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IMAGINARY WANTS:

DESIRE, VILLAINY, AND CAPITAL IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION

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## Introduction

In March of 1796, a young Samuel Taylor Coleridge published a polemic against the slave trade in his journal *The Watchman*. The essay calls for both abolition of slavery by act of parliament and boycotting of sugar and rum. Its opening salvo, however, is curiously abstract:

Whence arise our Miseries? Whence arise our Vices? From *imaginary* Wants. No man is wicked without temptation, no man is wretched without a cause. But if each among us confined his wishes to the actual necessities and real comforts of Life, we should preclude all the causes of Complaint and all the motives to Iniquity.<sup>1</sup>

Iniquity and suffering do not arise, for Coleridge, from elemental human needs. The desires that produce them must therefore be for something other than necessities: imaginary wants. The wording here is quite deliberate—when Coleridge first delivered the essay as a lecture in Bristol, the third sentence used the phrase “artificial Wants.”<sup>2</sup> The wants Coleridge has in mind must be produced by artifice, but above all they are attributable to the human capacity for imagining what is not immanent in lived experience. Such imaginary wants are the ultimate cause, he goes on to argue, of the slave trade:

the evils arising from the formation of *imaginary* Wants, have in no instance been so dreadfully exemplified, as in this inhuman Traffic. We receive from the West-India Islands Sugars, Rum, Cotton, Logwood, Cocoa, Pimento, Ginger, Indigo, Mahogany, and Conserves. Not one of these articles are necessary [ . . . ] If this Trade had never existed, no one human being would have been less comfortably clothed, housed, or nourished [ . . . ].<sup>3</sup>

The Caribbean plantation system, as pictured here, is an immense enterprise dedicated to producing goods that no one needs but everyone wants. The luxury items that Coleridge lists add relish to life but do nothing to support its basic functions. In the fiery abolitionist rhetoric that

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<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Volume 2, ed. Lewis Patton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 130-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Works*, Volume 1, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, 235.

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Works*, Volume 2, 132-3.

follows, Coleridge insists that his readers recognize the oceans of blood with which sugar, rum, and indigo are purchased. There is a direct link between the cravings of the metropolitan shopper and “tears and blood, [. . .] groanings and the loud peals of the lash!”<sup>4</sup>

Coleridge’s intuition, then, was that a vast network of trans-Atlantic exploitation and capital accumulation was made possible by imaginary wants, or by the production of desire. The essay on the slave trade contains Coleridge’s first extended discussion of the imagination, a concept that would become so crucial to his later writings. Equally fecund, however, is the other half of the couplet: want. This term, in the late eighteenth century, was undergoing a gradual and subtle shift in meaning. In early-modern English, want was lack. The verb indicated the absence of something necessary, and the noun indicated either a particular absent necessity or a general condition of poverty. For us, in contrast, to want is to have a preference or a desire, and the nominal use has become uncommon. One exception to the latter trend is telling: an elementary school social studies exercise teaches children to distinguish between needs and wants, or necessities and desires.

During the eighteenth century, though the older meaning seems to have remained dominant, the shift was underway. Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary*, in outright defiance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century schoolteachers, gives a succinct first definition of the noun “want”: “Need.” Among the definitions for the verb, however, Johnson includes “To wish for; to long for.” In the *OED*, the earliest example for the desire-oriented meaning of “to want” dates from 1621, and this in the relatively restricted sense of wanting to speak to a particular person. Very few of the examples for definitions under the heading “To wish, to desire, and related senses” date from before the beginning of the eighteenth century. For the noun, the *OED*’s first example of a usage clearly

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<sup>4</sup> *Collected Works*, Volume 2, 139. On Coleridge’s transmutation of sugar into blood, see Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 171-206.

implying desire to the exclusion of need dates to 1819. Very broadly, then, the long eighteenth century was a period in which the concept of want was undergoing a slow transition: from need to desire, involuntary lack to elective preference, poverty to luxury. If Coleridge declared wants to be a central question in relation to global capitalism, he thus did so at a moment when the word was beginning to be a historical palimpsest, simultaneously encoding two contradictory meanings. The phrase “imaginary wants” emphasizes the conceptual incoherence attending this transition: an imaginary want is an unnecessary necessity, a superfluity experienced as a lack.

Nearly four decades before Coleridge’s essay and a few years after completing his *Dictionary*, Johnson himself evinced a sensitivity to the subtle bivalence contained in the word. In *Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, the hero becomes weary of his opulent lifestyle in the Happy Valley, experiencing a malaise in which “pleasure has ceased to please.” The novel’s plot commences in earnest when the prince determines to leave the Happy Valley, a determination triggered by a conversation between Rasselas and his tutor, Imlac:

“Look round and tell me which of your wants is without supply: if you want nothing, how are you unhappy?”

“That I want nothing,” said the prince, “or that I know not what I want, is the cause of my complaint; if I had any known want, I should have a certain wish; that wish would excite endeavour, and I should not then repine to see the sun move so slowly towards the western mountain, or lament when the day breaks and sleep will no longer hide me from myself. [. . .] I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire.”<sup>5</sup>

In this fantasia on wants and wanting, the word is delicately balanced between its residual and emergent meanings. Imlac simply points out that Rasselas has no unfulfilled needs, or wants (for) nothing. But the phrase seems to catch Rasselas’ ear with a slightly different emphasis: for him, to want nothing is to experience lack without knowing what is lacking. This mishearing transmutes the merely negative experience of lack into a positive experience of an absence

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<sup>5</sup> *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed. Paul Goring (New York: Penguin, 2007), 12-3.

without determined content. If a “known want” is a “certain wish” (not a certain need), an unknown want is a wish that has not yet found its object. The miscommunication that triggers Rasselas’ plaint thus spans a divide between historically distinct (if overlapping) ways of conceptualizing want.

By wanting nothing, Rasselas inhabits a structure of feeling proper to developed capitalist societies rather than relatively impoverished pre-modern ones. Thus the startlingly modern lilt of his concluding imperative: “give me something to desire.” For the Abyssinian prince as for the modern consumer, it is possible to experience material abundance as malaise. In this condition, desire demands to be provided with new objects. The synthesis of such objects, the making of imaginary wants, is a crucial element in capitalist economies, and the provision of such wants occupies an increasing portion of their productive forces. In what John Kenneth Galbraith called an “affluent society,” the most pressing wants are imaginary: “we have wants at the margin only so far as they are synthesized. We do not manufacture wants for goods we do not produce.”<sup>6</sup> The manufacture of wants in addition to goods, according to both Galbraith and Rasselas, is a central function of modern economies. Such economies undertake not only the provision of commodities but the provision of desire.

This dissertation attempts a literary history of imaginary wants in long eighteenth-century Britain. It tracks the intertwining of desire and economics in the British novel from Defoe to Maturin in order to construct an account of how eighteenth-century literary culture metabolized the new conceptions of human motivation cultivated by economic modernization. Polemic and

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<sup>6</sup> *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 138. Galbraith viewed the eighteenth-century society that gave birth to classical economics as an impoverished one, and argued for the inappropriateness of the latter to the twentieth-century US on that basis. Though he was surely right that many people’s elemental wants went unsupplied in the eighteenth century, a historiographical literature has since emerged arguing that the period developed a “consumer society” which provided the experience of material plenty to surprisingly large numbers of non-elites.

political economy, over the course of the century, constructed an account of economic desire that they would bequeath to modernity: as both rationally self-interested and insatiable. Novelists also dwelt obsessively on questions of want, desire, interest, and appetite, sometimes producing answers in congruence with economic writing, and sometimes demurring from the emerging theoretical consensus. The most intensive thinking about imaginary wants in the novel, I argue, occurs in proximity to a relatively neglected class of characters: villains. In the inscrutable, rapacious desires of eighteenth-century villains, from Moll Flanders to Melmoth the Wanderer, novelists registered the pressure of the new insatiability of wants. The chapters here are organized around four crucially important villain archetypes, largely inclusive if not fully exhaustive of the range of villainy within the period's fiction: the criminal, the rake, the oriental despot, and the gothic villain.

The methodology I use to investigate the relationship between the literary and the economic is twofold. First, I argue for a thematics of insatiability within the narrative structure of a wide range of eighteenth-century novels. In a model perfected by Richardson but widely diffused throughout very different genres and writers, insatiable villain characters serve as the source of narrative action. Villainous desire, in such plots, perturbs and disorganizes a given narrative world, but in doing so serves as the condition of possibility for narrative and as its sustaining force. I call this narrative form the “persecutory plot,” and argue for its unrecognized importance in the period's fiction. Second, for each of four villain archetypes, I focus on a novelist whose writings and biography provide extensive material for thinking about the relation between fictional and economic desire: Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, William Beckford, and Matthew Lewis. Personally connected in various ways with entrepreneurship, finance, industry, and colonialism, these novelists produced works that exist within a complex discursive

web connecting fiction to political economy, mercantile conduct literature, and colonial politics. For each writer, the persecutory plot produces narrative energy by inhabiting questions about human motivation that assumed distinct urgency with the proliferation of imaginary wants: questions about privation and plenty, work and leisure, having enough and wanting more.

To give conceptual shape to these questions, finally, I draw on Lacanian psychoanalysis, a later tradition of thinking about wants. Lacanian thought holds that human life is shaped around an ineradicable experience of lack, and calls this predicament desire. Against the rational and inexhaustible wants of eighteenth-century political economy, Lacan posits a pervasive condition of want inaccessible to alleviation. This pessimistic account of wants, on one hand, demonstrates the limits of the Enlightenment economic rationalism. On the other, it resonates with an Enlightenment counter-tradition I hope to recover from the period's fiction. In its villain characters, eighteenth-century fiction imagined individuals capable of pursuing their wants to the ends of the earth, but not therefore capable of achieving happiness. The mastery that such figures exercise over the external world coexists with a searing internal condition of nonsovereignty. If political economy posited *Homo Economicus* as both rational and insatiable, novels used villains to investigate the contours of lived subjectivity invested with these qualities. Such investigation tends, according to the logic of eighteenth-century narrative, not toward comedy but toward tragedy.

## **1. Consumptive production**

The cultivation of imaginary wants, as Coleridge conceived them, is the production of new objects of consumer desire. Imaginary wants make the two terms difficult to pry apart: consumers demand novel forms of production and producers reciprocally seek to open up new

modes of consumption. Karl Marx, in the draft introduction to his *Grundrisse*, understood one term to be fully absorbable into the other: “Production is consumption, consumption is production. Consumptive production.” Consumption, for Marx, produces life by destroying the products of prior production, and the means of production themselves are gradually consumed in the act of producing goods for consumption. Both processes are therefore moments in the unified operation of capital on the material world. Most importantly: “Production not only supplies a material for the need, but it also supplies a need for the material.”<sup>7</sup> Consumptive production creates both goods and the need for their consumption, producing demand as well as supply. Though Marx’s idiom is Hegelian, he draws, whether consciously or not, on one of the crucial themes of eighteenth-century meditation on capitalist production: that it manufactures not only goods but also wants.

Though the interdependent relationship between production and consumption is obvious, historiographies of capitalism have tended emphasize one term over the other. Production-oriented stories about capitalism include those told by Adam Smith, Marx, Max Weber, and neoclassical economics; consumption-oriented stories include those of Bernard Mandeville, Werner Sombart, Thorstein Veblen, Georges Bataille, and recent historians of “consumer society.” In British history, the long eighteenth century is a crucial transitional period in both versions of this story, and an ever-growing literature attests to the importance and scale of the economic changes occurring in each domain. First, production: beginning with the founding of the Bank of England, a wave of financialization reshaped the country’s credit system and therefore its supply of capital. Shifts in the structure of the rural economy, the decay of the apprenticeship system, and the beginnings of industrialized manufacturing initiated the process

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1993), 90-4.

of proletarianization. Cooperation between state power and business interests expanded colonial production in the East and West Indies. Second, consumption: in the latter half of the century, habitual luxury consumption was extended to new and larger portions of the population. The newly abundant luxuries included edible, textile, and earthenware goods from the colonial world as well as goods produced by domestic industries. To create demand for new products, producers began to refine the art of advertising.<sup>8</sup>

Attending these shifts in economic organization were cultural and intellectual reconfigurations of human wants. In Albert Hirschman's classic account, the eighteenth century produced an account of interest and interestedness that managed to depict self-interested behavior as a virtue rather than a vice. The description of interest as a "countervailing passion" served the crucial role of validating a picture of society founded on the principle of "possessive individualism" (in C. B. Macpherson's influential phrase).<sup>9</sup> When Adam Smith famously declared that we derive our sustenance "not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker [...] but from their regard to their own interest," he was able to understand this situation as a condition of civic flourishing rather than depravity, and this was due to the

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<sup>8</sup> On finance, see P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Mary Poovey: *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). On early proletarianization, see Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 2006). On colonialism and state-capital collusion, see Siraj Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital: Enlightenment Writing and Colonial India* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011). On the relation between finance and colonialism, see Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). For the seminal statement on the eighteenth-century consumer society as well as early advertising, see Neil Kendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Also see John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993). For a detailed treatment of eighteenth-century luxury goods, see Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). J. G. A. Pocock's work has been crucial in showing how these ideas were deployed within a broader political imaginary; see especially "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103-24.

complex defenses of interest that had been developed over the course of the century.<sup>10</sup> Similar lines of defense arose for the period's rapidly burgeoning consumption. As John Sekora documents, the eighteenth century finally defeated the age-old tradition of sumptuary laws and transvalued the concept of luxury. Luxury was transformed from a vice associated with women and the lower orders to a key element of material comfort.<sup>11</sup> The eighteenth century, then, saw the simultaneous development of two capitalist ethics, one productivist and the other consumerist.<sup>12</sup> It also saw the inchoate emergence of two corresponding doctrines that, as we will see, would be formalized as a unified theory of *Homo Economicus* in the twentieth century. Enlightenment thought posited human wants as simultaneously rational and inexhaustible.

In his essay on the slave trade, Coleridge was responding to this bipartite theory of wants. His attack on imaginary wants was in part an attempt to reassert archaic taboos on acquisitive activity and luxury consumption that had, in large measure, fallen away. Yet the logic of the new defenses of interest and consumption are evident in Coleridge's argument, specifically in the meditation on the imagination that open the essay. "Providence," he declares, "which has distinguished Man from the lower orders of Being by the progressiveness of his nature, forbids him to be contented. It has given him the restless faculty of *Imagination*." Imagination is thus a name for insatiability, or for the faculty of discerning new wants where nature has allowed for contentment. This distinctively human restlessness is rooted in vice but tends toward benevolence:

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<sup>10</sup> *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 18.

<sup>11</sup> John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). The related concept of "comfort," in the sense of domestic ease provided by consumer goods, was also affirmed in new ways over the course of the eighteenth century; see John E. Crowley, "The Sensibility of Comfort," *American Historical Review* 104.3 (1999), 749-82.

<sup>12</sup> For seminal accounts of the development of productivist and consumerist ethics see, respectively, Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, trans. and ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002); and Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

I have the firmest Faith, that the final cause [effect?] of all evils in the moral and natural world is to awaken intellectual activity. Man, a vicious and discontented *Animal*, by his vices and his discontent is urged to develop the powers of the Creator, and by new combinations of those powers to imitate his creativeness. And from such enlargement of the mind Benevolence will necessarily follow; Benevolence which may be defined [ . . . ] “Natural Sympathy made permanent by enlightened Selfishness.”<sup>13</sup>

The cultivation of vice is also a cultivation of human powers of creativity, and such development will eventually transcend its bestial roots. The utopian vision of the triumph of Benevolence is articulated in terms borrowed directly from the Enlightenment defense of interest: “enlightened Selfishness” may appear to corrode the social fabric but in the long run cements it.<sup>14</sup> “Imagination” was thus, in the 1790s, Coleridge’s term for a human capacity for insatiability, a capacity which moved toward personal and social development but did so through the medium of depravity. In light of Coleridge’s championing of the concept in his mature aesthetic thought, the ambivalence of this account is remarkable.

Though Coleridge would likely have been troubled by the comparison, the notion that private insatiability produces public benefits can be traced back at least as far as the great intellectual scandal of the 1710s: the publication of Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*. Mandeville, in his malign brilliance, was the intellectual shock trooper for the theory of insatiability. Though he is best known for his equation of private vices with public benefits, Mandeville also offered—as the latter-day Mandevillean F. A. Hayek first pointed out—a general account of social development.<sup>15</sup> Its most precise articulation is found in “A Search into

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<sup>13</sup> *Collected Works*, Volume 2, 131-2.

<sup>14</sup> I neglect for economy’s sake the balancing element in Coleridge’s formula: “natural sympathy.” On the complex relation between market society and sympathy, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 129-59.

<sup>15</sup> *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 249-66. According to Hayek, Mandeville formulated a conception of spontaneous social order that placed him at the beginning of the intellectual lineage culminating in neoclassical and Austrian school economics. In a forthcoming article, Tony Brown offers an important critique of this reading.

the Nature of Society,” a critique of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, appended to the 1723 edition of *The Fable of the Bees*. This essay attempts to establish that the fabric of human sociability is not sensibility or innate virtue but “Evil both Natural and Moral.”<sup>16</sup>

Mandeville’s argument turns on a conception of the state of nature—that crucial implement of Enlightenment political thought—that emphasizes neither violence (as with Hobbes) nor primitive forms of property (as with Locke), but environmental exposure. For Mandeville, “it is impossible that Man, mere fallen Man should act with any other View but to please himself whilst he has the Use of his Organs.” (351) But in the “Wild State of Nature” (350) individuals are constantly beset by conditions inimical to self-gratification: fire and water, poisonous plants, bad weather, insects. The lack of arts and sciences to mitigate these conditions makes them irremediable. The primary characteristic of the state of nature is exposure without recourse, a condition of absolute want.

As Mandeville seems well aware, this argument flirts with heresy, since the Edenic state of nature is supposed to offer a life without want. Without openly declaring this heresy, Mandeville hints at the unlikelihood of such an Edenic Golden Age, and proceeds to argue that society emerged as a bulwark against want, not a corruption of its original absence:

In such a Golden Age no Reason or Probability can be alledged why Mankind ever should have rais’d themselves into such large Societies as there have been in the World [. . .] no Societies could have sprung from the Amiable Virtues and Loving Qualities of Man, but on the contrary that all of them must have had their Origin from his Wants, his Imperfections and the variety of his Appetites: We shall find likewise that the more their Pride and Vanity are display’d, and all their Desires enlarg’d, the more capable they must be of being rais’d into large and vastly numerous Societies. (349)

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. Phillip Harth (New York: Penguin, 1989), 330. Subsequently cited in the text.

In Mandeville's state of nature story, mankind emerges from pervasive want into relative abundance, but at the cost of innocence. He adopts the Miltonic cosmology of the Fall, but inverts one of its crucial axes: the movement from innocence to depravity and solitude to society is also a movement from want to plenty, and not the reverse. A full affirmation of animalistic desire is the necessary cost of a society capable of mitigating wants; individuals commit to the tenuous enterprise of tolerating one another because such tolerance yields gratification of the appetites. Market society, the society capable of producing plenty, is mankind's original sin.

The society produced when individuals collude to facilitate their depravity, furthermore, shows a tendency toward expansion in proportion to the "Pride," "Vanity," and "Desires" of those individuals. In arguing that "enlarg'd" desires produce "large and vastly numerous Societies," Mandeville discerns a relationship between vice and what we now call economic growth. In fact, his central, traumatic insight—that private vices produce public benefits—has long since been metabolized as the innocuous Keynesian notion that consumer demand drives growth. Continued economic expansion, according to this argument, depends on the human capacity for inventing new vices. The wealth of nations is produced not by the virtuous but by "the Sensual Courtier that sets no limits to his Luxury; the Fickle Strumpet that invents New Fashions every Week; [...] the profuse Rake and lavish Heir, that scatter about their Money without Wit or Judgment, buy everything they see, and either destroy or give it away the next day [...]"<sup>17</sup> (357)

If Mandeville's fallen market society flourishes in proportion to the depravity of its leading members, those employed in the manufacture of vices must exert their interest to claim a

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<sup>17</sup> For a classic early twentieth-century revival of the idea that the origins of capitalist society lie in prodigal luxury consumption by elites, see Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967). Sombart, however, singles out women for their extravagant consumption; Mandeville is more equitable and probably closer to historical accuracy in mentioning rakes as well as strumpets.

stake in the “public benefits.” What looks like patronage is in fact a kind of mutually parasitic symbiosis. Such a society can be described as a condition of universal knavery: “To me it is a great Pleasure, when I look on the Affairs of Human Life, to behold into what various, and often strangely opposite Forms the hope of Gain and thoughts of Lucre shape Men according to the different Employments they are of, and Stations they are in.” (352) The unity underlying the diversity within society is economic self-interest, and each distinct way of life can be understood with reference to the avaricious passion that shapes them all. With avarice as its bonding agent, society persists via mutual agreement to act as if lucre were not the basic motivation for sociability: “it is impossible we could be sociable Creatures without Hypocrisy.” (351) The public benefits of private vices, then, encompass not only economic growth and material improvement but the very possibility of communal life.

Mandeville’s account of social development crystallizes, in a way that preserves its traumatic nature, one of his period’s crucial legacies to modernity. The eighteenth century produced an account of *Homo Economicus* as both insatiable and rationally self-interested, and extrapolated from this account an ambivalent vision of market society as a beneficial edifice erected on rotten foundations. This enlightenment legacy remained, during the century that gave birth to it, somewhat inchoate, and often present more as a structure of feeling than as a theoretical doctrine. But its basic elements were firmly in place when, at the end of the century, it seemed intuitive to Coleridge to place both perennial discontent and “enlightened selfishness” at the center of human experience. In the twentieth century, these ideas were extended in enormously influential forms. (Though with a difference in tone: Mandeville’s position, in the early eighteenth century, could only be articulated from a position of bitter satire. Two and a half centuries later, Milton Friedman was able to posit enlightened selfishness as the underpinning of

political freedom and social development without discernable irony or ambivalence.)<sup>18</sup> Most importantly, neoclassical economics formalized the two strands of the eighteenth-century tradition and combined them to produce a unified theory of economic subjectivity.

The full formalization of the doctrine of insatiability came in the late nineteenth century with the development of marginal utility theory. As Regenia Gagnier argues, the work of Stanley Jevons and Carl Menger provided a formal means of conceptualizing consumption within utility calculus: consumption of goods adds utility to life, and consumption of more and newer goods adds “marginal” utility that declines as those goods become less related to the satisfaction of elemental wants. As Gagnier shows, however, the paradoxical result of this development was a strong consensus about the “insatiability of human wants.”<sup>19</sup> Galbraith offers a lucid explanation of the logic underlying this paradox. The theory of declining marginal utility, according to Galbraith, appears to argue for the finitude of human wants, but in the context of an economy with extremely high levels of production of consumer goods can be used to show the opposite. Once elemental wants have been satisfied, a mere sliver of lack remains at the margin of experience. To keep this sliver open, an endless succession of goods and ways of desiring them must be provided to the consumer. Advanced capitalist economies, however, with the help of advertising agencies, appear capable of providing such a cornucopia. The theory of marginal

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<sup>18</sup> *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Indeed, Mandeville’s position had already lost much of its edge by 1759, when Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, argued that insatiable desire produces social benefits without ultimately satisfying the desiring individual. Smith, however, largely dropped the opprobrious language of luxury and vice, and gently characterized the rejection of worldly goods as “splenetic.” *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 214 (Part IV, chapter 1, paragraphs 8-10). David Hume, in his essay on “Arts and Sciences,” offered an even more Whiggish version of the argument.

<sup>19</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 19-60. I differ, however, from Gagnier’s claim that the marginal revolution marks a wholesale shift from emphasis on production to consumption in political economy. Though this is a useful heuristic for understanding Jevons’ and Menger’s breakthrough, a thesaurus of *Homo Economicus* as consumer, as I document here, was alive and well from the birth of political economy.

utility thus inverts an account of the finitude of wants into an account of insatiability via the assumption that new pleasures can be manufactured faster than old ones cloy. An outsized portion of the productive forces of a consumer society are in fact, according to Galbraith, devoted to the dilation of this ever-declining but never-vanished margin.<sup>20</sup> Modern economies thus rely for the continual expansion of their productive capacity on the reliable reappearance of lack at the margin of experience, on a grain of dissatisfaction that, according to economists, never ceases to irritate human life.

If the theory of declining marginal utility provided a firm grounding for the inexhaustibility of wants, the mid-twentieth-century development of rational choice theory consolidated the enlightenment legacy by fusing the inexhaustibility thesis with the interest thesis. Rational choice theory holds that human behavior, by and large, is determined by accurate perceptions of optimal personal utility. It holds that action is always self-interested, that it always seeks to extract more utility from a given situation, and above all that it always calculates utilities more or less correctly.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the leading mind in this project was that of the economist Gary Becker. Becker extended the principle of rational optimization to the most impulsive and turbulent areas of human experience: reproduction, crime, and even drug addiction.<sup>22</sup> Apparently self-destructive behaviors could be explained, according to Becker, as motivated by utility calculations based on a high rate of discounting, which is to say a low valuation of anticipated future utility. With quiet audacity, Becker discerned instrumental reason at work in the most abyssal experiences of non-sovereignty. Rational choice theory thus took an

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<sup>20</sup> *Affluent Society*, 143-51.

<sup>21</sup> For a lucid exposition and critique of the rational choice model, see Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>22</sup> Many of Becker's most influential papers are collected in *Accounting for Tastes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). For an account of eighteenth-century consumerism rooted in Becker's rational choice model, see Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Demand and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

understanding of subjectivity derived from market transactions—namely, that a mind is something that always tries to get the most bang for its buck—and attempted to extend it across the breadth of human experience.

Neoclassical economics has thus been rooted in extraordinarily strong versions of assumptions it derived from the Enlightenment, holding that both wants and rationalization are unbounded.<sup>23</sup> Very broadly, the long eighteenth century marked the beginning of a theoretical consensus about economic subjectivity. This consensus rests on two pillars: inexhaustibility of wants and rational optimization, or insatiability and interest. *Homo Economicus* knows what he wants (more) and knows how to get it (instrumental reason). Weberian, or supply-side, or productivist accounts of the development of capitalist culture emphasize one half of this formula; Veblenian, or demand-side, or consumerist accounts emphasize the other. A full account of eighteenth-century imaginary wants, however, requires recognition of the interrelation between the productivist and consumerist ethics.

An account of this interrelation was put forward as early as 1711, in a remarkable *Spectator* essay by Joseph Addison (number 55, May 3, 1711). If Marx formulated the concept of consumptive production via Hegelian dialectic, Addison approached it through that most august of eighteenth-century forms, personified allegory, and using terms that had not yet lost their pre-modern opprobrium, avarice and luxury. According to Addison: “Most of the Trades,

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<sup>23</sup> Behavioral economics, in recent decades, has drawn on psychology in an attempt to wake neoclassicism from this fever dream. Its demonstrations of the limits of economic rationality, however, tend less to fundamentally challenge the rational choice model than to temper it in accordance with empirical observations. Its practical applications, furthermore, tend to take the form of a pedagogy of economic rationality: if people are more attached to their possessions, more concerned with fairness, and less fluent in solving utility maximization problems than Beckerians would like to think, behavioralism offers to highlight these human frailties only in order to correct them. It thus remains to be seen whether the behavioral turn in economics marks the beginning of the decline of the eighteenth-century heritage, or a cunning renewal of its dominance. See Daniel Kahnemann, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011), 269-374; and Richard Thaler, *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* (New York: Norton, 2016).

Professions, and Ways of Living among Mankind, take their Original either from the Love of Pleasure or the Fear of Want. The former, when it becomes too violent, degenerates into *Luxury*, and the latter into *Avarice*.<sup>24</sup> The necessary conditions for Luxury and Avarice are therefore, respectively, plenty and poverty. To illustrate this antinomy, Addison quotes a passage from Persius' fifth *Satire* (in John Dryden's translation) in which a Stoic named Cornutus instructs Persius on the competing claims of industry and pleasure. Cornutus imagines Persius indulging himself in "a lazy Morning's Nap," only to be accosted by Avarice. The latter implores Persius to undertake a mercantile venture, freighting a vessel with fish from the Black Sea to exchange for "Flax, Castor, *Coan* Wines, the precious Weight / Of Pepper and *Sabean* Incense" (ironically, many of these are luxury goods). Just as Persius prepares to embark, however, Luxury arrives and proposes a less strenuous course of action: "Indulge, and to thy Genius freely give: / For, not to live at Ease, is not to live." (For contemporary idlers, the use of the verb "indulge" in the imperative mode may recall marketing for, say, chocolate or spas.) Why undergo the toil and discomfort involved in capital accumulation, Luxury asks, when enjoyment is ready to hand? In Persius' account, the economic subject is presented with a clear choice: "Speak, wilt thou *Avarice* or *Pleasure* choose / To be thy Lord? Take one, and one refuse."<sup>25</sup> (207)

In presenting this episode from Persius, Addison articulates a pre-modern conception of economic subjectivity: production and consumption are fundamentally opposed forms of action, and the economic subject will always face an imperative choice between them.<sup>26</sup> Without quite

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<sup>24</sup> *The Spectator*, ed. Henry Morley (London: Routledge, 1891), Volume 1, 206. Subsequently cited in the text.

<sup>25</sup> Addison's quotation ends here, but Dryden's version finishes the exhortation with another couplet: "But both by turns the rule of thee will have, / And thou betwixt 'em both wilt be a slave." Though Persius views Avarice and Luxury as mutually exclusive, he thus does acknowledge that they can alternately hold sway over a single mind. *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. John Barnard and F. W. Bateson (New York: Longman, 2000), Volume 4, 189.

<sup>26</sup> A remarkable twentieth-century revival of this idea can be found in the work of Georges Bataille. According to Bataille, societies produce surplus, which can be either destroyed by consumption (as in most pre-modern societies) or reinvested in development (as in both capitalism and authoritarian communism). In viewing consumption and production as two fundamentally different paths of social development, Bataille reiterates precisely the view that

acknowledging he is doing so, Addison departs from Persius, and offers an account of Avarice and Luxury more in line with the realities of capitalist economies. Addison points out that in societies “settled in a State of Ease and Prosperity,” demand for more and new pleasures will naturally arise. The demand for pleasure will in turn necessitate capital accumulation: “as these Pleasures are very expensive, they put those who are addicted to them upon raising fresh Supplies of Money, by all the Methods of Rapaciousness and Corruption.” The search for pleasure also necessitates the search for the financial means of its procurement. Therefore: “Avarice and Luxury very often become one complicated Principle of Action.” (208)

To illustrate this compound “Principle of Action,” Addison adopts Persius’ figures—Avarice and Luxury—and places them in a new allegory. Two tyrants, Luxury and Avarice, engage in perpetual warfare, each wanting to obtain “Universal Monarchy over the Hearts of Mankind.” Avarice’s chief “Privy-Counsellor” is Poverty, and Luxury’s is Plenty. The situation, thus far, is in line with Persius’ account: Avarice seeks to evade Poverty (or Want), and Luxury seeks to enjoy Plenty. The two monarchs, however, declare a truce, and hold a parley in absence of their advisors. They determine that cooperation is a better strategy than warfare, and therefore that the two privy-councillors will be dismissed, and all future conquests will be divided equally between the two kingdoms. In the new arrangement, “we now find *Luxury* and *Avarice* taking Possession of the same Heart, and dividing the same Person between them.” (208-9) Such a heart, troubled by passions both warm and cool, voluptuous and miserly, is the shape that economic desire takes within the historical moment that Addison was already beginning to inhabit.

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Addison, Mandeville, and Coleridge found lacking. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, Volume 1 (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

This allegorical unification of pleasure and pelf concludes with a cryptic summary—indeed, the entire narrative seems in retrospect to have been crafted to prepare its final sentence: “Avarice supplies *Luxury* in the room of *Plenty*, as *Luxury* prompts *Avarice* in the place of *Poverty*.” (209) According to this chiastic formulation, Avarice and Luxury mutually fill the places vacated by the other’s former privy-councillors, Plenty and Poverty. The latter indicate the material background that makes each of the two principles intelligible: indulgence naturally occurs when goods are plentiful, parsimony when they are scarce. So long as these two privy-councillors are in place, consumption and production retain an organic connection to the affordances of any particular economic situation. In Addison’s formulation, however, Avarice and Luxury detach from natural cycles of want and plenty and symbiotically reinforce one another. The logic of this symbiosis is rather obscure. The idea that Luxury, rather than Poverty, prompts Avarice seems to echo the point Addison has just made: in flourishing societies, wealth is accumulated not just to relieve wants but to search for new pleasures. The first half of the chiasmus, however, is more difficult. If Avarice, not Plenty, “supplies” Luxury, this might simply mean that accumulated wealth offers a means of purchasing new pleasures. Yet the clause also affords a stranger reading: that Avarice itself becomes a form of Luxury, supplying an experience of decadent pleasure within the very act of capital accumulation. Within the askesis of scrimping and saving, the phrase suggests, lurks a perverse enjoyment. It is such avaricious luxury, Addison claims, that moves societies beyond the toil of fulfilling real wants and into the modern adventure of manufacturing imaginary ones.

Consumptive production, avaricious luxury: at the very outset of the bipartite enlightenment model of economic subjectivity, there was an impulse to collapse its terms into one another. It is here that Lacanian psychoanalysis can usefully intervene. In psychoanalytic

terms, the mental agency responsible for the productivist ethic is the superego: that in experience which produces both prohibitions and injunctions (for example, the prohibition of sloth and the injunction to work). The consumerist ethic, on the other hand, involves pursuit of enjoyment (*jouissance*), or instinctual satisfaction approached through the frame of fantasy. According to a central Lacanian paradox, however, the superego is itself a form of enjoyment. In germinal form, this paradox is already present in Freud's account of superego formation as an introjection of the father's obscene, violent sexuality. The "primal father," in Freudian mythology, is a figure beyond ethical law who experiences a full plenitude of sexual and gustatory enjoyment. It is his introjected image, however, that produces the experience of ethical obligation for his merely mortal sons. The inexplicable demands of the superego are thus, according to Freud, traceable to the violent *jouissance* of the paternal imago.<sup>27</sup>

In Lacanian thought, the paradox is radicalized: the superego is the Other's enjoyment.<sup>28</sup> As Slavoj Žižek puts it: "Superego is the obscene 'nightly' law that necessarily redoubles and accompanies, as its shadow, the 'public' Law."<sup>29</sup> If the principle of economic rationalization is the Law of maximized productivity, this principle is undergirded by a "nightly," pathological law of compulsive attachment to lucre. The rationally maximizing economic subject is compelled to accumulate wealth by the irrational, obscene injunctions of the productivist superego. Conversely, consumerism tends to invest the enjoyment of consumer goods with the character of an imperative. This imperative takes an especially pure form, as Žižek points out, in a ubiquitous

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<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIII, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953); also see Leo Bersani's reading of the corresponding argument in *Civilization and its Discontents* in *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 21-23.

<sup>28</sup> The crucial Lacanian text here is the essay "Kant with Sade," discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup> *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (New York: Verso, 2005), 54.

Coca Cola slogan: “Enjoy!”<sup>30</sup> Thus the strange virtue ethics that consumer societies attach to self-indulgence: enjoyment is detached from embodied cycles of lack and satiety and becomes the object of a compulsive and laborious quest.

“Avarice supplies *Luxury* in the room of *Plenty*, as *Luxury* prompts *Avarice* in the place of *Poverty*.” Addison’s formula can be rewritten in Lacanian terms, and in the process, collapsed: the superego consists in enjoyment, and enjoyment is accessed through the superego. The two aspects of the Enlightenment’s *Homo Economicus*—rationality and insatiability—are doubly linked by a chiasmus: the demand for maximized productivity contains a core of irrational enjoyment, and the search for enjoyment contains a core of superego pressure. As Emma Rothschild points out, the early political economists tended to describe economic interest as cultivating the warm, in addition to the cool, passions.<sup>31</sup> And in eighteenth-century images of luxurious dissipation, a certain restless pursuit of ever-new enjoyments indicates the presence of cool passions within the warm. Addison’s unification of Avarice and Luxury in a “complicated Principle of Action,” then, also unifies the productivist and consumerist ethics, the principal protagonists in the historiography of eighteenth-century capitalism. It provides a conceptual structure to the process through which imaginary wants transformed wishes into needs and desire into lack.

## 2. The persecutory plot

In the brief history of the novel that prefaces *Les Crimes de L’Amour* (1800), the Marquis de Sade reserves special praise for English novels of the 1740s:

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Enjoy your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, revised ed (New York: Routledge, 2001), vii.

<sup>31</sup> *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 25-8.

And then English novels, the vigorous works of Richardson and Fielding, appeared and taught the French that it is not by describing the tedious languors of love, or reporting the dull conversation of cliques and coteries, that success is achieved in the genre, but by creating strong, manly characters who, as the playthings and victims of that effervescence of the heart otherwise known as love, show both the dangers and miseries it generates. It is the only way to achieve the progression of plot [*développements*] and the workings of passion which are so well depicted in English novels.<sup>32</sup>

In some ways, this brief account of the English novel seems to confirm many elements of the established critical consensus about mid-eighteenth-century fiction: that it flowered during the 1740s, was dominated by the contrasting literary personalities of Richardson and Fielding, and achieved unprecedented representational access to the human heart. In other ways, however, it sounds quite strange. Where standard readings of Fielding and Richardson emphasize their virtuous young heroines and insipid heroes, Sade attributes their achievement to a different kind of figure: the “strong, manly character” tortured by the vagaries of desire. For Sade, it is such tortured figures who provide the English novel with both its affective charge and its narrative impetus (its plot or “development”). This last item in particular sounds odd in relation to our inherited sense of eighteenth-century narrative, which emphasizes its reliance on the marriage plot and tendency, as with *Pamela*, to reward virtue. Sade’s elevation of villains, certainly, is in line with his dark predilections. This dissertation, however, argues that Sade’s brief account of the eighteenth-century British novel contains a profound insight into the narrative structure of the period’s fiction. By displacing virtuous heroines and placing villains at the center of the novel, Sade discovered the narrative form I call the “persecutory plot.”

Sade’s encomium to the British novel, though brief, in fact achieves quite a bit in its description of the English novel and its villains. According to Sade, villains are crucial to a particular type of plot or narrative “development” that distinguishes the English novel. In hinting

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<sup>32</sup> Marquis de Sade, *The Crimes of Love*, trans. David Coward (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

at a type of narrative action in which villains rather than protagonists are the key agents, Sade grasps something essential about the actantial structure of much eighteenth-century narrative. And in describing such villains as “playthings” (*jouets*) and “victims” of their own passions, furthermore, Sade depicts such narrative movers as themselves involuntarily moved. If plot unfolds from the actions of villains, these actions themselves unfold from a condition of internal non-sovereignty, placing an aporia precisely at the center of narrative causation. As the passage continues, finally, Sade celebrates the tendency of the English novel to let virtue be ultimately “crushed” (or “laid low,” *terrassée*) by vice. This observation is curiously inaccurate, since the eighteenth-century novel more often rewards than punishes virtue.<sup>33</sup> It correctly identifies, however, a latent inclination toward tragic resolution in any plot that takes its impetus from villainous passions. According to Sade, then, villains are the actantial motor of the English novel, pose a problem for the narrative construction of motivation, and indicate an immanent (though generally unfulfilled) tendency toward tragedy. Here, in germinal form, are the essential elements of a narrative theory of the persecutory plot.

Eighteenth-century narrative, like all narrative, is a set of devices for producing eventfulness, or for making something happen. Narrative generally begins with a condition of homeostasis, or a world relatively calibrated to its inhabitants’ desires—a condition to which it ultimately seeks to return. The precondition for narratability is a perturbation or displacement which introduces lack into this world. Thus Peter Brooks’ classic argument that narrative operates beyond the pleasure principle.<sup>34</sup> In the eighteenth century, the event-less-ness that narrative attempts to annul was often thematized in the pastoral mode. According to Lacan, “The

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<sup>33</sup> The crucial exception is Richardson’s *Clarissa*, a novel that will figure in this dissertation as the most pristine and virtuosic instance of the persecutory plot. Sade, in fact, appears to have this novel above all others in mind in his praise of English fiction.

<sup>34</sup> *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

domain of the pastoral is never absent from civilization; it never fails to offer itself as a solution to the latter's discontents.”<sup>35</sup> The pastoral designates the calibration of needs and wants and offers a reprieve from the perturbation that plagues the desiring subject. It affirms the finitude of embodied human life as a refuge rather than a malaise. One of the central technical problems of narrative is how to rupture this pastoral closure and make something happen. Many such techniques—Brooks might say all of them—rely on the introduction of a desiring subject.<sup>36</sup> In the persecutory plot, this subject is a villain.

Character-driven criticism of the eighteenth-century novel has tended, for excellent reasons, to be preoccupied with questions about psychological realism and gender.<sup>37</sup> These twin preoccupations, however, have left an important class of characters relatively neglected. Eighteenth-century fiction is haunted by an array of fiendish, lecherous, avaricious, and otherwise dastardly supporting characters. Here, I focus on four archetypal villain figures: the criminal, the rake, the oriental despot, and the gothic villain.<sup>38</sup> Though not necessarily exhaustive, these types include all the most notable examples of eighteenth-century villainy. Across many of the most important generic and modal divisions of the eighteenth-century novel, such characters are enlisted to ward off the pastoral and provide narrative with the complications it needs in order to reproduce itself. In locating this insatiable, narrative-producing desire not in

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<sup>35</sup> *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 88.

<sup>36</sup> I thus join Leo Bersani in viewing desire as a world-shattering, disorganizing force in narrative, but dissent from his view that such shattering threatens the coherence and stability of narrative. Along with Brooks, rather, I view desire as sustaining, not destroying, narrative. Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969).

<sup>37</sup> For the most influential statement on the former, see Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character, Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); on the latter, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> Erin Mackie focuses on a partially overlapping cast of characters in her *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Though Mackie is concerned with the history of masculinity rather than economic subjectivity, I share her sense that certain apparently residual or marginal figures can be viewed as central to the eighteenth-century social imaginary.

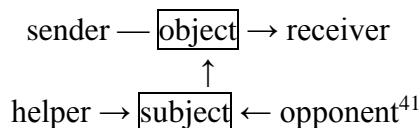
the protagonist but in her antagonist, eighteenth-century novelists constructed the distinctive narrative apparatus that so captivated Sade.

Narratological accounts of villain characters have tended to ascribe a certain flatness or functionalism to their motivational structure. Such accounts provide a starting point for theorizing the eighteenth-century persecutory villain, but only a starting point. Roger Caillois, for example, writes of a “sad poverty of motive” in detective fiction murderers: “But if the scheming can be constantly renewed, the list of instincts is short. [ . . . ] We never get very far from vengeance, self-interest, or fear, from love of money or legitimate self-defense [ . . . ]” The murderer’s motive, for Caillois, is a kind of narrative filler, necessary to produce the nefarious act but largely incidental to it. Tzvetan Todorov, in an account of the *Arabian Nights*, generalizes this type of motivational structure into a theory of “a-psychological” characterization. For example: “Kassim is greedy; therefore he goes looking for money. All character traits are immediately causal; as soon as they appear, they provoke an action.” Peter Brooks, writing of romantic melodrama, goes even further: “If there is a typical discrepancy between motive and villainy, it is no doubt because evil in the world of melodrama does not need justification: it exists, simply.”<sup>39</sup> The villain may undertake malign acts motivated by malignity itself, with the concept of evil tautologically describing both the spring and the issue of his actions. In each of these functionalist accounts, motives are provided to villains up to the point at which their actions have been satisfactorily accounted for, and no further. Motives for acting are a back-formation from actions.

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<sup>39</sup> Caillois, “The Detective Novel as Game,” in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn Most and William Stowe (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 5; Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 68; Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 33.

Vladimir Propp, in his classic study of the Russian folktale, undertook an extensive elaboration of this type of functionalism. Characters in the folktale, for Propp, can be described according to their participation in a set of archetypal narrative actions. An initial situation of lack is introduced into the world, often due to the violation of a prohibition. The hero's task is to ameliorate this lack; she is aided by "donor" and "helper" characters, who provide magical objects or other forms of assistance with her quest; she is opposed and impeded by a villain, who struggles with and pursues the hero in the course of the quest. For Propp, these actantial functions are the crucial characterological determinant at work in the folktale, and the attempt to ascribe motive to a particular action is largely incidental to the actantial role that that action fulfills. This is especially pronounced in the case of villain: "We notice that the actions of a dragon and of very many other villains are not in any way motivated by the tale. Of course, the dragon kidnaps the princess also because of certain motives [...] but the tale says nothing about this."<sup>40</sup> The villain, for Propp, exists only to impede the hero on her quest to cancel lack, and is perfectly capable of providing this narrative impedance without any subjective motivation. A. J. Greimas codified this functionalist account when he simplified Propp's theory into a unified actantial model involving six fundamental narrative roles:



In this schema, narrative is structured around the drama of a subject's search for her object. The opponent, or villain, is one of four actantial categories that interacts with the subject's quest, providing the function of impedance. If the central fact of narrative is the protagonist's desire,

<sup>40</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin, Texas: Publications of the American Folklore Society, 1968), 76.

<sup>41</sup> A. J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 207.

villainy intervenes to frustrate this desire. Any desire apparent in the villain himself, according to Propp and Greimas, is wholly incidental.

Narrative theories of the villain, then, have tended to reduce form to function: the villain serves as an impediment to the hero's resolution of lack, and his motives for doing so, if they are provided at all, are only such as are sufficient to explain his performance of this function. The texts Propp, Caillois, Todorov, and Brooks base their accounts on are in many ways distant from the tradition of European high realism. Yet to some degree, similarly functionalist accounts of the villain have been adopted in commentary on the realist novel: Franco Moretti argues that the nineteenth-century British novel, in its reliance on villains, adopts the fairy tale structure described by Propp, and Fredric Jameson, in the fiery villains of George Eliot's late novels, discerns an archaic and under-psychologized form of characterization that distorts Eliot's otherwise impeccable realism.<sup>42</sup> This dissertation departs from this extended Proppian tradition in arguing that the functionalist model of villainy is inadequate to describe the eighteenth-century novel and the role that villain characters played in the novel's response to emergent capitalism.

If critics have largely missed the distinct narrative form dominant in eighteenth-century Britain, it may be due to the usual habit of reading the history of the eighteenth-century novel as the pre-history of its nineteenth-century descendants. A rich tradition in criticism of the nineteenth-century novel holds, with Propp and Greimas, that narrative is organized around the desire of the protagonist. Brooks makes this argument in a psychoanalytic register, arguing that the novel fixes a readerly experience of lack in the protagonist, and that it is the restlessness of

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<sup>42</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 1987), 199-202; Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2015), 138-162.

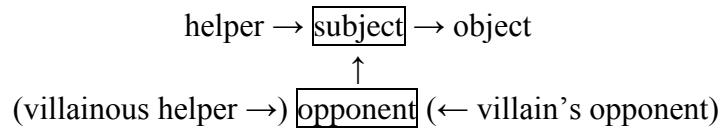
this desire that allows plot to unfold. Plot operates, according to Brooks, beyond the pleasure principle: if the beginning of a plot is the initiation of lack and the denouement its liquidation, the middle—the most extended and interesting component, at least in the realist tradition—defers satisfaction and the narrative closure it provides. Moretti, in his account of the *Bildungsroman*, emphasizes the function of youth as a state of narrative generativity. The social fixing of identity, for Moretti, is both the outcome of narrative and its dissolution—thus the fact that the most interesting novels (for Moretti, they are French, not English), tend to find ways of warding off such fixture. Alex Woloch adds to this picture an account of how narrative constructs the “space” of the desiring protagonist via the marginalization of other desiring subjectivities. For both Moretti and Woloch, these dynamics can be contextualized against the social and economic striving of the liberal subject: narrative desire and its liquidation correspond to social striving and its resolution, and the “character systems” of novels can be viewed on analogy with the competitive dynamics of the liberal economic sphere.<sup>43</sup> The composite picture these critics provide of the nineteenth-century novel, then, is a kind of psychologized version of Propp’s and Greimas’ model: the protagonist’s desire produces a lack in the world which sustains narrative, and insofar as villain characters appear it is to impede the resolution of this lack.

A wide array of eighteenth-century novels employ a very different way of allocating desire within their character systems. In the eighteenth-century persecutory plot, the desire that drives narrative is vested not in the protagonist but in her opponent. A Pamela, an Evelina, or an Emily Saint Aubert, left to her own devices, will remain in pastoral homeostasis; it takes a Lovelace, a Willoughby, or a Montoni to produce eventfulness. Desire and the narrative causality it produces are, in the persecutory plot, located outside the space of the protagonist. And if plot is

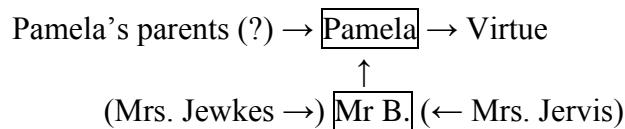
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<sup>43</sup> Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*; Moretti, *Way of the World*; Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

reliant on persecution, it is in turn reliant on the obduracy of the villain's noxious desire. The persecutory plot therefore deforms the Greimasian schema:



for example:



The villain's desire moves from its supporting role of impedance to the central task of narrative generativity, and the protagonist is displaced to mere victimhood. The evolution of the British novel between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, then, might be conceived as an absorption of the villain's insatiable, fiendish desire into the intimate narrative subjectivity of the protagonist. The generativity of insatiable desire, which in the nineteenth century will be vested in the protagonist, appears in the eighteenth century as a nightmarish external force. (Lacan's definition of the nightmare, following Ernest Jones, is suggestive here: the Other's *jouissance*).<sup>44</sup> I suggest that this process corresponds historically to the cultural metabolization of a new conception of economic subjectivity, and of the capitalist mode of production that makes it necessary.

The power of the persecutory plot is attested to by the monumental success and influence of Richardson, the novelist who gave it its purest and most forceful articulation. Previous accounts of persecution in the eighteenth-century novel, in recognition of this primacy, have

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<sup>44</sup> *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 61.

granted Richardson a starring role.<sup>45</sup> The adoption of the insatiably desiring villain as narrative engine is a simple, sweeping solution to the technical problem of warding off pastoral closure: as long as the villain desires, he will harm, and as long as he harms, plot will occur. The form thus relies on the same assumptions that political economy was in the process of developing: the boundlessness of human wants and the cunning of the instrumental reason that seeks to fulfill them. In Richardson's *Lovelace*, the century's greatest persecutory villain, we have an emblem of restless malignity that falls at the intersection of insatiable search for enjoyment and steely rationalization. Something similar might be said about a host of other eighteenth-century villains whose lights shine somewhat less brilliantly than *Lovelace*'s. Positing its central desiring subject as insatiable, a bottomless reservoir of predatory energies, the persecutory plot allows works of great complexity and length to achieve an elegant narrative unity—so much so that the form's great triumph, *Clarissa*, has never been surpassed in sheer length by Victorian triple-deckers or post-modern meta-fictions.

The narrative power of the persecutory plot, however, brings with it implicit formal problems. One of these is instability of motive in villain characters. Motive is the causal embedding of character within narrative, and narratological accounts of villainy, again, have tended to hold that villains are provided with motives sufficient to cause their actions, and not much more. However, eighteenth-century persecutory villains, unlike Propp's dragons and evil stepmothers, do not conform to such functional reductionism. The actions of a villain who intervenes merely to impede the hero's progress can be explained, as if in medieval allegory, by Greed, Lust, Jealousy, or simply Evil. A villain who is a narrative's principal reservoir of desire,

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<sup>45</sup> See Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 95-195; and Vivisvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

however, must be provided with more carefully constructed motives. Yet the very condition that allows him to produce narrative eventfulness—his insatiability—makes it difficult to assign stable subjective causes for his actions. Figures like Moll Flanders, Lovelace, and Count Montoni are prodigies of persecution, but narrative attempts to describe why they do the things they do often careen into obscurity or incoherence. Eighteenth-century narrative tends to be intensely interested in providing such figures with motives for their actions, yet also to falter when it tries to do so. Such narratives engage in what Coleridge, writing of Shakespeare's Iago, called “the motive-hunting of motiveless Malignity.”<sup>46</sup> They are characterized by an intensity and frequency of action by villains that intra-diegetic attempts at motivational attribution are not equipped to account for. Eighteenth-century villains are ill-described by both functionalist and psychologizing accounts of motive, for the reason that their actions combine the qualities of over-intensity and under-motivation.

Another imminent problem within the persecutory plot stems from the necessity of returning narrative to pastoral closure, which is to say the necessity of ending. Full acknowledgement of the importance of persecutory figures in eighteenth-century narrative will force us to qualify our sense of the eighteenth-century novel as, by and large, a comic genre. If the force that produces narrative is persecutory violence, then the inexorable tendency of plot will be toward tragic resolution. Thus, while comic endings are certainly the norm in the eighteenth-century novel, these endings can often be attained only by engineering the neutralization of the persecutory villain. Certain well-known violations of verisimilitude arguably stem from this necessity: Mr. B's precipitous conversion to the marrying sort in *Pamela*; Count Montoni's disappearance from the last hundred pages of *Mysteries of Udolpho*,

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<sup>46</sup> *Collected Works*, Volume 12 part 4, 862.

capped by his convenient and tidy death; the mysterious, providential extirpation of the Templar Brian de Bois-Guilbert in *Ivanhoe*. Sandra Macpherson has argued for a tragic current in the eighteenth-century novel that insists on the causal obduracy of harm without regard to the intentions of agents who produce harm.<sup>47</sup> In its adoption of an a-psychological legal formalism, however, this account neglects the crucial causal function that certain subjectivities play in eighteenth-century narrative. If, as Macpherson brilliantly demonstrates, writers like Defoe and Richardson adjudicate tragic harms without reference to the intentions or emotions of individual persons, it nevertheless remains the case that the causal description of why tragic harms occur in the first place tends to involve recourse to desiring subjects. Certain characters—villains—are unstable nodes in causal chains, acting with more intensity than they are acted on. This gap between motive and action is, in a Lacanian idiom, desire, and in the persecutory plot it is the wellspring from which tragic harm flows.

The persecutory plot, then, is a narrative device that produces eventfulness through the persecutory machinations of a villain character. The villain's desire, in this narrative form, serves to rupture pastoral closure and perturb the space of the protagonist. He is thus the principal source of harm in a given narrative, but also the reason that there is anything to narrate. Richardson was the novelist who fully consolidated and perfected this device, and emphasis on the persecutory plot therefore reconfirms the importance of Richardson in the development of the English novel, but on terms very different than the accustomed ones. The persecutory plot, however powerful, necessarily introduced two major narrative problems: the under-motivation of the villain and a tendency toward tragedy. The obduracy and insatiability of the villain's desire tend to exceed the causal explanations narrative is able to offer for his actions. This under-

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<sup>47</sup> *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

motivation places an aporia at the causal center of narrative and comprises a limit to its psychological realism. Furthermore, the more rigorously narrative relies on persecution in order to perpetuate itself, the more difficulty it will have finding its way back to pastoral homeostasis. A tragic tendency is thus part of the logic of the persecutory plot, even if most novels that utilize it—*Clarissa* is the major exception—find means to evade tragedy. These two formal issues—how to motivate the villain and how to arrive at a comic ending—are technical problems. But they also indicate the place in the novel, I argue, where the historical pressure of new conceptions of human wants can be glimpsed most directly. The questions that the persecutory plot forced novelists to ask—questions about human motivation and about the relation between individual desire and community—are versions of the questions belabored by the developing theory of wants, from Mandeville through Coleridge.

For an example that makes Richardson's narrative innovations more comprehensible by simplifying them, we can turn to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The Primrose family begins the novel in a state of perfect domestic felicity and pastoral stasis, a state that is curiously unaltered by their economic misfortunes. It is only with the introduction of the insidious Squire Thornhill that it becomes possible for something to happen in the novel. As Thornhill pursues Vicar Primrose's daughter Olivia, an escalating chain of harms unfolds, all causally traceable to Thornhill's persecutory machinations: Olivia is subjected to a sham marriage and then discarded, Vicar Primrose wanders the countryside in search of her, and the family is harried by escalating economic deprivation. The novel contains a handful of picaresque elements (the family's initial economic misfortunes, the destruction of their house by fire, and the vagabond-ish wanderings of their son George), yet these are absorbed into the tragic accumulation of harms produced by Squire Thornhill. Prior to the novel's comic denouement,

the weight of this process begins to point the novel toward almost unimaginable darkness: a badly-injured Vicar Primrose is imprisoned for debt, the family is destitute, one daughter (apparently) dies and another is kidnapped by Squire Thornhill, and George, the Vicar's eldest son, is imprisoned and likely to be sentenced to death. It is precisely at this point that Goldsmith resorts to *deus ex machina* to avert the tragic outcome that his novel's formal logic demands: the eccentric vagrant Mr. Burchell is revealed to be Squire Thornhill's benevolent uncle, Sir William, a counter-persecutory figure capable of distributing poetic justice, causing the obligatory marriages, and returning narrative to pastoral closure. Breezy as the novel may be, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is a marriage plot rather than a tragedy only due to this elaborate device. In order to ward off tragedy, it must betray the logic of its own causal processes, which up to the very end flow from Squire Thornhill's insatiable desire.

These narrative dynamics spread out across the tectonic divides of eighteenth-century fiction. As I will try to show, the persecutory plot disseminated itself across the customary division between the “formal realist” line of development and its antithesis in “romance” genres (the gothic novel, the oriental tale). My account begins with Daniel Defoe, a transitional figure between an older, picaresque model of narrative and the new, desire-driven paradigm. Though this historical tension is present in much of Defoe’s fiction, his *Moll Flanders* crystallizes it with particular precision. The novel begins as a picaresque—in which narrative is produced by external, impersonal contingency—and ends as a proto-persecutory plot—in which narrative is produced by a pathological subject of desire. Though not a full-fledged persecutory plot, *Moll Flanders* models the discovery that a plot’s causal structure can be organized around individual malignity. Richardson, again, is the high water mark of the persecutory plot, and much of his considerable influence can be understood as a series of emulations of and reactions to his

signature narrative form. After Richardson, many major novelists found distinctive ways of coming to terms with the persecutory plot. Henry Fielding's four major works of prose fiction, for example, are evenly split here: *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* manifest a kind of transitional compromise between the picaresque tradition of episodic narration and the later tradition of the desiring protagonist, if in the latter case introducing a villain (Blifil) to impede the hero's progress. The less-read Fielding, however, is more in line with Richardson: *Jonathan Wild* is a pristine example of the persecutory plot (see chapter one), and *Amelia*, though a more complicated novel, relies to a large degree on the persecutory machinations of Colonel James for its development.

In the oriental tale, especially in its English variant in the second half of the eighteenth century, we find a counter-realist genre that shows traces of the Richardsonian mode. Sometimes, as in Eliza Haywood's *Adventures of Eovaai*, oriental tales hew closely to the schema laid out above, displacing narrative desire from protagonist to villain. In other cases, including Frances Sheridan's *History of Nourjahad* and Beckford's *Vathek*, the oriental tale makes a more complicated negotiation with the persecutory plot, producing narrative by means of an insatiable, malignant figure, but choosing to focalize largely through this figure rather than his victims. (This superimposition of villain and protagonist perhaps anticipates the Byronic and Balzacian tradition of the demonic hero.) As I argue in chapter four, finally, the persecutory plot begins to fragment in the last decades of the eighteenth century, producing novels that react against the form even as they echo it. These reactions split into two major trajectories: Burney's and Austen's courtship novels, which maintain persecutory figures but confine them to subplots, and the gothic novel, which allows the function of the central persecutory villain to seep out into a large number of minor characters. One reaction contains and marginalizes persecution within

the narrative world, the other amplifies and metastasizes it. Some of the aesthetic highlights of the romantic novel, as I argue of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, can be read as deliberate, halting attempts to move beyond the Richardsonian pattern.

Sade, then, should be acknowledged as one of the great unrecognized critics of eighteenth-century fiction: his perverse appreciation for Richardson contains the germ of a revisionist narratological account of the period. As suggested by Sade, a simple transformation of the Greimasian model—investiture of narrative-producing desire in the villain rather than the protagonist—can shed new light on an entire century of British novels. A cast of characters that have tended to be peripheral in histories of those novels, in this new light, occupy a central position: criminals, rakes, oriental despots, gothic villains. In their restless, insatiable desire, these figures concentrate the uneasiness, at times the terror, with which eighteenth-century culture contemplated its emerging consensus about human wants.

### **3. Tragedy and the other Enlightenment**

The legacy of eighteenth-century economic thought and certain strands of eighteenth-century fiction can thus be seen to converge on a single concept: imaginary wants. Economic growth and plot development, within these parallel Enlightenment traditions, both rely on figures capable of desiring beyond the point of sufficiency and searching for enjoyment beyond the point of satiety. In very different ways, political economy and fiction posited a form of subjectivity capable of wants without limit. The tragic resonances of this conception have been noticed before: W. B. Carnochan, in a neglected minor classic of eighteenth-century criticism, argued for a pervasive thematics of “confinement and flight” in the period. From John Denham to Laurence

Sterne to William Blake, Carnochan identified a structure of feeling in which mental experience is described according to the metaphor of the prison. A finite mind inhabiting a finite body, according to this structure of feeling, is doomed to be closed off to an infinite beyond. Eighteenth-century writers aspired, for Carnochan, to feats of escape from this closure, but in all cases the carceral condition proved terminal.<sup>48</sup> This tragic vision of finitude can now be placed in its proper historical context: the triumph of imaginary wants, and the development of a form of economic organization demanding perpetual movement beyond limits.

To claim that desire emerged as a central problem in human experience only in the eighteenth century would, of course, be absurd. What did emerge, or at least become consolidated, was a new way of enmeshing desire in economic life. Desire—the haunting of the human organism by imaginary wants, the restless probing of experience for new spaces of enjoyment—became invested in concrete and quotidian activities of production and consumption. This saturation of economic life by desire could almost be described as a kind of eroticization of the economic. If the Freudian intellectual tradition is, as I find, useful for describing this transition, it is because many of the cultural theematics traditionally associated with sexuality—its supplanting of needs by wants, its staining of embodied satisfaction with an obscene excess—became attached in the eighteenth century to the market. As Eric Santner has argued, this market eroticization produced a distinctly modern experience of embodiment: that of the “busybody,” the subject plagued by an incessant imperative to productivity (and, I would add, enjoyment).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> W. B. Carnochan, *Confinement and Flight: An Essay on English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>49</sup> Santner et al., *The Weight of All Flesh: On the Subject-Matter of Political Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Lacan himself, in his obscure and oracular way, addressed the problem of market society in the last lectures of his 1959-1960 seminar on the “ethics of psychoanalysis.” Psychoanalysis, for Lacan, encounters a tragic dimension in subjectivity, a dimension rooted in the irresolvability of desire. This puts its function at odds with a prevailing ethos that Lacan calls “the service of goods” (*“service des biens”*): “Private goods, family goods, domestic goods, other goods that solicit us, the goods of our trade or our profession, the goods of the city, etc.” What Lacan seems to object to here is the collapse of the distinction between the ineffable, Platonic Good—the content-less endpoint of desire and action—and goods in the sense of consumer goods. The service of goods is thus the production and distribution of consumables, in the extended sense of the term suggested by Beckerian economics. Psychoanalysis is at risk of being drawn into this enterprise, since it seems to offer the most sought-after consumable of all, happiness. Yet, Lacan insists, its proper domain is desire, which continues to haunt societies that have achieved a very high efficiency in the service of goods: “The establishment of the service of goods at a universal level does not in itself resolve the problem of the present relationship of each individual man to his desire [ . . . ]”<sup>50</sup>

Desire thus, for Lacan, names an experience that seems to cling to life despite the best attempts of the economic and social development to remove it:

It is precisely to the extent that the demand always under- or overshoots itself that [ . . . ] it always demands something else; that in every satisfaction of a need, it insists on something else; that the satisfaction formulated spreads out and conforms to this gap; that desire is formed as something supporting this metonymy, namely, as something the demand means beyond whatever it is able to formulate.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Seminar VII*, 303

<sup>51</sup> *Seminar VII*, 294. I leave out a crucial element in this quote: “demand always under- or overshoots itself [ . . . ] because it articulates itself through the signifier [ . . . ]” My use of Lacan here bypasses his roots in Saussure not just for economy’s sake, but because I think his theory of desire can be understood just as well through the phenomenological tradition as through structuralist linguistics. The point cannot be argued here, but for the phenomenological Lacan, see “Beyond the ‘Reality Principle’,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton,

Desire names the gap between the subject's demand (*demande*, which in French as in English also has an economic usage) and the goods that purport to satisfy it. The perpetual falling-short of goods before the demands made of them creates an irresolvable impasse. The service of goods, once it has resolved the elemental human wants, proceeds to attempt to resolve this impasse by giving desire what it demands, not recognizing that this demand is formulated so as to supersede its object. This is also the error made by so many eighteenth-century villains: Moll Flanders, Lovelace, Vathek, and Ambrosio all believe that accumulation and use of goods—whether economic, sexual, or gustatory—will remove their elemental experience of want.

Psychoanalysis, in contrast, does not aim at resolving the impasse, but at achieving an accommodation with it. The same might be said for a certain kind of tragic moralizing endemic to the eighteenth century. Tragedy, for Lacan, is the genre that makes direct contact with the impasse of desire, the ineradicable gap between action and its fulfillment of wants. The great tragic figures—Antigone, Oedipus, Lear—are those who, due to circumstances, fall out of the service of goods and must directly address their desire.<sup>52</sup> Due to action's "fundamental failure to catch up" with desire, comedy is not exactly the opposite of tragedy but a different response to the same impasse: flight.<sup>53</sup> If tragedy dwells at the center of the experience of unrealizable desire, comedy dances lightly around it, disavowing its obduracy via manic activity. Thus the fact, for example, that Richardson's tragic villain, Lovelace, has a better sense of humor than everyone else in *Clarissa*. In relation to narrative form, comedy involves a return to pastoral

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2002), 58-74; and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 29-41.

<sup>52</sup> *Seminar VII*, 304-6.

<sup>53</sup> *Seminar VII*, 313-4.

closure, but this closure is always a tenuous negotiation with desire rather than a final resolution of its impasse. The comic and tragic modes thus operate in an ambiguous proximity.

In these terms, the familiar story of eighteenth-century political economy and economic development is a comic one: the theory and practice of the service of goods, during the period, was much improved, and more human wants were therefore satisfied. Gloomy moralizing, whether Johnsonian, Lacanian, or Marxist, should not cause us to entirely forget the advantages we continue to reap from this improvement. In this dissertation, however, I argue for the existence of another Enlightenment tradition that discerned, even as capitalist development was just starting to afford plenty, the limits of the comic account of wants. This counter-tradition was thus rooted in tragedy, or in the recognition of the irreducibility of wants. If I return to Lacan's thought as a reference point throughout this dissertation it is because—as an avid reader of Oliver Goldsmith, Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, and the Marquis de Sade—he was in some way a bearer of this other enlightenment tradition.

Johnson's Rasselas, in wanting nothing, encounters this tragic limit to the service of goods in an especially pure form: as an entirely content-less demand or sheer negation of lived experience. It is this content-less desire that causes him to escape the Happy Valley, a consumer society so opulent as to foreclose any but “imaginary wants.”<sup>54</sup> The moral of the narrative that follows is that none of the “choices of life” Rasselas surveys in his travels can remove the condition of wanting nothing. (A Beckerian might say: no consumption strategy will suffice to remove the possibility of further marginal utility.) Thus the novel’s famous “conclusion, in which nothing is concluded,” in which Rasselas and his companions return home having

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson himself uses the phrase to explain the inexplicable motivations behind the construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza; *Rasselas* 73. On Johnson and desire, see W. Jackson Bate, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 63-91; and Carnochan, *Confinement and Flight*, 147-70.

resolved simply to keep living. This inconclusive conclusion marks an arrival at something like the tragic psychoanalytic stance: that wants are interminable and happiness delusive, and that ethical maturity consists in coming to terms with these facts. Johnson's depressive Epicureanism—recommending variety, motion, sociability, but above all low expectations—should be read against a specific historical context: the accelerating development of a society fueled by imaginary wants. It is a response to a system of production that had seized on the kernel of want at the center of human experience, "the hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life," to promise a future of unlimited growth and perpetual enjoyment.<sup>55</sup> The fictions I attend to here are the products of an alternate enlightenment tradition that, along with Johnson, held that certain wants are not susceptible to alleviation by the service of goods. As long as partisans of the comic Enlightenment continue to maintain political and epistemological dominance, this other, tragic Enlightenment will remain worth fighting for.

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<sup>55</sup> *Rasselas*, 73.

## I. Moll's bundles: desire, tragi-comedy, and criminality in Defoe

Daniel Defoe begins *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders* (1722) with an apology. The famous pickpocket, “suppos’d to be writing her own History,” has written her life story in a “Stile” more appropriate for Newgate than for polite society. Her text has thus required significant editorial intervention.

The Pen employ’d in finishing her Story, and making it what you now see it to be, has had no little difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen, and to make it speak Language fit to be read: When a woman debauch’d from her Youth [ . . . ] comes to give an Account of all her vicious Practises [ . . . ] an Author must be hard put to wrap it up so clean, as not to give room, especially for vicious Readers to turn it to his Disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

The metaphor here is a textile one: Moll’s crude writing has been dressed or wrapped in a more palatable exterior. As G. A. Starr points out in his edition of the novel, the metaphor was habitual for Defoe: *Conjugal Lewdness* (1727) begins similarly, by puzzling “how to expose Modestly Things which ‘tis hardly Modest so much as to mention, and which must require abundance of clean Linnen to wrap them up in.” (*MF* 348 n. 3) In both cases, unseemly matter is swaddled by the “clean” exterior of Defoe’s prose. The first image Defoe provides us with in *Moll Flanders*, then, is that of the bundle. Bundling is a way of hiding something in plain sight: it provides a “clean,” illegible exterior to an invisible substance. Its outer cleanliness, according to the logic of Defoe’s metaphor, is precisely the mark of its inner filth. This image will turn out to be of the utmost importance in the “History” that follows. In fact, I want to argue that it is the central motif in an entire constellation of economic thought.

This chapter will consider Defoe’s contribution to the genre of crime narrative. Crime writing in its various forms—court reports, the ordinary of Newgate’s “Accounts” of condemned

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. G. A. Starr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1. Subsequently cited in the text as *MF*.

criminals, “last dying speeches” of the executed, broadside ballads, and criminal biographies—has long been recognized as a crucial part of the genealogy of the early British novel. Strange as it may sound, this body of writing also arguably constituted the most prolific engagement with the question of economic acquisitiveness to appear in the British press during the 1710s and 1720s. In figuring the rapacious, insatiable desires of highwaymen, house-breakers, and pickpockets, crime narrative raises questions about the nature of acquisitive desire that were simultaneously assuming a distinctive urgency in economic discourse.<sup>2</sup> Defoe’s work provides an unparalleled case for addressing such correspondences: he was simultaneously an energetic theorist and proponent of economic and social transformations brought about by the rise of capitalist production in Britain, and the first master of the Anglophone crime novel.

This chapter will argue that *Moll Flanders* can be taken as central to Defoe’s economic vision. *The Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) has traditionally been granted this distinction. *Moll Flanders*, however, supersedes its predecessor by offering an essentially tragic model of economic subjectivity. That is, a model in which economic accumulation reliably fails to result in the accumulation of a livable world, and in which the act of acquisition itself is experienced as essentially traumatic and alien. This negative phenomenology of accumulation opens up a tragic dimension in *Moll Flanders*, a dimension that resonates with Jacques Lacan’s theory of desire.

I will begin by defining some of the salient features of the criminal biography genre as Defoe inherited it: its preoccupation with precarious proletarian life, its narratological negotiations between picaresque and providential genres, and its tonal suspension of tragic and comic modes. Defoe’s reception of this tradition, I will argue, incorporates these generic and

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<sup>2</sup> Mandeville’s 1714 version of *Fable of the Bees*, for instance, appeared in the same year as the most significant collection of criminal biographies of the 1710s.

modal tendencies but reorganizes them around the criminal's desire—a procedure that makes Moll Flanders emerge as an early prototype of what I call the persecutory villain. I will follow the theme of theft through Defoe's writings on trade, which, like *Moll Flanders*, propose an account of economic action as fundamentally subjected to contingency. Turning to Defoe's descriptive technique, I will use Lacan's theory of the gaze to explicate the function of a central object in the novel: the bundle. In *Moll Flanders*, I will argue, the bundle is the economic object *par excellence*, and the scenes in which Moll pilfers bundles thus depict most vividly the novel's negative model of economic subjectivity. Finally, I will turn briefly to Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, a novel that carries Defoe's innovations in the crime narrative genre forward into the 1740s, the heroic decade of the early British novel.

## 1. The picaresque, the providential, the tragi-comic

A 1728 first-person criminal biography titled *Street Robberies Consider'd* offers a useful instance of generic self-identification: "I shall make an End of this Tragi-Comedy, with a word or two concerning Shoplifts . . ."<sup>3</sup> Though this is the only instance I have found of a crime narrative identifying itself as tragi-comic, I wish to argue that proximity between tragedy and comedy was, at a narratological level, a constitutive feature of the early eighteenth-century criminal biography.<sup>4</sup> These two opposed terms can, in part, be construed here in their customary senses: the criminal biography is a genre in which capers, jests, and feats of carefree derring-do

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, *Street Robberies Consider'd: The Reason of Their being so Frequent, with Probable Means to Prevent 'em* (London: 1728), 70. This robbery-prevention treatise and fictional autobiography was long thought to have been written by Defoe, but has been de-attributed by P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens. See *Defoe De-Attributions: A Critique of J. R. Moore's Checklist* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 146.

<sup>4</sup> Lincoln Faller notices this same generic affiliation in *Street Robberies Consider'd*, but situates it within a division between "serious" and "non-serious" currents in criminal biography, the former concerned with granting narrative depth to the lives of criminals, the latter with roguish picaresque adventure. I do not find this unambiguous distinction to be fully attuned to the tonal and formal tendencies of the criminal biography genre. *Crime and Defoe: A New Kind of Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.

occur against the background of an inexorable progress toward the gallows. Their specific meanings in Lacanian theory, however, should also be born in mind. For Lacan, tragedy is a mode of discourse that holds itself in proximity to the irreducible impasse of desire and thus to the non-functional core of the subject, comedy a mode that improvises ways of slipping away, if only temporarily, from this impasse.

*Street Robberies Consider'd* makes the proximity of the two modes clear from the very beginning. The narrator, like Moll Flanders, is born in Newgate, where his mother is serving time for shoplifting. A remarkable passage, retrospectively narrated in *utero*, foreshadows his later success as a pickpocket and shoplifter:

However, I was growing on to be a fine Child in my Mother's Belly, for I did so Jump and Caper in my Prison, within a Prison, that my Mother us'd to tell me afterwards, she always thought I should prove a stirring Babe, and a good Bustler in the World.<sup>5</sup>

The fetal criminal is doubly imprisoned in walls of stone and walls of flesh. His behavior in this prison within a prison, however, is of a piece with his later manic acquisitive activity: he is a “bustler” in the womb as in the world. W. B. Carnochan’s classic study *Confinement and Flight* argued that such images indicate a persistent structure of feeling in eighteenth-century literature, a sense of human life as unbearably finite, walled in by the impassable inertia of the given.<sup>6</sup> The body of the criminal, as figured in criminal biographies, tends to follow the pattern laid out here: within the privative economic, social, and physical constraints imposed on her existence, she stirs and bustles. In the tragi-comic criminal biography, the protagonist is almost always a locus of manic energy and competence, of bustle, in a privative environment. Tragedy tends to gain the upper hand when the criminal’s manic competence passes the threshold beyond which the world

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<sup>5</sup> *Street Robberies Consider'd*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Confinement and Flight: An Essay on English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

can no longer support it. Tyburn, with its notorious “triple tree,” exerts an inexorable gravitational pull in these narratives, as if a tragic black hole toward which criminal life is drawn.

Discussions of the lineage between crime writing and the early novel have often described the crime narrative as a genre that articulates a relationship between the individual life and the social, ethical, and institutional background against which it emerges. John Richetti, in a seminal discussion, argues that criminal biography is a genre that negotiates between “the new secular world of action and freedom and the old religious values of passivity and submission.” The form of the criminal narrative, in Richetti’s account, allows it to inhabit both sides of this opposition: in the criminal’s exploits, the modern ethic of “secular freedom and economic self-determination” asserts itself, but never without being “severely and decisively punished”—punished that is, by the inevitable appearance of Tyburn’s triple tree.<sup>7</sup> John Bender has approached similar issues from within a Foucauldian framework, arguing that the early criminal novel articulates the “penitentiary idea”: that an individual life can be made available to surveillance and control through its minute embedding in realist narrative.<sup>8</sup> Hal Gladfelter, most recently, has adopted this line of thought, but inverted its valence. For Gladfelter, the transgressive energies embodied in the criminal’s actions are the true subject of criminal biography, investing the genre with a “pathological” dynamism that its providential and punitive devices fail to fully contain.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700-1739* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). See also Lennard Davis’ argument that the criminal biography simultaneously solicits both identification and disavowal between criminal and reader. Davis argues, furthermore that such illicit identification is homologous with transgressive nature, in the early eighteenth century, of fictional narrative itself. *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 123-137. For an acute discussion of crime writing and masculinity, see Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

One critical tradition, then, holds that the criminal biography articulates the impasse between an unusually competent, intelligent, and willful protagonist and the social, legal, and economic forces that condition her existence—between the bustling, manic criminal and her prison within a prison. Crime narrative, in this account, operates along the fault line between autonomy and heteronomy. The historian Peter Linebaugh, in the course of his magisterial treatment of crime and proletarian life in the eighteenth century, offers a useful term for these narrative dynamics and social group they pertain to: the “picaresque proletariat.” Linebaugh traces the picaresque from its Spanish origins, through the Ordinary’s “Accounts,” and to *Moll Flanders*, suggesting that the genre has an affinity for representing populations that lack a reliable means of reproducing their form of life.<sup>10</sup> This is quite as true, in Linebaugh’s account, of sailors and itinerant laborers as of Lazarillo de Tormes or Roderick Random. If precarity was a dominant feature of proletarian experience in the proto-industrial phase of capitalist development, then the picaresque—with its emphasis on mobility, luck, and haphazard getting by—provided a narrative mode attuned to that experience.

Gladfelter confirms this insight from a literary-historical perspective by tracing the genres of early eighteenth-century crime writing back to a dual set of tendencies in early-modern narrative: the picaresque and the providential. On one hand, the picaresque narrates a form of motion through the world that is precarious and contingent, maintaining an elliptical relation to ethical and legal norms. On the other, providential narrative (notably John Reynolds’ *The Triumph of God’s Revenge*, a 1621 book documenting crimes and their divine punishments) neatly aligns transgressive sin and the punishment it incurs as cause and necessary effect.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2003), 119-122. In solid Marxian fashion, Linebaugh appends the caveat that picaresque experience is basically individual while proletarian experience is basically collective.

<sup>11</sup> *Criminality and Narrative*, 33-44.

picaresque and the providential might be described as two regimes of narrative causation: one in which causal relations are sporadic and unpredictable, another in which narrative is saturated by the gradual approach of a foregone conclusion. There is genealogical reason to think, then, that criminal biography had an especially lively relation to an elemental narrative problem: that of contingency and necessity.

To outline the tragi-comic narrative structure of the criminal biography, I will take as an exemplary case Captain Alexander Smith's *A Complete History of the Lives and Robberies of the most Notorious Highwaymen, Footpads, Shoplifts, and Cheats of both Sexes*. This collection, the most significant effort in the criminal biography genre before Defoe's novels of the 1720s, first appeared in 1714, and went through a number of expanded editions in the second half of the decade. (The text I cite here is the three-volume fifth edition of 1719-20.) Smith's collection, in its fully expanded form, comprises over 100 narratives of criminal lives, a few of them well-known (the celebrity highwaymen James Hind and Claude du Val, for instance), most of them obscure. The collection is highly formulaic, but there is, I will argue, a rigorous generic logic to its formulae. On the strength of its consolidation of decades of criminal writing, as well as its popularity, Smith's compendium can be taken as an archetypal introduction to the characteristics of the criminal biography genre as Defoe inherited it.

The vast majority of the narratives included in *A Complete History of the Highwaymen* have roughly the same formula: an episodic narrative that strings together notable feats of criminal activity, capped by eventual capture and execution. Though source material regarding, for instance, reformed or transported criminals would likely have been available to Smith, it is only the hanged who truly interest him. (The same, prior to Defoe, can be said of the criminal biography genre at large.) It is thus the progress of the criminal toward Tyburn that gives Smith's

narratives their underlying structure. “Progress,” however, should not be taken here in its Hogarthian sense, as a serial accretion of causes building toward an inevitable catastrophe.<sup>12</sup> Criminal life, for Smith, is resolutely picaresque, consisting of a sequence of situations encountered and negotiated, a chain of contingent circumstances placed in apposition to one another. A graceless stylistic tic that Smith often uses to initiate a new episode indicates the essentially picaresque, which is to say the essentially contingent and modular, structure of the narrative event: “One time . . .”; “Another time . . .” The incident that follows such invocations reliably has the quality of both narrative autonomy (independence from and, to some degree, interchangeability with other episodes, non-participation in any larger causal sequence) and of accident (an unfolding circumstance to which the criminal must improvise a response).

The contingent causality that composes the body of each of Smith’s narratives, however, reaches its limit with the arrival of each criminal at Tyburn’s triple tree (or the corresponding destination in the provinces). The narratives conclude, almost ritualistically, with a kind of death knell:

[. . .] he was hanged at York on Saturday, the 15<sup>th</sup> March, in 1684, aged 45 years.  
[. . .] no mercy being obtained for him, he was executed at Warwick, on Saturday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 1713, aged 29 years  
[. . .] she was committed to Bedford gaol, and at the summer assizes held there in 1715, being cast for her life, and condemned, she was deservedly hanged in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of her age.<sup>13</sup>

The termination of each criminal’s career in hanging sutures Smith’s episodic narration into a larger pattern of inevitable retribution. Underlying the improvised, sporadic capers of each individual criminal is a current of inexorability, a horizon of necessity that makes disparate

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<sup>12</sup> See John Bender’s argument that William Hogarth’s serial prints embed criminal life in a narrative causal structure resembling that of the novel. *Imagining the Penitentiary*, 114-136.

<sup>13</sup> Captain Alexander Smith, *A Complete History of the Lives and Robberies of the most notorious Highwaymen, Footpads, Shoplifts, and Cheats of Both Sexes*, ed. Arthur L. Hayward (London: Routledge, 1926), 30, 223, 473. Subsequently cited in the text as *CH*.

individual lives appear as having the same shape. Early in the collection, this narrative structure is often given explicit religious content in a way that recalls the seventeenth-century tales of providential punishment that Gladfelter discusses. A highwayman named Jack Withers, for example, accomplishes a series of roguish depredations in Flanders and around London, but is finally captured and convicted after committing a violent murder:

[. . .] at the place of execution at Thetford, on Saturday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, 1703, Withers confessed the murder aforesaid. Thus may we see God's goodness in bringing murder always out; for though a murderer may escape for some short time, nay, sometimes for many years, yet will God's judgment overtake the bloody offender at last, and bring him to condign punishment. (*CH* 66)

Such providential reflections project a structure of causal necessity backward onto the preceding narrative, allowing Withers' aimless, opportunistic wanderings to assume a definite shape: the shape granted by an impending divine retribution that turns out to have been immanent all along. However, such explicit providential discourse falls away by the end of the first volume of Smith's collection, as if the refrain of conviction and hanging were accomplishing an identical feat of narrative closure in a secular register.

Smith's narrative formula, crude as it may be, can thus be thought of as a compromise between picaresque and providential regimes of causality. Smith's narratives also tend to assiduously track a related problem: the limits of masterful activity in the world. The criminal-as-pícaro is a notable person—a narratable person—not just because of his exceptional cunning, but because this cunning is deployed in response to a contingent circumstances, whether a chance meeting with a wealthy traveler on the highway or persistent conditions of dispossession. The aforementioned Jack Withers' narrative, for example, begins in properly picaresque fashion, with the protagonist serving as a soldier in Flanders during the Nine Years War, “his belly being often full of emptiness.” Withers wanders into a church in Ghent and spies a collection box

under a picture of the Madonna, a sight that makes “his fingers itch to be fingering the coin.” He proceeds to pick the box’s lock and pockets the tithes therein, only to be detected when some of the coins drop noisily to the floor. In these dire straits, however, Withers engineers a way out, claiming that his act was prompted not by acquisitiveness, but by a miracle: the image of the Virgin beckoned him, he claims, to relieve his want with her tithes. The story, predictably, goes over quite well, and Withers is released with his loot. (CH 63) In a characteristically picaresque procedure, Withers’ canny stratagem inverts a situation of deprivation and exposure into an instance of triumph. Though Smith’s criminals are often cunning, their *savoir-faire* tends to exist, like Withers’, in proximity to that which is outside their control, along the fault line between mastery and non-sovereignty. And the providential narrative structure that ensures their eventual demise constitutes an ultimate limit on this mastery, a horizon beyond which picaresque improvisation avails no further.

A certain tonal inscrutability characterizes many of Smith’s narratives, in which criminals can appear as roguish trickster figures on one page and commit stunningly violent crimes on the next. The fifth edition, almost as if to establish this instability from the beginning, begins with the stories of two medieval highwaymen. The second is named Thomas Dun, the first is one Sir John Falstaff. The Falstaff narrative consists in a series of more or less lighthearted jests, mostly cribbed directly from Shakespeare’s plays, with a few original interpolations. In Falstaff we are offered an archetypal vision of the criminal as a trickster figure, and criminal activity as cheerful hustle, alternating between duping of the unwary and wiggling out of jams. With Thomas Dun’s narrative, however, we immediately encounter a very different kind of highwayman. Apparently both an exceedingly vigorous and an exceedingly violent individual, Dun needlessly murders scores of robbery victims, and at one point hangs a dozen sheriff’s officers sent to apprehend him

and his gang. Smith's collection begins, then, by oscillating between comic and tragic visions of criminal life: between the criminal as canny but ultimately harmless *bon vivant* and the criminal as dangerously, radically transgressive; between violence in the form of slapstick and violence in the form of irreparable, purposeless harm.<sup>14</sup>

The antithesis between the tragic and the comic established in these two medieval narratives recurs endlessly through the rest of the three volumes. At times, the membrane that separates the two modes becomes quite thin. Isaac Atkinson, an Oxford dropout, executes a series of robberies that seem light-hearted enough—a bed trick, some wordplay with a parson, a highway robbery interrupted by equine lust—only to finally be captured after savagely murdering five pursuers. Patrick O'Bryan, an Irish footpad and highwayman, spends the first part of his career engaged in humorous capers (gambling with a parson in mid-robbery, surprising a smitten young poet as he recites amorous verses). His culminating feat, however, is a horrific murder, rape, and arson, to which an entire household falls victim. (*CH* 300-4, 164-67) The criminal biography, in Smith's hands, is fully capable of accommodating both slapstick and radical violence, tricksterism and rapacity; indeed, it seems to bring the two currents into extreme proximity without so much as an ironizing gesture. While it is true that a more accomplished writer might have rendered such modal elasticity less glaring, the crucial point is that the logic of the genre, as Smith consolidates it, encodes both the tragic and the comic.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Sandra Macpherson's account of the comic and the tragic as narrative modes that take up different positions in relation to the question of harm: as exculpable and dissoluble within sentimentalized social relations, as irreversible and demanding an affirmation of responsibility. *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most pristine example of such modal instability in eighteenth-century crime writing is found in the final scene of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. The play is justly famous for, rather literally, its gallows humor, which is to say its quality of tonal indeterminacy between tragic and comic modes. The conclusion provides a formal precipitate of this modal instability when an impending tragic denouement (Macheath's execution) is abruptly displaced by a comic one (his reprieve and the revelation of his marriage to Polly Peachum, celebrated by one last rousing musical number). It is almost as if the two endings were occurring simultaneously, providing a fitting formal closure to the work's tragi-comic procedures.

The early eighteenth-century criminal biography, if we take Smith's encyclopedic collection as adequately representative, was structured by a set of unstable polarities at the levels of narrative form, characterization, and tone: the picaresque (contingent causality, episodic narration) and the providential (inexorable causality, narrative closure); mastery (auto-determination) and non-sovereignty (environmental determination); the comic (criminal as trickster) and the tragic (criminal as source of meaningless harm). These are some of the central features of the genre as Defoe inherited it in the 1720s. Two important developments occurred in Defoe's reception of this tradition: first, Defoe's preternatural gift for description allowed him to produce a phenomenological account of criminal acquisition, an account that discerned a tragic dimension in economic subjectivity. Second, without necessarily intending to, Defoe brought the question of criminality into extensive contact with the question of trade.

Among the many female criminals in Smith's collection who have features in common with Moll Flanders, a pickpocket named Nan Hereford stands out. Nan begins her career by scamming a wealthy apothecary into marrying her with skillfully unarticulated promises of an illusory fortune. Like Moll with Mother Midnight, she has an important criminal partnership with an older woman. After the episode of husband-baiting, Nan turns to pickpocketing to support her lover, who, like Moll's Jemy, is a highwayman. (Moll, of course, also begins her criminal career as a husband-baiter and ends it as a pickpocket.) Both Moll and Nan, finally, are apprehended at last when they are caught carrying off textiles from, respectively, a merchant's house and a mercer's shop. The most striking resemblance, however, occurs in a scene in which Nan's prospective husband, in a show of generosity and confidence, drops 250 guineas into her lap. (CH 348) There is a strong resonance here with the well-known scene in *Moll Flanders* in which one of Moll's lovers almost forcibly transfers a similar number of guineas from his coffers

into her hands and lap—beyond the surface similarities, both scenes conflate economic, erotic, and affective bonds in the same bewildering way. For these reasons, I submit the Nan Hereford narrative, which to my knowledge has not received attention from Defoe scholars, to the catalogue of possible source texts for *Moll Flanders*.<sup>16</sup> What can be firmly established, in any case, is Defoe's inheritance and development of the tragi-comic, picaresque, and providential currents in the criminal biography genre that Smith worked in.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Fortune, mastery, and the picaresque

We have become accustomed to regarding *Robinson Crusoe* as Defoe's major fictional statement on economic acquisitiveness. This tradition goes back at least as far as Marx, who posits Crusoe's island as a workshop, and his activities as constituting the most elementary mode of production possible:

As political economists are fond of Robinson Crusoe stories, let us first look at Robinson on his island. Undemanding though he is by nature, he still has needs to satisfy, and must therefore perform useful labours of various kinds: he must make tools, knock together furniture, tame llamas [sic], fish, hunt, and so on. [...] Despite the diversity of his productive functions, he knows that they are only different forms of activity of one and the same Robinson, hence only different modes of human labour. Necessity itself compels him to divide his time with precision between his different functions. [...] All the relations between Robinson and these objects that form his self-created wealth are

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<sup>16</sup> The most commonly cited argument about source material for *Moll Flanders* is Gerald Howson's argument that Defoe based his novel on a real-life case of a transported criminal he wrote about for *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*. The attribution of the writings in Applebee's *Journal* to Defoe has since been called into question, making this claim problematic. See "Who Was Moll Flanders?," *Times Literary Supplement* 3438 (January 18, 1968), 63. Lincoln Faller has also advanced the argument that some resemblance can be discerned between the incident in which Moll impersonates a Duchess and the narrative of Mary Jones in *A Complete History of the Highwaymen*. See *Crime and Defoe*, 143-144.

<sup>17</sup> We can know with near certainty, in any case, that Smith was reading Defoe. One of the final narratives included in *A Complete History of the Highwaymen* recounts the life of Zachary Moulton, a highwayman turned pirate. The centerpiece of the narrative is a miniature Robinsonade in which Moulton is marooned on an island in the North Sea, living on seagulls and eggs. The descriptive language here differs slightly from the rest of the book, tinged with the kind of minute proceduralist detail that Defoe is now renowned for. Smith, furthermore, forgoes his usual terse title for one that bears a close resemblance to that of Defoe's first novel: "The Life and Surprising Adventures of Zachary Moulton, A Pirate." (CH 564-69) Given that the third volume of the fifth edition of Smith's collection appeared in 1720, and that the most recent executions recorded therein occur in June, 1719 (after *Robinson Crusoe*'s publication in April of that year) the likelihood that Smith is emulating Defoe in the Moulton narrative seems high.

here so simple and transparent that even Mr. Sedley Taylor could understand them. And yet those relations contain all the essential determinants of value.<sup>18</sup>

Free of the social relations that would orient his productivity toward networks of subjugation, collectivity, or commodity exchange, Crusoe differentially invests his labor-time to produce differentially valued objects. Crusoe resembles primitive economic man as he appears in the notes on pre-capitalist economic formations found in the *Grundrisse*: appropriating the “inorganic” matter of the earth into his “organic” extended body, he establishes a relationship of hard-won mastery to his environment.<sup>19</sup> Ian Watt differs from Marx by arguing that Crusoe’s story is more modern and more capitalist than a surface reading would suggest.<sup>20</sup> Whether capitalist or pre-capitalist, however, Crusoe offers us an image of economic accumulation as environmental mastery. Labor, in this vision, wrests out of a contingent and hostile environment an ever-expanding sphere of material stability, a sliver of world available to the self’s control and enjoyment.

Only a few years elapsed after the publication of *Crusoe* before the appearance of *Moll Flanders*, a novel arguably just as preoccupied with the accumulation of worldly goods as its predecessor. The latter novel, however, offers a different, and darker, phenomenology of acquisition. In *Moll Flanders*, acquisitive activity, no matter how masterful, consistently fails to guarantee the accumulation of a stable, reproducible world. A novel of Linebaugh’s picaresque proletariat, the forms of economic activity it depicts are more properly described as hustle than accumulation. More fundamentally, the novel investigates the relation of the acquisitive subject to the objects of her accumulation. In *Robinson Crusoe*, “mastery” is an apt characterization of

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 169-70.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1993), 417-514.

<sup>20</sup> *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 63-74.

this relation. The same cannot be said of *Moll Flanders*. It is therefore perhaps ultimately more attuned to the capitalist mode of production, which is, as Marx puts it a few pages after his discussion of Crusoe, “a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite.”<sup>21</sup> I will, for these reasons, hazard the critical experiment of placing Moll, not Crusoe, at the center of Defoe’s economic vision.

There is a strong critical tradition of situating Defoe within an accumulative theory of subjectivity. John Richetti’s study of Defoe’s fiction, though now several decades old, remains perhaps the most searching study of the contours of subjectivity in the novels. Richetti breaks with the heavily biographical and intellectual-historical tradition of Defoe criticism, arguing that Defoe was essentially a kind of dialectician: “[. . .] the real movement of Defoe’s novels is not simply toward the determinants of character but rather toward the depiction of a dialectic between self and other which has as its end a covert but triumphant assertion of the self.”<sup>22</sup> For Richetti as for Marx, the development of the Defoean protagonist is a movement toward dominance of an external environment, an assertion of “the self as master.” Richetti’s dialectical approach, however, makes an important qualification: that the material out of which such mastery is fashioned is none other than contingency itself. In *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, the providential structure of narrative causality bears an inner relation to contingency: “Just as God co-operates with natural process and even employs disasters to further his mysterious ends, Crusoe finds meaning in flux [. . .] and converts disaster and accident into fortune and plan.” Defoe’s protagonists, then, are characterized by “free action in the context of compelling

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<sup>21</sup> *Capital*, 175. For a programmatic explication of this idea Lacanian terms, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 3-55.

<sup>22</sup> John Richetti, *Defoe’s Narratives: Situations and Structures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 96.

circumstances”—a narrative pattern which, I have argued, descends at least in part from the criminal biography tradition.<sup>23</sup>

The economic and historical coordinates of this Defoean self-other dialectic can be brought into view by recalling J. G. A. Pocock’s description of the Machiavellian inheritance in eighteenth-century economic thought. Pocock influentially argued that a wide array of eighteenth-century debates—debates we now regard as marking the emergence of capitalist production—must be understood within the long Western history of the opposition between “fortune” and “virtue,” and in particular the Florentine secularization of this opposition. According to this argument, the medieval, Augustinian/Boethian conception of *fortuna*—the irrational, directionless flux that characterizes secular historical time—retained a roughly consistent function from the patristic period through the Enlightenment. The resources available to individuals seeking refuge from *fortuna*, however, underwent a decisive theoretical shift during the Florentine Renaissance: from Boethian *virtus* (philosophical disengagement from the fortunes and misfortunes of secular history) to Machiavellian *virtù* (skillful seizing of opportunity and dominance of *fortuna* within the unstable theater of secular time). As Pocock’s argument runs, this Machiavellian conception of virtue became a crucial element in the anti-Whig discourse of the Augustan Britain. The Florentine inheritance can also, however, be discerned in certain Whiggish polemicists, tacitly shaping both sides of the argument.<sup>24</sup> Defoe in particular seems to introduce a complication into the argument: his colorful depiction, in the *Review*, of a capricious character named Lady Credit is, as Pocock points out, clearly of Boethian

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<sup>23</sup> Defoe’s *Narratives*, 40, 116.

<sup>24</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

provenance.<sup>25</sup> Defoe, then, is a central figure in the Augustan reception of the Machiavellian tradition, but also a problematic one: he seems fully capable of exploiting for Whiggish ends a tradition that, in Pocock's view, is basically conservative in nature.<sup>26</sup>

Though Pocock's account does not extend to Defoe's fiction, the full title of his second major novel promises a programmatic elaboration of the Boethian/Machiavellian inheritance: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders . . .* The title page of *Robinson Crusoe* had posited the novel's characteristic procedure as the “adventure”: for both merchants and protagonists of novels, a form of action that wagers exposure to contingency against the gains to be made by the mastery thereof, in which the protagonist seeks to harness *fortuna* in order to place herself outside of it. *Moll Flanders*, in contrast, identifies itself as wholly taking place within the turbulence of secular time.<sup>27</sup> At one point, while waiting in Bath for remittances from her husband-turned-brother in Virginia, Moll actively puns on the economic and providential double meaning of the term “fortune”: “being now, *as it were*, a Woman of Fortune, tho’ I was a Woman without a Fortune, I expected something, or other might happen in my way, that might mend my Circumstances [ . . . ]” (*MF* 106) Though the terms “woman of fortune” and “woman without fortune” are placed in syntactic opposition, they can in fact be taken as roughly

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<sup>25</sup> *Machiavellian Moment*, 452-56. For a different reading of Defoe's Lady Credit that emphasizes her sexualized and fabulative properties, see Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40-54. Not dissimilarly, John O'Brien discusses Lady Credit as a point at which gendered and political notions of “inconsistency” converge: “The Character of Credit: Defoe's ‘Lady Credit,’ *The Fortunate Mistress*, and the Resources of Inconsistency in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *ELH* 63.3 (1996), 603-31. For a brief and useful introduction to the figure, see Paula Backscheider, “Defoe's Lady Credit,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44.2 (1981), 89-100.

<sup>26</sup> To some degree, I here follow Christian Thorne's argument that the Machiavellian concept of fortune, in the early eighteenth century, was used to describe the newly precarious social relations brought about by the consolidation of capitalist production. I demur, however, from his broader view that both “fortune” and “providence” are essentially residual terms within the eighteenth-century novel: as I will argue, both terms can be viewed as central to *Moll Flanders*, in so many ways a staggeringly modern book. Christian Thorne, “Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident If You Please,” *MLQ* 64.3 (2003), 323-47.

<sup>27</sup> On fortune, adventure, and *Robinson Crusoe*, see Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (London: Verso, 2013), 25-29.

synonymous: to be without a reliable means of reproducing one's existence is to be subject to the vicissitudes of Lady Fortune's wheel. In this predicament, Moll resorts to a mode of being that remains characteristic of her through the novel: "expecting something or other," actively anticipating an event that she must receive passively, and the nature of which is invisible to her. What Moll "expects" and intends to turns to her ends is precisely "something or other," which is to say, the contingent.

Moll's management of contingency contrasts markedly with the accumulative structure of action in *Robinson Crusoe*. If Robinson fires a pot, fells a tree, or tames a goat, his action incrementally extends the field of his control over the environment, and provides a basis for further extensions. *Moll Flanders*, in contrast, proceeds largely via picaresque procedures, and Moll's actions therefore function quite differently as causal processes.<sup>28</sup> Over the course of the novel, Moll narrates (by my count) eight affairs and 26 criminal actions.<sup>29</sup> Though Defoe's technique is measurelessly more sophisticated than Alexander Smith's, the novel essentially retains the episodic structure of the criminal biographies it descends from. Prior to the final reunion with Jemy, each of the marriages or conjugal arrangements that Moll engages in during the first half of the novel dissolves: two by death, two by economic insolvency, one by a change of heart, one by the famous revelation of incest. In each case, Moll is essentially left in the same situation of precarity in which she began. The criminal portion of her life is even more episodic,

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<sup>28</sup> For confirmation of *Moll Flanders*' affinities with the picaresque, see Tina Kuhlisch, "The Ambivalent Rogue: Moll Flanders as Modern *Pícaro*," in *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, ed. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 337-60, and Richard Bjornson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977). For dissenting opinions, to the effect that the novel's realism violates the conventions of the picaresque, see Max Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 67, and Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 94-5.

<sup>29</sup> There is reason to believe, in both cases, that these numbers are too modest. In addition to many crimes alluded to elliptically but never narrated, Moll offers the following head-count at a point in the novel at which we have only known her to sleep with six men: "Then it occurr'd to me what an abominable Creature am I! [ . . . ] one that has lain with thirteen Men [ . . . ]" (MF 182)

a sequence of situations encountered and capers undertaken placed in apposition to one another. Like a true pícara, Moll moves through a world designed for and managed by others without seeming to accumulate a world of her own. It is only in the final pages of the novel, narrating Moll and Jemy's arrival in Virginia and consolidation of both family ties and plantations, that wealth and world begin to accumulate in a reliable way.

All of this is not to say that Moll is not a masterful tamer of fortune, which she certainly is, but that her mastery takes the form of an improvised response to the world as it is given to her. For example: in the delicate position of being courted by one brother and kept as a mistress by another in the family where she is in service, Moll manages to negotiate a marriage on amicable terms with both parties. Faced with a bad marriage market when living in London after the death of her first husband, she acquires a husband through an extraordinary act of tact, tacitly acting as if she possessed a fortune she does not. After the catastrophic revelation that her third husband is in fact her brother, though personally devastated, Moll nevertheless manages to secure remittances from her brother and mother in Virginia. And at the end of the novel, upon missing a ship bound for Carolina, where she and Jemy were to have started a plantation, she comes up with another just as good near the Chesapeake Bay. In each case, an adverse circumstance is deflected into a fortunate one, in a movement that neither accepts nor rejects a situation as it is given, but makes a kind of negotiation with it. And in each case save the last one, Moll's capitulation with the given turns out to be temporary.

Franco Moretti joins Marx and Richetti in arguing for an accumulative structure of subjectivity in Defoe. He bases his case in part on a particular grammatical structure omnipresent in *Robinson Crusoe*: past gerund, past tense, infinitive. ("[. . .] and having stowed my boat very safe, I went on shore to look about me [. . .]"') Moretti identifies this sequence as corresponding

to a distinctively “bourgeois” temporality: one in which the relation of the past to the present is linear and non-reversible (but not therefore teleological), and in which time progresses via instrumentality (via the relation of facilitation that one action bears to the next).<sup>30</sup> *Moll Flanders* abounds with the past gerund, and, though perhaps not so plentifully as *Robinson Crusoe*, contains some instances of the gerund-past-infinitive structure: “having dragg’d the heavy thing with much a-do out of the Chamber into mine; I went out into the Street, to see if I could find any possibility of carrying it off.” (*MF* 264) At times, however, this grammatical sequence narrates an event in which the world manages Moll, rather than the other way around: “the elder Brother, having thus manag’d me, his next business was to Manage his Mother.” (*MF* 57) Most strikingly, Moll adopts the sequence to describe the moment at which she succumbs to temptation and initiates sex with her Bath lover:

having drank, I think, a little more Wine that Night, both of us, than usual [ . . . ] after some other follies which I cannot name, and being clasp’d close in his Arms, *I told him, (I repeat it with shame and horror of Soul)* that I cou’d find in my Heart to discharge him of his Engagement [to abstain from sex] for one Night and no more. (*MF* 116)

Having drank, I told him, I could discharge.<sup>31</sup> This instrumental sequence operates according to forces (alcoholic and libidinal) that are not subject to Moll’s control. Actions continue to have an instrumental and linear relation to one another, but their operations take place without the intention of their agent. In *Moll Flanders*, then, the same stylistic tic that narrates adventure can also narrate the protagonist’s subjection to fortune, recording not a gradual extension of mastery over the external environment, but her instrumentalization by her own passions.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Bourgeois*, 51-58.

<sup>31</sup> This sentence, it is true, departs slightly from the gerund-past-infinitive structure in that the infinitive “to discharge” is modified by the modal verb “could.” The basic temporal and grammatical profile, however, remains intact.

Such inversion of mastery into non-sovereignty can be discerned throughout the novel's famous theft scenes. As Richetti points out, Moll's praxis as a criminal involves a kind of assent to the contingent, a seizing of whatever the streets of London present to her as she drifts through them: "Even as a thief [...] she avoids aggressive crimes like house-breaking and counterfeiting. Rather, she walks the streets and waits for the profitable opportunities that will offer themselves. Moll responds to events and dominates them, but she cannot be said to initiate them."<sup>32</sup> In this point, she differs somewhat from Colonel Jack and his fellow ragamuffins, who often have a particular target in mind when they set out on a criminal adventure. The terms of Moll's acquisitive feats, in contrast, are always dictated by the situations she finds herself in—her autonomy in relation to the objects of her acquisition is often difficult to distinguish from a condition of environmental heteronomy. At one point, this confusion takes a strange grammatical form. When a pursued thief drops a bundle at Moll's feet, she discreetly collects it "with less Disturbance than I had done formerly, for these things I did not steal, but they were stolen to my Hand." (MF 196) This transformation of an active into a passive construction is, to be sure, a rather pathetic attempt at rationalization. It also, however, expresses the agential contours of the situation: the bundle must arrive at Moll's hand before she can grasp it. Passive and active object-relating, as encoded in this grammatical sleight of hand, seem to have the same external form.<sup>33</sup> I will argue that the object stolen to Moll's hand here, the bundle, is the novel's central emblem of this installation of passivity within activity.

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<sup>32</sup> Defoe's *Narratives*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. an episode in *Colonel Jack* in which Captain Jack takes advantage of an unattended runaway horse: "the Horse stole the Capt. The Capt. did not steal the Horse." See also an episode in *Captain Singleton* in which the novel's piratical hero, en route to the Persian Gulf, captures a ship laden with pearl, among other goods: "so tho' we did not go to the Gulph for the Pearl, the Pearl came to us out of the Gulph [...]." Daniel Defoe, *Colonel Jack*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 93; *Captain Singleton*, ed. Shiv Kumar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 187.

If Defoe can plausibly be situated within Pocock's Machiavellian tradition, then the novel's episodic form might be described according to the Machiavellian conception of *occasione*. Defoe himself provides this description in the "Preface": the subject of the novel is "the particular Occasions and Circumstances, by which she first became wicked, and of all the progression of Crime which she run through in threescore Year [. . .]" (*MF* 1) Occasions and circumstances are the material of the narrative. Each term designates the emergence of a contingent situation; occasion differs from circumstance only in its potential graspability. As in Machiavelli's famous translation of Ausonius, occasion may be mastered, but only by the skillful, and only on her own terms:

Low on my brow before me spreads my hair,  
So that it covers all my breast and face;  
Thus, no one knows me, coming, till I'm there.  
Of hair behind my head there's not a trace,  
Hence, one I've turned against, or hurried by,  
Can never catch me: it's no good to try.<sup>34</sup>

Mistress *Occasione* is difficult to spot as she approaches and impossible to grasp as she recedes. She shares this quality with Moll's bundles, which provide occasions for accumulation that are visible only to the shrewd and irrecoverable if allowed to pass by. If Moll's picaresque is composed of occasions and circumstances, this means that she remains bound to Fortune's wheel, able to exercise her *virtù* only on the contingent, on whatever comes up.

Turning from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Moll Flanders*, then, we move between two very different forms of acquisitive action and narrative causality: from adventure to fortune, from bourgeois accumulation to proletarian hustle, from the *Bildung* to the picaresque. *Moll Flanders*, though so elaborately concerned with self-other dialectic and with the seizing of *fortuna*,

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<sup>34</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, "On Occasion," in *The Prince*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton 1977), 138.

ultimately does not display the type of accumulative structure of action described, in different ways, by Richetti, Moretti, and Pocock. In the later novel, the directionless flux of *fortuna* almost always dissolves the pockets of coherence and stability that the masterful subject constructs therein. This shift in actantial structure corresponds to the fact that the notion of Providence, which so famously surfaces in the opening pages of *Robinson Crusoe*, does not make an appearance until the concluding episodes of *Moll Flanders*. Crusoe's original act of transgression—his exit from pastoral narrativeless-ness, from the “middle station” that Providence has allotted for him—initiates the accumulative chain of actions with which he constructs a new, more capacious station in life.<sup>35</sup> In *Moll Flanders*, operating as it does within picaresque causal space, the “middle station”—the station that guarantees the reproduction of everyday life—is precisely what must remain inaccessible if narrative is to go on. Thus, when Moll begins to utter providential language while arranging her estate in Virginia, we know that her narrative is finally approaching closure.<sup>36</sup> As in the criminal biographies from which *Moll Flanders* descends, this final absorption of picaresque energies in a providential thematic structure retroactively invests the contingent causal chains of picaresque life with an inflection of necessity.

The fundamental law of economic subjectivity in its picaresque mode, then, is that gain takes the form of an inverted non-sovereignty, an assent to contingency. If Moll structures her world according to a self-other dialectic, it is the other that always gains the upper hand. Moll's triumphs, sporadic and temporary at best, absorb contingent circumstances as the material of

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<sup>35</sup> For competing interpretations of this incipit that disagree about whether to emphasize its economic or ethical dimensions, see Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 65-66 and Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*, 32-48.

<sup>36</sup> For two views of providentialism in Defoe, one emphasizing its continuity with spiritual autobiography, the other its transitional status toward a new model of secular providentialism, see G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 157-60, and Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 202 and *passim*. 195-231.

subjectivity.<sup>37</sup> The Lacanian theorist Jacques-Alain Miller calls this procedure “extimacy”: the installation of a contingent, traumatic kernel as the guarantor of the self’s stability.<sup>38</sup> Moll, the “woman of Fortune,” incorporates circumstance as her extimate core. The picaresque laws of motion that govern her world, however, ensure that each negotiation with circumstance collapses back into the flux of *fortuna*. A corresponding Machiavellian current can be followed through Defoe’s writings on trade. In *An Essay on Projects* and *The Complete English Tradesman*, two major works at either end of his career, Defoe proposes a picaresque model of economic action.

### 3. The projector’s fortune, the tradesman’s bait

“It must be confess’d, Trade is almost universally founded upon Crime.”<sup>39</sup> Defoe scholarship has long labored to determine how such a quasi-Proudhonian sentence could have flowed from such an ostensibly Whiggish pen. As Lincoln Faller has suggested, the “confused, ungainly, and even tortured arguments” that populate *The Complete English Tradesman* can be read as responses to the necessity of deflecting the equivalence between trade and theft.<sup>40</sup> It was perhaps this equivocation that led Charles Lamb to find the book alternately amusing and disturbing: “The pompous detail, the studied analysis of every little mean art, every sneaking address, every trick and subterfuge (short of larceny) that is necessary to the tradesman’s

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<sup>37</sup> On characterlessness in the picaresque, see Deidre Lynch’s reading of Smollett’s *Roderick Random* as a series of flat, archetypal characters attached haphazardly to a single body. This reading seems instructively different from John Barrell’s reading of the same novel, which argues that Roderick’s string of identities results, at the novel’s end, in a cosmopolitan, gentlemanly character. The difference might be described as that between episodic and accumulative theories of picaresque character. Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 102-12; John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 176-209.

<sup>38</sup> “Extimacy,” *The Symptom* 9 (2008), <http://www.lacan.com/symptom/>, accessed June 22, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Compleat English Tradesman: In Familiar Letters* (London: 1726-27), II 108. Subsequently cited in the text as *CET*.

<sup>40</sup> *Crime and Defoe*, 141. For the seminal discussion of trade and morality in Defoe, see Hans Anderson: “The Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe,” *MP* 39.1 (1941), 23-46.

occupation [ . . . ] It is difficult to say what his intention was in writing it. It is impossible to suppose him in earnest.”<sup>41</sup> Lamb struggles to see how Defoe’s prosaic elaboration of such mercantile arts as the conditional promise and the dissembling of emotions could be anything other than satirical. Subsequent readers have tended to take Defoe’s intentions more seriously, but to retain Lamb’s sense that *The Complete English Tradesman*, in one way or another, lacks the resources to fully follow through on the ethical defense of trade it sets out to accomplish.<sup>42</sup> Reading *The Complete English Tradesman* with an eye for references to criminality—the theme that had so preoccupied Defoe in his fictional writings of the early 1720s—can clarify the nature of the ethical negotiations Defoe undertakes in his conduct manual.

References to criminality appear in Defoe’s economic writing long before he began to meditate on criminals in narrative form. *An Essay upon Projects* begins with a speculation about the prevalence of “projecting” activity in the 1690s: “Necessity, which is allow’d to be the Mother of Invention, has so violently agitated the Wits of men at this time, that it seems not at all improper, by way of distinction, to call it, *The Projecting Age*.<sup>43</sup> Defoe goes on to argue that the economic disorganization caused by the Nine Years’ War had caused the mercantile class to seek new techniques of economic gain. He therefore posits a direct relationship between projecting and precarity. After offering a brief “history of projects,” Defoe returns to this idea in an uncharacteristically speculative mode:

Man is the worst of all God’s Creatures to shift for himself; no other Animal is ever starv’d to death; Nature without, has provided them both Food and Clothes; and Nature within, has plac’d an Instinct that never fails to direct them to proper means for a supply; but Man must either *Work or Starve, Slave or Dye*; he has indeed Reason given him to

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<sup>41</sup> “L.B.,” “The Good Clerk, a Character, with some account of *The Complete English Tradesman*,” *The Reflector* 2.4 (1811), 434.

<sup>42</sup> Sandra Sherman’s recent treatment, for example, takes an epistemological and historical approach, linking issues of truth and deceit in *The Complete English Tradesman* to the rise of the credit economy. *Finance and Fictionality*, 91-155.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Defoe, *An Essay upon Projects* (London, 1697), 1. Subsequently cited in the text as *EP*.

direct him, and few who follow the Dictates of that Reason come to such unhappy Exigencies; but when by the Errors of a Man's Youth he has reduc'd himself to such a degree of Distress, as to be absolutely without Three things, *Money, Friends, and Health*, he Dies in a Ditch, or in some worse place, *an Hospital*. (EP 31)

Reason, the usual distinction between the human and the animal, is a secondary consideration here. The fundamental difference between men and beasts, rather, is the former's basic helplessness in relation to the environment, their recourse to labor to furnish themselves with necessities. Like many seventeenth-century intellectual edifices, *An Essay Upon Projects* establishes its theoretical foundation by positing something like a state of nature. In Defoe's implicit state of nature (as in Mandeville's) animal life has the benefit of innate instinctual and physical attunement to the environment, whereas human life is thrown into the world without resources for its own reproduction, and must remedy this situation via work.

Defoe thus argues that the fundamental human situation in relation to the world is characterized by precarity. This precarity, he goes on to argue, is the origin of projecting:

Ten thousand ways there are to bring a Man to this [condition of dying in a ditch or hospital], and but very few to bring him out again.

Death is the universal Deliverer, and therefor some who want Courage to bear what they see before 'em, *Hang themselves for fear* [ . . . ]

Others break the Bounds of Laws to satisfy that general Law of Nature, and turn open Thieves, House-breakers, Highway-men, Clippers, Coiners, etc. till they run the length of the Gallows, and get a Deliverance the nearest way at St. Tyburn.

Others being masters of more Cunning than their Neighbours, turn their Thoughts to Private Methods of Trick and Cheat [ . . . ] by which honest men are gull'd with fair pretences to part from their Money [ . . . ]

Others yet urg'd by the same necessity, turn their thoughts to Honest Invention, founded upon the Platform of Ingenuity and Integrity.

These two last sorts are those we call *Projectors* [ . . . ] (EP 32-33)

In conditions of deprivation, four modes of response are available: suicide, crime, "Cunning" projects (Defoe here seems to mean irresponsible borrowing, but might also include "Stock-Jobbers, Engineers, Patentees, Committees [and] Brokers"; EP 13), and "Honest" projects (the kind Defoe intends to propose). Crime and projecting thus exist on a gradated spectrum; indeed,

Defoe confesses that the majority of projecting behavior falls into the “Cunning” category, and is thus not as distant from crime as one might wish. In Defoe’s discussion of bankruptcy, he follows through on this theoretical equivalence by comparing the actions of men who rack up massive debts and then remove their goods into the Mint with those of “a poor little lurking Thief, that it may be stole a bundle of old Cloaths, worth 5 s.” (EP 198) Defoe thus posits a fundamental link between projecting, the fundamental activity of what we now call capitalist production, and exposure to contingency. Projecting is, in this sense, picaresque in character: it involves the improvisation of a response to conditions of dispossession. Using the materials afforded by *fortuna*, it projects a haphazard structure of intention and design into the world. The narrative dynamics that would invest Defoe’s crime writing of the 1720s were thus already present, in a nascent theoretical form, in the late 1690s.

*The Complete English Tradesman*, it is true, is concerned with a different kind of capitalist than *An Essay upon Projects*: the tradesman rather than the merchant, dealing in stock rather than projects. It nevertheless is extensively preoccupied with the depredations of *fortuna* that can befall the tradesman: bankruptcy, bad credit, over-trading, imprudent marriage. In a chapter on bankruptcy, Defoe establishes a basic dichotomy: between the “fortunate tradesman” and the “unfortunate tradesman.” The latter, upon falling into insolvency, will inevitably petition the former for aid. Defoe issues a plea for mercy in this situation:

If then the contingent nature of trade renders every man liable to disaster that is engag’d in it, it seems strange that tradesman should be outrageous and unmerciful to one another, when they fall [ . . . ] Nay, I have liv’d to see, *such is the uncertainty of human affairs*, and especially in trade, the furious and outrageous creditor become bankrupt himself in a few years, or perhaps months after, and begging the same mercy of others [ . . . ] (CET I 198)

As Pocock points out, Defoe conceptualizes trade as operating within the realm of *fortuna*, the arena of secular time within which what goes up must come down. At the beginning and end of

his career as a writer, then, Defoe seems to have retained essentially the same conception of economic production: as operating in proximity to contingency. *The Complete English Tradesman* is largely concerned with instructing the young tradesman how to mitigate his exposure to “the contingent nature of trade” and “the uncertainty of human affairs.” In the later book, however, there is a greater sense that the tradesman’s own inclinations—for diversion, matrimony, luxury—are among the principal destabilizing implements of *fortuna*. It is thus concerned in large part with teaching him how to manage his desire.

Beyond the moment at which Defoe concedes a basic similarity between trade and theft, references to criminality surface sporadically but reliably in *The Complete English Tradesman*. The purveyors of “bubbles and projects” are compared to “a croud of pick-pockets.” An unattended shop may be “perfectly haunted with thieves and shoplifters.” If a tradesman is not able to take pleasure in his work, work becomes “a bondage, not a business; the shop is a *Bridewell*, and the warehouse a house of correction [ . . . ]”<sup>44</sup> A tradesman approaching bankruptcy is compared to a condemned criminal. An idle servant or apprentice “is as really a thief who robs him of his time, as he that robs him of his money.” Passing counterfeit money is equivalent to “picking the shop-keeper’s pocket, or robbing his house.” (*CET* I 46, 56, 69, 90, 184, 293) In each case, criminality figures the dangers to which fortune subjects the tradesman: predatory schemes, financial failure, lack of diligence. These depredations of contingency upon trade, crucially, operate through both heterogenic and autogenic means: *fortuna* is at work in the hostile exterior world, but also in the tradesman’s own vicious inclinations.

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<sup>44</sup> Bender discusses this passage, which goes on to compare the unmotivated shopkeeper to a galley-slave chained to his oars, as investing a pre-modern form of punishment with a modern, psychologically-oriented form of narrative. *Imagining the Penitentiary*, 51.

The latter kind of danger is often described in the language—crucial, as I will argue, in *Moll Flanders*—of “baits” and “snares.” Discussing “over-trading,” (taking and giving too much credit), Defoe writes that “the profits of trade are baits to the avaritious shop-keeper,” and goes on to describe the temptation to overstock one’s shop as a “snare.” (*CET I* 71, 73, 75) Lamenting the proliferation of distractions that the present age offers the young tradesman, he writes, “the baits which are every where laid for the corruption of youth, and for the ruin of their fortunes, were never so many and mischievous as they are now.” (*CET I* 128) Keeping good and therefore costly company is, for one just starting out in business, a “snare,” as is the temptation not to keep one’s wife abreast of one’s business dealings out of a desire to make her a gentlewoman. (*CET I* 147, 354) In each case, the language of temptation, if perhaps familiar from sermons and spiritual autobiography, occurs in what appears to be an entirely secular register.

In a chapter explicating the dangerous diversions that can pull the shopkeeper out of his shop, Defoe consolidates these observations by classifying two principal types of snare to the tradesman: pleasures and projects. (Or, qua Addison, “luxury” and “avarice,” consumption and production.) The first of these is to be resisted by taking pleasure in work itself: “To a complete tradesman there is no pleasure equal to that of being in his business, no delight equal to that of seeing him thrive, to see trade flow upon him, and to be satisfied that he goes on prosperously.” (*CET I* 121-22) This rather prim equation of business and pleasure is followed by an unusually (for Defoe) dense sentence that attempts to explain pleasure’s efficacy in keeping the tradesman at work: “Pleasure is a bait to the mind, and the mind will attract the body; where the heart is, the object shall always have the body’s company.” (*CET I* 122) Elsewhere in *The Complete English Tradesman*, the phrases “bait” and “snare” indicate the temptations that draw the tradesman away from his business, but here, the former describes his attachment to business itself.

“Pleasure,” in Defoe's schema, is not an end in itself but a “bait,” an enticement. Defoe's tradesman understands himself to be pursuing pleasure but ends up running after something both Defoe and psychoanalytic thought call “the object.” The complete tradesman has his body drawn toward this “object” like a hooked fish. While we might now call such people “go-getters,” in Defoe's description it is the object that does the getting and the subject that is got.

A few pages after the discussion of pleasure, business, and baits, Defoe pursues the same argument with an analogy drawn from crime narrative. The tradesman, rather than being beset by thieves, is himself figured as one:

I am ask'd here, perhaps, how much pleasure an honest-meaning tradesman may be allow'd to take? for it cannot be suppos'd I should insist that all pleasure is forbidden to him, that he must have no diversion, no spare hours, no intervals from hurry and fatigue; that would be to pin him down to the very floor of his shop, as *John Sheppard* was lock'd down to the floor of his prison.

The answer to this question every prudent tradesman must make for himself; if his pleasure is in his shop, and in his business, there is no danger to him [ . . . ] (CET I 125)

The reference here is to Jack Sheppard, the famous jailbreak whose biography Defoe may have written two years before *The Complete English Tradesman* appeared. Specifically, it refers to the most famous of Sheppard's five escapes, in which he escaped from the “strong room” in Newgate despite being shackled to the floor. The allusion to Sheppard posits the diligent shopkeeper as, like the protagonist of *Street Robberies Consider'd*, bustling in his prison. Officiousness and know-how appear not as freedom but as confinement. Defoe's answer to this objection is not, as his metaphor suggests, that the occasional jailbreak never hurt anyone. Rather, he insists that confinement itself be made productive of pleasure. Proper mercantile conduct appears as affirmation, rather than mere tolerance, of the hemming in of life by circumstance. The precise demand made on the tradesman, furthermore, is to install desire's bait in the activities of production themselves. In the next chapter, I will argue that Samuel

Richardson explored the contours of this predicament in the unlikely guise of his arch-rake, Robert Lovelace.

Defoe thus viewed capitalist activity and theft as intimately related subjects. He posited both, in *An Essay upon Projects*, as originating in a situation of fundamental human exposure, a theme that remains omnipresent, if in less programmatic form, in *The Complete English Tradesman*. Projecting attempts, as in a famous Machiavellian metaphor, to erect dikes in order to stem the floodwaters of fortune.<sup>45</sup> In the latter book, however, Defoe augmented this *topos* with the theme of the “bait.” The vagaries of fortune, when they take the form of the bait, originate from within subjectivity rather than without, and the tradesman must respond by investing work itself with baitedness. In making this argument, Defoe was in fact revisiting a theme of crucial importance in *Moll Flanders*. Indeed, the introduction of desire into picaresque economic subjectivity that occurs between *An Essay upon Projects* and *The Complete English Tradesman* echoes an analogous narrative transition that takes place in the novel. The role of baits and baitedness in acquisitive activity is organized, in *Moll Flanders*, around one of the novel’s central images: the bundle.

#### 4. Bundles and baits

Read alongside Alexander Smith, *Moll Flanders* appears to be a massively complex unfolding of the criminal biography form from which it descends: episodic picaresque contingency contained retroactively by providential closure, a masterful acquisitive subject whose feats of *virtù* establish various structures of makeshift order within the turbulent realm of *fortuna*, the coexistence of tragic and comic accounts of human action in the world. Defoe’s

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<sup>45</sup> *The Prince*, 70.

novel, however, supersedes its predecessors in more than mere volume: it develops the theme of masterful acquisitiveness in such a way as to make the act of acquisition itself appear as essentially traumatic. Defoe introduces this traumatic theory of acquisition into the narrative architecture of the picaresque, almost imperceptibly replacing the mode's characteristic hetero-determination with auto-determination. With a subtle gesture, very easy to miss, Defoe replaces the external disorganization of picaresque accident with the internal disorganization of Moll's desire. This shift signals the emergence, from within the picaresque, of what I call the "persecutory plot." It is precipitated by an encounter with a modest yet inexplicably mesmerizing object, the bundle.

That Moll's motion through the world would take a picaresque form stands to reason, since she is a member of Linebaugh's "picaresque proletariat." Throughout the first half of the novel, economic necessity remains the unifying force underlying the contingent causality and episodic structure of the narrative.<sup>46</sup> A strange feature of the novel, however, and one that remains inadequately registered by critics, is that the same cannot be said of the second half. Apparently so desperate throughout the novel's celebrated criminal section, Moll in fact achieves economic stability after only a handful of robberies:

[. . .] at last I got some quilting work for Ladies Beds, Peticoats, and the like; and this I lik'd very well and work'd very hard, and with this I began to live; but the diligent Devil who resolv'd I should continue in his service, continually prompted me to go out and take a Walk, that is to say, to see if any thing would offer in the old Way. (*MF* 199)

Moll has achieved the status of being able to support herself by working—the status which as a child she understood, ingenuously and poignantly, to make a gentlewoman. (*MF* 13) The possibility of a reliably reproduced form of life is proffered and, across the space of a semicolon,

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<sup>46</sup> As Max Novak argues, Defoe was generally willing to forgive vices compelled by necessity, less so those compelled by avarice. "The Problem of Necessity in Defoe's Fiction," *PQ* 40.4 (1961), 513-24.

vanishes.<sup>47</sup> This is precisely the moment in the novel at which acquisitive demand outstrips economic need, at which avarice replaces necessity as motivating psychological cause. In four subsequent passages, Moll pauses in her depredations to reflect on the fact that they are motivated by no material need.<sup>48</sup> This psychological problem can also be stated as a narrative problem: during the novel's criminal section, picaresque causality and narrative structure continue to organize the narrative long after their apparent cause (economic precarity) has been removed.<sup>49</sup>

In her second reflection on her own insatiability, Moll exhibits a striking stylistic tic:

[. . .] the Resolution I had formerly taken of leaving off this horrid Trade, when I had gotten a little more, did not return; but I must still get farther, and more; and Avarice join'd so with Success, that I had no more thoughts of coming to a timely Alteration of Life; tho' without it I cou'd expect no Safety, no Tranquility in the Possession of what I had so wickedly gain'd; but a little more, and a little more, was the Case still. (MF 207)

This passage is haunted by the absence of the “little more” that compels Moll’s acquisitive activity. The long sentence is perfectly complete, both in grammar and sense, with Moll’s moralistic reflection on the failure of ill-gotten goods to grant “tranquility.” In a characteristically Defoean procedure, however, another clause grafts itself onto the already bloated sentence: “a little more, and a little more.” As many critics point out, Moll’s narrative is twice mediated: by retrospection and by the “editor” who claims to have made her writing more presentable to polite audiences. Here, however, Moll’s lived experience of insatiability seems to distort the prose from beneath this double membrane of mediation. Within the apparent plenitude

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<sup>47</sup> Perhaps this deserves to be the second most famous semicolon in Defoe, after the one in *Robinson Crusoe* about which Coleridge and Watt famously disagree. *Rise of the Novel*, 119-20.

<sup>48</sup> See MF 207, 221, 253, 262

<sup>49</sup> *Colonel Jack*, in so many ways a companion novel to *Moll Flanders*, contains a remarkable set of scenes in which Jack’s “brother,” Captain Jack, compulsively steals everything in his path, substantially hindering rather than helping the protagonist’s attempt to escape enlistment in the army. In these scenes, kleptomania appears as dangerous and pathological. In the criminal section of *Moll Flanders*, the same disorder becomes a unifying principle of characterization. *Colonel Jack*, 87-101.

of her being, Moll finds a little something lacking, to describe which she takes recourse to the common eighteenth-century condemnation of “avarice.” Lacanian theory also has a name for this “little more”: the *objet petit a*, the evanescent something that promises to make the subject whole, always to be sought and never to be found.

In terms of narrative form, the episodic, contingent structure of the picaresque continues to shape the narrative during the novel’s criminal section. Indeed, its rhythm has intensified, with a greater frequency of episodes and a greater degree of modularity among them than in the novel’s first half. In causal terms, however, an important shift has occurred: the usual picaresque hetero-determination has been replaced, almost imperceptibly, by auto-determination. The crucial point is that this shift in actantial structure does not produce a corresponding shift in narrative form. Moll’s world continues to be precarious and disorganized, that is, to exist within picaresque narrative space, but the source of this disorganization has migrated inward. Within the larger narratological vocabulary I want to build in this dissertation, this means that Moll has become her own persecutory villain.<sup>50</sup> Moll’s villainy seizes control of narrative, but at the price of her access to “the settl’d life.” Though in one way this amounts to a subversion of the picaresque, in another it constitutes an intensification of the mode’s central paradox: the more Moll dominates her environment, the less she is in control. As in later persecutory plots, the villain’s desire is both the source of narrative and the impediment to the establishment of homeostasis, of pastoral narrativeless-ness.<sup>51</sup> Yet, in Defoe as in Lacanian theory, the relation of the desiring subject to her object must not be mistaken for a relation of mastery.

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<sup>50</sup> If *Moll Flanders* were a Richardson novel, the elder brother who seduces Moll at the beginning of the book might have occupied this role. Here, he is just one source of misfortune among many, in confirmation of Dorothy Van Ghent’s assertion that what constitutes an incident for Defoe constitutes an epic for Richardson. *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper, 1961), 45.

<sup>51</sup> For these reasons, I cannot entirely assent to Joshua Gass’ argument, however intriguing, that Moll’s psychological complexities are wholly the result of generic multiplicity and dissonance. Gass’ reading is well-attuned to the generic mixture that characterizes the novel, but his approach to the “partial villain” as a “flat” but

*Moll Flanders*, in its well-known theft scenes, provides us with an embodiment of the “little more” that sustains desire in a modest but ubiquitous object: the bundle. There is, perhaps, precedent for the novel’s thematization of this quotidian object in Smith’s *History of the Highwaymen*. One of the most interesting narratives included in Smith’s volume, that of a housebreaker named Arthur Chambers, is almost bizarrely preoccupied with bundles. That is, with objects contained in various kinds of textile wrapping. Chambers begins his career as a house-breaker on a macabre note: he steals a child’s corpse wrapped in a winding sheet, mistaking it for a bundle of linen. In his next adventure, he wraps himself in a winding sheet, has himself put into a coffin, and distracts his landlord with an apparent supernatural apparition while his companions rob the house. Smith offers no comment on the strange symmetry between these two episodes, but the rest of the narrative plays out as a fantasia on the related themes of duping via bundles and self-bundling. Chambers tricks a country bumpkin into serving as a footman via a promise of cast-off clothes. Disguised as a tradesman in a borrowed blue apron, Chambers appropriates several pairs of boots and a mutton pudding, as well as defrauding a market woman by buying a pig wrapped in white cloth and then “returning” a dead dog in the same habiliment. He fools a travelling gentleman by leaving a leather purse full of stones lying on the highway. And in the narrative’s climactic episode, he stuffs old clothes full of rags in order to create a scarecrow, a dummy house-breaker to distract a victim from an ongoing, authentic robbery. (CH 85-94) Concealment via bundling and wrapping is here the favored technique of the trickster criminal for duping his victims. His use of these techniques, however, is initiated when he is himself duped by the bundled corpse, the fair linen exterior of which

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multivalent character fails to account for the actantial function of the villain. “*Moll Flanders* and the Bastard Birth of Realist Character,” *NLH* 45.1 (2014), 111-30.

conceals a grisly, abject object. He responds, in the narrative's strangest maneuver, by taking the place of this object—by becoming for others the unwelcome, bundled reality that traumatized him. This odd story thus derives its impetus from the undecidability between bundling and being bundled, duping and being duped.

Whether via influence or coincidence, *Moll Flanders* also adopts the bundle as a central motif. Take Moll's very first caper, committed as poverty impends following the death of her fifth husband. A distressed Moll is meandering purposelessly through the streets when an opportunity presents itself:

Wandering thus about I knew not whither, I pass'd by an Apothecary's Shop in *Leadenhall-street*, where I saw lye on a Stool just before the Counter a little Bundle wrapt in a white Cloth; beyond it, stood a Maid Servant with her Back to it, looking up towards the top of the Shop, where the Apothecary's Apprentice, as I suppose, was standing up on the Counter, with his Back also to the Door, and a Candle in his Hand, looking and reaching up to the upper Shelf for something he wanted, so that both were engag'd mighty earnestly, and no Body else in the Shop. (MF 191)

This passage, though unusually dense with descriptive language, should not be mistaken for a tableau. It contains many details, but only one object. The stool, the counter, the maidservant, the apprentice with his candle, and the shelves all appear in the prose only insofar as they position the bundle within space and indicate the path via which it might be acquired. At one level, then, description here serves to depict what J. J. Gibson might have called the come-at-ability of the bundle, its affordance of snatching.<sup>52</sup> It figures the visual field as torqued around a single point, its periphery filled out by the environmental factors that make that point accessible. Cynthia Wall reads this passage as an exception to the general quality of description in Defoe, in whose prose “physical objects and structures appear primarily in the immediate service of narrative

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<sup>52</sup> “The Theory of Affordances,” in *Perceiving, Acting, Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, ed. Robert Shaw and John Bransford (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977), 67-82.

action [ . . . ] Things come (literally) to hand as the character requires.”<sup>53</sup> If the passage’s voluminous detail, however, serves only to show how a thing might (and will) come to hand, it is less an exception to than an intensification of Defoe’s ordinary descriptive procedure.

Here, it would seem, we have description that records Moll’s skill as a perceiver of the manipulable environment. As Richetti puts it in his discussion of this passage: “the moment of detail [ . . . ] is the self-assertive moment in Defoe’s narratives; the rendering of action as the precise alignment of the self’s alertness to the relationships around it.”<sup>54</sup> And Moll does masterfully take advantage of what the apothecary’s shop affords her, seamlessly slipping away with her prize. Yet Moll’s motion up to this point has been directionless, simultaneously animated and erratic: “I am sure I had no manner of Design in my Head, when I went out, I neither knew or considered where to go [ . . . ]” (*MF* 191) It is the appearance of the bundle that straightens Moll out, causes her to resume an instrumental relation to her surroundings. Though diminutive, just “a little bundle,” it reinvests action with purposiveness. This purposiveness, however, is not of Moll’s own making, but originates exterior to her. It is the bundle, not Moll, that asserts itself here.

The point is driven home if we turn to the sentences that frame the passage quoted above:

I neither knew or considered where to go, or on what Business; but as the Devil carried me out and laid his Bait for me, so he brought me to be sure to the place, for I knew not whither I was going or what I did.  
[ . . . ]

This was the Bait; and the Devil who I said laid the Snare, as readily prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and shall never forget it, ‘twas like a Voice spoken to me over my Shoulder, take the Bundle; be quick; do it this Moment [ . . . ]

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<sup>53</sup> *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 112. Also see Margaret Cohen’s concept of “performing description” in maritime fiction, an account in which Defoe plays a central role. *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 75-8.

<sup>54</sup> *Defoe’s Narratives*, 124.

As Starr argues, there is an unmistakable lineage with the spiritual autobiography tradition here.<sup>55</sup> The experience of temptation involves not Moll's desire, but that of a demonic other who desires within her. (In spiritual autobiography as in Lacan, "desire is the desire of the Other.") The crucial term, here, however, is capable of operating in both religious and secular registers. Baits, whether intended for a fish or an Eve,<sup>56</sup> operate by establishing an apparent affordance precisely where the subject cannot afford to tread. The fair exterior of the bait conceals the snare within, establishing the relation of exterior to interior as the relation between the edible and that which eats you. Writing in retrospect, Moll is well aware that even as she encounters her bait with impeccable *savoir-faire*, she has been duped.

If the object of economic desire is, in this scene, a bait, its mode of appearance is anamorphosis, a quality of sticking out in the visual field. Among all the passersby who (it can be presumed) populate Leadenhall street, the bundle addresses Moll as a signal meant for her and her only. Lacan argued that this anamorphic quality in object-relating indicates the presence of what he called the gaze. The gaze designates a phenomenology of visual desire in which geometrical, perspectival space is displaced by a central point occupied by a fascinating, enigmatic object:

I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometrical point from which the perspective is grasped. [...] That which is light looks at me, and by means of that light in the depths of my eye, something is painted [...] something that is an impression, the shimmering of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance. This is something that introduces what was elided in the geometrical relation—the depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment [...]<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Defoe and *Spiritual Autobiography*, 153-4.

<sup>56</sup> For the distinguished provenance of the term in its religious usage, see *Paradise Lost* X.551.

<sup>57</sup> *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 96.

Lacan goes so far as to make the formulation, somewhat fancifully, that it is not the subject who gazes at the object, but vice versa. It is not that the gazer composes a visual field and situates an object in its center, but that she is thrown into relation with a fascinating, enigmatic object, simultaneously too close and too far away. The spatial contours of the gaze curve towards this object, which in Lacanian theory is designated as the *objet petit a*: the missing piece phantasmically expelled from the body; the leftover of the subject's integration into the symbolic order; the object-cause of desire. The gaze is the scene in which the subject is captured by this object, which is also to say held in being by it.

The crucial point here is that when the gaze occurs it is the object, not the subject, that asserts itself.<sup>58</sup> The theft scenes in Moll Flanders characteristically initiate with the gaze, with the anamorphic presentation of a fascinating object. As Wall points out, Moll's second crime (the famous scene in which she steals a necklace from an unaccompanied young girl) involves an anamorphic visual field: "the details are spare, but the paved alley, the close, the dark of the alley, the bending woman, and the way out, all circle hungrily around the little necklace of gold beads that Moll has her eye on."<sup>59</sup> Something similar can be said of the descriptive language that initiates many such scenes:

I was going thro' *Lombard-street* in the dusk of the Evening, just by the end of *Three King Court*, when on a sudden comes a Fellow running by me as swift as Lightning, and throws a Bundle that was in his Hand just behind me [ . . . ]

[ . . . ] going by a House near *Stepney*, I saw on the Window-board two Rings, to be sure laid there by some thoughtless lady, that had more Money than Forecast [ . . . ] 196

[ . . . ] going by an Alehouse I saw the Door of a little room open, next the very Street, and on the Table a silver Tankard [ . . . ]

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<sup>58</sup> One recalls here the Hobbesian formulation in which it is not the eye that gazes at the object, but the object that "presses" on the eye. *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin, 1985), 85-7.

<sup>59</sup> *The Prose of Things*, 111.

Through the Window of the Warehouse we saw lying on the Counter or Show-board which was just before it, Five pieces of Silks, besides other Stuffs [ . . . ]

I set myself close up to a Shop-side with my back to the Compter, as if to let the Crowd pass by, when keeping my Eye upon a parcel of Lace, which the Shop-keeper was showing to some Ladies [ . . . ]

[ . . . ] I saw abundance of fine Ladies in the *Park*, walking in the *Mall*, and among the rest [ . . . ] a young Lady of about 12 or 13 Years old, and she had a Sister [ . . . ] I observ'd the biggest had a fine gold watch on, and a good Necklace of Pearl [ . . . ]

[ . . . ] when going by a Working Silver-Smiths in *Foster-lane*, I saw a tempting Bait indeed, and not to be resisted by one of my Occupation; for the Shop had no Body in it, as I could see, and a great deal of loose Plate lay in the Window [ . . . ] (MF 195, 196, 199, 215, 256, 257, 269)

In each case, the bait presents itself anamorphically in the visual field, organizing both Moll's sensorium and the mechanics of description. Even if Moll, in almost every instance, acquires her target, it is only because the object has captured her in its gaze.

Among this collection of anamorphic objects, the bundle is the most prominent: Moll steals an object explicitly described as a bundle on four separate instances, not counting many other crimes involving textiles.<sup>60</sup> The bundle is perhaps the archetypal bait: its alluring, blank exterior promises an unspecified plenitude within. This is not, however, a simple relation of signifying surface to signified depth: the textiles that the bundles are wrapped in are, in most instances, valuable commodities themselves. The enjoyment the bundle promises is thus simultaneously immanent and concealed: its evanescence is plainly there for Moll to see. The exterior of the bait/bundle is fascinating—to use another favorite term of Defoe's, it “ensnares” the observer. Its fascination, however, depends precisely on what fails to appear on its surface, on the palpable absence of some inner plenitude. In the bundle, then, we can recognize many characteristics of what Lacan would call the *objet a*: the bundle enmeshes the subject in

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<sup>60</sup> In one instance, Moll steals a bundle that turns out to be full of other fabrics. She conceals it by wrapping it in her apron, thus constructing a triple bundle. (MF 238-40)

anamorphic capture, and does so precisely by its enigmatic character, its promise of some unspecified Good. The essentially contentless character of Moll's phantasmic relation to her bundles should be emphasized: we do not find her, prior to a theft, day-dreaming about the enjoyments her loot might provide her (about the specific goods a bundle might contain, about the comforts that might be purchased with a pilfered ring or silver tankard). Rather, the bundle's quality of fascination, its ability to ensnare, lies precisely in the non-specificity of its promise—in Lacanian terms, the *je ne sais quoi* of surplus enjoyment.

Upon the object's acquisition and unbundling, it becomes clear that a mere bundle is in no position to provide the “little more” of surplus enjoyment that it has promised:

[. . .] when I came to open it I found there was a Suit of Child-bed Linnen in it, very good and almost new, the Lace very fine; there was a Silver Porringer of a Pint, a small Silver Mug and Six Spoons, some other Linnen, a good Smock, and Three Silk Handkerchiefs, and in the Mug wrap'd up in a Paper Eighteen Shillings and Six-pence in Money. (MF 192)

Upon unwrapping, the gaze-scene dissipates and the bundle presents another aspect. We move here from the anamorphic gaze to another characteristically Defoean descriptive procedure, the property inventory. In this mode, objects assume a relation of apposition to one another, rather than anamorphic subordination. The bundle seems to reappear briefly in its own interior when Moll discovers money “wrap'd” in paper and concealed in the silver Mug. Yet even this promise dissipates when the contents of the paper emerge. Here, satisfaction is essentially a scene of failure: as the bundle divulges its contents, Moll finds much pecuniary gain, but fails to encounter the object as such. Like the Lacanian drive, her act of acquisition has achieved its aim (money in the pocket, food in the belly) by missing its object (the unspecified plenitude of the bundled). She must therefore continue her search.

Another dimension of Moll’s object-relating emerges when she unwraps her third and most valuable bundle, acquired as she opportunistically helps remove valuables from a burning house and absconds with a package of goods entrusted to her:

[. . .] taking the Bundle up into my Chamber, I began to examine it: It is with Horror that I tell what a Treasure I found there; ‘tis enough to say, that besides most of the Family Plate, which was considerable, I found a Gold Chain [. . .] also a little Box of burying Rings, the Lady’s Wedding-Ring, and some broken bits of old Lockets of Gold, a Gold Watch, and a Purse with about 25*l.* value in old pieces of Gold Coin, and several other things of Value.

This was the greatest and the worst Prize that ever I was concern’d in [. . .] (MF 206)

As the passage goes on, Moll explains that her “Horror” stems from reflecting on the plight to which she has reduced her victim, who now lacks both a house and her most valuable possessions. (Moll uses the same term in a very similar way after her first crime.) If the literal sense of this passage concerns ethical horror, however, its rhetorical arrangement is somewhat strange: the content of Moll’s horror is deferred a full paragraph, until after the property inventory. The first sentence quoted above thus seems to imply that Moll’s horror is at the goods themselves—at the fact that the bundle has divulged precisely what was promised by its fascinating exterior. As Slavoj Žižek puts it in a discussion of Andrei Tarkovsky’s cinema: “What if the true horror is that of Something—the intrusion of some excessive massive Real—where we expect Nothing?”<sup>61</sup> In Lacanian terms, Moll’s horror indicates that she is in the presence of “*das Ding*,” the unassimilable Real of the object.<sup>62</sup> The Thing is, as Moll puts it, her “greatest and worst” acquisition, tainted by the ineradicable badness that clings to the good.

Moll’s relation to the Thing can be clarified by attention to another famous scene. In a rare failure to attain her target, Moll attempts to steal a woman’s watch at a “Meeting-House”: “I

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<sup>61</sup> “The Thing from Inner Space,” *Angelaki* 4.3 (1999), 221-231.

<sup>62</sup> For Lacan’s introduction of this concept, see *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 43-56.

had full hold of her Watch, but giving a great Jostle, as if some body had thrust me against her, and in the Juncture giving the Watch a fair pull, I found it would not come.” (MF 211) In a previous watch robbery, the item in question had detached smoothly from the victim’s person, almost as if phantasmically responding to Moll’s desire. (MF 201-2) Here, however, the watch tugs back. Watt identifies the tangible resistance offered by the watch here as exemplary of Defoe’s “formal realism.”<sup>63</sup> The passage might also be deemed Realist: for an instant, the Real of the object, its essential inertia and incomprehensibility, shows through its enticing Imaginary surface. Here, as in Freudian thought, Moll retains contact with the Real—is made sensible that something in the external world correlates with her desire—insofar as her object-relating is not working out.

In the form of the bundle, then, Defoe offers us a model of the relationship between the two pillars of Lacan’s theory of the object: the *objet a* and *das Ding*. The bundle’s fascinating surface conceals the gritty Real of enjoyment.<sup>64</sup> With Moll’s bundles as in Lacanian thought, one moves toward reality through fantasy, and approaches the Real object through its Imaginary counterpart.<sup>65</sup> Acquisition of the bait yields goods, but also the horrible sensation that these were not the goods one was looking for. This movement corresponds to Lacan’s radicalization of the Freudian distinction between the aim and the object of the drive—the satisfaction that the drive

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<sup>63</sup> *Rise of the Novel*, 96-7.

<sup>64</sup> During the early criminal sequences in *Colonel Jack*, a novel that bears a number of close similarities to *Moll Flanders*, the theme of the bundle reappears, but in a different key: “[. . .] I found a dirty Linnen Rag in the Street, and I took that up, and wrapt it [newly acquired coins] all together, and carried it in that, a good way. I have often since heard People, say when they have been talking of Money, that they cou’d not get in, I wish I had it in a foul Clout: In truth I had mine in a *foul Clout* [. . .]” (*Colonel Jack*, 23; see also 43, 52) In *Colonel Jack*, it is the possession of the dirty bundle that is posited as the fundamental model of the object relation. The clean bundle has decayed into a filthy, excremental object, swaddled in cast-off rags. While with Moll’s bundles, the relation between object and Thing takes the form of a relation between exterior and interior, with Jack’s the external object has begun to corrode into the abject internal Thing it contains.

<sup>65</sup> Slavoj Žižek has developed this aspect of Lacan’s thought in detail. See, for example, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 47-50.

seeks and the place where it intends to look for it. As Lacan puts it, the drive misses its object both coming and going, for the reason that the object was precisely what the aim (the Real of enjoyment) was incapable of providing.<sup>66</sup> The object, however, always reappears on the other side of this failure in the guise of the next bundle or bait. The “little more” that sustains desire reappears in the Imaginary as inexorably as it fails to substantiate itself in the Real. In the second half of *Moll Flanders*, narrative is structured as a sequence of such disappearances and reappearances, a series of failures in the search for the ineffable object. This search is stabilized by Moll’s indestructible desire, which exceeds instrumental economic motives in its quest for the ultimate act of acquisition, the “little more” that would make the acquisitive subject whole.

In *Moll Flanders*, then, Defoe offers us primordial scenes of economic acquisition, and posits the bundle—the object-Thing—as the economic object par excellence. The novel gives us reason to think of these scenes as something other than an expression of the self’s mastery over its environment, and thus to think of Defoe as something other than an early-bourgeois author of economic *Bildungen*. We here encounter the limits of readings of Defoe—such as Richetti’s and Moretti’s—that discern in his protagonists an accumulative structure of action, a narrative dynamic in which the self builds itself a home by fashioning a field of control and intentionality out of contingency. Attending to the descriptive language which saturates *Moll Flanders* (as well as Defoe’s other crime narratives), it becomes clear that the mastery thereby attained installs a contingent—in Miller’s terms, an extimate—kernel as the self’s core. Defoe, like Lacan, articulates a tragic theory of desire, an account of experience in which the goods that human actions seek to acquire are not of such a nature as to admit of acquisition. Toward the beginning of a century of triumphant capitalist expansion, *Moll Flanders* offers this tragic theory as if in

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<sup>66</sup> Seminar XI, 161-86.

dissent from the Whiggish—that is, comic—account of economic development that so many, including Defoe himself, were championing.

*Moll Flanders*, then, is a key transitional text in which the composite generic elements of the criminal biography (picaresque and providential, tragic and comic) are reorganized around the villain's insatiability. Against the background of heteronomous (picaresque) proletarian life, Moll's desire quietly emerges as autonomous narrative cause. Crucially, however, her status as an autonomous causal agent does not amount to environmental mastery. In each of Moll's transactions with bundles and other goods, it is the object (in Lacanian terms, the object-cause of desire) that is in charge. Defoe's projectors and complete tradesmen find themselves in the same predicament: in order to exit the turbulence of *fortuna*, to erect structures of intentionality and meaning within its flux, they must be taken in by the bait that desire offers them. In both cases, the Imaginary object-cause of desire is presented anamorphically within the chaotic Real of secular time, and in both cases, this “popping out” of the object results in a double bind: in order to conjure themselves as subjects, to claim their place in the world, Moll and the tradesmen must affirm their subjection to a contingent, extimate kernel.<sup>67</sup> If *Moll Flanders* can be taken as an early case of an emergent narrative form—the persecutory plot—in which the villain's desire is the cause that drives narrative, it is also an archetypal demonstration of the form's central paradox: if the villain is the cause of narrative, it is due to her subjection and disorganization by the cause of her desire.

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<sup>67</sup> With the providential procedure available to both protagonists of criminal biographies and participants in the Weberian “Protestant ethic,” the third Lacanian “order” emerges: the providential imposes Symbolic consistency onto the flux of the Real, and supports the subject's desire by the situating it in the gaze of the Other. If *fortuna* can be tamed by means of the notion, for example, that “God has a plan for everyone,” it is because the Other's guarantee of Symbolic consistency allows the contingent to be transformed into the necessary.

The continuity between the early eighteenth-century criminal biography and later instances of the persecutory plot can be briefly established by turning to Henry Fielding's *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743). In writing a biography of the famed "thief-taker general" and criminal-bureaucrat, Fielding was looking back to the late 1720s, a period which saw an efflorescence of Wild biographies following his execution in 1725. (One of these biographies has historically been attributed to Defoe.)<sup>68</sup> Fielding adopts many of the central elements of the Wild mythology, but adds a crucial new element: the virtuous jeweler Heartfree and his family. He thus allows the early eighteenth-century criminal to emerge into a full persecutory villain by providing him with a (conjugal, sentimentalized) world to disorganize. In a structure characteristic of the persecutory plot, what Alex Woloch calls "the space of the protagonist" is shifted from the criminal and to Heartfree, but the subjective source of narrative action remains the villain's desire.<sup>69</sup> (*Jonathan Wild* is arguably a highly transitional work in that, despite possessing an unmistakable persecutory plot, it generally, in the style of criminal biography, prefers to remain focalized on its villain.) Fielding's novel thus establishes a direct line of continuity between Defoe's crime writings and the 1740s, the triumphant decade of Samuel Richardson, master of the persecutory plot. It also marks the continuity between an established type of villain (Moll Flanders, Jonathan Wild) and an emergent one (Mr. B, Robert Lovelace).

*Jonathan Wild* is often classified as a satire, but there is something curiously stiff about its satirical procedures. The effortless mock-heroic wit for which *Tom Jones* is famous is absent.

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<sup>68</sup> For the debate over the attribution to Defoe of the Wild biography, along with other writings in John Applebee's *Original Weekly Journal*, see P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, "The Myth of Defoe as 'Applebee's Man,'" *The Review of English Studies* 48.190 (1997), 203; and Max Novak, "Daniel Defoe and Applebee's *Original Weekly Journal*: An Attempt at Reattribution," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45.4 (2012), 585-608.

<sup>69</sup> *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Instead, Fielding's narrator makes the same strained joke (about "great men") over and over. It is as if Wild's "greatness" held too strong a claim on Fielding's narrator to be properly ironized and disavowed. We can grasp what is at stake here by attending to the closest thing the novel offers to a definition of greatness: "the truest Mark of GREATNESS is Insatiability."<sup>70</sup> As in the second half of *Moll Flanders*, the primary source of both narrative development and evil in *Jonathan Wild* is the titular character's "greatness," which is to say his surplus desire. Wild's desire remains indestructible throughout the first three books of the novel: he is remarkable for being not only radically indifferent to the harms he causes, but also radically incapable of making mistakes. At the beginning of book IV, however, his "greatness" must be tempered so that the persecutions of the Heartfrees can cease and a comic denouement can be prepared. (Wild's descent is signaled by the adoption of a famous episode in which he is stabbed by a criminal named Blueskin, the permeability of his body initiating the softening of his omnipotence.) Book IV gains this comic trajectory at the expense of narrative consistency, decomposing into a mixture of courtroom report, travel narrative, and sentimental family scenes. With unusual clarity, the novel demonstrates an insoluble formal problem that haunts the persecutory plot in all its iterations: to achieve a comic outcome, it must extricate itself from the force-field of the villain's desire, precisely the element that keeps narrative in motion.

By implicitly formulating his account of Wild as a critique of Robert Walpole's regime, finally, Fielding extends another element of the criminal biography tradition: that of an eerie proximity between theft and trade.<sup>71</sup> (Jonathan Wild's career as either a criminal tradesman or a trader in criminals—it is hard to say which—may be the best biographical exemplification of this

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<sup>70</sup> Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*, ed. Hugh Amory, Claude Rawson, and Linda Bree (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52. Subsequently cited in the text as *JW*.

<sup>71</sup> Fielding denied that his Wild was a stand-in for Walpole. Critics, however, have not historically taken him at his word. See Fielding, *Miscellanies* (London: 1743), volume I, xviii.

proximity.) This association of criminal insatiability with the Whig political machine transposes to a grander level Defoe's implicit comparisons of petty thieves with small-time projectors and shopkeepers. In the criminal biography genre, then, certain suppressed resemblances between legal and criminal forms of accumulation come to light. In Defoe's hands, the theme of this genre became the traumatic core of acquisitive activity, the fundamentally alienated character of economic subjectivity. The same theme would reappear in Richardson's novels of the 1740s and 1750s, despite their apparent distance from economic questions.

## II. “Strange Diligence”: Lovelace and the rake ethic

A late scene in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* draws together many of the economic and psychological currents at work in the novel. After Clarissa escapes from Mrs. Sinclair’s brothel following her rape by Lovelace, she takes up lodgings with a Mrs. Smith, who runs a glovemaker’s shop in Covent Garden. Lovelace manages to track Clarissa down, and visits the Smiths in an attempt to see her. When he fails to find her there, his rage takes a strange form: a manic impersonation of a shopkeeper. Lovelace preens over his inventory of washballs and snuff, bustles in and out of the shop drawing in clients, and obsequiously assists in fitting a customer with new gloves. He reveals, in short, an unexpected gift for customer service. Lovelace, in his mercantile virtuosity, begins to resemble his sociological antithesis: rakish raillery and bourgeois diligence seem, eerily, to coincide. Lovelace’s pastiche of the mercantile class is not simply a satirical expression of aristocratic disdain. There is something about the role of shopkeeper that distinctly suits him.

This chapter represents, in part, an attempt to explain the presence of this odd and apparently extraneous scene in *Clarissa*. The novel has been read for many decades as mediating Britain’s historical transition between two social and ethical regimes, pitting Clarissa’s early-bourgeois moralism against Lovelace’s aristocratic decadence.<sup>1</sup> Lovelace’s rape of Clarissa, the

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<sup>1</sup> This tradition extends back at least as far as Dorothy van Ghent’s classic essay on *Clarissa*, in which Lovelace serves as both scapegoat and surrogate for the suppressed prudence of the rising middle classes. Similar arguments have been made in more explicitly Marxian fashion by Christopher Hill and Terry Eagleton, for whom the novel records the class struggle between the residual aristocracy and the emergent bourgeoisie, and comprises a feat of cultural legitimization for the values of the latter. Both Thomas Keymer and Elaine McGirr have provided an interesting variation on this theme by arguing that Lovelace invokes the specter of Jacobitism. Erin Mackie, finally, retains the view of Lovelace as an archaic figure, but also argues that he represents the continuities between courtly libertinism and an emergent model of gentlemanliness. Dorothy van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 45-63; Christopher Hill, “Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times,” *Essays in Criticism* 5.4 (1955), 315-40; Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Thomas Keymer, *Richardson’s “Clarissa” and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 168-76; Elaine McGirr, “Why Lovelace Must Die,” *NOVEL* 37.1/2 (2003-4), 5-23; Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 59-70.

story goes, represents a violent death spasm of residual aristocratic supremacy, while Clarissa's tragic dignity registers the coming historical invincibility of the bourgeoisie. I depart here from this way of historicizing *Clarissa*, arguing that the traumatic energies generated by a new conception of economic self-interest are focused in the figure of Lovelace.<sup>2</sup> Lovelace is, it is true, an aristocrat, and holds a properly aristocratic contempt for people like the Harlowe family. Yet his subjective organization, carefully considered, places him on the side of emergent capitalist hegemony rather than residual feudal dominance. Lovelace's actions have a tendency to exceed the possibility of exhaustive causal description, to displace motivations for acting with an endless chain of instrumentalization. His pursuit of sexual enjoyment dilates means and minimizes ends, moving toward consummation via an interminable labor of approach. Following Max Weber, I will call this tendency "the rake ethic."

Lovelace's rake ethic, I will argue, indicates Richardson's intuition of a motivational gap in the personalities produced by productivist early-bourgeois culture. Eric Santner has written of a certain relentless busy-ness that plagues individuals in the post-feudal world. For Santner, the libidinal attachments once affixed to the glorious body of the monarch have migrated to the bodies of workers and to the activities of production themselves. The plight of the post-feudal subject is therefore to be a busybody, or, more precisely, to find one's body invested with a second, uncanny body compelled to ceaseless productivity.<sup>3</sup> Lovelace, I will argue, suffers from an extraordinarily intense case of this illness, and therefore cannot be viewed in any

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<sup>2</sup> I build on a helpful essay by Daniel Gunn that refines Hill's and Eagleton's Marxian historicizations of the novel. Gunn argues that the Harlowe and Lovelace families are less locked in class struggle than uneasily integrated into a single, heterogeneous, ruling bloc. The historical transition that the novel records, for Gunn, is thus not the rise of one class and the fall of another, but a renegotiation of ethical norms within this bloc. "Is *Clarissa Bourgeois Art?*," in *Passion and Virtue: Essays on the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, ed. David Blewett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 135-51.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Santner et al., *The Weight of All Flesh: On the Subject-Matter of Political Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

uncomplicated way as a residual feudal figure. He also, however, employs his busybody in the pursuit of enjoyment itself, thereby pursuing a rationalized libertinism or, in Weber's phrase, a "hedonism without heart." Into the heart of libertine dissipation, Richardson introduces the austere compulsion proper to capitalist modernity: the demand for endless work.

Lovelace's preternatural diligence in pursuit of enjoyment, in addition to its economic resonances, has narratological ramifications. Lovelace's actions throughout the novel are over-intense and under-motivated; acting far more than he is acted upon, he installs a gap in the novel's causal chains. This gap is the principal source of both damage and plot within the narrative mechanics of Richardson's novel. *Clarissa* is simultaneously the most elaborate and the most pristine example of what I call the persecutory plot. Lovelace's desire is the sole source of harm and disorganization in the novel, but also the sole source of eventfulness: without his persecutory labors, there would be nothing to mourn, but also nothing to narrate. *Clarissa* is also deeply unusual among eighteenth-century novels in allowing the tragic tendencies of the persecutory plot to fully unfold themselves.

In this chapter, I will delineate Lovelace's function as a persecutory villain in the plot of *Clarissa*, as well as try to show how his persecutory function places him, despite appearances, on the side of an emergent, capitalist form of social and subjective organization. Richardson's fiction probably presents the most pristine case of the persecutory plot: in each of the four novels, persecution is absolutely indispensable to narrative. In the case of *Clarissa*, Lovelace's status as the causal engine of the novel stems from a special relationship of means to ends at work in his actions. To delineate this relationship, I will document Lovelace's own reflections on his tireless persecutory activity, which tend to describe debauchery as if it were labor. I will then draw on Max Weber, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Lacan in order to

theorize the subjective contours of Lovelace's libertinism, which, in my account, is driven by an imperative to enjoy symmetrical with the Weberian imperative to work. The development of this theme in the novel culminates with the remarkable scene in Mrs. Smith's shop in which Lovelace performs an extended impersonation of a petty tradesman. His performance, I argue, draws out the submerged resonances between the opposed historical and class forces that structure the novel, making frenetic libertinage and mercantile diligence difficult to tell apart. I will conclude by turning to the question of tragedy, adopting Sarah Fielding's argument for the necessity of *Clarissa*'s tragic ending. Fielding, basing her argument on the obduracy of Lovelace's desire, detects the tragic current in the persecutory plot.

## 1. The persecutory plot in Richardson

Narrative is founded on the fact of eventfulness, and many of its formal strategies thus constitute technical means of annulling uneventfulness. In the eighteenth-century novel, I am arguing, this function is often fulfilled by a persecutory villain. The homeostasis ruptured by the persecutory villain, furthermore, is often indicated by the appearance of pastoral themes, which argue for an immanent finitude in both narrative and human life. Richardson explicitly invokes the quietist pastoral tradition with the insertion of some unattributed verses on the subject of the rural poor into *Pamela in her Exalted Condition*:

The Man who in one Way was always bred  
Till thrice Twelve Winters have pass'd o'er his Head,  
*Is, or should be*, contented with his Fate,  
Nor covet *totally* to change his State.  
For Discontent once cherish'd in his Breast,  
Desire of Change will never let him rest,  
Unfix'd, unsettled, he, all Comfort past,

Knows his *first* Wish; but ne'er will know his *last*.<sup>4</sup>

As in William Empson's account, pastoral serves here as an alibi for class domination.<sup>5</sup> It also, however, posits the good life as an immobile one. "Desire of Change" is an entropic force that "unfixes" life and generates an endless chain of "Wishes." For narrative to occur, pastoral quiescence must be ruptured, and "Desire of Change" is thus one technique that narrative has at its disposal for producing eventfulness. In the previous chapter, I argued that Defoe's *Moll Flanders* represents a transition between two techniques for producing perturbation. In that novel, the picaresque—in which meaningless contingency disrupts narrative closure and buffets the protagonist from one episode to the next—gives way to the persecutory plot—in which the foreclosure of pastoral quiescence emanates from within a pathological subjectivity. It thus records a migration inward of the motor of narrative: from the shapeless flux of secular time to the entropic desire of an individual mind. The novelist who did the most to consolidate this transition is almost certainly Samuel Richardson.

The persecutory plot, though broadly diffused in eighteenth-century fiction, is at its strongest and purest in Richardson. In each of the four novels, there is quite simply no plot without persecution. Mr. B and Lovelace, of course, are the central persecutory figures in the Richardson canon. Yet throughout each of the novels, we find minor persecutory figures introduced precisely where narrative begins to settle into pastoral closure. If the first half of *Pamela* is dominated by Mr. B's lecherous machinations, his neutralization via marriage presents a problem for the second half of the novel. Thus the introduction of his aunt Lady Davers, whose

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition*, ed. Albert J. Rivero, volume 3 of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 243. The verses may be by either Aaron Hill or Richardson himself. For a more general discussion of pastoral tropes and imagery in *Pamela*, see Margaret Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 35-70.

<sup>5</sup> *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986).

fierce anti-Pamelism sustains the persecutory drama after the marriage. If the notorious bedroom scenes are the traumatic peaks of the action in the novel's first half, the climax of the second half is a long, agonizing sequence in which Lady Davers confines Pamela in her own dining room.<sup>6</sup> It is only with Lady Davers' gradual acceptance of Pamela as a sister-in-law that the novel's dramatic tension is fully resolved. When Mr. B's discloses his affair with Sally Godfrey and recites the story of her seduction, furthermore, his status as a persecutory figure is reactivated, albeit at a second remove. Thus the novel's famously extraneous (or apparently so) second volume, following the resolution of the marriage plot, in fact maintains the essential narrative dynamics of the first.

The persecutory function is weakest in *Pamela in her Exalted Condition*, the novel in which, as Pamela puts it, "my Persecutor [has] become my Protector."<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that critics have tended to deride it, in Margaret Doody's phrase, as "the sequel that failed."<sup>8</sup> Yet even here the ghosts of persecutory figures reappear, and tend to do so just at the points at which the novel's baggy narrative is in danger of collapsing into event-less-ness. In Volume III, Mr. B and Lady Davers periodically subject Pamela to a kind of raillery that seems to echo their former persecutory functions. Sir Simon Darnford and Sir Jacob Swynford, an aging rake and an oafish peer, transpose the persecutory energies formerly focused in Mr. B and Lady Davers into a satirical register, as if the sexual predation and class hostility of the first installment still lingered on after their comic neutralization. And in Volume IV, which threatens to stagnate into a compilation of Pamela's theatrical reviews and pedagogical musings, the introduction of a new persecutory figure rouses narrative and provides the novel with its

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 381-98.

<sup>7</sup> *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> *A Natural Passion*, 71.

dramatic climax, insofar as it has one. Mr. B encounters a widowed countess at a masquerade and contemplates, without consummating, an affair; a young barrister named Mr. Turner (a rival for the Countess' affections) represents the situation to Pamela as blacker than it in fact is. Turner, a peripheral figure, is introduced only to supply the persecutory function in its pure form, as if a supplement were needed to assist the semi-reformed Mr. B in his former demonic office. In this way, even in the most lugubrious of Richardson's fictions, persecutors periodically make an appearance, perturbing the pastoral closure of virtuous married life, and thus permitting narrative to occur.

*Sir Charles Grandison* famously replaces the central male persecutory figure with a paragon. Yet this absence of a central persecutor is balanced by a proliferation of minor persecutory figures: Sir Hargrave Pollexfen and Greville, two aggressive rakes who compete for the heroine Harriet Byron's attentions, Sir Thomas Grandison, Sir Charles' dissipated father who wastes the family fortune and refuses to allow the Grandison sisters to marry, Mrs. Jervois, the unstable mother of Sir Charles' ward Emily, Lady Olivia, a kind of female rake who aggressively pursues Sir Charles, and Lady Sforza, who sets the Porretta family against marrying their daughter Clementina to Sir Charles in order to facilitate devolution of the family property to her daughter Laurana. (In relating the story of the virtuous divine Dr. Bartlett, the novel even supplies a kind of miniature persecutory narrative, as if modeling its own dynamics on a small scale.)<sup>9</sup> In two instances, the interventions of these persecutory figures are indispensable to narrative development: had she not been kidnapped by Hargrave Pollexfen in the novel's first volume, Harriet Byron would never have become acquainted with the Grandison family,<sup>10</sup> and if

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<sup>9</sup> Letter II.36

<sup>10</sup> Pollexfen, the novel's most prominent rake, ceases to be important to the novel's plot after the abduction, yet continues to make sporadic appearances, as if in an echo of the full-blown persecutory plots of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. Indeed, Richardson uses the novel's final letter to report his death, despite his confinement to the narrative periphery

Lady Sforza had not exacerbated the tensions within the Porretta family regarding Clementina's potential match with Sir Charles, fewer impediments would have stood in the way of the marriage, thus providing the possibility of a different resolution for the novel's central love triangle. In this way, the function of the central persecutory figure is distributed outward to a constellation of minor persecutors, each making her own modest contribution to the ongoing perturbation of the narrative world.

Persecution, then, is an indispensable condition of narrative in Richardson's fictions; virtuous as the heroines and heroes may be, eventfulness will never unfold from within the space of the protagonist. In *Clarissa*, this narrative logic is deployed with a rigor, virtuosity, and expansiveness that is probably unmatched in the history of the novel. As a causal agent and source of tragic harm, Lovelace is quite simply omnipresent in the narrative. Lovelace's first letter does not appear until two months into the action of the novel, after many torturous scenes of domestic drama among the Harlowes. Yet these agonized debates stem from sibling rivalry—Arabella's jealousy of Lovelace's preference for Clarissa over herself, and especially James' peremptory insistence that Clarissa marry the odious Solmes—that has its final cause in Lovelace. James is hostile to Lovelace due to events that occur well before the novel's first letter, a college rivalry culminating in a duel in which the former is humiliated. In the novel's first episodes, then, James acts as a kind of surrogate persecutor: the impossible demands he makes of Clarissa can, carefully considered, be traced back to the figure of Lovelace. Furthermore, Lovelace's causal dominance of the narrative continues even after Clarissa is no longer directly under his power. As Sandra Macpherson has brilliantly demonstrated, Richardson insists on the

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for several preceding volumes. It is almost as if the novel could not come to a close without neutralizing its central rake, no matter how distant he had become from the action. Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), III.461-3.

causal links between Lovelace's actions and their unintended outcomes: Clarissa's imprisonment and eventual death.<sup>11</sup> If Lovelace did not intend for Mrs. Sinclair's prostitutes to have Clarissa arrested for debt, or for Clarissa to subsequently pine away, these outcomes nevertheless inexorably unfold from his acts. The causal filaments extending from Lovelace's pursuit of Clarissa thus penetrate the novel in its full breadth; Lovelace's desire is the causal engine of the entire narrative, from the first letter to the last. Readers of *Clarissa* have often noted with puzzlement the fact that the novel extends for over a hundred pages after its apparent tragic denouement, the death of the heroine. What has been less often noticed is the austere logic that determines the point at which the novel does end: the very same page as Lovelace's death.

In *Clarissa*, then, narrative flows from Lovelace's persecutory machinations. If Lovelace is the causal center of the novel, however, his actions themselves are problematic as causal phenomenon. His ceaseless, frenetic activity and production of mischief cannot be derived in any simple way from the usual motivating causes of villainy: lust, greed, envy, hunger for power. As with persecutory villains in diverse eighteenth-century genres, Lovelace's desire is both the necessary condition for narrative as well as a gap in narrative's causal system. The persistent under-motivation of Lovelace's activity in the novel, as I will argue, can be situated historically within the modernizing current that Weber termed "rationalization." At one point, Lovelace provides a rather desultory explanation for his relentless depredation of women:

[. . .] I was once in love before [. . .] It was in my early manhood—with that quality-jilt, whose infidelity I have vowed to revenge upon as many of the sex as shall come into my power. I believe, in different climes, I have already sacrificed a hecatomb to my Nemesis in pursuance of this vow.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 57-97.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 2004), 143. Subsequently cited in the text as *C*.

This micro-narrative, which reads like a comic book supervillain’s backstory, is a sorry attempt to shore up the under-motivation of Lovelace’s relentless activity. It is hard to say whether the lapse here is Richardson’s or Lovelace’s, or if Lovelace himself realizes how inadequate this story and offers it as a mere witty sally. In any case, the meagerness of the backstory regarding the “quality-jilt,” which disappears entirely from the rest of the novel, is instructive. The gap it attempts to plug—the villain’s desire—is both the narrative engine and the central epistemological problem of the persecutory plot.

## 2. Strange diligence

In only the second of his letters to appear in *Clarissa*, Lovelace indulges himself in a moment of melancholic reflection regarding the sexual enjoyment of women:

[. . .] what is there even in the ultimate of our wishes with them?—*Preparation* and *expectation* are, in a manner, everything: *reflection*, indeed, may be something, if the mind may be hardened above feeling the guilt of a past *trespass*: but the *fruition*, what is there in that? And yet, that being the end, nature will not be satisfied without it. (C 163)

The joys of rakishness, for Loveless, consist entirely in anticipatory “expectation” and retrospective “reflection” on the sexual act; “fruition” itself isn’t anything to write home about. If, as Dorothy van Ghent and Ian Watt both argued, *Clarissa* is a formally revolutionary novel in its dilated investigation of a single action, Lovelace is remarkably willing to minimize this action.<sup>13</sup> From the very beginning of the novel, Lovelace raises the idea that the enjoyment procured by violating Clarissa’s person may not be worth the trouble. Yet, over the course of the next three months and several hundred pages, Lovelace will secretly take lodgings in an inn near the Harlowes’ estate, haunt the garden wall across which he and Clarissa correspond day and

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<sup>13</sup> Dorothy van Ghent, *The English Novel*, 47; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 135.

night, corrupt the Harlowes' servant Joseph Leman, carefully orchestrate an encounter in the garden so that Clarissa has no choice but to flee with him, disguise the brothel of the procuress Mrs. Sinclair as a respectable boarding house, enlist a rogue to pose for months as a well-meaning neighbor of one of Clarissa's uncles, contrive an elaborate disguise and backstory to retrieve Clarissa from a house in Hampstead that she has escaped to, feign serious illness, intentionally set Sinclair's house on fire, and finally resort to laudanum and rape. All this for the merest pittance of carnal "fruition." This extraordinary sequence of means procures an "end" that Lovelace, from the beginning of the novel, declares to be meager.

As Clarissa puts it: "What a strange diligence!"<sup>14</sup> (C 343) Lovelace's strange diligence proliferates means out of all proportion to their end; his monumental labor of seduction attaches a chain of instrumental actions to a single resultant action that hardly seems to recompense him for his pains. This is what Freud called an "economic problem," and Lovelace's subjectivity is perfectly calibrated to produce such economic problems: to his vicious instrumentalization of other persons, he joins an unrelenting perseverance. Belford will later join Clarissa in noticing this curious combination of qualities in his friend: "a man born for intrigue, full of invention, intrepid, remorseless, able patiently to watch for thy opportunity; not hurried, as most men, by gusts of violent passion which often nip a project in the bud [ . . . ]" (C 501) (Anna Laetitia Barbauld would later concur, describing Lovelace as a "cool systematic seducer.")<sup>15</sup> Lovelace's lust is tempered by a steely *savoir faire*. He may be a haughty, aristocratic arch-rake, but he also exhibits the quality that Georg Simmel noticed in the personalities produced by urban, capitalist

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<sup>14</sup> Clarissa uses this phrase to describe Lovelace's expediency in collecting letters she deposits in their agreed-upon location. It recurs at least once more with a similar sense. (C 352)

<sup>15</sup> *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld (London: 1804), I.cv.

modernity: “relentless matter-of-factness.”<sup>16</sup> The attitude I will call the “rake ethic” consists in the application of this matter-of-factness to the task of procuring enjoyment.

Alenka Zupančič distinguishes helpfully between two types of rake, one who proceeds “one by one” (Don Juan) and one who proceeds “part by part” (Laclos’ Valmont).<sup>17</sup> That is, the rake who accumulates conquests by counting (“mille e tre,” for example), and the rake whose desire leads him on a slow, painstaking approach toward “One.” In Lovelace, however, we find a kind of superimposition of the “one by one” and “bit by bit” approaches: within the novel, we only know him to be attached to a single object, but we also hear rumors of innumerable previous conquests. This compromise between the two types of rake, indeed, is arguably typical of the treatment of the figure in the British novel: the rake is often understood to be a serial seducer, but is rarely seen to direct his efforts toward more than one woman in the space of a novel. The rake narrative, in its British variety, is thus a “One” extracted from a serial chain of “ones.” The plot of *Clarissa* is the purest and most voluminous instance of this tendency. When Lovelace affirms the superiority of “preparation” and “expectation” to “fruition,” he is celebrating the bit-by-bit mode of enjoyment, and it is the ingenuity and perseverance of his incremental approach toward fruition that gives *Clarissa* its massive scope.<sup>18</sup>

Lovelace’s bit-by-bit approach to enjoyment, in its proliferation of means out of proportion to ends, thus maintains a gap between actions and their motives. In one letter to his friend, Belford poses the question of Lovelace’s bloated instrumentality in no uncertain terms: “Thinkest thou, truly admirable as this lady is, that the end thou proposest to thyself, if obtained,

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<sup>16</sup> “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Blackwell City Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 104.

<sup>17</sup> *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (New York: Verso, 2000), 107.

<sup>18</sup> Terry Eagleton and Julie Park, not dissimilarly, argue that Lovelace is a fetishist, seeking in a replacement for the lost maternal phallus in Clarissa’s body. Eagleton, however, claims Lovelace as a Don Juan figure—a designation which, in light of Zupančič’s schema, does not seem quite right. Eagleton, *Rape of Clarissa*, 57-63; Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010), 51-76.

is answerable to the means, to the trouble thou givest thyself, and the perfidies, tricks, strategems and contrivances thou hast already been guilty of, and still meditatatest?" (C 555-556) Belford, in context, is tactfully pointing out that Clarissa is unlikely to be as fun in bed as any of the debauched women to whom Lovelace enjoys easy access. He is also, however, raising a question about the "answerability" of means to ends.

Writing in response, Lovelace spends an entire letter artfully evading this question before finally settling on an elusive response:

But another word or two, as to thy objection relating to my trouble and my reward:  
Does not the keen foxhunter endanger his neck and his bones in pursuit of a vermin  
which, when killed, is neither fit food for men nor dogs?  
Do not the hunters of the nobler game value the venison less than the sport?  
Why then should I be reflected upon, and the sex affronted, for my patience and  
perseverance in the most noble of all chases [ . . . ]?  
Learn of thy master, for the future, to treat more respectfully a sex that yields us our  
principal diversions and delights. (C 557-58)

The metaphor, certainly, is an aristocratic one. Yet Lovelace's description of the hunt bypasses its courtly qualities (pomp, ceremony, spectacle, hierarchy), in favor of its basic structure as a form of action. The chase interests Lovelace because it organizes an entire field of activity around an object that is, on its own, of indifferent interest. Though fox flesh and venison are what hunters aim at, these aims are purely incidental to the "sport" that they occasion. Lovelace then proceeds to invoke another aristocratic *topos*, courtly love (by arguing that Belford's exhortation to disengage from the "chase" of love amounts to an "affront" to the sex pursued). Yet rather than an idealized anchor for desire, the beloved lady is a kind of hedonic investment opportunity: she "yields [ . . . ] diversions and delights." Lovelace has departed from a Petrarchan model of erotic address (in which the unavailability of the lady opens a space of excruciating but habitable longing) for a model in which the lady's flight from possession is itself productive of enjoyment. And the lady herself, like the hunted fox, is incidental to the enjoyment obtained by

her pursuit. In the alliterative transformation of “patience and perseverance” into “diversions and delights,” we can recognize a hedonic logic proper not to aristocratic court culture but capitalist modernity.

A strange affinity thus begins to emerge between rakish enjoyment, as Lovelace pursues it, and work. It is, once again, Lovelace himself who leads this way in theorizing the problem: “men of our cast take twenty times the pains to be rogues, that it would cost them to be honest; and dearly, with the sweat of our brows [ . . . ] do we earn our purchase [ . . . ]” (C 691) Men of the rakish “cast” are condemned, like Adam, to sweat for their enjoyment. Roguishness requires a considerable increase in workload. Having arrived at Hampstead in order to recapture Clarissa, Lovelace preens: “What an industrious spirit have I! Nobody can say that I eat the bread of idleness. I take true pains for all the pleasure I enjoy.” (C 762) Sexual predation, so described, comes to sound like prim husbandry. But Lovelace presents us, furthermore, with a strange conception of “industry”: the expenditure of pains in search of pleasure. Within a Freudian, economic model of enjoyment, this is a form of activity that is, in both epistemological and actuarial senses, unaccountable.

Lovelace’s citations of scripture in support of his debauchery are, of course, intentionally perverse. But this does not mean that they are without a coherent logic. Indeed, there are sporadic points in the novel at which an oddly puritan note is detectable in Lovelace’s litany of self-exculpation. Gloating over the success of one of his stratagems (the invented threat of retributive violence on behalf of James Harlowe by a “Captain Singleton”), Lovelace invokes an age-old defense of acquisitive activity: “Nor blame me for the use I make of my talents. Who, that had such, would let ‘em be idle?” (C 574) Lovelace makes use of the logic developed in the Parable of the Talents: to let potentially productive capital lie fallow is not only negligent but

blameworthy. Lovelace's capacity for mischief is a kind of dormant labor-power that ought to be tapped rather than wasted. In making this argument, he arguably formulates the concept that Max Weber found to be central to the ethos of puritan capitalism, that of vocation or *Beruf*. For Weber, this concept allowed the pursuit of "innerworldly" economic interests to take on a spiritual shape.<sup>19</sup> Lovelace simply extends the same logic to the labor involved in the pursuit of enjoyment. Shakespeare's Falstaff, another virtuoso of self-exculpation, makes a similar argument to justify his highway robbery: "Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation."<sup>20</sup> Yet Richardson's villain differs markedly from his Shakespearean predecessor: Falstaff is wicked in order to avoid work, while Lovelace takes wickedness itself a transcendent imperative and a source of endless labor. He thus coopts what appears to be a moralistic aphorism as a statement of resignation to a life of rakish toil: "*it costs a man ten times more pains to be wicked, than it would cost him to be good.*" (C 912)

In Lovelace's pursuit of Clarissa, then, we find an immense dilation of means directed toward an end acknowledged from the outset to be paltry. When Lovelace has achieved this end, his characteristic volubility suddenly atrophies. In a famously terse letter to Belford, Lovelace reports the attainment of his goal: "And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives." (C 883) Judith Wilt is very likely incorrect in reading this letter as reporting Lovelace's abstention from rape.<sup>21</sup> She is right, however, to emphasize its elision of the very event it is reporting. And in eliding the rape, the narrative retracts its own dramatic climax. (The rape only appears in the narrative much later and in blurred form when Clarissa offers her

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<sup>19</sup> *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002), 28-36.

<sup>20</sup> *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1047.

<sup>21</sup> "He Could Go No Farther: A Modest Proposal about Lovelace and Clarissa," *PMLA* 92.1 (1977), 19-32. After the appearance of Wilt's article, T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel discovered an unpublished pamphlet in which Richardson seems to make clear that Lovelace is unequivocally guilty of rape. "An Unpublished Pamphlet by Samuel Richardson," *Philological Quarterly* 63.3 (1984), 401-9.

account of it; C 1011.) Yet Lovelace's taciturnity cannot easily be attributed to remorse or disappointment: throughout his pursuit of Clarissa, he has made it quite clear that the pains he takes will far outstrip the pleasure he gains. As he puts it at outset of his pursuit, sex is nothing special, merely the "end" without which "nature will not be satisfied." The letter's brevity is thus arguably more violent than many readings would have it. Within the instrumental economy of Lovelace's desire, means are everything, ends nothing. If the rape appears minimal in Lovelace's correspondence, perhaps this is simply because, within the logic of the rake ethic, it is so.

As if to magnify this violence, the rape seems to do little to change the narrative economy of the rake ethic. After the rape, Lovelace repeats his reflection, first made at beginning of the novel, on the meagerness of "fruition":

What, as I have often contemplated, is the enjoyment of the finest woman in the world, to the contrivance, the bustle, the surprises, and at last the happy conclusion of a well-laid plot?—The charming *roundabouts*, to come the *nearest way home* [ . . . ] (C 920)

Within Freud's economic model of the hedonic, according to which pleasure is merely the reduction of tension in the organism, such a "roundabout" approach to enjoyment is described by the term "fore-pleasure."<sup>22</sup> This is the strain in Freud's thought that would eventually lead him to posit a dimension of psychic life "beyond the pleasure principle." The novel's hedonic economy functions by minimizing Lovelace's pleasure and maximizing the pains taken to achieve it—just the form of deferral that, Lovelace asserts, characterizes a "well-laid plot." Patricia Spacks, following this term through the novel, has commented on Lovelace's enthusiasm for plots, or for narrative schemes that imaginatively project power and dominance into the world.<sup>23</sup> If we can

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<sup>22</sup> *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), VII.208-12.

<sup>23</sup> Spacks contrasts Lovelace's plotting with Clarissa's affinity for stories, or retrospective accounts that give her misfortunes definite shape and meaning. *Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 63-76.

take him at his word, however, his interest in plots extends primarily to their developments rather than their denouements. In the roundabout approach of desire toward its object, Peter Brooks argues, we can find a model for the most interesting part of a plot, the middle.<sup>24</sup> The extreme length of *Clarissa*'s middle corresponds in large part to Lovelace's bit-by-bit approach to enjoyment, an approach that paradoxically "bustles" even as it moves with agonizing slowness.

Lovelace's "roundabout" plotting, furthermore, is the wellspring of *Clarissa*'s plot. Macpherson vigorously demonstrates that, in spite of Lovelace's exculpatory acrobatics, he is the causal center of the novel and thus liable for its tragic trajectory. My account of the novel's causal form, however, differs from Macpherson's in declining to view Lovelace as himself an inert body colliding with other bodies. Lovelace's body is inhabited, as Clarissa immediately notices, by an inner reservoir of energy, an uncanny busyness. His causal relations with other bodies, which in large part comprise the subject-matter of the novel, are both its central crux and the cause of its plot. The causal embedding of characters in plots is generally called motive. In Lovelace, we find a nearly inexhaustible supply of motivation, of causal productivity, without easily finding external causal chains by which to explain such productivity. It is from within this causal aporia that the rake ethic—the proliferation of means and minimization of ends produced by the rake's desire—makes narrative occur.

As Clarissa is dying, Lovelace is tormented with indecision about whether or not to try to see her. His vacillations provide us with a perfect image of the rake ethic:

Forbidden to attend the dear creature, yet longing to see her, I would give the world to be admitted once more to her beloved presence. I ride towards London three or four times a day, resolving *pro* and *con* twenty times in two or three miles' and at last ride back; and in view of Uxbridge, loathing even the kind friend and hospitable house, turn my horse's head again towards the town and resolve to gratify my humour, let her take it as she will; but, at the very entrance of it, after infinite canvassings, once more alter my mind,

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<sup>24</sup> *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 90-112.

dreading to offend and shock her, lest by that means I should curtail a life so precious. (C 1334)

During Clarissa's final days, Lovelace is perennially in transit to London without ever reaching his destination. He labors furiously to produce the dilated middle of a plot that never attains its end. The image here is thus one of "roundabout" plot in its purest form. Multiple critics have celebrated the ouroboros symbol that Clarissa has embossed on her coffin as an emblem of *Clarissa*'s hermeneutic self-enclosure, or Clarissa's anorexic self-destruction.<sup>25</sup> Lovelace's rides to and from London, though equally without terminal closure, invoke a very different temporal and spatial structure: infinite labor within finite space. Time and space, for Lovelace, are open rather than closed, but only insofar as he fills them with object-less, interminable work. This image may be mildly comical or poignant, but it also indicates Lovelace's residence in the spatio-temporal lifeworld of the class toward which, on the surface, he is so hostile.

### 3. Hedonism without heart

After Clarissa's death, Anna Howe writes Belford a long letter celebrating her friend's virtues. Among these is a remarkable scheduling regimen. Clarissa, as Anna recounts, divided her day up into strictly apportioned segments: six hours for sleep, three for her epistolary duties, two for household management, five for needlepoint work, drawing, music, and other feminine accomplishments, three for meals and conversation, and one for visits to the neighboring poor. The remaining four hours comprised "*her fund*, which upon which she used to draw to satisfy her other debits." At the end of each week, Clarissa would tally the activities recorded in her

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<sup>25</sup> For the former point, see William Warner, *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 260-66; and Terry Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 136-47; for the latter, see Maud Ellman, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 82.

“account book,” and upon finding that she had fallen short in any item would declare herself, for example, “*Debtor to the article of benevolent visits* so many hours.” As William Warner puts it, “Clarissa’s use of her time is like an investor’s—she carefully apportions her reserves to different accounts so as to maximize her return.”<sup>26</sup> Time is virtue, and Clarissa’s practice was to maximize the productivity of the former in order to accumulate as much as possible of the latter. Thus she declared that “according to the practice of *too many*, she had actually lived more years at *sixteen*, than *they* had at *twenty-six*.” (C 1470-72)

Clarissa’s accounting system is precisely the kind of thing Weber had in mind when he proposed his celebrated account of the “Protestant ethic.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, if it were intended to convert time into money rather than virtue, one could imagine this passage supplanting Benjamin Franklin as Weber’s crowning example in the opening pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. For Franklin, “*time is money*,” for Clarissa, “no one could spend their time properly [ . . . ] who did not appropriate the hours [ . . . ] to particular purposes and employments”; for Franklin, “*money is of the prolific, generating nature*,” for Clarissa, careful accounting makes 16 years amount to 26.<sup>28</sup> (C 1470) Clarissa joins Franklin in arguing for the necessity of stuffing time with productivity. Time spent in idleness is equivalent to money (or accomplishments) lost; it is not so much that sloth is opprobrious as that it amounts to an

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<sup>26</sup> *Reading Clarissa*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> For full substantiation of Richardson’s inheritance of the Puritan tradition, see Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *Samuel Richardson and the Eighteenth-Century Puritan Character* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1972). Wolff seems to adopt a Weberian account of secularization, discerning in the movement between *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* a shift from the tortured introspection of seventeenth-century Puritanism to its milder, works-oriented eighteenth-century developments. Wolff is quite right that Sir Charles Grandison displays “that unmistakable Puritan busyness” (53); I am trying to argue that Lovelace, though far from Puritan, anticipates and probably surpasses Sir Charles in this respect.

<sup>28</sup> Franklin quoted in Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 9. For Weber’s commentary on various forms of ethical bookkeeping, including Franklin’s own, see *Protestant Ethic*, 84-85.

incomprehensible neglect of self-interest. The fantasy, in both cases, is of the final eradication of fallow time, the full subsumption of human life into the machinery of accumulation.

*Clarissa* can thus be situated historically within a process which, in Weber's thought, is central to capitalist modernity: rationalization.<sup>29</sup> Weber argued that the historical emergence of capitalist production was made possible by the gradual appearance of both institutions and personalities conducive to its functioning. Bureaucratic institutions composed of de-personalized "offices" provided the means of effectively administering labor, rationalized finance mechanisms provided a secure means of storing and transmitting capital, and formalistic jurisprudence provided capitalists with the reliable legal system that they required.<sup>30</sup> These newly formalistic institutions were populated by a new kind of personality: moralistic yet cunning, pious yet literal-minded. While Catholic culture had been hospitable to sustenance-oriented economic attitudes and strident ethical critiques of luxury and avarice, the Protestant ethic created individuals of an unflaggingly productivist cast. The "innerworldly asceticism" of these rationalized personalities was perfectly calibrated for the de-instrumentalized accumulation of surplus value: "if [...] restraint on consumption is *combined with* the freedom to strive for profit, the result will inevitably be the *creation of capital* through the *ascetic compulsion to save*."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> I leave to the side here a central crux in Weber's work: the exact nature of the causal connection between Protestantism and capitalist rationalization. The arc of Weber's career is ambiguous on this point. At the end of his life, he presented versions of the rationalization argument that minimized the role of religious culture (in *Economy and Society* and the lectures collected as *General Economic History*). He also, however, released a revised edition of *The Protestant Ethic*. Fredric Jameson offers a reading of Weber's work that emphasizes the status of the Protestant ethic as a "vanishing mediator," a mere support for the capitalist ethos that erodes as capitalist modernity comes into its own. Taking Weber's causal claim more seriously, Jere Cohen has carefully reviewed the evidence for a link between Protestantism and capitalism, with mixed results. Fredric Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator; or Max Weber as Storyteller," in *Ideologies of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), II.3-34; Jere Cohen, *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Mechanisms of Influence* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> See the section on bureaucracy in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al. [New York: Bedminster Press, 1968], III.956-1005) and the last sections of *General Economic History* (trans. Frank Knight [Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1950], 275-369).

<sup>31</sup> *Protestant Ethic*, 117.

It comes as no surprise to find the spirit of rationalization alive in Clarissa, a virtuous bourgeois heroine created by a moralistic bourgeois author. Less expected is the fact that the novel's most industrious character is indisputably her aristocratic nemesis, Lovelace. As we have seen, Lovelace's commitment to the activity of mischief exceeds the hedonic rewards offered by such activity. Narratologically, this feature of Lovelace's character appears as a problem of motive. In personalities under the sway of the Protestant ethic, similarly, Weber discerns a curious inarticulacy about motives:

If one were to ask them what is the *purpose* of their restless chase and why they are never satisfied with what they have acquired [...] they would answer, if they had an answer at all, "to provide for children and grandchildren." More frequently, however [...] they would answer, with greater justification, that business, with its ceaseless work, has simply become "indispensable to their life." That is in fact their only true motivation, and it expresses at the same time the *irrational* element of this way of conducting one's life, whereby a man exists for his business, not vice versa.<sup>32</sup>

These solid citizens, Weber finds, come up short when asked to account for their ceaseless productive activity. When the old religious justification (that virtuous work in this life substantiates one's election in the next) has fallen away, they are left with only an affirmation of work for work's sake. In pointing out this motivational gap in the capitalist personality, Weber places an irrational kernel at the heart of rationalized subjectivity. The people we now speak of colloquially as "highly motivated" are thus characterized by a fundamental condition of motive-less-ness. It is this motive-less subjective structure that Lovelace brings to bear on the rakish pursuit of enjoyment.

The feature of eighteenth-century libertinism I am trying to draw attention to here has been noticed before. Indeed, it has been detected in a figure even more unapologetically aristocratic than Lovelace: the Marquis de Sade. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, tracing

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<sup>32</sup> *Protestant Ethic*, 23.

the Enlightenment's tendency toward ever-increasing instrumentalization, argue for an affinity between Kant's unification of practical and pure reason and the antics of Sade's sexual athletes. Like the "modern sporting squad," Sade's libertines engage in "a tense, purposive bustle": "What seems to matter in such events, more than pleasure itself, is the busy pursuit of pleasure, its organization [ . . . ] the schema of activity count[s] for more than its content." Sadean libertinism, in its manic efforts to utilize each bodily orifice, manifests a "purposiveness without purpose."<sup>33</sup> For Horkheimer and Adorno, the schematic clarity of Sade's orgies is perfectly consistent with their radical violence and indifference to harm. And indeed, Sade's argument for the permissibility of libertine violence, presented in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, is crystalline and quasi-Cartesian.<sup>34</sup> Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative forbidding the instrumentalization of other persons is thus a stop-gap defense against Enlightenment reason, not its pinnacle. Yet, as Horkheimer and Adorno emphasize, sexual enjoyment tends to be displaced in Sadean violence by a pure form of instrumentality, and the use of bodies tends to proliferate means without designating corresponding ends.

For Sade's libertines, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, enjoyment is thus less important than the means of its attainment: "The means is fetishized: it absorbs pleasure. [ . . . ] Pleasure itself shows traces of the outdated, the irrelevant, like the metaphysics which forbade it."<sup>35</sup> If Sadean heroines like Juliette or Eugénie de Franval indulge in panegyrics on pleasure, this marks a kind of final superstition, one last veil to be lifted before the full subsumption of sex into instrumentality. Enlightenment libertinism is thus a product of rationalization: around the

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<sup>33</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 69.

<sup>34</sup> Sade argues that it is impossible to feel another's pain, and it is therefore inconsistent with reason to incorporate such pain into ethical decision-making. *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 252-3.

<sup>35</sup> *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 82.

modest phenomenon of embodied enjoyment, it erects an immense infrastructure of instrumentality. This is the same logic that is at work in Richardson's depiction of Lovelace: sexual pursuit dilates out of proportion to the enjoyment afforded by its fulfillment, and plot out of proportion to denouement. His libertine rake ethic, in this way, is by no means an obverse to the Protestant ethic. Though clothed in the embroidered waistcoat of archaism, Lovelace is a distinctively and traumatically modern figure.

Yet, in both Sade and Richardson, enjoyment is never completely abandoned as a locus of activity. Two decades after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Jacques Lacan wrote a preface to *Philosophy in the Bedroom* that, apparently independently, arrived at the same pairing: "Kant with Sade." Lacan, unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, takes the Kantian categorical imperative quite seriously. Yet he also discerns, in Sade's work, a complementary maxim: "'I have a right to enjoy your body,' anyone can say to me, 'and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body.'"<sup>36</sup> For Lacan, these two Kantian and Sadean maxims are fundamental to the ethical legacy of the Enlightenment: the right to non-instrumentalization and the right to enjoyment. As Lacan is well aware, these principles are pragmatically irreconcilable. Yet Sade, he argues, follows a Kantian intuition by introducing into sexual enjoyment a formal law that goes beyond any hedonic conception of the good. If enjoyment, according to the Sadean maxim, can be articulated as a universal right, this indicates the presence of a symbolic imperative in its functioning.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 648.

<sup>37</sup> Zupančič, in *Ethics of the Real*, has extrapolated this point into a reading of Lacan's seminar on ethics, with its own well-known imperative: do not cede your desire. As Zupančič demonstrates, Kantian and Lacanian ethics possess a symmetrical formal structure. For Kant, the categorical imperative cleanses ethical maxims of all inclinational content and lifts the subject out of her attachment to the pathological. For Lacan, fidelity to one's desire detaches subjectivity from its captivation by the pleasure principle.

The Lacanian name for this conjunction of embodied enjoyment and abstract imperative is desire, which Lacan provisionally defines as a “will to jouissance.”<sup>38</sup> Lacan concurs with Freud in positing pleasure as homeostatic, but quickly adds, again in line with Freud, that another principle must thus be at work to explain the activities of libertines, who take pains for their pleasure. Desire finds its support in fantasy, which is simultaneously the frame through which enjoyment is approached and the prop holding up a force that goes beyond instinctual satisfaction. The libertine’s will to jouissance helps him reach his goal, but also points the way beyond the liquefying effect of enjoyment. Reappearing beyond the pleasure principle, the will to enjoyment is experienced as demand rather than inclination. The title of the pamphlet Sade inserts into *Philosophy in the Bedroom* might thus be modified: “yet another effort, Frenchman, if you would be libertines.” As Slavoj Žižek points out, a vernacular example of this demand can be found a ubiquitous Coca-Cola slogan articulated in the imperative mood: “Enjoy!”<sup>39</sup> The imperative to enjoy is thus an obscene command barked by the voice of the Other. Lacan goes so far as to find a set of similar injunctions in Ecclesiastes: “it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life [ . . . ]” (5:18)<sup>40</sup>

A progression can be constructed as follows: Weber points us toward the irrational core of rationalized economic activity, and Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the atavistic charge of pleasure itself can be subsumed by this irrational rationalism. Lacan follows the latter in

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<sup>38</sup> *Écrits*, 652.

<sup>39</sup> *Enjoy your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, revised ed (New York: Routledge, 2001), vii. Žižek argues, similarly, that in post-bourgeois societies the superego changes its function from the prohibition of sexuality to the demand for enjoyment. In Richardson’s world, however, both functions seem to coexist. See, for example, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (New York: Verso, 2005), 16-22.

<sup>40</sup> *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 80. Lacan may be referring most directly to Ecclesiastes 9:9, which exhorts man to “live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest,” a phrase rendered in French using the imperative “jouis.”

discerning the steely force of reason in the manic bustle of Sade's libertines.<sup>41</sup> He also, however, presents a crucial theoretical development: the uncanny industriousness of the libertine, rather than indicating the betrayal of pleasure by reason, enlists reason in the intensification of perversity. The libertine obeys the call of an obscene command experienced as if it were moral law. He dwells at the point where the symbolic parasitizes biological life by demanding the reproduction and intensification of pleasures. Libertinism can thus be defined as fidelity to the imperative to enjoy.<sup>42</sup>

Lovelace's rake ethic thus manifests his obedience to an uncanny imperative that attaches itself to sexual enjoyment. On this point he bears some resemblance to antecedent rakes, most notably the Earl of Rochester. As Carole Fabricant argues in a seminal essay, Rochester's world is characterized by the imperfection of enjoyment, which is to say its misalignment with desire.<sup>43</sup> In "The Fall," for example, Rochester describes Edenic sexuality with a great deal of conceptual clarity:

Naked beneath cool shades they lay:

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<sup>41</sup> Lacan claims that the affinity between Kant and Sade is "something that has never been pointed out [...] to the best of my knowledge." (*Écrits*, 655) Lacan's wide reading and tendency to tacitly metabolize the work of other thinkers make this claim suspicious. In any case, if "Kant with Sade" cannot necessarily be read as a direct response to Horkheimer and Adorno, it can certainly be said to begin from the same intuition.

<sup>42</sup> It should be acknowledged that the scope of my concerns here allows me to do full justice to neither Lacan's essay nor *Clarissa* (and specifically Clarissa herself). Lacan ends "Kant with Sade" by discerning a limitation in Sade's pursuit of desire: Sade stops "at the point where desire and the law become bound up with each other," failing to recognize the disjunction of both from the Real. (*Écrits*, 667) For Lacan, this means that Sade is disavowing the tragic dimension of desire. Clarissa does not make the same mistake. Early in the novel, as Anna Howe begins to detect her desire for Lovelace, Clarissa responds with a curious refrain: "THIS man is not THE man." (C 72) Or, as Lacan would later put it: "That's not it" [*ce n'est pas ça*] is the very cry by which the *jouissance* obtained is distinguished from the *jouissance* expected." (*Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink [New York: Norton, 1998], 111.) This tragic disjunction between the substance of enjoyment and the reality that supports it, between object and Thing, is precisely what Lovelace cannot wrap his head around. As I will argue at the end of this chapter, Lovelace's desire is at the center of the tragic necessity of *Clarissa*'s plot. Lovelace himself, however, seems to continually disavow the tragic dimension of his desire; for its recognition, we must rely on Clarissa, who if less cunning is ultimately far more intelligent than her antagonist.

<sup>43</sup> "Rochester's World of Imperfect Enjoyment," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 73.3 (1974), 338-50. Jonathan Kramnick has recently offered a spirited and fascinating revision of this account, arguing that Rochester verges on epiphenomenalism. The difficulty Kramnick has in fully reducing Rochester's thought to a rigorous materialism, however, perhaps indicates the tenacity in his poetry of a dimension beyond the pleasure principle. *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010), 79-84, 99-140.

Enjoyment waited on desire.  
Each member did their wills obey  
Nor could a wish set pleasure higher.”<sup>44</sup>

Like any Edenic myth, this one indicates precisely what is lacking in the fallen world: the calibration of enjoyment to desire and the responsiveness of embodied pleasure to will. In Rochester’s world, in contrast, the will to enjoyment tends to outstrip the capacity of the body to deliver it. “The Imperfect Enjoyment” is, of course, the paradigmatic example of the will’s obduracy beyond the point of the body’s satiation. The same situation is extended into an entire phase of human life in “The Disabled Debauchee” and “A Young Lady to her Ancient Lover,” in which the will to enjoy has outlived its biological support. And Rochester’s vicious satire on foppery (in “A Letter from Artemiza in the Town to Chloe in the Country” and “Tunbridge Wells”) seems to be motivated by the fact that foppish vice pursues only the enjoyments that it is told it ought to desire. Rochester’s claim in “A Satire against Reason and Mankind” thus seems defensive: “Your Reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy.”<sup>45</sup> The poetry tends to describe the plight of the libertine quite differently: as reason’s pitiless demand on the body for more enjoyment.<sup>46</sup>

For the rake, desire is sustained by the imperative to enjoy, an imperative that attaches itself parasitically to the fact of biological need. Describing his weeks spent as an invalid during a dangerous illness precipitated by Clarissa’s death, Lovelace gives us a remarkable image of such parasitism:

How my heart sickens at looking back upon what I was. Denied the sun, and all comfort:  
*all* my visitors, low-born, tiptoe attendants: even those tiptoe slaves never approaching

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<sup>44</sup> John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *Selected Poems*, ed. Paul Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21 ll.5-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Selected Poems*, 55 l.104

<sup>46</sup> For the evidence that Richardson modeled Lovelace in part on Rochester, see Jocelyn Harris, “Protean Lovelace,” in *Passion and Virtue*, ed. Blewett, 92-113; for a discussion of Lovelace and Rochester within the larger libertine tradition, see James Grantham Turner, “Lovelace and the paradoxes of libertinism,” in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Doody and Peter Sabor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 70-88; on the two figures as linking decadent and emergent models of masculinity, see Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, 35-70

me but periodically, armed with gallipots, boluses, and cephalic draughts; delivering their orders to me in hated whispers; and answering other curtain-holding impertinents, inquiring how I was, and how I took their execrable potions, whisperingly too! What a cursed still-life was this!—Nothing active in me, or about me, but the worm that never dies. (C 1431)

The invalid body is condemned to a state of “still-life,” of quiescence or drive-less-ness. Unable to muster even the desire to nourish itself, it relies on assistants for its meager diet of boluses and potions. Yet within the inertia of his body, Lovelace detects another, parasitic, force. (The image is from Isaiah 66:24.) Clarissa, in her seventh mad paper, adopts the same imagery to describe Lovelace’s depredations:

Thou pernicious caterpillar, that preyest upon the fair leaf of virgin fame, and poisonest those leaves which thou canst not devour! [ . . . ]  
Thou eating canker-worm that preyest upon the opening bud, and turnest the damask rose into livid yellowness! (C 892)

Clarissa’s trauma here permits her a strange kind of clarity: in Lovelace’s libertine industry, in the flurry of manic rakish activity that occupies his body, she recognizes the same worm-like being that he will later discover within himself. William Blake would later settle on the same image to describe the blighting of life by desire:

O Rose thou art sick.  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm:  
  
Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy:  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “The Sick Rose,” in *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 1979), 47-8.

This wormlike disquiet that feeds on the body is, of course, represented by a phallic symbol. More importantly, however, it posits desire as that which parasitizes embodied enjoyment. The imperative to enjoy attaches itself to the drives and makes them sick; it wrenches the body out of its descent into contented inertia and demands more enjoyment.

In Lovelace's rake ethic, we can discern the convergence of a decadent tradition of libertinism and a new demand for boundless productivity. For personalities under the sway of the Protestant ethic, according to Weber, "the idea of the *obligation* of man to the possessions entrusted to him, to which he subordinates himself as servant and steward or even as 'moneymaking machine,' lies on life with its chill weight."<sup>48</sup> The imperative to produce settles on the living organism like a layer of frost. In Lovelace, the same frigid compulsion attaches to embodied enjoyment itself. He is therefore perfectly described by the epithet Weber gives to the emerging capitalist classes: "hedonists without a heart."<sup>49</sup> Hedonism without heart installs a perverse kernel at the core of accumulative activity. The warm passions of libertines and the cool passions of misers, according to its logic, become nearly indistinguishable. Nowhere in the novel is this indistinction more striking than in a remarkable scene in which Lovelace turns out to be right at home behind a shop counter.

#### 4. Smith's shop

Horkheimer, in a 1964 essay, argued that what we now call "customer service" descends from an absorption of certain aspects of feudal culture by the nineteenth-century mercantile class:

As the idea of being a 'purveyor to the king' motivated the choice of profession among bourgeois youth [...] so their dealings with prospective customers [...] were marked by

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<sup>48</sup> *Protestant Ethic*, 115.

<sup>49</sup> *Protestant Ethic*, 121.

courteous attention. The principle which every employer tried to drum into salesmen and salesgirls—‘The customer is always right’—derives in substance from the time of the absolute ruler.<sup>50</sup>

In the obsequious ministrations of mercers, jewelers, and department store salesgirls, for Horkheimer, one could discern the fading outlines of courtly attendance. The shop is a space in which a new system of economic production absorbs an old form of interpersonal relations. Richardson constructs a similar historical palimpsest in the remarkable scene in which Lovelace visits Mrs. Smith’s glove shop and performs a manic impersonation of its proprietor. Lovelace’s act in this scene has traditionally been read as a parodic co-option of the mercantile ethos and a sly assertion of aristocratic power.<sup>51</sup> This is indeed how Lovelace himself would be likely to understand his performance. Yet, as he bustles around the shop counter and proudly proclaims an inventory of his wares, Lovelace seems unexpectedly at home. In this odd image of rake as retailer, one of the last extended scenes featuring Lovelace in the novel, Richardson goes out of his way to collapse the historical division between aristocratic and mercantile forces that so many critics have viewed as central to the novel. It is almost as if the manic activity that seizes Lovelace throughout the novel had found its proper sphere of expression.

The theme of misbehavior behind the shop counter has a long history in Richardson’s writings. Indeed, the scene at the glovemaker’s shop is directly in line with one of the most important preoccupations of Richardson’s writings before *Pamela*: the conduct of tradesmen and apprentices. Richardson’s second published work, after a religious pamphlet, was the conduct

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<sup>50</sup> *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, trans. Matthew O’Connell et al. (New York: Verso, 2012), 125-6. Horkheimer goes on to argue that technical development and market specialization had diminished the importance of obsequiousness in salesmanship; another half-century of development seems to have confirmed this view.

<sup>51</sup> See John Richetti, “Lovelace Goes Shopping at Smith’s: Power, Play, and Class Privilege in *Clarissa*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 28.1 (1995), 23-33; Cynthia Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 158-9. See also Margaret Doody’s brief discussion of the scene which takes it as providing “a symbolic picture of the buying and selling” which characterizes women’s social plight in the novel. *A Natural Passion*, 218.

book *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734). The *Vade Mecum* follows the tradition of Defoe's *Compleat English Tradesman* in its Puritan productivism and defense of prim egoism. Richardson makes a plea for "Application and Diligence" in the conduct of apprentices, and goes on to join Franklin in reciting the central creed of the Protestant ethic: "to a *Handicrafts-Man*, Time is the same thing as Money." The same goes for shopkeepers and merchants. Like Clarissa, furthermore, Richardson extends the same logic to virtue, arguing for unremitting self-examination and vigilance against dissimulation: "For he that knows his Duty, and will not do it, shews nothing less than an abandon'd Mind; and, as nothing in Nature is long at a *Stand*, the inevitable Consequence of not growing *better*, must be to grow *worse*."<sup>52</sup> Virtue, like productive activity, cannot sustain itself "at a stand"; a good action not taken is equivalent to a bad one in the same way that, for Franklin, "He that idly loses five shillings' worth of time, loses five shillings, and might as prudently throw five shillings into the sea."<sup>53</sup>

Self-interested behavior, however, can fall under the heading of virtue, provided that the interests in question are not "sordid":

[. . .] you should *principally* pursue your *own Interest*, and prefer your *self* in all *lawful* Cases, to *every one* else; but yet that you should so pursue it, as should shew you were not sordidly attached to it, so as to be incapable of a generous Action, when it would be of little or no *Prejudice* to your *self*.<sup>54</sup>

It would be easy to ridicule these ethical principles, yet, as Albert Hirschman demonstrated, such arguments were to be victorious over the course of the century.<sup>55</sup> The difference between lawful and sordid attachment to one's interests, according to Richardson, is the difference between an unrelenting egoism and an unrelenting egoism that excludes even costless acts of generosity.

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<sup>52</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Early Works*, ed. Alexander Pettit (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27-8, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Early Works*, 35-36.

<sup>55</sup> *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

Sordidness closely resembles rational acquisitive activity, distinguished only by a marginal supplement that tips it over into pathology. Commenting on an intercepted letter from Anna to Clarissa, Lovelace mocks Anna's misunderstanding of his motivations by making a similar distinction: "INTEREST, fools!—I thought these girls knew, that my *interest* was ever subservient to my *pleasure*." (C 634) The distinction, in Lovelace's case, is a difficult one: as we have seen, he pursues his pleasures precisely as if they were economic interests. As with Richardson's apprentice, his "interest" supplements rationality with a pathological surplus, tainting reason with a kernel of sordidness.

Richardson returned to many of the same themes in *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends* (1741), a collection of model letters written immediately before his momentous discovery of large-scale epistolary narrative. Richardson scholars have long argued that these letters provided Richardson with the germ for much of his fiction.<sup>56</sup> Many of the correspondents seem to anticipate later Richardsonian figures: a virtuous servant girl beset by a predatory master prefigures Pamela, a dashing—if boozy—letter from one old “bottle companion” to another prefigures Lovelace's letters to Belford, and a “facetious” young woman skewering a dull suitor prefigures Anna Howe and Charlotte Grandison.<sup>57</sup> If the volume represents the protean emergence of Richardson's narrative technique, however, it also consolidates the mercantile conduct writing he had initially pursued. Many of the model letters concern various aspects of mercantile and shopkeeping life: proper conduct in apprenticeship, correspondence between wholesalers and chapmen, debt collection, and bankruptcy relief. The volume follows directly in the tradition of Defoe's *Complete English Tradesman*, which was itself written in “familiar letters.”

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Doody, *Natural Passion*, 28-30.

<sup>57</sup> *Early Works*, 463-4, 407-10, 415-16.

As in *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum*, the ethic expressed in *Familiar Letters* is solidly Puritan: in favor of industry, against extravagance and high-living, in favor of the pursuit of self-interest but within genteel limits, in favor of leniency to debtors provided it does not cost the creditor anything. The motif of “diligence” recurs throughout. The father of a young tradesman who has contracted “idle Habits,” for example, declares that “Remissness is inexcusable in all Men, but in none so much as in a Man of Business, the Soul of which is Industry, Diligence, and Punctuality.”<sup>58</sup> The uncle of a tradesman who is often observed to be “in an extraordinary Hurry” offers a variation on this theme: “more than half the Flutter which appears among Traders in general, is rather the Effect of their *Indolence*, than their *Industry*”; “Method,” therefore, “is every thing in Business, next to Diligence.”<sup>59</sup> An apprentice who finds himself indentured to a negligent master resolves “to double my Diligence, that his Family suffer as little as possible by his Remissness.” He goes on to resolve that he will draw guidance from his master’s negative example just as well as from a positive one, “for that Bee must be worse than a Drone, that cannot draw Honey from a bitter as well as a sweet Flower.”<sup>60</sup> This apprentice is a busy bee both in both economic and ethical dimensions, working hard to maximize his output of wealth and wisdom.

Richardson’s early efforts in didactic writing, then, lay out a program for apprentices, shopkeepers, and merchants in line with the Protestant ethic, advocating for diligence in the pursuit of self-interest and for the rational maximization of both profits and virtue. In depicting Lovelace’s manic impression of a shopkeeper, Richardson was returning to one of the major topics that had preoccupied him prior to his efflorescence as a novelist: conduct behind the shop

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<sup>58</sup> *Early Works*, 388.

<sup>59</sup> *Early Works*, 373-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Early Works*, 370-1.

counter. The scene in fact seems to consolidate many of the most important motifs in Richardson's account of mercantile conduct, if in a parodic register: the importance of diligence and application, the risible social aspirations of the petty-bourgeois, the problem of reconciling acquisitiveness and politeness. Lovelace's bustling feats of salesmanship are nothing if not diligent. Yet, in his office as counter boy, he also seems to constantly threaten a violence that is never quite delivered. His busy body, in Santner's phrase, projects both bourgeois diligence and sadistic aristocratic enjoyment, indeed makes them seem indistinguishable.

A great deal of the dramatic virtuosity of the shop scene resides in the way that Lovelace balances rhetorical elegance with the threat of violence, or indeed manages to make the two coincide. A barely contained viciousness simmers throughout the scene. Lovelace's gentility is indistinguishable from ruthless *savoir-faire* as he arrives at the Smiths' house and peremptorily invites himself upstairs to search for Clarissa. As the Smiths impotently follow him from room to room, he maintains his accustomed banter, disavowing the basic violence of the situation with a smooth ribbon of discourse. Yet he also operates, as if in a twentieth-century spy thriller, with icy efficiency, systematically canvassing each room in the house and even "sound[ing] the passages with [his] knuckles to find whether there were private doors." (C 1211) At first, Lovelace's aristocratic elegance takes on the familiar dimensions of class contempt: "Sir, said he [Mr. Smith], 'tis not like a gentleman, to affront a man in his own house. Then prithee man, replied I, don't crow upon thine own dunghill." (C 1211) Yet the brilliance of the scene is to make his libertine irreverence appear increasingly at home in its mercantile environment.

As Lovelace himself describes the scene, it takes on a tonal register familiar from early eighteenth-century crime narrative: the tragi-comic. Of Mr. and Mrs. Smith's ineffectual attempts to control the situation, he writes (as if in mock-Miltonic blank verse) that they follow

him “with countenances tragi-comical.” (C 1214) Tragic for the Smiths and comical for him, he perhaps means to say. Yet, upon failing to find Clarissa in the house, Lovelace confesses the affective complexity of his own situation: “But I am not merry—I am sad!—Hey-ho!—Where shall I find my dear Miss Harlowe?” (C 1212) Underpinning his skillful management of the situation is an intolerable predicament of lack. In the criminal tragi-comic earlier in the century, the pícara mastered and dominated the world only at the moment of her most extreme exposure to it, and tragic and comic accounts of human action were found to operate in extreme proximity (see the previous chapter). A similar narrative logic can be discerned in the shop scene: Lovelace’s deft manipulation coexists with his own escalating disorganization and compulsion by desire, and the more he takes control of the situation, the more we can detect a whiff of madness in his actions.

In the course of the shop scene, Lovelace never, or only barely, crosses the threshold from threat into actual violence. Yet the closer he gets, the more he seems to resemble a shopkeeper. After returning downstairs to the shop, Lovelace seats himself behind the shop counter and purchases, or helps himself to, several wash-balls. When Joseph, the Smiths’ resident bodice-maker, comes downstairs, Lovelace seizes him and threatens him with his servant’s pruning knife. Upon releasing Joseph, Lovelace offers an explanation for this apparently violent action: “I only wanted, said I, to take out two or three of the rascal’s broad teeth, to put them into my servant’s jaws—And I would have paid him his price for them—I would, by my soul, Joseph.” (Joseph, who never seems to decide whether the scene he is involved in is a tragedy or a comedy, looks “as if he knew not whether he should laugh or be angry.”) (C 1214) As Lovelace explains his action, he may have appeared to be Joseph’s attacker

but was in fact his client. According to the logic of Lovelace's jest, appropriative violence and economic transaction are indistinguishable.

As the scene goes on, Lovelace settles into his role as mock-salesperson. Seeing a "pretty genteel lady with a footman [ . . . ] peeping in," he officially rushes out from behind the counter, "and, as she was making off, took her hand and drew her into the shop, begging that she would be my customer; for that I had just begun trade." Having drawn his customer to the counter with "great diligence and obligingness," Lovelace, warming to his role, positively warbles out an account of his inventory: "Tapes, ribands, silk-laces, pins, and needles; for I am a pedlar: powder, patches, washballs, stockings, garters, snuffs, and pin-cushions [ . . . ]" (C 1214-5) What appears to be obsequiousness here is in fact coercion. (The same might be said of the most skilled salespeople one encounters today.) Salesmanship, as Lovelace practices it, uncannily resembles the rakish pursuit of women: the veneration he professes toward his customer is difficult to distinguish from contempt, and his diligent customer service is difficult to distinguish from a hostage situation.<sup>61</sup>

The superimposition of mercantile diligence and libertine violence only intensifies as the scene reaches its climax. The gentlewoman is in a mood to humor an upstart shopkeeper, and requests a new pair of gloves for her footman. As Lovelace fits the footman with his new accessories, he provides us with an image that, Freud might say, forms the "navel" of the scene:

I took down a parcel of gloves, which Mrs Smith pointed to, and came round to fit the fellow myself.

No matter for opening them, said I: thy fingers, friend, are as stiff as drumsticks. Push—thou'rt an awkward dog! [ . . . ]

The fellow said the gloves were too little.

Thrust, and be d—ned to thee, said I: why, fellow, thou hast not the strength of a cat.

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<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as if to underscore the resemblance with sexual pursuit, Lovelace has flippantly dismissed a "plaguy homely" female customer immediately prior to his elaborate courting of the "pretty genteel" woman. (C 1214) And as the genteel woman leaves the shop after making her purchases, Lovelace maintains a grip on her hand a few moments too long. (C 1215)

Sir, sir, said he, laughing, I shall hurt your honour's side.  
D—n thee, thrust, I say.  
He did; and burst out the sides of the glove. (C 1215)

The sexual innuendo here is perfectly clear: Lovelace reenacts the novel's traumatic climax in the comic mode. (In doing so he manages to extract a smile not only from Joseph but even from the solemn "Father and Mother Smith.") The splitting of the glove is the only actual violence that Lovelace performs during the shop scene, a tiny act of destruction that discharges the tension built up over the course of several pages. The minor narrative *jouissance* produced here, most crucially, reprises an act of sexual assault as an act of customer service. As Richardson crafts the shop scene, libertine depredation and mercantile diligence approach a point of indistinction.

As the scene progresses toward the quiet violence of its climax, the tectonic historical division that structures *Clarissa* comes closer and closer to dissolution. As dramatic tension builds, the rake ethic and the Protestant ethic, aristocratic hauteur and bourgeois obsequiousness, become more and more difficult to tell apart. The para-sexual climax of the splitting glove is thus also an orgiastic rupture of the division between the modern form and archaic content of Lovelace's performance. Richardson's achievement in this scene is to make decadent sexual violence coincide completely with mealy-mouthed early-bourgeois servitude. In the prim acquisitiveness of the small tradesman, his obsequious flattery and self-serving busyness, Richardson detects an atavistic and disturbing enjoyment. This enjoyment is the irrational kernel that motivates rationalization, the sordid surplus that grafts itself onto economic acquisition. Lovelace is, as Barbauld put it, a "cool systematic seducer." He is also, however, a warm and violent systematizer. In his machinations, we can discern the opaque and obscene enjoyment that lies at the center of rationalized economic activity.

## 5. “Visionary gratification” and tragedy

The persecutory plot, I have argued, relies on the persecutory villain’s actions to produce narrative, but also tends to come up short when called upon to provide motives for those actions. Lovelace’s libertine busybody, or his fidelity to the imperative to enjoy, constitutes the absent causal center of *Clarissa*. The escalating physical and social damage that forms the novel’s tragic trajectory flows from his uncanny hyperactivity. In this way, the persecutory plot makes two conceptions of the tragic converge: a narratological conception, in which tragedy is plot’s accumulation of irreparable harm, and the phenomenological conception Lacan formulated in the last lectures of *Seminar VII*, in which tragedy is a mode of attunement to the fundamental negativity of desire.

This argument—that the current of tragic necessity in *Clarissa* stems from Lovelace’s desire—was in fact made by one of Richardson’s most sensitive early readers. Sarah Fielding, in her 1749 epistolary essay on *Clarissa*, defends Richardson’s novel against a litany of charges that now seem customary: that it is too long, that Clarissa is to blame for her own predicament, that she is a prude, that she is a coquette. The essay concludes by refuting an argument made by many prominent readers of *Clarissa*: that it should have been a comedy. Lady Bradshaigh famously pleaded with Richardson for a marriage and Lady Elizabeth Echlin went so far as to write an alternate ending; these early partisans for a comic ending have found an unlikely twentieth-century ally in William Warner.<sup>62</sup> Richardson, in his postscript to the 1751 edition of

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<sup>62</sup> Echlin’s alternate ending is in fact tragicomic: both Lovelace and Clarissa perish, but the rape does not occur and Lovelace undergoes a reformation. Warner, for his part, argues that the membrane that prevents the novel from following the course of a marriage plot is thin, and that Richardson, after the first edition, edited the scenes in which Lovelace proposes marriage in order to reinforce the tragic trajectory. Lady Elizabeth Echlin, *An Alternate Ending to Richardson’s “Clarissa,”* ed. Dimiter Daphinoff (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1982); Warner, *Reading Clarissa*, 76-87, 196-209.

the novel, responded by invoking Addison's genre theory of tragedy, arguing against a naively restorative model of poetic justice.<sup>63</sup>

Fielding, though she cites Richardson's account of poetic justice with approval, ends her essay by offering a different account of tragic necessity in *Clarissa*:

If the Story was not to have ended tragically, the grand Moral would have been lost, as well as that grand Picture, if I may call it so, of human Life, of a Man's giving up every thing that is valuable, only because every thing that is valuable is in his Power. *Lovelace* thought of the Substance, whilst that was yet to be pursued; but once within reach of it, his plotting Head and roving Imagination would let him see only the Shadow; and once enter'd into the Pursuit, his Pride, the predominant Passion of his Soul, engaged him to fly after a visionary Gratification which his own wild Fancy had painted, till, like one following an *Ignis fatuus* through By-Paths and crooked Roads, he lost himself in the Eagerness of his own Pursuit, and involved with him the innocent *Clarissa* [ . . . ]<sup>64</sup>

A comic ending, Fielding argues, would have interfered with the “grand Picture [ . . . ] of human Life” that she takes to be central to the novel’s treatment of Lovelace. According to this “Picture,” possession of what is “valuable” is equivalent to its loss; the scene of arrival at a desired good is also the scene of its slipping away. It is not just that goods acquired and goals attained are disappointing, but that what was desired to begin with was not their “Substance” but their “Shadow.” This negative phenomenology of human striving crisply articulates what I, following Lacan, am calling a tragic account of desire. What drives Lovelace onward is the hope of a “visionary Gratification”; in Coleridge’s phrase, an “Imaginary want,” in Lacan’s, surplus enjoyment. Richardson’s tragic “picture of human Life,” for Fielding, is comprised of an insistence that the objects that promise such gratification are fundamentally unable, once attained, to provide it. Lovelace is thus “lost [ . . . ] in the Eagerness of his own Pursuit,” overtaken by the process in which he appears, on the surface, to master the world around him.

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<sup>63</sup> See Alex Hernandez, “Tragedy and the Economics of Providence in Richardson’s *Clarissa*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22.4 (2010), 599-630.

<sup>64</sup> *Remarks on “Clarissa,” Addressed to the Author* (London: 1747), 54.

Lovelace's persecution of Clarissa is propelled by a will o' the wisp, a shadow attached to Clarissa's frail substance. As I have tried to demonstrate, it is from this gap between shadow and substance that the plot of *Clarissa* unfolds.

### III. Beckford's insatiable caliph: oriental despotism and consumer society

A very young William Beckford of Fonthill, in a piece of unpublished occasional verse, provides a flippant account of human finitude:

Was I as great as Man could hope  
Great Turk, or Emperor or Pope  
Or King of France, or King of Spain  
Or British Monarch of the Main  
Or Rome's fam'd Caesars. rich as who?  
Rich as King Solomon the Jew,  
Or as the Emperor of Peru,  
Or Cublai Khan of Cambalu.  
As great, as rich as Zingis Khan  
Greater in short than any Man  
That was, or is, in wealth or might  
I still should be constrain'd to s\_\_\_\_\_  
All human greatness is a farce  
The Moral's plain to wipe y:r \_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup>

According to this scatological conceit, the boundless wealth and power of history's great monarchs fail to eradicate certain conditions imposed by the human gastrointestinal tract.

Frivolous as these verses are (and part of the joke may be the suggestion that they be used for the purpose designated in the punchline), they repeat as farce a structure of feeling that, at other moments in the eighteenth century, could take on the greatest tragic urgency. Samuel Johnson (in a poem that famously begins by surveying precisely the same domain that Beckford stakes out: "Mankind, from *China* to *Peru*") understands the limits of the digestive tract as part of the condition of vanity that dogs human life:

Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,  
And shuts up all the passages of joy:

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<sup>1</sup> Undated manuscript, c. 50 f. 83, William Beckford Papers, 1772-1857, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. (Sources from this archive will subsequently be cited by box and leaf number.) The manuscript is undated, but was found in a cover also containing correspondence from 1777-80. Beckford thus probably wrote the poem in his late teens.

In vain their gifts the bounteous seasons pour,  
The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flow'r,  
With listless eyes the dotard views the store,  
He views, and wonders that they please no more;  
Now pall the tasteless meats, and joyless wines,  
And Luxury with sighs her slave resigns.<sup>2</sup>

Both Johnson and Beckford emphasize the finitude of the human body's capacity for enjoyment: it can only support so much before pleasure cloys and its materials turn to excrement. The obduracy with which enjoyment palls and decays into shite, for both writers, is an exemplary case for a more general negative universalism. Both emperor and dotard encounter immanent limits to enjoyment, limits that reveal an essential homogeneity among different forms of human life. Part of my aim to in this dissertation is to argue that such negative universalism took on special urgency for eighteenth-century Britons, growing numbers of whom found themselves in possession of the economic means for procuring more or less boundless enjoyment.

Beckford's poem, furthermore, provides a very early case of his fixation on a concept that would haunt his literary output, just as it haunted much eighteenth-century speculation about the East: oriental despotism. The "Great Turk," Solomon, the "Emperor of Peru," Kubla Khan and Genghis Khan: these are some of the figures (especially the first) who provided the materials for a theory of political organization in the non-Western world. The questionable empirical grounding for the theory of oriental despotism has done little to dampen its remarkable resilience and durability, even into the twentieth century. From its consolidation in Montesquieu, through its development in Marx, and at least up to its eccentric resurrection in Deleuze and Guattari, western meditation on the East has kept returning to the figure of the despot: an insatiable, capricious, and violent being weltering in sexual and gustatory enjoyments. In British literary

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<sup>2</sup> "The Vanity of Human Wishes," in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, volume VI, ed. E. L. McAdam Jr. and George Milne (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 104 ll. 259-266.

history, the fascination with “eastern” forms of political sovereignty became increasingly pronounced starting in the mid-eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson, Frances Sheridan, and William Jones constructed fictions in verse and prose that took as their narratological motor the oriental despot’s insatiable search for enjoyment. Beckford would make his contribution to this tradition a few years after writing the scatological verses with his remarkable novel *Vathek*.

Oriental despotism, as a historiographical concept, has been thoroughly and sufficiently debunked from within both the Marxian and psychoanalytic traditions. It has been read as a projection of Western concerns onto a phantasmatic East, reflecting the threat of political absolutism, anxieties about epistemological solipsism, the transition to a conjugal, couple-oriented organization of human sexuality, the pressures of colonial labor politics, and the aesthetics of the sublime.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I propose—at least in the case of Beckford and perhaps that of the late eighteenth-century oriental tale more generally—a different grounding for this fantasy. As historians have long recognized, eighteenth-century Britons experienced an explosion in the affordability, variety, and transitivity of consumer goods.<sup>4</sup> According to this historical consensus, it was in the eighteenth century that the availability of sustained luxury consumption—which is to say, the purchasability of surplus enjoyment—saturated everyday existence with imaginary wants, former luxuries newly experienced as necessary to the

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Althusser, *Politics and History*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1972), 75-86; Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88-94; Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan’s Court: European Fantasies of the East*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1998), 178-83; Ashley Cohen, “Wage Slavery, Oriental Despotism, and Global Labor Management in Maria Edgeworth’s Tales,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 55.2-3 (2014), 193-215; Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 190-229.

<sup>4</sup> For the seminal statements of the “consumer society” thesis, see Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984); and John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1994). For a recent reconfirmation through the lens of Gary Becker’s economic behaviorism, see Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

reproduction of life. This explosion of consumer culture, furthermore, was often understood through the lens of orientalism. As Maxine Berg argues, luxury consumption was closely associated with the Orient: the most important sumptuary goods of earlier eras had been “goods from the east,” and it remained the case that many crucial luxury items—porcelain and japanned ware, calicos and silk, tea and sugar—were either eastern imports or western imitations of them.<sup>5</sup>

The eighteenth century, with this explosion in luxury consumption, marked the beginning of a cultural consensus positing the insatiability of human wants and the inexhaustibility of consumer demand as basic facts of economic and social life. The implications of this situation are nowhere more pronounced than in Beckford, who spent most of his life expending the unimaginable wealth accumulated from his family’s Jamaican plantations on artworks, travel, building, and entertainments. Beckford can probably be said without exaggeration to have been one of the most prolific individual British consumers of the century. The origin of his wealth in the cane fields of Jamaica, furthermore, places him precisely at the intersection of two geographically distant but intimately related phenomena: the accelerated consumption cycles in the British metropole and the global system of exploitative production that helped make them possible.

The late eighteenth-century oriental tale, like the other genres discussed in this dissertation, derives its narrative energy from desire’s supersession of the immanent limits that lived experience places on enjoyment. Its plots thus, as in other genres, are structured by an antinomy between pastoral stasis and tragic insatiability. The affinity between the pastoral and orientalist traditions was intuited by William Collins in his *Persian Eclogues* (1742) and theorized by William Jones in 1772: “*Arabia* [ . . . ] seems to be the only country in the world, in

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<sup>5</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 46-84.

which we can properly lay the scene of pastoral poetry; because no nation at this day can vie with the *Arabians* in the delightfulness of their climate, and the simplicity of their manners.”<sup>6</sup>

The pastoral element in the oriental tale can be located most precisely in a certain cornucopian mode of description omnipresent in the genre. At a crucial moment near the end of Voltaire’s *Candide*, for example, an old Turkish man presents Candide and his companions with a repast comprised of

[. . .] several kinds of sorbet which they made themselves, some *kaiimak* sharpened with the zest of candied citrons, some oranges, lemons, limes, pineapple, and pistachio nuts, and some Mocha coffee [. . .]<sup>7</sup>

Such descriptions operate within what Timothy Morton has termed the “poetics of spice”: they seem to make palpable the Lacanian object a, the little something more that promises a full plenitude of enjoyment.<sup>8</sup> It is this encounter with pastoral plenitude, in large part, that induces Candide’s famous decision to settle down and cultivate his garden. The sensorial opulence of oriental consumption, in *Candide* and elsewhere, is a signal of pastoral narrative closure, a sensorial blanket muffling the possibility of eventfulness.

The tragic current in the oriental tale stems from the moment at which pleasure cloyes and narrative seeks something beyond pastoral plenitude. As a young Beckford declared around the time of composing the scatological verses: “nor indeed do I believe that there exists upon earth the circumstance of a perfect enjoyment.”<sup>9</sup> The departure from a situation of pastoral enjoyment is a standard incipit in the oriental tale: Montesquieu’s Rica and Usbek depart Persia “for love of knowledge,” abandoning “the attractions of a quiet life in order to pursue the laborious search for

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<sup>6</sup> “On the poetry of Eastern nations,” in *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages* (Oxford: 1772), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, trans. Roger Pearson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87.

<sup>8</sup> *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> William Beckford, *The Vision and Liber Veritatis*, ed. Guy Chapman (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), 23.

wisdom”; Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* leaves the Happy Valley unable to bear the intolerable situation of “wanting nothing”; Jones’ *Maia*, in a narrative poem titled “The Palace of Fortune,” departs from the comforts of her parents’ lowly Himalayan cottage.<sup>10</sup> The same device, as we will see, initiates the action in *Vathek*. And if narrative begins with the rupturing of pastoral sufficiency by desire, it must conclude by neutralizing the tragic energies that sustain it. The denouements of some oriental tales accomplish this feat via moralism, as in Frances Sheridan’s *History of Nourjahad*, or via dry, bitter irony, as in *Candide* and very especially Johnson’s *Rasselas*. Beckford’s *Vathek* is relatively unusual in allowing the tragic dynamics that sustain its plot to fully express themselves. In sending his insatiable caliph straight to hell, Beckford follows the formal demands of the genre through to the end.

Recent critical reexaminations of the eighteenth-century oriental tale have moved our understanding of the genre beyond Saidean habits of thought. Ros Ballaster and the late Srinivas Aravamudan, in their exhaustive accounts, have read the oriental tale as an essentially cosmopolitan and engaged, if often confusedly, in genuine trans-cultural exchange.<sup>11</sup> For Aravamudan, this means that the oriental tale should be read as a strain of cosmopolitan and imaginative resistance to the burgeoning current of “national realism,” as documented by Ian Watt and the historiography of the novel he initiated. As evidence of the oriental tale’s speculative cosmopolitanism, Ballaster and Aravamudan point to the enthusiastic reception of the first translation of the *Arabian Nights*, the early-century vogue for trans-cultural “spy

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<sup>10</sup> Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. C. J. Betts (New York: Penguin, 2004), 41; Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, ed. Paul Goring (New York: Penguin, 2007), 12; Jones, *Poems*, 9. Montesquieu, however, almost immediately ironizes the trope by having Usbek provide a more honest account of his departure a few letters later: he has made enemies in the Persian emperor’s court, and flees under pretext of gathering knowledge of the West. (*Persian Letters*, 48-9)

<sup>11</sup> Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England, 1772-1785* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

narratives" (such as Marana's *L'espion Turc* and Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*), the influence of the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* on the European fable tradition, and the political utility of such quasi-oriental fantasies as Eliza Haywood's *Adventures of Eovaai*.

While building on this work, I also intend to suggest basic narratological continuities between the oriental tale and the "national realist" tradition. The characterological problem of motivation, in certain oriental tales, becomes a locus of epistemological uncertainty and narrative complexity in a way that should be recognizable to readers of Defoe and Richardson. And in Beckford as in Richardson, the problem of motivation is especially pressing in villains: figures who cause narrative by perturbing a given fictional world. The classic narratological account of the oriental tale perhaps remains Tzvetan Todorov's "Narrative Men." In the *Arabian Nights*, Todorov discerns a characterological "a-psychologism" that attributes motives to characters only insofar as they are necessary to ground actions.<sup>12</sup> Such a-psychologism, however, should not be extended uncritically to the entire genre that the *Arabian Nights* helped shape, despite the fact that that genre is among the counter-realist traditions critics tend to associate with "flat" characterization.<sup>13</sup> Certain despotic figures that populate the eighteenth-century oriental tale introduce the gap between action and motivation that, I argue, is characteristic of the persecutory plot: Vathek but also Eliza Haywood's Ochihatou (a despotic stand-in for Robert Walpole in *The Adventures of Eovaai*), Frances Sheridan's Nourjahad, and the Marquis de Sade's Rodrigo (in the story of the same name included in *Crimes de l'amour*).

Beckford's lifelong interest in orientalist scholarship was especially intense during his youth, producing the body of writing that I attend to in this chapter: a sporadic corpus of reading

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<sup>12</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 66-79.

<sup>13</sup> I differ here from Aravamudan, who uses Todorov's essay as a basis for hypothesizing that the oriental tale constitutes a "predicative" (action-oriented and a-psychological) counter-tradition to the "subjective" narration of "national realism." *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 56-8.

notes, manuscript poetry, a strange juvenile fantasy (the manuscript now referred to as “The Long Story”), the earliest English translations from the *Arabian Nights*,<sup>14</sup> and one masterpiece. Throughout these writings, I will argue, Beckford’s adoption of Enlightenment thought about “eastern” political sovereignty reflects a set of political and economic circumstances much closer to home. Oriental despotism, as reported in travel narrative and theorized by Montesquieu and others, is a political structure that organizes an entire system of production around the enjoyments of a single body. However little light this conceit sheds on the historical realities of the east, it is deeply resonant with the structural positions occupied by certain individuals in the west. Beckford, whose manic, imaginative, and prolific consumption was fueled by a transatlantic system of exploitative accumulation, was especially prominent among such individuals.

## 1. The Asiatic mode of consumption

The concept of “despotism” in western political meditation on the Orient extends as far back, by some accounts, as Aristotle, and perhaps remains palpable in the contemporary world in some of the more extravagant right-wing accounts of Wahhabi Islam and the People’s Bank of China.<sup>15</sup> The full theoretical grounding of the concept, however, is generally traced to the first half of the eighteenth century and to the writings of Montesquieu. Montesquieu’s introduction of

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<sup>14</sup> The *Arabian Nights* had circulated and had enormous influence in Britain since the beginning of the eighteenth century, but only by way of Antoine Galland’s translation into French. Beckford gained access to an Arabic manuscript acquired in Egypt by Edward Wortley Montagu and employed a Turkish man to produce a series of translations, one of which eventually made into print in 1799 as “The Story of Al Raoui.” Despite the abortive nature of this translation project, Laurent Châtel has argued, Beckford’s work with the Wortley Montagu manuscript was arguably a principle determinant in the composition of *Vathek*. “Re-Orienting William Beckford: Transmission, Translation, and Continuation of *The One Thousand and One Nights*,” in *Scheherazade’s Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 53-69. On the bibliography of Beckford’s translations, see Fatma Moussa Mahmoud, “A manuscript translation of the *Arabian Nights* in the Beckford papers,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 7 (1976), 7-23.

<sup>15</sup> See Grosrichard, *Sultan’s Court*, 4-19.

a rigorous distinction between monarchy and despotism—between sovereignty restrained by law and aristocratic interests and unmediated, fiat sovereignty—laid the groundwork for the theory of oriental despotism as it developed over the next centuries. Perry Anderson traces the course of the concept from Montesquieu through Smith, Hegel, Richard Jones, John Stuart Mill, and finally to Marx, who flirted extensively with the concept of an “Asiatic mode of production” proper to despotic eastern states only to leave the idea out of *Capital*. Anderson isolates some of the crucial elements in this theory of “Asiatic” economies: the dominance of agrarian over mercantile or industrial production, a lack of historical dynamism, sovereignty unmediated by juridical institutions, and universal state ownership of land.<sup>16</sup>

As a historiographical and political-theoretical concept, oriental despotism has been thoroughly discredited, and good riddance. If the concept is an orientalist fantasy, however, one of the most striking features of this fantasy has been relatively neglected: its rhetoric of consumptive opulence. What is imagined in the fantasy of oriental despotism is as much a mode of consumption as it is a mode of production. Throughout the history of the concept, we find images of eastern sovereignty associated not only with arbitrary violence but also with the most extravagant, luxurious consumption. Under a despotic regime, Montesquieu writes, “man is a creature that obeys a creature that wants [qui veut].”<sup>17</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge joins Kubla Khan in erecting a pleasure dome for the consumption of “honey-dew” and the “milk of Paradise.” Thorstein Veblen reports the existence of “certain Polynesian chiefs” so faithful to the task of pure consumption that “under the stress of good form, [they] preferred to starve rather than carry their food to their mouths with their own hands.” And Georges Bataille regards all

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<sup>16</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979), 462-83

<sup>17</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), I.2.10. Subsequently cited in the text.

Tibetan society as organized around the destruction of surplus product by means of monastic consumption.<sup>18</sup> According to these images, the office of the despot is to ceaselessly enjoy the goods produced by the community. *Vathek* and other orientalist despot stories adopt as their central narrative tension the imperfection of this enjoyment, the impasse that results when an embodied, finite individual takes on the labor of infinite despotic pleasure. My suggestion is that this impasse, in writers like Beckford, can be understood as a projection of the predicament in which participants in a consumption-driven economy increasingly found themselves.

In Montesquieu's thought, the supposed predominance of despotic governance in Asia can be traced largely to climatological factors in the global south and east that render the body surpassingly pleasurable. According to Montesquieu's speculative physiology, colder northern climates "coarsen" the fibers of the body and thus diminish sensitivity, while the warmer climes of the south and east render the body's surface highly receptive to stimuli. (III.14.2) The body of a Turkish, Persian, or Chinese person, for Montesquieu, quite simply has a greater capacity to experience pleasure than that of the European. Montesquieu imagines the bodies that inhabit torrid regions as existing in a kind of neural efflorescence, a condition of extreme openness and receptivity to the world. The relaxation of the bodily fibers, however, also leads to languor, timidity, and lack of enterprise. Inhabitants of the "hot countries" thus demonstrate a curious oscillation between languor and fieriness. Equally susceptible to fits of passion and bouts of laziness, the peoples of the torrid zones require robust governance in a way that hardy, self-sufficient northerners do not. (III.14.3) The influence of the climate on the body, then, is one of the principal reasons that despotic regimes take hold so easily in the East: vast empires populated

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<sup>18</sup> Coleridge, "Kubla Khan," in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004), 183 ll. 53-4; Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, ed. Martha Banta (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 32; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 93-110.

by languid, impulsive citizens—citizens incapable of reasoned participation in the political process—require an iron fist.

The despot himself, however, is often unable to escape the allure of the life of the senses: “A result of the nature of despotic power is that the one man who exercises it likewise has it exercised by another. A man whose five senses constantly tell him that he is everything and that others are nothing is naturally lazy, ignorant, and voluptuous. Therefore, he abandons the public business.” The despot, far from overcoming the life of sensuous languor determined by the climate, indulges himself more than anyone else. Thus the omnipresence of viziers and other shadow rulers in despotic states. With almost infinite resources to produce pleasure for himself, the prince of the despotic state becomes its most sensuous citizen; indeed, there is an inverse relationship between the amount of pleasure his domains are able to provide him and the amount of governance he engages in: “The more extensive the empire, the larger the seraglio, and the more, consequently, the prince is drunk with pleasures. Thus, in these states, the more peoples the prince has to govern, the less he thinks about government [ . . . ]” (I.2.5) For Montesquieu, then, the despot is someone who turns the state into a means of producing his own enjoyment. Behind his fiery, iron-fisted rule lies an essential languor and receptivity to pleasurable stimulation.

In a chapter of only two sentences, Montesquieu condenses “the idea of despotism” in a parable: “When the savages of Louisiana want fruit, they cut down the tree and gather the fruit. There you have despotic government.” (I.5.13) Despotism here appears to consist in a short-circuiting of the normal processes for obtaining gratification. The fact of wanting fruit and the outcome of obtaining fruit are brought as close together as possible, eliminating any intermediary considerations or techniques that might improve the consumption experience or make the process

more sustainable (ripeness, ladders). At a political level, this means that despotic government operates on a principle of equivalence between the despot's whims and incontrovertible law, which is to say an effective condition of lawlessness. This is perhaps what Montesquieu means to point out when he abruptly introduces this cryptic fable into his argument. The arboreal violence practiced by the "savages of Louisiana," however, suggests a further feature of despotic sovereignty: its demand for absolute immanence of enjoyment. The cause of the arbitrary destruction produced by Montesquieu's despotic consumers is their drive to make satiation follow almost immediately after desire.<sup>19</sup>

The authoritative sociological account of contemporary consumerism, put forth by Colin Campbell, contrasts between despotic consumption and the new forms of consumer behavior that emerged during the eighteenth-century. For Campbell, the Weberian conception of the "Protestant ethic," to adequately account for the processes of cultural modernization, must be supplemented by a "Romantic ethic." Against the rationalizing, productivist Protestant ethic, Campbell poises a consumptive, imaginative ethic that cultivates experiences of day-dreaming, longing, and inner dissatisfaction. Campbell distinguishes between "traditional" and "modern" forms of hedonism, the former largely the province of elites, the latter available to the masses. The traditional hedonism of the potentate essentially operates within the finitude of the human body, deploying Epicurean techniques of intensified appetite and delayed gratification to allow for a greater number and intensity of pleasurable consumptive experiences. Modern hedonism, in contrast, relies on the imagination to produce desire for goods and experiences not available

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<sup>19</sup> Honoré de Balzac, in his novella *Melmoth réconcilié* (a sequel to Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, discussed in chapter 4), reads the parable of the savages in precisely this way. The novella's protagonist, endowed with demonic powers of enjoyment, finds that "his tongue seized, so to speak, all flavors at once. His pleasure resembled the axe-stroke of despotism, which cuts down the tree to obtain its fruits. [...] His palate, become sensitive beyond measure, had wearied all at once in satisfying itself with everything." *La Maison Nucingen*, précédé de *Melmoth réconcilié*, ed. Anne-Marie Meininger (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 106-7; my translation.

within everyday experience.<sup>20</sup> It is characterized by the essential restlessness and demand for novelty that fueled the accelerating consumption cycles of eighteenth-century London. Despite its apparent decadence, crucially, this “other Protestant ethic” is essentially instrumental in nature, another element of the great current of modernizing rationalization.<sup>21</sup> It is an advanced solution to the perennial despotic problem of how to introduce more pleasure into the finite cycles of embodied human want and satiety.

In Campbell’s modernization narrative, then, the sensual excesses of the despot give way to the dissatisfied longings of the modern consumer, and extravagant displays of consumptive prowess are replaced by the more refined techniques of the advertisement and the daydream. Curiously, however, eighteenth-century Britons displayed an intense fascination with the image of despotic consumption just as they were undergoing this historical transition. In Beckford’s case, we can begin to see how the old figure of the luxurious potentate subsists into modern consumer culture. The caliph of Fonthill, as he came to be known, was an absolute prodigy of the type of daydream-oriented imaginative activity that Campbell describes. But in seeking a figure for his historical experience, he gravitated toward the apparently residual Montesquieuan figure of the despot. Campbell himself, at one point, seems to suggest this subsistence: “Modern hedonism presents all individuals with the possibility of being their own despot, exercising total control over the stimuli they experience, and hence the pleasure they receive.”<sup>22</sup> Just as the despot demands that enjoyment always be immanent within phenomenal experience, so the consumer arranges her sensorium and inner life so as to maximize pleasure. Modern consumerism therefore does not supersede despotism, but universalizes it.

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<sup>20</sup> Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 58-76.

<sup>21</sup> *Romantic Ethic*, 67-9.

<sup>22</sup> *Romantic Ethic*, 76.

The consumer-despot is thus, like Lovelace, enslaved by an imperative to enjoy. As with Lovelace, it is not clear that any embodied individual is made of the right stuff to undertake the labor of continuous *jouissance*. The office of the despot—boundless enjoyment of surplus product—is an impossible one. In a neglected Lacanian classic, *The Sultan's Court*, Alain Grosrichard provides an exhaustive analysis of the structure of the despotism fantasy that turns on this point. The theory of despotism, for Grosrichard, imagines a political system in which the pleasures of the despot are a kind of sink for the productivity of the community: “the despotic machine produces [ . . . ] a flux of all kinds of goods which are rechanneled so that they get lost in the central vacuum, in that *hole* which is the habitation and, perhaps, the very definition of the despot.”<sup>23</sup> The binding agent that coheres the despotic state around its absent center is, for Grosrichard, the fantasy of the despot’s extraordinary prowess in the enjoyment of goods and women. The phantasm of the despot thus shares its structure with Freud’s fantasy—both great and risible—of the primal father in *Totem and Taboo*.<sup>24</sup> The despot or primal father, who enjoys unrestricted use of the bodies of women and the collective property of the state or tribe, has access to a magnitude and fullness of pleasure unavailable to the ordinary citizen. In the despot’s obscene, excessive enjoyment we can thus recognize, as Lacan does in Sade’s libertines, the “typical dream of potency.”<sup>25</sup> The plenitude of despotic enjoyment is an Imaginary stopgap, indicating precisely what fails to occur in the ordinary embodied life of desiring subjects.

If the fantasy of oriental despotism posits an Imaginary subject who enjoys continuously and in full plenitude, modern consumerism attempts to substantiate this fantasy in everyday life. The consumer-despot, with a rapidly developing system of production at her disposal, devotes

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<sup>23</sup> *Sultan's Court*, 80.

<sup>24</sup> *Sultan's Court*, 190.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), 667.

herself to the impossible task of Imaginary enjoyment, only to encounter again and again the immanent limits of the human body and mind. Economic growth and the acceleration of consumption cycles in Britain during the eighteenth century afforded this form of experience to an unprecedentedly large segment of the population. Eighteenth-century orientalists were thus fascinated with the despot not as an exercise in archaism, but because the figure gave them access to a structure of feeling proper to their own historical experience. If a consumer society is a society that attempts to universalize despotism, it is also a society that places individuals in the strange situation of pursuing an experience of unlimited enjoyment that is irrevocably closed off to them. Nowhere is this predicament rendered more acutely than in Beckford's tempestuous love affair with orientalism.

## **2. Luxuriance, privation, and the market**

Around the time of the composition of *Vathek*, Beckford was assiduously reading orientalist travel narratives. A record of at least some of this reading exists in a set of meticulous reading notes in Beckford's hand held by the Bodleian library. As he read, Beckford would jot down extracts or summaries of particularly striking passages, thus leaving a record of his engagement with the material. Taken on their own, the reading notes provide a record of Beckford's absorption of orientalist learning. In his responses to his reading, two themes repeatedly come to the foreground: the dazzling wares of eastern markets and the despotic whims of eastern sovereigns. Perusal of the notes makes clear that, in Beckford's mind, these two themes had an uncanny proximity.

In the passages that draw Beckford's attention, there is often a notable oscillation between images of resplendency and images of privation. Reading Henry Maundrell's *A Journey*

from *Aleppo to Jerusalem* (1703), Beckford notes some highlights of Maundrell's passage through Palestine:

- Luxuriant Description of an Orange Grove in one of the Courts of the Emir Facreddin's Palace at Beroot [.] Ridiculous Story of St. Nicophorus's Beard. Mll pg. 41
- Certain recluses pass often 4 or 6 years immured in the Holy Sepulchre, their dayly employment trimming the Lampes and visiting in solemn procession the several Sanctuaries in the Church. Some are so transported with these Vigils that they continue observing them till their last Moments [?] and never wish to see the Day or communicate with the world — burying themselves (as it were) alive in our Lord's Grave. Mll p. 70
- Desert where Satan tempted our Lord described Mll p.78
- Banks of the jordan so beset with Tamarind, Oleander Willow, that you can see no water till after forcing a passage thro' them. Mll p. 81<sup>26</sup>

(The first passage cited, about the Emir Facreddin's gardens, is likely the source for the character of the same name in *Vathek*.) The extreme asceticism practiced by Christian anchorites and by Christ during his 40 days in the wilderness are juxtaposed here with “luxuriant” vegetal description. The tamarinds and willows that line the river Jordan are so resplendent as to fill the entire sensorium, intensifying surface at the expense of depth. Similarly, immediately after noting a description of a Maronite convent in Maundrell, Beckford picks up John Windus' *Journey to Mequinez* (a 1725 travel narrative about Morocco) and records its description of the lavish garden of the “Basha of Tetuan”:

- Canobine Convent of the Maronites and the seat of the Patriarch — its situation admirably adapted for retirement and Devotion — had for its Founder the Emp:r Theodosius the great. — M. 141

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-Basha of Tetuan's Garden 3 miles from the City in a pleasant Valley almost surrounded with Hills and Mountains which being green and woody every way gave a delightful prospect — watered by a stream. — The Gov:r of Tetuan gather'd the best Fruits Oranges Lemons Apricots for his Guests. — Musick sounding amongst the long shady Alleys separated with Cane work — Carnations in profusion coming in thro' these latices and shedding a grateful perfume. —<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 3-4 p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 3-4 p. 3.

Beckford selects descriptive details here in a way that transforms Windus' narrative description into a paratactic account of landscape overflowing with pleasurable sensation. The multi-sensory cornucopianism of this note, following immediately upon the monastic site described in Maundrell, creates a strange juxtaposition: pastoral opulence immediately abuts asceticism. In *Vathek*, this oscillation between plenitude and privation, satiety and its supersession by desire, would become a dominant motif.

Within the logic of Beckford's orientalism, crucially, this antinomy between pleasure and lack is inextricably linked to the figure of the despot. Continuing to read Windus' *Journey*, Beckford seems to become particularly captivated by his account of the emperor of Morocco. Here are some highlights from the several pages of notes on this figure:

- No Man appears before the Emperor of Morocco but with the utmost Dread and in doubt whether he shall return alive — W. - 89
- [. . .]
- Emperor wonderfully addicted to Building 115
- Manner of governing, by Alcaydes who have no commission but receive their Authority only by his saying, go — govern such a Country, be my General or Admiral. — 121.
- All his Court approach him with fear and trembling — fall down — kiss the Ground and bending forwards hold their Heads a little on one side in token of offering their Lives [. . .]
- Rises early unable to sleep. 130 and having prayed visits his immense Works before the Morning Star disappears. 132.
- [. . .]
- Magnificence of Muley Abdullah the Emperors Son — has an appartement well stored with European Curiosities and fine China jars in which he takes Delight — 182. 183.
- Emperor said to have 700 Sons and Daughters in proportion. 189.
- Took once 2 Hatchets from a Portuguese ship and the first time they were brought to him, killed a Negro without any provocation to try if they were good 137<sup>28</sup>

The account of the Moroccan emperor that Beckford cribbs from Windus contains many of the key elements of the oriental despotism topos: the dreadful, unlimited power of the despot; his

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<sup>28</sup> Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 5-8 pp. 5-9.

governance via fiat rather than law; his extraordinary sexual prowess and reproductive fecundity. Vathek, and Beckford himself, would later emulate the emperor in their addiction to building and construction of “immense works.” (My approach is not primarily biographical, but it is also hard not to see an image of Beckford himself in “Muley Abdullah,” with his severe, politically successful father and collection of “European Curiosities and fine China jars.”) The emperor’s word, as in Montesquieu, is law. But yet, as with the fruit-gathering techniques of Montesquieu’s “savages,” the despotic law produces an incomprehensible excess of violence. In the killing of the “Negro,” the emperor lets us glimpse the obscene underside of despotic law, its meaningless excrescence beyond instrumentality.

Beckford’s reception of orientalist learning, then, weaves together dual fascinations with the trope of oriental despotism and with opulent pastoral description. A careful reading of *Vathek*, I will argue, reveals the inner logic that connects these two currents. Though the reading notes are undated, there are good reasons to conjecture that they date from before Beckford’s composition of *Vathek*.<sup>29</sup> Beckford’s reading may even have flowed directly into composition: in certain passages, he appears to have revised carefully, and notes bleed into what seem to be abortive scraps of essays departing from their source materials. Perhaps most dramatically, a fairly dry entry in Barthélemy d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque Orientale* becomes, in Beckford’s rendering, something quite different:

Dar La roui, Sea without any habitation. Thus the Arabs call that part of the Indian Ocean that extends toward the southern lands, which were formerly entirely unknown. This sea

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<sup>29</sup> The notes, in addition to documenting Beckford’s absorption of the oriental despotism topos that would become so crucial in *Vathek*, document potential sources for the names of two characters in the novel: Fakreddin (the Emir who hosts Vathek during his journey to Eblis), and Nouronihar (Vathek’s lover). Oddly, Beckford claims that “Nouronihar Bahr Alakhshan” is a name for the Persian Gulf, a fact that does not appear in the entry in d’Herbelot he references, and which does not appear, as far as I can tell, to be true. (Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 9) Beckford may, then, have found the name in another source, possibly the *Arabian Nights*. Finally, Beckford notes, while reading Windus, that the Moroccans “Believe in the Mal-de-Oyo or malignancy of Eyes”—a trope that would become crucial in *Vathek* (see section V below). (Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 3-4 p. 4)

joins that which bears the name Sanefi, according to Scherif Al Edrissi, in its first climate.<sup>30</sup>

Dar la Roui. The solitary Sea, where no Islands diversify the vast expanse and where the vessel is arrested in its progress by beds of glowing corralines [?] and reefs of [illegible] covered by innumerable flowers, which blow on the very surface of the waves and tinge them with a vivid scarlet. They emit so subtle an [sic] perfume that the hardiest Mariners, swoon away and are unable to steer their vessels. What Regions be behind these blooming tho dangerous waves, seem likely to be never explored till some expedient be found to counteract this fatal odour.<sup>31</sup>

This passage appears on a manuscript page full of translated paraphrases from d'Herbelot, many of them also concerning oceans and regions at the boundaries of the known world. Beckford appears to have written it slowly, cancelling and rewording a number of phrases. The southern Indian Ocean, in his rendering, becomes a place of efflorescent and stifling sensuality. The antinomy between sensorial repletion and ascetic dissatisfaction, however, remains operative. The overwhelming "subtlety" of the marine blooms bars the centrifugal, expansive motion characteristic, in the orientalist imaginary, of the despotic state, and in European political reality, of the colonialist state. The most luxurious sensualism is balanced against an austere awareness of what lies beyond the senses.

In a set of notes on sinological books from around the same time, Beckford increasingly departs from his source material. The notes, bound in several fascicles, begin as extracts, but gradually shift to long, flowing passages of florid prose. Some of these passages were drafted and extensively corrected on a separate sheet. It appears then, that Beckford may have been abortively working on a piece of writing about China cobbled together from a number of sources.

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<sup>30</sup> Barthélemy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale* (Paris: 1697), 285. "Dar La roui, Mer où il n'y a point d'habitation. C'est ainsi que les Arabes appellent cette portion de la mer des Indes, qui s'étend vers les terres Australes, qui étoient autrefois entierement inconnues. Cette mer se joint à celle qui porte le nom de Sanefi, selon Scherif Al Edrissi dans son premier climat."

<sup>31</sup> Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 9. The passage appears on a sheet full of notes, all the rest of which contain information given in d'Herbelot. Thus, while it is possible that Beckford draws on another source, it seems more likely that this entry was his own creation.

Beckford seems to have been particularly fascinated with Chinese botany, and especially water plants (a motif which, as below, would return in his travel writings). As with the notes on d'Herbelot, Beckford's writing is sparked by his reading but not necessarily limited to it.

In one striking passage, Beckford cribbs a description of "Hang Tcheou Fou" (Hangzhou) from J. B. du Halde's *Description de l'Empire de la Chine*. Beckford's version emphasizes, in a way that du Halde's original does not, the silk manufactory in the city, and very especially its marketplaces:

There are many Cities in China adorned with gay palaces and lofty Towers; but Hang-tcheou-Four [sic] eclipses them all in every particular. [. . .] This impression is not diminished when he is led thro' long Alleys of Shops where every Article of convenience and Luxury is displayed. A singular neatness reigns in all these Buildings, the pillars which support them, the counters and shelves beneath are varnished so brightly as to reflect the surrounding Object[s].<sup>32</sup>

The only precedent for this passage in du Halde reads: "The streets are rather narrow, but the shops are clean, and the merchants pass themselves off as very rich."<sup>33</sup> Beckford's rendering of the streets of Hangzhou seizes on these meager details to create a shopper's paradise. This consumerist utopia, where both necessities and luxuries abound, is more or less unsupported by du Halde's text. Beckford goes on to describe the production of one of the most important "eastern" commodities then circulating in Europe:

— Above 60,000 persons are employed in the manufactory of Silk. Taffeties and Sattens are woven here to perfection. — Those called Lin-tse and Lao-fang-se are in high repute for their delicate Texture and unrivall'd glossiness. More curious Spectacles cannot be viewed than the vast Magazines of this precious Merchandise at Hang tcheou and when we consider the prodigious quantities they contain we are not surprised at this District's being termed the silken Country.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 32-5 pp. 33. The draft version of this passage goes into even more detail: "A singular neatness reigns in all these Buildings — the pillars — which support them — the counters and shelves beneath — often are varnished - so brightly as to reflect the surrounding objects. — The Merchandise they contain is ranged in the most exact order — and set out — evidently the best of its Kind." Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 15.

<sup>33</sup> J. B. du Halde, *Description de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*, volume I (Paris: 1735), 175. "Les rues sont assez étroites, mais les boutiques sont propres, et les Marchands y passent pour être très-riche."

<sup>34</sup> Beckford Papers, c. 55 f. 32-5 pp. 33-4.

Beckford sticks somewhat closer to du Halde here, but emphasizes the sheer magnitude and opulence of silk production in Hangzhou, the resplendency of its “vast magazines” and “unrivall’d glossiness.” The oriental luxury item *par excellence*, in Beckford’s imagination, takes on a “prodigious” plenitude, a promise of limitless consumption.

In Beckford’s description of Hangzhou, then, orientalist cornucopianism takes on an explicitly consumerist form. Shopkeepers’ stalls and silk manufactories are described via a rhetoric of plenitude. When Beckford’s notes depart from their source texts, it is generally as an indulgence in such rhetoric. Beckford’s writing-through of his sources thus cultivates the two elements of the orientalist imaginary I emphasize here: pastoral—which imagines a “circumstance of perfect enjoyment” or untroubled satiety—and despotism—which posits a subject capable of such perfect enjoyment, but also discerns therein a troubling supplement of violence. These two elements would be crucial when Beckford seized on certain details in d’Herbelot’s entry for “Vathek,” a ninth-century Abbasid caliph, and unfolded them into the novel of the same name.

### **3. Beyond the palaces of the senses**

Read in conjunction with Montesquieu, the opening pages of *Vathek* might be thought of as elaborating a kind of speculative political theory. Beckford imagines Vathek’s caliphate as an enterprise in the production of pleasure, an entire form of political organization organized around providing stimuli to the despot’s body. Vathek’s first act upon ascending to the throne is to undertake a few renovations to his palace: “he added [ . . . ] five wings, or rather other palaces,

which he destined for the particular gratification of each of the senses.”<sup>35</sup> Each of the palaces of the five senses is named according to its function of sensory gratification: for taste, “*The Eternal or unsatiating Banquet*,” where “the most exquisite dainties [are] supplied both by night and by day”; for hearing, “*The Temple of Melody, or The Nectar of the Soul*,” “inhabited by the most skilful musicians and admired poets”; for sight, “*The Delight of the Eyes, or The Support of the Memory*,” housing the royal collection of artwork, antiquities, and other optical delights; for smell, “*The Palace of Perfumes*,” where olfactory pleasures abound; and for touch, “*The Retreat of Mirth, or the Dangerous*,” headquarters of the royal harem. (2-3) The seat of Vathek's kingdom literalizes the Montesquieuian conception of despotic sovereignty: Vathek's palace is an extension of his pleasure-seeking body, with all the resources of his domain devoted to stimulating the royal person.

The true despot, however, is capable of tiring even of an entire kingdom's worth of pleasurable consumption. Not content with the palaces of the five senses, Vathek turns to intellectual pursuits in order to quiet his cravings, “for he wished to know every thing; even sciences that did not exist.” (3) In an attempt to satisfy his intellectual insatiability, Vathek constructs a tower “in imitation of Nimrod,” nominally in order to make astronomical observations:

His pride arrived at its height, when having ascended, for the first time, the fifteen hundred stairs of the tower, he cast his eyes below, and beheld men not larger than pismires; mountains, than shells; and cities, than bee-hives. The idea, which such an elevation inspired of his own grandeur, completely bewildered him: he was almost ready to adore himself; till, lifting his eyes upward, he saw the stars as high above him as they appeared when he stood on the surface of the earth. (4)

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<sup>35</sup> William Beckford, *Vathek*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1. Subsequently cited in the text.

The familiar biblical theme of the tower of Babel—humility toward God is essential to true happiness—is accompanied here by something else, a peculiar outward-oriented form of object relations. Having optically transformed his kingdom into a collection of objects that might be held in the hand—ants, shells, beehives—Vathek immediately turns his sights on new, less

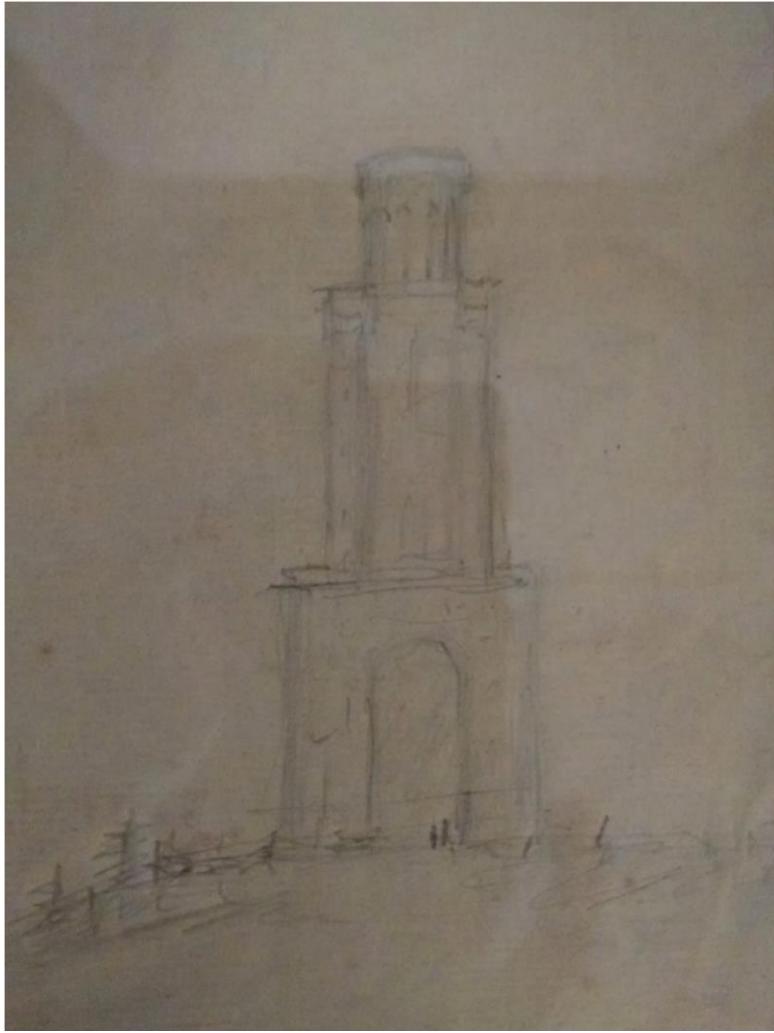


Figure 1: Sketch of Vathek's tower attributed to an 83-year old Beckford. c. 1843-4. Courtesy of Philip Hewat-Jaboor.

accessible objects. The satiated ego thus finds means to produce new conditions of lack within itself. Indeed, Vathek quickly forms plans to purchase the stars, if with mental acuity rather than capital: “[he] flattered himself that the light of his mind would extend beyond the reach of his sight, and extort from the stars the decrees of his destiny.” (4) Vathek's tower thus allows

knowledge to function as the means through which the satisfaction of the five senses can be converted back into dissatisfaction. In the architecture of Vathek's royal compound, then, we have an image of the paradox of consumerist desire: the apparatus that provides absolute satiation is conjoined with a drive upward and outward, toward ever more remote and refined pleasures. (See Figure 1)

The architecture of desire laid out in the opening pages of the novel is immediately literalized in the bodies of Vathek and his nemesis, the Giaour, in the form of insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst. Alan Liu has noted the omnipresence of orality—in the psychoanalytic sense of the word—in the novel: “The significance of Vathek's consuming orality is that to eat one's way through life is to be existentially incorporative, to seek to transcend the self by converting all external reality into the self. Vathek would swallow infinity.”<sup>36</sup> The more Vathek swallows, however, the larger the cavity inside him becomes. After the exceptionally ugly and rotund Giaour (“an Indian, but from a region of India which is wholly unknown”) visits Vathek's palace and then mysteriously disappears, the Caliph is seized with a sickness that renders him thirsty at all times: “So insatiable was the thirst that tormented him, that his mouth, like a funnel, was always open to receive the various liquors that might be poured into it [ . . . ]” (12) Vathek's body becomes a bottomless container, his mouth less an organ than a piece of plumbing. As Vathek himself puts it, accusing the Giaour of having caused his illness: “is it not enough to have transformed a prince, remarkable for his agility, into a water budget?” (14) (“Budget” is used here in the archaic sense of a pouch or bag, but the modern, fiscal meaning of the term is perhaps also invoked.)

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<sup>36</sup> Alan Liu, “Toward a Theory of Common Sense: Beckford's Vathek and Johnson's Rasselas,” *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 26.2 (Summer 1984), 198.

Against Vathek's compulsive insatiability, the novel poses the Giaour's extraordinary consumptive prowess. The latter, upon returning to the city, cures Vathek of his illness and proceeds to distinguish himself through an impressive performance at a feast: "In a word, his loquacity was equal to that of a hundred astrologers; he ate as much as a hundred porters, and caroused in proportion." Vathek, mortified that his own impressive appetites have been overtaken, sends his chief eunuch to secure the harem in the event that the Giaour's sexual appetites are equal to his gustatory ones. (16) The next morning, a hung-over Vathek finds that the Giaour's apparent overindulgence leaves no trace on his body: "[he] looked as cool as if he had been fasting." (17) The Giaour's boundless appetite takes a violent turn when, in exchange for the key to the underworld, he demands that his thirst be quenched with "the blood of fifty children." As Vathek reluctantly fulfills this demand, the Giaour is heard to utter a morose chant of insatiability: "with a sullen muttering, incessantly repeated; 'more! More!'"<sup>37</sup> (27)

The Giaour is introduced into the novel, then, to posit a situation in which bodily appetites are not necessarily constrained by the physical laws that normally alternate hunger and thirst with satiation. Beckford's fantasy of eating and drinking uninterrupted by satiety imagines a form of consumption so prolific as to supersede the material conditions of embodiment. The Giaour, with his repulsive body and inimitable consumptive prowess, provides in its pure form the fantasy that lies at the bottom of oriental despotism: the unimpaired plenitude of the Other's enjoyment. Having focalized the novel on the oriental despot, Beckford must acknowledge the imperfection of his enjoyment. The logic of orientalist fantasy thus dictates that a supplementary

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<sup>37</sup> We later learn that the children have been intercepted by a beneficent genii and brought to a remote aerie where, as in never-never-land, they will never grow up. Adam Potkay accordingly reads this scene as indicating *Vathek*'s participation in the symbolic complex that links male homosexuality, pederasty, misogyny, and nostalgia for childhood: the children are miraculously saved from entering the world of appetites and preserved in a state of perpetual nubility. Adam Potkay, "Beckford's Heaven of Boys," *Raritan* 13.1 (Summer 1993), 73-86.

figure be found to serve as, in Mladen Dolar's phrase, the "subject supposed to enjoy."<sup>38</sup>

Narratologically, this means that to some degree the Giaour functions as an auxiliary persecutory villain in Beckford's novel. In the boundlessness of his enjoyment, he provides the narrative means for Vathek's escape from the palace of the senses, a function which, as we will see, he will come to share with Vathek's mother Carathis.

The opening scenes of *Vathek* thus establish a trajectory from an intensification of sense experience to a transcendence of the sensory: from the palaces of the five senses to the lonely tower of knowledge, from appetitive enjoyment to machinic consumption. For Liu, this dialectical progression can be assigned to the oral and phallic drives, and discerned in the novel's alternating spatial structures: interiors and exteriors, pleasure domes and towers, verdant groves and long desert journeys. Oral enjoyment luxuriates in the repletion of the sensorium, phallic enjoyment empties the sensorium in its search for new objects. This progression corresponds, in some measure, to Campbell's "traditional" and "modern" hedonisms: cornucopian hedonism that pushes up to the boundaries of the body's capacity for enjoyment, and restless, inward hedonism that searches for novel enjoyments behind the veil of the senses.

As the novel progresses, this conjunction between sensual enjoyment and an austere drive to new enjoyments is articulated by the interplay between Vathek (with his taste for delicate viands and the comforts of the seraglio) and his mother, Carathis (with her mania for occult knowledge and boundless riches). The main action of the plot commences when Vathek—driven by the Giaour's prophecies, as well as by the reinforcing encouragement of his mother—sets off to the mountains of Istakhar in order to retrieve the untold riches said to be found there.

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<sup>38</sup> See Dolar's helpful introduction to Grosrichard, *Sultan's Court*, ix-xxvii. Dolar argues that Grosrichard's despot indicates the fantasy of a "subject supposed to enjoy," on analogy with the "subject supposed to know" in the Lacanian transference.

Unbeknownst to Vathek, the enjoyment of these riches involves eternal consignment to the halls of Eblis—that is, hell. Vathek's journey to hell involves a series of episodes in which he experiences satiation—after a good meal, in the arms of a lover—and contemplates settling down and abandoning his project of sublime consumption, only to be driven onward by Carathis' darker, more refined desire. Carathis thus provides an abstract goad to Vathek's sensuous appetites, producing new conditions of lack in order to convert satiation back into insatiability; consumptive desire reproduces itself by supplementing enjoyment with a drive to expand the field of what can be enjoyed.

If, as in Campbell's account, the Protestant work ethic coexists with a romantic ethic of consumption, we might think of Carathis as counterpoising Vathek's languid enjoyments with a kind of occult puritanism. When Vathek is bored, he eats and copulates; when Carathis is bored, she devises projects that combine despotism with rationalizing industry:

Carathis [ . . . ] never lost sight of her great object, which was to obtain favor with the powers of darkness, [and] made select parties of the fairest and most delicate ladies of the city: but in the midst of their gaiety, she contrived to introduce vipers amongst them, and to break pots of scorpions under the table. They all bit to a wonder, and Carathis would have left her friends to die, were it not that, to fill up the time, she now and then amused herself in curing their wounds, with an excellent anodyne of her own invention: for this good Princess abhorred being indolent. (38-39)

Rather than simply waiting for the expedition to the halls of Eblis to set off, Carathis works hard at maximizing her credit with the powers of darkness. The nightmarish circularity of Carathis' parties, in which she injects her guests with venom only to heal them, conceals a rationalizing logic: she is simultaneously accruing occult capital and keeping her stock of poisonable maidens in impeccable condition, and all the while relieving herself of indolence. Carathis' wanton, meaningless cruelty resembles that of Montesquieu's "savages of Louisiana," but with an additional emphasis on efficiency and cheerful industry. There is perhaps even a touch of the

sunny contentment in domestic labor that would later become attached to the figure of the housewife: the vipers and scorpions bite “to a wonder,” as if in a commercial for laundry detergent. A penny-pinching princess of darkness, Carathis keeps herself busy not only by doing evil, but by doing more evil with less.

It is only through Carathis' malevolent industry that Vathek's attention remains focused on the prize to be attained in the halls of Eblis rather than the immediate delights of the senses. Early in the journey to Istakhar, Vathek's caravan loses the majority of its provisions when trapped in a storm and beset by wild animals in a desolate mountain range. Beckford provides an image of privation just as striking as any of his orientalist tableaus: “on one side, a plain of black sand that appeared to be unbounded; and, on the other, perpendicular crags, bristled over with [. . .] abominable thistles [. . .]”<sup>39</sup> (50) The royal sensorium has been emptied out of pleasing objects, reduced almost to pure spatial extension (the horizontal plain and the vertical crags) and abrasively textured surface (black sand and thistles). Perhaps this landscape is simply demonstrating the horrors that sensorial privation presents to a mind accustomed to constant stimulation. Yet it also seems to image Carathis' abstract, arid desire within Vathek's sensorium, dramatizing the paradox through which a mismatch between sense-experience and desire attends the pursuit of new sensuous enjoyments: there is an inexorable link between the boundless pleasures of Istakhar and the wasteland, between repletion and emptiness. The food Vathek is

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<sup>39</sup> There is a certain resemblance between the desolate landscape here and the terrain Beckford encountered in the foothills of the Apennines during his grand tour of the continent: “We were soon in the midst of crags, and stony channels, that stream with ten thousand rills in the winter season; but, during the summer months, reflect every sunbeam, and harbour half the scorpions in the country. For many a toilsome league, our prospect consisted of nothing but dreary hillocks, and intervening wastes, more barren and mournful than those to which Mary Magdalene retired. [. . .] During three or four hours that we continued ascending, the scene increased in sterility and desolation [. . .]” William Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, ed. Robert J. Gemmett (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), 153. Subsequently cited in the text as *D*.

forced to consume in the mountains, similarly, comprises a symbolic inversion of the opulent feasts continually placed before him in the palace of the “unsatiating banquet”:

those delicate cakes, which had been baked in silver ovens, for his royal mouth; those rich manchets [small rolls]; amber confits; flaggons of Schiraz wine; porcelain vases of snow; and grapes from the banks of the Tigris; were irremediably lost!—And nothing [.] in their stead, but a roasted wolf; vultures à la daube; aromatic herbs of the most acrid poignancy; rotten truffles; boiled thistles: and other such wild plants, as must ulcerate the throat and parch up the tongue. (49)

The feast destined for the “royal mouth” wilts into a rotten, prickly version of itself, transforming satiation into privation, even revulsion. Beckford's superimposition of these images depicts the process through which pleasure cloys and satisfaction decays into dissatisfaction. By devoting himself to a life of ever-more-intense enjoyments, Vathek inhabits this zone of proximity between surfeit and vacuity.

The narrative pendulum swings back from privation to plenty when Vathek is rescued from the mountains by the local emir, Fakreddin. Carathis warns Vathek (via a pair of magical tablets she has provided him) to keep his eyes on the prize rather than accepting the emir's hospitality, but Vathek disobeys and takes advantage of the not inconsiderable enjoyments offered by Fakreddin. Among the residents of the emir's court, an oral rather than a phallic economy predominates. During an evening spent in the meadows outside the emir's palace, Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz (respectively, Vathek's future lover and her effeminate amour) luxuriate with a boundless supply of delicacies:

One of the eunuchs ran to fetch melons whilst others were employed in showering down almonds from the branches that over-hung this amiable party. Sutlememe, who excelled in dressing a salad, having filled large bowls of porcelain with eggs of small birds, curds turned into citron juices, slices of cucumber, and the inmost leaves of delicate herbs, handed it round from one to another [.] Gulchenrouz, nestling, as usual, in the bosom of Nouronihar, pouted out his vermillion little lips against the offer of Sutlememe; and would take it, only, from the hand of his cousin, on whose mouth he hung, like a bee inebriated with the nectar of flowers. (68)

The emir's pantries are so bountiful that food becomes a kind of atmospheric condition, a "shower" that blankets the reclining eaters. As in Vathek's palaces of the five senses, Beckford imagines a form of social organization in which many (the eunuchs and ladies of the emir's harem) labor for the pleasures of a few (Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz). In this case, however, the outcome of abundance is satiation and stasis, "inebriated" bodies that "nestle" and "hang" on one another. Eating, furthermore, is a social rather than a solitary act. Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz are bound together in a circuit of orality, joined at the mouth in hedonic symbiosis.

The satiate pleasures of oral sociality, however, are ruptured by the appearance of a "clear and bluish" beacon that bathes the party in "strange light." The pleasure-seekers disperse in a panic, with the exception of Nouronihar, who, "urged on by an irresistible impulse," follows the light down a gloomy forest path (like many a Gothic heroine) to a cave where she is exhorted by a mysterious voice to abandon her effeminate lover for Vathek, and to join the latter on his quest for unimaginable riches. (68-71) Just as Vathek is roused from his satisfaction by Carathis, an individuating compulsion tears Nouronihar away from the pleasures of sociality and the palate, literally severing her physical bond with her companion in oral satisfaction. This ignus fatuus episode is the precise moment of Nouronihar's induction into the tragic trajectory of the novel's plot: she is subsequently seduced by Vathek and, after a secluded sojourn in the mountains, rejoins him in his quest to reach the halls of Eblis. As the bluish light beckons Nouronihar beyond the limits of oral satiety, it also introduces perturbation into the pastoral finitude that had previously stabilized Fakreddin's household—a secluded detour in Vathek's journey to Eblis and thus in the novel's progress toward its denouement.

The despot's progress toward hell, in *Vathek*, is impeded by such eddies of blissful finitude. The temptation to gorge and luxuriate urges Vathek to deviate from the straight and

narrow path of insatiability. Thus the presence of Carathis in the novel: Vathek's mother introduces superegoic compulsion into her son's despotic enjoyment. It is in the composite image produced by Vathek and Carathis—sensuous pleasure and austere industry, romantic decadence and puritan self-denial—that the structure of desire operative in Beckford's novel comes into view. Consumption and production, along with the sensuous and the super-sensuous, are folded into one another. In Beckford's travel diaries, written during his travels through Europe immediately prior to the composition of *Vathek*, this orientalist parable of consumption and the senses (in which an imperative to consume supplements and ultimately overrides the life of the senses) finds a complement in concrete practices of looking, feeling, and imagining.

#### **4. Enameling the sensorium**

Beckford's *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* (1783), written in a series of letters to an unnamed friend, recounts his “grand tour” of the continent, undertaken in 1780-81. A highly precocious aesthete, Beckford travels through Flanders, Holland, Germany, and Italy, taking in the scenery, visiting architectural landmarks, and sampling (often with acerbic disapproval) local art collections and musical talents. The tonal quality of *Dreams* is difficult to describe: even as the preternaturally blasé Beckford drifts from one painting, opera-house, or prospect to the next, there is something frenzied about his drive to consume one aesthetic spectacle after another. We might think of the young Beckford as simultaneously exhibiting an inflexible will and an early case of *flânerie*—like the Giaour at Vathek's feast, his desire to devour aesthetic experiences is boundless. Simon During helpfully situates the travel diaries within the history of “secular enchantment,” and suggests that for Beckford there is an

inscrutable link between the experience of enchantment and the experience of damnation.<sup>40</sup>

Equally strong in Beckford's diaries, however, is disenchantment. Patricia Spacks argues that boredom, as a subjective state particular to secular consumerism, took on its fully modern form during the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Beckford was, among other things, a pioneer of boredom: if *Dreams* reveals the workings of a mind insatiable for aesthetic delights, it also chronicles the anxieties ensuing from the inevitable periods when no delightful objects present themselves for consumption. I will focus here on a perceptual operation that Beckford repeatedly performs on his surroundings in order to combat boredom, a technique that might be called the orientalization of the sensorium.

Having only just arrived in Ostend to begin his travels, Beckford is already bored:

[. . .] now I am landed in Flanders, smoked with tobacco, and half poisoned with garlick. Were I to remain ten days at Ostend, I should scarcely have one delightful vision; 'tis so unclassic a place! Nothing but preposterous Flemish roofs disgust your eyes when you cast them upwards: swaggering Dutchmen and mungrel barbers are the first objects they meet with below. (*D* 55)

Casting his eyes around for pleasing “delightful visions” and other pleasing “objects,” Beckford meets only with drab architecture and contemptible people. He expresses the experience of boredom as an inadequacy of the sensorium to the demands made of it by the mind, a mismatch between delights desired and those available to the senses. Boredom, furthermore, is colored by a tinge of “disgust” for the “preposterous Flemish roofs” and the stench of tobacco and garlic. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White understand such scenes of disgust and disavowal as the crucible of bourgeois identity-formation, the gesture of differentiation through which the

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<sup>40</sup> “Beckford in Hell: An Episode in the History of Secular Enchantment,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70.2 (June 2007), 269-88.

<sup>41</sup> *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

bourgeois subject keeps itself whole.<sup>42</sup> Beckford's disgust, however, is a special case in that it is linked to privation: rather than overwhelming the sensorium, the smell of garlic and the sight of "swaggering Dutchmen" are diminutive and paltry, introduced by the prepositional phrase "nothing but."

As Beckford travels through the Flemish countryside toward more scenic regions, this mixture of boredom and disgust becomes attached to the theme of satiety:

The neatness of the houses, and the universal cleanliness of the villages, shew plainly that their inhabitants live in ease and good-humour. All is still and peaceful in these fertile lowlands: the eye meets nothing but round unmeaning faces at every door, and harmless stupidity smiling at every window. The beasts, as placid as their masters, graze on without any disturbance: and I don't recollect to have heard one grunting swine, or snarling mastiff, during my whole progress. Before every town is a wealthy dunghill, not at all offensive, because seldom disturbed; and there they bask in the sun, and wallow at their ease, till the hour of death and bacon arrives, when capacious paunches await them. If I may judge from the healthy looks and reposed complexions of the Flemings, they have every reason to expect a peaceful tomb. (D 57)

For Beckford, there is something swinish about satisfaction: the "capacious paunches" and "harmless stupidity" of the Flemings render them nearly indistinguishable from pigs lying on a dunghill and waiting to die. To have one's appetites sated is to become like an animal, and sustenance—the condition simply having enough to comfortably get by—amounts to wallowing in the excremental cycles of organic life. The pastoral thus looks, to Beckford, like privation.

To mitigate the excruciating boredom he associates with satiety and sustenance, Beckford repeatedly practices a kind of inward turn to orientalism. During a particularly monotonous leg of the journey between Antwerp and the Hague, for example, Beckford discovers a technique for mitigating his ennui:

Towards evening, we entered the dominions of the United Provinces, and had all the glory of canals, trackshuyts, and windmills, before us. The minute neatness of the

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White: *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

villages, their red roofs, and the lively green of the willows which shade them, corresponded with the ideas I had formed of Chinese prospects; a resemblance, which was not diminished, upon viewing, on every side, the level scenery of enamelled meadows, with stripes of clear water across them, and innumerable barges gliding busily along. [ . . . ] I was perfectly in the environs of Canton, or Ning-Po, till we reached Meerdyke. (D 65)

Beckford makes boredom bearable by orientalizing his sensorium, recomposing the objects before him into a “Chinese” scene. Despite Beckford's pretensions to languor, this is a highly methodical procedure: he seizes on one detail after another (the red roofs, the willows, the meadows, the barges gliding down canals), resituating each within a speculative “Chinese prospect” almost, but not quite, identical with the much drabber prospect at hand. It is almost as if the Dutch countryside were painted on porcelain (“enamelled meadows, with *stripes* of clear water”).

Beckford employs this technique on a number of occasions during his travels, notably during a boat trip down the river Brenta near Venice:

Our navigation, the tranquil streams and cultivated banks, in short the whole landscape, had a sort of Chinese cast, which led me into Quang-Si and Quang-Tong. The variety of canes, reeds, and blossoming rushes, shooting from the slopes, confirmed my fancies; and, when I beheld the yellow nenupha [water-lily] expanding its broad leaves to the current, I thought of the Tao-Sé, and venerated on the chief ingredients in their beverage of immortality. Landing where this magic vegetation appeared most luxuriant, I cropped the flowers; but searched in vain for the kernels, which, according to the doctrine of the Bonzes, produce such wonderful effects. (D 133-34)

This episode differs from that of the Dutch “Chinese prospect” in that Beckford is not even bored to begin with. Rather, he is producing a surplus of sensuous enjoyment by overlaying the pleasant Italian countryside with an even more pleasant “Chinese cast.” At first glance, this appears to be a passage about free-associational daydreaming, but a closer reading indicates the deliberateness in Beckford's cultivation of his internal orientalist landscape: the supposition of a “Chinese cast” precedes the observation of resemblance to “Quang-Si or Quang-Tong,” and the

“canes, reeds, and blossoming rushes” “confirm” his “fancies” rather than causing them.

Beckford makes a demand of his sensorium and then interprets appearance so as to meet it.

Strangely enough, he then proceeds to literalize his own conceit, looking for lotus seeds in a plant he knows quite well to be a plain old European water-lily.<sup>43</sup>

Beckford's sensory orientalization is an active perceptual technique made to look like reverie, a form of attention that manufactures consumable aesthetic objects in landscapes devoid of them. The orientalist episodes in *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* are characteristic of a mind simultaneously reveling in sense-experience and unwilling to be satisfied with the objects placed before its senses. Orientalization—the enameling of the sensed world with an oriental “cast”—enhances the hedonic productivity of the sensorium, countering the paltry finitude of lived experience with an inner cornucopianism. There is something highly formalistic about his procedure, which intensifies the life of the senses by making sense-experience conform to an abstract conceit. A prodigy among Campbell's consumer-despots, Beckford knows how to organize his inner life so as to maximize consumption. Turning back to *Vathek*, and specifically to its two most memorable scenes, we can see how Beckford is attuned to the fundamental solitariness of this kind of cultivated consumerist desire.

## 5. Damnation, the gaze, and sociality

*Vathek*'s best-known sequence is probably the depiction of the halls of Eblis in the final pages of the novel. Hell, as Beckford envisions it, is replete with lavish imported consumer goods:

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<sup>43</sup> The fixation on Chinese botany, particularly the “nenupha,” in the reading notes on China discussed in section II make it seem possible that those notes date prior to Beckford's composition of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*.

[. . .] their eyes, at length, growing familiar to the grandeur of the surrounding objects, they [. . .] discovered a row of columns and arcades, which gradually diminished, till they terminated in a point as radiant as the sun, when he darts his last beams athwart the ocean. The pavement, strewn over with gold and saffron, exhaled so subtle an odour, as almost overpowered them. They, however, went on; and observed an infinity of censers, in which, ambergrise and the wood of aloes were continually burning. Between the several columns, were placed tables; each, spread with a profusion of viands; and wines, of every species, sparkling in vases of crystal.<sup>44</sup> (109)

Rather than the stench of burning flesh, hell smells of saffron, ambergrise, and aloe, goods gathered from various corners of the colonial world. This is an exemplary case of Morton's "poetics of spice": the rhetoric of pungency, supplementarity, and quasi-substantiality that identifies spice as a symbolic approximation of the commodity form. In this case, the phantasmal realm of spice converges on Beckford's lived reality. His aromatic description of the underworld is not dissimilar to a collection of curiosities he encountered while sight-seeing in the Hague:

Gold cups enriched with gems, models of Chinese palaces in ivory, glittering armour of Hindostan, and japan caskets, filled every corner of this awkward treasury. What, of all its valuable baubles, pleased me most, was a large coffer of some precious wood, containing enamelled flasks of oriental essences, enough to perfume a zennana, and so fragrant, that I thought the Mogul himself a Dutchman, for lavishing them upon this inelegant nation. (*D* 68)

The oriental goods on display here bathe Beckford in a wave of scopophilic and odiferous pleasure. The distilled enjoyment contained in the "oriental essences" in particular launches him into a playful imaginative foray: he transposes the "awkward treasury" to the privileged site of oriental enjoyment, the "zennana" (harem), and traces its acquisition to none other than the "Mogul" himself. The analogy, though stated ironically, is suggestive: the Dutch consumer in his curiosity cabinet is like a despot in his seraglio.

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<sup>44</sup> With its overpowering odor and boundless extent, the latter described with oceanic imagery, the halls of Eblis may descend from Beckford's (fabricated) account of "Dar la Roui," the "solitary sea" discussed in section III.

Beckford goes on to lament that his oriental reverie is interrupted by a bowing “Dutch porpoise,” whose “complaisance was full as notorious as Satan’s.” As During points out, there is an inscrutable link for Beckford between sensory enchantment and the underworld. In this case, furthermore, it becomes clear that consumerist enjoyment is something that one experiences alone: if the satanic Dutch porpoise introduces a whiff of sulfur into the aromas of the zennana, he also represents the threat that other people pose to the consuming subject’s absorption in the life of the senses. (Throughout the travel diaries, more generally, Beckford remains essentially alone with his art objects and “Chinese prospects,” his numerous traveling companions mere specters who drift in and out of the text’s periphery.) Beckford’s annoyance at the portly Dutchman contains in germinal form a theme he would work out in great detail in *Vathek*: the inexorable link between sensuous enjoyment and the decay of social life.

If the architectural descriptions in *Vathek*’s opening pages provide us with a parable of consumerist sense-experience and object relations, its greatest (though not, for some reason, its most famous) scene elaborates the ethos of consumerism into an account of sociality. The Giaour, upon his return to Vathek’s court, quickly falls out of favor (not least due to having gastronomically outperformed his host) and is accused of poisoning the Caliph. The Giaour merely laughs at these accusations, at which point things take a violent turn:

Vathek, no longer able to brook such insolence, immediately kicked him from the steps; instantly descending, repeated his blow; and persisted, with such assiduity, as incited all who were present to follow his example. Every foot was up and aimed at the Indian, and no sooner had any one given him a kick, than he felt himself constrained to reiterate the stroke. The stranger afforded them no small entertainment: for, being both short and plump, he collected himself into a ball, and rolled round on all sides, at the blows of his assailants [ . . . ] (18)

Incited by Vathek’s anger, the court foments into a violent mob around the balled-up body of the Giaour, initiating their attacks voluntarily but then, under the force of a repetition compulsion,

“constrained to reiterate.” The Giaour rolls out of the palace, through the streets of the city, and out onto an open plain, all the while accreting an ever-larger mob of kickers.

The sight of this fatal ball was alone sufficient to draw after it every beholder. The Muezins themselves, though they saw it at a distance, hastened down from their minarets, and mixed with the crowd; which continued to increase in so surprising a manner, that scarce an inhabitant was left in Samarah, except the aged; the sick [ . . . ] and infants [ . . . ] (19)

Leading the entire population of the city in pursuit, the fatal ball narrowly escapes by rolling over the edge of a precipice. With the exception of Vathek, the kickers dust themselves off, recover lost turbans and veils, and return to the city with an air of mutual embarrassment, as if they had overindulged in an unseemly pleasure together.<sup>45</sup>

This strange scene poses the question of how social bodies are held together by desire. The city of Samarah precipitates into unity in response to a collective desire for a continually receding object, an object that tantalizingly invites (and then compels) violence. Xenophobia is not quite the issue here: the Samarahans do not want to expel the foreign object, but to possess it, to bring it closer. Furthermore, even though the effect of such desire resembles collectivity, each of the kickers is effectively alone with the ball, and the form of social cohesion they participate in is accordingly tenuous and temporary. Indeed, a certain amount of the violence directed at the ball finds its way to fellow Samarahans when poorly-aimed kicks connect with other kickers rather than the target. As soon as the object has vanished, the social body produced around it dissipates and straggles back to the city, with the exception of its most insatiable subject of desire, Vathek, who pitches tents near the precipice and waits for the Giaour to return.

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<sup>45</sup> Aravamudan suggests that this “frenzied kickathon” may echo the death of Beckford’s great-grandfather, who died after falling down a flight of stairs during a scuffle in Jamaica’s colonial assembly. *Tropicopolitans*, 217.

The desire that shapes the collective life of Samarah, furthermore, does so at the expense of the agency of its participants. After recovering from their frenzy, the kickers make the mistake of thinking they were authors of their own actions:

[. . .] all with looks of confusion and sadness returned in silence to Samarah, and retired to their inmost apartments, without ever reflecting that they had been impelled by an invisible power into the extravagance, for which they reproached themselves: for it is but just that men, who so often arrogate to their own merit the good of which they are but instruments, should also attribute to themselves absurdities which they could not prevent. (20)

Having retreated from the collective space of the chase scene into the privacy of their “inmost apartments,” the Samarahans mistake their compulsion for intentionality, each understanding her participation in a mass delusion as the result of an individual choice. An “invisible power,” like Adam Smith’s famous invisible hand, coordinates individual desires within a collective movement of striving, but leaves the solipsism and unreality of these desires intact. Like the speculative bubble, the fatal ball creates a social field in which individual choices to pursue a perceived interest amount to collective madness.<sup>46</sup>

An uncanny transformation of this image occurs in the novel’s final scenes, when Vathek, Carathis, and the rest of the royal caravan arrive at the halls of Eblis—which is to say, in hell. As above, Beckford envisions hell as replete with orientalized opulence. The residents of the halls of Eblis, however, don’t seem to notice their lavish surroundings:

In the midst of this immense hall, a vast multitude was incessantly passing; who severally kept their right hands on their hearts; without once regarding any thing around them. They had all, the livid paleness of death. Their eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, resembled those phosphoric meteors, that glimmer by night, in places of interment. [. . .] They all avoided each other; and, though surrounded by a multitude that no one could

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<sup>46</sup> Beckford’s image of frantic collective pursuit (collective in form but atomized in content) arguably has a distinguished afterlife, from the frenzied death-dance of the living in Shelley’s *Triumph of Life* to the final scene of Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*, in which the jet-setters find themselves compelled to run toward a monstrous, beached sea creature. (Lacan was fascinated by the latter; see *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter [New York: Norton, 1992], 253.)

number, each wandered at random, unheedful of the rest, as if alone on a desert where no foot had trodden. (109-10)

As if in a slow-motion version of the mad dash for the “fatal ball,” the shambling dead appear to compose a crowd, but are in fact each rapt in solitude. Once again, Beckford gives us a vision of a social body held together only by the uniformity of its individuating compulsions, a form of collectivity that is essentially non-relational. In this instance, however, the common desired object is sequestered from view, indicated only by the intensity of “phosphoric” gazes. The essential aimlessness of a certain kind of striving becomes visible in this image.

When Vathek later encounters the pre-Adamite sultan Soliman, the reason that the dead cover their chests with their hands is revealed: “Soliman raised his hands toward heaven, in token of supplication; and the Caliph discerned through his bosom, which was as transparent as crystal, his heart enveloped in flames.” (114) The internal non-sovereignty figured by this image is the core of the consuming, imaginative subject—in the bosom of individuals marked by insatiable desire burns an unquenchable suffering. Yet this internal negativity is also, in the halls of Eblis, open to public view, and homogeneous across individual sufferers. The damned are pathologically individuated, but the content of their individuation is, in Jacques-Alain Miller’s phrase, extimate: an intolerable kernel of exteriority misrecognized as originating from within.<sup>47</sup>

It is at this point in the novel that Beckford had planned to insert the *Episodes of Vathek*, a set of three parallel narratives not published until the twentieth century. Vathek and Nouronihar, waiting to be cast into eternal torment, exchange stories with a group of other souls in the same predicament. Prince Alasi’s pederastic love affair, Barkiarokh’s despotic ambition, and Princess Zulkaïs’ incestuous desire lead each to take up, like Vathek, a quest for admission

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<sup>47</sup> “Extimity,” *The Symptom* 9 (2008).

to the halls of Eblis.<sup>48</sup> These stories bear no connection to one another beyond their common denouement. The four individual narratives that compose Beckford's full novel are thus unified by a common teleology—damnation—yet mutually incommensurable. This large-scale parataxis reproduces, at a narrative level, the disjoint sociality of the citizens of Eblis: the radical solitude of individual striving is made socially intelligible via its attachment to a common object. Despite the basic solipsism of individual lives organized around desire, a minimal level of mutual intelligibility is guaranteed by their shared commitment to damnation. This device retroactively renders Vathek's story as a frame narrative analogous to Scheherazade's story in the *Arabian Nights*. It thereby displaces what Alex Woloch calls the “space of the protagonist,” implying a potentially endless chain of parallel narratives with parallel (anti-)heroes.<sup>49</sup> The narratives making up this universe of stories, and the desiring subjects that drive them, would be at once radically separate and radically identical. This narrative device, in granting all lives the possibility of being organized around insatiability, figures the universalization of despotism.

The novel's final gesture is to dissolve the fragile cohesion of this sociality held together by desire. As Vathek and his companions are transformed into shades, the fundamental fact of their non-relationality comes into view:

Vathek beheld in the eyes of Nouronihar nothing but rage and vengeance; nor could she discern aught in his, but aversion and despair. The two princes who were friends, and, till that moment, had preserved their attachment, shrunk back, gnashing their teeth with mutual and unchangeable hatred. Kalilah and his sister made reciprocal gestures of imprecation; all testified their horror for each other by the most ghastly convulsions, and screams that could not be smothered. (119)

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<sup>48</sup> Beckford's intention to publish *Vathek* together with the *Episodes* as a unified work was not fulfilled until Kenneth Graham's twenty-first century edition (*Vathek with The Episodes of Vathek*, trans. Sir Frank T. Marzials and Kenneth Graham [Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2001]).

<sup>49</sup> *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

The contrast between Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz's oral sociality and the gnashing teeth and gaping screams of the dead is instructive: the mouth—chief organ of consumption—here becomes exactly what blocks the relationship with the beloved and rends the fabric of the commonly-held world. Beckford's novel thus begins with the Caliph's dissatisfaction with the pleasures of the five senses and closes with a catastrophic failure of the social world. According to the logic of the novel, sociality cannot withstand the pressures of the consumptive appetites of its constituent agents. The phosphoric gazes of the consuming dead, when turned toward one another, find no purchase.

If *Vathek* ends by asserting that eye contact does not add up to relationality, however, it is merely revisiting its opening image, arguably the germ of the entire work:<sup>50</sup> “[Vathek's] figure was pleasing and majestic; but when he was angry, one of his eyes became so terrible, that no person could bear to behold it; and the wretch upon whom it was fixed, instantly fell backward, and sometimes expired.” (1) If, as Aravamudan argues, Beckford establishes a link here between despotic power and sublimity, he also collapses the novel's narrative structure by installing its closing image in its first sentences.<sup>51</sup> The phosphoric, hostile gaze of the damned has been the emblem of Vathek's desire all along, consigning him to hell before the novel's action begins. According to the Carathis' rationalized time, hell is the teleological endpoint toward which the novel progresses; according to Vathek's affective time, to desire is to already be in hell. And if the novel begins by assigning this desiring gaze to the despot, it ends by distributing it to the multitudes as part of the generalized condition of individual despotism that, in Beckford's world, attends consumer society.

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<sup>50</sup> Beckford found the name “Vathek” in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*. D'Herbelot's entry on the caliph includes a description of Vathek's debilitating gaze, and it is this detail that seems to have sparked Beckford's imagination.

<sup>51</sup> Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 190-229.

George Gordon, Lord Byron would take up this image in “The Giaour” (1813), a poem he acknowledged to be indebted to *Vathek*. In Byron’s poem, a young Venetian nobleman rides furiously to avenge his beloved against Hassan, a despotic Ottoman captain:

young Giaour!  
[. . .] in thy lineaments I trace  
What time shall strengthen, not efface;  
Though young and pale, that sallow front  
Is scath’d by fiery passion’s brunt,  
Though bent on earth thine evil eye  
As meteor-like thou glidest by,  
Right well I view, and deem thee one  
Whom Othman’s sons should slay or shun.<sup>52</sup>

The Giaour’s gaze, though turned away from the observer, bears the unmistakable marks of a “fiery passion.” Though ostensibly fixed on nothing, it plainly betrays his malignant intent. This is a curious transformation of the trope of the “evil eye,” which, as in *Vathek*, is generally deemed dangerous when viewed directly and not, as here, askance. As I will argue in the next chapter, this way of describing the gaze would become crucially important in the gothic novels of the 1790s as a way of representing the other’s pathological desire. *Vathek* can be taken as an early example of this trope. If Byron adopts Vathek’s gaze, however, he transposes it from the oriental despot to the Giaour. Byron’s oriental tale, driven by the malign desire of a Westerner rather than an Easterner, draws out the suppressed identification at work in the rhetoric of oriental despotism.

Jorge Luis Borges declared Beckford’s rendering of the halls of Eblis in the final pages of *Vathek* to be “the first truly atrocious Hell in literature.” Borges explains: “In the congeneric

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<sup>52</sup> George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Major Works*, ed. Jerome McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 212-3, ll. 192-9.

story of Doctor Faustus, and in many of the medieval legends that prefigured it, Hell is the punishment for the sinner who makes a pact with the gods of Evil; here, it is both the punishment and the temptation.”<sup>53</sup> It is not that Vathek is punished for his acquisitive aspirations by being damned, but that damnation was just what he was aspiring to all along. There is a certain entropy in Vathek's conspicuous consumption, which, opulent as it may be, repeatedly leaves pleasure behind in its drive toward ever-intenser, ever-remoter forms of stimulation. This outward trajectory, like Carathis' occult projects, always resembles acquisitive self-interest, yet unfolds from a kernel of self-destructive incoherence. Enraptured by the new sensory delights made possible by empire and global capital, Beckford finds his way to two (perhaps *the* two) theses developed in Freud's late work: that pleasure, with its definitional link to satisfaction, is not alone sufficient to describe the insatiable desires of human beings, and that society, which exists only due to the precarious enterprise of repressing aggressive impulses, is a miracle. In the case of *Vathek*, capital's death drive becomes visible through its displacement onto the Orient—thus the curious tonal cleft between Beckford's lackadaisical travel writings and his delirious, apocalyptic masterpiece, despite the fact that both texts seem to be asking similar questions.

*Vathek*, in light of this apocalypticism, appears when all is said and done to be a moralizing tale. Its moralism, however, occupies a strange and decidedly secular register: rather than a demand for abstention or asceticism, the novel makes a plea for voluptuous satisfaction, for allowing oneself to be sated with the pleasures of the senses. As with the Voltairean injunction to cultivate one's garden, this defense of satiety indicates the pastoral dimension in eighteenth-century orientalism. It also points the way toward an understanding of pastoral as a mode of political critique, despite the fact that in Beckford's hands such critique could only be

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<sup>53</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “On William Beckford's *Vathek*,” in *Selected Non-Fictions*, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Viking, 1999), 237-38.

unwitting. Beckford's submerged intuition is that the system of global power that made him fabulously wealthy turns on a denial of the drive to satisfaction, on the production and reproduction of lack as much as on the fulfillment of wants. It is in this situation that an ethical plea for decadence might become intelligible.

#### IV. Matthew Lewis and the Gothic Face

Yes, in that gloomy brow is written a volume of villainy!<sup>1</sup>

In a late fragment titled “The Market: Its Impersonality and Ethic,” Max Weber argued that the market economy enacts a collapse between economy and society, or between “market” community and “fraternal” community. Traditionally, according to Weber, cultural practices surrounding commodity exchange are arranged so as to maintain a strict separation between rationalized market activity and social belonging. In early agrarian societies, therefore, trade was understood as something undertaken only with strangers. Thus the early predominance of the “silent trade,” a form of exchange in which bargainers separately deposit goods in an agreed-upon location, thereby avoiding “all face-to-face contact.”<sup>2</sup> Economic rationalization, however, violates such taboos by introducing trade into the fabric of normal sociality. The inherent tension between market consociation and fraternal consociation is not attributable, for Weber, to the competitive struggle inherent in the market; indeed, as he points out, intimate relationships may be just as agonistic as their economic counterparts. Rather:

The reason for the impersonality of the market is its matter-of-factness, its orientation to the commodity and only to that. Where the market is allowed to follow its own autonomous tendencies, its participants do not look toward the persons of each other but only toward the commodity; there are no obligations of brotherliness or reverence, and none of those spontaneous human relations that are sustained by personal unions.<sup>3</sup>

The matter-of-fact rationality of Weber’s market participants leads them to turn their eyes from the community to a common object of desire, the commodity. The market community coheres

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<sup>1</sup> Angela in Matthew Lewis, *The Castle Spectre*, in *Seven Gothic Dramas*, ed. Jeffrey Cox (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1992), 166.

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), I.637.

<sup>3</sup> *Economy and Society*, I.636.

through a kind of collective aloneness with this object. The ancient taboo on face-to-face contact with the trading partner thus lingers on even when market rationalization has dissolved the extra-commercial sphere it sought to protect.

Weber's image of market society as a collection of faces turned away from one another resonates curiously with a passage in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*. Radcliffe's hero Vivaldi is abducted and brought to the dungeons of the inquisition (that characteristically gothic state bureaucracy). While waiting to be brought to his cell, he watches the inquisitors going about their business:

A long interval elapsed, during which the stillness of the place was sometimes interrupted by a closing door, and, at others, by indistinct sounds, which yet appeared to Vivaldi like lamentations and extorted groans. Inquisitors, in their long black robes, issued, from time, to time from the passages, and crossed the hall to other avenues. They eyed the prisoners with curiosity, but without pity. Their visages, with few exceptions, seemed stamped with the characters of demons. Vivaldi could not look upon the grave cruelty, or the ferocious impatience, their countenances severally expressed, without reading in them the fate of some fellow creature, the fate, which these men seemed going, even at this moment, to confirm; and, as they passed with soundless steps, he shrunk from observation, as if their very looks possessed some supernatural power, and could have struck death.<sup>4</sup>

Radcliffe imagines the dungeons of the inquisition as a place alive with bustle, populated by individuals who know their business. A certain uncanny sense of efficacy and malignancy is concentrated, above all, in Radcliffe's descriptions of their faces. In saying that the inquisitors' faces are "stamped with the characters of demons," Radcliffe seems to mean that the inquisitorial countenance is inflected toward some invisible object of persecution. This society of persecutors, though their activities are coordinated through the bureaucratic apparatus of the inquisition, seems composed of atomistic individuals, each separately pursuing his interests. The "grave cruelty" and "ferocious impatience" of their faces—which render their precise intentions obscure yet their malignancy indubitable—is the emblem of such self-interested atomism.

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, ed. Frederick Garber and E. J. Clery (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 197.

These two tableaux, one economic and one gothic, share a central image: the averted gaze. In both Weber's market economy and Radcliffe's persecutory bureaucracy, a certain experience of another person's face figures the inexorable attachment of individuals to their interests. Thus Weber's emphasis on the silent trade, which attempts to protect society from economy by rendering the face of the trading partner taboo. The metastasis of economy within society means that anyone can potentially be a trading partner, and that clear boundaries between fraternal and market consociation are no longer maintained. This situation finds an image in Radcliffe's bustling dungeon, in which all faces are taboo, invested with an air of primal threat. In the genre Radcliffe helped codify—the gothic novel—the tension between relationships based on kinship and those based on interest is of supreme importance. Faces—legible or inscrutable, inducing sympathy or horror—are one of the principal places in which this tension is adjudicated. Weber helps place this tendency in historical perspective: his image of the averted gaze designates the gothic dimension of market society.

This chapter argues that Radcliffe's inquisitorial faces are an instance of an important trope within first-wave British gothic, which I call “gothic faciality.” It also argues for the economic implications of this trope by tracing it through the writings of Matthew “Monk” Lewis, who provides an exceptionally rich case by virtue of being both an influential gothic writer and an uneasy beneficiary of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The gothic face, in Lewis's work and elsewhere, is primarily associated with villain characters. It indexes, however, a structure of feeling in which the social is experienced as a condition of universal venality, or pathological attachment to self-interest. Ronald Paulson, linking the formal dynamics of the gothic to the chaotic historical processes of the French Revolution, has argued that “the gothic describes a

situation in which no one can understand or fathom anyone else's motives or actions.”<sup>5</sup>

Contextualizing the gothic against a different set of social transformations happening in the late eighteenth century, I want to modify Paulson's claim: the gothic describes a situation in which others' actions are inscrutable but reliably motivated by individuating compulsions.<sup>6</sup> Or, in Weber's terms, reliably turned away from the fraternal consociation of traditional society toward the impersonal consociation of market society. A certain deep pessimism about the cohesion of the social is therefore endemic to gothic fiction. Much excellent feminist criticism of the gothic has emphasized its reliance on plots of re-inheritance and familial reconstitution—plots resolved by the construction of a stable conjugal or intimate community.<sup>7</sup> Viewed in light of the tendency toward social fragmentation and individual precarity in the novels, however, such plots appear essentially defensive.

I build on E. J. Clery's work on the gothic, which situates the “rise of supernatural fiction” within the late eighteenth-century's rapidly expanding consumer culture. For Clery, the innovation of the early gothic novelists was not the invention of ghost stories (surely a timeless genre) but their transposition from vernacular culture to commodity culture. Horror, in the new gothic mode, became a commodified experience, produced for profit and readily available to those with discretionary income.<sup>8</sup> In producing horror as an imaginary want, the gothic thus

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 224.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks in large part to Paulson's influential account, the French Revolution has often been assumed to be the most significant historical context for the rise of gothic fiction. For accounts that instead emphasize, as I do, eighteenth-century economic transitions, see E. J. Clery's work, discussed below, as well as Stefan Andriopoulos, “The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel,” *ELH* 66.3 (1999), 739-58; Wolfram Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 150-85; and an unpublished paper by Cassidy Picken on the concept of “interest” in Radcliffe.

<sup>7</sup> For seminal accounts, see Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Ruth Perry, “Incest as the Meaning of the Gothic Novel,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 39.3 (1998), 261-78. Kamilla Elliott's recent work on gothicism and portraiture, discussed in section 2, also emphasizes the re-inheritance plot.

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

participated in the larger cultural meditation on insatiability that this dissertation tracks. I depart from Clery's work by following the problem of gothic insatiability into both the plots and descriptive procedures of the novels. Above all, I will argue, the gothic returns again and again to a certain chilling recognition of the other's insatiable desire, a recognition that is concentrated in an experience of other people's faces.

The first section of this chapter follows the fate of the narrative form I call the "persecutory plot" at the end of the eighteenth century. It argues that gothic fiction comprises one fork of a divergence: while the courtship novel begins to contain the persecutory plot in subplots and channel narrative desire through sympathetic protagonists, the gothic intensifies the persecutory function, distributing it to an increasing number of characters and creating character systems increasingly dominated by the malignant desires of villains. The second section offers a brief overview, historical and theoretical, of gothic faciality. One of the innovations of gothic fiction, I argue, is to signal the persecutory villain by making the negativity of his desire visible on his face. The third section surveys Matthew Lewis's writings after *The Monk*, arguing that when gothic faciality appears in different contexts across his oeuvre, it signals anxieties about market society. Among the important first-wave gothic novelists, Lewis left the most ample record of engagement with questions about capital accumulation and the social realities it produces. Consideration of Lewis's little-read later writings links the malignancy of the gothic villain with the insatiable desires of romantic-era Britons, whether merchants, consumers, or West-Indian planters.

## **1. The persecutory plot in romantic fiction**

The fate of the persecutory plot in romantic-era fiction might be thought of in light of two late eighteenth-century readings of Richardson: those of Jane Austen and the Marquis de Sade. Austen was an enthusiast of *Sir Charles Grandison*, and especially of its complex parlor scenes. In her miniature dramatization of the novel, tellingly, the villainous rake Sir Hargrave Pollexfen is ushered on and offstage in a hurry while Charlotte Grandison's witty repartee gets top billing.<sup>9</sup> Sade, on the other hand, preferred *Clarissa*, admiring its willingness to depict “virtue crushed by vice.” He seems to have had that novel in mind when, as discussed in the introduction, he praised the English tradition of “strong, manly characters [ . . . ] the playthings and victims of that effervescence of the heart otherwise known as love [ . . . ].”<sup>10</sup> One 1790s reading of Richardson, then, minimizes the Richardsonian persecutory villain, while another magnifies his importance. In the courtship novel and the gothic novel, similarly, late eighteenth-century fiction charted two paths away from the dominant Richardsonian model. As with any reaction, however, these paths were indelibly shaped by the tradition they sought to exit. This reaction, in the case of Austen and novelists like her, took the form of containment and neutralization of persecutory villains. Gothic fiction pursued the opposite path: a multiplication and intensification of the persecutory plot that allowed the dark energies concentrated in the persecutory villain to seep out into a larger narrative world. The gothic novel moved beyond the dominant narrative form, but only by pursuing its procedures without restraint. It can thus be read as both a reaction against Richardson and as a radicalization of his fundamental narrative techniques.

In courtship plots in the late eighteenth century and into the romantic period, there is a tendency to retain persecutory figures but minimize their narrative role by relegating them to subplots. This tendency is evident, for example, over the course of Frances Burney's career. In

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Austen, ‘Sir Charles Grandison,’ ed. Brian Southam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Marquis de Sade, *The Crimes of Love*, trans. David Coward (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

*Evelina*, the Lovelace-ian rake Clement Willoughby directly assails the heroine, and provokes some of the major crises of the plot. *Camilla*, which Burney began writing a decade after *Evelina* appeared, retains a rakish villain in the fiery fortune-hunter Alphonso Bellamy. It also, however, exiles the rake from the main narrative line, which recounts the tentative courtship and carefully calibrated misunderstandings between Camilla and Edgar Mandlebert. Bellamy surfaces periodically throughout the narrative, but plays a major role only at the novel's climax, when he kidnaps Camilla's sister Eugenia (the heiress of a wealthy uncle) and attempts to force a marriage. Camilla's desperate pursuit of Bellamy and Eugenia sets in motion the chain of events that will lead to Edgar and Camilla's final reconciliation and thus resolve the courtship plot. In *Camilla*, then, the persecutory villain plays a crucial actantial role, but does so from the delimited narrative space of a subplot.

The tendency to contain persecutory narrative dynamics within subplots is nowhere more pronounced than in Jane Austen's novels. The rakes who reliably appear in Austenian narrative—John Willoughby, Captain Wickham, Frank Churchill, Henry Crawford—in no case come close to a Rochester or Lovelace in their depravity, but in each case exude a whiff of the decadence and primal threat that characterized their rakish ancestors. These half-tamed rakes, however, reliably pursue victims other than the female lead (Willoughby is revealed to have seduced Colonel Brandon's teenage ward, Captain Wickham runs off with Lydia Bennet, etc.), thus leaving the protagonist free for courtship with a non-threatening male. An Austen novel thus reads like a rewriting of *Clarissa* from the perspective of Anna Howe: the tragedy of feminine precarity recedes to the narrative margin and the comedy of minor misunderstandings between people destined for one another occupies the foreground. The sub-plotting of the seduction narrative retains the rake, and with him a hint of the destructive energies he embodies. It deprives

him, however, of his power to dominate the narrative world. In this way, Austen's technical management of the persecutory plot both absorbs and minimizes it.

The romantic and proto-romantic courtship novel also tends to emphasize a non-villainous actantial role: the busybody. In Burney and Austen, minor social climbers, garrulous spinsters, and widowed aunts are often crucial to the production of narrative action. In *Camilla*, for instance, the hopeless self-absorption and ineffectual social ambition of Mrs. Mittin repeatedly result in awkward situations for the heroine, which reinforce Edgar's doubts about Camilla's virtue and thus extend the comedy of misunderstanding that sustains the novel's courtship plot. And most famously, the narrative climax of Austen's *Emma* is triggered by the intolerable but perfectly well-meaning garrulity of Ms. Bates.<sup>11</sup> Such characters fulfill some of the narrative functions of the persecutory villain, but do so in the comic mode. This reduction of malice to folly is a crucial innovation in the development of the late eighteenth-century novel beyond its Richardsonian center of gravity. It results in characters who, like the persecutory villain, produce disorganization and even harm in the narrative worlds they inhabit, but unlike the persecutory villain do not pose pressing questions about human motivation and evil. This strategy, on one hand, allows for comedy to tip the scales against tragedy and diffuses the traumatic energies concentrated in the persecutory villain. On the other, it draws pathological, irrational self-interest out of the sphere of traumatic otherness into that of normal sociability.

The narrative shift away from the persecutory plot can also be seen in gothic fiction, but operating in the opposite direction. Rather than containing its persecutory characters in subplots, gothic novels tend to multiply them. This tendency strengthens over the course of first-wave gothic fiction. Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve, in their seminal novels, maintained a tight focus

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<sup>11</sup> See, however, William Galperin's interesting and sympathetic account of Ms. Bates. *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

on one villain, and Ann Radcliffe largely followed suit. Lewis, inspired by Richard Steele's *Guardian* number on "Santon Barsisa," broke with this tradition and split the persecutory function into two component parts: a primary villain (Ambrosio) and a tempter who initiates him into villainy by cultivating his malicious desires (Matilda).<sup>12</sup> This pattern holds, for example, in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or the Moor*, Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. In a more complicated way, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* also falls within the Lewisite tradition of the dual persecutor. This type of demonic temptation narrative, by distributing the villain's malign desire across two characters, makes the persecutory function expand to include a larger share of each novel's overall character system.

Another tendency in the gothic novel distributes the persecutory function still further: the proliferation of minor persecutors. Radcliffe, Lewis, Dacre, and others, at various points in their fictions, introduce an array of peripheral villains: venal monks, wicked abbesses, corruptible noblewomen, and the ever-present banditti. These figures serve to move narrative action forward piece-meal in the absence of the central villain or villains. Their various depredations—robberies, immurements, disinheritances—add up to the pervasive condition of precarity and exposure that besets the gothic protagonist. Many gothic fictions thus seem, at moments, to have returned to the picaresque narrative forms with which this dissertation began, producing disruptive narrative events through ambient conditions of contingency and impermanence. The resemblance, however, is superficial. In the gothic, plot is nearly always produced not by hap but by individual pathological subjectivities; not by storms, shipwrecks, and market crashes but by

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<sup>12</sup> Santon Barsisa, the precursor of Ambrosio in Steele's narrative, is a Muslim hermit who submits to the devil's temptations to lechery and murder. Lewis's fascination with this narrative (recounted in the *Guardian*, number 148), provides a link between the oriental tales discussed in the previous chapter and the gothic novels discussed here. *Vathek* itself, in the relationship between the titular caliph and the Giaour, contains a villain-tempter split.

lust, jealousy, and covetousness. In many gothic novels, the pristine, Richardsonian form of the persecutory plot seems to be in the process of dissolving. It dissolves, however, via metastasis, creating an ever-growing number of characters tormented by insatiable, malignant desire.

Despite this widespread distribution of the persecutory function, however, gothic novels universally retain a central villain figure. Such characters are indeed a fundamental component of the genre, part of what makes the gothic recognizable as such. As with the other persecutory archetypes I have tracked, one of the principal features of the gothic villain is his under-motivation. That is, the villain is a character for whom narrative struggles to construct a stable relationship between motivations and actions. As with other persecutory villains, this characterological imbalance—over-intense action coupled with under-formulated motive—opens a causal gap at the center of the plot, precisely at the point where eventfulness is produced. In the gothic, this motivational instability often takes the form of an indomitable and opaque willfulness. When Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert, for example, demands an explanation for her captivity in the castle of Udolpho, the villainous Count Montoni tends to respond tautologically: “by the right of my will”; “It is my will that you remain here.”<sup>13</sup> The gothic villain wills that which is his will.<sup>14</sup> Ian Duncan helpfully comments that “the insatiable yet hollow automatism of the patriarchal will” in such characters is a product of the transposition of romance and realist narrative regimes, or of the literalization of an archetypal romance figure as an individuated psychology.<sup>15</sup> However, this kind of unstable compromise between “flat” and “round” models of

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée and Terry Castle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 216, 361.

<sup>14</sup> The explanation for Montoni's actions that gradually emerges—Involving gambling debt and a scheme to marry Emily off to a lecherous friend—is convoluted, and seems framed as an attempt to shore up the instability of Montoni's motive.

<sup>15</sup> *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32.

motive, I have argued, extends back into the eighteenth century, and to some of the central figures (Defoe, Richardson) of early Anglophone realism.

In gothic fiction, then, the basic features of the persecutory plot remain in place even as the schematic purity of the Richardsonian model begins to give way. Several of the aesthetic highlights among gothic and para-gothic novels, in fact, can be read as incomplete attempts to move beyond Richardsonian narrative form. Some of the more extravagant formal experiments and narrative contortions in romantic-era fiction become more intelligible when understood against the background of the normative eighteenth-century form to which they responded.

William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, perhaps most notably, attempts a sociological demystification of the persecutory villain. Volumes 2 and 3 of the novel offer a virtuosic persecutory plot, tracing the gradual destruction of Caleb's life by Falkland, an "enemy [...] untired in persecution."<sup>16</sup> Falkland's tireless persecutory labors, like those of Jonathan Wild, Robert Lovelace, or Count Montoni, do not seem quite adequately motivated by any information we are given about him. We know he persecutes Caleb for years in order to protect a secret of which the latter is in possession, but nothing in the novel conclusively establishes why he pursues this course rather than the more efficient and efficacious options (say, murder or bribery). Nor does Falkland's invocation of Alexander the Great at the beginning of volume 2 clarify matters—rather, "greatness," (as in Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, to which Godwin refers here) functions as a kind of placeholder term for whatever it is that motivates Falkland's indefatigable persecution. As in all persecutory plots, Falkland is indispensable to narrative yet persistently under-motivated, both the novel's source of plot and its central enigma.

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<sup>16</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. Maurice Hindle (New York: Penguin, 2005), 5.

Godwin's brilliant reaction against the persecutory plot, however, occurs in volume 1, much of which is taken up by a recitation of Falkland's backstory by Collins, his steward. In providing the history of Falkland's unwilling rivalry with and eventual murder of Barnabas Tyrell, Godwin provides the explanation for Falkland's later persecution of Caleb. The first volume thus shores up the under-motivation of the persecutory villain, and what's more does so via sociological reduction. Falkland's pathological, inexplicable violence is redescribed as a problem immanent to the rural aristocracy, with its acute status consciousness and concentration of power in the hands of a few men. The tragic antagonism between Tyrell and Falkland, as Godwin would have it, is a problem not of individual minds but of social relations. The narrative of volume 1, then, is by no means a simple backstory, but central to Godwin's intentions: it attempts a critique of the persecutory plot by reducing the enigmatic desires of the persecutory villain to their sociological determinants. The novel offers a kind of double persecutory plot: a main narrative line driven by a persecutory villain, with a secondary line that demystifies his under-motivation by situating it in social context.

Godwin's formal critique of the persecutory plot, however, has a limit. If Falkland's pathology is to be described as damage immanent to his social order, Godwin can only narrate this damage by introducing a second persecutory villain, Tyrell. Reference to jealousy does not quite seem to explain the actions of this inscrutable, despotic figure. It is Tyrell's enigmatic antipathy toward Falkland, and his extravagant punishment of his niece, Emily, for her regard for him, that lead to the catastrophe of volume 1, Tyrell's death at Falkland's hands. This catastrophe in turn determines the course of action in volumes 2 and 3. Thus Tyrell's under-motivated antipathy is the causal spring of the entire novel, and the persecutory villain reappears on the other side of Godwin's attempt to demystify him. If *Caleb Williams* seeks to move beyond

the persecutory plot by showing how tragedy can occur without persecution, this project remains incomplete. The novel's double plot is a testament to the inescapable gravity-field of the form during the 1790s.<sup>17</sup>

The most elaborate narrative reaction against the persecutory plot occurs in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. The novel's famously intricate, nested plot structure depicts a world of almost unmitigated social decay, a world in which people are relentlessly exposed to the predatory impulses of others. Narratologically, the persecutory function is distributed to an endless variety of characters: the relative who forces Stanton into the madhouse, the monks who entrap Alonzo de Monçada in a monastery and attempt to manipulate him into submission, the family of Isadora who attempt to force her into an unwanted marriage, the bigoted Spaniards who deny Guzman's Protestant family their inheritance and drive them to the point of starvation, and the avaricious Widow Sandal who interferes with her son's marriage to Elinor Mortimer. Maturin's novel thus fulfills, over the course of hundreds of pages, the vision of social life suggested by Radcliffe's image of the inquisitors: a condition of nearly universal villainy.

The Wanderer himself, however, is curiously inert as a persecutory presence. He appears to the novel's victims at their darkest moments and offers them a Faustian bargain: their immortal soul in exchange for alleviation of their sufferings. With the exception of Isadora's narrative, the Wanderer only appears once persecutory forces have already driven each protagonist to the brink of unimaginable darkness. And in no case, crucially, is his offer accepted.<sup>18</sup> The figure who is the locus of the novel's meditation on evil, then, is in fact only

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<sup>17</sup> A similar double-plot structure occurs in Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, which establishes a persecutory villain in Wringhim, and then proceeds to show in Wringhim's own narrative how his evil amounts to the operation of noxious religious doctrine on a weak mind. This second segment is accomplished only, however, with the introduction of an arch-persecutor, the demonic Gil-Martin.

<sup>18</sup> Isadora, who accepts the Wanderer's offer of marriage, is a partial exception. She too, however, finally rejects the Faustian bargain when the Wanderer visits her on her deathbed.

minimally involved in the causal production of evil. His appearance to multiple sufferers across three centuries is instead a meta-narrative device that links otherwise incommensurate lives. Maturin detaches his sublime persecutor from the actual work of producing harm and re-invests him with a second-order narrative function. The talismanic reappearance of the Wanderer binds together a narrative universe that has been fully saturated with gothicism—with pathological attachment to self-interest and its attendant social decay—and in which arch-villains are thus no longer necessary.

Some of the major strands in romantic-era narrative, as well as some of its most striking oddities, can thus be understood against the background of the eighteenth-century form they inherited. Villainy remains a central narrative problem, but various strategies attempt to displace the villain from the central position he occupied in the Richardsonian apogee of the persecutory plot. In the gothic strand of this reaction, persecutory functions extend to a wide range of minor characters, as if in an approach toward the fundamental gothic nightmare: the corruption of the social by universal pathology. The remainder of this chapter turns from the narratological to the imagistic profile of villainy in the gothic novel. The persecutory function, it argues, becomes attached thematically to an experience of uneasiness in the presence of other people's desire. This experience is concentrated, above all, in a way of describing the face.

## 2. Gothic faciality

“The human face,” Eve Sedgwick wrote, “seems [...] to tyrannize over the Gothic novel [...]” Sedgwick describes an uncanny fixity or flatness in the gothic face, and catalogues a few of its attributes: “Face highly colored? [...] Flesh marked by furrows? [...] Eyes fiery? (Fiery

eyes go with furrowed flesh, for they are reservoirs of the fury born of mutilation.)”<sup>19</sup> In coupling fiery eyes and furrowed flesh, Sedgwick hints at, without fully elucidating, a gothic convention that subsequent criticism has missed almost entirely.<sup>20</sup> Starting with Ann Radcliffe, almost every important novel in the genre contains such a fiery, furrowed face: Schedoni, Ambrosio, Frankenstein’s monster, Melmoth the Wanderer. In each case, as Sedgwick neglects to point out, this face belongs to a villain, specifically to a character who provides the narratological function of persecutory villainy. Between the 1790s and 1820s, such faces were a crucial generic signal marking the identity of the villain, quite often from his (or very occasionally her) first appearance. They also served as an index for what I am describing as the gothic conception of human community, registering an intuition of the pathology of other people’s desires. Within the terms of Weber’s speculative anthropology, this conception amounts to a breakdown in the cultural processes that distinguish economy from society. Among the homely faces of clan members, the gothic causes the strange, taboo face of the trade partner to appear.

In general, countenances in the gothic novel are eminently legible, offering a stable and reliable indication of character. The generic rules here are established as early as Radcliffe’s first novel: “The countenance of the youth, while he spoke, was overspread with the glow of conscious dignity, and his eyes were animated by the pride of virtue”; “her unconscious eyes were fixed on an opposite window; her countenance was touched with a wildness expressive of the disorder of her mind [ . . . ]”<sup>21</sup> The countenance, in Radcliffe’s endlessly influential novels, almost always provides immediate access to mental states. This facial legibility is in line with the

<sup>19</sup> *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 158. In the opening sentence, Sedgwick is echoing Thomas de Quincey.

<sup>20</sup> One exception is Michael Gamer, who calls attention, in a discussion of Walter Scott’s *Rokeby*, to the continuity in facial description between Milton’s Satan and Radcliffe’s and Scott’s gothic villains. *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 192-3.

<sup>21</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, ed. Alison Milbank (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7, 46.

affective function of the countenance described by Adam Smith from the very beginning of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In the book's first pages, Smith establishes the face as one of the principal media through which persons are capable of sympathizing with one another.<sup>22</sup> The emotions expressed on the face, for Smith, signal the sentiments experienced by one person to others, who simulate these sentiments within themselves via projective identification. The face, in Smith as in the gothic, thus allows sentiments to circulate among persons.

Kamilla Elliott's exhaustive work on portraiture in the gothic novel shows how facial description, in addition to signaling character and affect, is essential to many of the genre's plots. Elliott argues that the diffusion of portraiture downward into the middle classes is a crucial moment in the consolidation of the modern paradigm of "picture identification," or the idea that a representation of the face anchors individual identity. She argues, furthermore, that gothic fiction is exceptional in its interest in the human face and in correlating the face with its pictorial representation. Such correlations are of key importance in many gothic plots of familial reconstitution, in which the likeness between an orphaned protagonist and a portrait of a celebrated ancestor suggests or substantiates the protagonist's claim to aristocratic blood. The face plays a crucial role in such plots, triggering the process through which the protagonist reassumes his or her inheritance and the familial plot is resolved. (This device is present from the very beginning of the genre, with the resemblance between Theodore and the portrait of Alfonso in Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*.)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For example: "Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion. A smiling face is, to every body that sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance, on the other hand, is a melancholy one." Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Kamilla Elliott, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 106-13.

In the gothic novel, then, the tendency of facial description is generally sentimental: it allows for the circulation of sentiments among persons and is especially important in establishing familial identification. It is above all reliably legible in its depictions of both sentiment and identity. Yet there is one crucial exception to this rule: the villain. It is not exactly that the villain's countenance is not marked as villainous to readers attuned to gothic conventions; indeed, as Lewis's Angela puts it, a "volume of villainy" is generally written in his brow. Yet this self-evidence of villainy consists precisely in a certain opacity, a certain indefinable gleam in the eye. Onto the general affective legibility of the face, the gothic grafts—in the villain's case—an excess, an inscrutable surplus in the facial expression. To the habituated reader, if not necessarily to other characters, this surplus will immediately be legible as malignity, though the specific content of the malignity will remain occluded. The villain is thus marked as an exception from the sentimental economy of faces. The set of descriptive conventions used to accomplish this exception comprise the trope I call gothic faciality.<sup>24</sup> If the sentimental face binds the non-commercial kinship group together, the gothic face ruptures the family circle. Its appearance is precisely what Weber's "silent trade" attempts to suppress: the introduction of the implicit antagonism of commercial transactions into the sphere of social belonging.

This trope maintains a robust existence across the breadth of first-wave gothic, appearing from Radcliffe and Lewis to Maturin and Hogg. It maintains a recognizable consistency across novels that are otherwise quite different:

There was something in his physiognomy extremely singular, and that can not easily be defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated. An habitual gloom and severity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance; and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single

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<sup>24</sup> I borrow the term "faciality" (*visagéité*) from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In the case of the gothic villain, I share Deleuze and Guattari's sense that the face, in its very expressivity, constitutes a barrier to intersubjectivity. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 167-191.

glance, into the hearts of men, and to read their most secret thoughts; few persons could support their scrutiny, or even endure to meet them twice. (Radcliffe, *The Italian*)

There was that in the air and striking appearance of the count, which created at once a sensation of awe and admiration; his figure was noble and commanding, and in his features shone a dignity and fascination, which, while it irresistibly attracted the regards of all, flattered and delighted, if his could be attracted in return; yet, once attracted, those powerful regards overpowered by their beauty and their brilliancy those on whom they turned. (Charlotte Dacre: *Zofloya, or The Moor*)

In a large hall sat three or four men, whose marked countenances almost announced their profession to be bandits. *One* of superior and commanding figure, whispering to the rest, and himself advancing with the utmost and most unexpected politeness, accosted the travelers. [ . . . ] His countenance of excessive beauty even, but dark, emanated with an expression of superhuman loveliness; not the grace which may freely be admired, but acknowledged in the inmost soul by sensations mysterious, and before unexperienced. (Percy Shelley: *St. Irvyne*)

[ . . . ] John's eyes were in a moment, and as if by magic, riveted on a portrait that hung on the wall [ . . . ] It represented a man of middle age. There was nothing remarkable in the costume, or in the countenance, but *the eyes*, John felt, were such as one feels they never forget. Had he been acquainted with the poetry of Southey, he might have often exclaimed in his after-life, [“]Only the eyes had life, / They gleamed with demon light.[”]  
– THALABA (Charles Maturin: *Melmoth the Wanderer*)<sup>25</sup>

In each case, the villain's face conjoins describable features—gloomy, dignified, beautiful, or simply ordinary—with an indescribable surplus. The latter, generally, is concentrated in the gaze. The villain's gaze punctures the legible face with a beam of intensity, fascinating yet strangely meaningless. Narrative description tends to linger on the face as if trying to make it disclose the meaning of this intensity. This face forms a vacuity within the sentimental economy of faces, marking a character who is excluded from the sympathetic interchange of sentiments, and is unassimilable into the community comprised by such interchange. It also marks, with great reliability, each novel's persecutory villain (or at least one of them, and in some cases more than

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<sup>25</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 35; Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya, or The Moor*, ed. Kim Ian Michasiw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6; Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), 211; Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, ed. Victor Sage (New York: Penguin, 200), 20.

one). The villain's "singular" countenance, then, functions in part to establish the location in the novel's character system from which harm, and thus narrative, will flow.

The persistence and stability of the gothic faciality trope over three decades is an undercurrent of continuity in a genre which, as James Watt trenchantly argues, was characterized by discontinuity.<sup>26</sup> The trope is not present in any fully developed form in Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve's pioneering gothic novels, nor is it present in early Radcliffe. The first good example may be the initial description of Count Montoni in Radcliffe's fourth novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.<sup>27</sup> (Montoni's "visage" sparkles with "the spirit and vigour of his soul," and causes Emily St. Aubert to feel "admiration," but "mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore.")<sup>28</sup> Starting with *Udolpho*, more or less every canonical gothic novel through the 1820s contains instances of the trope. Gothic faciality crosses the major distinctions that have been used to organize the genre: between the Radcliffean "female" and Lewisite "male" strains, between the explained supernatural and the genuine supernatural, and between the middle- to low-brow productions of the 1790s and the increasingly sophisticated and literarily self-conscious novels of the 1810s and 20s.

At the end of the first wave of gothic fiction, the importance of gothic faciality reaches a crescendo. *Melmoth the Wanderer* dwells obsessively on Melmoth's phosphoric gaze, emphasizing his eyes virtually every time he makes an appearance. The novel goes out of its way to extinguish those eyes just as it reaches its denouement: "that appalling and supernatural lustre

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<sup>26</sup> Watt points out that the novels now included under the term "gothic" were never grouped together with any kind of clarity until the early twentieth century, and argues that the gothic included very different writers with very different reception histories. *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> The first page of Beckford's *Vathek*, as discussed at the end of chapter 3, may be a solitary exception here. Though the usual habit of lumping *Vathek* with the gothic rather than the oriental tale is probably not solid literary history, the uncanny prescience of Beckford's novel makes this tendency understandable.

<sup>28</sup> Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 122.

of the visual organ, that beacon lit by an infernal fire [ . . . ] that portentous light was no longer visible—the form and figure were those of a living man [ . . . ] but the eyes were as the eyes of the dead.”<sup>29</sup> And Hogg’s para-gothic *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is almost compulsively drawn to description of the gothic face (in the “Editor’s Narrative,” Robert Wringhim’s face, and in Wringhim’s own narrative, that of the demonic shape-shifter Gil-Martin). Such narrative inflation of the countenance is curiously literalized during the remarkable sequence on Arthur’s Seat, where George Colwan has walked early in the morning to escape Wringhim only to encounter him once again:

The idea of his brother’s dark and malevolent looks coming at that moment across his mind, he turned his eyes instinctively to the right [ . . . ] Gracious Heaven! What an apparition was there presented to his view! He saw, delineated in the cloud, the shoulders, arms, and features of a human being of the most dreadful aspect. The face was the face of his brother, but dilated to twenty times the natural size. Its dark eyes gleamed on him through the mist, while every furrow of its hideous brow frowned deep as the ravines on the brow of the hill. [ . . . ] He saw every feature, and every line of the face, distinctly, as it gazed on him with an intensity that was hardly brookable. Its eyes were fixed on him, in the same manner as those of some carnivorous animal fixed on its prey [ . . . ].<sup>30</sup>

Here, the spectral, predatory face of the gothic villain assumes the dimensions and inescapability of an atmospheric condition. Sedgwick’s “furrowed flesh” reappears at the scale of a landscape, enveloping Colwan’s visual field with an unbearable intensity. In this proto-cinematic close-up of Wringhim, Hogg follows the convention of gothic faciality to its limit, imagining a gazing face so intense as to subsume the entire sensorium, exuding a malignancy so potent as to transfix human life like a small animal before its predator.

These faces, with their content-less malignity, breach the circle of sentimental facial legibility. Against the Smithean account of the face, gothic fiction imagines—in the case of the

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<sup>29</sup> Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, 599.

<sup>30</sup> James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. Karl Miller (New York: Penguin, 2006), 36.

villain—the face as the embodied location of the individuating compulsion, the pathological desire that withdraws the individual from the social circulation of sentiments. As Weber would have it, the villain’s gaze is withdrawn from society to economy, and is stained by the enmity attached to the prehistoric trading partner. In terms borrowed from Gilles Deleuze’s theory of the cinematic close-up, we might say that the sentimental face is “intensive,” shimmying with a series of affective transformations, while the gothic face is “reflective,” affectively petrified and “under the domination of a thought which is fixed or terrible [ . . . ] immutable and without becoming [ . . . ]”<sup>31</sup> This petrification intimates a condition of inner torment or intensity but does not disclose its content. Within Radcliffe’s normative generic procedures, the black hole behind the villain’s gaze is maintained at a narratological as well as a descriptive level: 1790s gothic narrative, unlike many of its descendants, is rarely focalized through the villain.<sup>32</sup>

The Radcliffean exclusion of the villain from subjective narration, however, is not universal. The very first gothic novel, in its very first pages, lets us behind the villain’s face.<sup>33</sup> In the famous opening of Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*, the prince Conrad is crushed beneath a giant helmet, and his father, the villainous usurper Manfred, beholds the carnage:

He fixed his eyes on what he wished in vain to believe a vision; and seemed less attentive at his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that occasioned it. He touched, he examined the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young prince divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 89-90. On the possible eighteenth-century lineage of Deleuze’s theory of the close-up, see James Chandler, *An Archeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Film and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 199-201.

<sup>32</sup> *The Monk*, the bulk of which is narrated from Ambrosio’s perspective, is the major exception here. Another crucial exception is Radcliffe’s own *The Italian*, which gradually grants Schedoni’s interiority a narrative presence. This is arguably, however, a case of Lewis’s innovation infecting Radcliffe’s normative model.

<sup>33</sup> For a compelling reading of Walpole’s Manfred as an early instance of psycho-narration in the novel, see Marshall Brown, *The Gothic Text* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005), 19-65.

<sup>34</sup> Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother*, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), 75.

Slipping behind the mask of gothic villainy, we encounter the Lacanian gaze. As with Moll Flanders' bundles, the object of fascination here is wholly distinct from the traumatic Real, though they appear in the same place. Manfred's gaze bypasses the Real in favor of the "stupendous object" that holds his fascination; or rather, the object gazes at him, which is to say that the experience of fascination is also an experience of exposure and subjection to the object. The content of the gothic villain's petrified, inscrutable face, then, is a gaze on his object of desire. If Walpole did not achieve the descriptive idiom that marks villainy in later gothic fiction, it is only because he confined his narrative at such moments to the black hole behind the villain's face.

Gothic faciality thus registers an intuition of the other's desire. It allows narrative, without the aid of a focalization shift, to access the pathological desires of the gothic villain, not through projective identification (as in the Smithean model), but through the registration of a limit to projective intersubjectivity. Within the logic of the gothic, such an experience of intersubjective opacity amounts, ineluctably, to an encounter with evil. If Manfred's gaze is ensnared by the phantasmic visions produced by his guilt, the pathology of this gaze is readily legible to other characters even though its objects are invisible to them: "My dearest, gracious lord, cried Hippolita, [ . . . ] what is it you see? Why do you fix your eye-balls thus?"<sup>35</sup> Around the villain's fixed eyeballs, the torsion of his face around a single inscrutable feature, gothic narrative organizes a way of experiencing other people: as unreliably intelligible, but reliably immersed in an inner fantasy-space that detaches them from sociability. In Lacanian terms, the gothic face marks an encounter with the negativity of the other's desire, with "that fundamental

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<sup>35</sup> Walpole, *Otranto*, 134. Hippolita here addresses Manfred as he recoils in horror after mistaking the young plebian Theodore, dressed in armor, for Alfonso, the monarch he usurped. Hippolita thus recognizes, as in the incident of the "fatal casque," Manfred's gaze on an anamorphic excrescence to the real.

evil which dwells within [my] neighbor.”<sup>36</sup>

The gothic novel, however, offers subtly different modes of encounter with this desiring other. Within the gothic faciality trope, we might delineate two distinct variants, or at least opposed poles. On one hand, there is the direct gaze of the villain on the heroine or hero, as in *Melmoth the Wanderer* or Dacre’s *Zofloya*:

On opening her eyes, the first object she beheld was the Moor [ . . . ] His aspect was frigid and severe, yet his eyes shone with lambent fire, as a dark thunder-cloud emits the vivid flame. [ . . . ] The terrible eyes of Zofloya shot fire, as they turned their burning glances on Victoria.<sup>37</sup>

The villainous gaze here transfixes and petrifies its object. In Lacanian terms, such a gaze constitutes an encounter with the Other in the aspect of its enigmatic demand, the Other as addressed by the unanswerable question “*Chè vuoi?*,” ‘What do you want?’<sup>38</sup> An experience of massive, overwhelming alterity is anchored in the impossibility of answering such questions. In both novels, the inscrutability of the message conveyed by the Other’s gaze is a key source of narrative energy. In *Zofloya*, the meaning of the titular character’s message is never decodable until the novel’s denouement, when he reveals himself as none other than Satan himself and drags Victoria to hell. *Melmoth*, as usual, is a bit stranger: the meaning of the Wanderer’s gaze—his proffering of the Faustian bargain to his intended victims—is quite clear to an attentive reader, but is never actually articulated in the narrative. In each of the interlocking narratives that comprise the novel, Melmoth’s appearance and proposal of the bargain is carefully left as a lacuna, not directly narrated and only imperfectly reported. Maturin is almost obsessive in

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<sup>36</sup> *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 186. For a helpful Lacanian account of the face as the site of encounter with the other’s pathology, see Slavoj Žižek’s spirited critique of Levinas in Žižek, Eric Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 142-51, 158-64.

<sup>37</sup> Dacre, *Zofloya*, 228-9.

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), 690.

insisting that the Other's demand remain unspoken and unspeakable even when we have inferred its content.

This experience of petrifaction before the villain's face, however, sometimes shades into something slightly different, as in this description of Victoria di Loredani in *Zofloya*:

No, her's [sic] was not the countenance of a Madona—it was not of angelic mold [ . . . ] Her smile was fascination itself; and in her large dark eyes, which sparkled with incomparable radiance, you read the traces of a strong and resolute mind, capable of attempting any thing undismayed by consequences; and well and truly did they speak.<sup>39</sup>

A standard gothic parsing of the countenance—beautiful, but with a certain something in the eyes—here grants us access to Victoria's voluptuous willfulness. (Like Lovelace before her, she brings a frigid instrumentality to bear on the pursuit of sensual dissipation). Her eyes, unlike Zofloya's, fascinate rather than engulfing, and rather than gazing upon something or someone they are described as simply gazing. It is this absorbed gaze or gaze on nothing that allows Victoria's malignancy to become sensible.<sup>40</sup> For Lacan, such recognition of the other's desire requires an act of identification:

my neighbor possesses all the evil Freud speaks about, but it is no different from the evil I retreat from in myself. To love him, to love him as myself, is necessarily to move toward some cruelty. His or mine?, you will object. But haven't I just explained that they are the same [ . . . ]<sup>41</sup>

Lacan is elaborating here on a favorite, if rather obscure, metaphor: mustard pots, which are all alike insofar as they are all empty.<sup>42</sup> The recognition of the other's evil, which is to say her lack

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<sup>39</sup> Dacre, *Zofloya*, 76.

<sup>40</sup> I borrow the concept of absorption from Michael Fried's classic work on eighteenth-century French painting, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> *Seminar VII* 198. Lacan is discussing Freud's infamous critique of the Judeo-Christian injunction to love thy neighbor as thyself.

<sup>42</sup> See Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Lacan's turn to Freud," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-3.

of the full plenitude of enjoyment demanded by desire, amounts to a recognition that her lack corresponds to mine.

Gothic faciality, then, is arrayed between the two poles of the petrifying gaze on the victim and the absorbed gaze on nothing. In Lacanian terms, the distinction is between an encounter with the Other—the unreal-yet-palpable entity that solicits and fixes my desire with its enigmatic demands—and the other—the other desiring subject whom I can recognize insofar as she is hollowed out and captivated by desire in the same way that I am. The latter mode, even though in gothic fiction it remains focused on villain characters, thus operates through lateral identification. It therefore implies, as in Radcliffe's image of the inquisitors, a fraternal society of gothic faces and desiring subjects. Or, qua Weber, it implies the post-fraternal fraternity produced by collective pursuit of individuating compulsions. The two views of the gothic face—straight on and oblique—thus intimate two related modes of interpersonal experience within the universal pathology of gothic society: the Other as enemy, sphinx, and persecutor; the other as fellow sufferer of insatiable desire.

Gothic faciality, again, emerged as a conventional descriptive mode in the 1790s. This is not to say, however, that there are not isolated earlier instances of the trope, or something like it. There is at least one canonical example from the seventeenth century, which may have been an important source for *The Monk*:

his face  
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows  
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride  
Waiting revenge: cruel his eye [ . . . ]<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), I.600-4. Subsequently cited by line number in the text.

In historical retrospect, Milton's Satan—pictured here as he is about to begin his speech at the end of Book I of *Paradise Lost*—appears unmistakably gothic.<sup>44</sup> The usual elements, per Sedgwick, are in place: furrowed flesh and fiery eyes, with the wizened surface of the face set off against the affective depth of the brows and eyes. The “cruel” eye, from the plane of Satan's corroded flesh, projects a beam of malignant efficacy.

From the perspective of Milton's angels, Satan's gothic faciality only becomes visible when viewed askance. He thus offers a particularly pristine instance of gothic face in its absorbed or averted variant. In Book III, Satan descends toward earth and alights on the sun, disguised as a cherub, to ask directions from the archangel Uriel. Uriel fails to detect the imposture, “For neither man nor angel can discern / Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks / Invisible [. . .]” (III.682-4) Yet once Satan has flown downward toward Eden and alighted on Mount Niphates, his malice becomes visible to Uriel, as if through anamorphosis:

Uriel [. . .] whose eye pursued him down  
The way he went, and on the Assyrian mount  
Saw him disfigured, more than could befall  
Spirit of happy sort: his gestures fierce  
He marked, and mad demeanor, then alone,  
As he supposed, all unobserved, unseen. (IV.125-30)

It is not just that Satan relinquishes his hypocritically cherubic appearance once he thinks Uriel can no longer see him, but that Uriel takes Satan's new appearance as certain evidence of his evil. Uriel does not know precisely what Satan is up to, but can see plainly that he brings “hell within him.” (IV.20) What Uriel in fact witnesses here is Satan's delivery of the famous “myself am hell” soliloquy, in which Satan commits himself to complete alienation from heaven: “Evil

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<sup>44</sup> The gothic resonances of Milton's Satan are present in Heinrich Zschokke's *Abällino, der grosse Bandit* (1793), a novel Lewis translated in 1805, but may have known earlier. The hideous, scarred face of the titular bandit is, in Lewis's rendering, “the most horrible countenance [. . .] that Milton could have adapted to the ugliest of his fallen angels.” *The Bravo of Venice, A Romance* (London: 1805), 30.

be thou my good.” (IV.110) Within Immanuel Kant’s tripartite schema of radical evil, this amounts to the most extreme and formal articulation possible of evil’s most disturbing variety: wickedness, or the intentional adoption of a bad maxim for action.<sup>45</sup> What Uriel recognizes on Satan’s face is not just frailty or venality, but a deliberate commitment to placing harm at the center of his desire.

The idea that Uriel sees Satan “disfigured” is ambiguous. A literal reading might assume that Satan’s furrowed, scorched face has again become visible. Equally plausible, however, is the more subtle idea that Satan’s cherubic features have been disfigured by the evidence of his malignant desire. The second reading is supported by Milton’s retelling of the same episode several hundred lines later. When Uriel goes to the gates of Paradise to warn Gabriel about the intruder, his description drops any mention of hypocrisy and emphasizes the becoming-visible of Satan’s desire:

I described his way  
Bent all on speed, and marked his airy gait;  
But in the mount that lies from Eden north,  
Where he first lighted, soon discerned his looks  
Alien from heaven, with passions foul obscured [ . . . ] (IV.567-71)

Viewed obliquely rather than head-on, Satan’s countenance is darkened by “passions foul,” his suppressed faciality bubbling to the surface of his face. Satan’s malignant gaze disfigures his countenance, in a suggestively dense description, both by visual occlusion and by sullyng. His passions introduce “obscurity” into the countenance, but they also stain it, making palpable his pursuit of surplus enjoyment, the “foul” substance of desiring subjectivity. The filth within Satan’s heart, according to Milton’s dense language, becomes visible precisely through its

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<sup>45</sup> *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 33.

recession from the surface of the face. It is this immanence of malice in the countenance that marks Milton's Satan, perhaps, as the first gothic villain.

The Satanic countenance resurfaces over a century later in *The Monk*. Midway through the novel, in order to help Ambrosio rape Antonia, Matilda summons a being who bears some resemblance to his Miltonic predecessor:

He beheld a Figure more beautiful than Fancy's pencil ever drew. It was a Youth seemingly scarce eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked: A bright Star sparkled upon his fore-head; Two crimson wings extended themselves from his shoulders; and his silken locks were confined by a band of many-coloured fires, which played round his head, [ . . . ] Yet however beautiful the Figure, He [Ambrosio] could not but remark a wildness in the Daemon's eyes, and a mysterious melancholy impressed upon his features, betraying the Fallen Angel [ . . . ]<sup>46</sup>

Lucifer, his erotic appeal aside, is an unmistakable gothic villain. The descriptive procedure Lewis uses to canvas his ethereal body is identical to that established by Radcliffe: the face is appealing, even beautiful, “yet” a certain “wildness” in the eyes darkens his features. At the end of the novel, as Lucifer prepares to collect the Monk’s soul, this darkness has spread from the eyes to the rest of the demonic body:

His blasted limbs still bore marks of the Almighty's thunder: A swarthy darkness spread itself over his gigantic form: His hands and feet were armed with long Talons: Fury glared in his eyes, which might have struck the bravest heart with terror: Over his huge shoulders waved two enormous sable wings; and his hair was supplied by living snakes, which twined themselves round his brows with frightful hissings. (M 433)

It is as if the malignant desire that taints the gothic villain’s countenance has taken possession of the entire body. The absorbed gothic face, with its “mysterious melancholy,” has passed over into the horror of its direct, petrifying counterpart. A moralizing reading of the two passages would emphasize their juxtaposition of fair appearance and foul interior (and might furthermore, in Lewis’s case, connect this juxtaposition to homoerotic paranoia). Yet, according to the

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<sup>46</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson and Emma McEvoy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 277. Subsequently cited in the text as *M*.

paradox that structures gothic faciality, the “passions foul” of the villain are evident from the beginning, legibly illegible on the surface of the face. Not knowing what the other desires amounts, as always with the gothic villain, to certainty that he does desire.

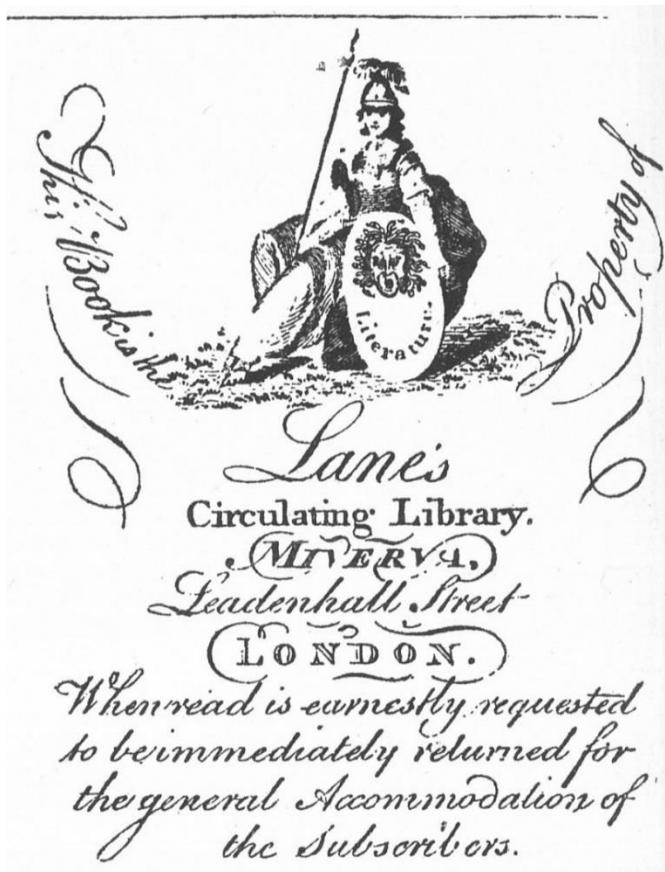


Figure 2: bookplate from William Lane's circulating library.  
Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. John Johnson Collection: Circulating Libraries 1 (82a).

Lucifer's serpentine hair, furthermore, might bear a more quotidian association for compulsive consumers of gothic fiction. William Lane's infamous Minerva press and circulating library, in an early masterstroke of branding, became associated with an image of Minerva bearing a shield depicting Medusa's head. An effigy is supposed to have greeted customers when

they walked into the circulating library on Leadenhall Street, and the image also appeared on Lane's bills and on the library labels placed inside the books themselves.<sup>47</sup> (Figure 2) Such a label very likely adorned copies of *The Monk*. As Lane's volumes circulated through London parlors dispensing (qua Clery) commodified terror, the inscrutable Medusan glare would have fallen on both binge-readers and dabblers, Catherine Morlands and Henry Tilneys. One of the cornerstones of Lane's brand, then, was the figurative petrifaction of his customers before the gaze of the gothic Other. If novel-reading was understood as an intimate space, Medusa's gaze breached this space with an intractable otherness, as if the literary commodity were reminding the reader of its origin in Weber's ancient enemy, the merchant/stranger.<sup>48</sup> In the diffuse body of work that Lewis produced after *The Monk*, this gaze detaches itself from its native gothic context and migrates to writing that bears, in one way or another, on capital accumulation.

### 3. Lewis: capital accumulation and the flaming eye

The first instance of gothic faciality in Lewis's work is the initial description of Ambrosio in *The Monk*. The abbot's "features" are "uncommonly handsome" and tranquil. Yet—according to the negative conjunction characteristic of gothic faciality—"Still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few could sustain the glance of his eye at once fiery and penetrating."<sup>49</sup> This fiery gaze, deforming the placid surface of the countenance, indicates (as always in the gothic) the precise point in the novel from which

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<sup>47</sup> Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press, 1790-1820* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1939), 15-16, 114.

<sup>48</sup> Tobin Siebers reads the Medusa myth as part of the larger, trans-cultural phenomenon of evil eye beliefs. For Siebers, such beliefs have the function of attaching stigma to social and cultural outsiders. *The Mirror of Medusa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, *The Monk*, 18. This description takes place toward the end of the novel's opening scene, a comic sequence in which two cavaliers attempt to catch sight of Antonia's veiled face only to be intercepted by her (unveiled) Aunt Leonella. The novel's opening thus juxtaposes the two accounts of the face present in the gothic novel: the sentimental, according to which the face puts persons in social and communicative circulation, and the gothic, according to which the face marks the limits of social intelligibility.

evil will unfold: Ambrosio's desire. It is also the first in a long line of such gazes in Lewis's writing, gothic and otherwise. Most of Lewis's writing after *The Monk* takes the form of sporadic translations and adaptations, particularly from German gothicism.<sup>50</sup> Throughout his dabbling, however, at least one constant feature recurs: gothic faciality. This section follows the gothic face through two works in Lewis's post-*Monk* career, the first of them almost entirely neglected by critics: *The Love of Gain* (1799) and "Isle of the Devils" (1815, first published 1827). Gothic faciality, in these works, migrates from its original generic context and resurfaces in neoclassical verse and travel writing. If the gothic face persists in Lewis's later writing, it is always in proximity to questions about capital accumulation, whether in London or the West Indies. Gothic faciality functions as a way of registering anxieties about market society and its attendant social decay, anxieties which for Lewis—a West-Indian scion with reformist politics—were compounded by personal implication.

After the publication of the bowdlerized fifth edition of *The Monk* and the blockbuster success of the gothic drama *The Castle Spectre*, Lewis spent the last years of the 1790s involved in the ongoing ballad revival. He had already had success in this genre with the widely reprinted "Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogine," first published in *The Monk*. Lewis built on this success by compiling his own ballads and translations along with contributions from Walter Scott, Robert Southey, and others, and publishing them in a volume called *Tales of Wonder* in 1801. The rhetoric of gothic faciality is alive and well in Lewis's poems, as at the climactic moment of "Alonzo the Brave," when the titular knight, jilted by Imogine while away at war,

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis's career as a writer was uncannily similar to that of William Beckford, the subject of the previous chapter: both West-Indian scions, both gay, both holders of the same parliamentary seat for Hindon. In particular, both produced one very early masterpiece followed by decades of sporadic output in the form of travel writing, satire, and translations.

appears at her wedding feast as a cadaver. When Alonzo's skeletal face is revealed, the intensity of the gothic villain's living eyes is replaced by a post-mortem equivalent:

The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,  
And sported his eyes and his temples about,  
While the spectre address'd Imogine.<sup>51</sup>

The face of the desiring Other, even in its cadaverous form, literally seethes with malignity. The vermin sporting in Alonzo's eye sockets provide the inscrutable excess that always invests the gothic villain's face, as if literalizing his obscene, opaque enjoyment in the form of riotous and putrescent organic life.

In "Osric the Lion," another of Lewis's original poems, the villain Osric's intention to murder his nephew Carloman is introduced via facial description:

Ha! dost thou not see, by the moon's trembling light  
Directing his steps, where advances a knight,  
His eye big with vengeance and fate?

As Carloman puts it: "Why roll thus your eyeballs? Why glare they so wild?" Osric's inscrutable eyes are mentioned multiple times before their meaning—his murderous intent—becomes clear. And when Osric receives his comeuppance at the claws of a band of demons, his over-intense eyes are the first to go:

They dash'd him, with horrible yell, on the ground,  
And blood down his limbs trickled fast;  
His eyes from their sockets with fury they tore [. . .]<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Matthew Lewis, *Tales of Wonder*, ed. Douglass H. Thomson (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2010), 64 ll. 59-61.

<sup>52</sup> *Tales of Wonder*, 55-9, ll. 13-5, 31, 110-12.

The poem's action is resolved by this act of facial destruction, as if neutralization of the villain required erasure of his ocular power. Such malignant eyes—rolling, glaring, glassy, or fixed—frequently mark the gothic villains who populate *Tales of Wonder*.<sup>53</sup>

The image resurfaces in a very different poem, *The Love of Gain*, which Lewis wrote in early 1799 while in the process of compiling *Tales of Wonder*:

Then why  
Thus pants your bosom, and thus flames your eye?<sup>54</sup>

An imitation of Juvenal's thirteenth *Satire*, *The Love of Gain* attempts to console a friend who has just lost a large sum of money. The pecuniary passions, as described here, manifest themselves through an unmistakably gothic icon: the flaming eye. Lewis, when he wrote these lines, was working simultaneously at two distant poles of the late eighteenth-century genre system: the sexualized decadence of the gothic ballad and the fusty respectability of the Johnsonian Juvenal imitation. Criticism of Lewis's poetry has almost completely neglected *The Love of Gain*, and Lewis's biographer largely writes it off as Lewis's attempt to appease his father.<sup>55</sup> The poem may not be entirely undeserving of this neglect. Its critique of economic acquisitiveness, however, is threaded through with subtle strains of gothicism. *The Love of Gain* holds, as satire and especially Johnsonian satire tends to, that the times are rotten. Lewis, however, shifts the balance away from the proto-Boethian themes in Juvenal's original (the vagaries of fortune and the need for philosophical detachment therefrom) toward a vision of

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<sup>53</sup> For further examples of gothic faciality in Lewis's contributions to *Tales of Wonder*, see "Bothwell's Bonny Jane," "The Water-King," and "The Grim White Woman." His collaborators, whether via Lewis or otherwise, also picked up the trope: see Scott's "The Wild Huntsmen," Southe's "The Old Woman of Berkeley," and William Julius Mickle's "The Sorceress; or Wolfwold and Ulla." Lewis's role in the 1790s phase of the ballad revival probably remains underappreciated. Michael Gamer's careful treatment of Scott's debt to the gothic, however, is an exception to this rule, placing a great deal of emphasis on the formative early relationship between the two writers. Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, 163-200.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Love of Gain* (London: 1799), ll. 322-3. Subsequently cited in the text.

<sup>55</sup> D. L. Macdonald, *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 142.

universal avarice, positing pathological attachment to lucre as a fundamental social condition. As I have been arguing, such a vision of the social body as rotted from within by the ruling passions of its members is characteristically gothic. The surfacing in *The Love of Gain* of gothic imagery, especially imagery of the face, confirms this inner affinity between the poem and Lewis's contemporaneous gothic writing.

Both Juvenal's and Lewis's versions of the satire attempt to console a friend (in *The Love of Gain*, named Emilius), who had been cheated by a duplicitous debtor. Chief among the arguments used to reconcile Emilius to his loss is the idea that malicious pursuit of wealth is a norm rather than an exception. Money, as Emilius's friend explains, is an object of universal compulsive desire, and to expect others not to act on this desire is naïve:

Boy-witted Elder! Must thou still be told,  
No sorcerer's spell can witch an heart like gold?  
That in each guinea conqu'ring Cupids swarm,  
And Venus less than good King George can charm? (ll. 71-4)

A kind of numismatic animism brings the dynamics of both supernatural enchantment and the erotic gaze to bear on the guinea. As the poem has it, the love of gain is best understood not as enlightened self-interest, but as compulsion toward a captivating object. The swarming cupids "in" each guinea mark the Lacanian object of desire, that which is within and yet more than the guinea, the phantasmic promise of a plenitude of enjoyment. This theme returns when Lewis invents a miser named "Gripe," modifying Juvenal's satire against perjury by shifting the emphasis from mendacity to avarice:

"Let wrath divine," thus Gripe in transport cries,  
"Curse every limb, and quench my blasted eyes,  
If still harmonious sounds mine ears may drink  
While in yon chest my counted guineas chink,  
And still my palsied hands have power to hold,  
Close to my heart, this bag of darling gold!  
[. . .]

If hoards of gold my bursting coffers fill,  
Gold, which can soothe each pang, each fear can still,  
Comfort for every care, and balm for every ill! (ll. 165-79)

Gripe imagines gripping his wealth even through the slow providential destruction of his physical ability to enjoy it. His peroration ends (just a bit bombastically, with both an alexandrine and a tercet) by positing gold as panacea, as a universal substance of enjoyment that can compensate for all suffering and deprivation. Gripe's pecuniary desire is not, perhaps, treated with the utmost seriousness: this is one of the few passages in which Lewis manages to inject some levity into his otherwise morose satire. Yet, crucially, Lewis paints miserliness as a warm rather than a cold passion, a form of obscene and incomprehensible enjoyment.

The trace of violent enjoyment in Emilius's own attachment to his lost wealth is, in fact, one of the central themes of the poem, as well as the locus of its submerged gothicism. Toward the end of his satire, Juvenal cautions against pursuing vengeance against the offender, arguing that a guilty conscience is the most severe form of punishment. Juvenal briefly describes the appearance of the aggrieved creditor's larger-than-life image in the debtor's dreams. This image seems to have triggered Lewis into a regression to old habits:

Now groans of tortur'd ghosts his ear affright;  
Now ghastly phantoms dance before his sight;  
And now he sees (and screams in frantic fear)  
To size gigantic swell'd thy angry shade appear!  
Swift at thy summons rush with hideous yell  
Their prey to seize the Denizens of hell!  
Headlong they hurl him on some ice-rock's point,  
Mangle each limb, and dislocate each joint;  
Or plunge him deep in blue sulphureous lakes;  
Or lash his quivering flesh with twisted snakes;  
Or in his brain their burning talons dart;  
Or from his bosom rend his panting heart  
To bathe their fiery lips in guilty gore! (ll. 385-97)

This bizarre eruption of gothicism, which will sound familiar to any reader of *Tales of Wonder*, figures the creditor Emilius as a sublime persecutor. While the burden of the rest of the poem has been to paint Emilius as something of an exception to the general condition of social corruption, Lewis here goes out of his way to transfigure him into nothing less than Satan. The sublime act of vengeance in the debtor's nightmare, recalling the denouement of *The Monk* as well as some of the ballads, revels in infernal violence, which is to say violence out of proportion to any retributive end and beyond even the physical capacity of the body for suffering.

Though this gothic rupture in the placid Augustan surface of the verse is unique—indeed out of place—in the poem, subtler strains of gothicism surface periodically. In two key passages, including that quoted above, Lewis depicts Emilius's difficulty in accepting his financial loss with a familiar image:

While, then, we mark your breast with passion rise,  
Your trembling lips, clench'd hands, and flashing eyes,  
When ask'd the cause, how poor the answer sounds,  
"A friend is false! I've lost a thousand pounds."

Then why  
Thus pants your bosom, and thus flames your eye? (ll. 29-32, 322-3)

The image, in both cases, is Lewis's rather than Juvenal's. Emilius's body and face, and especially the intensity of his eyes, become emblems of his excessive attachment to the money he has lost. In his flashing and flaming eyes, the poem locates the incoherent pathology of the love of gain, avarice's supersession of enlightened economic self-interest. While the ostensible purpose of both passages is to minimize and ironize such preoccupation with dross, Lewis's invocation of gothic faciality lends Emilius a certain air of primal threat. Lewis is fascinated by the face's betrayal of an inner non-sovereignty, a whiff of madness that taints economic

acquisitiveness. The gothic face thus obtrudes itself into Lewis's satire precisely at the moment that he tries to register the experience of the other's economic desire.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the one moment of genuine satirical brilliance in *The Love of Gain* comes at its conclusion, which continues some fifteen lines past the point at which Juvenal stops. Juvenal's version ends with an assurance that the deceitful debtor will repeat his crimes and therefore eventually come to justice. Lewis makes this argument, but continues with an exhortation to Emilius to go about his usual business: "Speed thou to Lombard-street, / Or plod the gambling 'Change with busy feet [ . . . ]" (ll. 449-50) Emilius, Lewis conjectures, will act the usual part of a merchant, creating false reports of market fluctuations

From specious lies an *honest* gain to draw,  
And spoil some wretch in forms allowed by law;  
More dupes to find, more knavish tricks to learn,  
And fooled thyself, fool others in thy turn [ . . . ] (ll. 453-6)

With vicious irony, Lewis here withdraws from the tone of bemused friendly address maintained throughout the rest of the poem. No longer singled out for his virtues, Emilius becomes just another economic actor within the general condition of mercantile mendacity. The last line quoted above directly refers to intentional acts of deceit, but also seems to suggest a condition of universal dupery and captivation by economic desire. The broader social world into which Emilius is integrated thus has perjury as its binding agent. A section of the poem written by William Lambe describes London as a place "Where disagreements in agreement lie, / Our close-knit mass of contrariety." (ll. 251-2) This social world bound together by its own

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<sup>56</sup> The poem also dwells on the poised demeanor of the debtor as he delivers false testimony in court, perhaps constituting another mode of gothic faciality: "Mark'd you [ . . . ] One slight convulsion, or one transient blush / Bid his lip quiver, or his forehead flush? [ . . . ] So firm his voice, so bold and clear his eye, / Yourself could scarce believe his tale a lye!" (ll. 127-38) Emilius, in a slight gothic tic, reports being struck with "horror" (l. 139) by the uncanny equanimity of the villain's face.

contrariety, or by anti-social individual attachments to congruent interests, is one of the fundamental elements of gothic fantasy.

The submerged gothic strain in Lewis's later writings, at the end of his life, came directly to bear on his uneasy relationship to his personal colonial wealth.<sup>57</sup> Lewis's visits to his Jamaican plantations in 1815-18 produced his last work, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, along with a narrative poem called "Isle of the Devils" that Lewis wrote shipboard on the way to Jamaica in late 1815. Whether by coincidence or instinct, Samuel Taylor Coleridge detected the gothic strain in the *Journal* and "Isle of the Devils" immediately upon their delayed publication in 1834. In his *Table Talk* entry for March 20<sup>th</sup> of that year, Coleridge savages Horace Walpole's gothic drama *The Mysterious Mother* before devoting a few lines to Lewis's *Journal*. The journal itself, he opines, is "delightful [ . . . ] but the Isle of Devils is, like his romances, a fever dream, horrible without point." The aged Coleridge here consolidates his conservative reaction against the gothic over the course of the 1790s (he had, with some ambivalence, praised Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* and *Mysteries of Udolpho* before turning against both *The Monk* and *The Italian*). Reading Walpole and Lewis at the same time, well after the first wave of gothic fiction had subsided, Coleridge recognized the affinity between Walpole's "disgusting, vile, detestable composition" and Lewis's colonial romance.<sup>58</sup>

Ellen Malenas Ledoux, in her reading of the *Journal*, carefully tracks the delicate ambivalence inherent in Lewis's "reform ideology": he was pro-abolition but anti-emancipation,

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<sup>57</sup> Prior to the late writings discussed here, Lewis approached the theme of colonial accumulation in "The Anaconda," a story included in *Romantic Tales* (1808). (Lewis claims the tale is adapted from the German, but the source is unclear.) In addition to investing its protagonist, a young colonial administrator in Sri Lanka, with certain overtones of gothic villainy, this story describes the eponymous snake in familiar terms: "We could see distinctly the shape of her hideous head and the flames of her great piercing eye-balls, reflected from the glass windows [ . . . ]" *Romantic Tales* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1857), 73. For a helpful discussion, see Julia Wright, "Lewis's 'Anaconda': Gothic Homonyms and Sympathetic Distinctions," *Gothic Studies* 3.3 (2001), 262-78.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 14.I.470-1.

he tempered his genuine humanitarian sentiment with stock pro-slavery arguments, and while his reforms angered other planters he joined them in endorsing brutal suppression of anti-colonial violence.<sup>59</sup> The carefree tone that Lewis maintains throughout much of the *Journal* belies the deep incoherencies implicit in his position as the inheritor of a West-Indian fortune with abolitionist political connections and personal tendencies. Much commentary on “Isle of the Devils,” in turn, has read it in light of such tensions, emphasizing the way in which the complex power dynamics between Izra and the demon king reflect the powerful yet precarious situation of West-Indian planters in relation to their slaves, as well as the poem’s unmistakable anxieties about miscegenation.<sup>60</sup> Less well-established is the direct imagistic lineage between Lewis’s early gothic writings and this late, strange poem.

“Isle of the Devils” is a gothic Robinsonade, recounting the story of a young Portuguese woman, Irza, shipwrecked on a haunted island. The poem begins with Irza sailing to Lisbon along with her intended, Rosalvo, a viceroy’s son returning home to take part in the campaign against the Moorish occupation of Iberia. The ship is sailing from Goa and laden with “countless wealth [ . . . ] In heaps there jewels lay of various dyes, / Ingots of gold, and pearls of wondrous size [ . . . ]”<sup>61</sup> The poem thus situates itself historically in relation to both (gothic) themes of chivalric valor and early-modern capital flows along the coast of Africa. Though Lewis is unclear about the location of the Isle of the Devils, furthermore, among the possible real-world analogues are the islands off the coast of West Africa (especially Madeira and São Tomé) where

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<sup>59</sup> Ellen Malenas Ledoux, *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change, 1764-1834* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 175-98.

<sup>60</sup> MacDonald, *Monk Lewis*, 199; Ledoux, *Social Reform*, 186-98; Lisa Nevárez, “‘Monk’ Lewis’ ‘Isle of the Devils’ and the Perils of Colonialism,” *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 50 (2008).

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, ed. Judith Terry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 163. Subsequently cited in the text as *J*.

the Portuguese, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, conducted the first experiments with plantation-based production using African slaves.<sup>62</sup>

When Irza is shipwrecked on the Isle of the Devils after a storm, the gothic sequence of the poem commences. Irza is attacked by a band of bloodthirsty dwarves, “their eyes of flame, / Twinkling and goggling [. . .],” only to be rescued by a yet more fearsome being:

a form,  
Gigantic as the palm, black as the storm,  
All shagged with hair, wild, strange in shape and show,  
Towered on the loftiest cliff, and gazed below.  
On *her* he gazed, so fixed, so hard,  
Like knights of bronze some hero’s tomb who guard.  
[. . .]  
On *her* he gazed, and floods of sable fires  
Rolled his huge eyes, and spoke his fierce desires [. . .] (J 169)

Lewis’s imagery here constructs a strange convergence between racialized sexual anxiety and gothic faciality. The sexual threat of the demon king is concentrated in his sable color and “wild, strange” form, but above all in his gaze. A simile (relatively unusual in Lewis’s verse) places a curious overemphasis on the fixity of the demon king’s gaze: the gothic face often petrifies its object but here also metalizes its subject. Yet this inorganic fixity, in the next image, implies an inner deluge, “floods of sable fires.” The last quoted line, indeed, makes explicit what many gothic facial descriptions leave unspoken: that the demon king’s fiery, immovable gaze is an emblem of malignant desire.

Irza, without any other recourse, seeks refuge in the demon king’s lair, where he treats her with a complex mixture and delicacy and cruelty and, in the proper gothic tradition, immures her. Raped by her captor, she eventually gives birth to two children, the second human but the first all too like its father:

A monster child

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<sup>62</sup> Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13-4.

Press'd her green couch; and, as it grimly smiled,  
Its shaggy limbs, and eyes of sable fire,  
Betray'd the crime, and claim'd its hellish sire! (J 172)

Once again, the threat of miscegenation is treated in a distinctly gothic register. The syntax of the second couplet quoted above makes its literal meaning—that the resemblance of the baby to the demon king establishes his paternity—shade into a more speculative one—that the baby's fiery eyes betray, even in its newborn state, an inborn criminality or radical evil.

The image returns once again at the poem's climax. Irza is rescued from the island by a group of monks, and as she sails away the demon king appears on shore to plead for her return. When his pleas are unavailing, he first kills the human infant, then leaps to his own death along with the monstrous one. Though the demon king is mute, Lewis writes him a short speech of tragic reproach and resignation, and allows him to deliver it through the medium of his gaze: “His eyes, which flash'd red fire [ . . . ] too plain implied, / Such were his thoughts, though nature speech denied.” (J 181) This somewhat awkward device is in fact directly in line with the tradition of gothic faciality: the muteness and monstrosity of the Other's face amounts to a communication of his inner disorganization by desire. This mute speech or speaking gaze is the center of the last image of the demon before he plunges into the sea clutching his child:

Proud was his port, and stern and fierce his mien.  
His blood-stain'd eye-balls glared with vengeful ire;  
His spreading nostrils seem'd to snort out fire. (J 181)

The racial import of the demon's “spreading nostrils” seems unmistakable. The final image of the poem's main action thus fuses the face of the racial other with that of the gothic Other in its direct, petrifying aspect.

En route to oversee his plantations, then, Lewis imagined the traumatic event of colonial encounter in distinctly gothic terms. This late burst of poetic productivity, in its decadent

gothicism, is curiously at odds with the dry humor and lackadaisical eclecticism of the journal in which it is embedded. In his descriptions of plantation life, Lewis emphasizes its comic aspects and deigns to cast a world-weary but gentle eye on his slaves' alleged laziness and mendacity. Various performances of sentimental hierarchy—the grateful effusions of slaves in response to holidays from work and extra provisions—abound. If “Isle of the Devils” discovered a gothic dimension in colonial experience—a pervasive sense of the intractable malignity of the other—this dimension is almost entirely suppressed in Lewis's journal. Lewis was not able, as we might be, to see the irreducible antagonism between slaves and their masters in terms not of human frailty, but of class struggle. Yet, as in “Isle of the Devils,” gothicism surfaces at moments to indicate his intuitions of the structural antagonism latent in the plantation, an antagonism that marks the limits of sentimental hierarchy. Notably, when Lewis describes a particularly violent and difficult slave named Adam—ultimately declared irredeemable and transported from the island—Lewis employs a familiar image: “He is a fine-looking man between thirty and forty, square built, and of great bodily strength, and his countenance equally expresses his intelligence and malignity.” (J 224) The malignity legible in Adam's face here indicates precisely his resistance to absorption in the sentimental gift-economy of the plantation. For Lewis, at some level, this resistance placed him in a lineage with Count Montoni, Ambrosio, and the others.

The gothic face thus persists in Lewis's writing through several decades, an insistent feature in an otherwise sporadic body of writing. It tends to appear, furthermore, in proximity to questions of capital accumulation, whether in London or the West Indies. The gothic experience of other people as subjects of inscrutable desire is, in Lewis's work, a form of meditation on both the desire for wealth and the historical realities that it produces. In the gothic mode, the love of gain appears not as *le doux commerce*, a socially salubrious circulation of goods and sentiments,

but as a fundamental condition of human depravity. Lewis's gothicism, despite its raging commercial success, contains a distinct note of untimeliness: just when political economy succeeds in arguing for the beneficence of self-interest and pursuit of the pecuniary passions, the gothic insists on a dimension of horror inextricable from such passions. Against a broader culture that appeared to have fully accepted commerce as a way of life, the gothic continued to discern a trace of primal enmity in economic activity. A gothic world, as in Weber's tableau, is one in which individuals turn their faces away from community and toward gain. Defenders of capital held that commerce could draw the ancient enemy, the trading partner, into the circle of sentimental community. The gothic responded by doing just that, making the malign face of the desiring other appear among the homely faces of the kinship group.

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