COMMON SENSE: THE RISE OF NARRATIVE IN THE AGE OF SELF-EVIDENCE

by

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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

2011

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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.

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Abstract

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This dissertation describes the role that eighteenth-century British popular fiction played in the development of "common sense" rhetoric as an appeal to a normative, imagined community. The transformation of common sense from its classical sense, as an internal faculty that organizes sensory perception into cognition, into a normative rhetorical device occurred across a period of time in which the destabilizing effects of social upheaval during the seventeenth century gave way to the normative pressure of the rise of the public sphere in the form of a burgeoning print culture.

Imagined communities of public readers are the inventions of texts that employ a self-reflexive rhetorical strategy of common-sense rhetoric. This strategy offers the reader the satisfaction of belonging to a normative, imagined community of readers through consensus with the moral conclusions drawn from a realistic narrative, which the author insists is already familiar to the "normal" reader from experience. Although this rhetorical strategy first appears in epistemological and moral philosophy of the early eighteenth century, it is greatly impacted by the

aesthetic developments of realistic fiction of the mid-eighteenth century, especially in fictional representations of sexual desire and morality.

Common Sense: The Rise of Narrative in the Age of Self-Evidence examines the relationships between the philosophical prose of John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume and the literary and critical prose of Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. It explores the role of normative imagined communities of readers in sexually explicit literature of the eighteenth century, as well as in critical, religious, and literary responses to these texts. The final chapter analyzes the challenges to epistemologically and morally normative rhetoric raised by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*. Each of these texts demonstrates its author's unique conceptions of the imagined reader, individual subjectivity, and the possibility of establishing epistemological consensus through shared narratives of experience. Rather than attempting to describe the imagined public as containing a subset of actual historical readers, this dissertation explores a variety of rhetorical representations of the imagined reader in eighteenth-century British texts in order to compare experimental uses of narrative in philosophy, fiction, and literary criticism.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful for the support I have received during my time in the Ph.D. Program in English at the City University of New York Graduate Center. David Richter, who advised this dissertation, worked with me since I arrived in New York as an admirer of his publications. His example and guidance has inspired me to strive to become a more confident and engaging writer since long before this project began. Carrie Hintz and Duncan Faherty have been excellent readers, pushing me to think more creatively about what this dissertation is and what it could become. I could not have asked for a more generous and thoughtful committee. I can only hope that this dissertation also reflects some hint of the influence of Blanford Parker on my intellectual development. He encouraged me never to allow boundaries of discipline, genre, or period to become excuses for lacking curiosity.

Every member of the English Program faculty should be thanked here. I have felt incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by the productive and humane professors of the Graduate Center, who have served as examples to me of the kind of colleague I hope to become. President William Kelly, Steven Kruger, Mario DiGangi, Rachel Brownstein, Joseph Wittreich, and Martin Elsky have each provided necessary support during the development of this dissertation, and Nancy Silverman has helped to keep the process moving.

Much of the initial research for this dissertation was done while I served as a research fellow in the Eighteenth-Century Reading Room of the Mina Rees Library

from 2005 to 2007. Charles J. Tanenbaum, who generously provided the financial support for this fellowship, lent his incredible personal collection of texts, maps, and illustrations from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries to the City University of New York for several years. The librarian for the special collection, Caroline Fuchs, filled me with admiration for the depth of her knowledge and her commitment to making these materials accessible to everyone.

This dissertation was also supported, sometimes unwittingly, by colleagues and students at all of the colleges where I have worked since 2003. I am grateful to all of those at New York City College of Technology, Hunter College, Queens College, Medgar Evers College, and Stern College for Women at Yeshiva University who listened to my plans for this project and gave me honest, helpful responses. Nora Nachumi and Ann Peters at Stern College have been especially encouraging and forthcoming with useful advice for writing while teaching. I would also like to thank the many presenters and participants of the Eighteenth-Century Interdisciplinary Group, as well as the contributors to The Long Eighteenth weblog.

This past year has made me feel particularly lucky to have had so many wonderful friends who have volunteered to read drafts, listen to ideas, ask questions, suggest answers, and offer kindness when I have needed it most. Olivera Jokic, Rebekah Sheldon, Hernando Estevez, Rustem Ertug Altinay, Helena Ribeiro, Andrew Statum, Amanda Springs, Andrew Dicus, Mia Chen, Lindsey Freed, Keridiana Chez, Rob Faunce, Brooks Hefner, Dustin Stewart, Ben Wolfson, Carl Voss, Dave Barber, Greg Freed, Megan Price, and Mark Gondree have each assisted me when I

needed fresh eyes or an honest opinion. Thank you to my fellow Graduate Center students, who always seem eager to put aside whatever they are doing to listen and offer help.

Most importantly, I want to thank my parents, Joe and Jackie Shanafelt, for providing love, patience, good humor, and confidence whenever I have run out.

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Introduction: Common Sense in the Public Sphere

Until the seventeenth century, authors writing in English typically used "common sense" in its Aristotelian signification as the internal faculty by which the mind organizes sensory perceptions into cognition, the coherent idea of a physical experience.[1] Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (completed in 1580) uses "common sense" in this way to describe an overwhelming sensual encounter:

> [O]nely my eyes did ouertake her; which when the table was stayed, and wee beganne to feede, dranke much more eagerlie of her beautie, then my mouth did of any other licour. And so was my *common sense* deceiued (being chiefly bent to her) that as I dranke the wine, and withall stale a looke on her, me seemed I tasted her deliciousnesse.[2]

Sidney plays with the erotic possibilities of the failure of the common sense, which should organize all of the beauties of the garden banquet—the birdsong, the food

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[1] Aristotle suggests this function of the common sense in *De Anima* II.6 in order to explain how one may arrive at ideas of "movement, rest, number, figure, magnitude," which are all sensible through more than one sense of perception. Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. and ed. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1986), II.6. The development of this conception of the "common sense" in European scholasticism seems to have come from Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, in which he renders it as "sensus communis." Hans Georg Gadamer writes that "for St. Thomas, in elaborating on the *De Anima*, the sensus communis is the common root of the outer senses—i.e., the faculty that combines them, that makes judgments about what is given, a capacity that is given to all men." Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 1975, 2004), 20.

[2] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), Ch. 14. Emphasis mine.

and drink, the flowers and women—into a pleasant and coherent image. But his narrator Pyrocles, currently in disguise as a woman so as to have closer access to his beloved, is incapable of making sense of his perceptions, and experiences a poetically synesthesic reaction, confusing the taste of the wine with the beauty of the woman. The failure of the common sense is, in this passage, Pyrocles's momentary inability to distinguish between the perceived properties of the objects and persons at the banquet, resulting in a sublime description of overwhelming erotic desire.

This scholastic understanding of common sense as an internal faculty that organizes perception is very different from its current meaning and usage, which implies a shared capacity for reasonableness that transcends education, class, and ideology. "Common sense" has become a rhetorical mantle for political candidates and pundits across the spectrum of party affiliations. "Common sense" is advised in matters of safety and public health. As it is invoked in current public discourse, "common sense" does not refer to the author or narrator's subjective experience of perception, as it does for Sidney's Pyrocles; rather, it refers to the author or speaker's conception of the recipients—the readers or auditors—of the text. "Common sense" announces to the reader that the author already knows how the reader experiences the world and that the reader somehow already knows—and agrees with—what the author is arguing. "Common sense" is, in its current usage, not a term that describes the means by which the mind organizes and draws conclusions from experiences, but a rhetorical gesture that implies a compulsory

complicity with the text based on an assumption that the reader shares the author's ideas of experience.

It is telling that the opening words of Glenn Beck's recent book of political polemic, *Common Sense: The Case Against an Out-of-Control Government, Inspired by Thomas Paine* (2009), are "I think I know who you are."[3] The introduction goes on to describe "your" experience of life in the United States since 2001 ("You don't have much in savings and your retirement plans have lost a significant amount of money"[4]) alongside statements about "your" values and self-perception ("You have strong beliefs, but you also have an open mind and a warm heart"[5]). Beck describes his readers' experiences of life to them in great detail, accounting for their emotional struggles, their economic concerns, and their anxieties about cultural diversity and

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[3] Glenn Beck, with Joe Kerry, *Common Sense: The Case Against an Out-of-Control Government, Inspired by Thomas Paine* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 3. Beck's invocation of Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* in the title of his book is not only a reminder of the twenty-first-century American conservative identification with the authors of the Revolutionary era, but of the persistence of (and nostalgia for) eighteenth-century forms of rhetoric in political discourse. Paine's pamphlet serves as a rhetorical template for Beck's polemic, in that it describes the conditions of life as they are presumed to be experienced by the American reader, before declaring its seemingly self-evident conclusion that revolution is the only possible remedy for these conditions. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (London: H.D. Symonds, 1792), ECCO, City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib. Beck takes care in his own *Common Sense* to clarify that he does not recommend a violent revolution against his own country, but instead offers a plan for a democratic process by which conservative parties will regain control of the government.

[4] Glenn Beck, *Common Sense*, 3.

[5] Glenn Beck, *Common Sense*, 3.

religious hypocrisy.[6] This introduction does not suggest a variety of possible experiences of different readers, but instead defines its reader as the "you" of this introduction. The reader is either welcomed into the book by his willingness to be described as Beck's "you," or he understands that the conclusions this book will draw are not written for his life experience.[7] (Marriage, family, American citizenship, Christianity, consumerism, nostalgia, fear, disappointment, and heteronormative sexual modesty are definitive characteristics of Beck's "you"; it is a narrowly-defined audience.) If the reader finds that the introduction of the book describes an experience of life he is willing to claim is his own, then, Beck declares, he will find *Common Sense* to be full of self-evident claims about what must be done to control the U.S. government through a democratic revolution.

The current use of what I will call "common sense rhetoric" is defined by this movement from a description of the world from the imagined perspective of the *reader*, rather than of the author, to a conclusion drawn by the author that declares its own self-evidentiary nature. This rhetorical structure claims that the reader already has the necessary evidence that will necessarily result in the author's conclusion. If the reader does not, then that reader is rejected as an appropriate reader of the text. In response to Beck's introduction, for example, I cannot

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[6] The rhetorical efficacy of this second-person description may seem suspect to anyone who has at some time found herself verifying the description of her life offered in a fortune cookie or horoscope.

[7] Perhaps comically, given the insistent second-person rhetorical structure of the introduction that follows, one of the last sentences of Beck's "Note from the Author" is "Do not let others speak for you." Glenn Beck, *Common Sense*, ix.

recognize any of the experiences he describes "you" as having, and so I am made aware that this is not a book written for or about me, and that I am likely not to find that his political remedies necessarily follow from my own experiences. This kind of common sense functions through the creation of an imagined community of readers for whom these experiences are shared in common. It is not a basic internal faculty of sensory perception, but instead a complex conceptual task requiring the reader to imagine himself partaking, through the act of reading, in a communal experience, not only of the book itself, but of life. The reader imagines himself agreeing not only with Glenn Beck, but also with all the other imagined "you"s who are embarrassed by sex on television.

The communal aspect of this shift from scholastic common sense to postmodern common sense, which emerged with the rise of the public sphere over the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, creates a political and moral imperative whose basis is readers' consensus that their subjective experiences are appropriately described in public narratives. This dissertation describes a part of the history of the development of common sense rhetoric across the middle of the eighteenth century in British philosophy, literature, and literary criticism. During this period, following the publication and increasing influence of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) on British philosophy, the use of the term "common sense" underwent dramatic shifts in signification as the core questions of intellectual and literary culture changed their focus from the attempt to define human nature to the later Enlightenment project to define a just society. These shifts reflect a change in focus from "the human" to "humanity" that follows

concurrent developments in the rhetorical structure of philosophical arguments and in the aesthetic experiments of realistic fiction in the 1740s and 50s.

As the spread of print culture and the consequent growth of the reading public helped to disseminate works of philosophy to a broader, less-educated readership, philosophers such as George Berkeley and David Hume began to describe their arguments as only true if it is possible for the "man of common sense," an imagined person of little education and typical empirical experience, to agree with them. This fictional character of philosophy is set up against the "Philosopher" himself, whose status as a learned academic is used against his credibility, as it leads him to absurdities that have no relationship to the "common" observation of the world. This marks the beginning of the use of "common sense" as a term that separates the intellectual from the rest of humanity. Although "common sense" is used in this way by Glenn Beck and others to reject the descriptions of the world offered by current philosophers, legal theorists, economists, and academics in general, it was originally employed by academic philosophers themselves, who used it as a complex rhetorical gesture of deference to their non-academic, self-educating readers.

These non-academic readers were, of course, more likely to find themselves engrossed in some new novel by Samuel Richardson or Henry Fielding than in philosophical works. The prose fiction of the 1740s, however, was deeply embedded in similar conceptions of the imagined public reader as someone who desires to learn about a broader understanding of human nature than what is offered by

individual experience alone. Authors described their novels in the terms of moral sentiment as defined by David Hume, teaching the reader not about what to think, but about how to feel about social behaviors, particularly those related to sexual desire. Henry Fielding's novels even develop a Humean discourse of moral feeling, similarly concluding that positive sentiments emerge in response to behaviors that are pleasant and useful to society. Like Hume, Fielding constructs a rhetorically complex framework in which the imagined reader is invited to consent to the truth of the author's descriptions of characters and narratives of typical behavior before being invited to consent likewise to the commonsensical, seemingly self-evident conclusions drawn by the author from his own text.

The British novel of the mid-eighteenth century constitutes the fullest development of common sense rhetoric, developing the broadest possible conception of the public reader to include young and old, male and female, of different classes and stations in life. This is also a moment in the history of prose fiction in English when debates about different styles of aesthetic representation take on an intense moral and political urgency, as the imagined social effects of novel-reading on the public become central to literary criticism.[8] In order to decide

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[8] The normative moral urgency of modern narrative is closely related to the modern practice of common law, in which the stories of individual cases must be told and retold, amended and re-interpreted, and compared with emerging narratives in order to arrive at proper adjudication. Robert Cover writes:

> In this normative world, law and narrative are inseparably related. Every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse—to be supplied with history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose. And every narrative is insistent in its

whether a novel's treatment of deviant sexual or criminal desires is potentially damaging to young, inexperienced readers, the literary critic must not merely reflect on the novel's effects on his own sentiments, but must further imagine the potential harm that may be created by the novel on the moral health of young men and women.

The ability of the intellectual to imagine the minds of others, and to conceive of the possible judgments that may be made by someone else, is at the core of Immanuel Kant's definition of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is, for Kant, the ability to construct one's own mature ideas about the world by internalizing a public sense of intellectual authority. In his 1784 essay in response to the question "What is Enlightenment?" posed by the Reverend Johann Friedrich Zöllner, Immanuel Kant writes:

> *Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity*. *Immaturity* is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. *Self-incurred* is this inability if its

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> demand for its prescriptive point, its moral. History and literature cannot escape their location in a normative universe, nor can prescription, even when embedded in a legal text, escape its origin and its end in experience, in the narratives that are the trajectories plotted upon material reality by our imaginations.

Robert Cover, *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992), 96. While Cover may be overstating the normative moral urgency of *all* narratives, his description of the normative function of moral literature accurately describes much of the mainstream literature published during the middle of the eighteenth century in England, at a time when concern about the potential moral effects of texts on readers mimicked similar concerns about the possible moral effects of law on citizens.

> cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your *own* understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.[9]

Rather than depending on the military, government, and religion for instruction on what to think or how to live, Kant goes on to argue, the enlightened person is one who develops his own ideas, and not merely to *have* an understanding, but to *use* it. In this brief essay, he posits that the intellectual self-reliance of Enlightenment requires "the freedom to make a *public use* of one's reason in all matters."[10] The political freedom to publicize thought is among what Kant refers to as "divine rights"; although the private citizen, soldier, or clergyman is bound to his duty to pay taxes, obey orders, or teach the doctrine of his church, every man must have the right to publicize his arguments against taxation, military action, or points of doctrine.

Kant's insistence on the freedom of the individual conscience in the public—if not the private—sphere is dependent on his sense that shifts in public opinion, even when they emerge from particular individual voices, will occur as the public discourse transcends the merely subjective nature of individual thought. Jürgen Habermas writes that Kant "ascribed the function of a pragmatic test of truth to the

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[9] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" trans. James Schmidt. In James Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 58.

[10] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" 59.

public consensus arrived at by those engaged in rational-critical debate with one another."[11] Kant's epistemological confidence lies neither in the traditional authority that seeks to preserve its own power, nor in the isolated individual who uses reason to organize empirical perception of the world, but in reason and judgment that transcend the subjective through the consensus of rational public discourse among intellectuals. In order to be able to have proper judgment, one must be able to imagine a public sense of what judgment might be.

Kant clarifies what he means by a "public sense" in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in discussing the process of responding to an aesthetic object:

> [B]y the name *sensus communis* is to be understood the idea of a public sense, i.e., a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, *as it were*, to weigh its judgment with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective, an illusion that would exert a prejudicial influence upon its judgment. This is accomplished by weighing the judgment, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else, as the result of a

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[11] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962, trans. 1989), 107-108.

> mere abstraction from the limitations which contingently affect our own estimate.[12]

Kant describes the faculty of developing a sense of the "collective reason of mankind" as a kind of triangulation in which one attempts to view the object through the imaginary judgments of "everyone else" in order to compare their "possible" judgments with one's own. One should not survey the range of actual subjective responses to arrive at proper judgment, as each person's would be as subjective as one's own; Kant asserts that "merely possible" judgments are indeed preferable to the "actual" because they imagine an abstracted—and therefore more objective—distance from any person's subjective response.

> This, in turn, is effected by so far as possible letting go the element of matter, i.e., sensation, in our general state of representative activity, and confining attention to the formal peculiarities of our representation or general state of representative activity. Now it may seem that this operation of reflection is too artificial to be attributed to the faculty which we call *common sense*. But this is an appearance due only to its expression in abstract formulae. In itself nothing is more natural than to abstract from charm and emotion where one is looking for a judgment intended to serve as a universal rule.[13]

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[12] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), sec. 40.

[13] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, sec. 40.

Kant describes "common sense" as the process by which the individual person may imagine a public discourse of judgment in which to participate, predict the conditions of consensus with "everyone else," and compare these conditions with one's subjective experience and judgment in order to overcome the accidental features of sensation. As Kant himself observes, this seems, on its face, to be an absurdly complex description of a faculty that would not seem to require complex analysis. Since its transformation in eighteenth-century public discourse after the publication of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), "common sense" is the irreducible faculty the very mention of which is typically the endpoint of an argument, calling attention to the self-evidence of a stated causal judgment. When all the arguing parties have arrived at consensus, not with one another, but with their own ideas of what may be abstracted as objective from among the imagined subjective judgments of "everyone else," then the argument about proper judgment has ended.

Habermas finds in Kant's conception of public consensus a naïve, or at least provisional, confidence in the continuation of class and labor hierarchies, such that the public sphere would be reserved for educated citizens, while uneducated laborers would not participate in the formation of public consensus, and thus remain unfit for full citizenship in the Enlightened republic. Habermas claims that Kant's description of public discourse as a site of purely academic critical inquiry seems oddly blind to the nature of the public sphere of eighteenth-century European print culture, which was not only the site of traditional academic

exchange, but also a modern marketplace of texts and ideas that redefined who and what could be considered a part of the public.

> However, although its center was the academy, the public sphere within which the philosophers pursued their critical craft was not merely academic. Just as the discussion of the philosophers took place in full view of the government, to instruct it and give it things to consider, so too did it occur before the public of the "people," to encourage it in the use of its own reason.[14]

Alongside conversations in print among academic intellectuals, the public sphere had come to include a much broader and more responsive reading public, as well as a much larger variety of writers participating in public debate on aesthetic, moral, and political issues.

According to Habermas, the rise of mercantile capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the commodification of information and commentary on observed phenomena ("news" when relevant), which in turn contributed to the erosion of traditional sources of authority of the state and church. As state authority became increasingly dependent on the success of capitalist "private initiative,"[15] the commodification of printed texts likewise resulted in the increasing dependence of writers on the continued interest and support of readers. Likewise, as the creation of a public discourse on state authority resulted in the

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[14] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 105.

[15] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 24.

mediation of control through the rise of the modern police, the creation of public discourse on textual authority resulted in the mediation of the print market through the rise of criticism.

The self-regulation of immoral content in the print market through the growth of literary criticism is similar to Michel Foucault's narrative of concurrent shifts in penal authority. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes the shift in penal authority across the eighteenth century, from traditional central monarchical power to the diffused power of the modern republic. Punishment of offenders under the former system of authority had been spectacular—violent and symbolic, not of moral correctness, but of the vertical power of the state itself. However, under the modern republic, in which authority is vested in the public conception of "the people," the offender becomes not merely the enemy of the state, but the enemy of every citizen of the state as well. "Thus a formidable right to punish is established, since the offender becomes the common enemy. Indeed, he is worse than an enemy, for it is from within society that he delivers his blow – he is nothing less than a traitor, a 'monster.'"[16] Although the authority of a public defined by its consensus on moral and social utility culminated in the abatement of public spectacles of torture by the state, this new form of penal authority, Foucault argues, was far more pervasive in that it rendered the entire public sphere a space of surveillance, discipline, and control. To commit a crime in the modern republic is

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[16] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977, 1995), 90.

not merely to disobey a law from on high, but to violate the entire social order. To punish the modern criminal is not merely to exact justice for wrongdoing, but to reform him back into moral consensus with the public sphere. Foucault describes this new kind of diffuse social authority as disciplinary rather than punitive, coercive rather than exemplary, and moral rather than legal. Paradoxically, while these new structures of moral control are less violent and vindictive than monarchic absolutism, they do not promote "freedom," in the sense of doing what one wills to do, in that the goal of republican authority is to transform not only the public actions, but also the private *sentiments* of the citizen into those desirable for maximum public security. Thus the boundaries between the state and citizen, public and private, and freedom and security become increasingly blurred with the growth of the public sphere in the modern republic.[17]

Rhetorical conceptions of textual authority undergo a similar shift across the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in philosophical prose. At the same time that monarchic absolutism was eventually, ironically, weakened by its use of the public sphere to create a "depersonalized state authority,"[18] the broadening reach of print culture served to disseminate texts of traditional

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[17] Foucault's description of the shift from monarchical penal authority to the diffusion of authority in the "people" is echoed in Benedict Anderson's examination of nationalism in *Imagined Communities*. Anderson argues that, during the European Enlightenment, the conception of sovereignty shifts from "the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm" to an imagined sovereign community of citizens defined by their proper ideological participation in the idea of the state. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, 2006), 7.

[18] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 19.

intellectual and religious authority, including works of philosophy, mathematics, and theology, while also placing them in the marketplace alongside political journals, scandal fictions, high and low poetry, travel narratives, romances, devotional literature, lives of criminals, books of instruction, and critical commentary on it all. Unlike Kant, who seems to imagine his 1784 essay as entering a public made up of Reverend Zöllner and Moses Mendelssohn,[19] many authors in Restoration and Augustan London seemed to envision the public sphere as snarling dogs, or sleepy idiots. To achieve consensus with this difficult crowd who demands to be pleased as well as informed, the author must cease to pronounce *a priori* truths from his lofty academic perch, but instead show humility, maintain a lively narrative style, and flatter the reader's intelligence. The rhetorical style of most Restoration and Augustan British philosophical prose (with the exception of a few important texts) develops steadily toward Kant's description of "common sense" from the *Critique of Judgment* above.

John Bender, in *Imagining the Penitentiary*,[20] also finds that the mutual influences of philosophical and literary works produced new structures of thought during the mid-eighteenth century in England that did not just provide for the invention of what we now call "the novel," but also transformed moral philosophy, which, by the time Adam Smith published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759),

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[19] Moses Mendelssohn also responded to Reverend Zöllner's question. Moses Mendelssohn, "On the Question: What is Enlightenment?" In James Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment*, 53-57.

[20] John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987). 201-230.

employed these structures of thought in imagining human consciousness through aesthetic processes of representation. The novel at this stage was, Bender asserts, "an aesthetic that affirms the transcendent value of self by transmuting fear of external power into identification with its strength and thereby stabilizing both self and the social other."[21] Following Foucault, Bender connects the growth of the public sphere with the normative discipline of social power. The narrative structure of the eighteenth-century British novel creates a causal link between identification with the normative community of the public sphere and moral self-actualization. And through the reader's sentimental identification with the "social other" represented in the novel, the reader is brought toward consensus with social norms of morality and behavior.

In their essay collection *This Is Enlightenment*,[22] Clifford Siskin and William Warner attempt to describe the long shift from the central authority of scholastic method to Kant's passionate call for the liberation of individual judgment in his response to Zöllner's question by way of Francis Bacon's *The New Organon* (1620). Siskin and Warner introduce this project:

> To identify Enlightenment as an "*event*"—one that conventionally occupies roughly a half century between the 1730s-1740s and the 1780s—we take a quantitative turn, focusing on the number as well

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[21] John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary*, 202.

[22] Clifford Siskin and William Warner, eds. *This Is Enlightenment* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010).

> as the kinds of mediation enabled by the early eighteenth century. Enlightenment emerged, we argue, as an effect of these *proliferating mediations.*[23]

They trace the idea that thought must undergo mediation, or transformation of state through representation or subjection to an inductive process of self-inquiry, back to Bacon, who found it nearly impossible for any person to arrive at judgments based solely on empirical experience without being influenced by various "Idols"—*a priori* assumptions derived from the limitations of subjectivity, accumulated past experience, the pressures of social influence, or pet theories and methods.[24] Siskin and Warner find the epistemological origins of "Enlightenment" in the methodologies of thought that Bacon develops in order to overcome these Idols and observe phenomena as they really are. They argue that the full development of the Enlightenment in the middle of the eighteenth century comes along with an extraordinary breadth of different kinds of mediations—of new genres, print media, representational styles, philosophical methods of inquiry, and interrelationships between writers and thinkers of that time.

These new interrelationships between texts became possible due to the rapid growth of the print market in the middle of the eighteenth century, which placed old

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[23] Clifford Siskin and William Warner, *This Is Enlightenment*, 11.

[24] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), aph. 39-45. The word "idol" comes from the Greek *eidolon*, used to refer to an image, either ghostly or aesthetic, that copies an original. In this sense, Bacon's "Idols" seem to be man-made traces of ideas that remain in the mind.

and new books, academic works and entertaining fictions, and moral and immoral works on the same shelves. Elizabeth Eisenstein's account in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*[25] of the effects of the technologies of print focuses in part on the new conversations that became possible through mass publication, and the new methodologies of thought that emerged from these conversations. As she argues, print functioned in one sense as a conservative force, in that vernacular translations of classical and Renaissance texts made traditional learning available to readers outside of universities and religious institutions. But while the dissemination of classical texts promoted the structures of classical thought among "lay" readers, it also destabilized the structures of intellectual authority that depended on the inaccessibility of these works. Likewise, even as print established the fixity of texts through reproduction, it also allowed for speedy revision in new editions.[26] And even as the growth of the reading public and the availability of printed matter dissolved, to some degree, the centrality of the literal public square in the lives of urban populations, she writes, "they were also linked in new ways by the more impersonal channels of communication," including "vicarious participation in civic functions and municipal affairs."[27] The massive growth of print culture in the

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[25] Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979, 1980).

[26] Eisenstein quotes a letter from David Hume to his publisher: "'The Power which Printing gives us of continually improving and correcting our Works in successive Editions,' wrote David Hume to his publisher, 'appears to me the chief Advantage of that art." Qtd. in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 112.

[27] Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 133.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries allowed readers vicarious access to historical and contemporary intellectual discourse, as well as vicarious participation in debates about political authority.

The modern novel, too, developed at this moment when a burgeoning print culture enabled readers to feel that, through reading, they had begun to participate vicariously in an ongoing debate about the common sense of morality, justice, and human nature. In *The Creation of the Modern World*, Roy Porter asserts:

> The novelty of the novel should not, however, be scanted. It was *via* such fictions and their spin-offs, like digests and magazine short stories taking over from the Bible as the age's master narratives – with *Pamela* supposedly being read out by clergymen from the pulpit – that the enlightened voyage into the self, its yearnings and ambiguities, was pursued and popularized. The novel, to adapt Bolingbroke, was new philosophy teaching by examples, and dubious ones at that.[28]

The novel served as the means by which representation of private experience became an object for public opinion and judgment, as well as the conduit for secular moral philosophy and popular learning.

The private self made public as a character enabled readers to imagine other subjectivities as abstracted representations of themselves through literary

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[28] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 2000), 285-286.

identification, and thus to participate vicariously in conversations about judgments of common sense. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor argues that the rise of the modern novel allowed for readers to begin to conceive of their own private lives as subject to the same interpretive forces as the narratives of novels. Of the eighteenth-century novel, he writes, "The very form of narration, relating the—sometimes minute—particulars of life, puts all events and lives on the same stylistic footing."[29] It is through the new aesthetic style of realistic representation, Taylor suggests, that readers begin to learn to view their own lives in the terms of abstracted narrative. While this tendency to narrate a private life according to a narrative pattern "was certainly evident in some of the writings inspired by Puritanism, like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*,"[30] Taylor writes, it was the rich abundance of vicarious detail found in the modern novel that allowed readers not merely to apply an allegorical narrative to their own lives, but to abstract a narrative from their own private experiences to compare moral judgment with the lives represented in novels, and, by extension, the imagined lives of others. Through the abstraction of the narrative form, which also allows for causal relationships between events to be implicit, the novel contributed to the public sense that the world, human nature, and private experience are all available as vicarious representations to be examined through communal moral judgment.

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[29] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989), 287.
[30] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 287.

The new conversations between literary, critical, and philosophical writers created by the rise of narrative rhetoric in all these genres yielded ever more complex and well-populated conceptions of the public sphere one must be able to imagine in order to develop a "common sense," or, as Kant writes, "a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of everyone else,"[31] for the purpose of overcoming the limitations of subjectivity. This dissertation examines some of the various ways in which the imagined social other, Kant's "everyone else," is prefigured by individual British authors of the 1730s-1760s. Each of the texts I address—philosophical, literary, and critical—attempts to define for the reader a particular imaginary participant in a dialogue between author and reader.

Long before Kant's assertion that common sense is the faculty by which one takes into account the imagined judgments of imagined others, the philosophers George Berkeley and David Hume use the idea of the "man of common sense" as a goal of philosophical inquiry, to somehow get back to a consensus with an imagined "ordinary," uneducated, un-philosophical man. Samuel Johnson, on the other hand, challenges the rhetoric of common sense in defense of realistic literature by imagining an inexperienced young reader who cannot knowingly arrive at consensus with the author. The second chapter describes the mutual influences of philosophy and literary uses of common sense rhetoric, especially in the works of Henry Fielding and David Hume. Henry Fielding repeatedly asks the reader of his

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[31] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, sec. 40.

novels to affirm that the characters, representations of events, and judgment of these events are accurate according to "common observation" of the world, and imagines various possible readers who cannot participate fully in the text because of their lack of common sense. Hume, meanwhile, draws from the narrative rhetoric of Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) in the process of writing *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). In the third chapter, I examine the eighteenth-century critical conversation about the morality of representations of sexual feeling, in which conflicting positions emerge from the critics' different representations of the normative reactions of various imagined readers to the texts. Finally, the last chapter examines the role of the vicarious imagination in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767), in which Laurence Sterne examines and satirizes the influences of Enlightenment philosophy on the form of the novel, and offers a theory about the inaccessibility of the subjective self and the consequent necessity of imagining the experiences of others for the formation of mature moral sentiment.

Throughout this dissertation, I examine this selection of philosophical and literary texts to find crucial comparisons and distinctions between them in their use of what I refer to as common sense rhetoric. I argue that the process by which the common sense of the public sphere came to represent imperatives of moral, political, and aesthetic judgment is not merely through the epistemological impact of the spread of print technology and social reform during the eighteenth century, but also through the self-conscious (and often ironic) rhetorical deployment of the

language of consensus epistemology in the literary productions of British novelists and literary critics.

In the work of each of the authors discussed in this dissertation, the attempt to achieve consensus with some imagined commonsense reader constitutes the goal of fiction, philosophy, and criticism, for the purpose of discovering some inherent truth about human nature, sentiment, and morality. Rather than approaching the reader with statements of authoritative truth, these authors create the illusion that the reader is in conversation with him, often by using first-person plural pronouns ("we," "us," "our") to represent "normal" experiences and judgments. Through the rhetorical use of exemplary fictional narratives rather than authoritative pronouncements, these authors make causal judgment implicit, as narrative encourages the reader to imagine the causality suggested by the events. As these authors employ causally suggestive narratives, they seem humbly to allow the reader interpretive freedom based on provided evidence, which has, of course, been arranged precisely to yield apparent consensus with the text, and therefore with common sense and "society" as a whole. Meanwhile, those imagined readers excluded from the "we" of the text are those who do not arrive at consensus with the text. I argue that these features of Enlightenment prose do not directly emerge, as Siskin and Warner[32] claim, from the methods of mediation for private thought recommended by Francis Bacon, but from the much more recent and pervasive

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[32] In *This Is Enlightenment*.

influence of John Locke, not just on philosophical methods of inquiry, but also on the rhetorical relationship between authors and their readers.

Common Sense in John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

The decades following the publication of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* saw attempts by philosophers, clergymen, poets, novelists, and political theorists to create a new narrative of normative human experience, and in so doing, to redefine "common sense." Locke's groundbreaking *Essay* eschewed the formal humanistic logic of Bacon's *New Organon* and Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651)[33] in favor of a conversational style, often in first person, singular ("I," "me," "my") for humble statements of speculation, and plural ("we," "us," "our") for confident descriptions of experiences presumed to be common. In the second chapter of the *Essay*, in which he argues against the existence of "Innate Practical Principles," Locke writes, "From what has been said, I think we may safely conclude that whatever practical rule is in any place generally and with allowance broken, cannot be supposed innate."[34] There is a clear division between "I think," which expresses the humility of his speculation, and "we may safely conclude," which suggests confidence about consensus with the imagined readers of the *Essay*.

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[33] Thomas Hobbes*, Leviathan* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).

[34] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2006), II.13.

Locke addresses his readers as if he is somehow in the room with them as he writes, and their agreement on certain points has already been accomplished.

Locke asks questions of an imagined skeptical reader, addressed as "you"—"When, therefore, you say that this is an innate rule, what do you mean?"[35]—in order to answer them. He supplies questions for the imagined reader to interrogate him with as he goes on, and asks rhetorical questions to which he presumes the imagined reader has no answer. This seemingly haphazard, often ostensibly conversational rhetorical style, lowers the author's status in position to the reader, while seeming to elevate the reader to a role somewhat like that of a co-author of the text. Yet this reader imagined by Locke to participate in the consensus community of "we" and "us"—"our" common sense—is a rhetorical invention of the author himself. He asks the reader to imagine himself not necessarily *as* the imagined consenting reader or the imagined skeptical reader, but alongside him, participating in the debate. The reader triangulates his own understanding of the text through the imagined rhetorical presence of readers who debate the terms of consensus with the author.

Locke uses "common sense" in order to define the limits of the normative community whose consensus with the text is possible and meaningful: "He would be thought void of common sense who asked on the one side, or on the other side went to give a reason why 'it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be.'"[36] For

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[35] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.12.

[36] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.4.

Locke, “common sense” is an internal organizing faculty of cognition that is “common” in that it is shared by the community of reasonable, normally-able persons. In the above example of a lack of common sense, the imagined “he” questions the impossibility of simultaneous being and non-being, not out of a failure to consent with communal knowledge, but because he lacks the cognitive faculty for internal consistency. As I demonstrate in chapter one, the transformation of the signification of “common sense” from an internal faculty of cognition to an ability to imagine one’s own judgment in consensus with “everyone else,” as in Kant, is marked in the epistemological developments of Locke’s philosophy made by George Berkeley and David Hume.

However, the rhetorical structure of the *Essay* reveals Locke’s commitment to consensus with an imagined community of readers who possess the cognitive faculty of “common sense” as the proof-terms of his epistemology. In describing and narrating the process by which perception leads to cognition, and cognition to more complex judgments, Locke must acknowledge that not every living person experiences the world in the same way; common sense is not universal sense. In order to verify that there is a normative communal experience of cognition, individual persons must share and collate “testimony” of their observations to discover what is incidental, and what is intrinsic to experience.

> Where any particular thing, consonant to the constant observation of ourselves and others in the like case, comes attested by the concurrent reports of all that mention it, we receive it as easily, and

> build as firmly upon it, as if it were certain knowledge; and we reason and act thereupon with as little doubt as if it were perfect demonstration.[37]

According to Locke, the closest we can get to certainty about observed phenomena is that all available accounts by various observers accord with one another in every significant detail. Although one may doubt one's own experience as limited or faulty, one may compare it with that of others and discover assurance that the observation was objectively correct. As Locke goes on to acknowledge, however, a confident agreement is not often the result of shared testimony:

> The difficulty is, when testimonies contradict common experience, and the reports of history and witnesses clash with the ordinary course of nature, or with one another; there it is, where diligence, attention, and exactness are required, to form a right judgment, and to proportion the assent to the different evidence and probability of the thing: which rises and falls, according as those two foundations of credibility, viz. common observation in like cases, and particular testimonies in that particular instance, favour or contradict it.[38]

The actual testimonies of persons, either describing their individual experiences of the same event, or their experiences of similar events, often do not agree. Whether the variations in testimonies of shared experiences are the products of faulty

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[37] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, XVI.6.

[38] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, XVI.9.

perception, damaged cognition, prejudiced judgment, limited perspective, or inarticulate representation of the experience in language, the difficulty of comparing testimonies of actual experience is enormous. Part of what Locke is interrogating in his skeptical treatment of testimony is the *commonness* of common sense. If eliciting testimonies of experience that do not conflict is so rarely possible due to the variety of subjective experiences and the representation of these experiences in language, then how can it be said that there is a truly "common" sense, or common observation, of the world?

What Locke is unable to prove epistemologically is that the varieties of subjective experience can only be overcome through the ability to *imagine*, rather than actually solicit, the perspectives of others. While each subjective account of experience is necessarily informed by self-interest, cognitive and perceptual ability, and limitations of time and space, a common sense of experience can be imagined by the individual person, and can be compared to the common sense of experience imagined by others. For Locke, the greatest proof that may be yielded through testimony is, after all, not the shared testimony of empirical experience, but the testimony of faith in God. While the objects available to the senses must necessarily affect each body and mind differently, and result in conflicting descriptions and judgments of truth, the revelation of the divine is, he argues, the universal sense. "[W]e may as well doubt of our own being, as we can whether any revelation from God be true."[39] The apparent universality of faith in the revelation of God is Locke's

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[39] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, XVI.14.

justification that consensus with all of humankind is the ideal endpoint of philosophical argument. Through imagining consensus with mankind in a radical sense, and with his reader in a local sense, Locke prefigures Kant's complex conception of common sense, as the definitive rhetorical endpoint of Locke's philosophical argument, if not as explicitly described as an epistemological process in its own right.

A Description of Common Sense

In modern usage, the phrase "common sense" is used to signal the self-evidence of an argument by appealing to a general consensus about how the world works. It deprecates the discourse of specialized knowledge derived from academic study or individual experience in favor of some irreducible understanding of the human condition as it is shared by the community addressed by the text. In political rhetoric, common sense appeals to a democratic vision of public wisdom. Regarding aesthetic matters, it assumes the possibility of representing the world in a way that is plausibly realistic to a broad audience. Epistemologically, common sense means that reality is that which all "normally" able individuals perceive as a shared experience. Whatever the purpose of the discourse is, "common sense" imagines the public as a community of people whose perception and judgment are valued not for their individuality, but for their normalcy. The rhetorical function of "common

sense" is to compel the reader to assent to the argument by threatening exclusion from the normative public sphere as it is imagined by the text.

Common sense is a particularly powerful rhetorical strategy because it constitutes an explicitly epistemological argument, locating the proof-terms of knowledge in consensus.[40] To assent to a common sense argument is not merely to join a political party or to enjoy a novel, but to validate a description of reality that both asserts its own validity through an imagined pre-existing consensus and insists upon the reader's complicity in that validation. This is why many arguments that appeal to common sense employ a first-person plural pronoun, which imagines a community, including but not limited to the author and the reader, that has somehow *already* achieved consensus with the author's description of reality.

No such consenting community exists in any empirically verifiable sense. The common reading public is an invention of the text that invokes it. No other published text can be cited as verification of common sense, as published writers are not, as themselves, "common" people without expertise or special education, and no actual individual person can be quoted to represent consensus among the masses. It is impossible to locate common sense in any one individual because it is produced and maintained in the public space outside of individual private identity.

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[40] Consensus is, as late as the middle of the twentieth century, still taken for granted as the goal of epistemological inquiry. For example, in *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt writes, "For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; Chicago: U Of Chicago P, 1998), 50. Note the use of the first-person plural pronoun, which, in this passage, has no specified antecedent.

Since an appeal to common sense cannot rely on verification from individual members of "the public" to prove consensus, it must produce the illusion of general consensus within the text itself. This requires a two-step process. First, the author must, in some way, hide or de-emphasize his own authority in the text, lest his claim to that which no one person can possess seem absurd. This can occur, as above, with frequent use of the first-person plural pronoun when making assertions, through a pseudonym that signifies "commonness," or through the invention of a narrator (or narrators) whose voice is distinguishable from the author's "own" voice. Second, the text must dramatize the process of public consensus through narrative.

Narrative plays several important roles in common sense rhetoric. As common sense is a fundamentally epistemological proof for an argument, it must include a plausibly mimetic representation of the world. While this representation may minimize idiosyncrasies that may betray the author's subjective limitations or personal interest, it is detailed enough to produce a sense of recognition in the reader. The first moment of consensus between the reader and the common-sense text is a mutual verification of the description of phenomena. If the author produces a mimesis that successfully engages a reader by inspiring a sense of private familiarity with the setting and characters, it is not only the mimesis that has been corroborated, but the reader's personal experience of life as well. A mimetic text in mass print culture is rhetorically powerful insofar as it offers the individual reader representation in public at the moment of self-identification. To consent to a text's description of the world is to achieve a measure of epistemic stability through

envisioning consensus, not only with the author, but often also with an imagined other reader.

Having establishing a plausible mimetic description of experience that is presumed to be shared with the reader, the common sense narrative represents events, across a period of time, that will resolve according to an implicit causality that defines the governing nature of the world described. In realistic common sense narratives, the implicit causality outlines the nature of the world such that it requires a moral, social, or political solution that may be suggested or explicitly stated by the text.

The normative moral rhetoric of realistic fiction has not always been considered its primary efficient purpose. The rise of the realistic novel has been described by Richard Rorty as creating a fictional space for a wide diversity of descriptions of the world:

> The novelist's substitute for the appearance–reality distinction is a display of a diversity of viewpoints, a plurality of descriptions of the same events. What the novelist finds especially comic is the attempt to privilege one of these descriptions, to take it as an excuse for ignoring all the others. What he finds most heroic is not the ability sternly to reject all descriptions save one, but rather the ability to move back and forth between them.[41]

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[41] Richard Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens," *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers* Vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 66-82. 74.

"The novelist" here is clearly an idealized figure of the novelist as imagined by Rorty. While this description might perhaps apply, in some measured sense, to some profoundly experimental twentieth-century novelist who satirizes the reader's desire to get a coherent grasp of what is occurring, as in, perhaps, Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* (1975), it does not seem to describe the traditional novel at all. For Rorty, the novel is the potential antidote to "the tradition of Western metaphysics"[42] because of its anti-essentialist rejection of the philosopher's desire to settle on a single privileged description of the world.

Rorty's description of the novel seems to ignore the complex rhetorical means by which even apparently conflicting descriptions of reality may be subtly (or not subtly) privileged by the author in order to create a rhetorical weight for some particular perspective, whether it is directly represented in the text or not. It does seem accurate, however, to suggest that there is something anti-metaphysical about the rhetoric of narrative, even when it is employed by philosophers. Common sense rhetoric, which is dependent on the representation of a reality that the author claims to share with an imagined reader, is one means of sidestepping the problems of metaphysics in order to arrive at essential truth through verification of a realistic narrative of experience.

In this dissertation, I examine a range of mid-eighteenth-century British philosophical, literary, and critical texts in order to identify shifts in the development of the rhetoric of common sense. In each case, I attempt to identify the

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[42] Richard Rorty. "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens," 75.

qualities the author ascribes to a man or woman of "common sense," and to compare these to the qualities of the imagined reader of the text, either as a peer of the author in intellect and experience, or as an innocent or uninformed person. I note the deployment of narratives as evidence for experiences and the rhetorical means by which the author asserts that the represented events serve as evidence for the existence of experiences, characters, or phenomena. I particularly look for examples in which authors use first-person plural pronouns when describing experiences, characters, or phenomena, and then proceed to make a claim of self-evidence about the conclusions drawn from these "common observations."

Through this analysis, I narrate a history of the development of the "common sense" that Kant describes as the ability to arrive at objective judgment, overcoming the limitations of subjectivity by imagining the perspective of "everyone else." In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the relationship between discourses of common sense and the implicitly normative moral function of the texts that employ them. The rise of the realistic novel, I argue, plays a crucial role in the development of normative moral rhetoric in narrative, not only borrowing from structures of philosophical argument, but also contributing in turn to the rhetorical style of philosophical writing.

Chapter 1: David Hume and Samuel Johnson on Common Sense

Since the eighteenth century, philosophers have often identified David Hume's skepticism toward the *a priori* principles of metaphysical enquiry as an experiment in philosophical reasoning that ironically reveals the impossibility of true induction and the necessity of metaphysics. Immanuel Kant was the first to describe the extraordinary nature of Hume's attack on metaphysics, in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783):

> Since the *Essays* of Locke and Leibniz, or rather since the rise of metaphysics as far as the history of it reaches, no event has occurred that could have been more decisive to the fate of this science than the attack made upon it by *David Hume*. […]
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> The question was not, whether the concept of cause is right, useful, and with all respect to cognition of nature, indispensable, for this Hume had never put in doubt; it was rather whether it is thought through reason *a priori*, and in this way has an inner truth independent of all experience, and therefore also a much more widely extended use which is not limited merely to objects of experience: regarding this *Hume* awaited enlightenment. The discussion was only about the origin of this concept, not about its indispensability in use; if

> the former were only discovered, the conditions of its use and the sphere in which it can be valid would already be given.[43]

Through Hume's conclusion that certainty in causal reasoning can only be deductive—that is, it can never arise from experience and observation apart from *a priori* assumptions—Kant claims he was able to formulate a new kind of metaphysics, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). While Hume himself rejected the project of metaphysics in favor of epistemological and moral philosophy derived through inductive methods, he, according to Kant, cleared a path for the return of philosophy to metaphysics by demonstrating the limitations of induction, which must necessarily give way to "common sense"—probabilistic causal judgment—in the interpretation and representation of experience.

In his assessment of the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) in *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945), Bertrand Russell describes the process by which Hume seems to have arrived at the necessity of probabilistic causal judgment. He writes:

> It is evident that he started out with a belief that scientific method yields the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; he ended, however, with the conviction that belief is never rational, since we know nothing. After setting forth the arguments for scepticism (Book

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[43] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science, with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 7,9.

> I, Part IV, Sec. I), he goes on, not to refute the arguments, but to fall back on natural credulity.[44]

Hume's rejection of deductive rational knowledge in favor of what Russell calls "natural credulity" (and Kant calls "common sense") results in a rather literary sense of experience as an object for probabilistic and sentimental "belief." Rather than concluding with Kant that the inability to derive knowledge from experience necessitates a return to metaphysical analysis of subjectivity and reason itself, Hume explores the means by which "common sense" operates on the objects of experience.

Because it is impossible to share actual experiences as examples for the reader, Hume shares experiences in language, through brief narratives that demonstrate how common sense operates in response to the perception of phenomena. Hume does not consider direct perception to be ontologically superior evidence to that obtained by reading; rather, the communal nature of shared language effectively overcomes the problem of subjectivity of direct perception and individual sentiment. Through representation, readers can share a mediated perception of the same object of experience and describe their responses to it. Indeed, Hume commonly uses the example of aesthetic response to literature in order to describe the operations of common sense on experience.

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[44] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 671.

Literary reading is, for Hume, a situation that involves the entire organism of sensibility and cognition, in which the text has the authority of experience only insofar as the reader finds its events and characters to accord with probabilistic judgment. Hume suggests that the reader's aesthetic judgment of the text is dependent on the author's ability to manipulate the sentiments with ease, without straining the intellect by representing perverse feeling:

> The straining of the imagination always hinders the regular flowing of the passions and sentiments. A tragic poet, that wou'd represent his heroes as very ingenious and witty in their misfortunes, wou'd never touch the passions. As the emotions of the soul prevent any subtile reasoning and reflection, so these latter actions of the mind are equally prejudicial to the former. [45]

In order to arrive at an epistemic consensus with the text about the nature of humanity or the customary causal relations between common events, the narrative must not deviate too far from the reader's expectations for sentimental appropriateness. In the comparison of reactions to shared experience between individuals, the problem of subjectivity will necessarily arise. But through the mediation of language, the experience is of the same textual representation, and the problem of subjectivity is diminished, and it becomes possible to examine how belief arises from probabilistic judgment, rather than from rational contemplation.

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[45] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000.), 1.4.1.

Hume writes, “Belief, being a lively conception, can never be entire, where it is not founded on something natural and easy.”[46] He uses “natural” and “easy” to describe the means by which a person derives probabilistic causal relationships through sentimental responses to both experiences and representations of experiences. The appeal of literary forms is not merely the production of aesthetic pleasure, but the clearest object for analysis of the means by which individual persons may compare their judgments, arrive at consensus, and discover what is “common sense,” not only with one another, but with the authors of the representations as well.

In this formulation, Hume implies that aesthetic excellence is necessarily paired with consensus with social custom regarding the morality of characters and common causal relationships. The credulity that Russell imputes to Hume with regard to probabilistic belief extends not only to the causes derived from repeated experiences of life, but also to the causes derived from participating as a reader in literary culture. In an essay on the peculiar status of fiction as evidence during the Enlightenment, John Bender writes, “Hume struggles valiantly to *feel* the difference between fiction and reality but, on his own skeptical account, verisimilitude is essential to our apprehension of both because both rest upon probable inference and upon the fiction of causal continuity.”[47] For Hume there is little difference between the validity of evidence constituted by experiential impressions and the

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[46] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.1.

[47] John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," *Representations* 61 (1998): 8.

validity of evidence provided by impressions received from reading representations of experience in language. Both are subjected to "common sense," which determines the fitting sentiment and probable causal relationship between events. Because these causes cannot be rationally determined, they must emerge from habitual inferences of causation derived from experience.

In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Charles Taylor considers that it is the "basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative.*"[48] For Taylor, it is only through the mediation of experience to oneself in causal, moral narratives that one can begin to create a conception of one's own subjectivity. Like Kant, Taylor reads Hume's reduction of subjectivity to bare consciousness, inaccessible to itself, as metaphysically incorrect because it empties the conception of the self from what he calls "the *mattering*."[49] Without *a priori* judgment, Taylor argues, induction alone cannot account for the moral pursuit of goodness, and especially the willingness of an individual person to rebel against the moral failures of society.

The development during the Enlightenment of modern philosophical thought, according to Taylor, depends entirely on the reduction of the conception of

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[48] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 47. Slavoj Žižek has made similar claims about the epistemological efficacy of narrative for managing the problem of the inaccessibility of subjectivity: "If we are to speak about reality in a consistent and sensible way, we have to have recourse to fictions." Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 88.

[49] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 49.

the self to bare self-awareness, as John Locke effects in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Taylor writes, "This is what I want to call the 'punctual' or 'neutral' self—'punctual' because the self is defined in abstraction from any constitutive concerns and hence from any identity," as in a continuing, narrative, morally relevant sense. "Its only constitutive property is self-awareness. This is the self that Hume set out to find and, predictably, failed to find." [50] Rather than attempting to establish the subjective nature of the one-who-experiences, however, Hume concludes that there is only a collected history of perceived experiences and beliefs derived from those experiences that may be termed the "self." Hume claims that his common-sense theory of moral sentiments is a description of how human nature responds to experience, rather than arising from any *a priori* impulse toward the good (as for Taylor), or toward the rational (as for Kant). Although Hume wants to define moral sentiments apart from subjectivity, he also defines the range of normal sentiment rather narrowly, so as to account for that which is, according to common sense, useful to society.

Hume's desire to construct an explication of morality divorced from a metaphysical subjectivity suggests his peculiar relationship with the representation of feelings and experiences in language. Rather than conceiving of the written text as the product of a particular subjective consciousness, Hume describes written texts as functionally communicating with readers only when they produce "natural and easy" effects by aligning with observations and experiences already shared with the

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[50] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 49.

reader. That is, texts are rhetorically successful if they conform to normative ideas of experience, as "belief" cannot, according to Hume, arise from ideas that do not agree with the probabilistic causal judgments constructed by the reader's experiences. This conception of the written word results in the development of rhetorical strategies that Hume shares with other empiricist philosophers (such as George Berkeley), as well as authors of fiction (such as Henry Fielding), in which the written text claims to demonstrate the truth of a proposition by using evidence, not from the author's experience, but from the reader's.

This appeal to "common sense," in which the author declares that the reader has already, or should have had, a certain kind of experience, and therefore must agree with the argument, emerges from what Taylor calls "the punctual self"—the conception of individual consciousness as an amalgamation of experiences rather than a fully subjective (and potentially ethical or rational) self. For post-Lockean radical empiricists like Berkeley and Hume, the self does not have special properties aside from its ability to construct probabilistic causal inferences from experience.[51] Thus the representation of experience in language is not a confrontation with a separate consciousness, but merely an addition to the body of experience that is amalgamated or discarded according to its plausibility.

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[51] Hume asks, "What then gives us so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possest of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives?" David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1.4.6. Charles Taylor attempts to answer this question by describing the special features of a fully metaphysical subjectivity in *Sources of the Self*, section 2.2.

David Hume's contemporary Samuel Johnson is invariably named among these great "common sense" thinkers of the eighteenth century, and yet his role among them is uneasy at best. According to James Boswell, who, in his *Life of Johnson* (1791), often lamented his biographical subject's low opinions of so many great thinkers of their time, Johnson was dismissive of George Berkeley[52], scornful of Henry Fielding[53], and contemptuous of David Hume[54]. He did not address his objections to these three authors directly in his written work, but in conversation Johnson aligns each of them with an absurd kind of modern thought, blind somehow[55] to some obvious and simple truth about reality or morality. Boswell evaluates Johnson's hasty responses as the products of "politicks" in the case of

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[52] Regarding a conversation with Johnson about Berkeley, Boswell reports, "I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it *thus*." James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 333.

[53] "Fielding being mentioned, Johnson exclaimed, 'he was a blockhead;' and upon my expressing my astonishment at so strange an assertion, he said, 'What I mean by his being a blockhead is that he was a barren rascal.'" Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 480.

[54] In his *Life of Johnson*, Boswell's attempts to discuss Hume with Johnson repeatedly end in animosity. During a conversation on various religious attitudes toward death, Boswell tells him that Hume had claimed not to fear death, which, Boswell reports, incensed Johnson so powerfully that he angrily sent Boswell away, calling out, "Don't let us meet to-morrow." Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 427.

[55] See chapter 2 for a closer analysis of the relationship of "common sense" rhetoric to the language of disability. Disability is a challenge repeatedly addressed in post-Lockean common sense, in that common sense assumes that there is a "normal" way to experience reality, and that therefore there is also an abnormal, damaged, or lesser experience that cannot experience or observe the world accurately.

Berkeley[56], and "prejudice" against Fielding[57], which prevented Johnson from giving either his full intellectual attention, or a calmly engaged explanation of their failures.

Of Johnson's apparent contempt for David Hume, Adam Potkay observes that Boswell "consistently misrepresents Hume's philosophical positions to Johnson and encourages Johnson's misconceptions insofar as they inflame his oratory."[58] While it is certainly true that Boswell took great pleasure in Johnson's masterful refutations of many of their respected contemporaries, it seems unlikely that Boswell would be motivated by a desire to publish brutal attacks by one of his intimate friends against another. Potkay adds that most of the ideas of Hume's that Boswell brought up to Johnson for comment come from Hume's private conversation, his earlier essays, and *A Treatise on Human Nature*, while "Hume's mature scepticism consisted of little more than reclaiming Cicero's epistemological modesty."[59] Potkay's comparison of Hume and Johnson is dependent, he admits[60], on ignoring Hume's earlier skeptical extremism regarding metaphysical subjectivity, as well as Johnson's reported conversation, in which he expresses his most extreme prejudices and allegiances. This comparison is also dependent, as Potkay acknowledges, on diminishing the religious differences between the two writers by focusing exclusively on their

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[56] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 334.

[57] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 389.

[58] Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000), 1.

[59] Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness*, 2.

[60] Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness*, 2.

published work and analyzing these works in isolation from the religious contexts in which they were written.[61]

In my own comparison of the published works of David Hume and Samuel Johnson, I find that the matter of religious faith constitutes a crucial difference between these two authors, who are in many ways the similarly skeptical but optimistic men of Enlightenment that Potkay describes in *The Passion for Happiness*. The problem of faith is not revealed, I argue, in their descriptions of morality or human nature, but in their conceptions of human subjectivity. While Hume famously rejects all inquiry dependent on a metaphysical conception of the subject, which allows him to treat representations of experience as experience itself, Johnson's interrogation of ethical subjectivity is at the core of his own literary productions as well as his aesthetic theory and literary criticism. For Johnson, as for Charles Taylor, the recognition of the isolation of the self and the inaccessibility of the self is prerequisite to the formation of a systematic ethics. Johnson's insistence on the centrality of metaphysical inquiry grows out of his profound understanding of Christian grace, and inspires his ambitious critical project to develop an ethical aesthetic purpose for the modern author that does not merely seek to reflect experience as it is, or, worse, constitute a rhetorical replacement for experience, but to intervene in the reader's perception of the world and reconstitute her role in it.

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[61] Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness*, 5-6.

Hume's Experiential Narratives

In *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)[62], David Hume argues that a sense of morality is determined largely by habitually constructed sentimental associations with particular perceived virtues and vices, which are in turn determined by the customary utility of these qualities to that society. Morality, he determines, must be derived from social consensus about the utility of observed moral behavior, rather than constructed as subjective *a priori* principles from which an individual person would rationally derive moral behavior. Hume proposes that morality, as with everything else, can only be discussed as experienced, and not as an *a priori* existing principle. There is no valid—that is, empirical—evidence for eternal moral truths, he argues, only for moral behaviors and the sentiments that motivate them.

But although behaviors may be observed and moral sentiments experienced in response, the communal verification of sentimental evidence is impossible (as sentiment is not experienced communally) without representation. Thus Hume insists that, unlike other philosophers of morality, he will rely not on general value statements, but on "instances"—descriptions of typical events and situations.

> It is easy for a false hypothesis to maintain some appearance of truth, while it keeps wholly in generals, makes use of undefined terms, and

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[62] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998).

> employs comparisons, instead of instances. This is particularly remarkable in that philosophy, which ascribes the discernment of all moral distinctions to reason alone, without the concurrence of sentiment.[63]

Hume suggests that the proper method of philosophy is not to seek truth in rational generalizations, but on "instances," because they demand the "concurrence of sentiment." Common sense is not, for Hume, a purely rational sense, but one that calls upon the heart as well as the mind in response to observation.

Hume's process of argumentation seems to be derived not only from the tradition of post-Lockean empiricism, but also from the evidentiary structure of the essay, modeled by Michel de Montaigne and Francis Bacon, in which a narrated event from history or literature or a description of a typical (rather than extraordinary) observed phenomenon serves as the basis for speculations on the possible causes or effects of similar situations or occurrences. For Hume's moral enquiry, the causality implicit in any such narration must be analyzed not through deductive reasoning based on *a priori* assumptions, but through the sentimental responses that customarily follow experience.

Whose sentiment, then, constitutes reliable evidence for the experience of moral discernment? Hume readily admits that there may be those members of

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[63] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, App. 1.5

society whose sentiment does not lead them to take pleasure in utility, or to abhor vice, but to feel the reverse in response to moral and immoral behavior.

> A creature, absolutely malicious and spiteful, were there any such in nature, must be worse than indifferent to the images of vice and virtue. All his sentiments must be inverted, and directly opposite to those, which prevail in the human species. Whatever contributes to the good of mankind, as it crosses the constant bent of his wishes and desires, must produce uneasiness and disapprobation; and on the contrary, whatever is the source of disorder and misery in society, must, for the same reason, be regarded with pleasure and complacency.[64]

The sentiment of any particular individual may not necessarily be trusted to constitute the basis for socially constructed morality. According to Hume, it may be possible that there are those whose responses to the actions of others are in direct opposition to the benefit of general society.

Even beyond the possible existence of perversely immoral persons, he writes, morality may not be found in the affective responses of any one individual. “Every man’s interest is peculiar to himself, and the aversions and desires, which result from it, cannot be supposed to affect others in a like degree.”[65] Despite Hume’s desire to avoid inquiry into subjective states due to the inaccessibility of

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[64] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 5.2.40.

[65] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 5.2.42.

subjectivity to empirical observation, he admits that it must be observable that even normal self-interest will also result in differences of moral sentiment. Hume's argument that morality may be determined through observation of sentiment in response to events therefore does not apply to individual members of society, but to the entire society at once and its culturally shared, normative moral sentiment.

The socializing element, for Hume, is not moral instruction, but language itself, because it evades the problem of inaccessible subjectivity. Hume posits that, in shared language, words that refer to socially beneficial qualities of character necessarily suggest sympathetic sentiments, while words that refer to those aspects of character that are harmful to society in general suggest negative sentiments.

> General language, therefore, being formed for general use, must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community.[66]

Language, which allows communication between different persons with differing interests, regulates the moral sentiment by mediating their communication in ways that are already laden with value judgments. Although subjective principles that do not change in response to new observations may lead to inappropriate moral action, and although individual interpretation of experience may be perverted by self-interest, increased experience with *descriptions* of characters and *narrations* of

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[66] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 5.2.42.

events will, he argues, correctly train the moral sentiments to align with the benefit of society in general. In this sense, a common sense of morality—in Hume's framework, a communally-negotiated sense of appropriate sentiment in response to events that in turn guides probabilistic judgments for future action—cannot be based on the actual observation of an event or even on one person's conclusions drawn from aggregated observations, but only on the readers' communal responses to representations in language, which contains in it the cues to appropriate sentiment. Hume does not attribute the moral feelings created by literature to the author, but to the communal and sentimental properties of language itself, which render texts—even those written by authors of dubious morality—morally legible by a sensible and experienced reader.

In his own philosophical writing, in which he has promised "instances" of common experiences to demonstrate the common sense of moral sentiment, Hume frequently provides representations of characters and behaviors. The descriptions and narrations Hume offers in his texts eschew the appearance of direct, subjective observations of events, devoid as they are of any details other than those that will elicit the desired sentiment. To present the reader with a narrative unmediated by the language of common, socially beneficial sentiment would be to write within the potentially subjective framework of Hume's own perspective. In order to involve himself in this social language, Hume not only eschews details irrelevant to his argument, but also often describes and narrates observed behavior from a first-person plural perspective. Thus, it is not that Hume has observed this or that phenomenon, but that "we" observe it.

This “we,” which clearly does not merely stand in for the author alone, nor for any particular reader or groups of readers, functions in the role of an abstract state of “Observation” that represents common sense, which, for Hume, is the set of moral principles, derived from the value judgments inherent in the language itself, that mediates among individual interests for the good of society. Consensus in response to texts—fiction and poetry especially—is, for Hume, crucial for the propagation of moral stability.

However, even language itself is unreliable in its ability to produce a proper consensus when rhetorical efficacy serves to pervert the natural socializing effects of language. In the introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume laments the rise of aesthetically pleasing rhetoric in post-Lockean philosophical debate. The problems he outlines in this introduction focus on the lag that seems to exist between the promises of consensus-based inductive epistemology and the development of a discourse in philosophical prose that finds socially beneficial purpose in consensus.

> Disputes are multiply'd, as if every thing was uncertain; and these disputes are manag'd with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain. Amidst all this bustle 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours. The victory is not gain'd by the men at

> arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army.[67]

There are three distinct complaints raised here. First, Hume argues that the endless debates arising in early eighteenth-century philosophy seem to him to be more the product of a sort of competitive skepticism rather than genuine disagreement. As Hume insists throughout his philosophical works, he insists that there must be practical limitations to skepticism when common observation yields manifest instances of certain phenomena. That is, it is inappropriate to attempt to prove or disprove through rational logic what is undeniably and repeatedly observable in the world.

Second, Hume complains that although these arguments seem to arise from hypertrophied skepticism about the work of other philosophers, each participant in these debates argues in favor of his position with what seems to be a total lack of skepticism about his own subjectivity. Philosophers are those who doubt one another too much, and themselves too little. Because there is so little admission of consensus among philosophers, there is very little potential for cumulative progress in the sense that Francis Bacon described in *The Advancement of Learning*. The promise that philosophy, could, through more inductive methodologies, at least produce probabilistic knowledge on which other knowledge can be built is, after Bacon, rather swiftly followed by remarkable, universally recognizable leaps in the natural sciences, but in epistemology and moral philosophy, consensus about the

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[67] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.

truth of an idea is not verifiable with the same certitude, as the objects of analysis lie not out in the world for empirical observation, but within individual minds, where they are prone to misinterpretations arising from subjective interest, which is not verifiable by common empirical observation.

Perhaps consensus is to be found, then, among the reading public. But here Hume is also disappointed, as the most successful works of philosophy seem to be those that are most aesthetically or rhetorically pleasing. Notably, Hume does not distinguish, here or elsewhere, between aesthetic and rhetorical appeal. Rhetoric is not, for Hume, that which appeals to the rational mind, but that which affects the sentiment.

It is difficult to understand why Hume, for whom consensus of sentiment is the basis for standards not only of beauty, but also morality and benevolent action, would express dismay that "reason" fails to produce philosophical consensus among readers. Does Hume, as the author of the *Treatise*, worry that the skill of his pen will, like that of his contemporaries, fail to live up to the promise of his arguments? Certainly, it seems that Hume's writing is most confident in the *Treatise* when he is discussing the understanding, rather than the passions or morals.

In the first book of the *Treatise*, Hume is often merely revising the structure of arguments made by his predecessors, and healing what he sees as false rifts among their works by finding the common substance of their conceptions of experience and decentralizing the question of personal identity. However, he

follows his polemical section “Of personal identity”[68] with an anxious and melancholic conclusion in which he reflects on his own inner turmoil and periodic dejection, which cannot be cured by reason, but can be allayed by spending time in the company of others. The act of writing and thinking philosophically is isolating, lonely work that causes him, he writes, to “begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron’d with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv’d of the use of every member and faculty.”[69] However, after going out to a dinner and games with friends—by immersing himself in experience and conversation rather than contemplation of his own thoughts—he recovers, and his earlier fears and miseries seem “ridiculous.” He writes, “Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin’d to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life,” in opposition to “my natural propensity” to philosophical melancholy.[70] Hume’s observations of his own solitude in mental labor have led him to the belief that sociability is the cure for the delusion that one is alone in a prison of subjectivity, inaccessible to others, and even inaccessible to oneself. To give up this “ridiculous” delusion is to experience the joy of the “common” world.

In this sense, it becomes clear that the entire project of the first book of the *Treatise* is to discover what the greatest modern philosophers may find in common—not only with one another, but also with the society that surrounds them.

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[68] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.6.

[69] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.7.

[70] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.7.

Near the end of the conclusion to the first book of the *Treatise*, Hume imagines those "many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carry'd their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses."[71] These gentlemen are contrasted with philosophers who heat their imaginations far beyond the sensory and sentimental experiences of the world, to create systems and theories that supposedly govern the universe. Hume does not believe the common man should take up philosophical thought, because it will bring him no joy, but he wishes that the philosopher would learn to think more like the common man. Hume acknowledges that his own mind does not work much like those of these imagined "honest gentlemen," but he proposes that all philosophers should strive to adopt their wisdom of common sense.

This philosopher's fantasy of the man of common sense does not originate with Hume. George Berkeley employed this imaginary person of sound, unlearned, epistemologically modest mental means in his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). In these fictional conversations, Hylas and Philonous meet three times to debate whether the world consists of real substance or whether it exists as a series of sensory perceptions. At several points in the dialogues, especially whenever the discussion becomes particularly abstruse, Philonous appeals to "common sense" for verification of his ideas. This is not the common sense of Aristotle, who used it to describe the faculty that organizes sensations into

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[71] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.7.

perception, nor the common sense of Locke, who used it to mean the faculty that organizes perceptions into cognition, but the consensus that might arise with individuals whose learning is limited to individual experience of the world, not tainted by ideas received through education. Philonous states:

> I am content, Hylas, to appeal to the common sense of the world for the truth of my notion. Ask the gardener, why he thinks yonder cherry-tree exists in the garden, and he shall tell you, because he sees and feels it; in a word, because he perceives it by his senses.[72]

And a few pages later:

> I wish both our opinions were fairly stated and submitted to the judgment of men who had plain common sense, without the prejudices of a learned education.[73]

That is, if we *could* submit our judgment to men like the gardener, they would be able to tell us whether our conceptions of reality accord with those he has derived from his empirical experience of the world. Neither Hylas nor Philonous actually engage the gardener in conversation; it would be absurd to submit the truth of an entire epistemological argument to an individual person, no matter how poorly educated or symbolically employed. Berkeley's use of "common sense" as an arbiter of epistemological judgment does not imply that such a sense is locatable in any

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[72] George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 117.

[73] George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, 120.

actual gardener, but in the *idea* of the gardener as someone whose cognitive faculties are free of the isolating influences of education and philosophical contemplation, and whose social influences are limited to a very basic knowledge of religion and some discourse with others like himself.

Ironically, Berkeley's gardener and Hume's "honest gentlemen" are, from a post-Kantian philosophical perspective, an invention of deduction masquerading rhetorically as induction. Berkeley's Philonous appeals to an external authority, common sense, that is locatable in a fictional character who exists solely to validate the philosopher's argument. Common sense is self-evidentiary epistemology. It appeals to no individual experience, while simultaneously refusing to assert itself as an individual voice. Common sense exists not in a self, but in the plausible fictions we can invent about others. This somewhat bizarre idea of presumed-consensus-as-evidence might make some sense as it relates to Berkeley's argument, which concludes that we perceive the world in common because those perceptions arise from the mind of God. For Berkeley, to have experience of the world that accords with the experiences of others is to know God. Common sense is a way of rejecting skepticism about the divine origins of human experience.

In the third book of Hume's *Treatise*, however, common sense is a way of rejecting skepticism about sentiment, that motivating faculty that does not submit to rational logic or public observation. Rather than positing certain abstract truths or ideals and deriving accidents from them, as in deductive reasoning, the common-sense argument in Hume describes a brief, plausible narrative scenario, free enough

of idiosyncrasies and details that it may apply to Everyman—or, perhaps, something like Berkeley's idea of the gardener. It is not Hume's story about himself; nor is it a story about a particular person he knows. He places the "common observation" in the first-person plural. "We" observe these behaviors and characters everywhere.

Hume's narratives that are examples of absurdly implausible motivations and conclusions, as counter-arguments, are often told in first-person singular, as in the story in the *Treatise* in which he facetiously argues that having sex with his neighbor's wife with the window closed is no moral breach because no one could see him doing it, and so no one would be misled to believe that she was his own wife.

> Add to this, that if I had us'd the precaution of shutting the windows, while I indulg'd myself in those liberties with my neighbour's wife, I shou'd have been guilty of no immorality; and that because my action, being perfectly conceal'd, wou'd have no tendency to produce any false conclusion.[74]

That is, what "we" observe is true and useful, but often at the expense of the credibility of what "I" do. The use of "I" in Hume is nearly always an admission of the isolating self-interest of personal narratives, as contrasted with the necessarily social purpose of narratives in which the readers' complicity in the observation is compulsory.

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[74] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.1.1, fn. 68.

Exemplary narratives serve as the evidence for many of Hume's most ingenious arguments, even when these narratives are clearly derived from Hume's imagination and not from his own personal experience. In the *Treatise*, he writes that "when we consider how aptly *natural* and *moral* evidence cement together, and form only one chain of argument betwixt them, we shall make no scruple to allow, that they are of the same nature, and deriv'd from the same principles."[75] The natural process by which one derives causality from sentiment is then exemplified in a brief narrative about the feelings of a fictional prisoner who is tortured by the inevitability of his death:

> A prisoner, who has neither money nor interest, discovers the impossibility of escape, as well from the obstinacy of the gaoler, as from the walls and bars with which he is surrounded; and in all attempts for his freedom chooses rather to work upon the stone and iron of the one, than upon the inflexible nature of the other. The same prisoner, when conducted to the scaffold, foresees his death as certainly from the constancy and fidelity of his guards as from the operation of the ax or wheel. His mind runs along a certain train of ideas: The refusal of the soldiers to consent to his escape, the action of the executioner; the separation of the head and body; bleeding, convulsive motions, and death.

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[75] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.1.

The reader is invited to imagine the feelings of the man condemned to die as he approaches his execution, as Hume confidently describes the prisoner's experience of lacking any option but to submit to his fate. Hume goes on to explain how this narrative serves as evidence for the claim he is making about how the mind employs causal reasoning in order to predict future events:

> Here is a connected chain of natural causes and voluntary actions; but the mind feels no difference betwixt them in passing from one link to another; nor is less certain of the future event than if it were connected with the present impressions of the memory and senses by a train of causes cemented together by what we are pleas'd to call a *physical necessity.*[76]

"Here" refers to a piece of evidence wholly invented in Hume's imagination. A crucial aspect of common sense reasoning is the author's ability to trust that his own imagined sentiment for fictional characters is shared, not with an individual person who has experienced the events represented in the narrative, but with readers who are willing to imagine the same sentiment while reading the narrative he has written, and will willingly participate in the "we" of the text.

The "we" of Hume's moral philosophy is a sort of sentimental equivalent of Berkeley's gardener, a fictional entity that is not the philosopher himself, nor any individual reader, but someone who has lived in the world and felt and thought,

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[76] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.1.

innocent of the pernicious influence of an education in moral philosophy. “We” is, like Berkeley’s gardener, deductive rhetoric communicating a purportedly inductive argument, an arbiter of common sense who represents everyone and no one, invented for the purpose of providing evidence that will yield Hume’s conclusion. But unlike Berkeley’s gardener, with whom we are encouraged to agree though he never speaks, Hume’s “we” of moral sentiment makes the reader compulsorily complicit in the construction of moral philosophy.

In the introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume acknowledges that the inductive model of using observations to derive conclusions is difficult, if not impossible, for questions of sentiment and morality. Unlike natural philosophy, for which observation may produce rational conclusions that are consistent with those of other observers (and are therefore, according to consensus epistemology, accurate), the observation of moral and immoral actions is necessarily, according to Hume’s argument, dependent on sentiment. He writes:

> When I am at a loss to know the effects of one body upon another in any situation, I need only put them in that situation, and observe what results from it. But shou'd I endeavour to clear up after the same manner any doubt in moral philosophy, by placing myself in the same case with that which I consider, 'tis evident this reflection and premeditation wou'd so disturb the operation of my natural

> principles, as must render it impossible to form any just conclusion from the phaenomenon.[77]

While the natural philosopher may conduct and observe experiments dispassionately through reason, the moral philosopher considers cases in which compassion and self-love, identification and vicarious experience do not just warp the observation; they are the objects of observation. Though we may all watch a ball drop or a comet pass, we can each only feel our own sentiment.

Can there be consensus regarding moral sentiment when the objects of observation are available only to ourselves? Hume wrestles with this problem throughout the *Treatise* in a way that does not offer much clarity. The *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, however, published twelve years later, much more confidently employs this first-person plural style of observation, which emerges alongside his more sophisticated use of descriptive and narrative techniques that elicit the socially appropriate sentiment his interpretation will demand. Hume acknowledges the possibility that there are those who do not experience the proper moral sentiment elicited by circumstances, but warns that such a person becomes the enemy of all mankind and will be shunned until he begins to have normative moral feeling:

> Let a man's insensibility be ever so great, he must often be touched with the images of RIGHT and WRONG; and let his prejudices be ever

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[77] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction, 6.

> so obstinate, he must observe, that others are susceptible of like impressions. The only way, therefore, of converting an antagonist of this kind, is to leave him to himself. For, finding that no body keeps up the controversy with him, it is probable he will, at last, of himself, from mere weariness, come over to the side of common sense and reason.[78]

In order to bring someone in line with "common sense and reason," Hume argues, society must abandon the person of perverse moral feeling until he begins to realize that he requires the company of those whose moral sentiments are in agreement. Hume places this as a sort of warning, about a fictional person, but no less addressed to the imagined reader, in the second paragraph of the *Enquiry* as a way of encouraging the reader's complicity in experiencing the sentiment suggested by the text, which is aligned with "common sense and reason," rather than employing a perverse skepticism about the evidence Hume presents.

As in the *Treatise*, Hume eschews deductive reasoning in this *Enquiry*, insisting that his judgments will be based exclusively on observation, not only because it satisfies the conditions for truth outlined in the *Treatise*, but also because the epistemological demands of readers of philosophy have changed. While his *Treatise* lamented that men are moved by the style of a philosophical argument rather than the substance of its evidence, Hume's *Enquiry* confidently asserts that this is no longer the case, at least in natural philosophy.

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[78] David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Sec. 1.

> Men are now cured of their passion for hypotheses and systems in natural philosophy, and will hearken to no arguments but those which are derived from experience. It is full time they should attempt a like reformation in all moral disquisitions; and reject every system of ethics, however subtile or ingenious, which is not founded on fact and observation.[79]

Moral philosophy, Hume argues, can be derived from observation of the world just as the laws of gravity may be derived from observation of the movements of planets. In the case of every particular proposition regarding morality and moral sentiment in the *Enquiry*, he offers a brief case for analysis, followed by a statement of the commonsensical moral response "we" derive from it.

In the third part of the *Enquiry*, "Of Justice," Hume offers a brief story that reads rather like the summary of a crime novel:

> Suppose likewise, that it should be a virtuous man's fate to fall into the society of ruffians, remote from the protection of laws and government; what conduct must he embrace in that melancholy situation? He sees such a desperate rapaciousness prevail; such a disregard to equity, such contempt of order; such stupid blindness to future consequences, as must immediately have the most tragical conclusion, and must terminate in destruction to the greater number,

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[79] David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Sec. 1.

> and in a total dissolution of society to the rest. He, mean while, can have no other expedient than to arm himself, to whomever the sword he seizes, or the buckler, may belong: To make provision of all means of defence and security: And his particular regard to justice being no longer of USE to his own safety or that of others, he must consult the dictates of self-preservation alone, without concern for those who no longer merit his care and attention.[80]

In attempting to explain how even a virtuous man may become violent and self-interested, Hume offers this wonderfully detailed little fiction, which he entreats the reader to imagine along with him as he narrates the progress of this imagined man's feelings. If he can move the reader's heart with this sentimental tale, then the feeling the reader shares with the author constitutes the evidence Hume needs to make his larger argument about how justice is related to moral sentiment.

These cases seem to constitute the same kind of "evidence" as Berkeley's gardener does, in that they do not display the complexity of detail or characterization that would constitute a mimetic representation of an actual person or situation, but instead serve as symbolic narratives. These narratives are indebted both to allegory, in which the characters and events are typological and precede application to reality, and to realism, in which the causality that structures the events does not depend on religious or eternal truths. They are, in John Bender's term, "hypotheses." He writes, "Fictions, be they hypotheses or novels, yield a

[80] David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Sec. 3.

provisional reality, an 'as if,' that possesses an explanatory power lacking in ordinary experience."[81] If the epistemic power of narrative over actual experience is that it renders the world more causally legible, it is because those causes are embedded within the narrative.

On nearly every page of the *Enquiry*, Hume appeals to the self-evident nature of his argument, which he claims can be derived from common experience of the world, and common-sense judgment based on that experience. A skeptical reader may wonder what may be the purpose of reading a text the author himself repeatedly claims is unnecessary for understanding. If every conclusion is based on evidence easily found in the common experience of life, what, then, could be the novelty of the argument? Yet the *Enquiry* remains Hume's most mature work of moral philosophy, arguing with clarity and conviction that the social construction of morality offers the possibility of happiness, utility, and meaning in a life otherwise plagued by doubts. It seems to be written to clarify the solution to skeptical melancholy, which he describes in the *Treatise*:

> This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may

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[81] John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," 9.

> seem entirely free from it. […] Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.[82]

Hume suggests that philosophical skepticism, in both metaphysics and epistemology, necessarily results in a kind of social sickness and isolation. In ceasing to think skeptically, and instead involving ourselves in experience—and in representations of experience—we may overcome the pernicious delusion of subjectivity and begin to partake meaningfully and morally in society.

It would be easy to accuse Hume of disingenuous rhetoric. By asserting the self-evidentiary nature of his arguments, praising consensus as an inherently moral goal, and using the first-person plural "we" when describing or narrating experiences and sentiments, a skeptical reading of Hume's "common sense" style might suggest that he must be disingenuous in failing to acknowledge the rhetorically manipulative effects of self-evidentiary argument. The page is not, after all, a tête-a-tête between author and reader as equals, each comparing his own experience with the other through the socializing medium of language. From the perspective of rhetoric, the reader's experience of "consensus" with a written text is learning without self-awareness. In asking the reader to abandon inquiry into the inaccessible subjectivity of selfhood, either his own or the author's, and to trust the depersonalizing effect of "language" to drain his examples of self-interest, Hume seems not to present his arguments for evaluation, but to declare that the reader *already* agrees with the evidence he provides for these arguments.

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[82] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.2.

Through his contributions to the development of anti-subjective, "common sense" rhetoric, Hume comes to employ what would become the dominant rhetorical structure of the late Enlightenment in the philosophical prose of the "Common Sense" school; in the novels of Fielding, Sterne, and Burney; and in the American Revolutionary arguments of Franklin, Jefferson, and Paine. By presenting evidence in the form of narrative and description from a non-subjective, first-person plural perspective, this rhetorical structure does not confront the reader as a separate consciousness, but rather assumes that the reader somehow already participates in a common observation of the world through the act of reading. Language, when employed in this Humean sense as a socializing force laden with sentimental values that promote general happiness and common utility, seems to equalize the rhetorical relationship of reader and author by diminishing the subjectivity of the author and calling on the judgment of the reader in evaluating the communal evidence provided by the text.

Johnson's Aesthetic Optimism

In *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume*, Adam Potkay observes that it is curious that David Hume, the most literary among the British philosophers of the eighteenth century, and Samuel Johnson, the most philosophical among the British literary authors of the eighteenth century, have so rarely invited interdisciplinary comparison. Despite their differences in religious and cultural

influence, the works of Hume and Johnson display a nearly identical passion for espousing the utility of morality and self-governance in a well-lived life. Potkay writes:

> [Hume and Johnson] concur that happiness or human flourishing is the proper aim not only of ethical precept but also of descriptive psychology, and that its attainment depends partly on political and economic conditions, but primarily on an inner economy, the proper management or regulation of the passions that propel us.[83]

This pointedly anti-ironic emphasis on the moral utility of happiness and affective self-governance is by no means limited to these two authors of the eighteenth century. However, the similarity of the methodologies of Hume and Johnson in pursuit of this aim is remarkable. The optimism and compassion that motivate the moral enquiries of Hume and Johnson are mitigated, or perhaps rendered more courageous, by their shared skepticism regarding received principles.

One of the ways in which Hume and Johnson similarly manifest their critical engagement with the culture of mid-eighteenth-century Britain is in their examinations of the epistemological function of aesthetic representation of experience in language. For Hume, representation serves as the means by which observation of the world transcends the merely personal and provides the opportunity for a probabilistic, but psychologically necessary, consensus about the

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[83] Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness,* 12.

nature of reality. For Johnson, representation constitutes the rhetorical means by which contingent knowledge of the world may be constructed in the mind of the reader by an author. In this sense, Hume and Johnson seem to be in agreement about the epistemic stakes of narrative; where they differ is in their treatment of the role of the consciousness of the author, the process by which a reader arrives at consensus with a text, and in the moral stakes of this relationship between authors and readers.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the aesthetic theorist, lexicographer, poet, playwright, and novelist Samuel Johnson is unwilling to blur the distinction between the roles of authors and readers, as Hume seems to do, or to disavow the moral stakes of authorship. According to Johnson, the customary, probabilistic knowledge derived from experience is likely to be morally perverse, and, therefore, so are those texts that attempt to reflect the true nature of reality without the intervention of a clear, *a priori* moral causality. That is, the sentimental effects and causal relationships of narratives in these texts should not appear to be self-evidently plausible (as in Hume's aesthetic judgment), but should evince the aesthetic intervention of the author in the representation of the world. According to Johnson, the reader should be reminded that the text is not epistemologically *equivalent* to experience, though it should reflect experience.

While Hume imagines his reader to be a peer, in an ongoing dialogue with texts, his own experiences, and those of his friends, using natural sentiment as the guide of his judgment, Johnson's imaginary reader is often a young person, driven by

curiosity about experiences she has never had, and moral problems she has never faced. In the literary print culture of the 1730's and 1740's, such a reader would have found fiction and poetry not only espousing prudence, justice, and toleration, but also representing the pleasures of crime and the flesh.[84] The failure of these latter texts, Johnson argues, is not the failure of causal or sentimental plausibility, nor of realism in representation, but the failure of moral purpose in the author.

In *Samuel Johnson and the Impact of Print*, Alvin Kernan argues that Johnson's literary criticism is so demanding in part because of his peculiar conception of the "reader," who is a necessarily fictional person whose perspective must be imagined in order to construct a coherent understanding of the potential relationship of influence that published texts create between authors and reader. He writes:

> When seen in the long tradition of literary audience-making, Johnson's common reader is not just a reflection of an actual historical audience of readers, nor merely an attempt to control the

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[84] One of the difficulties of identifying the particular texts that readers would have purchased for reasons other than moral edification is that, as I discuss in chapter 3, the framework of earnest moralization appears in texts that also provide explicit, tempting descriptions of criminal and sexual life. This apparent confusion about moral intent emerges not only in the works of lesser writers of true crime and bawdy pamphlets, but also in masterful texts such as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722). The tension between the thrilling effect of Moll's sexual and criminal adventures and the sober moral lessons offered by Defoe's preface and Moll's conversion seems impossible to resolve. *Anti-Pamela; or, Feign'd Innocence Detected* (1741), Eliza Haywood's vicious satire of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), creates a struggle between content and morality very similar to that in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*; despite the narrator's frequent interpretive intrusions in the narrative, *Anti-Pamela* offers a sensationally dramatic story of a young woman who uses sex to manipulate and blackmail the men around her.

> interpretation of books, nor only a way of overcoming the isolation of reader and author. The reader is all of these things, but ultimately he is also a way of attributing to letters, as if its nature were a prior fact, a certain kind of existence and worth that in part corresponds to the realities of print culture, and in part realizes a conception of what letters at its best might be.[85]

Johnson's imagined reader is active in response to texts, not merely praising or rejecting their aesthetic qualities, but also learning from them in morally significant ways that demand critical attention. As Kernan asserts, Johnson was keenly aware of the reach and effects of the medium of print, and he devoted as much attention to imagining the possible responses of readers as to describing the purposes and perspectives of authors. Rather than envisioning the author-reader relationship as a one-sided exchange, in which the author fills the passive reader with the information in the text, or as an implied conversation between equals, Johnson depicts the relationship of authors and readers as a complicated web of aesthetic, hermeneutic, and moral questions.

At the level of language itself, Johnson's skepticism far outstrips Hume's. While Hume takes for granted the social utility of language and its purpose of inculcating moral sentiment, Johnson describes the English language as naturally

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[85] Alvin Kernan, *Samuel Johnson and the Impact of Print* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987, 1989), 234.

tending toward disorder, confusion, and rhetorical manipulation. In his preface to the *Dictionary*, he laments the lack of order or reason he finds in the language:

> When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected, without a settled test of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected or received, without the suffrages of any writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority.[86]

This description of language as an ever-growing and ever-changing enormous collection of signifiers with no authoritative sense of logic or order is quite different from Hume's sense of language as a self-regulating tool for creating social order. For Johnson, nothing must be taken for granted by the author of literature, who must energetically apply himself to use this imperfect tool in representing an imperfect world to readers who may be willing to accept him at his every word.

Despite their differences, David Hume and Samuel Johnson each display surprising optimism in their work, finding in aesthetic writing the possibility of a

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[86] Samuel Johnson, Preface, *A Dictionary of the English Language: In which the Words are deduced from their Originals, and Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers, to which are Prefixed, a History of the Language, and an English Grammar*, 8th ed., 2 vols (London: Printed for J. Johnson et al, 1799. ECCO. City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib.).

stable understanding of the world not offered by experience alone. Through reading, representational poetry and prose, the isolated self may find comfort, hope, and a brief respite from skepticism in the discovery that mature consensus may produce a useful (if not objectively "true") sense of moral purpose. Both authors favored the ideal described by Horace in the *Ars Poetica*: "Poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life."[87] Writing should resemble life in some manner recognizable or rendered plausible to the reader, while offering some measure of moral or aesthetic pleasure. Johnson and Hume both discovered that doing so could constitute a remarkably powerful rhetorical strategy, one in which the aesthetic pleasure of consensus with the reality presented in the text might allow the reader to feel less alone, more happy, and more committed to some kind of moral judgment.

However, unlike Hume, who takes for granted that writing is necessarily a socialized representation of experience, Samuel Johnson is anxious about the moral stakes of the representation of experience in prose and poetry. In his extensive writings on art and its obligations to nature and morality, Johnson expresses this anxiety in the form of a potentially paralyzing ambivalence. On one hand, he is critical of the Augustan movement toward realistic representation, which, in its quest to destroy the sentimental abstractions that deform perception, often eschews moral prudence. The power of language to create a "common sense" of the world

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[87] Horace. "On the Art of Poetry." *Classical Literary Criticism*. Trans. T.S. Dorsch. New York: Penguin, 1965. l. 334

becomes, for Johnson, a post-Lockean epistemological crisis catalyzed by the growth of popular print culture. On the other hand, he also expresses disgust for the hubris of poets who would claim personal understanding of divine law for necessarily limited human purposes. Poetry and fiction, Johnson argues, must not be seen as passive media through which unscrupulous representation yields perverse moral instruction, nor passive media through which the pretense of moral clarity is allowed to distort the representation of life as it is commonly experienced. Rather, he argues that authors have the duty to serve as active mediators between worldly experience and moral truth. Johnson suggests that this may only be possible if the author, in a conscious struggle against epistemological and moral hubris, is able to confront the isolation and inaccessibility of his own subjectivity.

The literary author must therefore engage in what often appears as an ironically hubristic struggle against hubris. In an iconic passage in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759)[88], Johnson narrates a conversation between the poet Imlac and Prince Rasselas in which Imlac describes the role of the poet at great length as the extraordinary struggle of the mind of a man to incorporate all knowledge of the world through experience, of the arts through study, and of wisdom through understanding, and to interpret all of these through the medium of language. Imlac is censured at the beginning of the eleventh chapter for the

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[88] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed. Jessica Richard (Petersborough, Ontario: Broadview P, 2008).

"enthusiastic fit"[89] he experiences while aggrandizing the singular difficulty and universal necessity of his profession to Rasselas, who responds:

> [T]he prince cried out, "Enough! Thou hast convinced me, that no human being can ever be a poet. Proceed with thy narration."
>
> "To be a poet," said Imlac, "is indeed very difficult."[90]

The task of the author, Rasselas concludes, must be impossible; Imlac, seeming to agree, declares that it is merely "very difficult." This exchange encapsulates the apparent paradox of the role of the literary author, who can neither succeed in an accurate representation of the world as it is, nor express unearthly wisdom, but serves instead as an active mediator of the dialectic between the two.[91]

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[89] Johnson, *Rasselas,* 64.

[90] Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas,* 64.

[91] Not incidentally, this dialogue could also aptly describe one of the central philosophical debates of the modern era, on whether it is possible to consider and to write about metaphysical conceptions of subjectivity. Is it impossible, or merely very difficult? Can it be described in terms of what it is not? For Kant, as discussed above, Hume's avoidance of metaphysics cleared the path for Kant and others to reinvent metaphysics for post-Enlightenment thought. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, considers pure subjectivity among the subjects "[w]hereof one cannot speak," and "thereof one must be silent," as in proposition 7. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Richard Rorty suggests that one must rely on representative language to describe the self because there is no idea outside what one may formulate in words. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor insists that, although discussing the subjective self is impossible, its absence from our conceptions of the world results in an absurd failure to account for phenomena, especially that which relates to the moral life. Slavoj Žižek attempts to solve the problem of subjectivity by considering it not through metaphysical reasoning, but through Lacanian psychoanalysis and highly ironic narrative representations of the problem of attempting to imagine subjectivities.

The Johnsonian form of dialectic can be particularly frustrating, in that the struggle between two values allows neither for the possibility of a negotiated third term nor an apparent preference, ultimately, for either. Critics of Johnson have repeatedly commented upon this tendency toward apparent self-contradiction from his own lifetime to the present day. The anonymous 1782 pamphlet *The Deformities of Dr Samuel Johnson*, attributed to James Thomas Callender, is animated by aversion to Johnson's political and religious affiliations, but successfully isolates a great number of apparent contradictions in Johnson's moral and aesthetic works. The fundamental argument of this pamphlet is that, although Johnson pretends to espouse a "common sense" perspective that the main purpose of life and art is that they contribute to the general happiness and utility of mankind, Johnson's own attitudes toward mankind are relentlessly pessimistic, petty, and peevish. The author writes:

> But while we thus meet with something that is ridiculous in every page, we are not to forget even for a moment, what we have often heard, and what is most unquestionably *true*, viz. That Dr Johnson is the father of British literature, the capital author of his age, and the greatest man in Europe!!!
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> […] The Doctor has insulted almost every order of society.[92]

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[92] [Thomas Callender], *The Deformities of Dr Samuel Johnson* (Edinburgh: Creech, 1782. ECCO. City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib.), 35.

The pamphleteer expresses frustration that a man famous for his moral and intellectual achievements in the world of letters should be so given to such uncommonly narrow and negative opinions of acclaimed authors, entire nationalities, and even the human capacity for moral thought and action. But as the pamphleteer sighs in the opening pages, "The satirist has not a reformer's virtues."[93] As Ian Donaldson has noted, Callender's objections to Johnson's "prejudices" would later be echoed by Sir John Hawkins and, later, William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey, who also lamented the apparent contradictions between Johnson's professed moral and aesthetic values on the one hand and the limitations of his own moral and aesthetic imagination on the other.[94]

Johnson's satirical proclivities are indeed far-ranging, and display a rhetorical clarity of purpose that seems missing in his praise for particular authors, in his recommendations to artists in general, and in his own literary works. In *Rasselas*, for example, Johnson submits the poet Imlac to the harshest scrutiny of satire. The passage quoted above has been particularly vexing for readers who wish to see Imlac as Johnson's image of himself. As Howard Weinbrot has pointed out, although several of Imlac's statements about poetry clearly align with aesthetic theories that appear elsewhere in Johnson's work, about half of them seem in direct

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[93] [Thomas Callender], *The Deformities of Dr Samuel Johnson*, iv.

[94] Ian Donaldson, "Samuel Johnson and the Art of Observation," *ELH* 53.4 (1986): 788-791.

conflict with Johnson's explicit statements about poetry, and, Weinbrot argues, we should reject this naïve reading of Imlac as Johnson's mouthpiece.[95]

In response to Weinbrot, Arthur Scouten offers a nuanced reading of Johnson's likeness to Imlac, suggesting that the invective of *Rasselas* is so total that it includes not only poets in general, but Johnson's own poetry, aesthetic theory, and professional ambitions. He writes, "Samuel Johnson had to be on guard against the vanity, or the logical trap, of exempting his own 'choice of life' from 'Hope's delusive mine.'"[96] *Rasselas* concludes with the primary characters choosing some modest wishes for the employment of their remaining days, despite the fact that "they well knew that none could be obtained," but no character's ambitions are as totally destroyed as Imlac's. He joins the astronomer, whose example leads him to conclude that "no human mind is in its right state,"[97] and they are "contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port."[98] Scouten's claim that Imlac might indeed be a fictionalized image of Johnson himself, humbled by a ceaseless stream of disillusioning experiences, calls for a re-evaluation of the contradictions in Johnson's writing about observation and artistic production.

These contradictions seem to arise in part from Johnson's use of dialectical argument throughout his literary criticism, which many twentieth-century scholars

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[95] Howard Weinbrot, "The Reader, the General, and the Particular: Johnson and Imlac in Chapter Ten of *Rasselas*." *ECS* 5 (Fall 1971): 80-96.

[96] Arthur Scouten, "Dr. Johnson and Imlac," *ECS* 6.4 (Summer 1973): 506.

[97] Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, 123.

[98] Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, 137.

have identified as a particularly attractive feature of Johnson's critical writing.[99] A great deal of twentieth-century admiration for Johnson seems to be directed at the humility of his skepticism, which simultaneously acknowledges the desire to perform disinterested analysis as well as the vanity of attempting to achieve a state of disinterestedness.

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[99] Martin Maner has demonstrated that, throughout the *Lives of the Poets*, especially, Johnson frames nearly every major point of discussion in terms of a dialectical opposition that cannot be resolved with certainty. In *The Philosophical Biographer: Doubt and Dialectic in Johnson's* Lives of the Poets (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988). Arieh Sachs focuses on the endless contest between reason and imagination in Johnson: "Reason and Imagination form the basic polarity of concepts that underlies all of Johnson's generalizations about man. Imagination is the faculty which leads the mind into error by distorting, limiting, or hiding the true state of affairs in accordance with the heart's perverse desires and needs. Reason, on the other hand, is that which discloses the true state of affairs and which thus controls (or 'regulates,' as Johnson frequently puts it) the impulses of Imagination." In *Passionate Intelligence: Imagination and Reason in the Work of Samuel Johnson* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1967), 70. Charles Hinnant discusses the irresolvable conflict between "original and copy" in Johnson's aesthetic theory, particularly praising Johnson's refusal to settle definitively in any dialectical matter, noting that in *Rasselas*, Imlac's final discourse on art, which "reaches toward a perspective that is emancipated from involvement in time and history […] appears to be undercut by an immersion in what it cannot possibly hope to transcend." In *"Steel for the Mind": Samuel Johnson and Critical Discourse* (Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 1994), 50. See also Hinnant, "The Dialectic of Original and Copy," ibid. 123-151: "On the one hand, [Johnson] perceives, fully as much as Nietzsche or Foucault, that critical disputes are never resolved in some serene heaven of disinterested discussion, that they are demonstrably an effect of certain self-constituted interests rather than a self-caused activity of the human mind. On the other hand, for Johnson, it is no argument against the ultimate value of critical reputations that they take their rise in the climate of such quarrels. What provides an ultimate test of their durability is precisely the fact that they are shown as enmeshed in a larger world beyond their own particular, self-interested claims. For inasmuch as this world is absorbed in its own rivalries, it is ultimately indifferent to the seductions and partiality of these claims." Ibid, 133-134.

In "Samuel Johnson and the Art of Observation," Ian Donaldson praises this particularly Johnsonian skepticism in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Donaldson argues that the opening couplet (famously derided by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and De Quincey) is itself a satirical treatment of the vain Enlightenment poetical project of pretending to see all of mankind from a position of absolutely disinterested judgment. Donaldson writes, "*The Vanity of Human Wishes* might thus be described as a poem about the nature of human myopia: not a literal, physical myopia, but one that is spiritual and psychological."[100] If "Observation" is to "Survey mankind, from China to Peru," could any human agent personify Observation itself? If this is an obscured reference to God, would it not be blasphemy to write a poem that assumes an omniscient perspective to judge the failures God observes in human nature? Donaldson concludes that Observation cannot represent a particular omniscient or divine agent, but, somehow, the act itself, divorced from any observer. "Thus it is neither the poem's speaker nor the reader who enjoys the privileged position of calm superiority; it is instead something impersonal, dehumanized: it is *Observation* itself."[101] Observation here, and possibly elsewhere in Johnson, means neither an ocular exercise nor an all-knowing God's-eye view, but, to quote Johnson's first intransitive definition for "to observe," the capacity "To be attentive."[102] As Donaldson argues, it is not a merely physical limitation that

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[100] Ian Donaldson, "Samuel Johnson and the Art of Observation," 794.

[101] Ian Donaldson, "Samuel Johnson and the Art of Observation," 794.

[102] Samuel Johnson, "Observe," *A Dictionary of the English Language*.

prevents any poet from personifying Observation; it is also the limitation of the subjective self, full of prejudice, preference, and ignorance, that prevents any poet from inhabiting this role.

Miles Rind has argued that the very idea of disinterested observation is antithetical to eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse, in that disinterestedness could not have been applied to any faculty of perception, but only to the motives and actions of an individual. The faculty of perception, he argues, could only be disinterested if it "terminates upon the object"[103] without coming from and returning to a particular individual whose act of observation itself is a product of interest. Although Rind's analysis of Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson, and Alison is convincing, it does not address the work of Samuel Johnson beyond the use of the *Dictionary* as a suggestive resource. As Donaldson demonstrates with respect to *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, Johnson does seem to have a clear conception of what disinterested observation might be, though he does not allow that any human being might be capable of it, either for moral or aesthetic purposes.

Throughout his work, Johnson expresses a deeply conflicted wariness about observation of the world. It is human interest, prejudiced and perverse, that distorts observation, but it is also human interest, compassionate and energetic, that creates the desire to observe. Though he may be able to conceive of observation without human agency as a poetic conceit, Johnson attributes the human act of observation

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[103] Miles Rind, "The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40.1 (2002): 70.

to an endless cycle of hope and disappointment. In *Idler 80*, he writes, "To know the world is necessary, since we were born for the help of one another; and to know it early is convenient, if it be only that we may learn early to despise it."[104] In the space of this one sentence, Johnson manages first to argue that observation of the world produces compassion for humanity, and then to conclude that it yields isolation from humanity. To know the world is both to want to improve it and to reject the possibility of earthly satisfaction. Although both of these impulses seem to have driven Johnson to write, often with apparently paradoxical results, neither is an impulse that arises from disinterestedness.

In several of his *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson criticizes those poets who attempt to write of events and feelings they have not experienced themselves. Clear displays of human interest—the desire for gratification, pleasure, contentment, and a sense of personal utility—seem to elicit most of Johnson's praise for the poetry of others, and his disgust for other authors seems likewise to have been produced at the level of personal moral or aesthetic revulsion. But those whose poetry shows no such investment of experience and observation do not even seem to deserve the vehemence of Johnson's disgust. In the life of Cowley, Johnson criticizes the "fictitious" nature of Cowley's amorous poetry in the following paragraph:

> It is surely not difficult, in the solitude of a college, or in the bustle of the world, to find useful studies and serious employment. No man

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[104] Samuel Johnson, *The Idler.* 2 vols, 3rd ed. with additional essays. (London: T. Davies, 1767. ECCO. City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib.), No. 80.

> needs to be so burthened with life as to squander it in voluntary dreams of fictitious occurrences. The man that sits down to suppose himself charged with treason or peculation, and heats his mind to an elaborate purgation of his character from crimes which he was never within the possibility of committing, differs only by the infrequency of his folly from him who praises beauty which he never saw, complains of jealousy which he never felt; supposes himself sometimes invited, and sometimes forsaken; fatigues his fancy, and ransacks his memory, for images which may exhibit the gaiety of hope, or the gloominess of despair, and dresses his imaginary Chloris or Phyllis sometimes in flowers fading as her beauty, and sometimes in gems lasting as her virtues. [105]

The work of the poet who wishes to move the sentiments of the reader, Johnson argues, must arise from experience, or otherwise not at all. What is missing in Cowley's amorous poetry is not poetic skill or imagination, but the personal interest that both leads to and comes from actual experience of the passions of love. Instead, he finds in Cowley's work a description of love furnished only with the adornments of literary cliché, using pastoral conceits to veil a lack of personal experience and the representation of original observations.

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[105] Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets; and a Criticism on their Works*, 3 vols. (Dublin: Whitestone et al, 1779. ECCO. City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib.), I: 8-9.

When Johnson finds in poetry an ability not only to represent experience of the world, but also to mediate that representation through individual interest, he discovers in it a purpose. Johnson's praise for Thomson, qualified though it is, concentrates on Thomson's ability to employ observation and experience in the service of his unique poetic vision:

> He thinks in a peculiar train, and he thinks always as a man of genius; he looks round on Nature and on Life, with the eye which Nature bestows only on a poet; the eye that distinguishes, in every thing presented to its view, whatever there is on which imagination can delight to be detained, and with a mind that at once comprehends the vast, and attends to the minute. The reader of the *Seasons* wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shews him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses.[106]

The eye of the poet, according to Johnson, is one guided by his individual interest, and that makes his own interest appealingly legible to the imagination of the reader. Though the reader and the poet may share experiences of life, the poet is necessary as an interpreter and guide for those experiences. The reader thus judges first the observations of the poet, and then his "peculiar train" of thought. If the representation of the world is deemed accurate according to his own experience, then the reader will be particularly susceptible to adopt, possibly without even realizing it, the impressions left by the author's unique vision.

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[106] Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, III: 208.

Johnson's praise or censure for various poets is guided not only by how compelling this "peculiar train" may be in their writing, but by how beneficial (or at least harmless) this train of thought may be to the moral life of the average reader. As a literary critic, he comments not only as an expert on the technical abilities of the poet's observation and representation, but also as a morally interested reader who examines the relationship between the poet and the public. Of Addison, whose life Johnson treats with an even hand, Johnson concludes the biographical portion with the following paragraph, which introduces the criticism of his writing:

> It is justly observed by Tickell, that he employed wit on the side of virtue and religion. He not only made the proper use of wit himself, but taught it to others; and from this time it has been generally subservient to the cause of reason and truth. He has dissipated the prejudice that had long connected gaiety with vice, and easiness of manners with laxity of principles. He has restored virtue to its dignity, and taught innocence not to be ashamed. This is an elevation of literary character, *above all Greek, above all Roman fame*. No greater felicity can genius attain than that of having purified intellectual pleasure, separated mirth from indecency, and wit from licentiousness; of having taught a succession of writers to bring elegance and gaiety to the aid of goodness; and, if I may use expressions yet more awful, of having *turned many to righteousness*.[107]

[107] Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, II: 49-50.

This appreciation of Addison could hardly be described as disinterested or unprejudiced. Johnson's moralism is the interest and prejudice with which he reads the works of his predecessors and contemporaries alike. To claim disinterested analysis of literary works may be a pretense of later aesthetic theorists and literary critics, but, here as elsewhere, Johnson's evaluation and analysis of literary works is unabashedly informed by his own moral and spiritual interests.

This moralism in Johnson should not, however, be confused with an *a priori* judgment based on knowledge of God's law or "natural law." In his article "Samuel Johnson and 'Natural Law,' Donald Greene demonstrates that, throughout Johnson's work, nothing suggests that Johnson conceives of such a thing as "natural law," which might be described as a set of assumptions about true morality that may be learned through experience and applied to daily life. Greene calls attention to Johnson's affinity for Pascal, whose aversion to this conception of natural law is an essential element of his fideism. Greene quotes Johnson from his Vinerian Lectures, discussing the relationship of worldly law to divine law:

> This eternal and Archetypal Law is not however for the feeble spirit of Mortals to pry into; let not those who are ignorant even of their own Frame, and of the Essence of every thing around them, presume to scrutinize *his* nature or *his* Conduct, whose very Existence is incomprehensible, and whose Ways are past finding out. Content with that Knowledge of himself and his Dispensations which he hath been pleased expressly to reveal, let us acquiesce in his Government and

> Will, with that Humility which becometh Ignorance and Imperfection.[108]

Johnson's division between eternal law, which is perfect but unknowable, and human law, which must be derived *a posteriori* from ongoing observation of the world and is therefore inherently flawed, is an essential aspect of his dialectical thinking. Although the desire for eternal divine truth is what motivates "Mortals" to continually revise their own conclusions about truth, the two are utterly separate. Greene writes:

> Johnson makes it clear that in *his* system (unless you are a very rare genius) you work in the opposite way, *a posteriori*: you observe the consequences of concrete human behavior; if it seems to conduce to the general happiness, to the "utility" (Johnson's word) of mankind as a whole, you then infer that it is in accordance with "natural law," and so, the will of God.[109]

The problem that arises from this *a posteriori* with respect to law is that, by definition, law, whether of divine or human origin, serves in an *a priori* function, pre-existing the events it will judge, even constructing the causality that will determine future events. Divine law may have no cause, but human law, despite having a cause, also serves as a cause.

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[108] Qtd. in Donald Greene, "Samuel Johnson and 'Natural Law," *The Journal of British Studies* 2.2 (May 1963): 65.

[109] Donald Greene, "Samuel Johnson and 'Natural Law," 69.

The problem of "true induction" in Johnson's thought is analyzed by John Wright in "Samuel Johnson and Traditional Methodology." In comparing Johnson's judgment to Bacon's formulation of the proper methods of observation and analysis, Wright states, "It was far more often Johnson's practice to point out idols than to form 'axioms by true induction.' This is true equally of his writings on morals and his literary criticism, and is a crucial and too seldom emphasized characteristic of his thought."[110] Despite his frequent appeals to observation and the reasonable conclusions that may be drawn from common experience, Johnson's own method of judgment primarily rests on censure of commonly accepted models of literary, moral, or social observation that he finds pernicious. This proclivity for censuring others' observations demonstrates Johnson's mistrust of observation alone as the proper process by which truth may be revealed.

The potential failures of observation and subsequent representation are many, and Johnson shares many of Hume's qualifications of empirical methods for deriving truth. The organs of perception may be impaired. One's observations may be limited by age, society, gender, education, and place. The conclusions drawn from observation may be unwittingly influenced by self-interest, or by a misguided sense that one has a clear understanding of God's will. Johnson's skepticism outstrips Hume's, however, in the matter of mediation of experience through language. Rather than bringing experience closer to shared common sense, the transformation of

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[110] John Wright, "Samuel Johnson and Traditional Methodology." *PMLA* 86.1 (Jan. 1971): 45.

observation into language will warp the evidence of experience through the inaccuracies of the medium, no matter how perfectly employed, and also through the demands of the marketplace, which will limit the expression of some unpleasant observations while encouraging those that please the most people. For Johnson, unlike Hume, the art of pleasing is in an extremely uneasy relationship with social and moral utility. And, as Johnson complained often during his early career, the efforts of an unknown writer or artist may languish despite the quality of the work due to the difficulty of achieving fame.

As difficult as it is to be a poet, Johnson was also aware that the work of writing poetry, of attempting to represent the world for others, would necessarily lead to the delusion that he had, in fact, developed some knowledge of divine or natural law. Blanford Parker writes, "It would not be far wrong to imagine that Johnson, who knew the allurements of writing, held that the poet who hoped to attain all knowledge of plant, animal, and man, so that he could do nothing more than write verse, was as mad and pathetic as the hermit, the pharaoh, and the astronomer."[111] These characters from *Rasselas*, each of whom pursues a perfect understanding of the world through observation that may then grant them the ability to make perfect conclusions about the laws of the universe, fall miserably short of their goals due to the imperfections of their own assumptions, faculties of perception, temperaments, and conclusions, as well as the imperfections of the

[111] Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Culture from Butler to Johnson*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 245.

world itself. All of these imperfections are compounded by the solitary nature of their judgment. Outside of a community of regulating minds, as the astronomer has been for so long, ideas, theories, and plans may offer the promise of eternal truths, but instead result in total isolation and despondency. Likewise, as Parker suggests, the poet himself is in terrible risk of this same kind of intellectual isolation, self-aggrandizement, and failure. A regulating community is necessary not only for religion, government, and science, but also for the arts.

If we consider the problem of Johnson's literary criticism in terms of the attempt to form just such a regulating community, doing for poetry what he desired to do for the English language in his *Dictionary*, we arrive at the problem that to form a set of laws about aesthetic value requires not merely an agreement about the history of the use of particular words, but also about the history of the use of particular arguments, forms, and rhetorical strategies. As Claudia Johnson has observed in her examination of his use of quotations from Locke in the *Dictionary*, even Johnson's definitions are deeply informed by his particular philosophical, moral, and political interests.[112] His judgments of poetry and prose are even less disinterested, as the ever-broadening eighteenth-century reading public and the often-disingenuous claims to moral authority in popular literature spark anxieties about the effects of literature on the moral health of the nation. The image of the young reader's easily impressible mind confronted by a new seductive text haunts

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[112] Claudia Johnson, "Samuel Johnson's Moral Psychology and Locke's 'Of Power,'" *SEL*, 1500-1900 24.3 (Summer 1984): 563-582.

Johnson's speculations in a way that serves as a synecdoche for the fundamental paradox of his aesthetic theory, which is the tension between realistic representation of the world and the moral purpose the work may serve as a mediator between the world as it is and the world as it should be.

The rise of realistic fiction poses an even greater dilemma than that of poetry, in part because of the attraction it holds for young, inexperienced, and uneducated readers, but also because, unlike poetry, which cannot be read without some awareness of the formal structures that shape its methods of representation, fiction may give the appearance of being somehow unmediated, as if it is a factual narrative of events. And it is this very deception that authors of realistic fiction in the first half of the eighteenth century often embraced, using claims of veracity as advertisements for their stories. The various "histories" and "lives" that appeared to have been written by their protagonists, and only edited by their authors, offered the reader a uniquely metafictional pleasure, in that not only were these stories compelling and entertaining; they were also, possibly, in some sense, "true." Even those realistic fictions of the 1740's that do not claim to be actual memoirs offer something far more potentially tantalizing than romances and fantastic tales; they offer the promise of greater knowledge of human nature without the risks of experience.

The possibility that realistic fiction would be read for the purpose of gaining a wider experience of the world is deeply unnerving for Johnson, as it constitutes not only a moral problem, in that many of these fictions offer delight in the form of

immoral actions, but also an epistemological problem, in that fiction's pretense of offering "true" stories would create in readers a failure of skepticism about representation. This, in writing about fiction, Johnson insists that authors must consciously avoid the temptation to represent fictional events as if they are somehow happening, or as if they have in fact already happened, to the reader, which is how Hume presents his exemplary narratives of common experience and observation. Rather, fiction must take care to call attention to the aesthetic intervention of the author, and thus allow the reader to participate in critical interpretation of the text. In *Rambler* 3, he writes:

> The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths, by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things too hastily passed over, or too negligently regarded.[113]

Although Johnson clearly values the realistic object of art—that is, the representation of situations and experiences within the scope of life as it is lived by the average reader—he only sees potential value in a consciously transformative

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[113] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler.* 6 vols. (London: Payne and Bouquet, 1752. ECCO. City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib.), No. 3.

representational style, an active aesthetic intervention in the world, rather than an apparently naïve passivity of style.

In his clearest defense of consciously transformational representative aesthetics, *Rambler* 4, Johnson attacks the idea that any work of art that represents realistic objects can ever be truly passive in its representation of reality, or, even if it could be, that it would be worth reading at all. "If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination."[114] If literature were, in some sense, exactly like the fallen, morally confused world it describes, it would be entirely useless to the reader who already lives in and experiences the world first-hand. He goes on:

> It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn; nor of a narrative, that the train of events is agreeable to observation and experience, for that observation which is called knowledge of the world, will be found much more frequently to make men cunning than good.[115]

When an author seeks to represent the world without clearly providing a moral perspective that mediates the events, the result may be that the events that please

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[114] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

[115] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

the reader most will be those that seem most attractive. Although Johnson seems here not to see the aesthetic value of realistic representation, he admits that it is exactly the pretense that there is no aesthetic intervention that allows for this disturbing moral confusion.

In a literary genre consumed largely by those who lack the moral certitude and experience of life to judge the world itself, this moral absence may even produce an epistemological crisis:

> They are the entertainments of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.[116]

Without first-hand knowledge of the world, young readers may, Johnson fears, fill their minds with false observations of human nature. This young reader with whom Johnson is particularly concerned in *Rambler* 4 is highly susceptible to narrative fiction that represents common life experiences because they have not yet had these experiences and look to literature as a sort of conduct book, telling him what to expect from life and how to behave.

> [W]hen an adventurer is levelled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama, as may be the lot of any other

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[116] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

> man; young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention, and hope by observing his behavior and success to regulate their own practices, when they shall be engaged in the like part.[117]

The pretense of writers who represent common life as outside the jurisdiction of divine law is often that the world itself is apparently not subject to any such law. The wicked often go unpunished, the corrupt may be charming, the innocent suffer, and the benevolent languish for want of recognition or earthly reward. In respect to the nature of the world, Johnson and the author of this kind are in clear agreement.

Yet his aesthetic optimism causes Johnson to censure such authors because, to the young and inexperienced reader, if not all readers, fiction contains within it the power of moral instruction. Fictions of this morally confused kind, though more representationally "realistic," fail, in Johnson's account, to take advantage of the morally instructive potential of literature, instead falling prey to total moral cynicism. The emergent aesthetic of realism threatens to become the pornography of moral poverty.

Although Johnson's fideism contains within it the realist's sense of the world as morally lawless, its defining characteristic is the insatiable longing that lawlessness produces for divine justice and moral clarity. Aside from the potential harmful effects of amoral realistic fiction on young readers, realistically amoral fiction also threatens to numb that longing by destroying the hope that produces it.

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[117] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

If all human beings are "Condemn'd to Hope's delusive mine"[118] (as Johnson opens his poem "On the Death of Dr Robert Levet" (1783)), making the "choice of life" (as he styles it in *Rasselas*) that never satisfies, tormented by gains even more than by losses (as in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*), then the longing for the divine is necessary for the maintenance of hope.

In his works of literary criticism and aesthetic theory, Johnson continually demands more of those who would call themselves authors. To write with genius is not enough; the poet must write from observation. To observe the world is not enough; the poet must observe a world he shares with his readers. To represent a recognizable world is not enough; the poet must represent the world with moral interest. To maintain moral interest is not enough; the poet must have humility in the face of what he cannot know. To be a poet is indeed very difficult.

In asking so much of the written word, Johnson threatens to burden authors with the command to do the impossible. And yet, in doing so, he expresses a profound optimism, not about the world itself, but about the written word as a potentially ameliorating influence on readers as a source of comfort, guidance, inspiration, and education. The world itself, in Johnson's view, exists only to disappoint us, and realistic fiction, he fears, may only serve to increase the cynicism, suspicion, and prejudice that emerges naturally as protection against that constant disappointment. Poetry and fiction, on the other hand, may be able to maintain that

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[118] Samuel Johnson, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984, 2000), 35-36.

useful sense of disappointment by offering mediation between what we know enough to fear and what we do not know but long for.

Chapter 2: Common Observation and the Novel

The opening sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) offers a marvelous satire of the novelistic convention of common observation: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."[119] This introduction to our witty narrator is not merely a comment on the collective wisdom of small communities full of gossiping families. The "universal acknowledgment" here makes reference to the power of consensus among communities of readers, and the reality that is not described, but created, by fictional convention. Whether Mr. Bingley desires a wife or not is irrelevant; the experienced reader of novels knows, as much as Mrs. Bennet does, that he must, and that he will, marry one of the Bennet daughters. This "truth" of this novelistic convention likewise applies to Mr. Darcy, who will overcome his forcefully negative first impressions of Elizabeth Bennet and her family to want her as a wife. However satirically inflected Austen's introduction to this novel may seem at first, it nevertheless metafictionally comments on the causal structure of the plot. This consensus about the desires of the single man need not include him in order to direct the course of his life. Even if he does not want a wife, he *must*, because this is a novel, and that is what happens in novels.

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[119] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 1.

The power of novels to create consensus is not merely agreement about what or who exists in the world, but what will necessarily happen to characters, and, by extension, to people. The causal relationships between events that are constructed and reinforced by novelistic convention create communities of readers with shared desires and expectations, both in fiction and in reality, especially in the case of the marriage plot. For many women novelists of the latter half of the eighteenth century, the "novelization" of expectations for heterosexual relationships becomes not merely an aesthetic convention, but an object of complex metafictional irony. In many of these novels that are, in fact, marriage plots, characters discuss fictional genres and reading experiences in order to discover the proper behaviors that will give rise to a favorable conclusion, or, as in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the narrator comments explicitly on the novelistic logic that guides the characters' actions and leads to the inevitably novelistic outcome.

In *The Female Quixote* (1752),[120] Charlotte Lennox tells the story of a young woman whose expectations of heterosexual love, which she derives from extensive reading in Renaissance romances, are not shared by the men of her community, whose expectations for the process of courtship more closely resemble those of the characters of more contemporary fictional sources. While Arabella expects her suitors to be unable to look at her or converse with her without having first dared to perform some heroic deed in her name, they seem to expect her to converse with them according to various standards of commonly accepted sociability, all of which

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[120] Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

reflect the behaviors of heroines and anti-heroines in male-authored "realistic" fictions of recent decades. Arabella's failure to respond appropriately to others is not, as for Miguel de Cervantes's Quixote, a reading-inspired madness that prevents her from interpreting her sensory perceptions of the world, but a madness that prevents her from interpreting the actions and motivations of her suitors. The suitors, however, are not drawing their own interpretations of Arabella's behavior from "life itself," but from more current literary conventions of heterosexual sociability.

Mary Patricia Martin argues[121] that the denouement of *The Female Quixote* identifies Arabella's "problem" as a failure to participate in the dominant fictional conventions of her time, however offensive they may be to her sense of feminine dignity. In order for the novel to achieve the necessary marital conclusion, Arabella must cease to envision herself as a type of romantic heroine, beloved as a goddess from afar, and instead degrade herself to the lowly position of the new kind of heroine seen in *Pamela* (1740) or *Tom Jones* (1749)—a woman who must learn not to take herself too seriously. Thus, according to Martin, *The Female Quixote* serves as a metafictional commentary on the role of the female author in a genre that has been invented and defined by male authors, particularly Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. Martin writes, "We can read Lennox's own text as a self-conscious intervention in the debate of the new fiction, one that uses both romance and novel

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[121] Mary Patricia Martin, "'High and Noble Adventures': Reading the Novel in *The Female Quixote*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 31.1 (Autumn 1997): 45-62.

to expose the gendered rhetoric of the dominant discourse."[122] Martin points out that the "Divine" who consults with Arabella at the end of the novel does not recommend a more careful observation of the world as the cure for Arabella's delusions, but an embrace of more current fictions as a model for instruction in how to respond to the desires of those around her.

Martin argues that Lennox's novel dramatizes the loss of a lively, unique personality in Arabella, who suffers great emotional distress until she assimilates her understanding of the world to these more contemporary novelistic conventions:

> [I]f we read *The Female Quixote* back though the Divine's terms, locating both novel and romance in its pages, we discover that the opposition between genres which underlies each of these readings is far from stable. The novel is not quite so credible, nor the romance so pernicious as the Divine has argued, and the value of the lessons to be learned from each cannot always be predicted.[123]

Martin notes that the end of the novel, in which Arabella comes to realize that the romances that had structured her understanding of the world were not the "proper" source of understanding of the world, gives way to a perfunctory, and decidedly anti-climactic, but thoroughly "novelistic" ending, in which Glanville marries the chastened young woman. Although Arabella follows the Divine's advice, the

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[122] Mary Patricia Martin, "'High and Noble Adventures': Reading the Novel in *The Female Quixote*," 46.

[123] Mary Patricia Martin, "'High and Noble Adventures': Reading the Novel in *The Female Quixote*," 52.

marriage effected by her alteration is not narrated as a triumph for our heroine, but a convention that must be fulfilled through self-chastisement.

On the final page of Lennox's novel, Arabella accepts Glanville's earlier proposals of marriage with the following speech:

> To give you myself, said she with all my remaining Imperfections, is making you but a poor Present in return for the Obligations your generous Affection has laid me under to you; yet since I am so happy as to be desired for a Partner for Life by a Man of your Sense and Honour, I will endeavour to make myself as worthy as I am able of such a favourable Distinction.[124]

Arabella's character has, in only a few pages, undergone an extraordinary transformation—one that trades the romantic convention of the cruel, powerful, chaste beloved for the convention of the new, "realistic" heroine, as male novelists have constructed her. This new heroine, the one who deserves love and narrative fulfillment through marriage, is demure, apologetic, yielding, and easily gratified by male approval.

The contrast between this new self-loathing (but marriageable) Arabella and the haughty, magnetic woman of the earlier chapters troubles the reader's ability to find a satisfying didactic principle in the denouement, or a sense of mimetic satisfaction. Martin writes:

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[124] Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 383.

> [T]he world that stands in for the novel in *The Female Quixote* soon proves no more believable than the romance, featuring stock conventions and devices that call attention to its fictiveness. That "realistic" novels do not exactly "exhibit life in its true state" comes as no surprise to any reader of eighteenth-century fiction; what is important here is that the specific terms of comparison which define the differences between novel and romance are not sustained.[125]

The unsatisfactory resolution of the plot of *The Female Quixote* manages both to fulfill the narrative conventions of the new genre while also putting them in quotation marks, transforming the usual source of narrative satisfaction into a set of unanswered questions and uneasy feelings.

In her analysis of genre in *The Female Quixote*, Laurie Langbauer finds that the uneasiness created by Arabella's rapid acquiescence to patriarchal, novelistic convention dramatizes Lennox's sense that women's desires—for power, sex, and social connection with other women—are poorly served by the generic conventions of the novel. As the genre of romance is, in Lennox's novel, associated with women's desires, it is also anachronistic, and Arabella's chastened acceptance of conventional novelistic marriage signifies Lennox's acknowledgment that the form in which she is writing has foreclosed on the narrative possibility that a woman might escape heterosexual submission. Langbauer writes:

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[125] Mary Patricia Martin, "'High and Noble Adventures': Reading the Novel in *The Female Quixote*," 53.

> Yet Lennox's positive alignment of women and romance is wistful because she recognizes how tenuous that position is. Her treatment of romance reflects her feelings about the possibilities of the novel. By locating a women's form in romance, she is placing it in what her form, the novel, cannot admit and so casts out. This placement recognizes that women have no real place.[126]

Arabella's declaration to Glanville, that she is "so happy as to be desired for a Partner for Life,"[127] is an admission that the heroine of a novel can only be allowed to be happy to be the object of a man's matrimonial desire, and that her own desires are no longer relevant to the plot. The denouement of the novel cuts short the pleasure of the romantic plot, and Arabella's submission to modern patriarchal convention is starkly bare of any profound moral satisfaction.

While *The Female Quixote* provides an example of a particularly abrupt shift from comic romance to sullen obedience of convention, Lennox's novel may be read in the company of many other novels by women in which the marriage scene at the end seems oddly bare of the delightful detail and moving sentiment that fills the preceding story. In many women's novels of the latter half of the eighteenth century, the heroines' marriages do not constitute, as in Richardson's *Pamela*, a triumph of virtue over vice, nor as in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, a reward for a male character who

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[126] Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 89-90.

[127] Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 383.

has overcome adversity. Rather, they take on, as in *The Female Quixote*, the weight of the novelistic convention asserting itself (often in a hurried, awkward, or unaffecting scene) over the individuality and dignity of the heroine's single, private life. Even in the case of a "successful" marriage plot such as *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Elizabeth draws the notice of Mr. Darcy through her intelligence and independent spirit, the marriage may only take place after she is chastened by his magnanimity and fully comes to realize the protective power of his social superiority. Of the denouement of the plot of *Northanger Abbey* (1818),[128] Robert William Chapman finds that Catherine Morland's marriage must be a metafictional commentary on novelistic convention:

> Jane Austen mounts a critique of sentimental literature in the plot twist in which Catherine Morland, the socially awkward heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, gets married off to the desirable hero, Henry Tilney, despite the apparent lack of romantic attraction between them and his regular condescension to her. Austen's narrator suggests that "it is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a *wild imagination* will at least be all my own."[129]

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[128] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey; with Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

[129] Robert William Chapman, ed., *Northanger Abbey; and, Persuasion, The Novels of Jane Austen* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 243.

Austen's claim that a marriage that is "derogatory of an heroine's dignity" is new to sentimental literature seems to be satirical, as Chapman suggests. Austen's further statement that, if such "derogatory" marriages are not frequent in "common life," then she, as the author of the novel, must have a "*wild imagination*," is certainly a satirical commentary on the representation of marriage as an unmitigated triumph in the patriarchal novel. However foolish Catherine Morland may be, and however noble Henry Tilney appears, their marriage still marks the end of Catherine's status as a heroine. Once a female protagonist is a wife, her story is over.[130]

The metafictional irony of the marriage plot in women's fiction is particularly evident in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801),[131] which ends with a bizarrely rushed double-proposal, followed by a witty discussion of comic marriage plot conventions that the characters are ordered to perform. Upon realizing that the characters present have found themselves in the denouement of the typical marriage plot, Lady Delacour gives directions for an impromptu theatrical tableau, in which the couples line up symmetrically and the observers arrange themselves as if they were

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[130] This generalization is troubled by the fascinating counterexample of Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791), in which the initial heroine, Miss Milner, declares her obsessive desire for her guardian, a stern, moralizing Catholic priest. After he is released from his vows and the couple marry in an ominous and tearful ceremony, the third volume skips seventeen years to show the couple split by the wife's infidelity and the husband's degrading moralism, offering hope only that their daughter may be capable of finding the happiness denied to her parents. *A Simple Story* is an uncharacteristically explicit criticism of the patriarchal marriage plot of the moral sentimental novel, in which the marriage to a morally superior man is supposed to satisfy and domesticate the desires of the chastened heroine. Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

[131] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

characters attending a wedding in a play. Instead of offering a didactic or prophetic aside from the narrator on the subject of conjugal bliss, Edgeworth ends the novel with a few enigmatic lines spoken by Lady Delacour herself: "Our *tale* contains a *moral*, and, no doubt, / You all have wit enough to find it out."[132] In this scene, the heroine Belinda has no more to say, think, or do except obey the older woman; her thoughts and actions are no longer her own, as they are now dictated to her as proper narrative conventions. Likewise, the typical didactic function of the marriage plot is hastily understudied by Lady Delacour's generic, metafictionally ironic couplet, which assumes that the reader has enough experience interpreting novels to discover meaning in them. By rendering the inevitable marriage scene as a discussion of theatrical conventions, Edgeworth both fulfills the expectations of the comic marriage plot and empties it of sentimental and moral content, leaving the reader to provide her own.

The power of the "truth universally acknowledged" in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is that it is the role of the novelist to reinforce the inevitability of marriage in the comic novel through the systematic denial of the agency of its characters. By rendering the denouement of the marriage plot in unsatisfying, hyper-conventional, or abstract scenes, these novelists place the didactic function of the "realistic" novel in doubt. Rather than looking to the end of the novel for satisfaction, the reader may find herself drawn toward the earlier representation of the heroine as a uniquely

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[132] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 478.

interesting character who has not yet succumbed to the "common sense" of conjugal love.

In Patricia Meyer Spacks's reading of *The Female Quixote*, this hyper-conventionality of the conjugal event is an attempt to satisfy Johnsonian concerns about the moral effects of fiction on young women readers while doing emotional justice to the unspeakable realities of female sexual desire.[133] While apparently serving the didactic purpose of chastening the heroine into marriageability, the novel, perhaps unwittingly, offers a sort of tragic counternarrative about the submission of desire to the masculine authority of proper words. Spacks summarizes the lesson of this counternarrative as an argument about the power of words to reframe, and thereby destroy, desire itself:

> Arabella, heroine of a didactic novel, responds readily to a wise man's *naming* of her experience. She thinks she has read truth; the moralist names it fiction. She believes herself motivated by desire for virtue and fame; the clergyman names her desire as directed toward love and revenge. Accepting conventional names, she accepts her conventional fate. Control of language implies control of action.[134]

Here, Spacks suggests that Arabella serves as a representative of the author Charlotte Lennox within her own book, transforming her story of female desire and

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[133] Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Subtle Sophistry of Desire: Dr. Johnson and *The Female Quixote*," *Modern Philology* 85.4 (May 1988): 532-542.

[134] Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Subtle Sophistry of Desire: Dr. Johnson and *The Female Quixote*," 541-542.

ambition into a conventionally didactic marriage plot in order to satisfy the demands of masculine literary authority—specifically Samuel Johnson in this case. I argue that the tension apparent in the hasty denouement of *The Female Quixote* and later women's novels may be an attempt by their authors to call attention to, rather than unselfconsciously employ, the didactic rhetoric of masculine novelistic convention.

More generally, the works of Lennox and Austen describe a particular arc of late eighteenth-century British satire on the effects of fictional narratives to produce delusions that have real effects on the world insofar as they are shared with a community of other readers. These satires take for granted, and even comment on, Samuel Johnson's comments on the current state of fiction in *Rambler* 4 (1750), in which he alerts novelists and readers alike that the rise of realistic representation may well result in more accurate consensus about the nature of the world as it is, but in doing so, it raises the moral stakes of consensus with narrative causality. The average reader may not, like Lennox's Arabella or Austen's Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, confuse herself with the heroine of a fantastical adventure, but she may come to expect the world she lives in to follow the course of events in more contemporarily "realistic," but no less fictional, fiction.

The potential confusion between fictional causality and the events of the world in early realistic novels is by no means accidental. While Lennox and Austen both write with clear awareness of the influence of fiction on a community of readers, employing complex metafictional irony in depicting the heroines of their

novels as themselves bound by literary conventions imbibed through the act of reading, Richardson and Fielding are deeply invested in convincing readers that the worlds presented in their novels are purely representational of reality as it is lived. Although these two particular authors have been described by everyone from Samuel Johnson to Ian Watt as sharing little in their representational aesthetics, they share a common interest in constituting reality for their readers through a compulsory consensus (implied or explicit) with the representation of the world in the text. Beyond merely setting the fictional precedent for the development of metafictional irony expressed by later women novelists, these authors seem to have welcomed—even insisted upon—the truth of their fictions, purposefully creating the epistemologically perilous conditions later described by Johnson.

The problem of truth in the works of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding is directly and complexly related, I argue, to the state of British philosophical rhetoric in the mid-eighteenth century. While philosophical writing gradually took up the task of relating itself more closely to shared observations of life and commonsensical conclusions, the writers of fiction developed increasingly sophisticated methods of observation and aesthetic representation that not only took into account the contemporary arguments of moral and epistemological philosophy, but also, in turn, contributed to the development of modern epistemological thought. In constructing narratives that asserted themselves as, in a sense, more *true* than individual experience because more commonly shared, the writers of the early popular novel contributed directly to the rise of narrative in philosophical rhetoric and self-evidence of moral and political causality.

In this chapter, I analyze the rhetorical structures of moral and aesthetic argument in the work of Henry Fielding, focusing specifically on *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749), in which the authorial narrator frequently appears as a commentator on the narrative he is telling. I argue that, unlike in the women's novels discussed above, in which the metafictional commentary of the text serves to undermine the normative didactic function of the plot by highlighting its conventionality, Fielding's metafictional commentary intensifies the normative didactic function of the narrative by encouraging the reader to confuse the world of the novel for the truth of the world itself. Fielding's insistence on the reality of the characters of his novels, and the universally acknowledged truths of their moral lessons, takes for granted the consensus of the actual reader, while simultaneously imagining another reader who is excluded from that consensus, and thus, from the imagined community created by the text. In doing so, Fielding repeatedly marginalizes the non-consenting reader, not just from the community of acceptably able readers of fiction, but also from the community of acceptably able persons in society. In effect, the consenting reader of Fielding is invited to take pleasure in the exclusion of imagined others, who, Fielding argues, are as little able to make appropriate sense of the world as of his story. This rhetorical strategy, which Fielding shares (to some extent, as we shall see) with David Hume, forms the basis of narrative conventions satirically alluded to by these later women authors.

Hume, Fielding, and the Common Observation

The development of the structure of philosophical argument from Locke to Hume demonstrates increasing skepticism about traditional methods of philosophical inquiry, and, simultaneously, an increasing reliance on "common observation" as evidence and "common sense" as analytical methodology. Nearly every major British post-Lockean philosophical work of this period begins by satirizing the "philosopher" as one working from faulty *a priori* assumptions, motivated by misanthropy, and employing scholastic rhetoric to hide a lack of real knowledge. For Berkeley, Shaftesbury, Butler, and Hume, real knowledge lies not in brilliant feats of deductive logic represented in perfectly executed prose, but in the possibility of consensus with the reader about commonly observed phenomena.

This development mirrors a similar shift in the aesthetics of British narrative fiction across the same period of time. As Samuel Johnson remarks in 1750 in *Rambler* 4, authors of narrative had become contemptuous of allegory and heroic romance, gradually replacing the high style and sublime imagery with the representation of life as it is commonly lived.[135] While philosophical writers described their purpose as clearing away the thickets of dogmatism and scholasticism, the authors of narrative fiction claimed that they sought to rid their works of the long influence of generic convention and metaphor, turning to the world as it is lived, rather than as it is read, to discover truth. In his comparison of the evidentiary frameworks of philosophical and fictional texts, John Bender asserts:

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[135] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

> Not only do the novels of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding, for example, pretend to offer densely particular, virtually evidentiary accounts of the physical and mental circumstances that actuate their characters and motivate the causal sequences of their plots, but they also attempt to frame the subjectivity of their characters within editorial objectivity, as in Defoe and Richardson, or narratorial objectivity, as in Fielding.[136]

Philosophers and writers of fiction alike attempted to make a case for their own objectivity in analyzing evidence. However, in order to do so, they rhetorically distanced themselves from the conventional epistemic frameworks of their predecessors.

In this sense, philosophical prose and narrative fiction of the early eighteenth century in Britain are often very similarly rhetorically aligned against the "bad" practices of past discourse, and toward the discovery of truth through conclusions drawn from common observation of the world. This methodology of observation requires consensus with the reader about the represented objects of observation in order to yield plausible conclusions. This creates great difficulty for the writer, who must depict these objects so that any reader may recognize them, or, at least, believe he recognizes them. Of the new authors of fiction, Johnson writes, "They are engaged in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can therefore detect any

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[136] John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998): 8.

deviation from exactness of resemblance."[137] Though representational fidelity to observed phenomena must be strong enough to call up similar impressions in the mind of the reader, it must also allow for variety of experience. Thus, Berkeley's gardener must be an allegorical category rather than a man, Hume's anecdotal evidence of human behavior must lack nonessential detail[138], and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* must be populated with characters who, the author insists, hardly need to be introduced to the worldly reader.

Henry Fielding serves as a particularly important case in the development of the novelistic aesthetic, in part because, as Ian Watt famously argued in *The Rise of the Novel*,[139] Fielding's representational realism so little resembles that of his contemporaries Defoe and Richardson, or that of the novel as it has developed across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Johnson's famous comment on the aesthetic difference between Richardson and Fielding, as reported by James Boswell, suggests an interesting juxtaposition with respect to the development of "common sense" rhetoric. "In comparing these two writers, he used this expression: 'that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew

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[137] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4. This description of the new style of verisimilitude in fiction may especially apply to Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which is set in the very recent past, during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, and includes several scenes of contemporary life in England. Early readers of *Tom Jones* might possibly have seen David Garrick's performance in *Hamlet*, attended a masquerade, or gone hunting in the countryside.

[138] See Chapter 1 for discussion of Berkeley, Hume, and fictional evidence of epistemic consensus.

[139] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1957, 2000).

how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.'"[140] That is, according to Johnson, Richardson's aesthetic investment in representing the emotional and experiential subtleties of his characters shows far more expertise than Fielding's broader representations of characters and events. Boswell himself does not disagree with the aptness of the analogy, but with the aesthetic hierarchy associated with it. For Boswell, Fielding's skill of synthesis is equally as impressive as Richardson's skill of analysis.

However, it is not merely the common emphasis on utility that describes the complex relationship of Henry Fielding's work with the philosophical writings of David Hume, who found in fictional narratives the possibility of something like knowledge, even when absolute knowledge from empirical experience has been rejected as impossible. More than any other major novelist in British literature, Henry Fielding inserts commentary throughout his fictional productions that insists the narratives he constructs are not "true" in the sense of his having witnessed them (a narrative convention common in the works of earlier authors such as Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, Delarivier Manley, and Daniel Defoe), but "true" in the sense that the reader must recognize the characters and situations described from their own experiences of the world. Fielding argues for the aesthetic value of his work on the basis of this recognition, which is similar to the argument that David Hume makes for the philosophical robustness of his own exemplary narratives. By being

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[140] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 389.

recognizable in detail, both Fielding and Hume argue, their narratives may aptly instruct the reader in thought and action.

The similarities between the rhetorical styles of Hume and Fielding may not be accidental. A striking example of their common structures may be found in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749)[141] VI.1, a chapter titled "Of Love," and Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) Appendix 2, "Of Self-Love," which was probably composed, according to editor Tom Beauchamp, "between early summer 1749 and late 1750."[142] Each of these chapters draws material from Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons* (1726), in which Butler eschews the method of the "direct formal proof" of logical philosophical argument in favor of argument based on observation, but tempered with obligations to virtue and morality[143]. In several of the *Sermons*,

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[141] Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1975).

[142] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998, 2004). 10

[143] Butler writes:

> There are two ways in which the subject of morals may be treated. One begins from inquiring into the abstract relations of things; the other, from a matter of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature. In the former method the conclusion is expressed thus, that vice is contrary to the nature and reasons of things; in the latter, that it is a violation or breaking in upon our own nature. Thus they both lead us to the same thing, our obligations to the practice of virtue; and thus they exceedingly strengthen and enforce each other. The first seems the most direct formal proof, and in some respects the least liable to cavil and dispute: the latter is in a peculiar manner adapted to satisfy a fair mind, and is more easily applicable to the several particular relations and circumstances in life. (14-15)

From Joseph Butler's preface to *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown; Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins, 1827).

Butler focuses on the nature of love and its relationship to "self-love," which he defines as "the love of power and sensual appetites" (19). In the eleventh sermon and elsewhere, Butler argues explicitly against Thomas Hobbes, who had in *Leviathan* (1651) derived all aspects of human nature from the principle of self-interest. Rather than disagreeing entirely with Hobbes's principle, Butler argues that "self-love" may be gratified by pure acts of generosity and kindness. Likewise, in these chapters I have selected from Fielding and Hume, the pleasure and utility of love for others is celebrated, and described as not at odds with self-gratification, but an important aspect of happiness and moral fulfillment.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Hobbism did not constitute a clear and present danger to moral philosophy. The increasing fluidity of class structures and the rise of global mercantilism contributed to a few Hobbesian accounts of human nature by authors such as Bernard Mandeville, whose *Fable of the Bees* (1714-1734) attempted to refute the dominant strain of philosophical thought by insisting on the natural depravity of mankind. Overall, however, Hobbes's ideas are found most often in moral philosophy of the early eighteenth century as examples of how traditional deductive philosophical thinking will necessarily end in bad, misanthropic conclusions, while "common observation" and experience with life will give one hope and pleasure.

Both Fielding and Hume (the latter writing in the year following the publication of *Tom Jones*) begin their chapters on this topic with the same concern,

which is that some people (unnamed in either text) have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as pure love or generosity unmotivated by selfish desire or pride. Fielding opens his chapter "Of Love" this way:

> In our last Book we have been obliged to deal pretty much with the Passion of Love; and, in our succeeding Book, shall be forced to handle this Subject still more largely. It may not, therefore, in this Place, be improper[144] to apply ourselves to the Examination of that modern Doctrine, by which certain Philosophers, among many other wonderful Discoveries, pretend to have found out, that there is no such Passion in the human Breast.[145]

And here is the beginning of Hume's Appendix, "Of Self-Love":

> There is a principle, supposed to prevail among many, which is utterly incompatible with all virtue or moral sentiment; and as it can proceed from nothing but the most depraved disposition, so in its turn it tends still further to encourage that depravity. This principle is, that all *benevolence* is mere hypocrisy, friendship a cheat, public spirit a farce, fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence; and that, while all of us, at bottom, pursue only our private interest, we wear these fair

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[144] This phrase seems to echo a common legal phrasing also used by Samuel Richardson in Letter 20 of *Clarissa* (1748), in which Clarissa quotes a letter from Lovelace in her own letter to Anna: "It may not therefore be improper to assure you, on the word of a gentleman, that no part of my estate was ever mortgaged."

[145] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1.

> disguises, in order to put others off their guard, and expose them the more to our wiles and machinations.[146]

Comparison of these lines reveals several curious similarities of style. Although Fielding's opening employs a wickedly sarcastic irony in "wonderful Discoveries," both passages introduce an identical anti-Hobbesian argument by describing its antithesis. Both attribute the Hobbesian position to unnamed others[147] ("certain Philosophers" in Fielding, "many" in Hume) whose "Doctrine" or "principle" is "modern" or "supposed to prevail" in contemporary discourse. For both authors, this position constitutes an attack on the character of an undefined first-person plural.

The "we" of both passages remains unclear. In Fielding's chapter, "we" seems to represent a kingly authorial persona who contains within himself the desires and expectations of his readers, who have been reading the previous Book and will go on to read the following one. In Hume's appendix, "we" represents all of those who believe their own kindness and generosity to be sincere. In both texts, I argue, "we" comes to present a sort of test for the reader. Does he consider himself part of the "we" defending the pleasure and utility of sincere generosity and love against the misanthropists? Or is he one of those shadowy "Philosophers," the "many" who cynically dissect human nature?

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[146] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, App. 2.

[147] Hume goes on to excuse Hobbes himself explicitly from his criticism, on the grounds that he and Locke both "lived irreproachable lives" (App. 2). In a sense, Hume seems to disbelieve that Hobbes was fully a "Hobbist."

Both authors go on to describe a second set of "philosophers" (so called by both Fielding and Hume) who, similar to the first, derive all "Virtue or Goodness" (Fielding), all "affection [or] the most generous friendship" (Hume) from "Pride" (Fielding) or "self-love" (Hume). Neither author can seem to invent a reason for these philosophies other than the bad nature of the philosopher himself. Fielding, calling the philosophers "Finders of Truth" and comparing them to "Finders of Gold" (a cant term for latrine-cleaners[148]), arrives at this satirical witticism:

> The Method used in both these Searches after Truth and after Gold, being, indeed, one and the same; *viz.* the searching, rummaging, and examining into a nasty Place; indeed, in the former Instances, into the nastiest of all Places, A BAD MIND. […T]he Truth-finder, having raked out that Jakes his own Mind, and being there capable of tracing no Ray of Divinity, nor any thing virtuous, or good, or lovely, or loving, very fairly, honestly, and logically concludes, that no such things exist in the whole Creation.[149]

That is, any truth that may be found in such a mind is worth its weight in excrement. Hume likewise maligns the character of his imagined philosophers:

> What heart one must be possessed of who professes such principles, and who feels no internal sentiment that belies so pernicious a theory, it is easy to imagine: And also, what degree of affection and

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[148] See Battestin's note 1 in Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* VI.1 269.

[149] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1.

> benevolence he can bear to a species, whom he represents under such odious colours, and supposes so little susceptible of gratitude or any return of affection.[150]

Those who believe such terrible things of human nature, and belong to the shadowy group of "philosophers," according to both authors, must have done so because they themselves know nothing of love and benevolence and are, in some sense, sentimentally (and therefore morally, according to Hume) disabled.

The "we" of both passages emerges, then, as the category of the non-disabled, the "normal" community of those who see, hear, and interact with the world such that the existence of pure love and generosity is readily apparent. Fielding and Hume go on to ask the reader (who may not yet know whether he is with the "Philosophers" or with "us") for consensus with this normative "we," who see and recognize love and virtue in the behavior of those around "us." Fielding challenges the "Philosophers" directly, inviting them to concede to the authority of common observation:

> […] I desire of the Philosophers to grant, that there is in some (I believe in many) human Breasts, a kind and benevolent Disposition, which is gratified by contributing to the Happiness of others. […] That if we will not call such Disposition Love, we have no Name for it. […] To deny the

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[150] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, App. 2.

> Existence of a Passion of which we often see manifest Instances, seems to be very strange and absurd […][151]

Hume also appeals to the process of observation for the cure for philosophical misanthropy: “To the most careless observer, there appear to be such dispositions as benevolence and generosity; such affections as love, friendship, compassion, gratitude.”[152] Both authors attempt to account for this failure of observation on the part of the philosopher as a reduction of affect to “appetite,”[153] demonstrating their lack of proper sensibility.

The representation of these misanthropic “Philosophers” as disabled is intensified as Fielding explicitly compares them to “a Man born blind,” in an image borrowed from John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in that their “Idea of Love may be as absurd as that which we are told such blind Man once entertained of the Colour Scarlet: that Colour seemed to him to be very much like the Sound of a Trumpet.”[154] For both authors, the conclusion seems to be that certain people, disabled in their hearts or in their perceptive faculties, are only able to observe the basest “appetites” of others, while unable to experience or observe virtuous affect.

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[151] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1.

[152] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, App. 2.

[153] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1; David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, App. 2.

[154] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1.

Both authors end their chapters with an ominous challenge to the reader, ordering him to discover whether he belongs to the "we" who think and feel with full, normal capacity and observe a world that is shared with the author, in which love and virtue really exist, or whether he belongs to the "Philosophers." For Fielding, the price for choosing the latter is exclusion not only from the category of the normal "we," but also exclusion from the novel itself:

> Examine your Heart, my good Reader, and resolve whether you do believe these Matters with me. If you do, you may now proceed to their Exemplification in the following Pages; if you do not, you have, I assure you, already read more than you have understood; and it would be wiser to pursue your Business, or your Pleasures (such as they are) than to throw away any more of your Time in reading what you can neither taste nor comprehend.[155]

Here Fielding ceases to address the Philosophers, who seem to have been somewhere beside us in our imaginary community of readers, and turns directly to the individual reader, by himself, who can no longer imagine a crowd of excoriated others receiving Fielding's rhetorical blows. With great pleasure and relief, he may excuse himself from further insult by imagining yet another reader, the one who, like himself, was unsure which group he belonged to, but instead finds herself forced to close the book. The gratification of consenting to Fielding's "we," the normal, able-minded and able-bodied persons who will, with the author, "proceed to

[155] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1.

their Exemplification in the following Pages," is produced through the imaginary exclusion of others from that capable group. It is ironic that a chapter devoted to the common experience of virtuous love and benevolence would end in satirical Schadenfreude, a readerly glee at having been spared the fate of someone like oneself.[156]

Hume ends his appendix in an equally ominous tone, asking several rhetorical questions suggesting that the loss of an understanding of pure love would result in the total dissolution of civil society:

> And what a malignant philosophy must it be, that will not allow, to humanity and friendship, the same privileges, which are undisputably granted to the darker passions of enmity and resentment? Such a philosophy is more like a satire than a true delineation or description of human nature; and may be a good foundation for paradoxical wit and raillery, but is a very bad one for any serious argument or reasoning.[157]

Hume's challenging final words contain a threat of exclusion, not merely from the community of the normal, able "we," but, with a hint of Fielding's satirical conclusion, from the community of philosophical thought. The problem, for Hume, is "philosophers," none of whom we can name; "we" must rectify the processes of

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[156] This pleasure at the exclusion of another from the imagined community of "normal" readers and persons forms the basis for one of Fielding's most idiosyncratic forms of rhetorical humor, as I argue below.

[157] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, App. 2.

observation and consensus so that we may participate properly in argument and reasoning—that is, the arts of philosophy.

I will not go so far as to say that Hume borrowed egregiously from the structure and content of Fielding's delightful chapter "Of Love," but there is strong evidence of influence in the rhetorical structure of these passages. While it is highly likely that Fielding's work was itself influenced by the methodology and style of David Hume, especially the *Treatise of Human Nature*, it also seems apparent that Hume absorbed some of Fielding's rhetorical ease and "common sense" wit. The most striking similarity between the rhetorical structures of these two short essays on love is their reliance on the reader's desire to become, through reading, part of a community of normal, able people that excludes those who lack the ability to observe and experience life as it is "commonly" lived—in books.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Hume's rhetoric of consensus—through the construction of a compulsory "we" and the deployment of brief quasi-allegorical narratives as examples of "commonly observed" phenomena—appears as early as the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), and clearly served as an important influence on the development of Fielding's style of argumentation for his own aesthetic of representation, as displayed especially in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). Fielding's contribution to the development of this style is his direct address of a community of readers who may or may not agree with him about human nature. The reader is directly instructed to imagine herself as a member of this community, to imagine others in that community with different ideas of human

nature, and to make repeated decisions about whether she will be the reader who is included in the "we" of the text, or if she will be excluded from it.

It is striking that this rhetoric of compulsory consensus is so deftly employed in Fielding's numerous passages on the nature of proper companionate conjugal love. Following Butler and Hume, who argue against misanthropist "philosophers" for the purpose of creating consensus with the reader about moral sentiment, Fielding performs a nearly identical rhetorical gesture for the purpose of creating consensus with the reader about the aesthetic realism of his own novel. The consequences of disagreement about the possibility of love are not that the reader may be subject to actual social exclusion, but rather exclusion from participation in the imagined community of readers who may derive pleasure from the text.

Rhetoric of Consensus in Fielding

Henry Fielding's career as a playwright spanned the years 1730-1737, until the Licensing Act, which required all theatrical productions to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain, was passed, at least in part to put an end to Fielding's repeated satirical treatments of Robert Walpole. This era of Fielding's experience as a writer for the public stage seems to have affected nearly every aspect of his representational aesthetic, in which interiority and emotional realism are eschewed in favor of action, narrative structure, and the establishment of character through dialogue rather than first-person narratorial exposition. In *Joseph Andrews*, for

example, the early scene in which Joseph is subjected to the seduction attempts of his employer Mrs. Booby may be seen not only as a gender reversal of Mr. B's seduction attempts in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), but also as a genre reversal. The fundamental illusion of *Pamela*, that it is a collection of correspondence and journal writing from the titular young lady, is one to which Fielding responds directly in *Joseph Andrews* by parodying its most famous seduction scene, rendering it in the style of someone retelling a scene from a bawdy farce. In the place of Pamela's breathless and highly detailed narration from her own point of view, the ostensibly objective and omniscient narrator of *Joseph Andrews* accounts for the perspective of nearly every character. Rather than a voyeuristic representation of sensual detail, *Joseph Andrews* depicts Lady Booby's attempted seduction of Joseph in burlesque dialogue, in which the threatened outcome is not physical rape, but an attempt to trap Joseph in a verbal declaration of lust. And unlike Richardson's temporal scheme, in which the heroine pens lengthy descriptions of events in the present tense that dilate the duration of the action, *Joseph Andrews* closely mimics the real-time, but episodic, action of the stage. Unlike Pamela, who is tortured by complex emotional conflict rendered legible for the reader's empathy, Joseph must be judged by the reader on the basis of what he says and does.

Like Fielding's most successful plays on the Little Theatre stage, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* both feature broad casts of characters from all social levels, episodic structures that resemble acts and scenes, parody of other works, satire of current events, and the complex juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy, and high and

low style. Brean S. Hammond[158] (1992) credits Fielding for having brought this aesthetic credibility to post-Restoration theater by introducing moral complexity and ambiguity to burlesque comedy. By the 1720's, Hammond notes, theatrical productions were often incoherent parodies that aggressively mixed genres or softened versions of generic drama, such that "comedy" had become sentimental and "tragedy" avoided the traditional dramatic outcomes of failure and death. Pope's memorable couplet from *The Dunciad* (1728) describes the theater as the ill-gotten offspring of mated genres:

> How Tragedy and Comedy embrace;
>
> How Farce and Epic get a jumbled race. [159]

Rather than intervening in this theatrical style by heightening the contrast between generic forms, Fielding's plays succeeded, according to Hammond, by mixing aesthetic styles even at the level of representation, creating humor by depicting characters of higher classes in a low style and the lower classes in a high style, a Scriblerian strategy that appears to comic effect throughout his later fictional works.

While the theatrical aesthetic of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* would not prevail as the dominant representational style of the British realistic novel, it demanded that the reader imagine herself as one among many different readers—a responsive crowd no less diverse than the one at Fielding's Little Theatre in the

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[158] Brean S. Hammond, "Politics and Cultural Politics: The Case of Henry Fielding," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 16:1 (Feb. 1992): 76-93.

[159] Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* (London: Longman, 2009), Book I, ll. 69-70.

Haymarket. Fielding describes his readers in terms of this crowd repeatedly throughout his work, explicitly conflating the world itself, the characters on a stage, and the characters of his books, while also uniting the observers of life, a theatrical audience, and his current and future readers.

Throughout *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Fielding addresses particular groups of readers in turn, usually differentiating them through social hierarchies at first, and then arguing that while these distinctions are destructive of proper moral sentiment, they are easily reconcilable through a unified affective response to narrative. In *Joseph Andrews*, for example, the narrator argues that the only true social distinction between "*high* People and *low* People"[160] is due to an arbitrary notion of "Fashion," which separates these groups entirely except at "the Church and the Play-House," where they remain segregated by the altitude of their seats. Although "they seem scarce to regard each other as of the same Species," they are, Fielding argues, completely dependent on one another, as the labor of the people of "no Fashion" is necessary for the very "Fashion" that distinguishes their social superiors. The only events that bring them together are those through which, as common spectators, they experience a representation of the "World" at the same time. Thus, it is not a common experience of life itself that unites servants and the nobility, although they are directly linked by social dependence. They must participate in the observation of the same representations of life in order to understand one another.

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[160] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, II.13.

The narrator of *Tom Jones* introduces the connection between realism, fiction, and the stage in the introductory chapter of Book IV. In this passage, the narrator accuses other authors of madness and moral irresponsibility by asserting, "Truth distinguishes our Writings, from those idle Romances which are filled with Monsters, the Productions, not of Nature, but of distempered Brains."[161] The charge that follows is that the unrealistic romance must be conceived and read in a spirit of idleness, insanity, or drunkenness; this is, in part, derived from Cervantes's critique of chivalric romances in *Don Quixote*, but also suggests that his own work should be read as if attending a theatrical play, at which the audience participates in a public event by observing the work, and do not have the privacy of individual—and therefore anti-social—speculation about its content.

The second half of this chapter, and the exaggerated "Sublime" introduction of Sophia in the next, parodies the hackneyed theatrical convention by which attendant music or processional ritual announces the introduction of the hero. Although the narrator's introduction of Sophia is stylistically overblown, the effect is not entirely ironic. As this first description of Sophia[162] becomes more concrete and less "poetic," the narrator claims to defer to the reader's perception, as if Sophia were literally visible, outside of the words he uses to describe her. While addressing Sophia's personality, the narrator interrupts himself by appealing to the enjoyment the reader will experience if given the opportunity to draw conclusions from the

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[161] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, IV.1.

[162] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, IV.2.

events. "Nay, it is a Kind of tacit Affront to our Reader's Understanding, and may also rob him of that Pleasure which he will receive in forming his own Judgment of her Character."[163] The problem demonstrated throughout the first two chapters of Book IV is that unrealistic stylistic conventions prevent common sense and perspicacity from informing the reader's "observation." In the theater (as in fiction, and as in life, in a conflation Fielding makes throughout the novel), spectators and readers must be able to make observations without allowing the manipulative conventions of stagecraft to cloud or subvert their judgment. If this is successful, the audience will be capable of both sound interpretation (as implied in IV.1) and the pleasures of complicity with the judgment of the text (as indicated in IV.2).

The narrator of *Tom Jones* later offers an extended "*Comparison between the World and the Stage*," a commonplace that appears in various manifestations throughout the body of Fielding's work. In VII.1, the narrator examines the implications of this commonplace with respect to Aristotle's conception in *Poetics* of mimesis as the primary function of art:

> [T]he theatrical Stage is nothing more than a Representation, or, as *Aristotle* calls it, an Imitation of what really exists; and hence, perhaps, we might fairly pay a very high Compliment to those, who by their Writings or Actions have been so capable of imitating Life, as to have their Pictures, in a Manner confounded with, or mistaken for the

[163] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, IV.2.

Originals.[164]

The quality of art lauded here by the narrator is that which causes in the viewer a kind of epistemological confusion, an inability to distinguish between the empirical experience of life and the received representation, and even to offer moral privilege to the artist's representation of characters and events over the observation of one's own life. For Fielding, the moral superiority of art over life is a product of its ability to serve as a shared experience among disparate readers who may be made aware of one another's existence and consensus. While the audience of the theater may see and hear one another's reactions to the performance, the readers of a book must be made aware of one another through a wholly imaginary consensus that is rhetorically constructed by the text itself.

Later in this chapter, the narrator claims that he has copied the scene in which Black George steals Tom's money from "Nature," and that the audience is not comprised of a readership, but of the "World." The narrator then goes on to show how various members of the World/Stage audience, divided by the price of their seats (and therefore their economic status), judge George's actions. Those in the "upper Gallery," where seats are cheapest, respond with "their usual Vociferation" of "scurrilous Reproach." The audience of the middle gallery agrees with the upper, but with "less of Noise and Scurrility." The critics in the "Pit" do not choose to judge George's actions, but instead vilify the author for representing "low" action on the stage. Finally, the wealthy in the "Boxes" either fail to pay attention or declare

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[164] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VII.1.

George “a bad Kind of Man.” Although it seems at first as though the narrator is describing the different moral conclusions that might arise from various readers, it becomes apparent that the narrator is assuming that anyone who is paying attention to the action understands that George’s behavior is reprehensible. The only readers who will not arrive at this conclusion are those who are poor observers of art—the wealthy, who think too little to be affectively engaged in the action, and the critics, who think too much. The narrator argues that the moral affect of dramatic and fictional work is lost not on those who lack classical education, but to those who are unable to be complicit in active observation.

Fielding systematically constructs imaginary audiences within which the actual reader is rhetorically manipulated to locate herself. As in the “Of Love” chapter from *Tom Jones* discussed above,[165] the metafictional theater scenes in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* offer an explicit invitation to consent with a normative group of “common” readers, while threatening that a failure of consensus will align the reader with undesirable others whose inability to agree with the aesthetic and moral qualities of the text is a sign of perverted or disabled capacity. There is no room in Fielding’s audience for a reader who disapproves of the author’s moral conclusions and representational style, as Samuel Johnson apparently did, unless he is willing to accept the part of a “Critic,” a kind of reader (or audience member) who is abused by the narrator at every opportunity.

Like the “Philosophers” of VI.1, “Critics” are addressed throughout *Tom Jones*

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[165] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VI.1.

as those readers whose ability to understand the text is limited by their intellectualization of moral problems best approached with "normal" sentiment. In several of the chapters that introduce each Book of the novel, Fielding declares his aesthetic freedom from these imagined critical readers, and preemptively justifies his rejection of criticism by maligning the character of any reader who fails to appreciate the text in the manner prescribed by the author:

> For all which I shall not look on myself as accountable to any Court of Critical Jurisdiction whatsoever: For as I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing, so I am at liberty to make what Laws I please therein.[166]

> This Work may, indeed, be considered as a great Creation of our own; and for a little Reptile of a Critic to presume to find Fault with any of its Parts, without knowing the Manner in which the Whole is connected, and before he comes to the final Catastrophe, is a most presumptuous Absurdity.[167]

> [Having described critics as "Slanderers"] Vice hath not, I believe, a more abject Slave; Society produces not a more odious Vermin; nor

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[166] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, II.1

[167] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, X.1.

> can the Devil receive a Guest more worthy of him, nor possibly more welcome to him, than a Slanderer.[168]

The "Critic" is not merely maligned here as a poor reader, but, as someone who writes and disseminates his criticisms of authors in print, also as one who is subhuman and fit only for torment in hell. Fielding's overstatement of his case against critics is surely humorous, but it creates a rhetorically complex situation for the actual reader, who may derive pleasure from imagining the undesirable "critical" reader receiving extraordinary abuse from the author. I would argue that the satirical treatment of the excluded reader, whether "Philosopher" or "Critic," provides the structure for a great deal of humor—or at least relief—in the novel, but it also serves to bolster the self-evidentiary nature of Fielding's moral and aesthetic rhetoric. Those who enjoy the novel are those who understand the world, while those who do not are misanthropes, slanderers, or people who cannot perceive the world "normally."

Humor, Satire, and Inclusion

Fielding's satirical threats of exclusion from the imagined community of readers of *Tom Jones* seem not to have been terribly off-putting to most twentieth-century readers of the novel. They have instead tended to take for granted that the

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[168] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, XI.1.

"we" of Fielding's narrator refers to the "proper" readers of Fielding, who agree with (or are convinced by) the narrator's didactic interpretations of the events of the narrative, and that those who may feel excluded by this "we" are necessarily poor readers of the text. Despite the narrator's grandiose claims of universal experience, hostility to critical interpretation, and even cruel humor at the expense of many of his characters, he, and, by extension, Fielding himself, have been praised specifically in terms of his kindness, humility, and gentleness.

In his introduction to the 1975 Wesleyan edition of *Tom Jones*, Martin C. Battestin asserts that "Fielding's wit and hearty good humor and, above all, his tolerant humanity"[169] are the primary qualities that continue to attract readers to his works, and this evaluation is corroborated by countless others in their descriptions of the "author's" timelessness, good nature, and general appeal. Battestin cites a passage from Kingsley Amis's novel *I Like It Here*, in which a young writer ponders Fielding:

> Perhaps it was worth dying in your forties if two hundred years later you were the only noncontemporary novelist who could be read with unaffected and wholehearted interest, the only one who never had to be apologized for or excused on the grounds of changing taste.[170]

Likewise, Ralph Rader claims that his analysis of *Tom Jones* was prompted by wondering how a text so deeply "timebound" by 1740's English moral and social

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[169] Martin Battestin, Introduction, *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, xiv.

[170] Qtd. by Martin Battestin, Introduction, *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, xv.

conditions could provide such a "unified reading experience" in our own time.[171] Like many others, Battestin and Rader attribute the continued appeal of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* to the relationship that the reader develops with the affable, eloquent narrator, rather than to the plots or characters of the novels.

R.S. Crane's description[172] of this relationship between the reader and the narrator of *Tom Jones* accounts for the reader's continual interpretation of the plot as comic despite occasionally catastrophic events, because we learn never to take Tom's plight too seriously. Because the reader has accepted the terms of a friendly relationship with the narrator who provides a didactic interpretation of the sentimental function of the novel, the circumstances of the characters cannot be truly threatening. Likewise, Wayne Booth claims that this relationship successfully serves the rhetorical purpose of offering a reliable, worldly-wise, moral center in the narrator that does not exist in the fictional plot.[173] However, neither Crane nor Booth fully account for the passages in which the narrator himself directly threatens the reader who may not be interpellated by the "we" constructed by the narrator. Booth concedes that "For the reader who becomes too much aware of the author's claim to superlative virtues, the effect may fail,"[174] although he argues that this is a

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[171] Ralph Rader, "*Tom Jones*: The Form in History," *Ideology and Form in Eighteenth-Century Literature,* ed. David Richter, (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech UP, 1999), 48.

[172] R.S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of 'Tom Jones.'" *Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern*, ed. R.S. Crane et al. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952).

[173] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961, 1983).

[174] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 217.

fatal misreading of the text. He goes on to assert that "the reader with his mind on the main business" (that is, a "proper" reader) will be too overwhelmed by the narrator's "wisdom and learning and benevolence"[175] to be distracted by his playful threats of exclusion.

Booth argues that the reader must carefully distinguish between the narrator of *Tom Jones* and its author, specifically in those passages in which the narrator seems overly didactic or hostile, in order to read the novel appropriately. "It is only by distinguishing between the author and his implied image that we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as 'sincerity' or 'seriousness' in the author."[176] The failure to distinguish the narrator's voice from that of the author results in particularly problematic readings of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, in which the narrator expresses what Booth refers to as an "air of facetiousness combined with grand insouciance."[177] Booth argues that the reader who attributes this narrator's voice to the author "must end by condemning [Fielding] as insincere."[178] However, he later refers to this narrator as "Fielding's dramatic version of himself" whose "wisdom and learning and benevolence [...] permeate the world of the book."[179]

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[175] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 217.

[176] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 75.

[177] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 72.

[178] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 75.

[179] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 217.

Like many twentieth-century appreciations of Fielding's novels, Booth's analysis of *Tom Jones* in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* rests on an argument of hermeneutic circularity, one that is made repeatedly within the novel itself. Fielding's authorial addresses to the reader suggest that if one enjoys the book, agrees with the narrator, and feels included in the community of readers described by the book, then one has read it appropriately. To be distracted by its apparent inconsistencies or flaws is to be one of the "Critics" who are repeatedly excluded from the proper reading community by the narrator. To appreciate the novel and "like" the narrator is the first step in developing a valid reading of it, while criticizing it or calling attention to its inconsistencies is a sign of intellectual, emotional, or moral failure. Fielding seems to have successfully constructed an imagined community of acceptable readers, differentiated from others who are excluded from that community, such that literary critics must still first establish their credentials as non-critics with respect to *Tom Jones*, and, like Hume and his contemporary philosophers, relinquish the claim of expertise for the scepter of common sense, as it is defined by the text itself.

While many professional readers of *Tom Jones* seem to have been sufficiently interpellated by the "we" of Fielding's narrator to assume a satirical purpose where it is required to create a coherent reading, others are still troubled by the inconsistencies in the novel itself and in its critical history. David Richter describes[180] the problem of the ambiguity of the didactic passages in Fielding's

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[180] David H. Richter, "The Closing of Masterpiece Theater: Henry Fielding and the

novels, noting the peculiar phenomenon that critics seeking "Fielding's" ideological motives across the body of his work seem to confidently arrive at absurdly conflicting conclusions, depending on the particular passages quoted as examples. Richter writes, "Judicious quotation can make Fielding seem either the most chauvinistic or the most liberated of eighteenth-century novelists,"[181] and gives several examples of critical analyses of Fielding that seem to be describing many different authors.

The greatest source of these differences of interpretation seems to be the problem of humor and irony in Fielding. Fielding often writes passages in which the form and the content are at odds, as in the mock-heroic battles of IV.8 (in which Molly Seagrim is attacked by a mob for wearing one of Sophia's gowns, in which her mother has dressed her in order to hide her illegitimate pregnancy) and V.11 (in which Tom beats up Thwackum and Blifil in order to hide Molly from discovery). It is unclear whether the mock-heroic style is meant to lightheartedly elevate the matter of the brawls in these scenes, and thus to emphasize Molly's dignity in the face of humiliation and Tom's heroism, or if the mock-heroic style is intended to ridicule Molly's predicament, and to satirize Tom's self-interest and belligerence. Neither interpretation remains coherent in the context of the morally didactic passages of the novel, in that the former seems to over-praise behavior of which the

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Valorization of Incoherence." *Ideology and Form in Eighteenth-Century Literature.* Ed. Richter. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech UP, 1999. 3-14.

[181] David H. Richter, "The Closing of Masterpiece Theater," 8.

morally conscientious narrator would disapprove, while the latter offers an unpleasantly cruel and cynically unforgiving reading of the characters. While the irony of style in these passages offers an unpleasantly difficult choice for the ideological interpreter, both of these scenes still offer considerable humor and pleasure to the reader, if only because they are presented in the familiar form of a violently comic scene.

Although it may seem to most current readers of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* that Fielding's occasional use of cruel humor must be a reflexive object of satire, full of overstatements and cartoonish threats of violence, this satirical reading of cruel humor may, according to Simon Dickie, have been lost on many of his contemporaries. "For in spite of all the denunciations of malicious laughter, all the charity sermons, and the increasing prominence of humanitarian sensibility, it remained strikingly acceptable in mid-eighteenth-century England to laugh at misery or misfortune."[182] Although Fielding himself (along most of the other major British writers of the 1740's, including Samuel Richardson, Samuel Johnson, Sarah Fielding, and David Hume) argued for the centrality of empathic sentiment to moral life, laughter at the expense of someone weaker remained a dominant source of humor and jokes at the time. Dickie identifies this laughter as part of a sort of culturally accepted Hobbism. "This all suggests an unreflective if not automatic urge

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[182] Simon Dickie, "*Joseph Andrews* and the Great Laughter Debate," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* Vol. 34, ed. Catherine Ingrassia and Jeffrey S. Ravel (American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), 274.

to mock and exploit weakness simply because it was weak. Such laughter is best described, in Hobbes' famous term, as 'sudden glory,' the rush of glee caused 'by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.'"[183] Dickie's description of this cruel kind of humor differs from what we may term Schadenfreude in that the latter seems to arise from situations in which someone similar to the reader (or audience member, in a play) experiences harm, and the reader feels fortunate not to have endured that pain himself. Rather, this type of humor takes pleasure in the misfortunes of someone who is *not* like the reader in some way. The humor arises from the reader's confident knowledge that he is exempt from whatever violence the character has endured.

Fielding addresses this particular kind of humor in his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, when he describes the "Burlesque" as "the exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural."[184] Although he admits to having had success as a playwright who made use of the burlesque, Fielding promises in this preface that his comic fiction will not stoop to the mockery of poverty and disability. Rather, he insists that he will instead produce comedy by mocking the "Ridiculous," producing a Horatian satire of hypocrisy and affectation.

Dickie suggests that Fielding's subtle moral satire seems to have been lost on many contemporary readers who were used to taking pleasure in representations of

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[183] Simon Dickie, "*Joseph Andrews* and the Great Laughter Debate," 275.

[184] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 26.

the suffering of others, offering significant evidence that Fielding's initial readers were either delighted by the cruel treatment of Parson Adams, or else angered that Fielding seemed to invite that response. Dickie writes, "By showing such familiar pranks perpetrated against a largely sympathetic character by an overtly vicious one, Fielding was no doubt inviting at least part of his readership to think twice about their habitual actions. But the important point, it seems to me, is that most of them just couldn't get it."[185] That is, in satirizing this common form of cruel humor, Fielding may to have accidentally replicated it for many of his readers in *Joseph Andrews*.

The example of the roasting of Parson Adams highlights the subtle difference between burlesque and Schadenfreude. In the former, the audience laughs at the misfortunes of someone who is coded as "abnormal"; in the latter, the audience laughs at the misfortunes of someone who is "normal." Fielding may have believed that, by replacing the typical "abnormal" object of humor with a lovable and sympathetic character, the humor itself would be satirically drained from this mock-burlesque scene. According to Dickie, it is possible that Fielding underestimated the prevalence of "upper-class anti-clerical wit,"[186] which could have made Parson Adams seem like a perfectly acceptable object of ridicule. But laughter at Adams's expense also demonstrates the slipperiness of the distinction between burlesque and Schadenfreude, which depends on the reader's sense of who is "us" and who is

[185] Simon Dickie, "*Joseph Andrews* and the Great Laughter Debate," 288.

[186] Simon Dickie, "*Joseph Andrews* and the Great Laughter Debate," 281.

"them."

Humor at the expense of the excluded other is, I argue, only the most obviously violent form of the rhetorical strategy by which Fielding defines the boundaries of the community of acceptable readers in these novels. In its most apparently inclusionary form, Fielding repeatedly appeals to "common Observation" for evidence that his work, its characters and events, its moral conclusions, and its representational styles conform precisely to "Truth." Rather than claiming to produce a moral argument that is in any sense new or unexpected, Fielding insists that the moral truth of his works is self-evident, since it is drawn from experiences that readers somehow already share. However, like Hume's exemplary narratives in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Fielding's examples of common observation are entirely fictional and designed to produce the moral conclusions that are offered by the text itself. Thus, the "good" reader of *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones* is one who consents to the interpretation of the world provided by the text, while the "bad" reader is one whose own experiences or ideas do not reflect that interpretation, to the extent that they prevent him from arriving at the same moral conclusions as the author.

The novelty of Fielding's art, according to Fielding, is his willingness to recognize the world as it is, without bowing to previous literary convention. And yet *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are riddled with literary conventions—imitations and parodies of epic poets, Cervantes, Butler, Hume, Defoe, Pope, and, of course, Richardson. Brean S. Hammond's claim that Fielding revolutionized the comic

theater by parodically and aggressively mixing genres for the purpose of achieving a new kind of realism on the stage could be likewise applied to his approach to the comic novel. Fielding's insistence on his mimetic fidelity to the "world" claims to clear away generic conventions, while, in fact, he satirically deploys nearly every recognizable convention. Thus, consenting to the truth of the "common Observation" of his novels is, in a sense, participating not only in the community of readers imagined by the text, but also in the community of all readers.

In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding declares his intention to represent the world in his "comic Epic-Poem in Prose" by reasoning that comic art is enjoyed most when it is based on fact:

> [I]n the [Comic], we should ever confine ourselves strictly to Nature from the just Imitation of which, will flow all the Pleasure we can convey to a sensible Reader. And perhaps, there is one Reason, why a Comic Writer should of all others be the least excused for deviating from Nature, since it may not be always so easy for a serious Poet to meet with the Great and Admirable; but Life every where furnishes an accurate Observer with the Ridiculous.[187]

Even as Fielding acknowledges that his work is based on the conventional structure of the comic theater as well as the epic poem, he asserts that the comic genre is more inherently suited to realistic representation. The "accurate Observer,"

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[187] Henry Fielding, Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.

according to Fielding, is one who recognizes the ridiculous in the world around him, and is also capable of recognizing "just Imitation." The implicit flattery is that the reader is just such a "sensible Reader," who will therefore find *Joseph Andrews* to be a pleasurably comic, and thus faithfully mimetic, work, while the reader who does not find the novel (or life) to be particularly "ridiculous" is not just a poor reader, but a poor observer of the world.

Fielding then proposes that comic art is most capable of effecting the desired moral response in an audience:

> I will appeal to common Observation, whether the same Companies are not found more full of Good-Humour and Benevolence, after they have been sweeten'd for two or three Hours with Entertainments of this kind [that produce Mirth and Laughter], than when soured by a Tragedy or a grave Lecture. [188]

Fielding does not simply state that comic art more effectively produces desirable behavior than tragic art; he also asks for the reader's complicity in this "common Observation." The author flatters the reader's perception and judgment in order to entice the reader into agreeing with his claim that comedy is a more effective vehicle for moral instruction than tragedy or sermons. Notably, this observation could only be performed at the theater or at church, according to Fielding's own assertion that these are the only two places where people of various social classes can easily

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[188] Henry Fielding, Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.

observe one other—a luxury not shared by readers of the same text.

Implicit in this Preface is a basis for judging morality consists of good will applied to realistic observation. While many characters in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* act out of generous impulses, they are all fallible, to various degrees, in their inability to assimilate observations into an accurate understanding of human nature. Parson Adams and Squire Allworthy, the closest moral centers in these works, are each particularly susceptible to failures of observational skill, leading each to false judgments and grave errors. This creates situations of dramatic irony in the text that flatter the reader's perspicacity; the reader is made to see what even the most noble of the characters cannot, and can therefore make better moral judgments.

The narrator of *Joseph Andrews* further emphasizes the moral rhetoric of realistic narrative in the opening lines of the novel: "It is a trite but true Observation, that Examples work more forcibly on the Mind than Precepts: And if this be just in what is odious and blameable, it is more strongly so in what is amiable and praiseworthy."[189] Although this statement appears in a passage rife with irony (in which the narrator applauds his literary nemeses Cibber and Richardson), it so neatly follows upon the Preface that it seems, in itself, to be sincere. As an echo of Joseph Butler's preface to his *Fifteen Sermons*, it employs the terms of moral philosophy for the purpose of an aesthetic theory of realistic fiction. These opening lines express faith in the audience's ability to discriminate between the good and

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[189] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, I.1.

poor examples of moral behavior that recur throughout Fielding's body of work. However, they also acknowledge the necessary amplification of the "Examples" to an audience (presumably through either the public stage or publication in print) while insisting on mimetic fidelity to the "Originals" in communicating them to the "World." Thus, the role of the author is to give the world back to itself, and trust that it will interpret itself appropriately.

One may be reminded of Samuel Johnson's argument in *Rambler* 4, which seems to have been, at least in part, a response to this particular aesthetic theory of Fielding's. ""If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination."[190] That is, if the novel is a direct representation of the world itself, and makes no intervention or attempt to answer the moral problems it presents, then why would one feel the moral need to write novels? Johnson addresses what seems in Fielding to be a rhetorical tautology, and one that troubles Johnson generally with the rhetorical function of "realistic" narrative.

Johnson is concerned with the apparent self-evidence of moral and political rhetoric of realistic narrative, as it creates in the mind of the reader a sense of reality that denies contradictory evidence and individual experience. In order to participate in the imagined community of acceptable readers created by Fielding, one must submit to the author's representation of the world, experience the

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[190] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

sentiment the author designs for the reader to feel, and allow the causal logic of the narrative to affect one's own sense of morality and propriety. Through complicit reading, one accepts the world of the text in place of one's own. Like Mr. Bingley in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* or Arabella in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, the reader's own desires, expectations and judgments become irrelevant in the face of the "truth universally acknowledged."

Chapter 3: Regulating Vicarious Experiences of Sexual Desire

The representational style of Henry Fielding, which Ian Watt describes as "realism of assessment,"[191] tends to employ a combination of theatrical dialogue, parodies of classical narratives, and appeals to "common observation" rather than the sensory detail found in the works of Samuel Richardson, especially in matters of sexual experiences and feelings. Fielding's three greatest fictional works—*Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Tom Jones* (1749), and *Amelia* (1751)—share with Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-8), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) the common subject of young people experiencing internal conflicts between sexual desires and filial and religious obligations. As six of the most influential works in the development of the form of the novel and of the realist aesthetic, these texts all narrate the lives of characters who must learn to regulate the expression of private sexual feelings in the context of confusing, often conflicting, modern social norms and moral standards. The novels of Richardson and Fielding may be read as a debate not only on the subject of sexual morality, but also on the representational style that may encourage the reader to consider the subject of sexual morality. Although Fielding's descriptive style differs greatly from Richardson's, especially in scenes

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[191] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1957, 2000), 291. This is as opposed to the "realism of presentation" (290), which Watt uses to describe the representational styles of Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson.

with sexual content, both authors were accused of writing about sex in ways that would inevitably produce moral confusion about proper sexual behavior.

In this chapter, I outline the relationship of the history of the discourse surrounding the pornographic effects of literature in the middle of the eighteenth century and the concurrent development of new attempts at literal description and narration in prose. While the term "pornography" was not coined in English from the Greek *pornogrophos* (writing about prostitutes) until 1857, according to William Kendrick,[192] the idea that certain texts might be potentially damaging to the moral life of certain readers had already been a source of debate among literary authors and critics since the eighteenth century. The emergence of a discourse arguing for the regulation of certain texts for the benefit of social morals seems to have occurred in response to the growth of popular realistic fiction, at the middle of the eighteenth century, as the apparent intended audience of fiction became younger and more female.

In the first two chapters, I have described the ways that authors of the mid-eighteenth century imagine the reader or the typical person of "common sense" as peers in worldly experience, if not peers in intellect or education; the first-person plural of David Hume or Henry Fielding is consistently used in arguments in which the reader is expected to be already familiar with the represented experiences provided as evidence, if not the argument the author develops from this evidence.

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[192] William Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987, 1996), 1.

For Samuel Johnson, however, the imagined young and inexperienced reader, who may be using literature in order to learn about experiences she has not yet had, poses not only an epistemological problem, in that she may confuse textual representations of reality for the reality of the world itself, but a moral problem as well. If one can learn moral judgment through the vicarious experiences provided in realistic fiction, then fiction should demonstrate moral clarity of purpose.

The difference between the representational styles of Richardson and Fielding, as described by Ian Watt, are not, I argue, merely aesthetic choices, but are directly linked to each author's conception of the moral effects of these aesthetic choices on an imagined reader. As Michael McKeon has argued in *The Secret History of Domesticity*, the eighteenth century saw the rise of increasingly explicit visual and textual representations of sexual bodies, sexual practices, and masturbation that created a newly secular discourse on the effects of acting on desires. Masturbation, specifically, posed a threat that was not merely moral, but epistemological. According to McKeon, following the publication in 1710 of *Onania*, a series of moral reflections on the practice of masturbation, arose "the theorizing of the pleasures of the imagination as what would come to be called an 'aesthetic' effect, and its author's awareness of the causal connection between masturbation and the silent reading of 'literary' texts was acute."[193] As masturbatory habits came to be associated not merely with texts whose explicit intention was to arouse sexual

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[193] Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 296.

feeling, but with all manner of private reading materials, the early novel—so appealing to, or even addressed to, young men and women—became a topic for explicit debate about the potential effects of particular kinds of texts on the desires of imagined young people. McKeon notes that although sexually explicit literature in English had certainly existed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the limited, and almost exclusively aristocratic and male readership of these often privately-circulated texts preserved the private nature of pornographic reading and self-pleasure. McKeon writes that, in the eighteenth century, "[p]ornographers accommodated the belief in the universality of rights and of access to goods by pursuing in narrative the principles that bodies should be available and interchangeable regardless of political, social, and sexual difference."[194] Subsequently, the anxiety about who was reading what, for what purpose and to what effect on the moral life of the reader, began to be expressed in public debates about how to define obscenity, especially as women had greater access to texts that could be used for private pornographic stimulation.

In *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835*, Jacqueline Pearson examines the relationship of the growth of female readership to the increase in public anxiety about the effects of reading on women's morality, and to the eventual stabilization of categories of "good" and "bad" books. "Between 1750 and the mid 1830's literacy among women increased and women became increasingly significant in the literary marketplace: indeed, it has been argued that by the end of the eighteenth century

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[194] Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 312.

the majority of reading audiences were female."[195] Across this period, the image of the chaste young woman absorbed by a novel while her needlework waits becomes, according to Pearson, a sign pregnant with potential signification. For some, who imagine this young woman exercising the mind and contemplating virtue, the reading woman may be a more reasonable, helpful—and less sensual—mother and companion. For others, Pearson finds, the reading woman is heating her sensual imagination with images that may drive her to abandon her duty altogether:

> It seems there was hardly any crime, sin or personal catastrophe that injudicious reading was not held to cause directly or indirectly – from murder, suicide, rape, and violent revolution, through prostitution, adultery and divorce, to pride, vanity, and slapdash housewifery. In particular, criticism of women's reading became highly sexualized, sexual transgression being repeatedly figured by unwise reading.[196]

Across the second half of eighteenth century, Pearson finds, in novels, memoirs, and personal letters, male and female writers figure women reading novels as the narrative cause for their abandonment of traditional sexual morality. This anxiety about whether it is possible for any novel to be "moral" in the hands of an imagined sexual innocent emerges out of a peculiar debate about the moral stakes of aesthetic representation across the 1740's that followed the immense popularity of Samuel

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[195] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), ix.

[196] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835*, 8.

Richardson's *Pamela*. As novels such as *Pamela* were specifically addressed to young, innocent readers in need of moral instruction and preparation for the temptations of adult sexuality, they also produced anxieties about the dangers of using fiction to create a vicarious experience of sexual conflict.

The aesthetic shift across the end of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century in English has been described by Blanford Parker as the movement from the traditional theological relationships of words to meaning displayed in medieval and Baroque literature toward the literalism of the Augustan era.[197] The newly literal mimetic style of the early eighteenth century transferred the imaginative energy of literature from intrinsic theological meaning to the sensory imagination, depicting things and persons in time and space, connected by narrative causalities rather than intrinsically metaphorical signification. Through this emerging literal style, authors began to represent experiences such that readers may imagine the represented sights, sounds, and feelings as though experiencing the represented event first-hand. Likewise, pornography of the modern era may be described as a form of realistic representation of sexual experience such that the audience is invited to partake in the sexual gratification represented by the work without the concurrent physical experience of the represented action.

The aesthetic functions of the early novel and of pornographic texts seem quite similar. At the same moment that, as John Bender claims, "[David] Hume

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[197] Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 10.

struggles valiantly to *feel* the difference between fiction and reality,"[198] the epistemological status of mimetically literal fiction as evidence—or of the reading experience and the sensory imagination *as* experience—is troubling. Aesthetic theorists have often compared the vicarious pleasures of novels with those of pornography, in that novels and pornography both give readers a sensory illusion of having experienced something beyond their own lives. Writing of the similar aesthetic effects of eighteenth-century literal prose in France, Jean Marie Goulemot writes, "To read a pornographic novel and to be subject to its influence is perhaps in some way to experience something of the essence of literature."[199] To physically experience sexual stimulation in response to reading is, Goulemot asserts, the purest manifestation of the power of vicarious experience represented through mimetic realism. Just as one may physically sigh, cry, laugh, or gasp while reading, one may also be sexually aroused by a text, and the vicarious experience becomes less experientially distinguishable from an actual lived event.

The power of vicarious experience in fiction also led to the desire to control—or at least to carefully wield—the aesthetic of mimetic representation, and novels as well as more obviously obscene texts increasingly became objects of critical and legal speculation. In *The Invention of Pornography*, Lynn Hunt claims, "Pornography's relationship to the novel as a form of narration heightened its

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[198] John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," *Representations* 61 (1998): 8.

[199] Jean Marie Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts: Erotic Literature and its Readers in Eighteenth-Century France*, trans. James Simpson (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 75.

reputation as an oppositional genre, because the novel itself was under severe attack through the eighteenth century."[200] Despite the ostensibly moral claims of the early novel, it was suspected of the possibility for morally deleterious effects insofar as, like pornography, it could create real experiences of feeling based on vicarious experiences of events. Clearly, the authors of fiction expected, as we will see, that young people would develop ideas from having vicarious experiences through reading, and the moral stakes of representation were potentially higher as the mimetic realism of sensory experience became more detailed.

Samuel Johnson's concerns about realistic fiction in *Rambler* 4 display his anxiety about the power of description and representation to offer the inexperienced reader a similar kind of pleasurable idea of experience that, like pornography, requires no action on the part of the reader, but may lead to unrealistic expectations about the performance of that action in the future. And it is clear that, even among the authors of literary fiction of the 1740's who seem to have been genuinely concerned about the effects of literature on the moral life of readers, there was no consensus about which texts could be used by the imaginative reader in a pornographic fashion. The lack of consensus about what constitutes pornography has been central to debates about state control of the press since the spread of mass print culture during the eighteenth century. With the development of

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[200] Lynn Hunt, Introduction, *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 36.

increasingly realistic narrative forms that attempt to "exhibit life in its true state,"[201] as Johnson describes them in *Rambler* 4, came increased anxiety about whether the apparent moral framework of a text had aesthetic jurisdiction over the power of images of sinful behavior. If even the mere mention of acts of lust may corrupt the reader of a sermon condemning them,[202] then any work of literature that represents unchaste sexual activity, even in an entirely negative light, may constitute a work of sexual pornography. Although the dissemination of sexually explicit literature and images in England increased across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[203] the pornographic potential of explicitly "moral" images and texts produced for the English reader seems to have not become a public topic of debate about art, representation, and regulation in British culture until the middle of the eighteenth century. Lynn Hunt argues that "pornography as a regulatory category was invented in response to the perceived menace of the democratization of culture,"[204] offering several examples of historical attempts to define sexual pornography, not specifically in response to the growing numbers of pornographic titles, but in

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[201] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

[202] As suggested in a sermon on pornography by Edward Cobden, quoted below. Edward Cobden, "EXTRACT from a famed Sermon, preached before the King at Sr James's, on Dec. 11 1748 by Edw. Cobden, D.D. Archdeacon of London, and Chaplain in ordinary to his Majesty." Ed. Edward Cave [as Sylvanus Urban]. *The Gentleman's Magazine* 19.3 (March 1749).

[203] According to Lynn Hunt, "the main lines of the modern pornographic tradition and its censorship can be traced back to sixteenth-century Italy and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England (although with important antecedents in ancient Greece and Rome)." Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 10.

[204] Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 12-13.

response to increased access to media by increasingly literate young, female, and lower-class people. The danger is not that texts that represent sexual immorality may be written and published, but that they may corrupt those readers whose sexual behavior must be regulated.

The primary task of regulatory debate about pornography since the eighteenth century has been to define the qualities that render a text too potentially dangerous to sexual morality for common distribution. In *The Secret Museum*, Walter Kendrick explains that the difficulty of defining pornography as a special category of texts and images to be regulated is due to historical shifts in cultural, aesthetic, and sexual values. Kendrick writes:

> It would be laughably egotistical to suppose that our parents and grandparents called the wrong things 'pornographic' out of blindness or stupidity. It would be equally stupid to think that we, at long last, have found in our X-rated images the *real* pornography.[205]

Any current study of historical perceptions of pornography must take into account not only the historical differences between current and former perceptions of obscenity, but also, I argue, the lack of authority that any would-be censor may have in this matter. The censor may observe his own reactions to a work of art, and may comment on the subject matter and style of the work of art, but the definition of

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[205] William Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*, xii.

pornography must also account for the imagined reactions of the readers who are supposedly going to be subjected to moral danger.

Thus the censor must imagine the text in the hands of the reader who will be most vulnerable to the pernicious effects of vicarious sexual experience, and subsequently imagine the damage that this vicarious experience may have to that reader's moral life. Any description of the process of reading through the imagined sexual feelings of young men and women, as I examine below, may result in texts that are, in themselves, pornographic according to the terms set by the censor himself. For this reason, pornography has most often been identified according to the rhetoric of common sense, eschewing lengthy quotations from the offending texts and imaginative descriptions of the experience of the vulnerable reader. This argument from common sense claims authority about moral danger without making its own logic and reasoning explicit, as seen in Johnson's declarations of contempt for *Tom Jones*, which Boswell found so "excessive and unaccountable,"[206] as well as in U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's famously impenetrable, self-evident definition of pornography in 1964: "I know it when I see it."[207]

The eighteenth-century debate about what constitutes the pornographic exposes the role of the imagination in constructing a description of a common sense of reading experience, in that the participants rarely describe their own sensations in response to sexually explicit literature, but instead describe the self-evident

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[206] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 480.

[207] *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964)

nature of these responses for an imagined social other in confronting the text. However, this debate also reveals the complexity of conceiving of common sense narratives of reading experience in that the claims made about the necessity of regulating sexual content are in conflict due to the ever-increasing breadth of the reading public, and the variety of imaginable readers and their experiences.

In these conversations about the appropriateness of texts for certain readers, it is also apparent that it is unclear to what degree the vicarious experiences provided by realistic fiction constitute evidence of how sexual desire functions outside of fiction. As the fictional private feelings of young men and women are rendered public texts through representation and publication, the discussion about how to regulate sexual explicitness in fiction necessarily results in arguments about whether it is possible or desirable to use fiction to regulate actual sexual desire and behavior in people's lives.

Richardson, Fielding, and the Imagined Reader

In his famous preface to *Pamela*, Richardson, in his guise as "Editor," clearly addresses those he intends to become the primary audience of the text, and outlines the moral purpose of his realistic representation:

> If to *divert* and *entertain*, and at the same time to *instruct* and *improve* the minds of the YOUTH of *both sexes:*

If to inculcate *religion* and *morality* in so easy and agreeable a manner, as shall render them equally *delightful* and *profitable:*

If to set forth in the most exemplary lights, the *parental*, the *filial*, and the *social* duties:

If to paint VICE in its proper colours, to make it *deservedly odious*; and to set VIRTUE in its own amiable light, to make it look *lovely:*

If to draw characters with justness, and to support them distinctly:

If to raise a distress from *natural* causes, and excite a compassion from *just* ones:

If to teach the man of *fortune* how to *use* it; the man of *passion* how to *subdue* it; and the man of *intrigue*, how, gracefully, and with honour to himself, to *reclaim*:

If to give *practical* examples, worthy to be followed in the most *critical* and *affecting* cases, by the *virgin*, the *bride*, and the *wife*:

If to effect all these good ends, in so probable, so natural, so *lively* a manner, as shall engage the passions of every sensible reader, and attach their regard to this story:

And all without raising a *single idea* throughout the whole, that shall shock the exactest purity, even in the warmest of those instances where Purity would be most apprehensive:

> If these be laudable or worthy recommendations, the *Editor* of the following Letters, which have their foundation both in *Truth* and *Nature*, ventures to assert, that all these ends are obtained here, together.[208]

This extraordinarily long sentence, which begins Richardson's Preface, asserts a strange conditional causality between the self-evident worthiness of the numerous, extremely ambitious goals of the text, and the realization of all these goals in the text itself. That is, "If" to achieve these ends is worthy, then the "Editor" claims these ends have been satisfied. This appears to be not a classically truth-functioning material conditional statement (if *p* then *q*), but taken as a whole, something like what J.L. Austin described as a "biscuit conditional."[209] Keith DeRose and Richard E. Grandy describe the difference between a proper and a "biscuit" conditional:

> [W]ith the normal conditionals, it's the truth or believability of the consequent that is somehow being made contingent on the antecedent, while with the biscuit conditionals, it's the conversational

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[208] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (London: Penguin, 1980), 31.

[209] The term "biscuit conditional" comes from Austin's example: "There are biscuits on the sideboard if you want some." Although similar false conditionals are quite common in speech, one might humorously misinterpret it as classically truth-functional logic by wondering if the biscuits would cease to exist if not wanted. J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 2nd. ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1970), 212.

relevance of the consequent that seems to be contingent on the antecedent.[210]

That is, the reader of this lengthy multiple-conditional statement from Richardson might be tempted to ask whether the Editor would *not* assert that *Pamela* will achieve all of these moral and aesthetic goals for each of these possible readers *if* each of these ends is not worthy of praise. DeRose and Grandy argue that this kind of conditional may be false in a rigidly logical sense, but it functions in interpersonal communication as a "relevance" conditional.[211] The purpose of the relevance conditional, they argue, is to express humility not about the assertion in the consequent, but about its relevance to the auditor. In the case of Richardson's Preface, the many relevant conditions on which the author dares assert his success are a request for readers to choose a relevant motivation for reading the text, which will satisfy the chosen objective.

In a certain sense, it seems that *Pamela* promises to be a morally and aesthetically valuable reading experience *if* these moral and aesthetic objectives are those about which the reader already shares consensus with the author. And yet those purposes include the desire to "*instruct* and *improve* the minds of the YOUTH of *both sexes*"—presumably those in need of such instruction and improvement,

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[210] Keith DeRose and Richard E. Grandy, "Conditional Assertions and 'Biscuit' Conditionals." *Noûs* 33.3 (1999), 405-420. 406.

[211] Keith DeRose and Richard E. Grandy, "Conditional Assertions and 'Biscuit' Conditionals," 413.

who do not necessarily share this consensus. Part of the pleasure of reading *Pamela*, then, comes from being someone who takes pleasure in imagining the potential moral utility of such a book for someone else—namely, the *idea* of the innocent youth. Even if the reader himself is a sexually experienced adult, this relevance conditional encourages him to imagine another reader, simultaneously having the same vicarious experiences of fear wrestling with desire, while also satisfying himself of the moral purpose of the book.

In *Shamela* (1741), his first (and anonymously published) parody of *Pamela*, Fielding satirizes the breathless immediacy of Pamela's first-person description. This satire exposed not only the implausibility of a country maid's aesthetic sophistication, but also the pornographic potential of "writing to the moment," as Richardson described this style. Fielding's Shamela writes:

> Mrs. *Jervis* and I are just in Bed, and the Door unlocked; if my Master should come———Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the Door! You see I write in the present Tense, as Parson *Williams* says. Well, he is in Bed between us, we both shamming a Sleep, he steals his Hand into my Bosom, which I, as if in my Sleep, press close to me with mine, and then pretend to awake.[212]

Fielding mocks Richardson's pretense of writing in the voice of a virginal country girl who is able to represent "warm scenes" with such vivid detail. Yet even in this

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[212] Henry Fielding, *Shamela*, in Eliza Haywood and Henry Fielding. *Anti-Pamela and Shamela* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview P, 2004), 247.

parody Fielding is still the playwright, eschewing *Pamela*'s time-bending flood of empirical detail in favor of action and dialogue. Although Shamela Andrews writes that she has experienced sexual pleasure with Parson Williams, she does not, in the manner of Pamela, describe the physical experience of intimate contact at length to the reader.

Fielding's implied censure of the titillating detail of the "warm scenes" in *Pamela* seems not to argue, however, for censorship. Rather than expressing outrage about the imagined vicarious sexual pleasure of a young and vulnerable reader,[213] Fielding seems more concerned with the hypocrisy of adult readers who recommend *Pamela* as a moral guide for young people, even as these readers seem to be transported by feelings originating from a source rather lower than the heart. Indeed, as Jacqueline Pearson observes, "Fielding likewise uses Shamela's library as a coded language for her body and her character,"[214] including several sexually explicit texts alongside sermons. However, Fielding does not depict Shamela as a tragically lost little lamb; she is not a stand-in for some imaginary virgin seduced by textual representations of sensuality. Rather, Shamela's library is a satire on the absurd mixture of vicarious sensuality and preachy morality that he finds in Richardson's *Pamela*.

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[213] For an example of this kind of reading of *Pamela*, see the discussion below of *Pamela Censured* (1741).

[214] Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835*, 23.

Fielding's parody of Richardson is not a satire on the possibility of feminine chastity—his own prose fiction depicts many admirable women who resist sexual temptation—but a parody of Richardson's style of representation, in which erotic detail and materialistic envy swim in churchy platitudes. While dramatizing the preservation of chastity, Richardson seems, according to Fielding, to seduce his readers through the promise of the vicarious experience of sexual longing, fear, and shame in the body of a fictional young woman. Richardson's reader, who may in no way be a young virgin threatened by temptation, is allowed to indulge in an ostensibly moral discourse by imagining its effects on the young woman or young man who might also be reading.

In the prefatory pages of *Shamela*, Fielding quotes and extrapolates from the fulsome letters of praise that Richardson had included in the second edition of *Pamela*, suggesting that Richardson's representational aesthetic caused his readers to conflate erotic and moral pleasures. Parson Tickletext writes, quoting from one of *Pamela*'s puffs:

> For my own Part (and I believe, I may say the same of all the Clergy of my Acquaintance) "I have done nothing but read it to others, and hear others again read it to me, ever since it came into my Hands; and I find I am like to do nothing else, for I know not how long yet to come: because if I lay the Book down *it comes after me*. When it has dwelt all Day long upon the Ear, it takes Possession all Night of the Fancy. It hath Witchcraft in every Page of it."—Oh! I feel an Emotion even while

I am relating this: Methinks I see *Pamela* at this Instant, with all the Pride of Ornament cast off.[215]

Tickletext's "Emotion […] at this Instant" suggests sexual climax, drawing a comparison between the temporal and sensual immediacy of Richardson's style and the vicarious pleasures of pornography. By satirically setting it in the context of a clergyman's onanistic fit, Fielding transforms the praise of *Pamela*'s "Witchcraft" from aesthetic ecstasy into literary priapism. It is clear that Fielding imagines the titillated reader of *Pamela* not as an innocent girl in need of moral instruction, but as a grown man who is aroused by reading about the contest between moral and erotic sentiment in a young woman.

Although Fielding's *Tom Jones* would allude to frequent instances of extramarital sexual intercourse that constitute crucial events in the plot, his third-person narrator merely suggests the inevitability of sex, without directly naming it, and then either switches to the narrative of another character or begins addressing the reader directly. Only the reader who is familiar with sexual experience or other more explicit descriptions of sex may imagine an erotic feeling to accompany these sexual events in the novel. For Fielding, the aesthetic of "writing to the moment" in sexual matters would necessarily result in the vicarious erotic stimulation of the reader. Whatever moral argument the novel might otherwise claim to express, it

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[215] Henry Fielding, *Shamela*. 236-237.

would be easily compromised by the prurient effects of reading so much detail about the adventures of "a poor Girl's little, *&c.*"[216]

While Fielding's characters succumb more often to sexual incontinence than Richardson's, these sexual events are depicted, if at all, with descriptive restraint. The attempted rape of Sophia Western by Lord Fellamar, for example, is represented almost entirely in a dialogue beginning with Fellamar laying "Hold of her Hand," and ending with "He then caught her in his Arms."[217] The full extent of their intimate contact in this scene is only revealed after Sophia hears her father yelling and the danger has passed; Fellamar "thought proper to relinquish his Prey, having only disordered her Handkerchief, and with his rude Lips committed violence on her lovely Neck."[218] The reader who would seek in this scene the potentially delectable tension between fear and desire that characterizes such scenes in *Pamela* must be disappointed to find no more detail of thought or feeling than could be distinguished at the distance of the pit from the stage.

Fielding's aesthetic distance, especially from the physical and emotional feelings of female characters in sexual situations, has been a source of critical debate about the merits of Fielding's style since the publication of *Tom Jones*. Samuel Johnson's remarks on Fielding's moral and aesthetic poverty, as reported by James

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[216] Henry Fielding, *Shamela*, 237.

[217] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, XV.5.

[218] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, XV.5.

Boswell[219] and Hannah More,[220] seem to describe a causal relationship between Fielding's refusal to focalize descriptive passages from within the perspective of a character and his murky sexual ethics.[221] More recently, Gene S. Koppel has argued[222] that, although *Tom Jones* uses conjugal love and desire as the central motivation of the plot, the novel seems to lack any coherent discourse of sexual morality, instead representing sexual desire as a purely physical drive, like

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[219] "In comparing [Richardson and Fielding, Johnson] used this expression: 'that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.'" James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 389.

[220] More writes of a conversation with Johnson in her *Memoirs*: "I alluded rather flippantly, I fear, to some witty passage in *Tom Jones:* he replied, 'I am shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book. I am sorry to hear you have read it; a confession which no modest lady should ever make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work.'" In *Memoirs of . . . Hannah More,* ed. William Roberts. Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1836), 101. Qtd. by Russell A. Hunt in *The Humanities Association Review* 27:4 (Fall 1976), 412-420.

[221] In twentieth-century scholarship, Johnson's possible reasons for dismissing *Tom Jones* are discussed by Robert Etheridge Moore ("Dr. Johnson on Fielding and Richardson." *PMLA* 66.2 [March 1951]: 162-181), Ian Watt ("Fielding as Novelist: *Tom Jones.*" *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1957. 260-289.), Russell A. Hunt ("Johnson on Fielding and Richardson: A Problem in Literary Moralism," *The Humanities Association Review* 27:4 [Fall 1976], 412-420.), R.C. Reynolds ("Johnson on Fielding." *College Literature* 13.2 [Spring 1986]: 157-167.), Jocelyn Harris ("Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson, and the Dial-Plate." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 9.2 [September 1986]:157-163.), Allen Michie (*Richardson and Fielding: The Dynamics of a Critical Rivalry*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1999.), and Martin C. Battestin ("Dr. Johnson and the Case of Harry Fielding." *Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture: Serious Reflections on Occasional Forms*. Ed. Dennis Todd and Cynthia Wall. Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 2001. 96-113.).

[222] Gene S. Koppel, "Sexual Education and Sexual Values in *Tom Jones*: Confusion at the Core?" *Studies in the Novel* 12:1 (Spring 1980): 1-11.

hunger.[223] By representing sexual scenes "off-stage," at a distance, or through comically inexplicit dialogue, Fielding relegates sexuality in *Tom Jones* to a physical fact that only becomes an issue of serious moral conflict in the case of premarital pregnancy when the consequences of sexual activity are rendered visible, as it is for Bridget Blifil, Molly Seagrim, and Nancy Miller, and for the fathers of their children.

Only in *Amelia* does Fielding begin to show serious and consistent moral concern about sexual decisions. Notably, this is the one work by Fielding that Johnson seems to have offered any praise, using it in conversation, Boswell reports, as an example of a book he read in a single sitting.[224] *Amelia* is also unique among Fielding's novels in that characters narrate sexual feelings and experiences at length from their own perspective, as Richardson's Pamela does in her letters. While the moral judgment of sexual behavior in *Tom Jones* may be incoherent, the moral judgment of conversation about past sexual experience is clearly negative.[225] In *Amelia*, however, several of the chapters in Books I and II are devoted to an

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[223] This comparison between lust and hunger appears in *Tom Jones*, VI.1: "That what is commonly called Love, namely, the Desire of satisfying a voracious Appetite with a certain Quantity of delicate white human Flesh, is by no Means that Passion for which I here contend. This is indeed more properly Hunger; and as no Glutton is ashamed to apply the Word Love to his Appetite, and to say he LOVES such and such Dishes; so may the Lover of this Kind, with equal Propriety say, he HUNGERS after such and such Women."

[224] James Boswell triumphs over this remark in a footnote: "We have here an involuntary testimony to the excellence of this admirable writer, to whom we have seen that Dr. Johnson *directly* allowed so little merit." *Life of Johnson*, 747 fn. 1.

[225] Sophia is annoyed by Tom's infidelity with other women, but she is enraged by her discovery that he has been using her name with a freedom that suggests to others a lack of chastity in their relationship.

exchange of monologues by Miss Matthews and Mr. Booth about their past experiences of love and desire. Other lengthy personal narratives in Fielding's previous novels, such as those told by Mr. Wilson in *Joseph Andrews*[226] or the Man of the Hill in *Tom Jones*,[227] are interrupted repeatedly for comic or moral commentary, lest the reader be too drawn in by the story, and therefore less critically active in response; in *Amelia*, Miss Matthews and Mr. Booth very rarely interrupt one another, and then only to express sympathy for the speaker and a desire to hear more. Rather than puncturing the realism or vanity of one another's tales of woe, as Parson Adams does to Mr. Wilson and Partridge does to the Man of the Hill, Miss Matthews and Mr. Booth successively flatter one another's narrative style with compliments and expressions of sentimental compassion.

Miss Matthews's story of her sexual betrayal by Mr. Hebber[228] and Booth's story of his relationship with Amelia[229] are told with far more emotional sensitivity and immediacy than any other first-person narratives told by characters in any of Fielding's fiction. Though Miss Matthews and Mr. Booth linger longer on the sentiments of desire, love, and fear than they do on descriptions of sexual contact, they react to one another's tales with increasingly sympathetic pleasure until they

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[226] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, III.3.

[227] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, VIII.11-14.

[228] Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, I.7-9. Hebber's name suggests a loose connection to the Biblical story in Judges 4 of Heber the Kenite's wife Jael, who killed Sisera, the captain of the Canaanite army, by driving a spike into his head. Miss Matthews murders Mr. Hebber by stabbing him with a penknife in the chest.

[229] Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, II-III.

decide to spend the night together.[230] Miss Matthews, inflamed with jealousy over the lengthy expression of Booth's feeling for his wife Amelia, has little difficulty in seducing him, as he is himself aroused with emotion from telling his own story. The narrator interrupts as the Governor locks the gate and departs for the evening:

> In Imitation of him, we will lock up likewise a Scene which we do not think proper to expose to the Eyes of the Public. If any over curious Readers should be disappointed on this Occasion, we will recommend such Readers to the Apologies with which certain gay Ladies have lately been pleased to oblige the World, where they will possibly find every thing recorded, that past at this Interval.[231]

While Fielding's moral stance on extramarital sex may remain incoherent, his position on the representation of sexual activity in fiction is clear. Though sex may be treated as a physical fact, and part of a novel that intends to represent life as it is commonly lived, it should not be described. In this authorial aside to the reader, he suggests that the imagined reader's temptation to read an explicit description of Miss Matthews and Mr. Booth having sex would be better served by reading the titillating accounts of courtesan's lives, such as the autobiography of "Con" Phillips, to whose work Fielding's own *Tom Jones* had been favorably compared by *Gentlemen's Magazine* editor Edward Cave.[232]

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[230] Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, III.1.

[231] Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, III.1.

[232] See below.

Fielding's refusal to describe an action more crucial to the plot of his novels than scenes of eating, reading, or fighting, which receive far more detailed accounts, suggests his hesitancy to provide the reader with the imaginative materials of erotic titillation, lest he fall into the hypocrisy he accuses Richardson of displaying in *Pamela*. By condemning dilatory first-person accounts of "warm scenes," Fielding suggests that Richardson's *Pamela* has more in common with contemporary pornographic narratives than with useful moral discourse, and that this kinship should be understood in formal terms—that it is clearly an effect of style rather than content alone. As I have argued in chapter 2, Fielding's rhetoric of moral discourse requires the reader to imagine herself not in the place of the hero or heroine, vicariously experiencing a life, but in a crowd of readers, participating in an imaginary dialogue about the characters and events as they unfold. Fielding encourages readers to love, hate, pity, or celebrate his characters, but never to feel that they are literally experiencing the lives of his characters.

The aesthetic of vicarious experience allows the reader to develop an idea of a feeling or sensation that she has never actually had. Samuel Johnson expresses his concern about the moral stakes of vicarious experience in the new realistic fiction in *Rambler* 4 (31 March 1750, sic):

> These books are writen chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainments of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles,

> and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account.[233]

Realistic fiction, according to Johnson, has the potential to fill the mind of the young reader with ideas of experiences and desires without the consequences of real action. Johnson's anxiety about fictional vicarious experience seems to have been prompted, at least in part, by his reaction to *Tom Jones*, which had been published the previous year, in 1749. Johnson was disturbed by the apparent flippancy with which Fielding's masterpiece handles the topic of premarital sex, despite the author's care not to represent sexual scenes in detail.

The year 1749 saw the publication of a number of other popular titles on the subject of sex that would have supplied the desirous young reader with ample material for the active imagination, including the final installments of *An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs. T C Phillips*, an autobiography by the famous London courtesan "Con" Phillips; the bestselling anonymous pamphlet *Satan's Harvest Home*, a collection of poems, essays, and stories about sodomy, lesbianism, transvestitism, and prostitution; and the fictional pornographic novel *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known as *Fanny Hill*, by John Cleland. These texts offer a wide range of representations of sexuality for the prurient reader—Phillips tells scandalous stories of her sexual relationships with famous men, *Satan's Harvest Home* offers tempting glimpses into queer and forbidden sexual practices, and *Fanny Hill*

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[233] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

describes numerous sex acts in lengthy detail—but each of these works attempts to frame these representations with a moral message about the pernicious effects of a sex life unregulated by heteronormative marriage.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* of March 1749[234] extracts a sermon by the London Archdeacon Edward Cobden on the subject of fornication and the decline of sexual chastity. In an attempt to avoid the trap of condemning sexual laxity only to recommend it by the mere suggestion of particular acts, Cobden states:

> It would not become me to mention some of those monstrous and unnatural obscenities with which our land hath been stained: they would be offensive, indeed, to the ears of a modest heathen. I shall therefore only insist on two, which are plainly and frequently condemned in scripture; nor any where more expressly than in these words: *Whoremongers and adulterers* GOD *will judge*. Heb. xiii. 4.

Rather than describing these acts of lust and adultery, Cobden goes on to narrate their inevitable effects on the life of an imagined young woman: "Alas! that virgin innocence, which was once her comfort and her glory, which was her brightest ornament, and most valuable dowry, is lost, irrecoverably lost; and shame, guilt and sorrow are to be her continual attendants." To this sentence, the editor "Sylvanus

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[234] Edward Cobden, "EXTRACT from a famed Sermon, preached before the King at Sr James's, on Dec. 11 1748 by Edw. Cobden, D.D. Archdeacon of London, and Chaplain in ordinary to his Majesty." Ed. Edward Cave [as Sylvanus Urban], *The Gentleman's Magazine* 19.3 (March 1749).

Urban"[235] appends a curious and timely footnote applying the content of this sermon to the sexual narratives emerging in the popular press.

Beginning with Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748) as an example, Urban recommends a descriptive scene of the degradation of an unchaste woman for the reader's edification. "Of this wretched state, a most lively and striking picture is exhibited in *Roderick Random*, which we have here copied as a warning to one sex, and a remonstrance against t'other."[236] After quoting from Miss Williams's description of women of fashion reduced by disease and crime to beggars and streetwalkers, Urban supplies his own fanciful narrative of an imaginary woman whose life is destroyed by sexual seduction, until she "degenerates into a state of brutal insensibility, rots and dies upon a dunghill." Urban completes his lengthy footnote with a comment on the representation of such narratives in other popular works:

> Some strokes of this kind appear also in *Tom Jones*, and in *Mrs Philips*'s *Apology*.—Indeed as this subject is capable of very high colouring, almost every writer has exercised upon it his skill in painting.

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[235] Pseudonym of Edward Cave, publisher and first editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. This pseudonym would be adopted by subsequent editors of the *Magazine* after Cave's death in 1754.

[236] Edward Cave [as Sylvanus Urban], in Cobden, "EXTRACT from a famed Sermon," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 19.3 (March 1749).

> However, the loose images in these pieces perhaps incite to vice more strongly than the contrast figures alarm us into virtue.[237]

Linking the recently-published *Tom Jones* with the scandalous autobiography of "Con" Phillips, Urban acknowledges the moral framework in both that describes the frightening consequences of sexual immorality, and acknowledges the aesthetic temptation of such scenes for the writer that seems to have induced his own previous paragraph. However, despite Urban's praise for Fielding's and Phillips's skill in representing the effects of vice, he suggests some ambivalence about the moral content of works that describe the lives of libertines to such pleasurable effect.

In this assessment of *Tom Jones*, Urban seems to overstate both the case for and the case against the novel's argument for chastity. Fielding's narrator repeatedly refuses to draw a necessary causal relationship between sin and suffering, as in the opening line of book XV: "There are a Set of Religious, or rather Moral Writers, who teach that Virtue is the certain Road to Happiness, and Vice to Misery in this World. A very wholesome and comfortable Doctrine, and to which we have but one Objection, namely, That it is not true."[238] Although Fielding takes great care not to explicitly represent sexual acts, the interpretive framework provided by the narrator is equally careful never to suggest the common sense truism that moral

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[237] Edward Cave [as Sylvanus Urban], in Cobden, "EXTRACT from a famed Sermon," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 19.3 (March 1749).

[238] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, XV.1.

virtue necessarily causes happiness or success. The entire premise of Cobden's sermon is that, since one may not represent sexual sins, or even explicitly name them, without unwittingly suggesting them to the minds of the young and innocent, one may only describe at length the suffering that will definitely result from these unnamable obscenities. And in the case of "loose images" in *Tom Jones* that may incite the reader to vicious sensuality, one would be hard-pressed to find a description of any such images beyond a wordless smile or the pressure of a hand.

Gene S. Koppel concludes that *Tom Jones* suffers from a "Confusion at the Core" of its sexual values because of rapidly shifting standards of sexual behavior in 1740's England. I argue that it is possible that some of the confusion in the moral interpretation of actual sexual practices may have been influenced by the critical reception of various experiments in the representation of sexual acts and sexual morality in the popular literature of the decade. Henry Fielding's satire of the reception of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* as a moral novel for young readers is at least in part a reaction to the potentially titillating descriptive style of its sexual encounters. Samuel Johnson's rejection of *Tom Jones* for its potential to corrupt morality seems to have been no more explicable to readers like James Boswell and Hannah More, who enjoyed the novel in 1749, than to current readers. Sylvanus Urban's common moral appraisal of Mrs. Phillips's autobiography and *Tom Jones* must have surprised Fielding, who went on to denounce the immorality of Phillips's work in his 1751 novel *Amelia*.

The question of what did or did not constitute sexual pornography in the middle of the eighteenth century in London seems to have been a crucial and unsettling aspect of the aesthetic developments of contemporary realistic prose. Not only was it becoming increasingly difficult to imagine who might be reading a particular published narrative; it also became obvious that different readers were experiencing the sexual content and moral values of texts in almost directly conflicting ways. Common sense in both the Lockean sense, as a cognitive faculty of abstracting similar conclusions from experiences, and in the Kantian sense, as the ability to imagine the ideas of everyone else, seems practically impossible with respect to the moral danger of sexual representation in mimetically realistic texts.

Pornographic Anti-Pornography

Although the current critical consensus about scandalous texts like Phillips's autobiography, homophobic pamphlets like *Satan's Harvest Home*, and *Fanny Hill* is that they were almost certainly intended to be read primarily for the stimulation of the sexual imagination rather than the edification of the morals of young readers, there were several other productions of the print culture of the middle of the eighteenth century in London whose intended use remains in some sense mysterious. Randolph Trumbach[239] argues that although the difficulty in discerning

[239] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England," *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Lynn Hunt, 253-282.

the pornographic purpose of texts is, of course, a function of the need for publishers to remain respectable, further editions of certain books seem to record a history of their use (or misuse) for stimulation of the erotic imagination.

According to Trumbach, in the case of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, a medical guide for midwives first published in the 1680's, further editions rearranged the content in order to reflect its larger readership of young men seeking detailed information about genitalia and sexual intercourse for purposes other than medical knowledge. Trumbach writes, "This rearrangement was presumably meant to heighten further the book's appeal to a male audience. […] But it still limited its libertine and pornographic intention by placing sex in the context of marriage and going back to Adam and Eve in Paradise."[240] Likewise, many other works of eighteenth-century prose seem to offer, on one hand, far too much detail about sexual feelings and experiences to be innocent, and on the other, far too much moralization about sexual purity to be uncomplicatedly pornographic. Because the rhetorical style of several genres, like the medically scientific treatise and the morally outraged pamphlet, had been appropriated by purveyors of pornography for masturbatory use, it becomes impossible, and perhaps useless, to distinguish between texts written for the purpose of vicarious sexual pleasure and those genuinely written with anti-pornographic or un-pornographic intent.

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[240] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England," 264.

The anonymous "anti-Pamelist" pamphlet *Pamela Censured*[241] (1741) produces a concentrated experience of the pornographic anti-pornographic text. As Tom Keymer and Peter Sabor argue,[242] *Pamela Censured* ironically heightens the pornographic potential of *Pamela*'s "warm scenes" by reproducing them, isolated from the surrounding novel, and subjecting them to the author's hysterical moral outrage at imagining young people of both sexes feeling sexually stimulated while reading. According to Keymer and Sabor, "*Pamela Censured* has traditionally been read, and laughed at, not only as a humourless exercise in scandalized paranoia, but also as the work of a writer rather too deeply absorbed in the lewdness he berates."[243] It is unclear, they suggest, whether the author could possibly be so naïve as to imagine his pamphlet could effectively serve as anything other than an advertisement for reading *Pamela* with the purpose of erotic stimulation.

The first eighteen pages of *Pamela Censured* are filled with the author apparently sincerely berating Richardson for his hypocritical pretense of having edited the letters of an actual young woman only to praise the book as if it were not

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[241] *Pamela Censured: In a Letter to the Editor: Shewing That under the Specious Pretence of Cultivating the Principles of Virtue in the Minds of the Youth of both Sexes, the Most Artful and Alluring Amorous Ideas are convey'd. And that, instead of being divested of all Images that tend to inflame; Her Letters abound with Incidents, which must necessarily raise in the unwary Youth that read them, Emotions far distant from the Principles of Virtue.* (London: J. Roberts, 1741; Reprinted by Augustan Reprint Society, 2010).

[242] Tom Keymer and Peter Sabor, *'Pamela' in the Marketplace: Literary Controversy and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

[243] Tom Keymer and Peter Sabor, *'Pamela' in the Marketplace*, 34.

written by himself, before mocking the letters of praise printed in the second edition of *Pamela*. The author protests at length that *Pamela* may upend the entire social order by suggesting that birth and fortune should be of no consideration in marriage, and follows with a quick summary of the entire story, ending with a sneer: "And *thus is Virtue Rewarded*."[244] These criticisms are similar to many anti-Pamelist critiques of the potential moral harm of a book whose authorship is a lie, and whose narrative content and title seem to promise its readers earthly monetary reward for the preservation of sexual chastity. In its preface, *Pamela Censured* is only particularly distinguishable from other similar criticisms of *Pamela* in the degree of its vehement outrage.

After this extensive mockery of Richardson's preface, praise, and plot, the author of *Pamela Censured* begins a detailed catalogue of every potentially sexually exciting scene in *Pamela*, reproducing each, and then describing in detail the feelings he imagines this scene might create in the body of a young male or female reader, or the desire the scene might cause this reader to reproduce the actions depicted, either through masturbation or through pursuing sexual partners. Early in the pamphlet, the author of *Pamela Censured* claims to quote from a letter he received from "a Gentleman of the MOST distinguished Taste and Abilities," who supplements the author's imagination of the effects of *Pamela* on the body of an imagined young female reader:

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[244] *Pamela Censured*, 42.

> [T]he Modest Young Lady can never read the Description of Naked Breasts being run over with the Hand, and Kisses given with such Eagerness that they cling to the Lips; but her own soft Breasts must heave at the Idea and secretly sigh for the same Pressure; what then can she do when she comes to the closer Struggles of the Bed, where the tender Virgin lies panting and exposed, if not to the last Conquest, (which I think the Author hath barely avoided) at least to all the Liberties which ungoverned Hands of a determined Lover must be supposed to take? […S]he privately may seek Remedies which may drive her to the most unnatural Excesses.[245]

Whatever his intentions, the author seems to exceed his stated purpose of decrying *Pamela*'s erotic potential, describing the necessary effect of Pamela's "Naked Breasts" on the "soft Breasts" of the imagined female reader. The pornographic content of *Pamela Censured*, such as it is, is fetishistically metafictional, in that the author does not merely describe the sexual experiences of a fictional character, but quotes a (possibly fictional) friend's erotic description of a fictional young person's masturbatory thoughts caused by reading a description of the sexual experiences of a fictional character. *Pamela Censured* is a pornographic representation of the experience of reading pornography, seasoned by moral hysteria about the effects of pornography on the sexual imaginations of the young readers who encounter them,

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[245] *Pamela Censured*, 44-45.

and heightened by the pleasures of sharing this erotic moral hysteria with like-minded gentleman friends.

A similarly pornographic anti-pornographic pamphlet appeared in 1755 in London with a title page advertising:

> *The True History and Adventures of* Catharine Vizzani, A YOUNG Gentlewoman a Native of *Rome*, who for many Years past in the Habit of a Man; was killed for an Amour with a young Lady; and found on Dissection, a true Virgin. With curious Anatomical REMARKS on the *Nature* and *Existence* of the HYMEN. By GIOVANNI BIANCHI, Professor of Anatomy at *Sienna*, the Surgeon who dissected her. With a curious FRONTISPIECE.[246]

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[246] Giovanni Bianchi, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani, A young Gentlewoman a Native of Rome, who for many Years past in the Habit of a Man; was killed for an Amour with a young Lady; and found on Dissection, a true Virgin. With curious Anatomical REMARKS on the Nature and Existence of the Hymen*. [trans. and ed. John Cleland] (London: Reeve, 1755). Cleland translated from Bianchi's 1744 publication, *Brief History of the Life of Caterina Vizzani, a Roman*. According to Paula Findlen, Bianchi's text was a critical intervention in the history of medical literature on female sexuality, as it debunked the former belief that the size of the clitoris caused same-sex desire. But in addition to its medical insights, it is also a titillating story. Findlen writes, "Bianchi's interest in Vizzani […] was not purely medical. He was fascinated by the narrative possibilities of the story of her life as well as the anatomical issues raised by the dissection of her body; his pamphlet sought to reconstruct both histories simultaneously." Paula Findlen, "Medicine, Pornography, and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Italy," *Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, ed. Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassyng Roworth,, and Catherine M. Sama (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2009), 225.

Unlike Henry Fielding's rather criminological 1746 pamphlet *The Female Husband*[247], which also narrates the life of a person we would now refer to as a transgender man, the story of Catharine Vizzani is advertised as a scandalous "adventure" story of disguise, lesbian sex, jealousy, and murder, promising anatomical descriptions of her vagina.[248]

While Fielding attributes the cause of the lesbian desires of the "female husband" to probable seduction by a woman who was herself seduced by a woman, suggesting that empirical experience of lesbian sex creates the insatiable desire for further lesbian experience, the Italian surgeon-author of Catharine Vizzani's life seeks the cause of her lesbianism in the shape and size of her sex organs. Bianchi reports that he is frustrated in this examination, and find nothing physiologically abnormal during her autopsy, other than the curious fact that Vizzani was still, at her death, *virgo intacta*. Bianchi's titillating narrative of Vizzani's life in disguise as a ladies' man finds no cause for her behavior, reporting that even her parents had learned to accept her identity as a man.

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[247] [Henry Fielding.] *The Female Husband; or, the Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, alias Mr. George Hamilton*, (London: Cooper, 1746). While Fielding's pamphlet appeals to the reader's eagerness for a scandalous narrative, it avoids detailed descriptions of lesbian sex, at most offering a few suggestive gerunds—"squeezing, kissing, toying, &c."

[248] Randolph Trumbach notes that many of the textual and visual objects reported to have been used for pornographic purposes by eighteenth-century readers either were intended to appear to be, or were in fact, medical guides written by doctors to describe genitalia. Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England."

As the anonymous translator and editor of Bianchi's pamphlet, John Cleland appends a lengthy explanation of his anti-pornographic purpose in offering this story to English readers. While Bianchi claims to find neither biographical nor biological cause for Vizzani's voracious same-sex desire, Cleland argues that Vizzani must have been seduced by pornographic *stories*:

> It seems therefore most likely that this unfortunate and scandalous Creature had her Imagination corrupted early in her Youth, either by obscene Tales that were voluntarily told in her Hearing, or by privately listening to the Discourses of the Women, who are too generally corrupt in that Country. Her Head being thus filled with vicious Inclinations, perhaps before she received any Incitements from her Constitution, might prompt her to those vile Practices, which being begun in Folly, were continued through Wickedness; nor is it at all unreasonable to believe, that, by Degrees, this might occasion a preternatural Change in the animal Spirits, and a Kind of venereal Fury, very remote, and even repugnant to that of her Sex.[249]

Cleland insists that, if neither sexual seduction nor physiological abnormality can be blamed for Vizzani's remarkable life, we must consider the possibility that exposure to "obscene" narratives of same-sex attraction "filled" her mind and led to her interest in sex with women. He goes on to explain the relationship between

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[249] [John Cleland], ed., *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani,* 54-55.

narratives of perverse sexuality and the potential effect they may have on young readers.

> It is therefore very expedient, whenever a Treatise of this Kind is committed to the Press, that it should be accompanied with such Reflections as may render it manifest, that it comes abroad with a good Intent, and with a real View of correcting, not a latent Design of corrupting the Morals of Youth; and, for this Reason, it may not be improper to hint at a few Particulars that are extremely worthy of Notice. […]
>
> In the next Place, it affords (if that were at all necesary) a new Argument for suppressing those scandalous and flagitious Books, that are not only privately but publickly handed about for the worst Purposes, as well as Prints and Pictures calculated to inflame the Passions, to banish all Sense of Shame, and to make the World, if possible, more corrupt and profligate than it is already. We are very certain that all Things of this Sort must have a very bad Tendency; but surely it would lay some Kind of Restraint, even upon those who are most forward in these Things, if they considered, that they know not what might be the Consequences, and that they may become

> inconsiderately the Instruments of much greater Wickedness than they design.[250]

Unlike the author of *Pamela Censured*, Cleland does not describe the imagined sexual arousal inspired by pornographic narratives in the body of the imagined young reader, but instead describes the moral responsibility of the publisher of sexually explicit material in protecting the minds of these young readers from the damage that will result from the reading experience. By providing these moral "Reflections," Cleland expresses his intention to render the pornographic potential of the text harmless. While other books that do not provide similar "Reflections" may be potentially harmful and should be kept from the eyes of youth, this pamphlet, he claims, will not result in a similar pernicious influence due to the moral framework he, in his role as editor, provides.

Much like the author of *Pamela Censured*, however, Cleland disavows his own responsibility in publishing and disseminating content that seems clearly intended to appeal to the reader seeking a sexually titillating reading experience. The story of Catharine Vizzani's life is full of explicitly rendered scenes of lesbian sex as imagined by its author, as well as anatomically detailed descriptions of her genitalia. If sexually explicit stories are, as Cleland asserts, capable of resulting in insatiable sexual desire in their readers, then it is curious that his editorial comments would so vehemently condemn publishers of such texts.

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[250] Sic, [John Cleland], ed., *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani,* 62-64.

The rhetorical framework of this editorial comment, however, appeals to the reader who would imagine the potentially inflaming effects of Catharine Vizzani's story on another reader who is more sensitive and inexperienced. The anti-pornographic editorial comments serve, in effect, not to dampen the pornographic effect of the text, but to heighten it, ironically, by directing the reader to envision the young person for whom this text might serve as pornographically stimulating and morally deleterious. By presenting the Vizzani narrative as second-hand reportage, rather than as fiction, Cleland offers a plausible excuse for its translation as factual information about an instance of human behavior while also encouraging the reader to imagine the titillating truth of the narrative it tells. As in the case of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, the story of Catharine Vizzani serves as pornography precisely because it insists on its non-pornographic, medical authority on the true nature of sexual human bodies.

Pornographic Common Sense in *Fanny Hill*

These claims to moral duty are particularly suspicious coming from John Cleland, the author of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (or *Fanny Hill*, after its narrator, 1749),[251] a novel that Randolph Trumbach describes as "eighteenth-century Europe's most notorious pornographic work," which "appears unique in its

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[251] John Cleland, *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (London: Penguin, 1985).

singleness of purpose"[252] to produce vicarious sexual pleasure in the reader. Although the narrative framework of the novel sees its prostitute protagonist happily married to the man who took her virginity and celebrating the virtue of marital love, it describes the pleasure she takes in her sexual experiences with multiple female and male lovers, including lesbian sex, masturbation, voyeurism, seduction, erotic violence, cross-dressing, oral sex, group sex, and even the sharing of pornographic personal narratives, in extraordinary detail, with each sexual encounter followed by the narrator's first-person analysis of the actions just described. At the end of the novel, as she describes the marital bliss in which she now finds herself, married to the father of her children, Fanny reflects on the nature of the entire tale she has told:

> I could not help pitying, even in point of taste, those who, immersed in a gross sensuality, are insensible to the so delicate charms of VIRTUE, than which even PLEASURE has not a greater friend, nor than VICE a greater enemy. Thus temperance makes men lords over those pleasures that intemperance enslaves them to: the one, parent of health, vigour, fertility, cheerfulness, and every other desirable good in life; the other, of diseases, debility, barrenness, self-loathing, with only every evil incident to human nature.[253]

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[252] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism," 253.

[253] John Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 223.

In contrast to her grim assessment of the necessary effects of a life dedicated to sexual pleasure outside of the bounds of heterosexual marriage, the novel itself suggests an entirely different idea of vast and varied sexual experience as a healthy part of the progress of life, not leading away, but toward virtue and happiness. The counter-narrative offered in Fanny's closing remarks seems less a product of the narrative we have just read, and more like an excerpt from Cobden's sermon on the effects of fornication,[254] or at least like the author is attempting to do as Urban suggests for the ill effects of fornication, "exercis[ing] upon it his skill in painting."[255] Fanny's lengthy narrative of sex leading to a life of happiness and Cobden's narrative of sex leading to a life of despair are in a struggle, in these final pages, for control of the moral framework of the novel.

Fanny herself seems to recognize the hypocrisy of this hackneyed moralization, given the tale she has told, and adds, "You laugh perhaps at this tail-piece of morality"[256] before revising the moral conclusion of her epistolary narrative to one more in line with the narrative causality of the whole:

> If you do me then justice, you will esteem me perfectly consistent in the incense I burn to virtue: if I have painted vice all in its gayest

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[254] See above.

[255] Edward Cave [as Sylvanus Urban], "EXTRACT from a famed Sermon," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 19.3 (March 1749).

[256] John Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 223.

> colours, if I have decked it with flowers, it has been solely in order to make the worthier, the solemner, sacrifice of it to virtue.[257]

Echoing the language of Samuel Richardson's Preface to *Pamela*, Fanny restructures the narrative causality of virtue to happiness; while Richardson promises his readers that he will teach them that virtue is the only sure path to earthly enjoyment, Fanny offers a statement of her experiential superiority to those who have lived virtuous lives. Having experienced both, she chooses virtue. Fanny then recommends the practice of an acquaintance who, in an attempt to bring his son to a life of virtue, offered him a tour of "all those scenes of debauchery so fit to nauseate a good taste."[258] These last remarks on the "true" moral framework of the novel may do more justice to the content and narrative arc of the whole, but they still seem ill-considered in the context of the moral anxiety of 1740s British literary authors and critics about the sexual chastity of the imaginations of young people.

It is certainly possible that Cleland intended the reading of *Fanny Hill* to serve as just such a tour, taking the young reader through all possible experiences of sexual pleasure with such explicit detail that he may no longer desire to experience the mysteries of sex first-hand, because he feels as if he has already done so. While this moral purpose differs greatly from Johnson's insistence "THAT the highest degree of reverence should be paid to youth, and that nothing indecent or unseemly

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[257] John Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 224.

[258] John Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 224.

should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears,"[259] it argues for a different and perhaps more instrumental moral use of the power of vicarious experience in realistic fiction.

Randolph Trumbach argues[260] that *Fanny Hill* represents the purest expression of John Cleland's commitment to the philosophy of libertinism. Trumbach describes the progress of libertine ethics, in which pleasurable bodily experience is the means by which a man may proceed from lower to higher virtues: "From human beauty, then, one proceeded to the beauty of art, but from art, one went on to virtue. This required gentlemen to surrender 'brutality, insolence and riot,' and turn to good breeding."[261] Through the masturbatory pleasure of indulging in pornography, the reader may then be able to progress, like Christian in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678),[262] from a life mired in the substance of the world to one devoted to higher thoughts and actions. Likewise, the sexual escapades represented in *Fanny Hill* follow a progress from those represented as simple, solitary, and childish (lesbian sex, masturbation, and voyeurism), through the increase of materialistic desire (represented by Fanny's experiences with increasingly large penises), into encounters with perversity and danger (flogging and being flogged, spying on sodomites at an inn, seducing a "changeling"), and

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[259] Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 4.

[260] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism."

[261] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism," 271.

[262] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Ed. W.R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

rising finally to pastoral bliss (the group trip to Cythera). The life of the prostitute is not intended, as Trumbach notes, to be a realistic representation of the representation of prostitution in 1740's England; rather, it can be read as an allegory for the progress of the man of breeding toward politer and more social virtue through the satiation of sexual curiosity.

Fanny Hill also resembles *The Pilgrim's Progress* in that the narrative is filled with personal narratives and shared experiences. At the beginning of the second letter, the assembled women at the bawdy-house narrate their experiences of losing their virginity to one another. After Fanny receives "wholesome lessons" about the proper conduct of a whore over tea (in a scene reminiscent of Christian's conversation with Prudence, Piety, and Charity at the House Beautiful[263]), it is "proposed that each girl should entertain the company with that critical period of her personal history in which she first exchanged the maiden state for womanhood."[264] The sharing and comparison of stories of sexual awakening is a clear parallel to the testimonies shared by Christian and the other pilgrims he meets along the road in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as they each share the narratives of how they realized their lives were lacking, sought satisfaction of their desires, and found themselves leaving their homes and families to pursue greater happiness. The young women relate their stories at great length, with detail not only of the physical sensations of passionate desire, but also of their emotional and moral reflections

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[263] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 48-53.

[264] John Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 134.

throughout and since the act. None of the women laments the day that she first strayed from the normative moral path; rather, each supports the evidence provided by the others by showing a similar kind of personal growth in response to different sexual circumstances.

Rather than being a "secret history" of the shameful, private scandal of an individual life, *Fanny Hill* is an attempt to mediate between the substance of private life and the public discourse of personal growth and engagement with society through the means of shared vicarious pleasure. Just as Christian, Faithful, and Hopeful in *The Pilgrim's Progress* continually narrate their private experiences of conviction, temptation, sin, and redemption to one another in order to produce a shared experience of faith, Fanny and the other prostitutes use their narratives of seduction, sex, and discovery to construct a social experience of sexual conversion.

Like Christian and his fellow pilgrims, Fanny and the other prostitutes have left behind the safety and order of the heteronormative family, seeking the freedom to behave according to other principles. Unmoored from the traditional private sphere, Christian and Fanny both long to find society with others who can verify their experiences in similar narratives. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt describes the desire to share narrations of private experience as an epistemological yearning:

> Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain,

> shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. […] Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before.[265]

Arendt argues that the rise of the social and public spheres and the transformation of epistemological philosophy across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are responses to the need for storytelling that accompanies increased freedom from traditional private life. Shared narratives allow individual persons to establish a common sense of reality within communities that can verify that experience. The sharing of stories is especially important in the case of private or sensual experiences that seem to be locked up in subjective experience. Through mutual verification of private feeling, she argues, communities use narratives to constitute the real for one another.

In fictions such as Bunyan's and Cleland's, the metafictional representation of communities sharing and verifying one another's personal narratives offers the illusion of consensus already having been created within the texts themselves. A community of storytellers has established and affirmed the experiences and

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[265] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958), 50.

conclusions drawn by their equally fictional friends, such that the surrounding narrative, focalized through a single character, may appear to have greater credibility. Christian's choice to leave behind his family in pursuit of "Life, Life, Eternal Life"[266] and Fanny's bravery in the face of increasingly demanding sexual clients may seem less foolish, or at least less peculiar, within the fictional social milieux created for these characters, in which they find themselves surrounded by others who have also given up a normative private life for ethical freedom.

At the same historical moment when authors of the realistic novel strove to vindicate themselves from accusations of sensuality and immorality by distancing their works from associations with the anti-social self-pleasuring of pornography, works of sexually explicit literature simultaneously attempted to ground their representations of physical pleasure in the rhetorical and epistemological frameworks of religious and moral fictions. What Gene S. Koppel describes as "confusion" about sexual morality in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*[267] is merely one example of the broader confusion of mid-eighteenth-century literature about what constitutes a proper modern, secular attitude toward sexual desire and expression and how to inculcate sexual morality effectively in young, inexperienced readers. In the ensuing debates about the regulation of sexual immorality in fiction, authors express deeply conflicting views on whether the aesthetics of mimetically realistic representation pose a moral danger to these imagined young readers, or if the moral

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[266] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 13.

[267] Gene S. Koppel, "Sexual Education and Sexual Values in *Tom Jones.*"

assessment of sexual behavior provided by the text may overcome its potentially morally deleterious effects. Public debate about what does and what does not constitute pornography that requires regulation has not, in the intervening two and a half centuries, produced much more clarity about what is the effect of representations of explicit sexuality on imagined vulnerable readers, what would be the desirable moral outcome of such regulation, or how to enact regulation against pornographic materials without simultaneously denying public access to texts of obvious artistic, social, medical, and even moral merit.

While John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* is certainly the most explicit example of long-form narrative pornography of this era, its representation of women sharing their private stories of sexual liberation in order to arrive at a verified, public, common sense of physical and emotional subjective experience demonstrates the epistemological need for mimetic representation of sexuality. What Arendt refers to as "the reality which comes from being seen and heard"[268] has become central to the modern conception of political and personal freedom. Likewise, Immanuel Kant defined the political requirement for Enlightenment as "the freedom to make a *public use* of one's reason in all matters,"[269] to share one's private judgment in the public sphere without being silenced. As the confusion at the heart of the debate about the self-regulation or state regulation of sexual content in realistic texts shows, the attempts to silence public discourse on matters of sexual experience

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[268] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.

[269] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" 59.

demonstrate the unimaginable nature of subjective imaginations and psychological response to vicarious experience through a "common sense" of human nature.

Chapter 4: Subjectivity in Paranoid Fiction and *Tristram Shandy*

John Cleland, whose notoriously pornographic novel *Fanny Hill* (1749) made him a target of obscenity charges, criticized Laurence Sterne, the author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767),[270] for his "bawdy" writing. According to James Boswell, who reported Cleland's account of a conversation with Sterne in his journal in 1779, Cleland said, "Sterne's bawdy [was] too plain. I reproved him, saying, 'It gives no sensations.' Said he: 'You have furnished me a vindication. It can do no harm.' 'But,' (I said,) 'if you had a pupil who wrote C———on a wall, would you not flogg him?' He never forgave me."[271] As I have argued in the previous chapter, it is clear that Cleland held peculiar, seemingly conflicting opinions about what constitutes inappropriate sexual content in fiction. His criticism of Sterne is that *Tristram Shandy* is "bawdy" without being erotic, and suggests that Sterne's sexual humor is too crude and childish. Cleland seems to assume that sexual content in fiction *should* produce "sensations" in the reader because doing so suggests a more aesthetically mature relationship to sexuality. If we consider Cleland's sexual aesthetic in the light of Randolph Trumbach's

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[270] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (London: Penguin, 1997).

[271] James Boswell, "John Cleland on Sterne (1779)," *Laurence Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes (London: Routledge, 1971, Reprint Taylor & Francis 2002), 228.

argument[272] that *Fanny Hill* is an attempt at an ethical libertine novel, it is possible that Sterne's refusal to engage the reader's erotic "sensations" by reducing sexual content to jokes constituted, for Cleland, a failure to treat sexuality as a mature aspect of moral life. The failure to give a vicarious sensation of life—and of sexual experience in particular—seems to be Cleland's aesthetic criticism of Sterne.

It is certainly true that Sterne's great work, *Tristram Shandy*, does not produce the effects of other excellent eighteenth-century novels. It gives few descriptions, and those are of scenes entirely imagined by the narrator, with no claim to realistic verisimilitude, and so it does not allow for the "transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized"[273] mutual verification of the world that Hannah Arendt gives as the reason for reading and sharing stories of private life as it is lived. The reader is never allowed to experience the illusion that what is happening to the protagonist is happening to herself, because it isn't even apparently happening to the protagonist, who only imagines most of the book, possibly with some unmentioned assistance from family lore, and imagines it very strangely. *Tristram Shandy* does not flatter the dominant aesthetics of eighteenth-century fiction, and does not obey the typical causal logic of a mid-eighteenth-century plot. The characters are represented through such an extraordinary amount of absurd dialogue and narratorial evaluation that they cannot be typical; Walter and Toby are far too strange to stand in for average bickering country gentlemen, and Yorick is

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[272] Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England," *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Lynn Hunt, 253-282.

[273] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958), 50.

certainly no typical parson. Tristram himself explains early in the book that it was apparent from the time he was a baby playing with his top, his father "said his heart all along foreboded, and he saw it verified in this, and from a thousand other observations he had made upon me, That I should neither think nor act like any other man's child[.]"[274] Humorously, Tristram announces just a few paragraphs later that he expects his book will "be no less read than the *Pilgrim's Progress* itself,"[275] making a comparison to John Bunyan's 1678 allegorical narrative to which the reader is urged to place himself and his neighbors in the roles of various types of people represented in the text. In his own book, he tells us again and again, any such attempt to identify with Tristram or his family will be frustrated; they "neither think nor act" like people of common sense.

Sterne's reported response to Cleland, that because *Tristram Shandy* does not raise erotic sensations in the reader, he is morally vindicated as an author from charges of inappropriate sexual content, reflects a very different conception of what constitutes obscenity in fiction. For Sterne, the potential for fiction to construct vicarious experiences for the reader is of great ethical and aesthetic concern, and the possibility of creating the illusion of vicarious experience of trauma—especially sexual trauma—is what Sterne seems to avoid, almost obsessively. Although many of the critical events in Tristram's life and in his uncle Toby's life seem to have been events of either literal or symbolic sexual trauma, these scenes are never narrated

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[274] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, I.3.

[275] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, I.4.

directly in Tristram's voice about his own traumatic experience, or even in the voice Tristram imagines for Toby about Toby's experience. Their inability to describe or narrate their pain is turned into a series of elaborate abstractions, as in Toby's response to Mrs. Wadman's question about where exactly he received the wound in his groin—"You shall lay your finger upon the place"[276]—which sends Mrs. Wadman into anxious anticipation that Toby is about to drop his breeches, before he places her trembling digit on a map of the fortifications at Namur.[277] Like Mrs. Wadman, the reader also wants to know something more of Toby's wound, and whether and how it relates to his shyness in sexual matters, but she is forbidden (perhaps by "the goddess of Decency"[278]) from knowing.

In this chapter, I argue that Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is a novel that describes the absolute necessity of *imagining* other people's stories for repressing trauma experienced by the subjective self. It is only through the ability to imagine the experiences of others that Tristram is able to develop a conception, however fragmented and incoherent it may seem to the reader, of who he is. Likewise, *Tristram Shandy* forces the reader to imagine a great deal of the details of the novel herself, piecing together fragmented and disordered bits of causal logic, filling in

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[276] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX.20.

[277] "My uncle Toby measured off thirty toises, with Mrs. Wadman's scissars, from the returning angle before the gate of St. Nicholas, and with such a virgin modesty laid her finger upon the place, that the goddess of Decency, if then in being—if not, 'twas her shade—shook her head, and with a finger wavering across her eyes—forbid her to explain the mistake." Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX.26.

[278] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX.26.

small and large textual gaps, imagining what is happening while what Tristram is writing is happening, and even describing characters where Tristram refuses to do so. Like the word "C———" written (exactly so) on a wall, it gives no "sensations," and can therefore do no harm, unless the passerby fills in the blanks and imagines why it might have been written there.

Unlike David Hume,[279] and much more like Samuel Johnson,[280] Laurence Sterne finds the difference between vicarious and subjective experiences to be crucial. His narrator Tristram especially takes seriously the difference between words and actions, despite the apparent fact that most people consider speaking or writing words about an action—especially sex—to be experientially the same as doing. He writes:

> My uncle Toby never understood what my father meant, nor will I presume to extract more from it, than a condemnation of an error which the bulk of the world lie under——but the French, every one of 'em to a man, who believe in it, almost as much as the REAL PRESENCE, '*That talking of love is making it.*'
>
> ———I would as soon set about making a black-pudding by the same receipt.[281]

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[279] Hume's philosophical preference of realistic narrative to "actual" individual experience as evidence is discussed at length in chapter 1.

[280] Also in chapter 1.

[281] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX."The Eighteenth Chapter" (after XXV).

Tristram is writing of uncle Toby's terse and self-evident declaration of love to Mrs. Wadman, which needs no flattery, or complex causal reasoning. He does not even say to her what he intends to do about his love, such as asking her to marry him. He does not describe his pains, or beg her to relieve them. Toby is unaware of why one might be tempted to talk of love, and Tristram is sure that it is a common understanding that is plainly absurd. Description is not the same as perception. Narration is not the same as action. By refusing to provide the illusion of vicarious experience, Sterne seems to hope the reader is less likely to confuse the two, and makes several meta-novelistic jokes throughout *Tristram Shandy* that depend on this very confusion.

As several Sterne scholars have argued,[282] *Tristram Shandy* is as much a contribution to post-Lockean epistemological discourse as the works of George Berkeley or David Hume. Like Berkeley and Hume, Sterne uses John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) as the epistemological foundation on which he constructs a theory of experience that attempts to solve the problem of the inaccessibility of the subjective self. While Locke discovers the ability to develop complex and abstract ideas out of associations from personal experience of the world, Sterne troubles this causal relationship between experience and judgment through the intervention of language. Christina Lupton argues that, for Sterne,

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[282] See John Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophic Rhetoric* (Berkeley, U of California P, 1954); Helen Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne* (Gainesville, UP of Florida, 1975), and James Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: An Essay in Phenomenological Criticism* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1977).

"epistemological uncertainty is less a problem than the basis of the productive relationship *Tristram Shandy* develops between, on one hand, literature as an object of knowledge and, on the other, the acknowledgement that words, particularly literary words, depend on subjective responses."[283] Time and again throughout *Tristram Shandy*, the events that occur do not result in common sense reactions from the characters, in that Sterne does not depict anyone's behavior or thought process according to what any man might think or do. Rather, Sterne's characters consistently find themselves driven to judgment or action by idiosyncratic associations of language. Much of the pleasure of the book emerges as the reader begins to learn the private sense of each character, recognizing the words that will inevitably send Toby or Walter off on their hobby-horses; rather than finding that events fall out the way they commonly do in novels, the reader finds instead that it is possible to imagine a compassionate sense of how each individual character is likely to feel.

Action and events, in the sense of a narrative plot, are rarely represented in mimetic prose in *Tristram Shandy*; what we refer to as crucial events in the novel—Tristram's conception, his birth and baptism, the falling window, Toby's wooing of Mrs. Wadman—are all merely suggested by a few details and the lengthy discussion and interpretation of them in conversations Tristram imagines among his family members. In each case, the subjective associations each character has for words

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[283] Christina Lupton, "*Tristram Shandy,* David Hume, and Epistemological Fiction," *Philosophy and Literature* 27.1 (April 2003): 99.

alters the course of events, such that the reader of *Tristram Shandy* soon learns that the traditional expectations of common sense causality will be consistently frustrated. Unlike Hume, who seemed to draw an epistemological equivalence between fictional representations of experience and experience itself as long as these fictions accorded with a "natural and easy" probabilistic causal judgment,[284] Sterne's characters never seem to exhibit anything like normative common sense.

For Sterne, the inaccessibility of one's own subjective self is a sort of wound in the groin that can only be healed through one's ability to imagine the subjective experiences of others compassionately, in spite of the fact that others' subjective motivations are not available to themselves, either. In *Tristram Shandy*, the substance of the novel is not, as it is in, for example, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, a matter of what happens, but of how Tristram is able to imagine how people talk about what happens. Experience recedes behind a veil of complex theoretical and satirical discourse in *Tristram Shandy*, but Sterne does not depict the unverifiable, non-commonsensical nature of represented events as a tragic loss, or the start of a paranoid self-interrogation about what the world is, or a painfully modern alienation from the literalism of the Augustan imagination. Rather, the veil of language in *Tristram Shandy* is used to acknowledge and indicate, but beneficently draw attention away from, sites of unspeakable physical and emotional trauma. As Tristram attempts to narrate his life, which, though devoid of any objectively tragic

[284] "Belief, being a lively conception, can never be entire, where it is not founded on something natural and easy." David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.1.

circumstances as far as we know, he has experienced as a chain of supremely unfortunate and unhappy events, he seems to relieve his subjective experience of suffering, and especially of his illness and impending death, through representing his own life through speculative theories about the unreality of subjective perception, and through the imagined perspectives of others.

I argue that *Tristram Shandy* is a kind of extreme Anti-Pamelist novel, in that it avoids the direct, immediate style of representation of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740),[285] in which the reader is encouraged to experience Pamela's conflict between fear and desire through the author's representation of literal events. Pamela cannot know any more of Mr. B's thoughts or feelings than what he has expressed in words or deeds to her, nor what his own experiences have been when out of her presence. Her imagination ends with her experience and the conclusions she may draw directly from that experience, much like the man of common sense—the "gardener" —in George Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*.[286] *Tristram Shandy* challenges Richardson's typically post-Lockean representational style by positing that the subjective self has no means of describing or knowing itself, nor even one's own empirical experiences, without the faculty for speculative imagination about the lives and thoughts of others. And while representations of sexual desire and physical violence make up the central events of the plots of most mid-eighteenth-century fiction, Sterne posits that sex, pain, birth,

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[285] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (London: Penguin, 1980).

[286] See discussion of the "gardener" in chapter 1. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 117.

and death are matters too potentially harmful to inflict on readers. Sterne depicts the absence of these events, and the impossibility of understanding and describing their pain, rather than offering readers a vicarious experience of pain itself.

In his reported response to Cleland's criticism of his representational style—"You have furnished me a vindication. It can do no harm"[287]—Sterne establishes an ethical hierarchy for fiction, that, devoid of content that might stimulate the sensual imagination of the reader, it may, at least, avoid "harm." Having liberated himself from the aesthetic mandates of fashionable literalism, Sterne ironically seems to advocate, or at least defend the necessity of, the repression of trauma through the externalization of the sentimental imagination. In Tristram's attempts to repress experiences of trauma through imagining the emotional experiences of others, he finds that everyone around him is also caught in a cycle of narration and externalization in order to repress their own trauma.

In "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface of the Gothic Novel," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes Sigmund Freud's image of the self as it relates to experiences of trauma and repression.

> In this map of the self, a vesicle of life substance, is separated from the surrounding reality by a thin membrane that, while formed from the life substance, has for protective reasons differentiated itself in several respects. To guard its contents against dissolution as a result

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[287] James Boswell, "John Cleland on Sterne (1779)," 228.

> of inner drives, it has developed mechanisms of defense, signally repression, by which the inner drives, signally sexuality, are denied expression and returned to the interior "unconscious." Trauma, or the rupture from without of the protective membrane, threatens dissolution through an uncontrolled influx of excitation; and its content is too often notoriously sexual.[288]

Sedgwick's description of trauma, as drawn from Freud, produces a physicalized image of trauma as that which threatens to pierce the membrane, or veil, of subjectivity, and she goes on to locate this image as the externalized metaphor of sexual trauma in the veils so often found in the Gothic fiction of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The conventional Gothic veil at once obscures and indicates the presence of sexual trauma, and in so doing, takes on the affective intensity of the trauma itself, which cannot be directly addressed or described.

Although it is by no means a Gothic novel, and is merely contemporaneous with the earliest examples of that genre, *Tristram Shandy* is concerned with the same set of problems of subjectivity, trauma, and repression that would come to define the Gothic. Like the heroines of Gothic fiction, Tristram seeks to discover the mystery of himself, and finds life so consistently filled with threats of violence and sexual harm that he cannot approach a description of his own memories or fears. Instead he wraps these experiences in a veil of language, devoid of literal

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[288] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface of the Gothic Novel," *PMLA* 96.2 (March 1981): 255.

description, that both obscures its object and indicates the tremendous anxiety it produces.

In this sense, although *Tristram Shandy* never provides the reader with a vicarious experience of harm, it is nevertheless a novel almost entirely about harm. Tristram laments the state of his life not because of its particular tragedies, but because the world itself is a place of terrible trauma. Early in the novel, Tristram reflects on his entrance into "this scurvy and disasterous world of ours":

> I wish I had been born in the Moon, or in any of the planets, (except Jupiter or Saturn, because I never could bear cold weather) for it could not well have fared worse with me in any of them (tho' I will not answer for Venus) than it has in this vile, dirty planet of ours,--which o' my conscience, with reverence be it spoke, I take to be made up of the shreds and clippings of the rest;[289]

If it weren't for the humorous self-interruptions, in which Tristram begins to take his own hyperbole seriously and imagines what life might literally be like on various planets, this chapter, and several others, would possibly strike the reader as *saeva indignatio*, the savage indignation more commonly found in Jonathan Swift's viciously outraged satires. But *Tristram Shandy* is no Juvenalian satire; his self-puncturing style mocks, with Horatian laughter, the attempt to inspire pain and sorrow in the reader on his own behalf.

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[289] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, I.5.

Sterne's novel is funny and familiar, despite being, as Samuel Johnson described it, "odd,"[290] not because the characters are familiar, nor because events occur in the probabilistically normal way predicted by the common sense of the reader of novels, but because it acknowledges the un-literal, subjective, imaginative, and extremely *un*common means by which individual people repress their own experiences, even—or especially—from themselves. In this chapter, I first analyze the context of "paranoid" epistolary and gothic fiction, in which the inability of the protagonist to corroborate the narratives and judgments of other characters results in the protagonist's realization her own subjectivity cannot be accurately assessed or taken for granted as coherent. While the criticism of "common sense" is similar in paranoid fiction to that in *Tristram Shandy*, the protagonist of paranoid fiction feels the inability to verify her subjective experience through the narrated experiences of others as a tragic, isolating, terrifying loss of self; in *Tristram Shandy*, because Tristram actively imagines the narratives of others, and encourages the reader to contribute his own imagination to these stories, they become the means by which the protagonist is able to make the details of his own inaccessible trauma irrelevant. I then describe Sterne's use of creatively, compassionately imagined experiences in *Tristram Shandy* in order to indicate the novel's criticism of the dominant common sense rhetoric of philosophy and literature. As common sense of the Enlightenment fails to acknowledge the necessity of a conception of the subjective self, *Tristram Shandy* responds by positing a literary representation, not of a vicarious experience

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[290] "Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last." As reported by James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 696.

of the world, as in most realistic novels of the mid-eighteenth century, but of the need of the subjective self to develop a vicarious experience of other minds in order to repress the memory of sexual and violent trauma.

Subjectivity and Narrative Digression in Paranoid Fiction

In *Tarrying with the Negative*,[291] Slavoj Žižek describes the inaccessibility of the subject to itself as the motivation behind much of modern philosophical discourse from the work of Immanuel Kant to the present. "In short," he writes of Kant's analysis of subjectivity in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781):

> [W]e can provide no possible answer to the question "How is the Thing which thinks structured?" […] We can see, now, how, more than two hundred years ago, Kant's philosophy outlined an answer to this enigma: the very notion of self-consciousness implies the subject's self-decenterment, which is far more radical than the opposition between subject and object.[292]

The problem of not being able to describe the functions of one's own subjectivity, Žižek argues, is not merely the fundamental question of Kant and the philosophers

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[291] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993).

[292] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 15.

who followed in his footsteps; it is also the foundational question of psychoanalysis, and of a great deal of literary narrative, as well. The inaccessibility of subjectivity as the "Thing which thinks" has become a source of conflict even in popular films and television. Žižek writes, "Today, even the mass media is aware of the extent to which our perception of reality, including the reality of our innermost self-experience, depends upon symbolic fictions."[293]These narratives, he argues, are concerned not merely with what the world is, but how the subjective mind creates symbolic fictions about the experiences of others in order to understand its own perception of reality and capacity for reason and judgment.

These anxious, paranoid fictions, in which protagonists desperately seek the truth of their own reality and stability in stories about others, have tended, over the past two hundred years, to appear in the gothic, noir, dystopian, occult, and horror genres. Unlike the interpolated narratives that punctuate the novels of Henry Fielding, in which the protagonist listens and responds to stories told by others, these fictions feature protagonists who come to fear that their experiences and understanding are somehow flawed when they fail to be corroborated by the interpolated narratives of others' experiences. The protagonist must then attempt to discover whether and how these narratives are dishonest or flawed, or else conclude that he or she is somehow unable to perceive and judge experience correctly. Žižek uses the example of the film *Blade Runner* (1982) as a paranoid fantasy in which a man, Deckard, collects the stories of others and compares them

[293] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 11.

with a normative understanding of narrative causality in order to decide whether they are non-human "replicants" who must be destroyed; in doing so, Deckard becomes aware that he has no way of knowing if he himself is a replicant who must be destroyed.

In a more traditional eighteenth-century narrative like Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, (1749), the protagonist may listen to various narratives told by other characters, and then respond confidently that the speaker has or has not drawn the proper conclusion from his own experience. If the causal reasoning of the events and their conclusion fits the protagonist's idea of common sense, he will praise the narrator of the story for his good tale. When the narrator fails to derive what the protagonist believes are the appropriate conclusions from these events, he can confidently state this. When Tom has finished listening to the lengthy story told by the Man of the Hill, who has claimed that these events led him to become a misanthrope, Tom responds: "I believe, as well as hope, that the Abhorrence which you express for Mankind, in the Conclusion, is much too general. Indeed you here fall into an Error."[294] He goes on to describe the proper process of deriving causal judgments about human nature from narratives.

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[294] Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan UP, 1975), VIII.15. This confident response is similar to that of Christian to various would-be pilgrims with whom he meets along the road in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As I argued in the previous chapter, Bunyan's representation of the pilgrims sharing their stories with one another in order to discover who is on the correct path and who is not constructs a common sense of the world through the ability to corroborate one another's judgment about their experiences. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Ed. W.R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

Unlike Tom, the protagonist of the paranoid narrative cannot so easily dismiss the causal judgment of the narratives told by others, no matter how they fail to corroborate his or her own experience. Examples of these paranoid fictions long predate *Blade Runner*; the late-eighteenth-century American novelist Charles Brockden Brown's four major works[295] feature protagonists who, in attempting to collect and collate the conflicting narratives of others to create a coherent idea of the world, find themselves desperately searching for physical evidence to prove to themselves that their own senses are not disordered.[296] These protagonists ask questions only to hear answers that are so bizarre and unexpected that they begin, or at least the reader begins, to question their sanity.

Although aspects of this paranoid structure are certainly to be found in texts such as Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), perhaps the earliest *novel* in which the plot significantly depends on the protagonist's self-examination in response to the conflicting narratives and

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[295] *Wieland; or, the Transformation* (1798), *Ormond; or, the Secret Witness* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799-1800), and *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799).

[296] Janie Hinds describes the protagonist of *Edgar Huntly* as "the somnabulist unknown even to himself, whose interventions in the affairs of others lead unfailingly to disaster." Jamie Hinds, "Deb's Dogs: Animals, Indians, and Postcolonial Desire in Charles Brocken Brown's *Edgar Huntly*," *Early American Literature* 39.2 (2004): 333. Likewise, Leslie Fiedler described *Edgar Huntly* as "an initiation story, the account of a young man who begins by looking for guilt in others and ends finding it in himself; who starts out in search of answers but is finally satisfied with having defined a deeper riddle than those he attempted to solve. […] Any many may wake to find himself at the bottom of a pit. *We are all sleepwalkers!*" Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Stein and Day, 1960; reprint Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive, 2003), 157-158.

judgments of others is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-1748).[297] Throughout the novel, Clarissa Harlowe is the object of plots to manipulate her judgment, her actions, and even her perception of what is happening to her, culminating—but not ending—in her being drugged and raped by Robert Lovelace. Even after the rape, her relatives continue to reinterpret the experience for her as an excusable excess of love and attempting to convince Clarissa to marry Lovelace after all. In this sense, *Clarissa* is ultimately a novel of triumph, not over the rape itself—Clarissa dies soon after—but over self-doubt. Clarissa learns over the course of the novel that her suspicions have always been correct, that Lovelace and her family have always been manipulating and lying to her, that the danger she feared from them was real, and that her own judgment is trustworthy.

The reader of *Clarissa*, however, is in a privileged position with respect to the protagonist because, as an epistolary novel with many letter-writers, the reader knows long before Clarissa does that she is not insane, imperceptive, or even morally wrong; her judgment is corroborated for the reader through the letters in which those conspiring against her explain their plans. As a protagonist, Clarissa is privileged to have at least one true friend, Anna Howe, who disagrees with her judgment at times, but does not attempt to convince her that she is insane. Through these letters, the reader also discovers that the villain is not an insatiable and omnipotent mastermind, but a fallible man who is misleading others, but is also

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[297] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady* (London: Penguin, 1985).

being misled. Thus, unlike later paranoid fictions, the produced effect of *Clarissa* is not that the reader begins to interrogate her own sanity or the reality of her experience. The contagion of self-doubt is fully contained by the multi-vocal structure of the text.

By the end of the novel, Clarissa's enemies have ceased to torment her, and instead they begin to corroborate her understanding and judgment of the preceding events. Belford turns against Lovelace and toward Clarissa, Lovelace comes to some understanding of what he has done from Clarissa's perspective, and some members of Clarissa's family write letters explaining to her that they know she was in the right. While her sister Arabella remains haughty, perceiving herself morally superior,[298] her uncle John Harlowe writes to beg her forgiveness: "Forgive my part in it, my dearest Clary. I am your *second papa*, you know. And you *used* to love me."[299] In the final few hundred pages before Clarissa's death, and even more significantly after her death, the bulk of the characters attempt to reconcile with Clarissa, no longer by demanding her corroboration of their understanding of the world, but by reluctantly admitting that she was right all along. While some, like her sister Arabella, continue to fail to see the events of the novel through Clarissa's eyes, a common sense of what has occurred, corroborated by many voices, recuperates the certainty the reader has in the protagonist's reliability.

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[298] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, Letter 484.

[299] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, Letter 485.

Truly paranoid gothic novels followed and, in many ways, imitated *Clarissa*, but they heightened the effect by which other people's stories disorient the protagonist and force her to doubt her sanity; by extension, these novels also disorient the reader. The limitation of perspective to the protagonist, as in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, a novel entirely about the disturbing effects of multiple voices and unverifiable stories, the epistolary form is limited to a single letter with a brief addendum by the same writer. The epistolary structure calls the reader's attention to the site of writing—Clara Wieland describes the difficulty of composing the text as she writes[300]—while narrowing the narrative perspective to an extremely limited first person. As she reminds us throughout her story, "Solitude imposes least restraint upon the fancy."[301] Alone, Clara's imagination seems to be in perpetual darkness, unable to distinguish reality from imagination. In the company of others, who once provided her with a stable sense of her own identity and of their mutual experiences, she finds their judgment no longer accords with her own. To the reader, Clara seems unable to perceive, intuit, judge, reason, or estimate any event or character with accuracy, and the stories told by others about their own experiences do not corroborate her experience except in a few details, and do not concur with her judgment of them at all. The world of Charles Brockden Brown's

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[300] Clara pauses before narrating the suicide of Wieland, writing, "A few words more and I lay aside the pen for ever. Yet why should I not relinquish it now? All that I have said is preparatory to this scene, and my fingers, tremulous and cold as my heart, refuse any further exertion. This must not be." Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*, ed. Bryan Waterman (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 164.

[301] Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*, 68.

novels is disturbingly illegible, to the point that his protagonists interrogate their own sanity, and are placed under extremely skeptical scrutiny by the reader, who, in turn, must interrogate her judgment of the text, and possibly even her own experience.

Paranoid fictions of this type, from the gothic stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James to films such as *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) and *Waking Life* (2001)[302] encourage the reader or viewer to feel disorientation, or even terror, at the possibility that one's senses are disordered, one's judgment disabled, and one's experience of life no more meaningful than the narratives one hears from others about their own lives. *Tristram Shandy* should resemble these texts, in that Tristram seems desperately to want to develop a coherent sense of his own fragile, inaccessible subjectivity in response to the incoherent, bizarre narratives he has been told about and by his family. Instead of responding to his existence as a horrific phastasmagoria of gruesomely illegible trauma behind the hideously stained veil of language, however, Tristram seems to give up on the task of knowing his own life, in favor of imagining the events of other people's lives. Rather than conclude that the unknowability of the self and the inability to corroborate one's own experience with the narratives told by others create a state of unending fear, Tristram seems to

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[302] The prevalence, persistence, and popularity of paranoid fictions, and their insistence on creating the paranoid effect suggests a history of aesthetic judgment that, as Eve Sedgwick has argued, "privilege[s] of the concept of paranoia." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 125.

conclude that, properly repressed behind the veil of language, one can, at least, make light of one's true fears, and focus instead on experiencing compassion for others.

Representation of the Self through Imagined Narratives

Whatever Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is, it is certainly not, like *Tom Jones*, the narration of the experiences of several clearly fictional characters from a purportedly objective authorial viewpoint. Nor is it, like *Clarissa*, a fictional collection of the subjective perspectives of several characters, addressed to one another. And unlike other pseudo-autobiographical novels, rich with sensory detail, like John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, the narrator seems not to be able to describe anything that literally *happened* to himself, from his own perspective, except a few scenes of his travels, and these are highly stylized by the generic conventions of jokes, pastoral scenes, and travel narratives. Very few of the childhood scenes he has narrated are ones in which he is a participant, and even when he is present, as in the "circumcision" scene[303] and when Toby catches a fly at dinner,[304] the focus of the action is on the adults as much as it is during the scenes in which Tristram is not present. Frustrating all possible readerly desires for vicarious experience of events

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[303] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, beginning V.17.

[304] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.12.

and the sentiments that arise from them, Sterne instead offers a novel in which the best his narrator—beset by misfortunes, confusion, physiological and mental deficiencies, and terminal illness—can offer is a deeply compassionate imagination. In lieu of the inaccessible subjective self, Sterne demonstrates, one may seek solace, as Tristram does, in telling other people's stories for them. In doing so, he urges the reader to participate in imagining his story—the life of Tristram Shandy—for him.

Tristram interrupts the narrative of his birth to describe this interaction between an author's narrative and the reader's understanding of that narrative:

> The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.
>
> For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own.[305]

While Tristram presents partial imaginative control as a generous offering from the knowing narrator to the curious reader (who is designated as "him," not "you," another writer), he simultaneously makes it obvious, in case the reader was not already terribly aware, that the entire story of his birth is a product of his own imagination, to some degree suggested by tales told to him by his family. In this

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[305] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.11.

poignantly ironic moment, Sterne makes the reader suddenly aware of the limitations of individual consciousness, which keep one from knowing much at all on the basis of empirical experience. Thus, just as the reader must fill in various gaps in interpretation and detail, Tristram himself is filling in the gaps in stories he has heard about the night of his birth from his family. Sterne makes clear to the reader that this novel contains many gaps that the reader's imagination must fill with stories of her own, encouraging her to begin a transformation from passive reader to actively imaginative co-author, just as he has acted as the author of the experiences of his uncle and father.

If one were to pare down *Tristram Shandy* to include only the scenes that contain conversations and actions that Tristram could have empirically experienced, there would be little left beyond what he sees and does in France, and even these scenes are suspiciously full of joking set-ups, parodies of generic conventions, and unrealistic content in the personification of Death. The limitations of the individual human consciousness are, in this novel, not merely ignored, as in the case of an omniscient narrator, but openly exploded through Tristram's aggressive re-imagination of scenes from his family's history. On a few occasions, Sterne's narrator leaves nothing to the reader's imagination, providing such an overwhelming lot of sensory detail that it stops the temporal flow of the narrative (such as it is). Tristram's minute attention to detail when describing the physical postures of Trim reading[306] and of Walter attempting to wipe his head with his

[306] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.17.

handkerchief[307] cannot be empirically mimetic from the perspective of the narrator, who is, during these moments, upstairs being born, but is instead an imaginative exercise in creating postures that *might* have been assumed by these characters at these particular moments. With an index marker, Tristram goes so far as to recommend his description of Trim's posture to painters—who, presumably, could paint while viewing a model, while Tristram describes an event it would have been impossible for him to view. This recommendation seems yet another of Sterne's indications that the stories one tells must not intend to be representations of actual reality, but also not completely fantastical; they should be the products of the plausible imagination that come from thinking carefully and compassionately in someone else's perspective.

The only sense we get that Tristram is recording "true" family lore is, ironically, the narrator's description of the sentimental affect created (or resurrected) by the process of writing. The intensity of Tristram's affective responses seems inversely correlated with the necessity of the events to the primary narrative causality of his own sufferings. At one point, Tristram interrupts an account of Walter mocking Toby's interest in fortifications with a memory of watching his uncle Toby catch a fly that had been bothering him at dinner. Though this scene is presented as a digression during the longer narrative of Tristram's birth, it is a momentary prolepsis ten years into the future, to a moment that he has empirically observed that infuses the birth scene with a similar sentiment of

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[307] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III.2-3.

gratitude and love for his uncle. Upon catching the fly, Toby does not kill it, but releases it out the window, saying, "I'll not hurt thee, [...] I'll not hurt a hair of thy head:---Go [...] go poor Devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? - - - - This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me."[308] Set up against what the reader has been told of Toby's military character and obsession with battles and fortifications, this tiny gesture of mercy might easily be represented as ridiculous, yet Tristram's response is both comically extreme and apparently sincere in its sentiment.

> I was but ten years old when this happened;—–but whether it was, that the action itself was more in unison to my nerves at that age of pity, which instantly set my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation;—–or how far the manner and expression of it might go towards it;—or in what degree, or by what secret magick,—a tone of voice and harmony of movement, attuned by mercy, might find a passage to my heart, I know not;—this I know, that the lesson of universal good-will then taught and imprinted by my uncle *Toby*, has never since been worn out of my mind.[309]

The scene that Tristram has described, though sweetly sentimental, seems not to merit the lengthy, interpretive, moral judgment he provides. Certainly there are other places in Tristram's narrative where this encomium would have something

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[308] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.12.

[309] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.12.

more obvious to do with the described action. The wary reader is likely to be doubtful of Tristram's sincerity, afraid of becoming what David Richter has referred to as an "ironic victim"[310]—a reader who fails to reject the explicit signification of the passage and misses the second, intended sense. But this scene is placed as an example of Toby's "peaceful, placid nature," so "patient of injuries" that even when his brother loudly mocks his obsession with fortifications in the framing natal scene, Toby merely stands, smiles, and thanks Walter for bringing Shandy children into the world. Thus, the scene that is described with such imagined empirical clarity—the men talking while Tristram is being born—is a product of the narrator's empirical imagination, while the scene that Tristram claims to have witnessed first-hand—Toby releasing the fly—is primarily represented in the narrator's affective interpretive imagination.

Later, during the long digression on noses that occurs during his handling by Dr. Slop, Tristram recounts how his father "oft-times" hypocritically teased Toby about the limited range of books represented in his library, as they are all on military fortifications.[311] Again, this is presented as a context not of Tristram's life, but of the brothers' relationship as Walter bemoans the loss of his child's nose and Toby patiently sits by his bed, waiting for the right moment to cheer him. Although the teasing itself considerably predates the narrator's existence, he is able to

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[310] David H. Richter, "The Reader as Ironic Victim," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 14.2 (Winter, 1981): 135-151.

[311] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III.34.

describe with intricate detail the mindset that his father had when attacking Toby's narrow scope of learning. Like the scene described above, the narrator has no experience of this event to empirically justify the intricacy of his description, and therefore must be forming his knowledge of his father's mindset through a mixture of vicarious knowledge and imagination.

In describing his father's opinions on having opinions, Tristram empathically wonders, "What a shuttlecock of a fellow would the greatest philosopher that ever existed, be whisk'd into at once, did he read such books, and observe such facts, and think such thoughts, as would eternally be making him change sides!"[312] His father, of course, immediately and forever takes sides in an argument, and, as this chapter makes clear, had always and would always mock Toby's hobby-horse. Tristram suddenly breaks from this description of his father's wont to tease into a loving apostrophe to his uncle.

> Here, ——but why here,——rather than in any other part of my story,——I am not able to tell;——but here it is,——my heart stops me to pay to thee, my dear uncle *Toby*, once and for all, the tribute I owe thy goodness. —– Here let me thrust my chair aside, and kneel down upon the ground, whilst I am pouring forth the warmest sentiments of love for thee, and veneration for the excellency of thy

[312] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III.34.

> character, that ever virtue and nature kindled in a nephew's bosom.——Peace and comfort rest for evermore upon thy head!—[313]

One may ask, "Yes, why here?" as Toby and his own thoughts and troubles are barely mentioned in this whole digression on noses. The unexpectedness of this apostrophe makes it seem, at first, absurd, and possibly a mockery of sentimentality. But as the passage moves on, it becomes clear that Tristram is suddenly genuinely struck by his admiration for Toby's qualities. "Thou envied'st no man's comforts,——insulted'st no man's opinions.——Thou blackened'st no man's character,———devoured'st no man's bread."[314] The sentiment here, though seemingly emerging from Tristram's sentimental imagination and unconnected to any particular event, serves to remind the reader, while on this digression (which lasts through the end of the third volume, and well into the fourth, beyond "Slawkenbergius's Tale"), that compassionate, loving Toby is sitting by Walter's bedside, waiting to comfort him. Again, after a scene in which Walter's thoughts and actions are depicted in detail by a narrator that could not have observed them, Tristram's own observations of Toby's character are represented through statements about moral sentiment, rather than through the creation of vicarious sentiment in the reader through a detailed, mimetic description.

In the scene usually described as Tristram's "circumcision," it is curious that the narrator provides almost every perspective of the occurrence and its aftermath

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[313] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III.34.

[314] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III.34.

except his own. This episode begins with Tristram's evaluation and justification of what occurred. "——'Twas nothing,—I did not lose two drops of blood by it——[...] thousands suffer by choice, what I did by accident [...]——O 'twould provoke a stone, to see how things are carried on in this world!"[315] This dismissive response gives no clear representation of what actually occurred, and Tristram seems unwilling or unable to narrate this moment of trauma for the reader. Thus, when Susannah shouts, "Nothing is left, [...] nothing is left—for me, but to run my country,——" we have every reason to believe that the boy's penis has actually been cut off, and Tristram's dismissive "'Twas nothing" takes on a gruesome retrospective meaning. But, as Robert Darby has noted, "except for the startled and perhaps exaggerating maid, however, no one says anything was cut off, and the nature of the accident would not automatically imply such a surgical result."[316] There are, of course, several suggestions that Tristram's penis has been cut off, as discussed above, but they are quickly dismissed as fragments of sentences or humorous double-entendres. Of all of the possible physiological effects of a window sash falling on a boy's penis, a surgical circumcision is unlikely, and yet that is immediately the conclusion drawn by the men in the household. The reaction of Walter, Toby, Trim, and Yorick becomes funny, Darby argues, because, it demonstrates how little capable any of them are of examining the trauma to the boy's body, any more than Tristram, as an adult, is able to describe it.

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315 Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, V.17.

316 Robert Darby, "'An Oblique and Slovenly Initiation': The Circumcision Episode in *Tristram Shandy*." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27.1 (Winter 2003): 72-73.

Guided solely by their fears and theories regarding any kind of wound to the penis, these men whisk Tristram immediately off to his mother and the incompetent Dr. Slop while they discuss what circumcision would mean for the little boy. The text recounts in plodding detail their conversation, which is informed by reading rather than seeing, while the only first-hand information we receive about the wound is the dismissive and vague interpretation at the beginning of V.17 and, in V.26, Tristram's description of his scream at the moment of the accident. "Fifty thousand pannier loads of devils—(not the Archbishop of *Benevento*'s,—I mean of *Rabelais*'s devils) with their tails chopped off by their rumps, could not have made so diabolical a scream of it, as I did—when the incident befell me."[317] Again, Tristram provides only his affective response—screaming—with a hint—"chopped off"—of the kind of pain that might have induced it.

Tristram goes on to remark upon the curious fact that he has said nothing, neither to the reader nor to anyone in the household, of his own empirical experience of the event. "Now, though I was old enough to have told the story myself,—and young enough, I hope, to have done it without malignity; yet *Susannah*, in passing by the kitchen, for fear of accidents, had left it in short-hand with the cook."[318] At this young age, according to Tristram, the would-be narrator is interrupted in his attempts to tell his family about the injury he suffered. Although he has already expressed his affective response to the family, the self-interested

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[317] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, V.26.

[318] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, V.26.

Susannah wrests the descriptive control of Tristram's accident from him, relating the tale in her own written words, which pass through all the servants' hands before Obadiah finally tells Walter, who wants to know what all the screaming is about. It is odd, then, that given the chance to reclaim that descriptive control in writing his memoirs, our narrator leaves his own subjective perspective untold, and instead returns the favor by imaginatively describing Susannah's perspective of the situation.

The narrator goes on to suggest that his father's mild reaction—"I thought as much"[319]—might lead the reader to believe that the *Tristrapædia*, his father's slowly produced volume on child-rearing, might have already contained its "remarkable [...] *chapter upon sash-windows*, with a bitter *Phillipick* at the end of it, upon the forgetfulness of chamber-maids."[320] Rather, the narrator informs us, this chapter had not only not yet been written; it was written by Tristram himself as an adult. Thus, since his father's interpretive reaction to this painful event failed to be appropriate, Tristram claims to have inserted this belated chapter into the *Tristrapædia* in order to wrest interpretive control back from his father, who is incapable of responding in a manner suited to the undefined sufferings his son has endured. Thus, in this scene, we see Tristram forming his consciousness as a man, which, since he is barely a character in the book at all, *is* his consciousness as an imaginative author. Throughout the novel, Tristram exercises this same peculiar

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[319] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, V.26.

[320] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, V.26.

kind of imaginative control over mimetic description and affective interpretation of others' experiences because he cannot seem to describe or narrate events from his own memory of them.

Tristram has formed his narrative style out of his reactions to the family that has so badly misinterpreted every major event in his life. One sees, then, why Tristram shows such extreme gratitude and respect for his uncle Toby, who places no interpretive constraints on the boy. Toby simply provides an example of generosity, innocence, and happiness, even if these virtues are misguided or foolish in their particular aims. In the sudden apostrophe to his uncle discussed above, Tristram's praise of his uncle takes on the metaphor of Toby's literal lot in life. "[G]ently with faithful *Trim* behind thee, didst thou amble round the little circle of thy pleasures, jostling no creature in thy way [...] Whilst there is a rood and a half of land in the *Shandy* family, thy fortifications, my dear uncle *Toby*, shall never be demolish'd."[321] Although the fortifications themselves seem not to be of any value to Tristram (especially since the fortifications' requirements led Trim to take the sash-weights from Tristram's nursery window), they are the one symbol of Toby's innocent pleasures that Tristram claims will remain beyond all other property in the Shandy family.

A clear comparison has been set up throughout the novel between Walter's hobby-horses, which lead to his constant and invasive re-interpretation of Tristram's traumas, and Toby's hobby-horse, which does not intervene in others'

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[321] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, III.34.

interpretation of their own experience. From Tristram's reaction to the window incident and its aftermath, it is clear that Toby's hand in the matter is far less troublesome to him than his father's. As the frontispiece to the first volume reminds us, "Men are tormented with the opinions they have of things, and not by the things themselves" (from Epictetus).[322] Tristram is likewise far less upset by the events that come to pass than by the cruel or thoughtless interpretations that his father forms regarding those events. Thus, although Toby seems incapable of righting any of Walter's interpretive wrongs, his lack of desire to interfere with anyone's life (unless he can justify his actions through military code, as in the case of Le Fever), even through faulty interpretation, endears him greatly to Tristram.

One of the reasons for Toby's generosity regarding interpretation is that his own narrative gift is, like Tristram's, for imaginative representation. Though he is almost incapable of interpreting any statement or event accurately, Toby has a wonderful passion for remembering details, and, more importantly, for the mimetic reproduction of detail. In the first volume, the narrator tells us that while Walter is in London on business, he invites the recently-wounded Toby to stay in the townhouse with him.[323] As Toby is required to be confined to a bed for four years, his brother keeps him company by bringing guests by the house who ask about the battle in which he received his wound. At the beginning of the second volume, Toby begins to realize that it is difficult to describe, in words, precisely what occurred,

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[322] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, I.frontispiece.

[323] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, I.25.

since the fortifications at Namur were terribly complex, despite the fact that the act of description so greatly relieves his pain. "To speak the truth, unless the company my father led up stairs were tolerably clear-headed, or my uncle *Toby* was in one of his best explanatory moods, 'twas a difficult thing, do what he could, to keep the discourse free from obscurity."[324] Of course, in Tristram's own narrations, any obscurity in the discourse is filled in with imaginative detail, but narrative imagination requires an ability to conceive of plausible causation, and "— My uncle *Toby* could not philosophize upon it;—'twas enough he felt it was so."[325] Although he is incapable of plausible judgment, Toby finds his greatest gift is spatial representation. When he is able to provide himself with an accurate map of Namur, and can stick a pin into that map at precisely the place where he was wounded, Toby finds both relief of his pain and a project for the rest of his convalescence: carefully reconstructing scenes of war in accurate mimetic detail.

The only time that Toby successfully counters an interpretation of Walter's is when, after the Treaty of Utrecht, he defends himself from his brother's teasing about the end of the war. Since there are no more sieges to re-enact, Toby has been downhearted without his favorite project. Walter mocks his brother for the apparent bloodlust of his wishes for the war to go on, as it so sharply contrasts Toby's sweet and innocent nature. Toby responds with an "apologetical oration" that Walter finds so pleasing that he copies it down, and Tristram, in turns, copies it

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[324] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.1.

[325] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.1.

into VI.32. In this oration Toby begs his brother to remember what kind of man he is that wishes for war. He asks if his brother has ever known him to act or think cruelly of anyone, living or dead, known or unknown. He asks, if we know a war to be fought on principles of justice, "what is it, but the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the ambitious and the turbulent within bounds?"[326] In this moving speech, Toby makes it plain that his interest in battle does not stem from his bloodlust, or even from the bloodlust of human beings in general. Rather, he suggests, war is noble *especially* because the men who fight are like himself—inherently gentle, "*born to love, to mercy, and to kindness*"[327] in Yorick's words—who must exercise the greatest triumph of will in order to perform acts of violence for the greater good.

Toby's desire for war, after all, is a desire for vicarious battle. Though he seems completely uninterested in fighting human beings again, he is obsessed with engaging in a kind of war that produces no wounds. He and Trim can recreate sieges, battles, and conquests, building up fortifications and blowing them up later, without a single life lost. All the aspects of war are painstakingly imitated on the family bowling green except the very thing that makes a war—violence of one human against another.[328] Thus, Toby and Trim are able vicariously to enjoy the

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[326] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, VI.32.

[327] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, VI.32.

[328] Toby's description of war is deeply anti-Hobbist, in that he rejects Hobbes's description of man in a state of nature as a "war of every man against every man." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), I.13. For Toby, war is an unnatural state that must only be brought about as a response to grave injustice.

great nobility of spirit that participating in a battle requires, without the actual fear or trauma that make it unbearable. Thus Toby is finally able, in VI.32, to wrest interpretive control from Walter of, if not the war itself, then at least his own recreation of it.

Similarly, Tristram Shandy's "memoirs" are mostly a series of vicarious experiences imaginatively created by the narrator himself. In painstakingly reconstructing scenes of argument, passion, sadness, or misfortune that he, like Toby, has only second-hand information about, Tristram has the opportunity, in writing these volumes, both to experience the events himself through imaginative mimetic narration and to control the interpretation of that re-creation in a way that would be denied him if it were merely someone else's lived experience.

When Tristram finally begins an extended narrative of his own experiences, he is already on the run from Death, who chases him across the Channel and into the continental interior. What results is an absurd sentimental-travelogue-*cum*-dirty-jokebook at high speed. Like Death, the reader chases after a man who, despite his protests to the contrary, seems not really *there* to begin with. It is disappointing to find that a narrator so capable of mimetic description of events so distant from himself would only be able to write of his own adult life in ironic imitations of forms such as the travel guide.

> *Calais, Calatium, Calusium, Calesium.*
>
> This town, if we may trust it's archives, the authority of which I see no reason to call in question in this place—was *once* no more than a

> small village belonging to one of the first Counts de Guines; and as it boasts at present of no less than fourteen thousand inhabitants, exclusive of four hundred and twenty distinct families in the *basse ville*, or suburbs——it must have grown up by little and little, I suppose, to it's present size.[329]

There is little in these passages to suggest mimetic narration or description, as the travel narrative seems entirely to imitate pre-existing genres. As in the chapters on his childhood, Tristram seems to have an overdeveloped knack for interpretation of observed phenomena, yet he demonstrates little ability, or willingness, to represent his own subjective experience in narrative.

It is telling, then, that the last and most extensive single narrative in the novel is Toby's. Because Tristram has formed a deep sympathy for his uncle Toby, perhaps due to their shared compulsion to imagine the passionate and painful experiences of others, he chooses to end his memoirs not with his own demise, but with Toby's shock in the affair with the widow Wadman. Tristram nearly begins and ends his book with Toby's two great injuries—the one he receives in his groin at Namur, and the one he receives to his philosophy from Mrs. Wadman's curiosity about his wound. Just as Toby defends the ridiculousness of his battle re-enactments by telling Walter it provides the vicarious noble experience of the soldier overcoming his own gentle nature to attack in the name of justice, Tristram might defend the inherent ridiculousness of the final narrative by urging the reader to gain the noble

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[329] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX.5.

vicarious experience of Toby overcoming his sweet compassionate nature to come, face-to-face, finally, with the carnal nature of humanity. Unable to narrate his own story, Tristram gives us a proxy for his demise—the innocence of his uncle.

The inherent quality of humanity has been bandied about by Walter and Toby throughout the novel. Though Walter seems to place the driving nature of man in his "ass"[330]—his carnal desires—Toby has insisted that man is driven by a desire to love and care for his fellow beings. Therefore, it is iconic, when, near the end of the novel, humanity is caught in all uppercase letters and centered on the page:

"H U M A N I T Y – – – – thus."[331]

In this scene, Trim is taking dictation from Toby for a list of the perfections of the widow Wadman, whom he has recently begun courting. The innocent Toby explains to Trim that she has been deeply concerned with his groin wound in the most sisterly way, constantly asking about its exact nature and how he suffers from it. Trim, however, has knowledge from Bridget that Mrs. Wadman's interest in the wound is less compassionate than carnal, as she is worried about his abilities to perform sexually. Thus, rather than writing down either "COMPASSION" or "LUST" for the list and therefore lying or shocking Toby, Trim chooses the broader "HUMANITY," for the moment, as Mrs. Wadman's most perfect quality. No other entries are made to the list, and indeed, the expansiveness of the first obviates the need for any other.

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[330] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, VIII.31.

[331] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX.31.

Here, for once, humanity is not compartmentalized or dissected by the perspective of a single character, but, if only for a moment, it signifies both the innate generosity of the human spirit and the innate desire for carnal gratification. This momentary hermeneutic negotiation exists only for a moment before Trim undeceives Toby about the source of Mrs. Wadman's apparent compassionate curiosity. The narrator tells us, at this moment, "My uncle Toby gave a long whistle——but in a note which could scarce be heard across the table."[332] We have seen Toby whistle throughout the book to cover over moments when his lofty notions of humanity are challenged by the base motives—the "ass"—of others. At this instant, perhaps the first philosophical whistle of his life, his shock is so great that he cannot produce anything like "Lillabulero." He faces, for once, the dual nature of humanity, and his innocence is lost. This moment of revelation causes Toby to leave off wooing forever. In II.7, during the chronologically much later scene of Tristram's birth, Toby explains that the shock he receives regarding Mrs. Wadman's motive is proof of his complete lack of knowledge of carnal womankind.

The attention to mimetic detail, imaginatively reconstructed by a narrator who was not even going to be born for several years, provides a touching (if ridiculous) replacement for the narrator's own death at the end of the book. Rather than providing a primarily ironic or cliché interpretation of the meaning of death, Tristram instead dramatically retells the death of his uncle Toby's innocence regarding the carnal nature of humanity. The hermeneutic movement across Trim's

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[332] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, IX.31.

page, from compassion to lust, is marked by Toby's quiet, sober exhalation of breath. The reader has realized by this point that all the characters in this final scene have been dead since long before Tristram began writing his memoirs. This is a work populated by ghosts, revived just to have their experiences reconstructed by a man himself on the edge of his grave. This tale forms the final narrative of the novel, which, at the last moment, famously becomes a cock-and-bull story, according to Yorick. Instead of the death of the narrator, we are left in the midst of a perpetual happy party of bawdy but philosophical talkative ghosts. It is no wonder that there is speculation that *Tristram Shandy* could have been longer if its author had lived; the characters themselves only exist because they refuse to stay in the grave. The problem is deciding what exactly it is that we have read.

Tristram is born into the natural condition of an inaccessible subjectivity, in which he has no ability to understand or interpret his own experiences, and the interpretations imposed on him cause him to be repeatedly wounded and mutilated until the reader almost fears that, like Bobby, he will simply disappear from the text altogether. Though the other characters remain vibrant and alive, Tristram jostles merely to share room with them on the page. His attempt to establish a sense of his "life and opinions" causes him to narrate, compulsively and imaginatively, his own attempts to reconcile the dual natures of humanity through his uncle Toby's experiences, while exercising active interpretive control in his self-narration.

As Tristram vacillates between mimetic narration of the lives of his now-dead family and affective interpretation of his own experiences, the reader must fill

in interpretation of the mimetic narration and narrative detail that is lacking in Tristram's interpretations. After all, he warned the reader that he would "halve this matter amicably, and leave [the reader] something to imagine, in his turn."[333] The novel will seemingly come to a dead stop if the reader does not attempt to imaginatively reconstruct some of the events that are, like the "circumcision" incident, constructed of all the details one could ask for, except the fact one wants to know.

The reader must also learn to handle what David Richter terms the "reverberatory irony"[334] of the text. If there is humor to be found in the mock sentimentality of the text, why is the sincerity of it as convincing as the irony? The reader must also decide what to do with Tristram's pedantic scholarship, and with the asterisks and black and marbled and blank pages. Most importantly of all to the reader's growing awareness of himself as a reading consciousness, the reader must learn to see reading even silly stories as noble, when they sincerely convey the vicarious experience of pain we would rather avoid for ourselves. Then, perhaps, like Tristram and Toby, the reader can learn to overlook the inaccessibility of the subjective self and the certainty of death by concentrating on the sufferings of other people, even if they never existed.

Laurence Sterne's novel is not merely a response to the problems raised by the post-Lockean philosophical tradition, nor is it entirely a response to the

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[333] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.11

[334] David H. Richter, "The Reader as Ironic Victim," *Novel* 14 (1981): 138-143.

aesthetic pretenses of the early novel. I argue that it is a response to the rhetoric of common sense that dominates both the philosophical and the aesthetic discourses of the eighteenth century, which are themselves in conversation with one another. According to the rhetoric of common sense, one must judge the strength of an argument by how plausibly one can imagine its judgment arising entirely from experience for "everyone else" or for the "man of common sense."

This normative rhetorical style defines the good as that which seems *likely* to be affirmed by the greatest number of people (usually of some particular social type defined by the text), and yet it fails to confront the problem that everyone's judgment is affected by an idiosyncratic relationship to language, and that there is no pure description of experience without a transformation into rhetorical discourse. The sex and violence of the novel, and the abstract conceptions of the mind in philosophy are equally invented in the language of the person who describes them. *Tristram Shandy* relinquishes the claims of generalized knowledge based on experience of the world and of *a priori* truths through which the world may be properly interpreted. Rather, it declares that to live well, and to think as well as one is able, one must first do no harm.

Sterne seems to imagine his novel entirely outside the generic and aesthetic conventions of the sentimental novels that preceded it, and yet there are hints and gestures throughout the work of the kinds of feelings aroused by novels, even if the conventional events remain incomplete or not represented at all. The characters play-act at war, at love, at sex, and at death. However, their emotional lives are not

defined by events, but by the way they talk about events—describing, theorizing, remembering, imagining, modeling, and feeling. In *Tristram Shandy*, Laurence Sterne insists that this web of representational language through which we think *is* the closest we can come to an understanding of what it means to be a subjective self. Unlike in fictions of the paranoid type, in which the impossibility of verifying the existence of the world through sharing stories of experience results in a terrifying sense that the protagonist and, by extension, the reader are lost in a meaningless universe, *Tristram Shandy* resolves that the impossibility of verifying the world is merely an invitation to fill the gaps between our own experiences and those of others with compassionate, imaginative fictions.

In this sense, Laurence Sterne was to the realistic novel what David Hume was to philosophy. Taking the assumptions of his contemporaries—about readers, experience, imagination, and the hunger for vicarious experience—to their extreme ends while refusing to adopt the *a priori* assumptions of other authors, Sterne seemed to clear the way, in a sense, for the possibilities of Romantic fiction and the invention of a new, modern aesthetic discourse of subjectivity, just as, according to Immanuel Kant, Hume cleared the path for a modern philosophical discourse of metaphysics. "I freely admit," Kant writes, "that the remembrance of *David Hume* was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy."[335] For both Sterne and Hume, the ability to imagine other minds, not

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[335] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Preface, 10.

only on behalf the characters in their own sentimental narratives, but also on behalf of the reader, allowed them to write movingly of thoughts, feelings, and experiences far removed from the experience of the reader. The reader, in turn, is invited to participate in the compassionate imagination of the moral sentiments of people who never existed. In doing so, both authors dramatized the process Kant would later refer to as "common sense."

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