a castrato in hell, unwillingly reunited with his wife. In both cases, the “men” are profoundly unable to satisfy their voracious wives. Not only is Tom’s whole miniature body a penis (he “hath not a Bone/ Within his Skin, but is a Lump of Gristle” [I.i.20-21]), rendering his wife’s fear that he’ll be lost like a needle in a haystack all too vivid, but she goes on to tell Tom’s rival that her “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” (II.x.37-39). She is sexually insatiable even beyond Tom’s minimasculinity. Similarly, Signor Opera, a castrato, is married to the very epitome of the sexually voracious woman, Mrs. Novel. In both cases, the characters are already mockeries of power, already emasculated, already radically and doubly overpowered by wives of insatiable appetites. That the husbands are played by actresses exaggerates this, and is manifestly theatrical in that the emasculation of these two men is played out, performed, and embodied. Dominated by his wife, unmanned, Tom, a penis without power, and Opera, a penis without power to perform, are visible failures of the traditional phallic symbols of power. To whatever extent *Tom Thumb* is or was perceived as political, and there is wide disagreement about that, the performance of its title character by a woman, making meaningless even the physical phallus, undercut his pretended ascent to monarchical power. Lord Place is a significantly different character. He moves through the worlds of men and women without participating in either, and dominates both.

¹⁶ Neither of these parts was cross-cast during the original run of the plays, but was so cast for later productions.

Pasquin stages the rehearsals of “The Life and Death of Common-Sense,” a tragedy by Fustian, and “The Election,” a comedy by Trapwit. The tragedy and comedy raise similar themes—English integrity and the manipulation of power—the tragedy in allegory and the comedy in narrative. In the tragedy, Queen Ignorance, aided by Law, Physic, and Firebrand the priest, comes from overseas to usurp the throne of English Common Sense. In the comedy as well, English customs, though often violent and self-serving, maintain a kind of harmony until disrupted by outside influences. The play, which ran for fifty-nine nights, was widely applauded (Rivero 129). Aaron Hill wrote that while the “Theatrick Sovereigns” spent small fortunes on “*wonderful Scenary* [and] *surprising Transformations*... at a very great Expence; a Gentleman, under the Disadvantage of a very bad House, with scarce an Actor, and at very little Expence, by the single Power of *Satire, Wit, and Common Sense*,” had been able to achieve a success that, Hill correctly predicted, was less than halfway through its run (*The Prompter* April 2, 1736).¹⁷

The comedy works the theme of English harmony disrupted through Lord Place, a figure who embodies the crisis. Even as originally played by a male actor, Place, Court candidate for a Parliamentary seat, dislocates the accepted relationships on which society functions. The campaign, understood as a battle between political parties, is corrupted by secret machinations; the family, a smaller version of the nation, is led to revolt. Place causes both of these disruptions by undermining the accepted differences between men and women. A foppish man, he cannily seeks the favor of the wives. He steals the election by impelling the women to usurp their husbands’ power. Ultimately the

¹⁷ In Paulson and Lockwood *Critical Heritage* 77.

Country-leaning Mayor is browbeaten by his wife into falsely declaring the Court candidates (Place and Promise) the victors. I will first consider the effect of this “third term” character as played by a man, and then discuss the enhanced effects it took on once Charke was in the role.

Though an election plot would imply a weighing of the relative merits of two parties, in Fielding’s hands our attention is rather drawn to those electing than those being elected, to the process, not the individuals. “The Election” was actually Fielding’s second election satire, the first being the subplot of his 1734 *Don Quixote in England*, in which that Spaniard is recruited into standing for MP solely so that the incumbent will need to bribe the electors for their votes. The satire, on electors who sell themselves (for “that is the privilege of a free Briton” [*Don Quixote* I.viii]), is fuller and more extended in *Pasquin*. Though neither presents an honest candidate, both plays were aligned with the opposition. “By reason of the long repetition of charges against the Minister of peculation, manipulation of elections, bribery, and infringement of constitutional liberties, even the briefest allusion to these crimes... implied a hit at Walpole” (Loftis 115). In *Pasquin*, moreover, it is the Court, pro-administration candidate on whose behalf the election’s results are fraudulently reported.

As a representative of the Court party, Place is a man with very high, though very secret, connections. A courtier, he acts through influence, manipulation, and diplomacy, not direct action, petition, or legislation. In order to woo voters, he stresses his ability to maneuver men into “places,” offices in the court that are mostly ceremonial and carry healthy stipends—yet these allusions are always guarded, made in whispers or codes. His politics are simply an extension of his manners, which are artificial, effeminate,

licentious, and self-serving. By the same token, his opponent Sir Henry Fox-Chace represents the Country party as one of appetite. He speaks only of hunting, drinking, and eating. His followers physically frighten the Court supporters away from a gathering, calling their force “reason.” Both candidates mouth the expected cant, Prosperity and No pope on the one side, Liberty and Property and No excise on the other, and neither is likely to actually work to the town’s benefit once elected.

The function of an election, to register public opinion within regulated limits of legitimacy, is completely invalidated by corruption; officials are unfairly elected and deceive the people they are meant to serve. Within the hermeneutics of Fielding’s theatricality, electors are not really choosing between Court and Country, man and woman—they are presented not with a valid choice but with a unified embodiment of imbalance. They are allowed the theatrical illusion of pretending to make a choice and pretending to have opinions, but the choices and the voice have been stolen from the people.

Although Fielding presents the opposition, Country candidate as at best the lesser of two evils, his satire depends upon this slight superiority. The electors, for whatever reasons, choose correctly. As a collective they express a public, consensual opinion that is then subverted and has no effect on the public sphere. Fielding depicts the Court party as the force behind this obstruction and manipulation of the collective conclusion, and responsible for the effects of that obstruction throughout society.

Both sets of candidates engage in the expected bribery of the voters. Place ends the play by admonishing the audience *not* to argue about which party’s bribery is worse

(or better) since “better Herring is in neither Barrel” (III, 28).¹⁸ Yet there is a difference between the candidates and their dealings with the townspeople in terms of their respect for traditional economies.¹⁹ The Country candidates maintain the expected circulation of goods, inflating their needs but supporting a domestic system of circulation and stability. The Court candidates, on the other hand, disrupt the economy by distributing money that has no relation to goods or services, by disrupting the family unit, and by encouraging citizens to leave the town for the city.

Sir Harry engages in what Trapwit, the comedy’s author, describes as “indirect bribery.” He declaims against corruption—“Do you think a Man, who will give a Bribe, won’t take one? If you would be served faithfully, you must choose faithfully”—and then distributes venison and ale to the Mayor and promises his wife’s patronage of local merchants. “Mr. *Damask*, I believe you are afraid to trust me, but those few Yards of Silk you sent my Wife—she likes the Pattern so extremely, she is resolved to hang her Rooms with it—pray let me have a hundred Yards of it; I shall want more of you” (I, 9). While intended to influence these voters, such generosity is also the customary (or at least ideal) behavior of local large landholders. Sir Harry already regularly dines with the leading members of the town. As the Alderman notes, Sir Harry and Squire Tankard are “Gentlemen whose Honesty we are Witnesses of, and whose Estates in our own Neighbourhood render ‘em not liable to be bribed” (I, 6). Throughout the play the rhetoric of the “true Englishman” accrues around the Country candidates, who bribe in

¹⁸ The Iowa edition of *Pasquin* does not give line numbers. For this play I indicate act and page numbers.

¹⁹ Bertrand Goldgar represents the majority opinion that the play was not partisan or considered so by contemporaries. “In point of fact . . . no opposition politician could take much heart from Trapwit’s plot, since the courtiers, Lord Place and Colonel Promise, come off no worse than the representatives of the country party, Sir Henry Fox-Chace and Squire Tankard” (151). To the contrary, they come off considerably worse, as intruders, corruptors, and thieves.

traditional, understood, English fashion. Their Englishness is characterized by their heavy drinking (as Squire Tankard's name suggests), and the Mayor, a typical John Bull, approvingly notes that a "Man that won't drink is an Enemy to the Trade of the Nation" (II, 18). Englishness, ale, and trade are tightly bound together and to the masculine physicality of these men. When in his cups, the Mayor proclaims the importance of the "Spirit of a true *Englishman*" and of "reform[ing] the Nation," representing the government at its fallible but very British best (II, 19).

Where Sir Harry assures the continuation of the community's financial and social economy, Lord Place disrupts it. He causes conflict in the Mayor's marriage, he subverts the natural course of the election, and he advocates refusing to pay tradesmen. All expected relationships between family members and citizens are for him spaces for personal gain. Place assures Mrs. Mayoress that "[t]here are no such Things as Marriages now-a-days," as indeed he lives in a world of individual passions, not a world where vows have substance (II, 14). Those marriages he is familiar with enable the spouses to take lovers; again, the tie between people represents only a space for personal gain. He predicts that when in London Miss Mayoress "will be much admired by the *Beau Monde*, and I dont question but will soon be taken into Keeping by some Man of Quality" (II, 14). His careless immorality and his language implicate each other, for Lord Place prefers French and Italian terms for the suspect pleasures of court society, rather than the plain (read: honest) English of the country. His is the world of masquerades and love affairs, of deceit, not of diplomacy. He does not discuss policy or war; he does not negotiate between opposing sides; he escapes conflict with as much personal profit as he can.

Disrupting the moral and social economy, Place also disrupts the circulation of money. On his first entrance he suggests favors he will do which he cannot mention, whispers in men's ears, and begs leave "to squeeze you by the Hand," at which time he slips money into voters' palms (I, 7). His actions are shrouded in secrecy, his promises are vague, and the playwright complains that even the bribery isn't visible enough, bringing all the actors to the edge of the stage. Yet still, the actor rehearsing the part of Place has no money, and so only pretends to give it.²⁰ "This Bribing with an empty Hand," says the observing playwright Fustian, "is quite in the Character of a Courtier" (I, 8). Sir Harry buys food for and products from the local citizens; Lord Place only pretends to distribute cash. While neither lives up to the ideals of a free election, Sir Harry does have the town's best interests at heart. Although both Fielding and the "author" of the comedy claim to censure both parties "with great Impartiality" (Fielding writes this in his advertisement, and Trapwit says something to the same effect in his "Prologue" [I, 5]), *Pasquin* is patently an opposition play. This was obvious to contemporaries as well, so much so that a new opposition journal, *Common Sense*, was named after the heroine of the tragedy.

Fielding engages directly with what will come to be the Habermassian question of the production of public opinion. *Pasquin*, a name denoting anonymous, public satire,²¹ had already been the title of an influential pro-government journal in the 20s, and the title of Fielding's next play, *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*, was the title of the annual reports on Parliamentary actions. Periodicals not only precede and follow, but

²⁰ While for Trapwit this is an unfortunate prop accident, *The Historical Register's* Medley will use the same gag on purpose, when Quidam (Walpole) bribes the Patriots and then leads them in a dance so that the money falls out of their pockets.

²¹ OED: "The Roman Pasquino (man or statue), on whom pasquinades were fathered; hence, the imaginary personage to whom anonymous lampoons were conventionally ascribed."

make part of the manipulations which permeate *Pasquin*. Miss Stitch and Miss Mayoress, of different parties, bicker first over the superiority of their respective papers (*The Craftsman* for the opposition Miss Stitch, *The Daily Gazetteer* for the pro-administration Miss Mayoress) and then the war in Spain. Rather than circulating ideas, the papers feed the girls opinions they mimic ignorantly. The girls consume information, rather than gaining knowledge, a consumer attitude reinforced by Miss Stitch reluctantly selling her sweetheart's vote for a new fan.²² The dynamic echoes that of the election corruption. The public seems to be presented with a choice between two parties, as consumers as well as voters, but are simply picking a label, choosing a name under which to range a set of opinions not theirs, not reasoned, and not necessarily valid. The party fervor which the periodicals enflame falsifies the circulation of ideas they seem to instigate.

The scene is critical of the periodical culture, of the self-satisfied, ignorant knowingness it bred. Fielding demonstrates the false consciousness propagated in precisely those middle-class consumers most likely to read, and least likely to act on behalf of others. He had created a similar character in *The Coffee-House Politician* (1732), a father so consumed with the news from abroad, so preoccupied reading dozens of daily papers in order to seem knowledgeable—instead of thinking for himself—that he fails to notice his (morally and intellectually superior) daughter's false arrest for prostitution. The critique remains the same although the genders differ. Yet again, although papers for both sides are involved in the critique, the Court-affiliated Miss Mayoress closes the scene with bribery and manipulation. Repeatedly, the Court party

²² They are, in Habermas's terms, part of a "mass public of culture consumers" (168) who speak out of "pure prejudice... [and] a mental condition of uncertainty and vacuousness" (92).

secretly twists the mechanism for the expression of public opinion into one for manipulating and buying public opinion.

Pasquin's strange Man-Woman

When Charke stepped into the role of Lord Place, the sexual and social disruptions already inherent in the character took on far darker colors. In her 1755 autobiography, Charke claims that the only reason she was given the part was that Mr. Yates had other roles in the play, and so it could be spared. Leonard R.N. Ashley, who edited the *Narrative* in 1969, writes that the role was available because “the actor Mr. Yates [had] gone to the rival company at Drury Lane” (xv). Hume alone suggests that the casting was more intentional than fortuitous: “I suspect that as soon as Fielding realized *Pasquin* would be a success, he hastened to improve his sorry band of actors. Within two weeks, he scored a coup, hiring Charlotte Charke (Colley Cibber’s transvestite daughter) away from Drury Lane” (207-8). As Cibber’s daughter, Charke would have been a box office draw for Fielding in any role. He gave her the part of the highest-ranking man instead of the shrewish masculine wife, which was played by an actress who also had two roles. As Hume suggests, Fielding had deeper reasons than personnel shuffling to wish to see Charke play Place. I argue that her transvestism is not merely a colorful descriptor of an infamous public personality or a quirky casting choice. It is the source of the power of her presence in this play in this character.

On the most accessible level, she brought with her a well-known family history. Charlotte Charke debuted on stage in 1730, playing ingénues with some small success. As early as 1731 Charke parodied her father in a brief scene added to Fielding’s *Tom*

Thumb.²³ After Cibber sold his share to John Highmore rather than his son,²⁴ Theophilus Cibber led a band of actors in a rebellion against Drury Lane. The actors, including Charlotte, now wife to a philandering musician and mother of a baby girl, set up camp at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Jones DeRitter notes that their repertoire was primarily traditional English plays and those whose theme emphasized liberty from tyranny. “The rebels succeeded [so well] in presenting themselves as the true guardians of the English theatrical tradition... that when they returned to Drury Lane in the spring of 1734, Highmore was forced to sell his patent [to Charles Fleetwood], and many of the rebels had their salaries increased” (80).

Charke played a wider variety of roles during the rebellion, including the ambiguously gendered Mrs. Otter,²⁵ and almost as soon as the actors returned to Drury Lane, she began acting in trouser roles in the off-season.²⁶ While she lasted one more season with Drury Lane, in September of 1735 she produced a satire on Fleetwood called *The Art of Management* with her own small company of actors at Lincoln’s Inn Fields.²⁷

²³ Fidelis Morgan repeats Ashley’s assertion that Fielding wrote “The Battle of the Poets,” which mocked the selection of Cibber as Poet Laureate, but Fielding himself placed a notice in the *Daily Journal* disclaiming it (Hume 76n). Robert Rehder, editor of the *Narrative*, does not list this role in his Chronology of Charke’s roles at all. For a discussion of the scene (though not of Charke’s possible casting in it) see Barker 158-9.

²⁴ Though he had “rented” the share to Theophilus during the 1732-33 season, he sold to Highmore “at a high price” in March of 1733 (Loftis 100). According to Rehder, Highmore paid three thousand guineas (lvi).

²⁵ Mrs. Otter, from Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene*, is more a hermaphroditic figure than a neutered one, like the epicene itself—the “Silent Woman” of the subtitle, who turns out to be a silent man, and the grammatical item, both feminine and masculine. Both wives, Epicoene and Otter, embody their gender confusion by attempting to “rule the roast” as the expression was, to take over the household and subject their husbands to their own despotic power.

²⁶ The actors returned in March of 1734, and the theatrical season ended soon after. Because the patent theaters were closed during the summer, uncensored theaters often gained permission to offer summer seasons, and Charke’s long list of male roles were almost all performed at the New Haymarket during this summer and the next (see Baruth).

²⁷ John Rich had moved his company to the new Covent Garden Theatre in 1732.

Although Fleetwood seems to have rehired her, possibly at Cibber's urging, in March of 1736 she again decamped, this time specifically to Henry Fielding. With this history, then, of aggressive disobedience, of disquieting androgyny, and of filial defiance, Charke entered the "Great Mogul's Company of English Comedians."

Charke's willing participation in satires directed against her father was part of the frisson audiences came to witness.²⁸ Although "the published cast list gives no hint of this particular indecency, the dramatic historian John Mottley later declared that Cibber should not be blamed for vilifying Fielding in his 1740 autobiography, for in *The Historical Register* Cibber's 'own Character was brought upon [the stage] in a very ridiculous Light, opening the Play with a *New Years Day Ode*, and, what was shocking to every one who had the least Sense of Decency or good Manners, the Part was performed by his own Daughter'" (Battestin 219). Although "shocking" is Mottley's language, "indecency" is Battestin's; most historians and scholars have focused on the filial and sexual politics of Charke's actions, and even though Cibber was widely used as a figure for Walpole,²⁹ almost no one connects this particular piece of family politics with national politics.

In one scene the role of Place parodies Cibber directly. As his name indicates, Place bribes both with cash and with "places," and the satire on Cibber and Walpole overlaps and combines here, especially as Cibber, when he was manager at Drury Lane, had had the power of assigning (or simply promising) roles as liberally as Walpole could

²⁸ In *Sawney and Colley*, a satirical pamphlet written in 1742 in ridicule of the squabbling between Pope and Cibber, Charke, "In Day-light breech'd a bullying Spark,/ But a mere *Female* in the Dark" is shown swearing at her father and demanding money. The anonymous author's footnote reminds readers that she was "celebrated for her Performances in the *Hay-Market Theatre*, where, in the Farce of *Pasquin*, the *Historical Register*, &c., she play'd off her Father and Brother with surprising Humour to the high Recreation of many Audiences" (4).

²⁹ See Chapter 1.

offer places at court.³⁰ In the comedy's third act, Lord Place distributes promises to the voters. One, listing his qualifications/predilections, describes himself as "a devilish Lover of Sack."

Lord Place. Sack, say you? Odso, you shall be Poet-Laureat.

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

Lord Place. No Matter for that,—you'll be able to make Odes.

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

Lord Place. Faith, Sir, I can't tell well what they are; but I know you may be qualified for the Place without being a Poet. (II, 17)

The insult is treble. Charke the daughter is playing the kind of role her father made a career playing (the fop); the position of poet laureate (the role the father was currently filling) is demeaned as a bribe to a drunken illiterate; and in the dialogue, in the "Odso" and not knowing what an ode is, Charke mocks her father's characteristic mannerisms and his poetic skill.³¹ Charke not only plays Cibber playing a fop, she plays Cibber unmasked and with empty trousers. She hijacks her father's domestic authority in addition to his theatrical and poetic authority, already mocked by the character as played by Yates.

Lord Place, the agent of disruption, became disruption personified as played by Charke. The money that isn't there, spent to influence a vote that doesn't matter, is the phantom phallus echoed in gossip about the pregnancy of celebrated castrato Farinelli, or

³⁰ In *Eurydice Hiss'd*, Fielding gives the theater manager a levee like any other Great Man, where he distributes promises and roles to his numerous sycophants.

³¹ Charke "treated audiences to hilarious mimickry of her father's mannerisms" (Battestin 193).

Faribelly, the strange Man-Woman that they say is with child” (II, 13).³² The male/female binary fails to account for this creature who wields enormous power over the public. Neither does Campbell’s thesis that the castrato, like the transvestite and the masquerader, presents primarily a disruption of “signification in a system of gender oppositions” (21). Campbell’s reading of these disruptive figures rightly turns on Fielding’s fascination with “metaphors of theater (and of costume, masking, and disguise),” but she argues for replacing the male/female opposition with an inner identity/outward behavior one, lumping all the confusions of disguise safely together.³³ Writing with a view toward the interiority of the novels, she resolves the unresolvable excess of theatricality into a simple disguise of a truer, singular essence. While Fielding’s satires certainly do not question the expected social dominance of men, his plays use inversions and subversions of the gender binary, as with all binaries, to figure specifically the failure of order, not to lament or suggest an alternate order.

Campbell and Terry Castle both point to Fielding’s disgusted fascination with the castrato, transvestite, and masquerader as a deeply conservative and jealous defense of male privilege. Such figures take to themselves a power artificially and deceitfully obtained. Beyond questions of gendered specificity, Fielding’s ire is raised by what he saw as illegitimate power, in Cibber as well as in Farinelli, but also in Walpole and other

³² Anti-opera writers frequently intermingled anxieties about foreignness, money, and sexuality (both the questionable sexuality of the castrato and the overheated lasciviousness opera was thought to inspire in women) in their satires. Jill Campbell writes that the satires imply that “the stability of currency’s value rests on the stability of gender categories: as long as a castrato stays at least ‘half a Man,’ his value insures the value of his subscribers’ investment, and only the proof of his possession of a penis, even a castrated one, can provide that insurance” (34). She sees the castrato and the transvestite as emblematic of similar instabilities (37).

³³ As I argue in the Introduction, I believe not only that the novel-reading sensibility limits our understanding of the plays, but also that a more thorough understanding of the plays can enrich our readings of the novels. No doubt the interior/exterior opposition of Campbell’s thesis is central to Fielding’s novels, but so is the publicity of behavior, settings of scenes, and responsible readerly engagement.

“manly” men. Farinelli was performing in London during the run of *Pasquin*, and many “patriotic” writers objected to the enormous sums of money the Italian singer was making, as if he were conning the British public.³⁴ The subversive gender representations (of Farinelli and of Charke’s characters) characterize the power, not of maleness nor of money, but of the accumulation and manipulation of money, the withholding it from circulation. Instead of signifying circulation and reproduction, the faux phallus represents tyranny.

The marital dynamics of the Mayor’s family also reflect the struggle over the phallus as one between natural dominance and unnatural tyranny, both in the family and in the state. The Mayor’s wife, charmed by Lord Place’s talk of lace, *ridottos*,³⁵ and the *beau monde*, wants her husband to vote Court. Their verbal battles quickly take on sexual, and then violent overtones. Mrs. Mayoress wishes women could vote. “[W]e should have a fine Set of Members then, indeed,” the Mayor wryly observes, viewing her “political” intervention as a salacious lusting after the members of men (II, 15). Once Charke took the role, the Mayor’s comment evoked other meanings—that Parliament should then be full of members as substantial as the member Lord Place has in his “empty hand,” and that should the women make the decisions, the men would be bereft of the phallic power, left with no “members” at all.

³⁴ *Pasquin*’s Epilogue warns opera singers with this address to the audience “With soft *Italian* Notes indulge your Ear;/ But let those Singers, who are bought so dear,/ Learn to be civil for their Cheer at least;/ Nor use like Beggars those who give the Feast” (italics reversed 14-17). See also Hogarth’s “Masquerades ad Operas” (1724), in which devils lead a fashionable crowd into the New Theatre at the Haymarket, an opera house where Count Heidegger held his masquerades. The flag before the establishment illustrates several Englishmen begging the Italian singers to take their £8,000. Anti-opera writers, like Steele, had long imagined the singers building large estates in Italy and laughing at the stupidity of the English who funded them. Much the same was said of Walpole’s enormous estate at Houghton, which he bragged had cost him well over £200,000. Edward Harley, Lord Oxford, said of the house when it was nearly complete in 1735 that “there is a very great expense without either judgement or taste” (Wilson and Mackley 88).

³⁵ An Italian word for a masquerade in use after 1727, when George II reluctantly condemned the masquerade assemblies (Castle 95).

Mrs. Mayoress ends the scene with the couplet: "I'll teach Mankind, while Policy they boast, /They bear the Name of Power, we rule the Roast" (II, 16).³⁶ The man has only the name of power. Mrs. Mayoress reasons with her husband, threatens him, and finally beats him: "I tell you, you must vote for my lord and the colonel, or I'll make the house too hot to hold you... I am too reasonable a Woman, and have used gentle Methods too long; but I'll try others. [*Goes to a Corner of the Stage, and takes a Stick*]" (II, 20). The power struggle and the violence, both typical farce characteristics, also signal the scene's enactment of skimmington.³⁷ The trope of skimmington, used in literature from Jonson to Swift, theatrically enacts a reversal of the domestic hierarchy as community disturbance, or rather, enacts the community's theatrical response to the disruptive family by caricaturing it.

Once a village ritual regulating marital behavior, the skimmington had become an urban, political phenomenon by the early 1700s.³⁸ Dressing as the powerful Lady Skimmington, apprentices and other workers took to the London streets to protest against

³⁶ The phrase, which had long meant the control of the household economy, began to transform into the now more familiar "rule the roost" at least by 1768.

³⁷ As in *The Welsh Opera*, "Where the grey mare is the better horse, the horse is but an ass." Such a "greedy" desire for "vast dominion" signals to audiences a skimmington topos. Called charivari on the continent, and occasionally shivaree or rough music in England, the skimmington was "a deeply-rooted cultural form" in the central districts of England (Underdown 178). The Mayor and Mayoress echo Mr. and Mrs. Otter in *Epicoene*, who are both target and enactment of the skimmington torturing the bridegroom Morose with "rough music."

³⁸ Ingram notes that "a political flavour was sometimes present even in charivaris ostensibly concerned with domestic situations. Conceivably the parades of armed men and presentations of legal forms were deliberate parodies, implying that Jack was as good as his master ... ridings were particularly zestful if the victim happened to occupy some position of authority, and such demonstrations were open to the charge of anti-authoritarian ... intentions" (Ingram 90-91). Thompson discusses varieties that closely resemble the formally organized masquerades "By the seventeenth century [the Horn Fair] had become an annual carnival... In the eighteenth century it was proclaimed by printed summonses... Attendance at this supposedly licentious and bacchanalian event was not confined to the plebs – young patricians also might come, masked and in transvestite disguise – and all the symbolic vocabulary of 'skimmingtons' and cuckoldry was kept vigorously alive" (484).

Dissenters, labor conditions, tollbooths, the Gin Act, and more.³⁹ Lady Skimmington had more influence and muscle than either a man or a woman could. S/he was, in Garber's formulation of the transvestite, an insistence on the human overflow of the binary. In the cross-dressing, in the name of Lady Skimmington, the rioter appropriated the history and the enormous social force of the skimmington ritual, as well as the anonymity of law and of disguise. During these years, and in response to these riots, Parliament passed the Black Act, which made rioting in disguise a capital offence. Nonetheless, Lady Skimmington outlived the enclosure and wheat riots of the seventeenth century and appeared at the head of community protests of more and less violence well into the eighteenth century.

Lady Skimmington is neither male nor female but is rather plural. Unidentifiable, unindividual, s/he is out of the reach of the law. In the cross-dressing and in the name, s/he contained multitudes, as s/he was the whole community in a purely oral version of a public sphere. The funeral parades for Queen Gin, in 1736, in protest of Walpole's effort to restrict the consumption of gin by the poor with the Gin Act, were a variety of the skimmington and demonstrate the ubiquitousness of cross-dressing as political statement. The cross-dressed figure which began as a domestic disruption became the entire political sphere. As the skimmington makes clear via its visual theatricality, family politics *are* state politics. "You pretend to be afraid of your Liberties and your Properties," Mrs. Mayoress says of the voters, "—You are afraid of your Wives and Daughters" (II, 15). Especially, perhaps, when those wives and daughters donned trousers in popular parodies.

³⁹ Davis, 148-9; Thompson 476-531.

The threat of violence and tyranny, which is the basis of the Country party's objection to a standing army, is ever-present within the household and within the nation.

The entire Act, Trapwit assures his spectators, "gives you to understand that we are all under Petticoat Government" (II, 16). The satire ostensibly targets Queen Caroline, who had enormous influence over her husband. Her unnatural aggressiveness feminizes the King.⁴⁰ In these years though, the mention of petticoat government had a double effect, for though Caroline decided what the King would think, Walpole was said to decide what Caroline would think.⁴¹ Again, one seems to be presented with a simple opposition (Queen/King, Female/Male), yet a third disrupts that simplicity. If Walpole is beneath Caroline's petticoat, and it is really Walpole who controls the king, then "petticoat government" is a term for the transgressive power wielded by a common man in the guise of a royal woman, as much as the power wielded by a woman over a man. The figure of Lady Skimmington is a useful illustration of this dynamic and its domestic origins. The woman's body is the fiction, the disguise, the conduit through which power is manipulated. Lord Place, who acts through Mrs. Mayoress to effect his own wishes to the detriment of the community, parallels Walpole. Charke, playing Lord Place, reenacts the conduit yet again, as Walpole and Place are both signified through her female body.

To those spectators who picked up the direct allusions to skimmington (rather than the general dynamic), which Charke's casting would have strengthened,

⁴⁰ As King Arthur comments in *Tragedy of Tragedies; or, The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*, "when by force/Or art the wife her husband overreaches,/ Give him the petticoat, her the breeches" (I.3). "In the case of anti-Hanoverian demonstrations, the symbols of charivari would no doubt seem particularly appropriate; for, as one Hertfordshire individual expressed it in 1716, George I could be seen as 'a damned cuckoldy rogue and a dog... [who] had banished his wife for making him a cuckold,'" unlike his son, George II, who obeyed his wife (Ingram 109).

⁴¹ As court insider John, Lord Hervey wrote in his memoir, it was widely understood that "Sir Robert was the Queen's minister; that whoever he favoured, she distinguished; and whoever she distinguished the King employed" (9).

“Walpole’s” appropriation of a native ritual of community action to his own use and to the detriment of the nation is yet another embezzlement. In its least narrative, least political manifestations, the skimmington was essentially blackmail: “riders” created as much disturbing noise as possible outside the bedroom window of a bridegroom until he paid them to leave. In many ways an inversion of the Wassailing traditions, this originally French ritual seemed native to the English by the early seventeenth century. While the dynamic replicates that of Lady Skimmington, the power acting through Lady Skimmington acts on behalf of and for the benefit of community harmony and stability, whereas Place/Walpole’s actions benefit himself and his followers, and allow for financial disproportions and concentrations of power. Evoking and perverting skimmington, Fielding allows the “ideal” traditional community action to stand beside the degraded “public” vote that denies the community self-determination and disrupts the town’s internal harmonies.

When in an earlier scene Mrs. Mayoress calls Lord Place a “Human Creature,” verbally paired with the “strange Man-Woman” Farinelli (II, 13), the effect is not Place as a woman or as an emasculated man, but as a something both/neither, much like Lady Skimmington. Place is the highest-ranking man on stage, finally the representative of the district, and a member of the party in power. With all the ambiguities of his moneyless bribes, his insubstantial “places,” and his empty trousers, he is undoubtedly the Great Man. Charke as Place is, like credit or fame, the embodiment of power as nothing but power itself.⁴² Place is powerful *because* there is no there there.

⁴² “One of the cultural functions of the transvestite is precisely to mark this kind of displacement, substitution, or slippage... The transvestite is both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification. It points toward itself—or, rather, toward the place where it is not. The transvestite ... is there and gone at once” (Garber 36-7).

Prime Minister Theatrical

Pleased with the enhanced political coloring the role of Place took on once Charke was cast, Fielding wrote similarly manipulative male characters for her to play in his final plays. These roles, Mr. Hen and Mr. Spatter, frequently pass under the critical radar as relatively apolitical, and have been understood as relatively insignificant theatrical burlesque. Neither are lead roles. Both contribute to scenes not explicitly political, parts of larger satires that contain more evident representations of Walpole. However, both roles are strikingly similar to Lord Place. Both manipulate people and money, both are cynically aware of the workings of power, and both corrupt the public “voice.”

Debuting in March of 1737, *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* ran for thirty-six nights.⁴³ Enemies claimed Fielding was turning the stage into “a private Looking-Glass, where Spleen, Resentment, and inconsiderate Levity, displays Objects without any Regard to Truth, Decency, Good Manners or true Judgment” (*The Daily Gazetteer* May 7, 1737) and his friends considered it a judicious exposure of Walpole’s venality. Fielding wrote in his own defense that he had intended to “shew the several Obstructions to a proper exerting [of Patriotism]; and that Corruption alone is equal to all the rest” (*Common Sense* May 21, 1737).⁴⁴ Battestin calls it “the brashest of all his political dramas” (217) and it unequivocally made the Haymarket “a focus of boisterous opposition gaiety” (Loftis 136). *The Historical Register* does not comply at all with

⁴³ Its final performance was on May 23. On May 20, the bill that would become the Licensing Act added censorship to the more economically motivated restriction of performance to the two patent houses. See Appleton’s Introduction. See also Loftis, 139-142. It is likely that Fielding halted the performances in order not to exacerbate what he now saw was a seriously dangerous climate for satirical farce.

⁴⁴ In Paulson and Lockwood *Critical Heritage* 104.

formal expectations, being composed of six unconnected scenes. Two of the six, the first and last, display political machinations; another set of two ridicules the tastes, values, and venality of the world of “fashion;” and the last set parodies the talents and pretensions of Colley Cibber and his son Theophilus, and through them the state of the “legitimate” stage.

The two middle scenes tend to be overlooked, yet in them we see the same passion for manipulation and accumulation, the same mercenary pollutions of social commerce, of which the Walpole and Cibber administrations stood accused. These feature “the ladies in council” and a society auction. In them the passion for opera—in particular, the literal, sexual passion of the ladies for castrati—parallels the community distaste for such items as Modesty, Political Honesty, and Patriotism. Without even the pretence of a narrative, the play proclaims itself irregular while damning all “regular” plays, political or not, as submissive to the Walpole government.

As in *The Beggar’s Opera* and *The Grub-Street Opera*, the Ladies’ Council scene has more of a mercantile tint than an amorous one. Author and actress Eliza Haywood was typecast and played one of the ladies, a sexually insatiable woman, desiring to have Farinelli’s babies (whether wax or live) despite her husband’s objections. Haywood frequently played herself, or rather, played her public persona in both its ideal and crude versions.⁴⁵ In *Eurydice Hiss’d*, the afterpiece to *Historical Register*, Haywood played the Muse, a flesh-and-blood woman in the style of the romance heroine who also seems to echo Pope’s insinuation of prostitution in *The Dunciad*: “Are not thou conscious of the wrongs I bear/ Neglected, slighted for a fresher Muse?/ I, whose fond heart too easily did

⁴⁵ See Chapter 3.

yield/ My virgin joys and honor to thy arms/ And bore thee *Pasquin*" (224-228). The tailoring of these roles to play up Haywood's reputation is evidence that the relationship between the public history of the actor and her role had great audience appeal.

The ladies all pine for Farinelli, but shift easily into desiring to acquire his babies, however made, at whatever price. The concern with production and reproduction reiterates the constant anxiety that commerce is subsuming art.⁴⁶ One lady wishes to fill her coach with the babies, but the impossible babies are as unable to "fill" a coach as the castrated male would be to fulfill her desire. "[T]he sweet extraordinary voice of Farinelli that is said to have ravished the heart of every woman in his audience manifested precisely his inability to ravish a woman physically, the puzzle of his sexuality" (Campbell 29); this ambiguity made him ungraspable, which increased his market value. The consumer desire for material accumulation (to purchase an excessive number of "babies") displaces the proper sexual and financial economies of the family. "If my husband was to make any objection to my having 'em," boasts the First Lady, "I'd run away from him and take the dear babies with me" (II.35-6).

In a parallel to the ladies' proud sexual dishonesty, the first item on the block at Medley's allegorical auction is "A most curious remnant of political honesty" (II.i.79). The cloth "will make you a very good cloak. You see it's both sides alike, so you may turn it as often as you will" yet Mr. Hen the auctioneer has all he can do to coax a bid of five pounds (II.i.138-141). He calls it curious and a curiosity several times, trying to stir interest in it by virtue of its rarity, if nothing else, but to his assembled buyers (who include the council of ladies), it's simply a leftover scrap of little value. Although

⁴⁶ Just as Miss Stitch and Miss Mayoress are consumers of the newspapers, accumulating opinions like accessories, these ladies consume culture, careless of the quality of the music (or singer). Both are what Habermas called "culture consumers" (168) rather than participants in a rational-critical discourse.

Medley claims that his jokes “lie pretty deep... and may escape observation from a moderate understanding, unless very closely attended to” (II.73-75), they lie not so deep. Medley/Fielding succinctly illustrates the current state of English politics and the meaningless flexibility of the term (political honesty) itself. Other unwanted lots include three grains of modesty, a bottle of courage, and all the cardinal virtues—qualities disregarded in contemporary society.

As with the political honesty, the most important items from the “catalogue of curiosities” on exhibit are cloth, clothing, or makeup. Castle writes of Fielding’s preoccupation with disguise, noting that “the masque is Fielding’s metaphor ... for moral dissimulation and chicanery, the ‘*Art of Thriving*’ through deception. The hypocrite imposes on others, he suggests, by affecting the ‘garments’ of innocence” (“Matters not Fit” 77). To entice his buyers, Hen stresses the items’ ability to conceal the wearer’s true thoughts, feelings, or actions. The modesty and the clean conscience, in particular, provide screens behind which women and men can shamelessly pursue their desires. Mrs. Screen, played by Haywood, displays the most interest in those two items.⁴⁷ Disguise and costume pervade this scene, and this play, in other ways.⁴⁸ Theatricality, in this sense, brings out the wrong-ness of things—their artificiality, their deceit, their distance from realities of life. The theatrically perverse, like Farinelli’s babies, permeates the play, from its theatrical politics to its political theatrics. The name “Mr. Hen,” already

⁴⁷ Walpole was satirically known as the Skreen-Master General, referring to his ability to screen friends and useful acquaintances from prosecution.

⁴⁸ Revivals frequently advertised that they were being played “with new clothes.” Costumes were crucial to a theater’s success, not primarily for their contribution to “realism” but rather for their sensational draw. Fielding himself mocks the convention in an advertisement in 1736 for *Pasquin* that “The Cloaths are old, but the Jokes intirely new” (qtd. in Battestin 193).

hermaphroditical, was more so for contemporaries; the character is a parody of Christopher Cock,⁴⁹ and was performed by Charlotte Charke in trousers.

Other than its play with costume and disguise, the auction scene is the only one in *The Historical Register* that doesn't explicitly exhibit politics or theater and so is most resistant to simplification. The richness of the scene lies in what is neither concealed nor conveyed by costume or trousers, in the ambiguity paradoxically on display (like the performing castrato). Spectators knew that Hen represents Christopher Cock and that Hen was played by a woman who was not only cockless but also Colley Cibber's daughter and Theophilus Cibber's sister, and whose own name—Charke, pronounced “Cawk”—was a near homonym to Cock.⁵⁰

Although the part of Hen was clearly written for an actress dressed in trousers, highlighting the deceit of costume (a woman in trousers, a courtier wearing the “cloak” of political honesty) and pointing particularly to the absent Cock, there are no jokes or allusions to his sexual abilities, his courage, his own clothing, or his position of power vis-à-vis other men. Quite to the contrary, Mr. Hen manipulates the value of the items bought and sold, controls the bidding, and so controls the exchange of money. He is identified by his ability to control public perception and thereby monetary worth.

Hen is something like a puppet-master, like Luckless in *The Author's Farce*, directing the people assembled before him.⁵¹ He speaks from his own small stage out

⁴⁹ Auctioneer Christopher Cock “founded the first auction house in London... [He] allegedly cut the heads out of some Raphael cartoons he was ‘restoring’... and sold them separately to others... Hogarth was not alone in damning his sales as stacked with forgeries and blatant copies” (Uglow 78).

⁵⁰ In this way theater, especially farce, banks on what Steven Mullaney has called the “vast memory system” of the community (quoted in Backscheider 37).

⁵¹ Fielding returned to the analogy of statesman and puppet-master or stage manager frequently, most emphatically in *Jonathan Wild*, written around this time though not published until after 1743. The Great Man “doth indeed, in this GRAND DRAMA, rather perform the part of the prompter, and doth instruct the

toward spectators and bidders, audience and actors, himself performing and causing them to perform. When Lord Dapper, one of the observers in (and of) *Historical Register*, gets caught up and bids for “interest at court,” the audience has become the manipulated “actors” under Hen’s control. No events curtail or compromise his power, which is both unnatural and ungraspable. The space between on-stage and off-stage worlds is appropriately narrow for a set of plays that use theatrical satire as a method of political satire. The slippage between the spaces, which the transvestic figure of Charke facilitates, connects the disparate scenes of *Historical Register*. That figure also connects the afterpiece *Eurydice Hiss’d* to the mainstage *Historical Register* and is crucial to the shorter farce’s complex doubles and displacements.

Eurydice Hiss’d was not only the afterpiece to *The Historical Register*, but was presented almost as an extension of it. Though it appeared once or twice earlier in the month, only once it was paired with *The Historical Register* did it become an “immediate and unequivocal” success (Appleton xii), and the two were published together in May of that year.⁵² Moreover, it had much the same cast, which is perhaps not surprising for a theater with a small company, but still reinforces the themes of the earlier play. Not only did Charke play two men, Eliza Haywood, the licentious Mrs. Screen of the first play, was the licentious Muse of the second, and Mr. Roberts, who played Medley (Fielding’s

well-drest figures, who are strutting in public on the stage, what to say and do. To say truth, a puppet-show will illustrate our meaning better, where it is the master of the show (the great man) who dances and moves everything, whether it be the King of Muscovy or whatever other potentate *alias* puppet which we behold on the stage; but he himself keeps wisely out of sight: for, should he once appear, the whole motion would be at an end. Not that anyone is ignorant of his being there, or supposes that the puppets are not mere sticks of wood, and he himself the sole mover; but as this (though everyone knows it) doth not appear visibly, i.e. to their eyes, no one is ashamed of consenting to be imposed upon; of helping on the drama, by calling the several sticks or puppets by the names which the master hath allotted to them, and by assigning to each the character which the great man is pleased they shall move in, or rather in which he himself is pleased to move them” (154).

⁵² Contemporaries treated the two plays together, as they had treated the two parts of *Pasquin* together.

“Author”) in the former play was Pillage (Spatter’s “Author”) in the latter. Spatter, the playwright, thanks Lord Dapper for staying to hear his rehearsal. “I hope it will please your Lordship as well as Mr. Medley’s comedy has, for I assure you ‘tis ten times as ridiculous” (2-4). As a rehearsal play, it has an inner and an outer play, but the inner play itself has an inner play. Fielding’s *Eurydice Hiss’d* is the rehearsal of Spatter’s *Eurydice Hiss’d*, which tells the story of the failure of Pillage’s *Eurydice*. Spatter’s play narrates his own previous failure. “I fancy, Mr. Sourwit, you will allow I have chose this subject very cunningly, for as the town have damned my play for their own sakes, they will not damn the damnation of it” (13-16). But *Eurydice*, the innermost fictional play, was also a real play by Fielding which had failed at Drury Lane earlier in the year. There are, correspondingly, three playwrights: Henry Fielding; Spatter, the author of the play being rehearsed; and Pillage, the author whose play (*Eurydice*) is being performed *in* the play being rehearsed. All three are (and aren’t) Fielding.

Though Pillage is a caricature of Fielding, he gets there only through Spatter, and Spatter was played by Charlotte Charke. Going through Charke allows Fielding to build on the earlier two Walpolian manipulators she had played for him, so that in the displacement from Fielding to Pillage, the playwright/manager becomes a thief and a cheat of the public.⁵³ Once he has obtained the promises of friends, employees, unemployed actors, and other sycophants to applaud his farce especially when spectators hiss, Pillage triumphs; “Then I defy the town, if by my friends,/ Against their liking, I support my farce,/ And fill my loaded pockets with their pence” (122-124). The caricature of Fielding’s failed play is transformed by the manipulating figure of Charlotte

⁵³ Charke had also read the “Prologue” to Medley’s “Historical Register,” a parody of the Poet Laureate, so the Charke-Cibber-Walpole connection was already explicitly articulated.

Charke, as Spatter, as the brazenly self-promoting sellout, into a satire of Walpole's failed 1733 Excise bill.⁵⁴ Fielding could only transfer the critique from himself to Walpole via that already transgressive, already politicized, already overdetermined figure of Charke-in-trousers.

Pillage, transparently the manipulative manager/Great Man Cibber/Walpole, does everything to ensure the success of his farce except make it worth succeeding. "The trifling offspring of an idle hour," the play is only an excuse to take the people's money (231). Likewise, Spatter tells us, "Wolsey's self, that mighty minister,/... Was but perhaps the author of a farce,/Perhaps a damned one too. 'Tis all a cheat,/ Some men play little farces and some great" (44, 47-49). Fielding attributes the farce's failure and the bill's failure to the people's righteous outrage at the attempted swindle. Honestus, the one honest man who refuses to be bought, stands in for the entire audience, and through them, the English people. Fielding neatly figures the three forces Habermas sees in balance in coffee-house culture. The public voice declaims against government venality and refuses to be cheated. Commercial forces reinforce the public judgment, so that the theater/country profits by their approval and loses money by their disapproval. The state and the market try to connive against the public interest, but the public stands vigilant.

Yet just as the periodical scene in *Pasquin* critiques the possibility of an ideal rational-critical discourse, the figure of Charke as Spatter (the playwright) cynically lays a Machiavellian film over the Habermasian balance. The extent to which the English people are the heroes of the inner fiction remains a transparent fiction, for in the "real"

⁵⁴The bill would have established a new tax on wine and tobacco. Goldgar writes "As the *Gazetteer* pointed out (4 June 1737), the 'Drift of the Allegory throughout, is too plain to be mistaken'; in his diary the earl of Egmont both interpreted correctly the allusions to Walpole's most notorious defeat and reported that the prince applauded vigorously at the 'strong passages,' 'especially when in favour of liberty'" (155).

world, Spatter/Walpole continues to hold the strings. The apology he offers at the outset (“like a good pious criminal, [I] rejoice that in being put to shame [I] make some atonement for [my] sins” [22]) is too patently opportunistic, so that his symbolic self-abasement, drawing the curtain on a drunk and ruined Pillage, returns him to the audience’s good graces without actually atoning for the earlier manipulation. That is, he atones for the earlier play with another manipulation.

Charke too repeats her manipulations from the earlier play—from *The Historical Register*. Again she plays a “real” man (Christopher Cock in the former, Henry Fielding in the latter), again the character she plays trades England’s virtues for an evening’s pleasure and manipulates his audience for financial gain, as she as an actress did. As an embodied fraud, Charke emphasized Spatter’s fraudulent claims. Although both plays contain caricatures of Cibber, it is rather her ability to stand outside accepted categories, her ability to stand *for* that which was outside those categories, that Fielding exploits. In that space of possibility, the terrifying enormity of state corruption could come to fruition in its human and artistic embodiments. It is the same space in which public opinion could be an equal and opposing force; Fielding presents the space and offers paradigms for both its positive and negative use. Through Charke, Fielding challenges the public to make its voice heard.

The critic Sowrwit, in *The Historical Register*, appeals to his companion Lord Dapper for moral reform in the theater.

I wish your Lordship would think it worth your consideration, as the morals of a people depend, as has been so often and well proved, entirely on their public diversions, it would be of great consequence, that those of

the sublimest kind should meet with your Lordship's and the rest of the nobility's countenance. (I.264-69)

But Lord Dapper does not think it worth his consideration. His aristocratic status does not compensate for his vanity and lack of judgment but rather compounds their negative effect on the world. His "luxury, effeminacy and debauchery" render him completely unable to "reform the age," and unwilling to give any consideration to the morals of the people (II.25-24, I.254-5). But the real mistake is Sowrwit's, in looking to the stupid, vain aristocrat for the salvation of London's aesthetics, morals, and politics. He thinks Lord Dapper must be an example, must be seen to have better taste than he does; he appeals to the power of spectacle, not of reason, or discourse, or well-informed reading.⁵⁵

More to the point, the once and future law student in Fielding may well have felt that the morals of a people should never depend "entirely on their public diversions." Rather, public diversions reflect the people who patronize them, much as Lord Dapper prefers a playhouse with enough looking-glasses that one may see one's self. To Dapper the theater is a place to display status, not to learn or teach morals. Its politics provides an opportunity for a spectator to showcase his own wit, not to change his thinking, or his world. On a simple level, of course, farce ridicules vice and foolishness by providing a "mirror" for spectators: "Some follies scarce perceptible appear/In that just glass which shows you as you are./But Farce still claims a magnifying right/To raise the object larger to the sight" (Fielding *The Lottery* Prologue). But in the mirror of Fielding's political

⁵⁵ This recalls Habermas's concept of representative publicness by which monarchs inscribed their authority through pageantry, processions and other self-displays, a theatrical manipulation somewhat worn and obvious in 1737. See Backscheider 5-22 and 34-66 for discussion of how Charles II attempted to reinscribe his authority theatrically, and the politically resistant theatrics with which some segments of the populace responded.

farces, a society in turmoil saw its own judicious outrage at the vices and follies of the state and theater administrations.

The difference between a theater that influences its public and one that reflects the feelings or gives voice to its public is an important one, one rarely articulated by contemporaries or scholars but at the heart of the question of Fielding's responsibility for the Licensing Act. Although the former sense, that theater exerts an almost physical influence over the minds and morals of spectators, predominated during the early eighteenth century, the latter, modern sense was dawning, perhaps facilitated by the increasingly self-conscious public sphere fostered by the coffee houses. In the exchange between Sowrwit and Dapper, Fielding shows both a passively influenced and a passively reflected audience as insufficient and frivolous, opening instead a space for the stage as an *expression* of its audience, as "directed" by its purchasing power.

That such an audience was at the same time a publicly acting political body Fielding makes explicit in *Jonathan Wild*, an early novel written during these same volatile years though published only after Walpole's retirement.⁵⁶ While the actor on the "stage of the world" manipulates people as a puppet master manipulates puppets, audiences/publics pretend to believe the illusion.

Not that anyone is ignorant of his being there ... but as this (though everyone knows it) doth not appear visibly, i.e. to their eyes, no one is ashamed of consenting to be imposed upon ... It would be to suppose thee, gentle reader, one of very little knowledge in this world, to imagine thou hast never seen some of these puppet-shows which are so frequently acted

⁵⁶ Battestin 281.

on the great stage;... if thou hast any penetration, thou must have had some occasions to admire both the solemnity of countenance in the actor and the gravity in the spectator, while some of those farces are carried on which are acted almost daily in every village in the kingdom. He must have a very despicable opinion of mankind indeed who can conceive them to be imposed on as often as they appear to be so. The truth is, they are in the same situation with the readers of romances; who, though they know the whole to be one entire fiction, nevertheless agree to be deceived; and, as these find amusement, so do the others find ease and convenience in this concurrence. (154-5)

So long as an audience is passive it will be a passive public. An audience/public may collude with their own degradation out of convenience, but they may not make the excuse of ignorance. Fielding, who had developed the public's sense of itself as an active vocal body through all of his Haymarket farces, articulates the potential social power of such a public. It was their sense of this public and active role of the audience that led opponents of the Stage Licensing Act to fear that new law would lead to restrictions on the freedom of the press. The fact that it did not returns us to the particularly theatrical elements of these farces as the source of their danger and returns us as well to the transvested Charlotte Charke.

The discomfort that the ambiguity of such a figure arouses serves to amplify Fielding's critique of power. Embedded within a partisan satire and a set of allusions to communal cultural experiences, it was widely applauded on the Haymarket stage. In order to allow for interpretation, for metaphor, in order to create the "space of possibility"

Garber attributes to the transvestite, the satirical stage advances a deliberate artifice, a self-conscious disguising. The artificial alerts the audience to “other” meanings beneath and between surfaces, and their collective translation, in the playhouse and afterwards in society, generates “public opinion.” The emphasis thus on the theatrical, on the costume, and on the playacting within a satire of power and privilege becomes the source of a social critique of government deceit. But without the knowing wink supplied by the frame of the stage and public performance, cross-dressing loses that charge. In the “real world,” Charke’s gender bending was not political or socially tolerated or financially profitable; she became a social outcast and an outlaw. In order to be a genuinely public figure, Lady Skimmington must perform for—both before and as representative of—the entire community. Without the assent of the communal public voice, Charke’s cross-dressing lost its “third term” power of disruption and was reduced to the foibles of a private (though in other senses very public) woman. Like Fielding’s farces seen only in the sober light of print, she would become only a slightly embarrassing footnote to an otherwise respectable decade.

Afterpiece: Punch in Petticoats

In many ways the history I have related in the preceding pages has been a story of recycling. Gay borrowed from Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* when he wrote his *Three Hours After Marriage* and the theater managers excerpted its most ridiculous scene and turned it into an entr'acte dance; Fielding's *The Author's Farce* concludes in a puppet show, "The Pleasures of the Town," which was performed separately for several decades; "The Roast Beef of Old England" was written for the revision of a popular farce, and debuted in a third; Fielding's last new farce *Eurydice Hiss'd* pretends to reinterpret the events of an earlier one. *The Beggar's Opera*, itself a collection of tunes and metaphors already current, was reincarnated in prints, souvenirs, local productions, a sequel, and dozens of imitations. These are only the appropriations and re-uses most thoroughly discussed in this work; the performance history is rife with borrowings, adaptations, allusions, and transformations. This is one of the ways farce as a form spreads through a culture and defies authority, and when, as in the decades of this study, the theatrical culture is already politicized, each restaging of the ideas enhances them and encourages other revisions.

I have argued that Walpole's prohibition of *Polly* was in large part an effort to end the regeneration of *The Beggar's Opera* and that the Licensing Act of 1737 was a similar—but more successful—effort to kill the form of satirical farce altogether by interrupting its accumulation of meaning. Political farce was effectively hobbled by the law, and later theatrical efforts by both Fielding and Charlotte Charke illustrate this revealingly. One of the plays Fielding wrote for Drury Lane, *The Covent-Garden*

Tragedy, is a perfect case-study for a brief review of the causes and effects of the Licensing Act.

The Covent-Garden Tragedy (1732) was overwhelmed by negative press at its debut, and the managers announced after three nights that it would be “Acted no more, both the Author and the Actors being unwilling to continue any Piece contrary to the Opinion of the Town” (advertisement cited in *London Stage* II.223). A reviewer for the anti-ministerial *Grub Street Journal*, whose tone is representative, called it “only the dull representation of the most obscene characters in life” (June 8, 1732). Yet despite what seemed to be universal distaste, the play was revived with considerable success by Theophilus Cibber’s rebel troupe at the Haymarket in 1734, running for two weeks. Its next significant revival/regeneration was in 1738, when Charlotte Charke opened a fashionable puppet theater at the Tennis Court at St. James, for which she had had the puppets’ faces carved to resemble particular live actors. In her production of the play, she not only returned to the original cross-casting of the lead villainess, but entered puppetry history by casting Punch in the role, it being the first time he appeared in petticoats. She seems to have met with tolerable success, but her theater failed. It may have been that the profits could not make up for the enormous expense (£500) of setting up such an unusual puppet company, or it may have been, as she suggests in her *Narrative*, that the physical exertion of running the business and performing as all of the puppets each night was too great.¹ Her example was at any rate successful enough that when Fielding too set up a puppet show theater, under the name Madame De La Nash, he also cast Punch as Mother Punchbowl, and also met with modest success, though not

¹ See Speight 102-105; Shershow 157-159; Charke 75.

enough to encourage him. After two months, and at the close of his *Covent-Garden Tragedy*, Fielding left his puppet theater to other hands.²

The varying fates of the play help us to articulate the importance of many of the tropes this work has traced through twenty years, as well as the success of the Licensing Act in limiting their political effectiveness. The characters—and their author—were too “low” for the first audiences; it became a two-layer theatrical burlesque in its second production; and it became a commentary on Walpole’s Licensing Act itself in its final incarnation. Yet this last clever representation was itself illegal and presented to a limited number of spectators. With an audience no longer representative of the public, no longer large enough for spectators to feel a relatively anonymous part of a larger whole, the play could not have the effect Fielding’s late Haymarket farces had.

Like *Three Hours After Marriage*, the original production of *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* was met with outraged reviews representing the town as offended. Its hostile reception, again like that of the earlier play, was partly due to the personalities involved. We noted, when discussing Colley Cibber and *Three Hours After Marriage*, that the problem wasn’t the vulgarity of certain productions but of the producers. Fielding’s early successes, *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, *The Author’s Farce*, and *The Welsh Opera*, were all produced with the random actors and other materials available at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, safely confined to the irregular, outlaw, “low.” *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* came with Fielding to the established, licensed and patented Theatre Royal at Drury Lane. What offended was that the farce-writer, who Cibber would later call a “broken Wit,” was rising to displace mainstays of the regular stage (*Apology* I.286). In a fictional criticism appended to the publication of the play, Fielding suggests that envy and

² See Battestin 439.

personal animosity were the primary causes of the negative reaction in the journals. “The success of *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and the *Modern Husband*,” writes his critic-persona, “did not only determine me to draw my pen against those two performances, but hath likewise engaged my criticism on every thing which comes from the hands of that author, of whatever nature it be” (105). The “critic” of this Scriblerian Prolegomena, like the “critics” Gay answers in his Introduction to *The What D'ye Call It* and like Sir Tremendous in *Three Hours*, objects to the impropriety of its adjectives and the absurdity of its metaphors, his insistence on correctness exposing a pedantic ignorance. Like Gay, Fielding characterizes his enemies as only capable of seeing the lower elements and too stupid to comprehend a larger purpose.

Theophilus’s subsequent success with the “obscene” play in 1734 becomes more understandable, especially as Fielding’s more daring and popular productions were associated with the Haymarket, where his troupe performed. He staged *Covent-Garden* as the afterpiece to the always successful *Tragedy of Tragedies*. Inasmuch as Drury Lane was the respectable royal theater, the Haymarket was outside the rules of decorum, the aesthetic laws of the stage, because outside the legal license of the stage; irregularity was tolerated there like the vaguely outlawed debtor on Sundays. Moreover, the associations of “Covent Garden” had changed since the play’s debut. The neighborhood had been known mainly for its brothels until John Rich, proprietor of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, moved his company (and patent) to the theater in Covent Garden late in 1732. He financed his new theater largely from the enormous profits he had made producing extravagant pantomimes. The name of the play now called to mind one of the “legitimate” theaters, and its burlesque applied not only to bombastic plays but also to “legitimate” theater as a

concept. When performed by actors who were demanding a legal freedom from an exploitative employer (Drury Lane, the other patent theater), the license that allows theatrical monopolies blends with the license that signals immorality; the theaters are brothels and their masters are bawds. Mother Punchbowl bemoans the loss of the “glorious days” when statesmen and respectable soldiers frequented her house, but in 1734, the reference applies to the house (auditorium) at Covent Garden. In 1749, Fielding began the *Covent Garden Journal*, in which as Sir Alexander Drawcansir, Knt., Censor of Great Britain he judged theatrical, literary, and criminal events, symbolically recognizing the union of them in the London neighborhood.

When Charke produced the play in her puppet theater in 1738, it was an “absolutely dizzying spiral of cultural appropriation” (Shershow 157). It was associated with Cibber’s renegade success and with the theater politics it conveyed then. As proprietor, Charke was inextricably associated with Fielding and the anti-Walpole farces of the two years previous, associated with the cause of the Licensing Act itself, and so not a victim of the law but rather one of its instigators. Casting Punch in her play aligned her with the English tradition of puppetry, not yet confined to children or to the lower classes, but like ballads and roast beef, evocative of a more genuine English culture. Her productions, therefore, especially when added to Fielding’s authorship, suggest an opposition interpretation.

However, just as the gender manipulations of Fielding’s last plays have not been recognized as part of the political disturbance they caused, so too in this production the issues of politics and of the cross-dressed Punch are considered separately. By 1738, the figure of the bawd had come to be one of the symbols of Walpole, with his reputation for

buying and selling people. In 1735 and 1736, the pro-government journal *The Daily Gazetteer* was officially produced by a Mrs. Osborne, but it was widely thought (understood) that Walpole himself funded and controlled the publication. References to Mother Osborne were covert ways of referring to Walpole. Although the original cross-dressing in the Drury Lane production of 1732 would have only emphasized the unfeminine nature of the bawd, the male figure in a dress as Mother Punchbowl in 1738 would evoke Walpole, running his “house” by giving away liquor and favors, buying and selling people for his own profit.

Moreover, as in Charke’s later roles at the Haymarket, Punch’s transvestism here functions as “a powerful agent of destabilization” (Garber 223). With his high squeaky voice and lecherous behavior, he was neither man nor woman, not human yet not object, the “woman” who buys and sells women, the sexless “mother” who exploits her children. This powerful, ungendered figure recalls the ambiguous power Charke herself represented in trousers. Coming from the actress who had embodied cross-dressing as political disruption and the cross-dressed body as Walpole’s corruption, as well as rebellion against her father via rebellion against the state, Punch in petticoats was both the utmost reach of political transvestism and the most complete embodiment of petticoat government.

Punch as Mother Punchbowl also interrupts the verisimilitude otherwise maintained by the other actor/puppets. While each of those resembles a live actor, and recalls the roles that actor played, as well as the role he played in Charke’s *Covent-Garden*, Punch is emphatically inhuman. As such he emphasizes the extent to which the bawd/Walpole’s characteristic behavior demeans those he takes advantage of. He also

undermines the verisimilitude of the other characters, the simple fact of his presence emphasizing the artificiality of the other puppets, regardless of their realistic faces. He highlights the hypocrisy inherent in the burlesque by drawing attention to the mask, just as Fielding heightened artifice in many of his farces, passing over into the completely fantastic at the end of *The Author's Farce* or discarding narrative unity altogether in *The Historical Register*. Like Charke in her onstage sartorial inversion, Punch's dress announces the play's participation in the circulation of tropes through the culture, from village to urban street, from masquerade to periodical and back to the theaters.

Fielding followed Charke's lead in 1748 when, as Madame De la Nash (no longer the Great Mogul, but himself the subversive, law-evading cross dresser) he produced *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* at his own puppet theater. Unlike Charke, he did not obtain a license, and so could not charge admission to his puppet show. To get around the prohibition, Fielding charged only for the tea, coffee, and chocolate he sold, providing the entertainment for free. The pseudonym and the subterfuge called attention to the legal restrictions under which he suffered. Much like the prostitution in the play itself, the legality of "Madame De la Nash's" action wavers in an ambiguous moral-economic dimension, where the profit, not the action, is prohibited.

While Charke's and Fielding's puppetry performances of *Covent-Garden* recalled all the elements that had made the Haymarket productions so successful—aesthetic criticism, cultural satire, cross-dressing, the shadow of the English law that guaranteed "liberty" to all citizens but could easily be evaded or purchased, and the nationalism of such a character as Punch—they had no socio-political effects. More a domestic salon than "public" space, the puppet theaters could only seat a limited number of spectators,

and so could not achieve the sense of plural, public anonymity possible in a theater that seated over a thousand strangers. Madame De la Nash's Breakfast Room was no public space. The ten years between the Licensing Act and Fielding's performance robbed the play of the subtle associations it had accumulated; Punch shows had proliferated, and he performed in petticoats in other plays; Walpole was gone and with him the energy of the opposition and the more subtle associations. Like Charke's failed performance of Macheath in the Women's Condemned Hole, the puppet show could not elicit the kind of public response Fielding expected from theater.

It had not been the tropes themselves but the people among whom they circulated that generated the politics. Those tropes circulated the ideas of a population because they were able to do so in community, national terms—the ballads, the law, the skimmington, roast beef, and Punch—but they relied on the community created in the theaters, that microcosm nearly every prologue writer referred to with pride. The Licensing Act not only silenced a writer of political farces and a location for political farces. It smothered a culture that was reliant on the proliferation and expansion of ideas in the public realm.

Bibliography

Primary Works

- Addison, Joseph, and Richard Steele. *The Spectator*. Ed. Donald F. Bond. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Arbuthnot, John. *The History of John Bull*. Eds. Alan W. Bower and Robert A. Erickson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.
- Behn, Aphra. "The Emperor of the Moon." *Aphra Behn: The Rover and other plays*. Ed. Jane Spencer. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 271-335.
- Breval, Joseph. *The Confederates: A Farce*. Printed as by Mr. Gay, London: Printed for R. Burleigh, 1717.
- Butler, Samuel. *Hudibras*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Charke, Charlotte. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke. Youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.* Ed. Robert Rehder. Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 1999.
- Cibber, Colley. *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber: With an Historical View of the Stage During his Own Time*. Ed. Robert W. Lowe. NY: AMS Press, 1966.
- . *A Letter from Mr. CIBBER to Mr. POPE*. Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1973.
- Durfey, Thomas. *Thomas D'Urfey's The Richmond Heiress, 1693: An Edition with Introduction and Notes*. Ed. Raymond Adam Biswanger. New York: Garland, 1987.
- . *Wit and Mirth: or Pills to Purge Melancholy*. New York: Folklore Library Publishers, Inc., 1959.
- Fielding, Henry. *The Author's Farce*. Ed. Charles B. Woods. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1966.
- . *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, Esq.* Ed. William Ernest Henley. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967.
- . *The Grub-Street Opera*. Ed. Edgar V. Roberts. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1968.
- . *The Historical Register for the Year 1736 and Eurydice Hissed*. Ed. William W. Appleton. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1966.

- . *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*. NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1966.
- . *Pasquin*. Eds O.M. Brack, Jr., William Kupersmith, and Curt A. Zimansky. Iowa City: The U of Iowa, 1973.
- . *Joseph Andrews; with Shamela and related writings: authoritative texts, backgrounds and sources, criticism*. Ed. Homer Goldberg. New York: Norton, 1987.
- . *Tom Jones*. Ed. Sheridan Baker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Gay, John. *Dramatic Works*. Ed. John Fuller. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.
- . *The Poetical Works of John Gay*. London: Oxford UP, 1926.
- Gay, John, Alexander Pope, John Arbuthnot. *Three Hours after Marriage*. With "A LETTER giving an Account of the Origin of the Quarrel between *Cibber*, *Pope*, and *Gay*" Ed. John Harrington Smith. Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1961.
- Haywood, Eliza. *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1979.
- . *Love in Excess*. Ed. David Oakleaf. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1997.
- . *Selected Fiction and Drama of Eliza Haywood*. Ed. Paula R. Backscheider. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Hervey, John. *Lord Hervey's Memoirs*. Ed. Romney Sedgwick. NY: The Macmillan Company, 1963.
- Hogarth, William. *Engravings by Hogarth*. Ed. Sean Shesgreen. NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*. Ed. Donald J. Greene. New Haven: Yale UP, 1958.
- Parker, E. *A Complete KEY to the New Farce, call'd Three Hours after Marriage*. London: Printed by E. Berrington, 1717.
- Pope, Alexander. *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*. Ed. George Sherburn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
- . *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966.
- . *The Poems of Alexander Pope*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963.

Sawney and Colley (1742) And Other Pope Pamphlets. Ed W. Powell Jones. Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1960.

Steele, Richard. *Richard Steele's The Theatre 1720*. Ed. John Loftis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Swift, Jonathan. *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, Vol III*. Ed. Harold Williams. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965.

Secondary Works

Armens, Sven. M. *John Gay: Social Critic*. New York: Octagon Books, 1970.

Ashley, Leonard R. N. *Colley Cibber*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989.

Avery, Emmett L., and Arthur H. Scouten. *The London Stage 1660-1700: A Critical Introduction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968.

Backscheider, Paula R. *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.

---. "The Story of Eliza Haywood's Novels: Caveats and Questions." Saxon and Bocchicchio 19-47.

Balen, Malcom. *A Very English Deceit: The Secret History of the South Sea Bubble and the First Great Financial Scandal*. London: Fourth Estate, 2002.

Ballaster, Ros. "A Gender of Opposition: Eliza Haywood's Scandal Fiction." Saxon and Bocchicchio 143-167.

---. *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Barish, Jonas. *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley: The U of California P, 1981.

Barker, Richard Hindry. *Mr Cibber of Drury Lane*. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966.

Baruth, Phillip, Ed. *Introducing Charlotte Charke: Actress, Author, Enigma*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

---. "Who is Charlotte Charke?" Baruth 10-62.

Battestin, Martin C. and Ruthie R. Battestin. *Henry Fielding: A Life*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Benedict, Barbara M. *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2001.

- Bermel, Albert. *Farce: A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Tr. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1984.
- . "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. 29-73.
- Brewer, David. "'Haywood,' Secret History, and the Politics of Attribution." Saxon and Bocchicchio 217-239.
- British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan*. Eds. George H. Nettleton, Arthur E. Case, and George Winchester Stone, Jr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1975.
- Campbell, Jill. *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.
- Canfield, Douglas J. *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997.
- Canfield, Douglas J. and Deborah C. Payne, eds. *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*. Athens: The U of Georgia P, 1995.
- Carswell, John. *The South Sea Bubble*. London: The Cresset Press, 1960.
- Castle, Terry. *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986.
- . "Matters Not Fit To Be Mentioned: Fielding's The Female Husband." *ELH* 49:3 (1982) 602-22.
- . "Women and Literary Criticism." *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on women, sex, and writing*. New York: Routledge, 2002. 3-24.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, ed. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- . "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." Cohen 3-25.
- Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.
- Conlin, Jonathan. "'At the Expense of the Public': The Sign Painters' Exhibition of 1762 and the Public Sphere." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36.1 (2002) 1-21.
- Davis, Jessica Milner. *Farce*. Bristol: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1978.

- Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays By Natalie Zemon Davis*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1975.
- Denning, Michael. "Beggar's and Thieves." *John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. 99-116.
- DeRitter, Jones. *The Embodiment of Characters: The Representation of Physical Experience on Stage and in Print, 1728-1749*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994.
- Donaldson, Ian. "'A Double Capacity': *The Beggar's Opera*" *Modern Essays on Eighteenth-Century Literature*. Ed. Leopold Damrosch, Jr. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. 141-158.
- Downie, J. A. "Gay's Politics." *John Gay and the Scriblerians*. Peter Lewis and Nigel Wood, eds. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. 44-61.
- Dugaw, Dianne. "'High Change in 'Change Alley': Popular Ballads and Emergent Capitalism in the Eighteenth Century." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22:2 (1998) 43-58.
- . *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
- Empson, William. "*The Beggar's Opera*: Mock-Pastoral as the Cult of Independence." *Some Versions of Pastoral*. New York: New Directions, 1968. 195-250.
- Fields, Polly Stevens. *High Drama at the Little Theatre, 1730-1737: Henry Fielding, Eliza Heywood, Charlotte Charke, and Company*. Unpublished Dissertation, Louisiana State University 1993.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. NY: Vintage Books, 1995.
- . "What is an Author?" *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980. 113-138.
- Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Gatrell, V. A. C. *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Gilman, Todd. "*The Beggar's Opera* and British Opera." *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities*. 66:3 (1997) 539-561.

- Goldgar, Bertrand. *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1976.
- Gubar, Susan. "The Female Monster in Augustan Satire." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3:2 (Winter 1977) 380-394.
- Guerinot, J. V. and Rodney D. Jilg. *The Beggar's Opera: Contexts*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976.
- Guthrie, Neil. "'No Truth or very little in the whole Story'? – A Reassessment of the Mohock Scare of 1712." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20.2 (1996) 33-56.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Tr. Thomas Burger. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.
- Hawley, Judith. "Margins and Monstrosity: Martinus Scriblerus his 'Double Mistress'" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22:1 (February 1998) 31-46.
- Hay, Douglas. "Property, Authority and the Criminal Law." *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975. 17-63.
- Hayes, Tom. *The Birth of Popular Culture: Ben Jonson, Maid Marian and Robin Hood*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1992.
- Highfill Jr., Philip H. "Performers and Performing." Hume 143-180.
- Hogue, Arthur R. *Origins of the Common Law*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984.
- Holmes, Richard. *Dr. Johnson and Mr. Savage*. NY: Pantheon Books, 1993.
- Huet, Marie-Hélène. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Hughes, Leo. *A Century of English Farce*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1956.
- . *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1971.
- . "The Evidence from Promptbooks." Hume 119-142.
- Hume, Robert D. *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre 1728-1737*. Oxford: Clarendon UP, 1988.
- , Ed. *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1980.
- Hunter, J. Paul. *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. New York: Norton, 1990.

- . *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1975.
- Ingram, Martin. "Ridings, Rough Music and the 'Reform of Popular Culture' in Early Modern England." *Past and Present*, 105 (1984) 79-113.
- Jurkowski, Henryk. *A History of European Puppetry: From its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 1996.
- Kenny, Shirley Strum. "Theatre, Related Arts, and the Profit Motive: An Overview." *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*. Ed. Shirley Strum Kenny. Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1984. 15-38.
- Kinservik, Matthew J. *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2002.
- Koon, Helene. *Colley Cibber: A Biography*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 1986.
- Kritzman, Lawrence D. "Representing the Monster: Cognition, Cripples, and Other Limp Parts in Montaigne's 'Des Boyteux'." *Cohen* 168-182.
- Langhans, Edward A. "The Theatres." *Hume* 35-65.
- Lewis, Peter "The Beggar's Opera as Opera and Anti-opera." *John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. 81-97.
- . "The Beggar's Rags to Rich's and Other Dramatic Transformations." *Lewis and Wood* 122-146.
- . *Fielding's Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1987.
- Lewis, Peter and Nigel Wood, eds. *John Gay and The Scriblerians*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Liesenfeld, Vincent J. *The Licensing Act of 1737*. Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1984.
- . *The Stage and The Licensing Act 1729-1739*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981.
- Lindgren, Lowell. "Camilla and The Beggar's Opera." *Philological Quarterly* 59:1 (Winter 1980) 44-61.
- Linebaugh, Peter. "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons." *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975. 65-117.
- Loftis, John. *Politics of Drama in Augustan England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.

- The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainment & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment.* Eds. William van Lennep, Emmett L. Avery, Arthur H. Scouten, George Winchester Stone, Jr., and C. Beecher Hogan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1960.
- Mack, Maynard. *Alexander Pope: A Life.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- Mardsen, Jean. "Charlotte Charke and the Cibbers: Private Life as Public Spectacle." Baruth 65-82.
- McDowell, Paula. *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- McKeon, Michael. *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
- McVeagh, John. *Thomas Durfey and Restoration Drama.* Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000.
- Milhous, Judith. *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1979.
- Milhous, Judith and Robert D. Hume, eds. *A Register of English Theatrical Documents, 1660-1737.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Morgan, Fidelis. *The Well-known Troublemaker: a Life of Charlotte Charke.* Boston: Faber, 1988.
- Newman, Gerald. *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830.* Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1997.
- Noble, Yvonne. "The Beggar's Opera in Its Own Time." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Beggar's Opera.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975. 1-14.
- . "Light Writing from a Dark Winter: The Scriblerian *Annus Mirabilis*." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25:2 (2001), 19-31.
- Nokes, David. *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Nussbaum, Felicity A. *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.
- O'Brien, John. *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2004.

- . "Harlequin Britain: Eighteenth-Century Pantomime and the Cultural Location of Entertainment(s)." *Theatre Journal* 50.4 (1998) 489-510.
- Patterson, Annabel. *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*. Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1984.
- Paul, H.G. *John Dennis: His Life and Criticism*. New York: The Columbia UP, 1911.
- Paulson, Ronald. *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.
- . *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.
- . *Popular and Polite Art in the Age of Hogarth and Fielding*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1979.
- Paulson, Ronald and Thomas Lockwood, Eds. *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969.
- Pedicord, Henry William. "The Changing Audience." *Hume* 236-252.
- Pender, Stephen. "'No Monsters at the Resurrection': Inside Some Conjoined Twins." *Cohen* 143-167.
- Plumb, J. H. *Sir Robert Walpole: The King's Minister*. London: The Cresset Press, 1960.
- . *Sir Robert Walpole: The Making of A Statesman*. London: The Cresset Press, 1956.
- Potter, Lois. "Colley Cibber: The Fop as Hero." *Augustan Worlds*. Eds. J.C. Hilson, M.M.B. Jones, and J.R. Watson. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1978. 153-164.
- Ray, William. "Talking About Art: the French Royal Academy Salons and the Formation of the Discursive Citizen." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37:4 (2004) 527-552.
- Rembar, Charles. *The Law of the Land: The Evolution of our Legal System*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1980.
- Richardson, John. "John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, and Forms of Resistance" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 24 (Fall 2000) 19-30.
- Richetti, John. "Histories by Eliza Haywood and Henry Fielding: Imitation and adaptation" *Saxon and Bocchicchio* 240-258.
- . *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969.

- Rivero, Albert J. *The Plays of Henry Fielding: A Critical Study of His Dramatic Career*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989.
- Roberts, Edgar V. Introduction. *The Grub Street Opera* Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1968.
- . "The Songs and Tunes in Henry Fielding's Ballad Operas." *Essays on the Eighteenth-Century Stage*. Eds Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972.
- Rogers, Pat. "Gay and the World of Opera." Lewis and Wood 147-162.
- Saxon, Kirsten T. "Telling Tales: Eliza Haywood and the Crimes of Seduction in *The City Jilt; or, the Alderman turn'd Beau*" Saxon and Bocchicchio 115-142.
- Saxon, Kirsten T. and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio, eds. *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 2000.
- Schultz, William Eben. *Gay's Beggar's Opera: Its Content, History & Influence*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967.
- Sherburn, George. "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of *Three Hours after Marriage*." *Modern Philology* 24 (1926) 91-109.
- Shershow, Scott Cutler. *Puppets and "Popular" Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
- Smallwood, Angela J. *Fielding and the Woman Question: The Novels of Henry Fielding and Feminist Debate 1700-1750*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Smith, Sidonie. "The Transgressive Daughter and the Masquerade of Self-Representation." Baruth 83-106.
- Spacks, Patricia. *John Gay*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965.
- Speaight, George. *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990.
- Staves, Susan. *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1979.
- Straub, Kristina. "The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke." Baruth 107-133.
- . *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-century Players and Sexual Ideology*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.
- Stillman, Robert E. "Hobbes's *Leviathan*: Monsters, Metaphors, And Magic" *ELH* 62:4 (Winter 1995) 790-815.
- Stone, George Winchester Jr. "The Making of the Repertory." Hume 181-209.

- Thompson, E.P. *Customs in Common*. New York: The New Press, 1991.
- . *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*. NY: Pantheon Books, 1975.
- Todd, Dennis. *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.
- Todd, Janet. *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.
- Turner, Cheryl. *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Routledge, 1992
- Uglow, Jenny. *Hogarth: A Life and A World*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997.
- Underdown, David. *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- von Sneidern, Maja-Lisa. "Joined at the Hip: A Monster, Colonialism, and the Scriblerian Project" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30: 3 (Spring 1997) 213-225.
- Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture*. 14.1 (2002) 49-90.
- Warner, William B. *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.
- Weinbrot, Howard D. *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England: The Decline of a Classical Norm*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. London: Fontana, 1981.
- Wilson, Richard and Alan Mackley. *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880*. New York: Hambledon and London, 2000.
- Winton, Calhoun. *John Gay and the London Theatre*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1993.
- Wood, Nigel. "Gay and the Ironies of Rustic Simplicity." *John Gay and the Scriblerians*. Peter Lewis and Nigel Wood, eds. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. 94-121.
- Woods, Charles B. Introduction. *The Author's Farce*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1966.