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FULL FAITH AND CREDIT:
READING CHARACTER AFTER CALVIN

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ABSTRACT

How do we determine whether other people are in good faith? On what measures of credibility and moral character might we rely when deciding where to invest our trust? This dissertation tracks articulations of and responses to these questions in Restoration and eighteenth-century British fiction. Most broadly, I show how the problem of authenticating claims to religious faith and economic creditworthiness influence the methods of characterization exhibited by early novels. More specifically, I argue that in works by John Bunyan, Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Henry Fielding, the parallel interpretive tasks of vetting fellow religious professors and evaluating the credit of prospective business partners result in ostensibly flat characters who ultimately defy interpretation. Recent scholarship has gone far toward recovering the historicity of literary character. Yet many such accounts, including Deidre Lynch's landmark study, describe early eighteenth-century fictional characters as "legible" objects that help readers cope with the transition to new modes of exchange and new forms of property. My project focuses, by contrast, on writers who reproduce rather than ameliorate the confusion of the marketplace. The two-dimensional characters in their narratives prove unstable, defined by the tension between flatness and inscrutability.

"Full Faith and Credit" demonstrates that Calvinist theology persists in the fiction of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, as an epistemology of character if not as a comprehensive system of meaning. On a familiar, if increasingly challenged, narrative of secularization in eighteenth-century Britain, the displacement of Reformed theology sets the stage for the inevitable triumph of Enlightenment rationalism over religious belief. Attending to the complexity of early novelistic characters reveals the religious dimension of the epistemological problems that credit posed, as well as the tentative solutions offered by

Calvinism. Calvin's emphasis on providential determinism leads to a two-dimensional and taxonomic conception of character. Every person features an outward face and an inward condition that corresponds to one of two rigid genera, the saved and the damned. The outward face ideally makes the inward condition intelligible to observers: we might discover another person's salvific state by interpreting external clues. Over the course of this dissertation, I argue that late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century fiction writers draw on this Calvinist understanding of character to impose order on a fallen world governed by commercial principles. This is true of an avowed Calvinist like Bunyan, and also of a writer like Fielding, who openly repudiates Calvinist theology itself. The instability of the characters in early novels reflects writers' efforts to test the Calvinist model against the conditions of an emerging culture of credit.

I begin by examining the ways in which Bunyan's elaboration of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination exerts pressure on his allegorical mode in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In my next two chapters, I turn to the prose fiction of Behn and Haywood in order to ask what happens to Calvinism's model of character when overtly religious questions take a backseat to topical economic crises like the Financial Revolution at the turn of the eighteenth century and the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720–1. Fielding, the subject of my final chapter, openly repudiates Calvinist theology itself. Yet the program of discernment that Fielding develops in his periodical writings and in his major novels betrays a surprising affinity to Calvinist notions of character. I read Fielding's final novel, *Amelia*, as the capstone to a sweeping cultural project of understanding character in Calvinist terms. That project comes under threat from one of the defining features of the culture of credit: the ascendance of a form of desire that renders character indeterminate rather than merely opaque.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation attempts to position literary character at the intersection of religious and commercial logics. In doing so, it provides an account of how religious faith and economic credit came to be entangled during the eighteenth century. Their relationship has legacies on both sides of the Atlantic. By the time the United States Constitution was drafted in 1787, the terms were yoked in concept and in language. Article IV, Section I of the Constitution provides that “Full Faith and Credit shall be given in each State to the public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State. And the Congress may by general Laws prescribe the Manner in which such Acts, Records and Proceedings shall be proved, and the Effect thereof.”¹ In elaborating on a similar provision in the Articles of Confederation, the framers of the constitution responded in part to a historically specific economic and legal concern: the problem of “migratory debtors” who evaded creditors and court judgments by moving from colony to colony.² The “Full-Faith-and-Credit Clause,” as it is widely known, ensures that judgments rendered in any one state in the union carry preclusive effect in every other state. Under Article IV, there is no room to relitigate the case or challenge the merits of the original court’s judgment.

Although economic examples influenced its drafting and adoption, Article IV also serves the wider aim of coordinating multiple sovereigns. To that end, it resolves a problem of “credit” according to the more capacious sense, very much alive in this moment and earlier in the

¹ Reprinted in *The Federalist Papers: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay*. Ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 465.

² William L. Reynolds and William M. Richman, *The Full Faith and Credit Clause: A Reference Guide to the United States Constitution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005). Reynolds and Richman trace the spirit of the clause back to legal reform in colonial Massachusetts, which required courts to use “foreign” judgments in actions for debt recovery. The law’s preamble announces its principal aim: to protect creditors from “negligent and evil-minded debtors” (2–3).

eighteenth century, of “trustworthiness, credibility.”³ The concept of credit encompasses all social relations that defer the fulfillment of a promise or condition. It structures interactions between members of a church, potential lovers, and authors and readers as well as those between debtors and lenders. In each of these contexts, evaluations of creditworthiness measure not only the veracity of a statement but also the durability of its underlying intention. As a result, creditors make decisions based on probability rather than on certain knowledge. How likely is it that a debtor will honor his pledge of repayment, or that a religious professor will live according to his avowed faith? Such projections carry great uncertainty, fomenting suspicion among those who seek and those who give credit. The mandatory language of Article IV—one of James Madison’s contributions—and its easy path to adoption at the Constitutional Convention reflect the pressing need to promote trust between states.⁴ The framers made the credit of judicial proceedings in each state a matter of legal fact rather than of interpretation or debate. To allow for the uncertainty and discord attendant on evaluations of personal credit on an interstate scale would be to compromise their vision of unity. So, the framers wrote this danger out, prescribing implicit “faith” in the justice dispensed by each state.

A quick survey of contemporaneous British texts reveals that faith and credit appear as a syntactical unit within a range of genres. According to the English translation of Isaac de Pinto’s *Traité de la Circulation et du Crédit* (1774), the value of stocks and paper money depends on

³ *OED Online*, “Credit, n.,” definition 2b, <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed 18 Jul. 2015.

⁴ Constitutional scholars frequently remark on the surprising lack of debate surrounding the clause. See George P. Costigan, Jr., “The History of the Adoption of Section I of Article IV of the United States Constitution and a Consideration of the Effect on Judgments of that Section and of Federal Legislation.” *Columbia Law Review* 4.7 (1904): 470–489; and Timothy Joseph Keefer, “DOMA as a Defensible Exercise of Congressional Power Under the Full-Faith-and-Credit Clause.” *Washington and Lee Law Review* 54 (1997): 1636–1683. Keefer points to the conspicuous absence of the clause in *The Federalist Papers* (it receives only one mention, in number 42) as evidence of its uncontroversial nature.

“credit and good faith.”⁵ John Trusler describes government annuities in similar terms, explaining to his target audience of uninitiated young men that the public lends the government money “upon the faith and credit of Britain.”⁶ The phrase also appears outside of immediately economic contexts. Samuel Jackson, for instance, refers to the “faith and credit” extended to certain authors, decrying the unearned authority of a class of books.⁷ In each of these formulations, as in the U.S. Constitution, faith and credit are mutually reinforcing terms. Together, they comprehend credit in its various applications within and beyond the market. One of the aims of this dissertation is to uncover the literary prehistory of their synonymy. Drawing on Restoration and eighteenth-century British fiction, I attempt to defamiliarize the easy equivalence that de Pinto, Jackson, and the framers all take for granted. I trace the imbrication of faith and credit back to the turn of the eighteenth century, when new modes of exchange and forms of property intensified an epistemological crisis rooted in Calvinist Protestant theology.

CALVINISM IN A “SECULAR AGE”

Through their fictional narratives, Restoration and eighteenth-century writers respond to a question implicit in Richard Baxter’s remarks on the nature of trust between contractors. How far can we “trust our own circumspection” when authenticating professions of faith and credit?⁸

The Presbyterian minister’s *A Christian Directory* (1673) accommodates basic Protestant

⁵ Isaac de Pinto, *An Essay on Circulation and Credit, in four Parts; and a Letter on the Jealousy of Commerce. From the French of Monsieur de Pinto*, Trans. S. Baggs (London: J. Ridley, 1774), 127.

⁶ John Trusler, *A Compendium of useful Knowledge, containing: A concise Explanation of every thing a young Man ought to know, to enable him to converse on all general Topics* (London: R. Baldwin, 1784), 39–40.

⁷ Mr. Pratt [Samuel Jackson], *Liberal Opinions, upon Animals, Man, and Providence* (London: G. Robinson and J. Bew, 1775–7), 7.

⁸ Richard Baxter, *Chapters from A Christian Directory, Or: A Summ of Practical Theology and Cases of Conscience*, Ed. Jeanette Tawney (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1925), 106.

morality to the experience of the market. At one point in his lengthy tome, Baxter pauses to address a hypothetical objection to his alignment of conscience with commerce. The ascendancy of self-interest within “the markets,” his imagined interlocutor reasons, would seem to demand that we assume the worst of other people. Baxter responds,

Among Thieves and Pirats such total distrust may be allowed. But among sober persons in Civil Societies and Converse, we must in reason and charity expect some truth and honesty, and not presume them to be all lyars and deceivers, that we may seem to have allowance to be such ourselves. Indeed we trust them, not absolutely as Saints, but with a mixture of distrust, as fallible and faulty men: And so as to trust our own circumspection above their words when we know not the persons to be very just.⁹

Baxter rejects the ethic of mutual suspicion, partly because his religious commitments require a more “charitable” disposition toward strangers. But he also recognizes that adopting a default posture of suspicion is tantamount to stepping outside of an economic system structured by promises and mutual trust.¹⁰ We cannot presume other men dishonest lest we forfeit our own appearance of honesty, Baxter warns. The qualifiers in his second sentence—we must allow for *some* truth and honesty in other economic agents so that we may *seem* to be truthful and honest ourselves—prepare the ground for an important concession. Other people are not all “lyars,” but they are not all “saints,” either. As such, we must approach them with a measure of caution, trusting to our own “circumspection” rather than their words.

Baxter’s use of the term “saint” as a point of contrast to the “fallible and faulty men” encountered in the marketplace reinforces his overarching argument that Christian morality extends to the economic realm. Religious character, one’s orientation to that moral schema, matters to judgments of one’s creditworthiness as an economic agent. Baxter’s language also

⁹ Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 106.

¹⁰ Craig Muldrew cites this passage as “the best contemporary description of how trust worked” within the incipient credit economy. *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 126. For Muldrew, *A Christian Directory* illustrates the interchangeability of trust and credit in the period.

invokes his Calvinist Protestant heritage. Central to this theological tradition is a typological and two-dimensional conception of the self. Under the Covenant of Grace, humankind is divided into two mutually exclusive categories, the saved and the damned. Within the English dissenting tradition, examples of the former category are referred to as “saints.” For orthodox Calvinists, such as John Bunyan, these salvific types are predetermined. According to the doctrine of double predestination, saints come to salvation through God’s freely granted grace. Everyone else is consigned from the start to eternal damnation. Moreover, each individual features an outward face and an inward, spiritual condition that corresponds to one of the bounded categories prescribed by doctrine. The outward face ideally makes the inward condition intelligible to observers: we might discover another person’s salvific state by interpreting external clues like words, actions, and reputation.

A moderate Calvinist, Baxter rejects double predestination and transfers some of the responsibility for salvation from God to the individual believer.¹¹ He nevertheless applies the doctrine’s underlying conception of character as a way to elucidate the conditions of postlapsarian, economic experience. When he advocates that we regard other people “with a mixture of distrust,” Baxter alludes to the potential disharmony between Calvinism’s two dimensions of character. Outward signs of character (e.g. a person’s “words”) may not agree with its contents (e.g. a person’s status as “very just” or not). Baxter also uses Calvinism’s simple typology to define economic agents in the negative. By comparing participants in credit

¹¹ For Baxter’s stress on the moral agency of sinners, see Isabel Rivers *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Univ. of Cambridge Press, 1991), 151–72, and Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *God’s Plot & Man’s Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 51–9. According to Rivers, Baxter and his acolytes charted a “middle way” between the teachings of Calvin and Arminius, helping to change the theological tenor of English dissent.

relationships to the figure of the saint, he sets their mixed moral natures in sharp relief. In *A Christian Directory*, Calvinism's dualistic structure ramifies into a more pliable, robust taxonomy—one that comprehends the muddle between the extremes of election and reprobation. But it also provides Baxter with the terms in which to convey the ethical complexity of credit-based exchange.

“Full Faith and Credit” traces the enduring cultural relevance of this Calvinist paradigm through Restoration and early eighteenth-century works of fiction. The story that unfolds over the course of its four chapters runs counter to an entrenched historical narrative. According to Isabel Rivers's influential study of religion and ethics, the turn of the eighteenth century sees Calvinism displaced by more progressive forms of Protestantism, namely Latitudinarian Anglicanism.¹² The latter tradition favored the teachings of Arminius over those of Calvin, conferring agency to the believer and, in doing so, recasting salvation as an achieved rather than a predestined state. By emphasizing the capacity of rational agents to choose “the good” for themselves, Anglican Arminians prioritized the operations of right reason above the felt experience of grace. Rivers claims that their victory over Calvinism in both the theological and ecclesiastical arenas set the stage for the rise of Enlightenment rationalism and the eventual triumph of skepticism over religious belief. Her historical arc, thus, supports a mainline theory of secularization that has come under increasing scrutiny: beginning in the eighteenth century, the religious past slides inevitably toward secular modernity.

¹² Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 1. For the decline of Calvinist theology as an intellectual force after 1660, see Gerald R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought Within the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950) and Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–1688* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988).

My own argument aligns more closely with that of another religious historian, Dewey Wallace, who pushes back against the scholarly consensus for which Rivers speaks. Wallace invokes the logic of transformation and persistence rather than displacement. He proposes that Calvinism lives on in eighteenth-century natural theology, which infers the existence of God through the “wonderful design evident in the created world.”¹³ In the British context, at least, Calvinist thought is not pushed aside by more rationalistic religious forms; it is part of their genealogy. Throughout this dissertation, I follow Wallace both in treating Calvinism as a “cast of mind” rather than a rigid set of doctrines and in tracking its persistence into the eighteenth century.¹⁴ There are, however, significant differences between our accounts. In pursuing the link to natural theology, Wallace focuses on the moderate strain of Calvinism espoused by Baxter, William Bates, and John Howe. He charts the ways in which these figures accommodated their theological heritage to the burgeoning age of reason. I concentrate on the very crux of Calvinist orthodoxy: the doctrine of double predestination. And where Wallace works exclusively within religious and intellectual history, I foreground Calvinism’s literary afterlife.

The resilience of Calvinist theology problematizes the familiar, if increasingly challenged, narrative of the secularization of eighteenth-century British society. That Calvinist thought is embedded in responses to the epistemic threat posed by credit contradicts the understanding of the period as a step in the slow and steady march toward secular modernity. In fact, the evidence of early novels suggests that eighteenth-century Britain was already “secular” according to the enlivened sense developed by Talal Asad and Charles Taylor.¹⁵ Long taken to

¹³ Dewey Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003) and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge and London: Belknap, 2007).

mean the end result of eroding faith in God or the gradual dissociation of religion from other domains, especially the political and economic, secularity in their hands acquires a more complex, positive definition. By reimagining secularity, Asad and Taylor reject the commonplace opposition of “the religious” and “the secular.” Taylor in particular stresses that these categories “coexist and are subject to social and ethical cross-pressures.”¹⁶ It is not the negation of religion or its expulsion from ostensibly autonomous institutions that defines the secular. Rather, within a secular society, belief counts as one contested position among many. In the diegetic worlds of their novels and as a body of thinkers, the writers gathered together in this dissertation represent such a plurality.¹⁷ An array of positions—frequently embattled and sometimes indeterminate—between belief and unbelief becomes possible. Thus, Bunyan can make profound concessions to skepticism without abandoning his sincere and strident faith, and the freethinking Haywood can lift her gaze toward a power that transcends the impersonal orders of nature and capitalism.¹⁸

¹⁶ Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, “Editors’ Introduction” to *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), 23.

¹⁷ I am careful in ascribing these features to the early novel to avoid the term “post-secular.” The label is very much in vogue among academics of various cloths and members of the general public. Even the erstwhile secularist Jurgen Habermas has recourse to the term. A post-secular society, he explains, “is one in which religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularist certainty that religion will disappear world-wide in the course of modernization is losing ground.” Habermas, “Notes on a Post-Secular Society,” *Sign and Sight* (June 18, 2008), www.signandsight.com, accessed August 28, 2015. As Warner, VanAntwerpen, and Calhoun point out, the concept of the post-secular involves an impoverished idea of what it means to be secular in the first place. “Editors Introduction,” 21–2. Reimagined by Asad, Taylor, and others, the concept of the secular includes the continued influence of religion. It need not, as Habermas assumes, entail certainty about the extirpation of religion from modern life.

¹⁸ In sketching the contours of the secular eighteenth century, I also go farther than Taylor himself does in *A Secular Age*. Though his work resists meta-narratives that treat religious forms like Calvinism as though they are obstacles to modernization, Taylor nevertheless regards the eighteenth century as a staging ground for ideas that would, with refinement, establish the intellectual preconditions for secularity. One of his central historical trajectories follows the

THE NOVEL AND THE CHARACTER(S) OF CALVINISM

Within early eighteenth-century Britain's secular milieu, Calvinism provides a framework for reading other people. The chapters that follow demonstrate that the language and logic of providential determinism are bound up in evaluations of credit, broadly construed. In precursors to and early exempla of the novel, as in *A Christian Directory*, one cannot proceed as though the market were peopled with evidently sincere believers. How, then, do we know whether another person is in good faith? For such disparate authors as Bunyan, Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Henry Fielding, assessing the credit of prospective business partners and the credibility of professed co-religionists become parallel (and sometimes coincident) interpretive tasks. I argue, moreover, that the habits of mind and interpretive strategies involved in making such judgments shape the history of novelistic character. The writers considered here enact the struggle to read the religious and ethical natures of other people. They do so, specifically, by introducing characters that are two-dimensional and nevertheless difficult to read. Ostensibly "flat" characters simultaneously invite and frustrate efforts—by readers of the texts and readers inscribed within them—to assign straightforward meanings. A crisis of credit with both economic and religious dimensions plays out as literary technologies of character.

Attending to the surprising complexity of characters like Bunyan's Talkative and Behn's Oroonoko reveals the religious dimension of the epistemological problem that credit posed, as well as the tentative solution offered by Calvinist theology. Fiction writers, including those, like Fielding, who openly repudiate Calvinist theology itself, turn to the Calvinist model of personal

impact of providential deism, which by the dawn of the nineteenth century had facilitated a shift toward an understanding of human flourishing as the highest possible good rather than as a means to an end (pleasing God, achieving salvation, etc.). *A Secular Age*, 221–69. Calvinism's legacies in the literature of the long eighteenth century suggest that the period serves as an exemplification of rather than a precursor to Taylor's "secular age."

character as a way to impose order on a fallen world unsettled by the advent of protocapitalist institutions and principles. By promising to reconcile outer and inner worth, the Calvinist discourse on character discernment offers a kind of symbolic compensation. It repairs the rupture of sign and signified, value and grounding meaning, wrought by credit instruments.¹⁹ Though each of the novels discussed in “Full Faith and Credit” indulges in this fantasy of perfect correspondence, they also expose its failure to authorize experience in a postlapsarian, credit-based marketplace. The instability of the characters in early novels, their defining tension between flatness and inscrutability, reflects writers’ efforts to test the Calvinist model of character against the conditions of the new economic order. On my reading, the form emerges in part as a site of experimentation with the limits and possibilities of two-dimensional, typological representation.²⁰ “Full Faith and Credit” takes the flatness of early eighteenth-century character slowly, foregrounding points of strain and rupture in the structure imported from Calvinist theology. In doing so, it reveals the complexity of Restoration and eighteenth-century literary characters—without foisting psychological richness onto narratives that cannot support it.

Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) illustrates the allure and constraints of Calvinist ways of reading character. Moll’s first-person narrative, which alternates between eager

¹⁹ Catherine Ingrassia shows how credit instruments, in sharp contrast to the forms of property and exchange constitutive of a mercantilist economy, dislocated value and meaning. *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

²⁰ Leo Braudy argues that “the novel marks a transition in literature from theatrical and satiric definitions of character—character apprehended from without—to fictional character—character apprehended from within.” “Penetration and Impenetrability in *Clarissa*,” *Modern Essays on Eighteenth-Century Literature*. Ed. Leopold Damrosch, Jr. (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 274. While the former model aimed for caricature and simplification, the latter explored “the potentials of inconsistency and uncertainty” (262). The novels gathered together in this dissertation, however, construct characters indeterminate between Braudy’s taxa. Carrying forward the dynamic from Calvinist discourses, early novels adhere to a model of fictional character in which the insides—spiritual status or ethical content—are stable and the outsides produce “inconsistency and uncertainty.”

retellings of her criminal past and attempts to reframe that history as spiritual autobiography, alludes frequently to her malleable character. Defoe's heroine assumes the defining quality of credit instruments: she becomes fungible and, therefore, difficult to value properly. Moll features as an object as well as an agent of credit-based exchange. As a consumable within the marriage market, she avoids evaluation by curating the appearance of "something more than I was."²¹ Moll possesses the "Character" of virtue and wealth, but not "the Thing itself" (*MF*, 110). The "double Fraud" perpetrated by Moll and her Lancashire husband confirms the severance of value and meaning under credit and suggests the extension of that phenomenon into extra-economic domains (*MF*, 117). She takes him for an Irish nobleman based solely on his glittering equipage, while he accepts as fact the hearsay about her grand estate. Both lean on superficial evidence in drawing conclusions about one another's character, which here bears the sense of social as well as moral standing. In the culture of credit, character becomes as fluid as other possessions and indicia of value, defined by the instable relationship of outer to inner worth.

Although Moll exploits her fungibility as she amasses her illicit fortune, adopting and sloughing off personae with ease during her successful career as a thief, the same quality poses a problem for her spiritual self-accounting. Her response to this difficulty, instinctive at first but eventually refined through the teachings of a kindly dissenting minister, is to apply Calvinist logic to her own case. More specifically, she applies the categories of predestination as a way to construct a cohesive spiritual identity. Defoe's modern readers have responded in general terms to the subsequent tensions between the tone of Moll's criminal history and the terseness of her moralizing reflections, between her the facts of her life and her professed religious conversion. Ambiguities in Moll's character have been read as evidence of the conflict between Defoe's

²¹ Defoe, *Moll Flanders*. Ed. Albert J. Rivero (1722; New York: Norton, 2004), 102, henceforth cited parenthetically as "*MF*."

overt Christian morality and his protocapitalist sensibility.²² I wish to make the more specific claim that the unresolved questions about Moll's character—is her repentance sincere, and is she saved or damned in the final assessment?—serve as a comment on the ameliorative function of Calvinist theology. By extension, *Moll Flanders* demonstrates some of the ways in which that potential shapes novelistic character in its earliest permutations.

Moll has already learned to capitalize on her fungible character by the time she meets her Lancashire husband. Yet she resists such instability with respect to character's spiritual content. Moll recoils from the peculiar brand of wickedness practiced by the debtors she encounters in the Mint.²³

These men were too wicked, even for me; there was something horrid and absurd in their way of Sinning, for it was all a Force even upon themselves; they did not only act against Conscience, but against Nature; they put a Rape upon their Temper to drown the Reflections, which their Circumstances continually gave them; and nothing was more easie than to see how Sighs would interrupt their Songs, and paleness, and anguish sit upon their Brows, in spite of the forc'd Smiles they put on; nay, sometimes it would break out at their very Mouths, when they had parted with their Money for a lewd Treat, or a wicked Embrace. (*MF*, 54)

The debtors' sinning is form of extreme self-violence, the strain of which finds nonverbal expression as they sigh and blanch their way through their misdeeds. They act out of character *qua* essential "nature," transgressing against both the dictates of conscience and their own moral dispositions.

Through her revulsion toward the debtor's inconsistencies, Moll reveals a Calvinist instinct. She is guided, here, by the tacit conviction that one's ethical-religious character ought to be stable and readily classifiable according to external signs. The ineffable "something" that

²² See, for example, Hans H. Andersen, "The Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe," *Modern Philology* 39.1 (1941): 23–46; John Preston, *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1970); and Ann Louise Kibbie, "Monstrous Generation: The Birth of Capital in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 1023–1034.

²³ An infamous legal sanctuary for debtors in Southwark.

strikes Moll as “horrid and absurd” in these men is not so much the specific nature of their sins as it is their self-contradiction, their penchant for action that violates the good natures conveyed by verbal and somatic clues. Moll is especially distressed by the debtors’ anguished, unresolved flirtation with repentance. Later in the paragraph, she notes that their conviction of their own wickedness produces no lasting effects:

The next Morning they are at their Penitentials again, perhaps the poor weeping Wife comes over to him, either brings him some Account of what his Creditors are doing, and how she and his Children are turn’d out of Doors, or some other dreadful News; and this adds to his self Reproaches; but when he has Thought and Por’d on it till he is almost Mad, having no Principles to support him, nothing within or above him, to Comfort him; but finding it all Darkness on every Side, he flies to the Relief again, (*viz.*) to Drink it away. (*MF*, 54)

A feeling that should conduce to moral reformation instead perpetuates a cycle of sin, self-loathing, and escapism. They sin persistently, defaulting on debts and filial obligations alike, but they do so almost against their own wills. And while they exhibit sincere penitence, they achieve neither comfort nor improvement through spiritual self-scrutiny. The debtors’ spiritual condition seems unstable or, at least, unclassifiable. The final strokes of Moll’s character sketch hint at a resolution to this incoherence: the organizing power of Reformed theology. The thing negated by Moll’s “nothing,” is the grace that should operate “within” and “above” believers to sustain spiritual awakening and regeneration. The debtors’ ineffectual repentance flags its lack and, thus, their collective status as recipients of an ineffectual call. Although they exhibit the stirrings of good nature through their expressions of self-reproach, these men must be counted among the reprobate.

Over the course of the novel, Moll seeks to stabilize her own spiritual identity in the same way that she works toward a coherent account of the debtors’ sinfulness: via the logic of Calvinist predestination. She is convinced, at first, of her own damnation. When her aristocratic

lover at Bath breaks off their dalliance because of his sudden conviction of its sinfulness, she feels doubly abandoned. The baronet “was mercifully snatch’d out of the Gulph by a convincing Work upon his Mind,” but Moll is “left as if I was forsaken of God’s Grace and abandon’d by Heaven to a continuing in my wickedness” (*MF*, 100). Moll invokes the concept of predestination when she subordinates her own and her lover’s agency to the will of “heaven.” The baronet’s aversion to their former relationship provides evidence of the “work” of prevenient grace. Because Moll feels no such effects, she resigns herself to the course charted by reprobation—that of continued wickedness. She expresses a similar fatalism when, toward the end of her narrative, she is convicted of burglary and imprisoned at Newgate. To this point in her criminal career, Moll has understood her character as something that she might refashion at will. She boasts that “if I should have had the Misfortune to be taken, I might call myself any thing else, as well as *Moll Flanders*, and no old Sins cou’d be plac’d to my Account” (*MF*, 176). Now, she is “fix’d indeed,” confined within the walls of the prison and held accountable for her long train of sins. “It seemed to me,” she recalls, “that I was hurried on by an inevitable and unseen Fate to this Day of Misery, and that I was to Expiate all of my Offenses at the Gallows” (*MF*, 215). She cedes control to an unseen but irresistible force and awaits the realization of her “fate” as one of the damned.

Under the tutelage of a minister sent by her governess, Moll learns to see her newfound conviction of sinfulness as the first step on a mended path. The minister’s explanation of the “Terms of Divine Mercy,” and especially his insistence that even the greatest sinner might hope for grace, marks him as a member of Defoe’s own dissenting culture (*MF*, 225–7). Moll embraces a new spiritual category, that of the “true Penitent,” and the mixture of shame and joy it encompasses (*MF*, 227). By transposing the events of her life onto the pattern of sin,

awakening, and conversion typical of the Calvinist believer's spiritual journey, Moll adopts a character familiar to readers of spiritual autobiography.²⁴ She stakes her claim to that genre's insulating morality as she recasts herself as the protagonist of a conversion narrative (*MF*, 220). Taken at face value, Moll's repentance reconciles Christian morality to economic expediency. She proposes that the success of her New World commercial ventures varies in direct proportion to the urgency of her intertwined conviction to sinfulness and resolution to live a pious life going forward.²⁵

The fit between Moll's narrative and the paradigms of election and reprobation prove awkward, however. By giving us ample reason to question Moll's authenticity, Defoe gestures toward the limitations of the Calvinist model of character. That Moll's prosperous New World estate is built on the capital accrued during her long tenure as a thief undermines her claim that a newfound abhorrence of sin settles both her religious character and her financial circumstances. What's more, as several scholars have pointed out, Moll lies and practices concealment long after her supposed conversion, disclosing the truth of her past only selectively after she is reunited with her son and Lancashire husband in the colonies.²⁶

Defoe also invites readers to ask whether Moll's professions are her own or merely the projections of a moralizing editor. John Preston reminds us that the editor-persona in the "Preface" to *Moll Flanders* admits to altering the narrator's "stile," which better suits one "still

²⁴ For Defoe's debt to this body of literature and the cast of mind to which it gives narrative life, see George A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965).

²⁵ She remarks, "my past wicked and abominable Life never look'd so Monstrous to me, and I never so completely abhorr'd it, and reproach'd myself with it, as when I had a Sense upon me of Providence doing good to me, while I had been making those vile Returns on my part" (*MF*, 263).

²⁶ See, for example, John Preston, *The Created Self*, 12; and Maximillian Novak, *Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe's Fiction* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1983), 71–98.

in *Newgate*” than “one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterwards pretends to be” (*MF*, 3).²⁷ The editor goes further, though, intimating that his purview extends beyond Moll’s “stile:” “In a Word, as the whole Relation is carefully garbl’d of all the Levity, and Looseness that was in it: So it is all applied, and with the utmost care to virtuous and religious Uses” (*MF*, 5). Although the passive construction of the sentence makes it impossible to say for certain, Moll’s editor seems to have made alterations to the content of her story. If the same agent that “garbl’d” or cleansed her relation of *Newgate* cant and salacious detail also “applied” it in the manner of a homily, then it is the editor and not Moll who is responsible for teasing out the religious meaning of her life.

The question of Moll’s religious character is an abiding one, for Defoe and for his readers. It applies as well to the sundry other characters that people the early eighteenth-century fictional imaginary. Like Defoe, the authors discussed in the pages to follow are agnostic about the extensibility and integrity of Calvinism’s model of selfhood. As Moll’s example demonstrates, that model offers an imperfect solution. It helps eighteenth-century writers and readers to frame but not necessarily to resolve the epistemological pitfalls of the market. Though he wonders, alongside Moll, precisely how one might “know the just Character of the Man” who makes an offer of marriage or a declaration of creditworthiness, Defoe makes his point primarily at the level of the reader (*MF*, 61). We are cast in the difficult position of evaluating Moll’s sincerity with only her own account for evidence and left to consider the implications of our failure to determine her salvific status. Bunyan, Behn, Haywood, and Fielding tend to stage similar evaluations within their texts, sometimes—though not always—without alleviating the pressure on readers. Unlike Defoe, these authors introduce increasingly obtrusive, third-person

²⁷ Preston, *The Created Self*, 19.

narrators who either announce or, through their frequent interpositions, demonstrate the need to balance interpretive effort with receptivity to a superintending figure modeled on God. The shifting relation in which writers set external and inscribed readers—they are sometimes congruent, sometimes distanced through dramatic irony or other techniques—clarifies the reason that Calvinist reading practices ultimately fall short of containing the complexities of credit. Calvinism relies on a coordination of intellectual effort and passive faith that is irreproducible within the market. For the market, unlike the novel as a form, offers no proxy for God’s perfect wisdom and justice.

SURFACE AND DEPTH

Recent scholarship has gone far toward recovering the historicity of literary character, and particularly its relationship to economic change. Work by Deidre Lynch and Mary Poovey, in particular, helps us to see how the evolving conditions of commercial society set the parameters of character. Returning novels to their “transmedia” context, Lynch illuminates the ways in which eighteenth-century Britons “used the characters in their books” to help them make sense of market culture.²⁸ Over the course of the century, she argues, the act of engaging with literary characters changed from a practice analogous to reading a signboard or coin to a process of “plumbing” psychological depth. According to Lynch, it was only after mid-century that British writers and readers came to value complexity, to see character as a “secret, inside story.”²⁹ She describes the early eighteenth century as a “typographical culture” invested in the knowledge purveyed by the “eloquence of material surfaces,” such as the human face or the face

²⁸ Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

of a printed page.³⁰ Within the typographical paradigm that Lynch sees at work in the fiction of the first half of the century, the surface of character is the object and the locus of truth. It tells the whole story. Through their legibility, early eighteenth-century characters functioned as a “coping mechanism” by which Britons reconciled their experience to their belief that they occupied an accessible, orderly symbolic environment.³¹

While Lynch ascribes a compensatory function to literary character, Mary Poovey focuses on its didactic potential. Poovey contends that readers’ interpretive encounters with the characters in novels mirrored the challenge of negotiating a social sphere governed by commercial principles.³² On her reading, texts like Defoe’s *Roxana* (1724) served as primers on the credit system, inculcating the skills and habits required of its participants. She therefore sees eighteenth-century fiction engaged in a project of “managing” the “problem of representation”—the dislocation of sign and referent—produced by the rise of economic credit.³³ I share with both critics the sense that early eighteenth-century writers attempt to rethink social relations within an increasingly commercialized Britain. And like Lynch, I identify the surface rather than the interior of character as the primary site of interest for the fiction of the period. But I want to stress the extent to which early novels reflect and perform anxiety about the capacity of rational agents to evaluate the consumables and consumers that circulate alongside them in the credit-based marketplace—and the extent to which that anxiety is informed by Calvinist theology.

³⁰ Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 76, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³² Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008). For a similar perspective, see Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).

³³ Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*, 5.

Beyond neglecting the religious concerns that shaped both discourses around credit and the contours of literary character, Lynch confines her inquiry to transactions between historical readers and the imaginary persons in their books. This scope serves one of her central aims: to disentangle the concept of character from the “rise of the individual” narrative that dominated twentieth-century engagements with the characters in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels. Lynch’s commitment leads her to issue a wholesale rejection of the conventional association between developments in fictional characterization and evolving definitions of social, spiritual, and economic identity. Character, on her view, does not reflect period understandings of selfhood. “Full Faith and Credit” seeks a middle ground between Lynch’s argument and the train of scholarship she rightly disavows. This dissertation examines inscribed acts of character reading that present challenges both within the diegesis and from the perspective of the reader. Early novels demand this dual attention. They are replete with figures and scenes that illustrate the obstacles confronting social observers and undermine the representational function of fictional character. Bringing these scenes to the fore reveals the considerable influence of the Calvinist model of selfhood on novelistic character.

This approach also yields a fresh account of how fictional character works in the period, one that casts doubt on the eloquence of surfaces. Texts like *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Memoirs of a Certain Island* fall short of the compensatory and didactic roles envisioned by Lynch and Poovey. The two-dimensional characters in these works neither support the fantasy of a fully accessible symbolic universe nor naturalize the practical instruments of credit. Instead, they reproduce the epistemological confusion of the marketplace. Lynch’s contention that eighteenth-century writers externalize the knowledge of character by composing “tell-tale bodies” holds up where reading character consists of recognizing the individual traits that make

it possible to distinguish between individuals.³⁴ Bunyan, Behn, Haywood, and Fielding all dwell on a more fraught mode of reading, in which external strokes of character—whether stamped on the face or demonstrated through action—must be scrutinized for evidence of its ethical or spiritual content. Where Lynch sees a gradual move away a model of character defined by legibility, I see a tension inherent in the Calvinist paradigm adapted by economically minded writers. The “real Character at the Bottom” of our self-presentations, to borrow Henry Fielding’s suggestive phrase, is both profoundly stable and potentially inscrutable.³⁵

Character is already an “inside story” for Restoration and early eighteenth-century writers like Bunyan and Behn, though it is one that makes surfaces more and interiors less interesting. In emphasizing the latter point, I depart from existing scholarship on the Protestant underpinnings of the novel. Mid-twentieth-century studies of the relationship between the novel and religious and economic thought, including influential work by Ian Watt, Maximillian Novak, George Starr, and J. Paul Hunter, flatten out distinctions between iterations of English Calvinist Protestantism.³⁶ Like the more recent work of Leopold Damrosch, Martin Battestin, and Richard Rosengarten, this train of criticism also tends to displace characterological questions onto notions of providence.³⁷ This dissertation clarifies not only the particular theological crux at play in early eighteenth-century literary treatments of the problem of credit, but also the ways in

³⁴ Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 37.

³⁵ Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, Ed. Linda Bree (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010), 350.

³⁶ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001); Maximillian E. Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962); George Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*; and J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe’s Emblematic Method and the Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1966).

³⁷ Damrosch, *God’s Plot & Man’s Stories*; Martin C. Battestin, *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1989); and Richard A. Rosengarten, *Henry Fielding and the Narration of Providence: Divine Design and the Incursion of Evil* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

which those concerns help to delineate a narrative category, character, mostly overlooked by the body of criticism that addresses the role of Protestantism in the novel's origin story.

Insofar as it matters at all to the latter arguments, character matters as a reflection of the introspective, individualist bent of Calvinist (or, often and inaccurately, "Puritan") theology.³⁸ This is especially true of analyses of novels by Defoe, whose evident fascination with the intersection of fiction, religion, and economics has made him a crucial figure for scholars of the novel from Watt onward. Leaning on Max Weber's famous thesis, these critics treat characters like Robinson Crusoe as formal instantiations of a Calvinist-inflected economic individualism. By contrast, I emphasize the outward turn of Calvinist theology. It is not, or not only, a focus on individual psychology that puts Calvinism and modern economic thought into conversation. The problem of discerning the characters of others serves as a further point of intersection—one that underlines the dangers rather than the benefits of forming affiliations within eighteenth-century Britain's culture of credit.

The legacies of Calvinist reading practices extend as far as these modern critical engagements with early novels. Accounts of early eighteenth-century character share the assumption that flatness, one- or two-dimensionality, promotes intelligibility of a specific kind. Whether they signify in the manner of typeface, as in Deidre Lynch's study, or emblematically, as in Hunter's and Battestin's, the characters from this period have long been understood as fixtures of a cooperative symbolic environment. They are subject to classification, ruly and

³⁸ Though critics like Paul Hunter and George Starr apply it unselfconsciously, Dewey Wallace has shown that the label "Puritan" needs careful parsing. *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982). As Hunter points out in the preface to *The Reluctant Pilgrim*, George Starr is less interested in the "distinctly Puritan" quality of Defoe's thought than the generic inheritance of conversion narratives. Hunter himself attributes to "the Puritan mind" a theological current the scope of which, I hope to demonstrate, far exceeds the teachings of a particular sect.

bounded and accessible through the logic of kind. This is true even of Ian Watt's discussion of Defoe. The compositional practices that Watt identifies with Defoe's "vestigial" Calvinism (e.g. first-person point of view, attention to the trappings of daily life) do not produce interiority, *per se*, but a recognizable pattern of reflection. Defoe's characters are of a kind: they exemplify a mode of religious thought redirected toward the world of everyday life. When scholars read characters in this way—when they describe Bunyan's pilgrims as projected aspects of the believer's psyche, Behn's Oroonoko as a figure for divine right absolutism, or Fielding's Sophia Western as virtue personified—they respond unselfconsciously to authors' shared project of using two-dimensional representation to contain ambiguity. Scholars of the early novel avail themselves of the very typological logic that appeals to the novelists themselves. They do so at the expense of nuance, glossing over inconsistencies as if to fulfill retroactively Bunyan's or Behn's or Fielding's unrealized dream of coherence.³⁹

READING CHARACTER, 1660–1750

Moving from Bunyan's overtly religious allegories to texts preoccupied by economic concerns, "Full Faith in Credit" sketches the historical pressures that made this dream so appealing for Restoration and eighteenth-century writers and readers. Chapter One focuses on Bunyan's externalization of Calvinism's celebrated introspective gaze in both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678–84). I relate this perspectival shift to Bunyan's Congregationalist

³⁹ Even where they see texture, critics taxonomize eighteenth-century literary characters. John Preston, one of Defoe's more sensitive readers, makes much of the contradictions in Moll's self-presentation. Yet he attributes her inconsistency to her status as a "Picaresque heroine." *The Created Self*, 33–4. Reflecting briefly on the imperfect fit between character and generic category, Preston acknowledges a tension that, I wish to argue, haunts Defoe's novel and Restoration and eighteenth-century fiction more broadly. Categories must be pliable, but they cannot "mean just anything" if they are to retain their interpretive usefulness. They must bend without breaking.

ecclesiology and then to his self-styled “allegorical” mode of representation. I begin the chapter by arguing that, in *Part I*, Bunyan dwells on the problem of distinguishing sincere pilgrims from false friends, outlining strategies for reading religious character according to outward signs. In *Part II*, this solution no longer works: scenes of superintended reading in Bunyan’s sequel betray his skepticism about Calvinist protocols of detection. *Part II* requires a passive rather than an active mode of reading. Christiana and her companions rely on inscribed agents of revelation to unpack the meaning of events and emblems. Readers are similarly dependent on Bunyan for explication and reflection on episodes with otherwise opaque meanings. Richard Baxter’s warning against trusting other men as saints applies with equal force to Bunyan’s vision of a world in which indefectible true believers are presumed to live among the damned. The chapter concludes by pursuing the implications of Bunyan’s express acknowledgement that the economics of grace mirror the practical operations of the credit system. That bad faith and bad credit are coextensive in Talkative’s case points forward to the convergence of economic and religious domains in the eighteenth-century novel.

My next two chapters consider how changes in commercial society—and particularly the rise of credit—further complicate efforts to differentiate between good- and bad-faith asseverations. In Chapter Two, I read Behn’s prose fiction from the late 1680s as a record of her engagement with the consequences of England’s conjoined political and economic revolutions. Paying particular attention to *Oroonoko* (1688), I argue that Behn looks to Calvinist hermeneutics for a solution to the problem of negotiating social relations in a world in which property has shifted from real and finite to mobile and imaginary. But ultimately, Behn’s method of characterization reveals the inadequacy of Calvinism’s taxonomic logic when applied to a marketplace in which mutually exclusive categories prove unstable. The visible overloading of

“types” on Oroonoko’s countenance, for example, forecasts his failure to serve as a stable figure for Stuart monarchy, as a moral exemplar, or as an archetypal hero of romance—all emblematic readings invited by the narrative but withheld by its gruesome conclusion.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Eliza Haywood’s allegory of the South Sea Bubble, *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1724–5). In order to reckon with the causes of Britain’s first great stock market crash, Haywood adjusts the theory of desire operative in her more familiar works, such as *Love in Excess* (1719–20) and *Fantomina* (1725). In the latter tales of amorous intrigue, Haywood often emphasizes the recuperative potential of sexual desire. In *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, however, she suggests that the form of desire licensed by speculative finance renders character not just opaque but indeterminate. Haywood shares with Bunyan and Behn a preoccupation with the difficulty knowing other people, but she departs from their example by extricating her readers from the interpretive morass that confronts her inscribed investors and lovers. She deploys a technique conventional to the scandal chronicle, which anchors her characters to external referents within Britain’s multimedia cult of celebrity. I argue that Haywood insulates her readers in order to demystify the effects of rampant speculative investment, and especially the ascendance of a form of self-interest that Haywood persistently figures as sexual desire. I conclude by arguing that, like Bunyan, Haywood looks to a version of providence for a failsafe against the epistemological pitfalls of the credit-based marketplace.

My final chapter considers Henry Fielding’s novels alongside his “Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men,” charting his changing attitude toward the “diagnostic” approach to penetrating hypocrisy that Fielding shares with the Calvinist Methodist George Whitefield. In the first half of the chapter, I argue that from *Joseph Andrews* to *Tom Jones*, Fielding grows increasingly skeptical about external evidence of inward or “real” character, such

as physiognomy and observed behavior. In the second half of Chapter Four, I propose that in *Amelia*, Fielding takes up the same problem that preoccupies Haywood: the capacity of desire (sexual or economic) to destabilize the binary between interior and exterior upon which rests the Calvinist epistemology of character. According to that model, the insides of character—the truth of one’s salvific status—are eminently stable. Problems emerge where this content becomes alienated from its external markers. In such cases, though, Calvinism’s two-dimensional model preserves the fantasy that the surface and depth of character might be brought into alignment through some combination of evidentiary reading and divine inspiration. By producing a more fundamental inconsistency, muddling the truth (e.g. “inside”) as well as the evidence (e.g. “outside”) of character, desire pushes Calvinist logic to its breaking point.

Viewed by this light, Fielding’s last novel appears less as an imitation of Samuel Richardson’s sentimental mode, and more as a capstone to the broader cultural project of understanding personal and literary character in Calvinist terms. Indeed, the arc of Fielding’s career reproduces in microcosm the overarching trajectory mapped out in Chapters One through Three. In his writings, as in early eighteenth-century fiction more generally, a confrontation with the operations of desire undermines confidence in the Calvinist epistemological program based on reading external signs, as well as in its underlying conception of the self. Hence the shift from conviction to agnosticism as we move either from *Joseph Andrews* to *Amelia* or from the works of John Bunyan to those of Eliza Haywood. Whatever its appeal as a framework through which to understand or even mitigate the risks of credit-based exchange, the Calvinist model fails to comprehend economic agents motivated by desire.

CHAPTER ONE:
SINNERS AND “STANDERS BY” IN *THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS*

The characters in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678–84) exhibit what seems a tidy consonance of name and nature. The apostate Turn-away turns away from God, Ready-to-halt embraces every opportunity to suspend his pilgrimage, and Hopeful’s optimism buoys Christian’s spirits while the two languish in the dungeon of Doubting Castle. One of the convoy of Christiana’s fellow pilgrims in *Part II*, Mr. Honest, invokes this consonance when he proclaims his own representational status, explaining that he is “Not Honesty in the Abstract, but Honest is my Name, and I wish that my Nature shall agree with what I am called.”¹ His self-introduction suggests the surprising complexity of Bunyan’s characters. On the one hand, Mr. Honest tells readers of and within the text exactly what kind of character he is: not quite a personified abstraction, he is nevertheless two-dimensional and wholly intelligible.² He exemplifies a familiar ethical type, a “Cock of the right Kind” to join a company of pilgrims, as their guide, Great-heart, puts it (*PP*, 193).³ On the other hand, Mr. Honest complicates the two-dimensionality of Bunyan’s characters by implying that names might not match inner or essential natures, or that their correspondence is a matter of aspiration rather than a matter of fact. Such a disjunction is not the only or even the most likely contingency, but it is a contingency—and one that haunts interactions between professed co-religionists throughout *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, ed. Cynthia Wall (New York: Norton, 2009), 194, henceforth cited parenthetically as “*PP*.”

² In that sense, Mr. Honest illustrates E.M. Forster’s definition of “flat” characters in *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, 1927). He adheres to the moral pattern conveyed by his surname and thus to readers’ expectations.

³ When Mr. Honest urges Christiana’s sons to act as types of their biblical namesakes, he advocates the conformation of their characters to the broader system of “similitudes” from which Bunyan draws his source material—sacred history. He instructs Mathew to “Be thou like Mathew the Publican,” and Samuel to “Be thou like Samuel the Prophet,” and so on (*PP*, 195).

As Bunyan ushers his pilgrims and his readers through a series of encounters with fellow religious professors, he underscores the urgency of their efforts to distinguish between “Cock[s] of the right Kind” and false friends, to read religious character correctly. With such efforts, Bunyan’s pilgrims respond to an imperative of Congregational ecclesiology, which restricted communion to “visible saints” who could give credible testimony to their faith.⁴ The ministers and lay members of gathered churches vetted applicants for admission, assigning salvific categories established by the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination.⁵ The doctrine attributes salvation to prevenient grace (as opposed to good works) and organizes all persons into two mutually exclusive classifications, the elect and the reprobate. Taken in the abstract, then, Calvinist doctrine promotes a “rigidly dualistic” concept of character: everyone we meet is defined—in advance—by an ostensibly fixed spiritual status.⁶ They are either saved or damned. Yet for all the simplicity of this taxonomy, the task of assigning would-be pilgrims to prescribed genera proves surprisingly difficult for Christian, Christiana, and their peers. Confronted by the religious hypocrite Talkative in *Part I*, Faithful hits upon the underlying problem: “How doth the saving Grace of God discover it self, when it is in the Heart of man” (*PP*, 64)? In keeping with his commitment to gathered church ecclesiology, Bunyan insists that outward signs of grace—markers of one’s spiritual status or character—are accessible to “him that hath it, or to standers

⁴ For Bunyan’s views on church membership and conversion, see Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 66, 271–77, and 301–9. See also George Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640–1660* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 110–14.

⁵ See Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People*, for background on the Bedford congregation. Where John Calvin imagined the visible church as a “mixed body” composed of both elect and reprobate, churches in the Congregationalist tradition attempted to “make the visible church a more accurate spiritual approximation of the invisible church.” D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Biography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 47–50.

⁶ Leopold Damrosch, *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories*, 37.

by.” But in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, he presents the interpretation of such signs as a fraught and uncertain process.

Existing scholarship fails to account for the striking sociality of Bunyan’s fiction. Studies of the Puritan inheritance of the early English novel emphasize the introspective and individualist logic of Calvinist theology. Ian Watt attributes the genre’s defining focus on representing “the inward moral being of the individual” to the abiding cultural relevance of the Puritan requirement of “continual scrutiny of [one’s] inner man.” He regards novels’ attention to the “day-by-day mental and moral life” of their heroes as the “vestigial remnants of Calvinist introspective discipline.”⁷ Leopold Damrosch shares Watt’s conviction that a Calvinist-inflected psychology of “inwardness” shapes the emergence of the novel as a genre, which depicts “the private experience of the individual faced not so much with society as with the ultimate order of the universe.” As they situate the history of the novel within another critical metanarrative, that of the rise of individualism, such accounts identify Bunyan and the Reformed Protestant tradition for which he stands with “profound spiritual isolation.”⁸ This approach, as Michael Davies has recently pointed out, “elides, if not erases entirely, the significance of community from Bunyan’s writings.”⁹ Scholars such as Davies who recover the “social and communitarian” spirit that subtends both Bunyan’s pastoral career and Congregationalist practices in general focus on intra-ecclesiastical texts, and especially on conversion narratives that were circulated as evidence of election.¹⁰

⁷ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 75, 76.

⁸ Damrosch, *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories*, 13, 19.

⁹ Michael Davies, “Spirit in the Letters: John Bunyan’s Congregational Epistles,” *The Seventeenth Century* 24 (2009): 324.

¹⁰ See also Crawford Gribben, “Lay conversion and Calvinist doctrine,” *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. Deryck W. Lovegrove (London and New York: Routledge, 2002): 36–46.

The present study bridges these two bodies of criticism by demonstrating that *The Pilgrim's Progress*, like the genre of the conversion narrative, reflects a culture of accreditation. Conversion narratives, including those circulated within Bunyan's own congregation at Bedford, document the individual believer's struggle to satisfy the principal criterion for admission into an ecclesiastical polity by mapping his or her experience onto the paradigm of election.¹¹ In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan approaches religious accreditation from the opposite perspective, that of Faithful's "standers by." The inwardly focused subject central to spiritual autobiographies—and to the familiar account of the "rise" of the novel as a genre—gives way to a community of believers engaged in careful, collaborative authentication of claims to saving faith. Bunyan thus turns the celebrated Calvinist introspective gaze toward an external world of characters whose credit at once demands and resists final assessment. In doing so, he illustrates the high stakes of character discernment undertaken in this context. Bunyan's inscribed adherents reckon with predestinarian theology's contradictory but entangled conceptions of election as predetermined and aspirational. Denied certain knowledge of his own spiritual state, the Calvinist believer strives to become what he projects through outward sanctification—much as Bunyan's Mr. Honest hopes to grow into the character advertised by his name. In both *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, this spiritual project comes under threat in the form of contaminating "conversation," the danger that saints might somehow sabotage their election by admitting false professors into their company (*PP*, 66).¹²

¹¹ For the conversion narrative as the defining genre of the gathered church tradition, see Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983). For the social role of spiritual self-examination, see Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 27.

¹² Evidence of this tension need not conflict with our image of Bunyan as a "high" or orthodox Calvinist. In seeking reliable protocols for discerning the characters of others, Bunyan does make

The immediacy of this threat within Bunyan's writings distinguishes them from the Congregationalist conversion narrative, a genre underwritten by confidence that the marks of grace are subject to "discovery" and interpretation.

This chapter considers the ways in which the need to determine the spiritual states of other professed believers bear on the representational status of Bunyan's literary characters. At various points in "The *Author's Apology* for His Book," Bunyan calls *The Pilgrim's Progress* an "allegory," a "parable," and a "fable," using the terms interchangeably to denote fictions that rely on "Metaphors/ To set forth Truth" (*PP*, 5–9). Introducing two-dimensional "figures" that "call for one thing, to set forth another," Bunyan asks his readers to bridge literal and figurative planes of meaning (*PP*, 9).¹³ Making sense of such figures requires some interpretive effort—Bunyan envisions a reader who actively "seeks to find out" the veiled correspondence between the image called for and the meaning set forth—but he affirms that the "precious stones" of truth are accessible and "Worth digging for" (*PP*, 7–8). As the work proceeds, though, this mode of reading strains under the difficult task of deciding whether fellow professors are in good faith. Bunyan aligns his method of characterization with a Calvinist model of spiritual character defined by the ultimately withheld promise of intelligibility: he constructs characters that are

surprising concessions to the Arminian emphasis on muscular piety. Yet these concessions emerge from his elucidation of the doctrine of double predestination. In Bunyan's exegesis, the crux of Reformed Protestant theology demands cooperation between grace and reason.

¹³ Taken at face value, Bunyan's method accords with J. Paul Hunter's vision of the "emblematic" Puritan imagination. *The Reluctant Pilgrim*, 96. Hunter claims that Puritan writers regarded the "book of nature" as an "imperfect emblem of the spiritual world—one which needed careful interpretation but which led, equally surely if not equally easily, to truth." On my reading, Bunyan's characters test the limits of emblematic as well as analogical representation, complicating Hunter's argument about the transition from one mode to another (i.e. from analogy to metaphor or emblem). Even if interpretation leads surely to spiritual truth of one order, namely of God's existence and justice, it does not lead with any sense of inevitability to the truth of one's salvific status. For the instability of Bunyan's emblems in *Part II*, see Cynthia Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), 97–108.

two-dimensional and nonetheless difficult to read. Rather than a straightforward course in Christian hermeneutics, *The Pilgrim's Progress* serves as a cautionary tale about the limits of available protocols for discovering grace when it operates in other persons.¹⁴

PURITAN INTROSPECTION EXTERNALIZED

There are two forms of assurance at play in predestinarian arguments. The first is well documented: the doctrine of double predestination acts *as* assurance that election is both indefectible and entirely dependent on the freely granted grace of God rather than on the strivings of an imperfect creature. Faced with his natural depravity and inevitable moral failings, the believer takes comfort in the doctrine as a guarantee that God will fulfill his promise by serving the elect and preventing a second fall. But the doctrine also places a demand upon the believer to cultivate assurance of his own status vis-à-vis predestination. Dewey Wallace and Joel R. Beeke demonstrate that, persistent disavowal of works notwithstanding, the doctrine of double predestination does not obviate the believer's responsibility to interpret the facts of his experience for signs of salvation.¹⁵ Proponents of Reformed theology vehemently rejected Catholicism's vision of a universal order charged with sacramental significance, but they also held that the individual's actions concealed markers of his predetermined fate. Literary critics

¹⁴ For Bunyan's work as a course in Christian strategies of interpretation, see Damrosch, *God's Plot and Man's Stories*, 159–60, and Dayton Haskin, "The Burden of Interpretation in *The Pilgrim's Progress*," *Studies in Philology* 79 (1982): 261, 272.

¹⁵ Dewey Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*; Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Protestantism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). For the origin of Puritan "introspective piety," see Michael P. Winship, "Weak Christians, Backsliders, and Carnal Gospels: Assurance of Salvation and the Pastoral Origins of Puritan Practical Divinity in the 1580s," *Church History* 70 (2001): 462–81.

and religious historians have made much of the consequent impulse to self-scrutiny, especially with regard to Bunyan's imaginative works.¹⁶

For Bunyan, the work of spiritual self-reflection entails negotiating a lived biblical typology, an interpretive key unavailable to the readers of other persons. In *Grace Abounding*, for example, Bunyan's program of self-scrutiny depends on a typological system whereby characters from biblical texts act as "metaphorical foreshadowings" of the reader's internal struggles with sin ("convictions," in his vernacular) and external circumstances ("judgments").¹⁷ Unlike the version of literary character exemplified by Talkative, this typology flattens out the temporal scale by positing an identification between biblical characters from different epochs (e.g. Adam, David, Moses, or Christ) and their extra-textual counterpart: the Calvinist believer engaged in the search for evidence of his or her election. Spurred on by the lingering sense of his irredeemable sin—he fears that he has sold his "birthright" by agreeing implicitly to trade Christ's saving love for sublunary goods—Bunyan searches sacred history for characters whose sins carry equal weight but who nevertheless find redemption. "I began to compare my sin with others," he writes, "to see if I could find that any of those that are saved had done as I had done" (*GA*, 42). Bunyan weighs his transgression against those perpetrated by David and Peter, but decides that their crimes, though "hainous," fall short of his "*selling of my Saviour*" (*GA*, 43). He realizes "that I came nearer to *Judas*, than either to *David* or *Peter*" (*GA*, 43). Though Bunyan fails to match his experience to an exemplar of the redeemed sinner, he does find an analogue in

¹⁶ Calvinist introspective discipline plays an important role in Ian Watt's teleological account of individualism and narrative interiority in *The Rise of the Novel*. For the "aggressively private" nature of nonconformist spiritual practices, see also Sarah Ellen Zweig, *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660–1760* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), 76.

¹⁷ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding with Other Spiritual Autobiographies*, ed. John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 8, henceforth cited parenthetically as "*GA*."

Judas, the New Testament's very archetype of apostasy. Reading the Bible in this way requires an active engagement. Correspondences between character and reader are not necessarily self-evident, and they are constructed carefully according to Bunyan's preferred logic of substitution, a logic later upheld through his successful attempts to compare himself to the apostle Paul.

In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan performs reading practices that resemble those he describes in his preface to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Like the "Dark Figures" of that text, biblical types such as David, Peter, and Judas "doth call forth one thing, to set forth another" (*PP*, 8–9).

Specifically, they call forth the genealogy of sacred history in order to set forth both the external circumstances and the spiritual struggle of the individual believer. The typological reading practices enacted in *Grace Abounding* promise a solid ground for assurance of one's own character, in the Calvinist sense of spiritual status. They extend the existing sacred narrative, enfolding the historical scope of the Bible within the personal history of the Christian believer and indulging the fantasy of a continuous and recursive epoch. The "characters" of this expansive narrative, the creations of the Bible and the creatures of the present moment, become so many reflections of one another, and reading them ultimately becomes an act of recognizing and inserting oneself into a set of stable correspondences.

Although it functions primarily as a record of introspective piety, *Grace Abounding* also gestures toward the social and ecclesiological concerns of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. More than their contents, the contexts of these narratives highlight the need to test prospective coreligionists. The church records from Bunyan's own congregation at Bedford evoke confidence in a collaborative, layered admissions protocol: appointed members interviewed the applicant and then either invited him to deliver a public relation of his conversion experience at

the next meeting, deferred his application, or denied him admission.¹⁸ Visitations allowed the church to police its existing membership: “two brethren should be made choice of every monethly meeting, to go abroad to visit our brethren and sisters, and to certify us how they doe in body and soule” (*MIC*, 23). Such entries depict a religious community optimistic about its capacity to “certify” the salvific states of its members and achieve “full satisfaction” of the “truth of the worke of grace in their heartes” (*MIC*, 24).

Like the spiritual testimonies for which it served as a model, *Grace Abounding* articulates a religious identity in the terms provided by Calvinist doctrine, and it does so in the service of church formation.¹⁹ Even here, though, Bunyan betrays his sensitivity to the problem of discerning religious character that comes to preoccupy his allegories. His own initiation into the church highlights the difficulty of distinguishing true saints from those who merely profess the Christian calling. Bunyan’s outward godliness—the “great and famous alteration of my life and manners”—secures his place in Bedford Church. It does not, however, index a genuine conversion: “yet I knew not Christ, nor Grace, nor Faith, nor Hope” (*GA*, 13). By regarding his adherence to mere morality as an outward manifestation of his election, Bunyan’s interlocutors at Bedford confuse a possible effect for its cause. Cultivating a reputation for godliness does not satisfy the conditions of the Covenant of Grace.

Bunyan suggests, moreover, that living life according to the letter of the law in order to achieve a pious character represents a particularly threatening form of religious hypocrisy.

Bunyan fleshes out this notion of hypocrisy in “The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded”

¹⁸ *The Minutes of the First Independent Church (now Bunyan Meeting) at Bedford, 1656–1766*, ed. H.G. Tibutt (Bedford: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, 1976), henceforth cited parenthetically as “*MIC*.”

¹⁹ For Bunyan’s influence on spiritual autobiography in the Nonconformist and later evangelical traditions, see Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 50–51, and Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography*, 182–206.

(1659), a treatise on the respective roles of faith and works in salvation. He uses a sequence of scriptural examples to show how closely a reprobate may resemble a saint in deed as well as in word.²⁰ The damned may practice piety, secure admission into the visible church—they may even preach and perform miracles. Yet they remain damned. The distinction between salvific categories hinges on the spiritual motivation behind a given action: the pious life serves as a marker of grace only where it stems from “true and saving faith” rather than from a “legal spirit” (*DLG*, 71–5).

The recursive quality of the narrative paradigm of election, which Bunyan dramatizes through Christian’s famously “anti-progressive” pilgrimage, makes it difficult to parse the backslidings of a true believer and the signs of irredeemable depravity.²¹ When one of Christian’s companions, Hopeful, compares the latter condition to the biblical image of the dog that eats its own vomit, he casts a thin veil over the complex psychology of damnation. Recourse to sin suggests a parallel with the reflexive response of a sickened animal, but the movements of the human agent’s “free mind” demand more careful accounting (*PP*, 117). As in *Grace Abounding*, guilt, fear, and shame must be set in the proper constellation in order for awakened conscience to produce the faith necessary to salvation. Both the elect and the damn exhibit these mental states, though in different proportions and with antithetical consequences. In Bunyan’s scriptural exegesis as well as in his spiritual autobiography, cultivating personal assurance of salvation means recognizing the difference between the inner workings of grace and the false start of an ineffectual call. The difference is nearly impossible to see from without.

²⁰ Bunyan, “The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded,” *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, Vol. 2, ed. Richard L. Greaves (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), henceforth cited parenthetically as “*DLG*.”

²¹ For Christian’s conspicuously nonlinear “progress,” see Stanley Fish, “Progress in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 1 (1971): 261–93.

KNOWING TALKATIVE

While *Grace Abounding* documents Bunyan's self-scrutiny, *The Pilgrim's Progress* extends the interpretive task incumbent upon the Calvinist believer to an evaluation of other people's claims to membership in the community of true saints. Bunyan's turn from spiritual autobiography to allegorical fiction represents the shift from introspection to character detection demanded by Congregationalist ecclesiology. The consequent change of objects—from self to other—puts pressure on the logic and intelligibility of his two-dimensional characters. Bunyan's perspectival shift yields an alternative model of character that simultaneously gestures toward the rigors of specific reading practices and calls the efficacy of those practices into question. Scenes of character detection in *The Pilgrim's Progress* demonstrate that the knowledge of predestined states rests on the potentially shaky evidence of external markers.

As they journey toward the Celestial City, Christian and Faithful encounter a personification of religious hypocrisy called Talkative. The ensuing interview foregrounds the dangers of admitting claimants into the “company of Saints” without first investigating their characters. Christian's final word on the version of hypocrisy practiced by Talkative includes a sober warning about the consequences of accepting fraudulent claims to affiliation: “they are these Talkative Fools, whose Religion is only in word, and are debauched and vain in their Conversation, that (being so much admitted into the Fellowship of the Godly) do stumble the World, blemish Christianity, and grieve the Sincere” (*PP*, 68). Bunyan plays on several senses of the word “conversation” in this passage; throughout his writings, the term frequently carries the sense of social intercourse—“the action of living or having one's being *in* a place or *among* people” or “mode or course of life”—in addition to the more familiar denotation.²² The multiple

²² *OED Online*, “Conversation, n.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed August 25, 2014.

connotations of the term highlight the contaminating influence of false pilgrims like Talkative, who by his speech and the proximity it seems to license, threatens to lead sincere professors like Christian and Faithful out of the Way.²³ The possibilities of the gathered church—chief among them its promise to transform the quest for personal assurance into a collaborative spiritual enterprise—must be balanced against the pervasive danger of hypocrisy.²⁴

As an embodiment of that danger, Talkative stands opposed to characters like Turn-away, whose fate is forecast by his name as well as by his place of origin (“The Town of Apostacy”) and whose status as a reprobate is inscribed on his person (*PP*, 97). Hopeful spies a scrap of paper affixed to Turn-Away’s back. It reads: “*Wanton Professor, and damnable Apostate*” (*PP*, 97). Turn-away is quite literally reading material, and his fully legible character renders his place in Bunyan’s allegorical schema self-evident. Talkative preserves the apparent correspondence between outside (name) and inside (nature). Bunyan’s scant physical description—“He was a tall Man, and something more comely at a distance than at hand”—accords with Talkative’s eventual classification as the kind of religious hypocrite who pays homage to correct doctrinal positions without living a life according to his profession to saving faith (*PP*, 60). Yet the veracity of his profession—and so, of his character *qua* spiritual condition—is not immediately evident. Registering him as a threat requires more than recognition of his correspondence with an ethical-religious type. In disabusing Faithful of his mistaken impression, Christian leans on empirical evidence and Talkative’s reputation:

²³ That Christian himself leads Hopeful astray later in *Part I* confirms the importance of fellowship to the spiritual work of the believer—and lends credence to Christian’s fears about Talkative’s contaminating influence. Hopeful, who replaces the martyred Faithful after Christian escapes Vanity Fair, reframes the object lesson with characteristic optimism: “Saints fellowship, if it be manag’d well, / Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell” (*PP*, 106).

²⁴ Michael Davies argues that the church community insulated its members against the alienating effects of Calvinist theology. Personal salvation became a matter of collective conscience. “Spirit in the Letters,” 325–26, 336.

Chr. Deceived! you may be sure of it. Remember the Proverb, *They say and do not: but the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.* He *Talketh* of Prayer, of Repentance; of Faith, and of the New-birth: but he knows but only to *talk* of them. I have been in his Family, and have observed him both at home and abroad; and I know what I say of him is the truth[...]. There is there, neither Prayer, nor sign of Repentance for sin: Yea, the bruit in his kind serves God far better than he. He is the very stain, reproach, and shame of Religion to all that know him; it can hardly have a good word in all that end of Town where he dwells, through him. Thus say the common People that know him, *A Saint abroad, and a Devil at home*[...] Men that have any dealings with him, say 'tis better to deal with a Turk than with him, for fairer dealing they shall have at their hands. (*PP*, 62–63)

Christian's knowledge of Talkative's public and private past actions stems from both first-hand observation (aided by an unexplained intimacy of access to Talkative's home, servants, and relations) and the corroborating testimony of "common people that know him" or "have dealings with him themselves."²⁵ Christian relies as much upon Talkative's reputation, his "character" in the period sense of circulating, "detailed reports of a person's qualities," as he does upon the evidence of personal experience.²⁶

He may do so safely for two reasons, as he goes on to explain. First, these "reports" are grounded in the established credit of "good men," known quantities rather than "enemies to Religion," so they may be distinguished from the "slander" spewed by "bad men" (*PP*, 63). Secondly, he may rely on "my own knowledge" to prove Talkative guilty of the sins of which he stands accused (*PP*, 63).²⁷ Though he invokes his own experience and perspicacity as a failsafe,

²⁵ Thomas Hyatt Luxon regards Faithful's mistake as an instantiation of the opaque relationship between words and the Word created by Luther's doctrines of justification by faith alone and passive righteousness—and, thus, as an example of excusable error. "The Pilgrim's Passive Progress: Luther and Bunyan on Talking and Doing, Word and Way," *ELH* 53.1 (1986): 73–98. The tone of Christian's correction, Faithful's resolution to show more care going forward, and Bunyan's preoccupation with contaminating "conversation" trouble Luxon's reading.

²⁶ *OED Online*, "Character, n." <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed August 25, 2014. Insofar as these detailed reports do circulate, the form of "character" in play in Christian's account of Talkative also carries the sense of an "estimate formed of a person's qualities; reputation."

²⁷ By judging how well Talkative's profession to faith conforms to his own observations and to the testimony of others, Christian anticipates John Locke's protocol for evaluating the truth of a

Christian demonstrates confidence in the reports of Talkative's reputation because they are underwritten by a prior and stable sense of the good character of Christian's sources. The accuracy of Christian's judgment, which does hold up in this episode, hinges on the prerequisite and off-stage process by which he sorts potential witnesses into sweeping categories of "good men" and "enemies to Religion" and then credits or discredits their accounts accordingly. Bunyan suggests that if the witnesses to Talkative's hypocrisy had not been vetted already, then this scene of character evaluation would necessarily proliferate into a series of further acts of assessment. Faithful appears to get the message, acknowledging the weight of external opinion when he points out to Talkative the "great wickedness" of projecting a false character in the face of the contradictory evidence of reputation, of saying "I am thus, and thus, when my Conversation and all my Neighbors tell me, I lye" (*PP*, 67). Christian does not read Talkative as one might a straightforward emblem typical of coherent allegorical systems.²⁸ Rather, he insists upon the essentially empirical approach of collecting and analyzing evidence to establish the religious content of Talkative's character.

How should we account for the Arminian instinct exhibited by Christian's speech? For one thing, his effort to define pious works against the empty promise issued by Talkative accords with the defensive posture Bunyan adopts with respect to Antinomianism throughout his writings. Christian's speech reflects a local instantiation of the delicate balance that Bunyan strikes between ostensibly competing theological commitments. But Christian's reflections also

proposition in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (IV. xv. 4). For the significance of testimony to Locke's epistemology, see Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620–1720* (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), 89–90.

²⁸ In *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), Dorothy Van Ghent defines "proper" allegory as a system of emblematic images that are endowed with the "power of symbols;" such emblems evoke feelings and associations "spontaneously" and "naturally," reinforcing the allegory's larger conceptual framework (25).

reveal his effort to elevate the evidence brought to bear by his interpretive model to the status of truth. Where past actions are the objects of inquiry rather than its intermediate steps, Christian's evidentiary model promises certain knowledge. Considered in light of Bunyan's exposition of Reformed theology in *Grace Abounding* and "The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded," however, Christian's dismissive line about "Faith" complicates his analogy between "Doing" and the soul—and presages Bunyan's sustained critique of Christian's mode of reading in *Part II* of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. "Doing" produces external evidence gathered through observation or through credible testimony: it is grace (identified here by its effect, faith) rather than action that serves as an analogue to the interior component of the body/soul binary. Unlike past actions, knowledge of which may be recorded, disseminated, and tested against professions, the inner workings of grace fall strictly within the realm of probability. The question of whether a given action reveals the operation of grace within the soul of an agent cannot be settled with full assurance.

Faithful's attempt to answer the question raised by the Talkative episode—"How doth the saving grace of God discover it self, when it is in the heart of man"—reinforces Bunyan's emphasis on interpreting external evidence. It also reveals the probabilistic quality of knowledge produced by that interpretation (*PP*, 64).²⁹ Faithful argues that grace discovers itself to "him that hath it" through the sequence of awakening and conversion familiar to readers of *Grace*

²⁹ The pilgrims' recourse to an evidence-based model of reading complicates Carlo Ginzburg's account of the rise of an "epistemology based on clues" within nineteenth-century scientific and humanistic disciplines. "Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm," *Theory and Society*, 7 (1979): 273–88. Like Christian and Faithful's protocol for character detection, Ginzburg's "semiotic paradigm" relies on the process of reasoning from "clues" or "symptoms" to conjectural knowledge (contra absolute truth). While Ginzburg locates the emergence of this paradigm within secular disciplines, I would point to Bunyan's fiction as documentation that a narrative instantiation of the paradigm occurs earlier, in the context of theological exposition. The doctrinally mandated task of developing working diagnostics of spiritual character begets a turn toward the probabilistic realm.

Abounding and other conversion narratives influenced by Reformed Protestant theology. He acknowledges, as Bunyan frequently does in his spiritual autobiography, the difficulty of recognizing those processes at work within one's own soul. Faithful then makes the same perspectival shift I have attributed to Bunyan's work on the whole, outlining a protocol for identifying grace in other professed pilgrims. "To others," Faithful explains, "it is thus discovered":

1. *By an experimental confession of his Faith in Christ.* 2. *By a life answerable to that confession, to wit, a life of holiness; heart-holiness, family holiness (if he hath a Family) and by Conversation-holiness in the World: which in the general reacheth him, inwardly to abhor his Sin, and himself for that in secret, to suppress it in his Family, and to promote holiness in the World.* (PP, 66)³⁰

The observer must, on Faithful's account, reason from effect to cause—precisely the interpretive step Bunyan cautions his readers against in *Grace Abounding*. Even here, Faithful acknowledges the crucial role played by the inaccessible inward motions of the professor by stressing the impulse "inwardly to abhor his sins," which manifests in efforts to promote "holiness" and to preserve both his loved ones and the "World" at large from the deadly allure of sin. Outward righteousness and proselytizing represent signs of a "heart-holiness" located within.³¹ For Bunyan's "standers by," these are the best, because the only available, indices of grace.

³⁰ In "The Pilgrim's Passive Progress," Luxon makes much of the grammar of Faithful's initial question, positing a connection between the position of "grace" as a subject rather than an object of interpretation, on the one hand, and Bunyan's argument in favor of the Lutheran doctrine of passive righteousness, on the other. Here, Faithful restores grace to object status without conferring agency to the believer (he passive construction). Bunyan flouts the line between the believer's intellectual agency and the passivity demanded by the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luxon's insistence on passive intellectual engagement obscures Bunyan's interest in the energies of the "stander-by."

³¹ Bunyan's interest in the semiotics of religious character—the process by which one deduces another person's inner motions by examining his or her outward expressions—suggests an unexpected parallel with the Latitudinarian preoccupation with the mutual intelligibility of the heart. During the eighteenth century, this preoccupation carried forward from the Latitudinarians to Enlightenment models of sentimental exchange. For the influence of Latitudinarian ideals on

In this instance, Faithful's criteria suffice to discredit Talkative's claim to membership in the invisible church, and therefore to bar him from the community of the elect. His protocol nevertheless fails to settle the question raised by Bunyan's treatments of religious hypocrisy in *Grace Abounding* and *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded*. How does the reprobate discover himself to the world when his life closely resembles the paradigm of election? Even under the best of circumstances, standers by are susceptible to error, and strategies of character detection that rely on external evidence yield only probable knowledge. Such strategies may expose a disjuncture of "confession" and social "conversation," as they do in Talkative's case. They cannot, however, determine with any certainty whether "conversation-holiness" reflects genuine "heart-holiness" or belies the heart of a reprobate. The question goes without a final answer until the day of judgment, when, as Christian reminds his companion, God collects the "fruit" of his "Harvest" and casts the damned aside (*PP*, 63–4). To imitate God in his capacity as harvester, attempting to separate the spiritual wheat and chaff, is to fulfill an imperative of Congregationalist ecclesiology. But doing so also courts error and exposes the limitations of human faculties of perception and discernment.

Bunyan outlines an alternative and more reliable method for discerning character in "The Author's Apology," where he defends his use of "Types, Shadows, and Metaphors" on the

Enlightenment moral philosophy, see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Although Bunyan clearly shares the latitudinarians' interest in the accessibility of frames of heart, he stops short of envisioning sympathetic exchange as the basis for affiliation. He does not, that is, share in their optimism about the possibility of knowing another person's heart, nor does his emphasis on the high spiritual stakes of social intercourse mark him as a "bad" Calvinist. Questions about the intelligibility of spiritual states are rooted first and foremost in the Reformed tradition represented by Bunyan. Taken in context, the overlap between Bunyan's thought and the latitudinarians' language of the heart nevertheless introduces the possibility that ostensibly opposed currents of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century religion intersect as parts of a broader discourse around reading character.

grounds of biblical precedent (*PP*, 7). Lest he transgress against the “highest Wisdom,” the ideal reader does not find “fault” with such figures when they appear in the gospel:

*No, he rather stoops,
And seeks to find out what by pins and loops,
By Calves, and Sheep; by Heifers, and by Rams;
By Birds and Herbs, and by the Blood of Lambs,
God speaketh to him (PP, 7)*

Bunyan prompts readers of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* to adopt the same approach, to ask “what by” various emblems and personifications he “speaketh” to them. He argues further that the mode of representation he shares with the author of revelation only veils its “solidness,” and he uses a series of metaphors to explain how his figures convey valuable knowledge: like a “Toads-head,” an “Oister-shell,” or a “cabinet,” they enclose “pearls” and “gold” (*PP*, 7). Bunyan’s figures yield meaning by revealing their insides to the reader who “stoops” to interpret their initially opaque surfaces. Recalling the typological reading program he enacts through *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan instructs readers to discover the truth of an object by lifting the veil of figurative language and matching its double meanings, substituting one quantity (the thing called for) for another (the thing set forth).

At first glance, Talkative’s character seems to work according to a similarly doubled logic. His espoused doctrines, which conform perfectly to the Calvinist position shared by Christian, Faithful, and Bunyan himself, contrasts with his fundamental spiritual status as a reprobate. His outside (here his outward show or profession of faith rather than his physical appearance) and his inside (his predestined religious-ethical category) do not match. Yet for Christian and Faithful, reading Talkative’s character produces only further external evidence: the details of his impious life and his deleterious influence on the members of his household and the community at large. While their interpretive work rules Talkative out as a candidate for election,

their evidentiary reading model cannot guarantee infallible knowledge of another person's spiritual state. Unlike the "Toads-head" and the "Oister-shell," the outward strokes of Talkative's character—physical markers, reputation, and past actions performed in public and in private—deliver probable knowledge rather than the "Truth" Bunyan promises in his preface (*PP*, 7). To the extent that they offer clues of their spiritual states to the empirical gaze of the stander-by, false professors like Talkative depart from the logic of "doubleness" central to the allegorical mode, as well as from the inside/outside dialectic Bunyan uses to describe the ideal hermeneutic encounter with primary (literal or material) and secondary (figurative or thematic) meanings.³²

Because the "truth" of his character—his place within the rigid system prescribed by the doctrine of double predestination and, thus, his "function" within Bunyan's "total cosmic order"—is not self-enclosed, Talkative does not function allegorically, at least for readers within the work.³³ Access to his character depends on both second-hand accounts of his life outside the concrete narrative of *Part I* and on Christian's prior decisions about the character of those who provide such accounts, evidence accumulated in the margins of Bunyan's text and then synthesized and interpreted within the episode. Faithful learns the hard way that Talkative's defining lack of grace does not "discover it self," after all, nor does it submit to active

³² For Angus Fletcher, this "doubleness" is constitutive of the mode. Like Bunyan, Fletcher is drawn to the language of penetration or excavation in his account of the reading practices demanded by allegory: he imagines the readers of ancient and modern allegorical fictions engaged in a practice of "read[ing] into literature." *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), 8.

³³ Fletcher, *Allegory*, 60–3. The rigidity of the categories imposed by double predestination suggests a natural affinity with allegory. Yet *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not bear out their compatibility. Fletcher contends that the characters of allegory are "fixed" to unmistakable, specific ideas. Bunyan's false professors, by contrast, exhibit fluid characters. True, each of these characters ultimately reduces to one of two sweeping genera. Their oscillating frames of spirit and the impenetrability of their fundamental spiritual conditions nevertheless thwart efforts to "fix" them to their correspondent ideas.

interpretive engagement in a vacuum.³⁴ Such clues as Talkative does afford are gathered over time and pieced together into a coherent report of his hypocrisy. As Christian asserts to the devil Apollyon, religious character manifests gradually, and it is ultimately confirmed only by the supreme arbiter: “[Christ’s] forbearing at present to deliver them [i.e. pilgrims] is on purpose to try their love, whether they will cleave to him, to the End” (47). Christian’s defense of Christ’s belatedness includes an acknowledgment that election maps out onto a temporal rather than a spatial axis. The task of evaluating character in Calvinist terms means speculating on how the claimant will fare at the “Harvest,” at the “End,” rather than penetrating a “Mantle” to uncover a static truth.

SUPERINTENDED READING

Part II of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, as Leopold Damrosch has observed, exhibits an overt “social emphasis.”³⁵ Christiana’s tale examines the Protestant believer cast as a “member of a sect or community.” I would add that Bunyan’s sequel also functions as an extended metaphor for proselytizing, preaching, and martyrdom—for the social duties that fall to those who, like Bunyan himself, answered Christ’s “particular calling” to minister to other claimants to the invisible church (*GA*, 76). *Part II*, therefore, dramatizes the foundation of the fellowship of saints and the interpretive activity of its members as they negotiate a world littered with inscrutable

³⁴ In *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), Stephen Knapp shows that eighteenth-century engagements with Milton’s *Paradise Lost* register anxieties about the capacity of formerly stable, inert personifications to act within their narratives—about the unsettling transformation from merely ornamental or emblematic figures into “characters” according to the more familiar sense. Bunyan’s Talkative takes on some of the force and dimensionality of inflected persons through the inscrutability of his spiritual condition. Talkative proves “monstrous” more because he resists efforts to attach meaning to him than because he acts within the narrative.

³⁵ Damrosch, *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories*, 179.

characters. Despite his stated intention to use his sequel to teach readers “Twixt Idle ones and Pilgrims to discern,” Bunyan dwells on the difficulty of adjudicating between sincere and inauthentic claimants (*PP*, 135). He promises to inculcate a method of reading suited to the task. Almost in the same breath, however, he acknowledges the possibility of misinterpreting available evidence of religious character. Just as counterfeit pilgrims may pass for saints, so certain types of sincere pilgrims “may look ... as if their God had them forsook” and therefore invite mistaken classification as reprobates (*PP*, 136). The evidentiary model of reading that Christian applies to the encounter with Talkative works in *Part I*—he correctly classes Talkative as a hypocrite according to various external clues—but the abundant scenes of character reading and emblematic interpretation staged in Bunyan’s sequel cast doubt on the efficacy of that approach. *Part II* betrays Bunyan’s skepticism about an evidential paradigm that shifts away from the “truth” promised by his two-dimensional method toward the tenuous assurance achieved via probabilistic reasoning.

In Stand-fast’s encounter with “Madam Buble,” whom Bunyan glosses marginally as a figure for “this vain World,” *Part II* presents an extended episode of character detection according to the same protocol and forms of evidence to which Christian turns during the confrontation with Talkative. Stand-fast’s initial account of his wearied resistance to the seductress’s advances leads to a moment of collaborative character delineation with Mr. Honest:

Hon. *Without doubt her Designs were bad. But stay, now you talk of her, methinks I either have seen her, or have read some story of her?*

Standf. Perhaps you have done both.

Hon. *Madam Buble! Is she not a tall comely Dame, something of a Swarthy Complexion?*

Standf. Right, you hit it, she is just such an one.

Hon. *Doth she not speak very smoothly, and give you a Smile at the end of a Sentence?*

Standf. You fall right upon it again, for these are her very Actions.

Hon. *Doth she not wear a great Purse by her Side, and is not her Hand often in it, fingering her Mony, as if that was her Hearts delight?*

Standf. 'Tis just so. Had she stood by all this while, you could not more amply have set her forth before me, nor have better described her Features.

Hon. Then he that drew her Picture was a good *Limner*, and he that wrote of her, said true. (*PP*, 236)

Just as Christian combined his first-hand observation with the testimony of Talkative's reputation, Honest validates Stand-fast's misgivings about Madam Buble's intentions by way of second-hand evidence. He has seen her features "limned" and he has "read some story of her." As narrative and pictorial modes of description coalesce to confirm the identity and nature of this threat to their pilgrimage, Bunyan proposes an equivalence between first- and second-hand testimony. As Stand-fast remarks, by producing reliable evidence, these modes of representation compensate perfectly for immediate experience: "Had she stood by all this while, you could not more amply set her forth before me, nor have better described her Features." Stand-fast stresses the utter sufficiency of Honest's prior knowledge—his description is "ample" and above improvement—and implies that such evidence substitutes for the knowledge that Stand-fast himself has earned through dangerous proximity.

At this point in the exchange, Great-heart intervenes in order to elaborate on the specific dangers posed by Madam Buble. That Great-heart's exposition follows hard upon the collaborative character sketch undermines Stand-fast's assessment of the sufficiency of these representations to fully characterize their enemy. Along the way, he sheds light on the identity of Mr. Honest's "Limner" and character-writer. Great-heart lists Madam Buble's traits as well as her modus operandi for leading Pilgrims out of the Way—"she has given it out in some places, that she is a Goddess, and therefore some do Worship her"—but he also locates her within the familiar genealogy of New Testament characters. "'Twas she," he informs the pilgrims, "that set *Absolom* against his Father, and *Jeroboam* against his Master. 'Twas she that persuaded Judas to

sell his Lord, and that prevailed with Demas to forsake the godly Pilgrim's Life" (*PP*, 237).

Madam Buble lives in the margins of the sacred narrative; Great-heart's language suggests that, though she is not fully embodied in the Bible, Madam Buble is nonetheless recognizable. Great-heart's repetition of phrases like "This is she" and "'Twas she" act as enjoinders to remember a character familiar from other reports, to match the evidence of observation and "report" with the revealed knowledge of the gospel.³⁶ His exposition leaves nothing of her character, nor of the particular dangers she represents, unsettled.

While Bunyan clearly endorses the modes of representation at play in this episode, he qualifies that endorsement by underscoring the central role played by original revelation in grounding Stand-fast's and Honest's conclusions in the ultimate credible authority, God. To the extent that the pilgrims find Madam Buble's character already sketched upon the pages of the New Testament, God is the author of her narrative as well as the author of her existence (and that of every other thing). He is the limner and writer to whom Honest refers. Providential knowledge acts as a failsafe against misjudging, and there is a sense of security conferred by Madam Buble's insertion into familiar biblical episodes. On an important level, knowing her character consists of substituting the "'Twas she" of particular scriptural passages for the figure before Stand-fast's eyes. The external referent of Madam Buble's character also troubles Bunyan's fronted position on the stability of reputation: she embodies, with dangerously sexual feminine energy, the pernicious temptations of the sublunary realm rather than a spiritual or ethical category. Madam Buble is not an inscribed Professor, like Talkative, and though her promises also demand evaluation and rejection, the task of assessing her character does not present the same interpretive challenge. All who received the truth of the Word will find her an

³⁶ Demas also appears as a character in the *Part I* of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, so Madam Buble's exploits are grounded in the shared discursive world of Bunyan's corpus.

accommodating object, as effable to the faculties of perception and reason as she is deadly to the soul. As the first several pages of Christian's own story prove, identifying the threat posed by her beauty is a prerequisite to spiritual regeneration.³⁷ Shortly after feeling the stirrings of grace, the awakening to sinfulness that initiates his conversion experience, Christian must cast off the fetters of this world, an act understood as the subordination of familiar affection to faith and the rejection of filthy lucre. The Reformed theology of grace leaves no room for uncertainty in this context.

Christiana's visit to the House of the Interpreter demonstrates that even straightforwardly emblematic representation proves troublesome in the context of evaluating the spiritual content of character. As if to make good on Bunyan's prefatory promise to teach his readers how to distinguish between authentic and fraudulent claims to saving faith, the Interpreter presents Christiana and her company with an allegorical set piece:

Then, as they were coming in from abroad, they espied a little *Robbin* with a great *Spider* in his mouth. So the *Interpreter* said, look here. So they looked, and *Mercie* wondered; but *Christiana* said, what a disparagement is it to such a little pretty Bird as the *Robbin-red-breast* is, he being also a Bird above man, that loveth to maintain a kind of Sociableness with man? I had thought that they lived upon crums of Bread, or upon other such harmless matter. I like him worse then I did.

The *Interpreter* then replied, This *Robbin* is an Emblem very apt to set forth some Professors by; for to sight they are as this *Robbin*, pretty of Note, Colour and Carriage, they seem also to have a very great Love for Professors that are sincere; and above all other to desire to sosciate with, and to be in their Company, as if they could live upon the good Mans Crums. They Pretend also that therefore it is, that they frequent the House of the Godly, and the appointments of the Lord: but when they are by themselves, *as the*

³⁷ For critics of the egotism produced by Calvinist spiritual practices, Bunyan's description of Christian's first steps along the narrow path presents a haunting image: "So I saw in my Dream, that the Man began to run; Now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life: so he looked not behind him, but fled toward the middle of the Plain" (*PP*, 12–13). This scene of abandonment illustrates the necessity, and the difficulty, of the abandonment of all for the sake of Christ's saving faith. It is made possible first by the recognition of one's depraved state, and second by the proper valuation of spiritual goods in relation to worldly desires.

Robbin, they catch and gobble up *Spiders*, they can change their Diet, drink *Iniquity*, and swallow down *Sin* like Water. (*PP*, 159)

To emphasize the capaciousness of Christ's mercy, the Interpreter refers to an earlier spectacle that likened pilgrims (tainted, as they are, with both original sin and their particular transgressions) to hideous "spiders" dwelling in "the best Room in the House" (*PP*, 158). Just a page later, the image of the Robbin snatching and "gobbl[ing] up" spiders carries at least some sense of the threat that Christian makes explicit when he chastises Faithful for his credulity. The kind of "Professor" figured by the Robbin devours sin in secret and in feigning continuity with the mission of the visible church, consumes its sincere members.

Bunyan exacerbates the threat of hypocrisy by introducing a new "kind" of insincere professor, one who obscures his spiritual status through a deft negotiation of the public vs. private distinction. Bunyan's Robbin only "seems" domesticated, its natural diet of creeping things hidden from the view of the humans with whom it seeks to achieve "Sociableness" (159). The version of the false professor "set forth" by this emblem, like the reprobate of Bunyan's *The Doctrine of Law and Grace*, looks the part of the true saint and makes an outward show of fellowship that disguises his appetite for sin. That Christiana expresses surprise at the Robbin's defiance of the character she assigns to its species reflects her—and, by extension, all believers'—susceptibility to pretended sanctification. Unlike Talkative, whose life at home and abroad flags his disqualifying impiety to the student of reputation, such professors hide their true natures in public. Bunyan thus raises questions about the viability of past, public actions as evidence of the spiritual status of professors.

Beyond exposing the limits of such evidence, Christiana's encounter with the Robbin and the Spider foregrounds the pilgrims' reliance on recipients of God's "particular calling," ministering agents like Evangelist and the Interpreter, to fill in the gaps left by their interpretive

efforts (*GA*, 76). Bunyan’s revised sacred history, like the Word itself, requires accommodation to the benighted senses and reasoning faculties of postlapsarian man. Mercy simply “wondered,” suspended in a state of awed confusion. For her part, Christiana remains preoccupied with the literal plane of meaning. She fails to disclose the “truth” behind the “dark matter” of the Interpreter’s emblem (*PP*, 157–58). That meaning is delivered rather than left to the believer’s apprehension.³⁸ The equivalent episode in *Part I* sets Christian and the Interpreter in the same relation. Balanced against his requests for direct explication—“what means this?,” he importunes three times in as many pages—Christian’s claim to “know the meaning” of his host’s final vision fails to demonstrate his readiness to assume the intellectual burden incumbent upon the “lone interpreter” of Calvinist tradition (*PP*, 26–29).³⁹ Neither Christiana nor her husband before her learns to expound independently on the significance of the Interpreter’s visions. By unpacking the moral of each emblem, enjoining Christian to “keep all things so in thy mind, that they may be as a *Goad* in thy sides,” the Interpreter inculcates habits of mind based on remembrance and application rather than rigorous interpretive engagement (*PP*, 32).⁴⁰ Christian must treat each episode of his journey as a further iteration of a familiar object lesson. In so doing he performs the appropriate affective responses to demonstrations of God’s exacting wrath and Christ’s infinite benevolence: “fear” and “hope” (*PP*, 32). The pilgrims’ visits to the House of the

³⁸ The emblem of the Robbin isn’t the only figure that outstrips the pilgrims’ interpretive efforts. Prudence “shewd [Christiana] one of the *Apples* that *Eve* did eat of . . . and asked her what she thought that was” (*PP*, 183). Christiana simply “held up her hands and wondered.” Because she fails to recognize Eve’s apple either as an immediate danger or as a representation of her inheritance of sin from the first woman, her hosts “opened the matter to her” through exposition.

³⁹ Haskin, “Burden of Interpretation,” 265.

⁴⁰ Despite the homage in the “Author’s Apology” to the intellectual burden borne by individual agents, the text of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* enacts at the level of the reader a similar model of guided interpretation. Bunyan’s frequent marginal annotations and almost compulsive scriptural citations suggest a parallel between the author and the Interpreter (as well as between Christian and the reader).

Interpreter resonate with Books 11 and 12 of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667–74), which depict Adam's failure to interpret the scenes of Christian history unfolding before him. Like the Archangel Michael, Bunyan's Interpreter must explain the spectacles, supplementing Christian and Christiana's benighted faculties with divinely imparted wisdom.

Bunyan's sequel places readers in a similarly dependent position. While the reader of *Part I* is treated to the certainty of allegory even when his characters are not—we recognize Talkative by the consonance of his appearance and essence—the reader of *Part II* loses that perspectival advantage. In the former case, reading other persons and reading the text are incommensurate activities, but in the sequel the distinction between them erodes—and with it the certainty of allegorical reading. Without the Interpreter's explanation, the meaning of the emblem of the Robbin is no more transparent to Bunyan's readers than to his characters. At House Beautiful, to cite one further example, Mathew's call-and-response with Prudence confirms that Bunyan regards natural phenomena as so many metaphors for the vertically structured, mediated relationship between God and his creatures:

Mathew. *What should we learn by seeing the Flame of our Fire go upwards? and by seeing the Beams, and sweet Influences of the Sun strike downwards?*

Prudence. By the going up of the Fire, we are taught to ascend to Heaven, by fervent and hot desires. And by the Sun his sending his Heat, Beams, and sweet Influences downwards, we are taught, that the Saviour of the World, tho' high, reaches down with his Grace and Love to us below. (*PP*, 181)

Mathew proceeds from the conviction that the created world holds symbolic significance, that there is something we ought to learn by observing the “upwards” flickering of a flame or the downward cast of the sun's rays. The grammar of his tutor's response—“we are taught”—evokes the passivity of both Mathew and Bunyan's readers. It is only through Prudence's direct instruction that we, alongside Christiana's eldest son, come to understand the figurative significance of these phenomena and, thus, the spiritual lessons disclosed by creation.

Contrary to the familiar account of the didactic dimension of his allegorical fiction, Bunyan stops short of training readers. Just as Christiana and her troupe of pilgrims rely on inscribed agents of revelation, so the reader relies on Bunyan for exposition of and reflection on episodes and emblems with otherwise oblique morals. Rather than teaching interpretive techniques, he stresses the limits of human faculties and advocates deference toward both revealed knowledge and his own narrative authority. Reconsidered in this light, the awed expressions of Christiana and Mercy when confronted with the emblem of the Robbin look less like failures of reading than appropriate responses to the conditions of experience in a sublunary realm where probability has usurped the place of truth.

In each case, the presentation of the object itself, which on the bare logic of Bunyan's allegorical mode should suffice as reading material, requires exposition grounded, either directly or through intermediary figures like the Interpreter, Mistress Prudence, or Great-heart, in divine authority. By balancing the mental energy of the pilgrims and the authority of revelation, Bunyan achieves an uneasy reconciliation of the Calvinist diminution of human agency in salvation to the doctrinal imperative to distinguish between "sincere" and "counterfeit Pilgrims" (*PP*, 159, 132). It is possible to read these interpolated ministers and conduits of revealed knowledge as so many features of the Calvinist Protestant worldview, as embodiments of the individual agent's intellectual struggle or projections of his or her mental energies, rather than as inscribed individual agents themselves.⁴¹ Such an approach to this particular class of Bunyan's characters would accord with a reading of the motley company of pilgrims assembled by the end of *Part II* as personified qualities of heart and spirit, to invoke Bunyan's own language from *Grace*

⁴¹ For Bunyan's secondary characters as projections of Christian's (i.e. the individual believer's) frames of mind and spirit, see Brian Nellist, "The Pilgrim's Progress and Allegory," *The Pilgrim's Progress: Critical and Historical Views*, ed. Vincent Newey (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1980), 132–153.

Abounding, that obtain to one saint's personal history. Even reading Bunyan's characters in these terms—positing that he conceives of the individual as a society or aggregate of persons—sets the sociality of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in sharp relief.

Moreover, this line of argument glosses over the other ways in which Bunyan's characters signify: as personifications of an abstract idea; or as recognizable types of moral agent, an inscribed person, like Mr. Honest, identified with a particular trait.⁴² Treating Bunyan's characters as externalizations of *the* Calvinist believer's psyche also requires that we ignore the emphasis, exhibited by both parts of his work, on the discreteness of individual persons. The character sketches with which Bunyan introduces his sequel insist on the logic of kind and the necessity of sorting living objects into the appropriate categories as part of the journey toward spiritual regeneration. And insofar as the types of the elect and reprobate figure individual agents, Bunyan's emblematic universe outpaces the human capacity to solve riddles and shed light on dark matter.

Instances of divinely abetted interpretation and direct instruction in both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* underscore the plight of the stander-by in her confrontation with the faces of hypocrisy, as well as introducing Bunyan's proposed solution. Bunyan hints at a question that haunts *Grace Abounding* as well as his didactic writings: what would it mean to be cast into Faithful's position at the moment prior to Christian's intervention? Christian finds himself in Faithful's position early in his journey. Having accepted Worldly-wiseman's promise to deliver him from his burden—"he looked like a gentleman, and talked much to me, and got me at last to

⁴² Leopold Damrosch rightly points to the possibility that one figure might oscillate between different referents, as Mercy variously personifies the Christian virtue of that name and acts as the human recipient of it. *God's Plot and Man's Stories*, 181. This feature makes these characters versatile rather than slippery reading objects; they allow Bunyan to link his allegory of spiritual regeneration to a simplified, discursive translation of the external social world to which that allegory refers.

yield”—Christian receives a harsh corrective from Evangelist (*PP*, 21). “I will now,” the latter announces,

shew thee who it was that deluded thee, and who ’twas also to whom he sent thee. . . .
Thou must abhor his turning thee out of the way and thine own consenting thereto:
because this is to reject the counsel of God, for the sake of the counsel of a *Worldly-
wiseman*. (*PP*, 21)

Evangelist describes Christian’s error as a failure to credit the right “counsel,” to distinguish between the eminently well-grounded claim of the Word and the faulty promises of a moralist. He “believed” Wordly-wiseman on the shaky ground of his gentlemanly appearance, and because he sought an easy reprieve from his discomfort. Evangelist goes on to characterize Worldly-wiseman’s compatriots, consigning each figure to a simple ethical type. While Worldly-wiseman is an “alien” (willfully excluded from participation in the category of the elect), “Legality,” is a “cheat,” and his son, “Civility,” is “but a hypocrite” (*PP*, 22).⁴³

Through his elucidation of scriptural warrants for the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Evangelist also clarifies each character’s allegorical function. Worldly-wiseman caricatures the Arminian position (he advocates justification by works, salvation as an achieved or transacted state rather than a predestined and freely granted condition). Legality gives body and voice to such an orientation to the Covenant of the Law. Finally, Civility represents the performance of moral rectitude, already an empty concept within Reformed Protestant theology. The integrity of the categories applied to each figure and the harmony of literal and figurative meaning both hold up in this instance. Worldly-wiseman, Legality, and Civility each weds evident, superficial character (i.e. name, appearance, and doctrinal position) to demonstrable

⁴³ Evangelist also points out Legality’s descent from “the Bond woman which now is, and is in bondage with her children,” which suggests the causal relationship between original sin and the universally damning first covenant (the administration of Mosaic law). As in the presentation of Eve’s apple to Christiana in *Part II*, Bunyan suggests the matrilineal inheritance of sin.

character (i.e. the evidence afforded by consideration of their past, public actions). Yet neither the ethical-religious content of Worldy-wiseman's character nor the theological object lesson allegorized through this episode are left to the work of interpretation. Rather, Evangelist "shew[s]" those meanings to Christian; he makes them explicit. Even under the best of circumstance, when neither the public "character" (i.e. reputation) nor the professions of another person obscure his or her spiritual state, guided reading offers the best course. Christian does "progress" from his baseline of ignorant credulity. He has learned, by the time that Faithful plays the naïve Christian to his Evangelist, the forms of evidence that conduce to probable knowledge of religious character.

In the absence of reliable reports and first-hand observations of an object's words and deeds—or at times despite of the availability of those clues—pilgrims must turn to the evidence of revealed knowledge. Bunyan argues for the necessity of mental habits and reading practices that facilitate the discovery of grace (or its absence) in other people. But he also acknowledges throughout these scenes of failed and superintended reading that the "lonely interpreter" associated with Calvinist spiritual practices is not so lonely in the end.⁴⁴ She has recourse to the final authority on questions of character and credibility—to God and his agents of revelation. Bunyan posits no ground of assurance to which the Calvinist believer may turn when appeals to providence and human discretion prove equally impotent. For denied direct "explanation" of the kind provided to his pilgrims, the stander by must "be drowned in thy Contemplation" (*PP*, 9). Though the devout Bunyan ultimately defers these questions, the novelists of the next half-century, as I argue over the course of this dissertation, offer their own, often troubled responses.

⁴⁴ Haskin, "Burden of Interpretation," 265.

At stake in this reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a clearer sense of Bunyan's place in the novel's origin story. "What happens," Michael McKeon asks, "when we actually try to read *The Pilgrim's Progress* as though it were a novel?" The query leads McKeon to a deliberate "misreading" of Bunyan's work that extricates the literal plot from its figurative dimension.⁴⁵ To McKeon, *The Pilgrim's Progress* looks most like a novel where its diegetic world courts autonomy, standing up to the obtrusiveness of allegorical meaning. This dissertation offers an alternative explanation based on the unexpected affinity between figures like Talkative and the ostensibly flat but inconsistently legible characters in eighteenth-century novels. I propose that the distinctively novelistic quality of *The Pilgrim's Progress* plays out at the level of characterization rather than through the conflict between microcosm and allegory, as McKeon suggests. Like Bunyan's work, early exempla of the form inscribe a struggle to discern the spiritual and ethical states of other people according to external markers. Their characters bear the residue of Bunyan's "allegory" and of the English Calvinist tradition more broadly: an unfulfilled promise of harmony between surface and essence.

CREDIT AND GRACE

Attending to the problematic credibility of professors within Bunyan's imaginary reveals that "credit" is a religious as well as an economic concept. When Christian turns to the evidence of reputation in order to assess Talkative's claim to faith in *Part I*, he follows the procedures by which lenders evaluated the creditworthiness of prospective borrowers. Craig Muldrew has shown that, at least through the early part of the eighteenth-century, the terms "credit" and

⁴⁵ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600–1740* rev. ed. (1987; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002), 297, 312. McKeon echoes Martin Battestin, who argues that eighteenth-century novels differ from conventional allegories insofar as they preserve the "illusion of reality" and the integrity of their literal narratives. *The Providence of Wit*, 148.

“reputation” were used interchangeably to refer to circulating, collaboratively formed “judgements [sic] about trustworthiness” and honesty.⁴⁶ Such judgments depended on the “moral knowledge” of other people—on the discernment of ethical character, in other words—and they were based on observed and reported “relations with friends, neighbours and others with whom people dealt on a continual basis.”⁴⁷ Moreover, Muldrew argues convincingly that religious standards of propriety inflected notions of credit: securing access to circuits of exchange necessary for survival meant establishing and maintaining a “reputation for religious virtue, belief and honesty.”⁴⁸ In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian points out that Talkative acquires a kind of bad credit within an overlapping circuit of exchange and social network: “Men that have any dealings with him, say ’tis better to deal with a Turk than with him, for fairer dealing they shall have at their hands” (*PP*, 63). Talkative’s socially constructed character for religious hypocrisy comes with material consequences. The same evidence of dishonesty that Christian uses to discredit Talkative’s claim to membership in the visible church also excludes him from future commercial “dealings” with those who know his reputation.

Christian’s deployment of the language of exchange signals that economic and theological domains blend together through a broader cultural preoccupation with the challenge of vetting other people’s creditworthiness. The doctrine of double predestination gives rise to a powerful anxiety about the possibility of detecting, in oneself as well as in other professed Christians, and projecting the outward signs of an election that can only be confirmed, retrospectively, by God. Notions of credit as a form of assurance subject to the scrutiny of reason and susceptible to counterfeiting, notions consistent with economic applications of the term,

⁴⁶ Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, 148–9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 150–2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 149.

emerge within the context of spiritual reflection.⁴⁹ The deeply felt obligation to cultivate assurance of one's own status vis-à-vis the sweeping, mutually exclusive categories of elect and reprobate mirror the pressing demand to evaluate claims to credit in commercial contexts.

Judging the sincerity of a promise to be “faithful unto death,” as Bunyan's Evangelist puts it, and crediting a promise to repay a debt at a later date are correlative interpretive activities. In as much as they depend on the probable knowledge of character—the sense of another person's spiritual status or ethical content based on external signs—both tasks promote an evidentiary model of reading. Furthermore, both tasks are complicated by their investment in the necessarily speculative endeavor of projecting character into an indeterminate future. Will the self-professed pilgrim “hold out,” per Evangelist's enjoinder, until the end of his personal narrative? Will a debtor exhibit the same ethical character upon the date of repayment? That these are versions of the same question suggests that the concept of credit yokes epistemological concerns raised within religious and economic discourses, and that the temporal dimension of character consigns creditor and Christian believer alike to the probabilistic realm.

The next two chapters focus on the prose works of Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood, writers who respond directly to the problem of credibility as it unfolds within an economic context, and particularly to the pervasive moral consequences of the so-called Financial Revolution. What happens to the Calvinist logic of character detection when overtly religious questions take a back seat to topical and political crises like the Revolution of 1688–89 and the bursting of the South Sea Bubble? I propose that Behn and Haywood adjust the approach to two-

⁴⁹ Aaron Kitch has observed the intersection of religious and economic logics in the context of Tudor and Stuart England. “The Character of Credit and the Problem of Belief in Middleton's *City Comedies*,” *Studies in English Literature* 47 (2007): 403–426. Kitch remarks that “the emphasis on spiritual self-scrutiny produced at the heart of Reformed spiritual practices...influenced strategies for establishing personal creditworthiness.”

dimensional character on display in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Before moving on, though, I want to pause over Bunyan's express acknowledgement that the Reformed theology of Grace mirrors the institutions and practices of the credit system.

In "The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded," Bunyan deploys an extended economic metaphor to clarify the terms of the Covenant of Grace and to reassure his readers of the indefectibility of election. He applies the logic and vernacular of credit relationships, assigning each party to a correspondent position: God becomes an unrelenting "creditor" (he demands exact and timely "repayment" according to the administration of the law); man becomes a "debtor"; and Christ becomes a "surety" or bondsman thereof—a third party who accepts responsibility for the debtor's obligations and answers to the letter the creditor's demands (*DLG*, 99). Bunyan figures Christ's redemption of the elect as a smoothly executed exchange relationship, the conditions of which have already been honored. In the context of biblical history and, thus, in the felt experience of the believer, the debt has been settled and the promise fulfilled. The unqualified success of this transaction depends on the infallible credibility of both parties to the contract, the creditor and the surety:

Now the covenant was not only made on Jesus Christs side with an *Oath*: but also on God the Fathers side, that it might be fore the better *ground* of stablishment to all those that are, or are to be the children of the *Promise*. Methinks it is wonderful to consider, that the God and Father of our souls by Jesus Christ, should be so bent upon the salvation of sinners, that he would covenant with his Son Jesus for the *security* of them; and also that there should pass an *Oath* on both sides, for the confirmation of their resolution to do good: as if the Lord had said, My Son, thou, and I, have here made a *Covenant*, that I, on my part, should do thus, and thus; and that thou on thy part, shouldest do so, and so. (*DLG*, 97–8)

As Bunyan points out a few paragraphs later, neither God nor Christ can "lye." Their reciprocal oath-giving thus produces supremely stable grounds for assurance that the predestined "children of the *Promise*" have been saved, finally and ineluctably, from the curse of the law (their

inheritance from Adam). Lori Branch has observed that “economic possession” becomes the predominant metaphor for epistemological certainty within the discourse of covenant theology.⁵⁰ She departs from twentieth-century critical engagements with the popularity of that metaphor, arguing that, in *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan’s economic metaphors induce rather than attenuate fears about the disjunction of value involved in any transaction with God.⁵¹ I wish to argue that, in “The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded,” Bunyan leans on the familiar theological emphasis on Christ’s capacity and willingness to stand in for sinner as debtor, which allows him to accentuate the positive tincture of the analogy between economic credit and grace. But I agree with Branch that economic logic and Calvinist spirituality need reconciling, and I propose that this episode, through its focus on credit rather than other forms of possession, gestures toward the uncertainty inherent in exchange relationships ordered by conceptions of imaginary property.

The analogy to daily commerce, which Bunyan extends via a comparison between the Covenant of Grace and the transaction of livestock later in his treatise, conveys Bunyan’s unwavering confidence in the capacity of Christ to effect salvation. The analogy aims at the first kind of assurance at stake in the doctrine of double predestination, “security” for the belief that God’s mercy is freely given rather than achieved (a daunting notion for the Calvinist believer awakened to his innate sinfulness), and that Christ’s love is sufficient to pay the “price” for our sins. But it also reveals the instability of credit relationships within ostensibly secular domains

⁵⁰ Lori Branch, “‘As blood is forced out of flesh:’ Spontaneity and the Wounds of Exchange in *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” *ELH* 74 (2007): 271–99, 272.

⁵¹ For counterpoints to Branch’s view, see Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factitious People* and David Zaret, *The Heavenly Contract: Ideology and Organization in Pre-Revolutionary Puritanism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985). Both Hill and Zaret treat the preeminence of economic tropes within expositions of covenant theology, such as the one Bunyan conducts in “The Doctrine of Law and Grace,” as efforts to ameliorate fears about the “price” God exacts from sinners and the relative value of an individual sinner’s tainted soul. The metaphors confer certainty by bringing economic rationalism to bear on an emotionally charged discourse.

like the commercial marketplace. Bunyan himself suggests a possible breakdown when he notes in the margins of his treatise that, “How ever it is in Other ingagements, yet it is thus in this,” i.e. the creditor-surety-debtor triangulation involving God, Christ, and the chosen sinner (*DLG*, 99). By “thus,” he means binding, incorruptible.

As Bunyan here intimates, and as Aphra Behn is at pains to demonstrate through *Oroonoko* (1688), the God-Son relationship that Bunyan recasts in economic language fails to serve as a model for “other ingagements”—for literal, human credit relationships. The precarious position of the stander-by, central to Bunyan’s understanding of the intellectual duties of participants in forms of economic and religious exchange, has no place in the God-Son/creditor-surety dynamic. Put simply, God and Christ do not need to read one another; their promises are beyond suspicion because they are backed by the perfection of their natures. The rupture of Bunyan’s metaphor points to the fallen nature of sublunary experience. Depraved man, unlike God and Christ, must lay claim to creditworthiness precisely because he *can* and often *does* lie. It also suggests the broader collapse of figurative modes that invoke one thing in order to “set forth another,” as Bunyan writes in the preface to *Part I of The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Bunyan’s proposed analogy between the mediated God-man credit relationship and human credit relationships represents yet another example of the analogical and emblematic modes of representation that dominate his religious thought. Its failure, like the failure of emblems to signify without exposition and the failure of extrinsic character to index spiritual states, reveals the instability of modes of representation that draw equivalences between discrete quantities: part and whole; general and particular; literary character and external referent. Despite Bunyan’s insistence on emblems and types through which such planes of meaning are made to harmonize—Adam and Christ each serves as a “Publick-man,” a consolidated agent or

“author” in the Hobbesian mold, of the aggregate—those figures strain under the pressure to represent the everyday experience of Protestant believers. Their experience is troubled by the epistemological demands created by Calvinist theology and the advent of protocapitalist financial institutions (*DLG*, 119). As Chapter Two shows, Aphra Behn is acutely perceptive of the moral and formal implication of these demands. She explores what happens when the bare word binds neither economic agents nor professed participants in saving faith, and especially the ways in which the emergent economic order complicates endeavors to differentiate between good- and bad-faith asseverations.

CHAPTER TWO:
APHRA BEHN AND THE CHARACTER OF THE CREDIT REVOLUTION

In *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684–7), Aphra Behn depicts a London elite governed by appetite, interest, and—ideally—the obligations conferred by verbal contracts. Her characters must negotiate a social world crowded with schemers bent on erotic domination, men and women whose protestations and intentions rarely match. One character’s compound oath highlights the urgent need to “gain a credit” in a world so constituted.¹ As the servant Brilljard relates, “Octavio kneel’d and beg’d she would but only hear him speak, he pawn’d his soul, his honour, and his life...in fine, my Lord, he vow’d, he swore, and pleaded till she with patience heard him tell your story” (*LL*, 362). The operative metaphor, which equates swearing with pawning, invests Octavio’s speech-act with credibility. Breaking such a promise carries high stakes: if proven false, the swearer forfeits his reputation, his life, and even his soul, ostensibly invaluable possessions offered as security against his word. When set against the countless instances of vow-breach chronicled by Behn’s letter writers and third-person narrator, however, the comparison becomes strained. Brilljard pays homage to the notion that oaths count as a transaction whereby one hazards valuable possessions (fortune, life, honor, or soul, depending on the formulation) on the fulfillment his word. Yet in *Love-Letters*, perjured characters live on, to lust and swear and scorn anew. The problem of credibility, of distinguishing between false professions and valid pledges of love and friendship, permeates every relationship described in Behn’s novel. In the final assessment, the only firm ground for “crediting” the oaths of a professed friend or lover is the prior conviction—or deeply felt wish—that one’s counterpart is sincere.

¹ Aphra Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*. Ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 1996), 362, henceforth cited parenthetically as “*LL*.”

Brilljard's metaphor indulges the fantasy of a grounded, coercive system of assurance, but it also reveals Behn's interest in the parallels between the principles of economic credit and claims to credibility issued in romantic or religious contexts. Because it exhibits Behn's most sustained attempt to explore this relationship, *Oroonoko* will be the primary focus of this chapter. But I return to *Love-Letters* in the pages that follow in order to ask how, in Behn's vision, the unsteady grounds of credit and credibility shape the contours of personal and literary character. If *Love-Letters* flags Behn's anxiety about the possibility of evaluating the credit of potential partners in romantic exchange, her most widely studied work of prose fiction, *Oroonoko*, clarifies the specific economic pressures in back of that anxiety. Both texts reveal Behn's ambivalence about the possibility that character might serve as a key to negotiating a the epistemological challenges posed by Britain's transition to a protocapitalist economy.

Though set across the Atlantic and at least several decades earlier than its date of composition, *Oroonoko* bears the marks of Behn's volatile historical moment. As in *Love-Letters*, Behn's conservative anxieties manifest in a preoccupation with episodes of word-giving. In her novella, those episodes illustrate the prevalence of commercial forces that prove anathema to the code of aristocratic masculinity embodied by her stand-in for Stuart authority and integrity. On the eve of the forced abdication of James II, her sovereign and sometime patron, Behn wrestles with the ramifications of economic changes concomitant to the Whigs' rise to hegemony, and particularly with the emergence of a credit system that transformed conceptions of property from "real" and finite to mobile and imaginary. Her novella demonstrates at once the nostalgic appeal and the inevitable collapse of an aristocratic code of honor that "enjoins implicit faith in the word of others."² The eponymous hero responds to the shift in much the same way

² Michael McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 113.

that Bunyan's Faithful responds to the danger of false claimants to the fellowship of the godly: by insisting that the evidence of personal character might act as a guarantor of a person's word and a deterrent against defaulting on it.

Oroonoko's project would seem to mark Behn's novella as part of (or precursor to) the typographical culture that Deidre Lynch ascribes to early eighteenth-century Britain. He wishes to counteract the negative effects of the credit episteme by promoting a "pictorial" one in which characters become circulating, cooperative objects of interpretation—"visible bodies" that purvey "effable, public knowledges," in Lynch's terms.³ A person's character functions as a self-evident truth against which to measure the sincerity of his or her professions. Yet Behn's novella exposes Oroonoko's conception of character as a fantasy, and the prince himself experiences and embodies the false promise of mutual intelligibility.

Turning to Aphra Behn's fiction from the late 1680s serves two ends, then. First, this approach puts pressure on Lynch's account of the intersection of modern economic thought and genres of character writing. Second, it demonstrates the projection of the Calvinist conception of character developed in *The Pilgrim's Progress* onto a volatile economic and political landscape. Neither Behn's genuine commitment to the principles of deism nor the politic Catholic sympathizing in her occasional writings prevents her from weighing the resources of an earlier theological tradition. In fact, Behn's method of characterization might be described as an attempt to literalize the understanding of personhood produced within Calvinist discourses, in which outward signs project or manifest secret, inward truths. For Bunyan and the broader tradition of English dissent in which he participates, such outward signs consist of any trait or action that makes one's ethical and spiritual status part of the environment—e.g. actions, reputation, or

³ Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 25–7.

language. Behn takes this a step further, if only in a provisional way: she experiments with locating the evidence of character on the physical surfaces of the body.

More than the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels taken up by Lynch and Mary Poovey, which were shaped by the legacies of the financial revolution, *Oroonoko* and *Love-Letters* emerged at the very site and moment of transition. Behn's fiction reflects a Britain on the verge of conjoined political and economic revolutions. Her engagement with the epistemological consequences of those revolutions makes her works instructive test cases for Lynch's argument, which correlates flatness to intelligibility. I wish to argue that Behn scrutinizes rather than assumes the intelligibility of flat characters, alternately gesturing towards and rejecting the authenticity of the silent language of the body, the efficacy of physiognomic reading, and the very representational status of types.

Behn's method of characterization yields objects quite opposed to the model of character outlined by Lynch and espoused by Oroonoko himself. She peoples her imaginary worlds with two-dimensional figures that court but ultimately defy interpretation. Rather than accommodating readers to the practical instruments of credit, as critics like Lynch and Mary Poovey argue of eighteenth-century fiction in general, Behn's works reproduce the uncertainty attendant on navigating a credit-based economy. Her model of character is suited to the task of translating that confusion into discursive form, and, thus, suited to her peculiar realist project: depicting the conditions of an environment in which apparently mutually exclusive categories (of familiar relations, of cultural domains, and of generic modes) do not hold up, and Calvinism's inside/outside dualism collapses under the pressure of representing experience in all of its dimensions.

ENGLAND IN 1688

Despite the recent attention paid to Aphra Behn's life and works, and particularly to *Oroonoko*, treatments of the political and economic dimensions of her prose fiction remain scarce. Beginning with George Guffey, several scholars over the last thirty-five years have explored the relation between the novella and its immediate historical moment.⁴ As Behn composed *Oroonoko* in a fit of creative energy in late 1688, the last legitimate monarch from the Stuart line, to which she was fiercely loyal, faced imminent deposition. Following the death of Charles II and the ascension of James II in 1685, members of both the Whig and Tory parties dissented against James' Catholic sympathies, and the Duke of Monmouth led a failed rebellion. During the summer of 1688, encouraged by political opposition groups seeking the deposition of James and the ascension of William of Orange, the Dutch made preparations for war on England. As Guffey observes, Behn chose to dedicate *Oroonoko* to Richard Maitland, a "strong Tory and supporter of the Stuart dynasty" and, in her title proper, to balance her reader's attention between "The Royal Slave" as a literary type and *Oroonoko* as an individual.⁵ The term by which the narrator most frequently refers to *Oroonoko* is "Caesar," an appellation which Behn frequently assigns to Charles II in her occasional poetry and which in her time carried the figurative denotation of "an absolute monarch."⁶

Guffey also observes that Behn's depiction of Coramantien departs from contemporary travel narratives, such as that by William Bosman. Laura J. Rosenthal adds that the "social, political, and educational institutions of Coramantien, as Behn describes them, are more like

⁴ George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: Occasion and Accomplishment" in *Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope* (Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, 1975): 1–41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

those of Restoration England than those of the Gold Coast of seventeenth-century Africa.”⁷ Behn’s fictionalized description of Oroonoko’s homeland, therefore, invites a comparison of the royal slave to the Stuart monarchs, and particularly to James II. In the sense that he possesses an inherent virtue and nobility requisite to absolute rule as well as a legitimate claim to the admiration and obedience of his subjects, even when deprived of his political base, Oroonoko resembles James II in the Tory imagination of the late 1680s, after that king’s Catholic leanings stoked the flames of opposition to his administration. Both leaders lost support, Oroonoko by his forced departure from his kingdom and James by suspicions of his religious orientation. Like Charles I, Oroonoko is ultimately betrayed by his followers, and like that king he bears his execution with stoic dignity.

Their similarities suggest that Behn’s royalist ideology energizes a narrative that functions more as a paean to legitimate absolute authority and an endorsement of the “hierarchical and elitist values of the ruling class” generally—or even a political allegory for the gradual erosion of Stuart power over the course of the seventeenth century—than as the biography of a historical African prince, a “proto-abolitionist” tract, or a “feminist corrective to *Othello*,” as some have argued.⁸ It’s worth noting, though, that attempts to read Behn as a “Tory propagandist and Stuart apologist” are reductive; with reference to *Oroonoko*, at least, Behn’s particular brand of royalism is founded on “an idealized aristocratic ethos” rather than a Dryden-

⁷ Rosenthal, “*Oroonoko*: Reception, Ideology, and Narrative Strategy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, Ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 152.

⁸ Anita Pacheco, “Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34 (1994): 491–506; Elizabeth D. Gruber, “Dead Girls Do it Better: Gazing Rights and the Production of Knowledge in *Othello* and *Oroonoko*,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 14 (2003): 99–117.

like endorsement of patriarchal theories.⁹ As Melinda Zook points out, Behn argues in favor of hereditary monarchy, but her devotion stems from faith in the transcendence of the “noble mind and heart” over any constraints, including those posed by “dull customs and traditions, things acceptable for the common castes of society.”¹⁰ This qualification helps to resolve an apparent contradiction between Behn’s Tory politics and her critique of domestic tyranny (such as that imposed by Oroonoko’s grandfather in the first part of the novella) and to reconcile modern scholars’ images of Behn the political writer and Behn the proto-feminist.

Although these accounts are helpful in sketching the parameters of Behn’s political position, they make only passing reference to the influence of a fierce economic debate on the volatile politics of the 1680s. Rosenthal acknowledges the “emerging forces of mercantile capitalism” that, by promoting the expansion of the bourgeoisie and obviating upper class sectionalism, undermined divine-right Toryism and threatened James’ tenuous hold on power. But she stops short of offering a more specific explanation of the shape those forces take, either in the political atmosphere that produced the Glorious Revolution or in the novella itself. In his several treatments of the manifold contexts and consequences of the Revolution of 1688–9, Steven Pincus adjudicates between humanist (i.e. “Pocock-ian”) and social-scientific accounts of the relationship between the transformation of Britain’s political economy in the late seventeenth century and the ideological currents of the Revolution. He provides a rich sense of the politicized debate about emergent capitalist institutions and draws a causal link between the revolution and

⁹ Melinda Zook, “Contextualizing Aphra Behn: Plays, Politics, and Party, 1679–1689,” in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, Ed. Hilda L. Smith and Carol Pateman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998): 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 77.

the economic paradigm shift of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹¹ Pincus argues convincingly that, because they focus on “a few canonical texts divorced from the material, social, and political contexts in which they were produced,” historical and literary-historical accounts of “the Glorious Revolution have focused so narrowly on traditional political and religious issues that they have failed to note the vicious and important debates over political economy which both preceded and deeply influenced the events of 1688–89.”¹² Pincus uncovers a pre-history of the so-called Financial Revolution of the mid-1690s in the form of Whig arguments in favor of the national bank and a system of public credit. Throughout the Restoration, a debate raged between Tories and Whigs about whether England should be an agrarian or a “commercial political economy,” whether it should base its economic identity on “mobile” and imaginary or “real” and finite property.¹³ Pincus demonstrates that these competing visions of England’s political economy corresponded to the divisions between Tory and Whig, and that the arguments “played a role in generating the ideological energy that erupted in 1688–89.”¹⁴

The well-documented Protestant fear of a Catholic monarchy, which reached a climax with the birth of James’s son on June 10, 1688, undeniably added fuel to revolutionary fires, but ebbing popular support also registered dissatisfaction with his regime’s economic policies, which favored an agrarian model founded on real property and thus, according his detractors, inhibited the development of commercial society. On these grounds, Pincus refutes J.G.A Pocock’s claim

¹¹ See Pincus, “Whigs, Political Economy, and the Revolution of 1688–89,” in *Cultures of Whiggism: New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Ed. David Womersley (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2005) and *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009).

¹² Pincus, “Whigs, Political Economy, and the Revolution of 1688–89,” 64 and 78.

¹³ *Ibid*, 64–5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 73.

that “the assertion of the commercial order” did not factor into the English ideological debate in the buildup to the events of 1688–89, arguing instead that the “credit revolution” that transformed property was actually an intended consequence of the revolution.¹⁵

Moving the economic transformation to center stage, as Pincus does, helps us to make sense of Behn’s textured vision of the political climate and its deleterious moral effects.

Oroonoko gives the lie to Pincus’s suggestion that the “imaginative literature” of the period has led historians astray by obfuscating the “revolution of political economy” that preceded the Whig victory.¹⁶ In fact, the debate over political economy was sufficiently prominent in 1688 that Behn associates the rise of both credit and commercial society with threats to absolute monarchy and to the cult of heroic, masculine virtue through which its legitimacy was grounded. I contend that Behn’s best known imaginative work enacts the competing, highly politicized economic programs at stake in the debate by pitting the titular hero, a figure (albeit, for reasons I discuss in this chapter, a problematic one) of royal authority, against English colonists engaged in forms of exchange structured according to capitalist principles.

The competing models of character that emerge during their confrontations stand in for the disparate notions of property in back of each program. If Oroonoko’s invocation of mercantile logics (via his insistence on an idea of character parallel to real property) bespeaks a figurative alignment with the Tory economic paradigm, then Behn’s attention to the implausibility of his idea of character further complicates political readings of the novella. Indeed, there is a way in which Behn’s attention to the intelligibility of character unsettles the Whig position, as well. Behn’s treatment of character foregrounds and problematizes what is on

¹⁵Pincus, “Whigs, Political Economy, and the Revolution of 1688–89,” 63. For Pocock’s argument, see *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 108 and 112, and *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 424.

¹⁶Pincus, *1688*, 369.

Pocock's account a distinctly Whiggish project: making personal character into a "ground" of civic virtue and, by extension, political authority.¹⁷ As I argue in this chapter's final section, Behn neither endorses nor flatly rejects Oroonoko's approach to the system of exchange operative in British Suriname, and her endorsement of the colonial enterprise in general reveals the intermingling of Tory and Whig interests rather than a tacit acknowledgement of the superiority of the Whig argument for the primacy of protocapitalist institutions.

Behn, therefore, offers an "imaginative work" uniquely attuned to the ferocious but often overlooked debates about Britain's political economy that raged during its moment of composition. She also offers a record of her complicated response to those debates and to the notions of property upheld by proponents of Tory and Whig economic programs. Before the Financial Revolution and before the turn of the eighteenth century, Behn recognizes that "English society had been taken over by hard-faced *homines economici* obedient only to the laws of market behavior."¹⁸ According to the royalist position, the conditions of the incipient economic order render the conventional aristocratic sense of honor obsolete and transform implicit faith in parole into foolish credulity. Negotiating the public sphere after the economic

¹⁷ In *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, Pocock describes the conflicted movement within British political thought away from a Machiavellian/Harringtonian conception of "virtu," which ascribed political authority to the literal ground secured by force. Apologists for the Whig oligarchy answered this martial version of civic virtue by promoted a model of political authority as established by a sympathetic capacity polished by economic politesse. The Whig commercial order, on this account, promised a nonviolent means of affirming political legitimacy, but the authority it conferred was vulnerable because of its uncertain ground. I suggest that, through her novella, Behn illustrates that character doesn't function as a ground—stable, visible, and subject to readerly comprehension—but as a code to be deciphered (under the best of circumstances and with the right technology).

¹⁸Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 113. Pocock contends that English society's moment of self-recognition took place around 1700, after the establishment of the national bank and the credit revolution. Behn's fears seem prophetic, until we consider how pervasive mercenary interests are in both *Oroonoko* and *Love-Letters*. In Behn's reflections of contemporary English society, royalist fears of the consequences of the rise of commerce have already been realized, and Behn seems resigned to that fallen contemporary reality.

paradigm shift, Behn suggests, means adopting a more skeptical posture vis-à-vis claims to credibility. In turn, the need to distinguish between authentic and fraudulent claims to credibility bolsters the appeal of a notion of character as the grounds of assurance. Over the course of this chapter, I attempt to suss out Behn's nuanced attitude toward the plausibility of that conception of character in both *Oroonoko* and *Love-Letters*.

SWEARING BY GOD

The first instance of reciprocal word-giving in *Oroonoko*, in this case between the protagonist and the perfidious English captain by whom he is enslaved, foregrounds the two models of character at play in the novella: Oroonoko's, based on a distinctly European code of "honour"; and that of his English enemies, which is inflected by the principles of credit and justified by professed piety. Although he has already fallen victim to the captain's treachery, Oroonoko readily believes his promise, delivered by proxy, to return the prince and his companions to Coromantien, so he abandons his resolution to starve himself: "Oroonoko, whose honour was such as he never had violated a word in his life himself, much less a solemn asseveration, believed in an instant what this man said."¹⁹ The captain explains his own, ironic mistrust of Oroonoko as a result of "the difference of their faith," claiming—again through intermediaries—that he had "protested to him upon the word of a Christian, and sworn in the name of a great god, which if he should violate, he would expect eternal torment in the world to come" (*O*, 35). In his stern counter, Oroonoko registers the difference between their models of character:

¹⁹ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings*. Ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 34–5, henceforth cited parenthetically as "*O*."

Let him know I swear by my honour, which to violate would not only render me contemptible and despised by all brave and honest men, and so give myself perpetual pain, but it would be eternally offending and diseasing all mankind, harming, betraying, circumventing, and outraging all men; but punishments hereafter are suffered by oneself, and the world takes no cognisances whether this god have revenged 'em or not, 'tis done so secretly, and deferred so long, while the man of no honour suffers every moment the scorn and contempt of the honest world, and dies every day ignominiously in his fame, which is more valuable than life. (*O*, 35–6)

He asserts “that such a social and secular moral principle as honor is a superior guarantor of moral conduct.”²⁰ Fear of disgrace carries greater coercive force than a religious oath, even taking the latter at face value, because the repercussions for a man who violates his word are immediate, severe, and public. To default on his word would damage Oroonoko’s “fame,” which the narrator elsewhere refers to as his “character,” invoking the sense of reputation, the reports which Christian uses to discredit Talkative in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Character circulates in Oroonoko’s model, but like real property, it is finite and readily intelligible; one’s character is either good or bad, a man either “honest and brave” or not. The ethical content of character can be tested and confirmed, measured against expectations and reports.²¹ Later, the narrator justifies

²⁰ Pacheco, “Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” 500.

²¹ Oroonoko’s merit, reports of which spread amongst the colonists before his arrival to the plantation, is confirmed on sight. But the narrator’s account of her first encounter with Oroonoko reveals that the evaluation of his personal character—the spectator’s work of balancing reputation against visible evidence of his participation in broad ethical categories like hero and villain, credible and untrustworthy—involves a more complex affective response. Although she takes pains to draw a correspondence between Oroonoko’s royal status and his self-evident personal qualifications, Behn registers the inadequacy of reputation to capture the protagonist’s particularity, and especially his capacity to affect his admirers: when she finally “sees” Oroonoko, she “was as greatly surprised... as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond report I found him” (*O*, 11). When Oroonoko’s grandfather endeavors to “confirm” the “character” he has received of Imoinda, “he found her all he had heard” (*O*, 15). Here, Imoinda’s reputation for great beauty matches her person, but the recognition of that correspondence does more than simply confirm her ethical character: it activates the old king’s desire. Such episodes suggest that, as they submit to reading of this sort, Behn’s characters also become objects of wonder and desire. “Seeing” these persons involves more than lining up their reputed, professed, and

her self-consciously lengthy, tangential interruption of the chronological narrative (pages 47 to 57) on the grounds that it offers “some proofs of the curiosity and daring of this great man, [and] I was content to omit nothing of his character” (*O*, 57). According to this formulation, the components of Oroonoko’s character—attributes like “curiosity and daring”—can be inventoried and documented; it is possible to leave out a characteristic or its “proof,” but also, apparently, to “omit nothing.”

Both Oroonoko and the captain regard personal character as an index of credibility, a familiar move for creditors and debtors alike during the long eighteenth century.²² For Oroonoko, the concept of character is anchored to the demonstrable truth of merit or birth, and it thereby anchors claims to creditworthiness in past, public actions and in the pressing need to maintain one’s good name. Where that model holds, the decision to credit or withhold credit depends on the swear-ee’s assessment of the swearer’s fully visible character. Oroonoko, thus, conceives of character as an analogue to real property: fixed, finite, and measureable. What he is arguing for is the Calvinist model of selfhood extracted from its doctrinal context and rendered in ideal form, untroubled by the dislocation of sign and referent that preoccupies Bunyan.

By contrast, the captain’s model requires speculating about private, inaccessible states of conscience and the hoped-for correspondence between present and future selves. His version of character suits the credit system, in which property is unmoored to landed interests, as well as the

demonstrated merit and sorting them into ethical categories. It also involves attending to their singularity, and thus to their capacity to surprise or allure the observer.

²² In *Character of Credit*, historian Margot Finn documents the prevalence of creditor-debtor relationships in the fiction of the long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing along the way that credit both reflected and constituted personal character. She observes that creditors often unsuccessfully sought to assess debtors’ economic and ethical “worth” by reading superficial markers like clothes, marital relations, and spending patterns. My emphasis, here and throughout this dissertation, falls on the difficulties involved in that task of discernment, difficulties exacerbated by the compound nature of both relevant categories. “Personal character” and “credit” each contain economic, religious, and ethical dimensions.

Christian oathing practice that ostensibly authorizes his economic activities. Oroonoko's plight, considered in light of the foregoing discussion of the illegibility of character in Behn's works, illustrates the inadequacy of a model of character that adheres to mercantilist definitions of property. To acknowledge the allure of Oroonoko's model of character, as Behn does, is to recognize the epistemological danger inherent in the new economic order. But Oroonoko's insistence on the validity of that model when thrust (quite literally, in this case) into the credit system's circuits of exchange renders him vulnerable to deceit. The uncertainty effected by the rise of modern financial instruments only strengthens the appeal of this model of character, which nevertheless must give way to the captain's idea—to the speculative, inscrutable character of credit.²³

Oroonoko's famous critique of the colonist's treachery brings to the surface a concern at which Bunyan hints in his exposition on Calvinist doctrine. Even accepted as genuine, religious oaths work on a kind of credit system that parallels the economic model. To swear by God is to trade on a fantasy of speculation and futurity, and to accept that pledge is to invest in another individual's genuine faith in and fear of an omnipotent and omniscient deity that enforces

²³ Behn bolsters her own claim to authorial credit by appealing to her subject's self-evident moral character: "I was myself an eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down, and what I could not be witness of I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself" (*O*, 6). As Vernon Guy Dickson observes, Behn defers accountability for the veracity of her narrative. "Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in English Literature: 1500–1900* 47 (2007): 573–94. In so doing, she also enacts the model of assurance promoted by Oroonoko, grounding her claim to credibility within the literary marketplace in Oroonoko's unimpeachable moral character. The veracity of the tale, though relayed in her language, does not depend on her word. That Behn leans on the same model espoused by her hero, one that conceives of character as a form of (transparent) evidence or security, suggests its appeal. But does it count as an endorsement of Oroonoko's conservative understanding of credit in the economic sense of the term? As I argue in the final section of this chapter, the text as a whole resists attempts to read it for a coherent political ideology or a clear position on the economic debate. Rather, Behn's ambivalence toward aristocratic honor and the forces of commercial society anathema to it structures *Oroonoko*'s well-documented narrative inconsistencies and complicates Oroonoko's status as a mouthpiece for Behn's views.

punishments in the hereafter. In *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, J.G.A. Pocock writes that the very concept of “futurity” emerged during the Financial Revolution, when property “ceased to be real and [became] not merely mobile but imaginary.”²⁴ Like government stock, the captain’s religious oath represents “a promise to repay at a future date” that will never actually come—in this world, at least. As Oroonoko observes, the consequences for violating such an arrangement are delayed, individual, and private; the compact is between one party and his god rather than between fellow men, and the second party cannot redress wrongs in the here and now. Oroonoko eventually discovers that faith, like coin, can be counterfeited. Although he never explicitly acknowledges the mercenary interests governing social relations in the colony, he has learned that, in a system that does not invest character qua reputation with intrinsic value, the possibility for trust becomes remote and the old system of word-giving becomes impracticable.

The operative system of assurance and word-giving in British Suriname, like both the vision of the credit system advanced by one side of the fierce debate about political economy and claims to conscience issued in an ecclesiastical context, offers no “good grounds for believing that promises would be performed and expectations fulfilled.”²⁵ The point here is not that the religious domain dissolves into the economic upon the emergence of the credit system, but that those domains overlap in their conceptions of credit and character. Both conceptions demand either blind faith in parole or a means to evaluate claims to good conscience, such as the method Oroonoko ineffectually brings to bear in his exchange with the colonists. While, as I argue in my first chapter, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* shows the dangers of blind faith and the problematic nature of assurance strictly within the framework of Protestant thought, Behn demonstrates the ways in which that problem relates to the economic conception of credit.

²⁴ Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 112.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 113.

Ultimately, the colonists give Oroonoko little reason to credit their words: “they fed him day to day with promises” and commission the narrator, whose “word would go a great way with him” to quell his growing discontent with assurances (*O*, 45). Even Trefry, whom both the narrator and Oroonoko seem inclined to exonerate, fails to fulfill his promise to conduct Oroonoko home as soon as possible (*O*, 38–9). After the cowardice of his fellow slaves dooms Oroonoko’s insurrection, he flatly rejects Byam’s ostensibly favorable terms of “composition,” which include the promise to excuse Oroonoko’s insubordination and release him, Imoinda, and their unborn child from slavery:

Ceasar told him, there was no faith in the white men or the gods they adored, who instructed ’em in principles so false that honest men could not live amongst ’em; though no people professed so much, none performed so little; that he knew what he had to do when he dealt with men of honour, but with them a man ought to be eternally on his guard, and never eat and drink with Christians without his weapon of defence in his hand, and for his own security never to credit one word they spoke. (*O*, 62)

The familiar coupling of faith and credit recurs in this passage, but here the terms are set in direct opposition. Having been duped repeatedly by Englishmen who present their belief in God as the foundation for their credibility, Oroonoko comes to identify professions of religious faith with discredit. Byam’s plot succeeds only through Trefry’s misguided intervention, and the narrator clearly attributes the error of “believing the governor to mean what he said” to Oroonoko’s benefactor rather than to the prince himself (*O*, 63). Trefry prevails upon Oroonoko to surrender through a combination of tearful entreaty and “wit and reasons,” but Behn’s toiled hero never completely abandons his posture of wary “defence.” He names his conditions for surrender and demands that the agreement “should be ratified by their hands in writing, because he had perceived that was the common way of contract between man and man amongst the whites” (*O*, 63). Oroonoko mistakenly assumes that setting the agreement in writing will somehow force the

English to honor it, but he rightly judges that a verbal pledge is in no way binding, and he makes an ill-fated attempt to adjust to the new system.

Michael McKeon points to Oroonoko's initial credulity as evidence of his status as an embodiment of the Restoration-era tension between implicit faith in parole and empiricist epistemology. On his account, the hero's capacity for freethinking skepticism about the Christian myth of the trinity, for example, belies his deep sympathy for a faith-based model of word-giving. McKeon argues that Oroonoko's hard earned conversion to "Western skepticism" is followed hard upon by his violent and ignominious death, suggesting Behn's nostalgic endorsement of the "native simplicity" that Oroonoko shares, at least at first, with the indigenous people of Suriname.²⁶ Yet Oroonoko's conception of "honour," and his commitment to accept the captain's word, itself relies on a kind of skepticism, a model of evaluating claims to credibility by way of careful scrutiny of the other party's personal character. From this first encounter, Oroonoko promotes a method of crediting that requires active interpretive engagement. His mistake consists of assuming that his European counterparts invest honor (and, thus, ethical character) with the same coercive freight that he does. He espouses implicit faith not in "the word" itself, but in a conception of character as a circulating, accessible form of knowledge, and as an index of credibility. He is not so much converted to skepticism, in other words, as he is disabused of the applicability of that conception of character to his New World environs.

In taking Behn as the subject of this chapter, I focus on a writer who responds directly to the problem of credibility as it unfolds within an economic context, and particularly to the pervasive moral consequences of the rise of the credit system. But I also want to stress that

²⁶McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 113.

Behn's articulation of that problem has theological resonances. Turning to Behn allows us to ask what happens to the Calvinist logics of character detection when overtly religious questions (like those addressed in the previous chapter) take a back seat to topical economic and political crises like the Revolution of 1688–9. Oroonoko's pointed critique of the colonists' organized religion flags Behn's sensitivity to epistemological concerns that, while foregrounded by debates about the financial revolution, trace their roots to the doctrines of English Protestantism. Like Bunyan before her, Behn explores the grounds of credit by staging attempts to evaluate pledges of, and pledges backed by, faith. Also like Bunyan, Behn treats personal character as a potential vehicle for demonstrable knowledge in the social domains governed by probability.

To the extent that Oroonoko's choice to credit or discredit the English slave-trader's promises depends upon his assessment of that man's religious character (and his own willingness to invest in another person's claims to genuine faith), Behn's hero confronts the same interpretive challenge faced by Bunyan's Christian and Faithful as they interrogate fellow travelers on the road to the Celestial City. Character is something that we must decipher through intellectual energy and in view of making sense of the topsy-turvy sublunary realm. Behn's approach gestures toward the appeal and portability of Calvinist strategies of evaluating character. Calvinist introspective discipline, reoriented, as I argue in Chapter One, toward the external field of characters and consumables by the time Bunyan composed his religious allegories, offers a failsafe when verbal contracts cease to enforce or constrain action—even for a supposed freethinker skeptical of the value of organized religion.²⁷ Behn's reluctance to

²⁷Sarah Ellenzweig, *Fringes of Belief*, 76. Ellenzweig overstates Behn's deist orientation, glossing over the writer's paeon to Catholicism in her dedication to Richard Maitland, as well as her endorsement of that denomination's symbolic forms of worship in *Love-Letters*. Behn's political allegiances no doubt influenced her fronted attitude toward Catholicism, but I would

challenge or espouse a particular system of religion should not be mistaken for indifference to religious questions. Rather, that reluctance underscores her textured engagement with a complex theological inheritance, in this case the extensibility of Calvinist strategies for assessing the truth of character via outward marks and measures. Whether these strategies consistently mitigate the erosion of implicit faith in promises remains an open but abiding question for Behn.

BODY LANGUAGE

Behn opens her dedicatory epistle to *Oroonoko*, addressed to the Catholic Jacobite Lord Maitland, by comparing her mode of description to portraiture. She considers the character-writer (in this instance the author composing her dedication) alongside “a picture drawer.” “a poet,” she opines, “is a painter in his way; he draws to life, but in another kind; we draw the nobler part, the soul and mind” (*O*, 3). Behn’s association of Oroonoko’s qualities of “soul and mind” with the beauties of his form and countenance blurs the distinction she argues for in her dedication. Although she privileges literary over pictorial character sketches in the abstract (writers sketch the “nobler parts,” and she predicts that “the pictures of the pen shall outlast those of the pencil”), her actual method of characterization strives (and fails) to unify interior and exterior qualities (*O*, 3). In Behn’s fiction as well as in the Calvinist paradigm, the insides and outsides of character sit in uneasy relation. Countenances sometimes communicate interior truths—with or without their owner’s permission—but superficial indicia cannot be relied upon to compensate for the loss of a system of assurance founded on honor.

The characters of both *Oroonoko* and *Love-Letters* are “legible persons” in an important way: their surfaces can reveal inner character in the sense of ethical content and social status. In

argue that her prose fiction reveals a more subtle sense of religiosity than Ellenzweig’s characterization suggests.

Oroonoko, for example, the hero's "person" manifests his noble qualities and royal birth, and Imoinda's beauty flags her "delicate virtues" (*O*, 12). Yet neither text features a perfect system of characterization (schemers' bad intentions are not transparent in the same way that inner virtue registers in the outer beauty of its possessors), nor are characters' attempts to read one another consistently successful. Truths are not simply evident in the worlds of the texts—perspicacity rather than perspicuity seems to be the ideal here—but in the "silent" yet "powerful language" of the eyes and face, Behn gestures towards a sincere, nonverbal discourse, a way to read characters in spite of their efforts to disguise their motives, feelings, and even their identities (*O*, 20). But does reading the ostensibly authentic language of body offer a way of navigating a social environment in which words, like credit and currency, can be counterfeited? In this section, I argue that in *Oroonoko* and *Love-Letters*, Behn that model of character reading up to scrutiny and that, by illuminating the threat of counterfeit character, she creates a limit case for critical accounts that promote a notion of early eighteenth-century literary characters as conduits of "effable, public knowledge."²⁸

The serendipitous reunion between Oroonoko and Imoinda in Suriname signals Behn's interest in the legibility of character. Behn figures the hero's recognition of his beloved as the gathering of an extensible list of external signifiers: "There needed no long gazing or consideration to examine who this fair creature was; he soon saw Imoinda all over her: in a

²⁸Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 27. Behn's preoccupation with body language and physiognomy would seem to corroborate Deidre Lynch's account of an eighteenth-century's "somatic culture" that invested the human body with "significant centrality." On the whole, though, the novella betrays ambivalence about the possibility that the surfaces of the body might reveal inward motions "in uniform, predictable, and so readable ways" (71). For further elucidation of eighteenth-century British culture's fascination with faces and other surfaces, see Richard W. F. Kroll, *The Material world: Literate Culture in the Restoration and early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991). Lynch draws on Kroll's study as she relates the contours of novelistic character to broader cultural forces in the first half of the century.

minute he saw her face, her shape, her air, her modesty, and all that called forth his soul with joy at his eyes” (*O*, 43). The strange formulation reflects a conception of personal identity as indexed by the face and body. Oroonoko recognizes, literally sees “all” that makes Imoinda Imoinda—her identity in both the literal and the psychological senses—is accessible to his “gaze.”

The silent language of the body promises an alternative to the uncertain authenticity of the word, a distinguishing feature of the late Restoration commercial world. In accord with his antiquated system of word-giving and in contrast to the dissemblers he encounters in British Suriname, Oroonoko’s words are completely authentic. His “discourse” accurately reflects the quality of his mind, and his virtuosic command of the “soft” language of love (he speaks through the “strange inspiration” of an “unknown power”) suggests that he uses no art when he courts Imoinda (*O*, 12–13). Because they are spontaneous and almost self-generating, his professions of love cannot be affected. At their first encounter, Oroonoko addresses Imoinda in “the silent language of new-born love,” telling her “with his eyes that he was not insensible of her charms” (*O*, 13). Shortly thereafter, Imoinda receives the king’s counterfeit gift “with an air of love and joy that could not be dissembled” (*O*, 15). A “change of countenance” lets Imoinda know the falsity of the rumors about Oroonoko’s fading passion, and the vexed lovers engage in a “parley of the eyes” when the prince attends his grandfather at the Otan. Imoinda

had time to tell the prince with her angry but love-darting eyes that she resented his coldness, and bemoaned her own miserable captivity. Nor were his eyes silent, but answered hers again, as much as eyes could do, instructed by the most tender, and most passionate heart that ever loved; and they spoke so well and effectually, as Imoinda no longer doubted but she was the only delight and darling of that soul she found pleading in ‘em its right of love...And ’twas this powerful language alone that in an instant conveyed all the thoughts of their souls to each other. (*O*, 19–20).

The eyes are truly windows to the “heart” and “soul”; they convey complex ideas in an “instant” through their silent but “powerful” and eloquent language—and they enable the pair to communicate without alerting the suspicious king to the renewal of their affair.

The same legibility of countenances and eyes obliges the couple to practice self-command and ultimately betrays Oroonoko to the king’s servile attendants. Imoinda receives the news of Oroonoko’s fickle affections “in all appearance with unconcern and content,” even though “her heart was bursting within” (*O*, 19). Cognizant of the dangers of revealing his love for Imoinda before his jealous grandfather, Oroonoko at first “showed a face not at all betraying his heart,” but at a glance from his beloved, the façade crumbles and his face reveals his suffering “notwithstanding all his determined resolution” (*O*, 19). At the sight of the king leading Imoinda into his chamber, the strain of keeping his “rage” and “wild frenzies” “within bounds” physically exhausts Oroonoko, who like Imoinda must “suffer without noise” and retire to give vent to his vehement passions in safety (*O*, 20). Only after Onahal assures him of the king’s impotence does Oroonoko regain composure. That change of countenance requires real “hope” and has a definite horizon—he can “look” only as “gay as ’twas possible a man in his circumstances could do” (20). Therein lies an important distinction between self-regulation and affectation. According to the logic of this episode, it is possible to temper or repress affect to a point, even to “force” a gesture of affection (such as the caress Imoinda uses to distract the king from the dangerous change in Oroonoko’s countenance), but characters cannot counterfeit emotions through their faces and eyes. Later, even the English captain, who is presumably able to disguise his bad intentions when he finally makes his false promises in person, cannot suppress a “blush on his guilty cheeks” when Oroonoko castigates him for his perfidy (*O*, 37). Such failures to modulate or even disguise vehement passions suggests that the body testifies to

the authentic emotional states of persons under scrutiny—and, thus, that exterior character counts as a kind of evidence, as one way to assess claims to credibility.

Yet Behn's preoccupation with the legibility of character is an uneasy one, as her presentation of John Trefry and the peculiar love affair between Aboan and Onahal attest. Through the relationship between Oroonoko and Trefry, Behn worries over the efficacy of gauging inner character through countenance reading. Trefry is the very picture of a young Restoration gentleman, "a man of great wit and fine learning" who immediately recognizes Oroonoko's exceptionality and promises "him on his word and honour he would find the means to reconduct him to his own country again" (*O*, 38). Trefry quickly earns Oroonoko's trust,

Though, as Oroonoko afterwards said, he had little reason to credit the words of a Backearary, yet he knew not why, but he saw a kind of sincerity and awful truth in the face of Trefry; he saw an honesty in his eyes, and he found him wise and witty enough to understand honour, for it was one of his maxims: a man of wit could not be a knave or villain. (*O*, 39)

Oroonoko "credits" Trefry's words in large part because he reads "sincerity" and "honesty" in the young man's "face." In some ways, Trefry demonstrates the friendship he professes. He uses legal legerdemain to protect Oroonoko from Byam's jurisdiction after the former's failed suicide, and Byam only succeeds in capturing and executing Oroonoko by drawing Trefry away from Parham plantation. As I have noted, Oroonoko excuses Trefry for his role in convincing him to accept Byam's terms of surrender, and in recounting that episode the narrator stresses that Trefry himself is a victim of Byam's mendacity.

Nevertheless, the failure of Oroonoko's attempt to read Trefry's physiognomy is contingent on Trefry's own failure to honor his promise. The passage above suggests that at some unspecified future moment of reflection, the hero recognizes that it was a mistake to "credit the words" of a professed friend based on the sincerity advertised by his countenance. Applied to

Trefry, Oroonoko's "maxim" proves inaccurate: he is no "knave" or "villain" (especially compared to the captain, Byam, and Banister), but his example shows both that faces can be deceiving and that abundant "wit" is not sufficient to understand or, more importantly, to practice "honour." Trefry's character cannot be so easily classified according to moral types because its content consists of a mixture of virtue and vice, sincere and dissembled intentions. Oroonoko's maxim assumes the integrity of mutually exclusive categories—the man of wit, on one hand, and the knave/villain on the other—that do not, in fact, stand up to experience. Oroonoko's classificatory logic is out of place in British Suriname, a context that produces inconsistent and inscrutable figures like Trefry rather than ossified types subject to classification along clear ethical lines (a problem to which I shall return in this chapter's final section).

The juxtaposition of Oroonoko's effective silent communications with Imoinda and his failure to penetrate the schemes of the English colonists suggests that only certain forms of relation and certain contexts uphold the model of visible character toward which Behn gestures and for which Oroonoko himself argues. On this reading, exterior character reveals essential natures in the private arena of romantic intercourse, such as the insulated space shared by Oroonoko and Imoinda, but not in the public, commercialized space into which Oroonoko has been inserted. Behn's hero mistakenly applies the conventions that obtain to his romantic relationship to his interactions with Trefry and the British slave-trader who betrays him earlier in the novella. Geography seems to matter, too, since character submits to Oroonoko's interpretive efforts in Coromantien and not in Suriname. Taken in isolation, these passages invite a reading of the social world of *Oroonoko* as divided into distinct dimensions (the romantic vs. the economic; European vs. "other"; colonial vs. African) analogous to the simple binaries that underwrite the notion of character as flat and self-evident: inside vs. outside; sincere vs.

fraudulent; or good vs. evil. But the text as a whole casts doubt on the viability of these distinctions, just as it casts doubt on the viability of two-dimensional character.

Aboan's seduction of Onahal, Coromantien's version of the superannuated beauty (a figure recurrent in Restoration drama), introduces the possibility of a counterfeited display of passion and, thus, the extension of the danger of credulity to the private, romantic realm. When Oroonoko asks Aboan to insinuate himself into Onahal's good graces in order to gain access to Imoinda, his loyal friend complies with alacrity, boasting that he will "make love so effectually that he would defy the most expert mistress of the art to find out whether he dissembled it or had it really" (*O*, 22). His efforts outwardly resemble Oroonoko's courtship of Imoinda: "he failed not to sigh in her ear, and to look with eyes all soft upon her and give her hope that she had made some impressions on his heart" (*O*, 21). The young courtier may have shown "the height of complaisance for his prince" by actually complying with Onahal's unabated sexual desire, but his motives in initiating the affair—which he does well before Oroonoko's command—blend genuine attraction with mercenary ambition. Aboan knows "that to make his court to these she-favourites was the way to be great, these being the persons that do all affairs and business at court" (*O*, 21). Moreover, he is only "half-feigning": he takes "pleasure" in engaging Onahal in the "discourses of love" (discourses conducted primarily through sighs and "tender glances") and he is attracted to her "sense and wit" if not to her body (*O*, 21).

Does Aboan's success prove that, contrary to Behn's tendency to conceptualize character as reading matter, even the "highest degree of love" can be dissembled (*O*, 12)? Onahal succumbs to false professions of love, but not necessarily through a failed attempt to practice physiognomy. She is desperate to believe Aboan's verbal assurances, but she says nothing about what he claims to have told her with his eyes. The matter is ultimately unsettled, but at the very

least, the affair reflects Behn's anxiety about the introduction of a dissembler into the economy. Even in Coromantien, and even within the sphere of romance, the problem of assessing claims to credibility plays out at the level of character. Aboan exploits the expectations that obtain to the nature of his relationship to Onahal, as well as her willing credulity, in the service of his ambitions—which are neither merely political nor merely erotic, and which are not explainable by the laws of the market. The practical question raised by this episode troubles the reading of discrete dimensions of experience: how does one identify the operative context, never mind the apposite set of prescriptions for evaluating credibility? Behn's Suriname itself is a site of mixture. Its Prelapsarian indigenous people share space with venal operators from Britain; its natural wonders are balanced against the harsh calculus of the colonial enterprise; and it is at once the backdrop for Oroonoko's romantic feats of hypervirility (his triumph over jungle beasts) and the scene of his and Imoinda's grisly, ignoble deaths. It may be that the hodge-podge of contexts and conventions that characterize Suriname are, in Behn's assessment, an unintended consequence of the colonial project.

DISORDERED CATEGORIES IN *LOVE-LETTERS*

I want to return, briefly, to *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* because the novel stages its scenes of word-giving in the ostensibly private, insulated spaces of romantic exchange and, therefore, illustrates the extension of the logic of credit to extra-economic contexts. Moreover, the novel offers a sustained investigation of the intelligibility and dimensions of character that makes explicit what *Oroonoko* reveals through Behn's presentation of the titular hero: the instability of apparently ordered categories. In *Love-Letters*, Behn is even less optimistic about the possibility of reading exterior character for marks of intention or

essential nature, and, therefore, about the status of personal character as a form of assurance. As in *Oroonoko*, the “rhetoric of love” consistently facilitates silent communication between Silvia and Philander (*LL*, 33). Philander also claims to have discovered Mertilla’s vow-breach and infidelity by scanning her body for clues. Mertilla’s person gives the lie to her dissembled sexual passion for her husband, and it also reveals her desire for Caesar, Behn’s figure for the Duke of Monmouth, whenever she is in his presence. She blushes and blanches, her heart races and her hands tremble, and illicit love “danc[es] in her eyes” (*LL*, 17).

Yet sundry passions can be disguised or feigned through “gallantry” and “good management” (*LL*, 126). Confronted with the possibility of execution for treason, Caesar submits a convincing but totally counterfeit performance of contrition before the king. He marshals “all the force of necessary dissimulation,” and in the eyes of the credulous monarch, his tears, trembling hands, and tender voice communicate the intensity of his feeling (*LL*, 330). Bent, for different but equally selfish reasons, on reconciliation late in the novel, Silvia and Philander successfully impose upon one another through similar performances of emotion, each convinced by the other’s dissembled love and repentance. Philander’s performance is so convincing that it blurs the line between authenticity and dissimulation: he “swears his faith with sighs, and confirms it with his tears, which bedew’d her fair bosom, as they fell from his bright dissembling eyes; and yet so well he dissembled, that he scarce knew himself that he did so” (344). In each case, the body promises but ultimately withholds an index of sincere emotion and intention; in and of themselves, surfaces do not reveal true character.

The problem of evaluating claims to creditworthiness and of discerning the personal character in which those claims are grounded manifests on a formal level, as well. Behn’s foray into the novel-in-letters reveals the possibilities and problems inherent to epistolary exchange,

which gestures toward an insulated one-to-one channel for intimate converse—a space for bearing one’s character to a trusted other.²⁹ Behn suggests that letter writing *can* license a salubrious discharge of sincere (because spontaneous) emotion, as it does for Silvia when she confronts the reality of Philander’s first act of infidelity. More often, though, letters license the transmission of inauthentic thoughts, feelings, and intentions. In Behn’s imagination, the letter is a form of transactional prose, each missive written, revised, and adjusted to a purpose or stratagem. As a calculated projection rather than an authentic reflection of self, the persona of the addresser does not necessarily match the character of the letter writer.

Such is the case with Philander, whose dislocation of professed and true character reveals itself only retroactively to Silvia and to the reader. Although Behn’s epistolary frame seems at first to collapse under the exigencies of her tales of erotic and political intrigue, the shift from letters to third-person narrative actually occasions this parallel experience of discovery. As Silvia learns to distinguish the character Philander projects through his letters from the shameless Lothario of her experience, the content of the epistles in the first volume necessarily look different, more like the performances of the sort described by the third-person narrator of Behn’s latter two volumes. The formal shift does more than highlight the limits of epistolary form or the contemporary ambivalence about the status of the letter as intimate correspondence; it also jars the reader into cognizance of the dangers of false oaths and dissembled character—without cultivating optimism about the possibility of timely detection.³⁰ Silvia’s own “true character,”

²⁹ In seeking to account for the eighteenth-century fascination with letters and literary form, William C. Dowling describes “epistolary space” in similar terms. *The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).

³⁰ Silvia does not learn any important lessons pertaining to character detection, beyond the obvious value of cynical withdrawal from the temptations of a fallen world. If anything, reading Philander’s letters to her against his intercepted letters to Octavio, and all of his letters against his actions, teaches Silvia to exploit the natural credulity of lovers for her pecuniary benefit.

which is out of step with her account of herself in her letters to Philander, is not accessible through the epistolary archive (*LL*, 257). Only through the narrator, who stands, Fielding-like, astride the positions of omniscience and impartial spectatorship in the novel's final installment, do we learn of Silvia's "abundance of disagreeable qualities" (*LL*, 257). And only the narrator grants the reader access to Silvia's inner welter of passions and interests, which neither registers on her placid exterior nor jibes with her attempts to fashion herself through her early love letters.

Most of the primary characters in *Love-Letters* function as analogs of historical personages, each of them embroiled in the scandal of Ford Lord Grey and Monmouth's failed rebellion.³¹ Behn's characters are therefore grounded in reported historical facts, and fixed to the structure of expectations generated by newspaper coverage of Henrietta Berkeley's abduction, Lord Grey's trial, and the couple's escape to the continent. The neat, one-to-one correspondences between these figures and real-life persons belies the slipperiness of character in Behn's narrative, which dwells with evident fascination and concern on the psychology of the characters' choices rather than on the bare plot imported from the emergent press. The ease with which a change of clothes transforms or obscures identity attests to that slipperiness. A cross-dressing Calista passes for her brother, Octavio, and Silvia inflames Don Alonzo's passion in the guise of three discrete persons, one of them male. With an exchange of wardrobes, the substitution of Antonett for her mistress, Silvia, is perfect:

Much of the third volume of the novel is devoted to an almost gleeful recitation of her machinations and conquests.

³¹ For a helpful "key" to the relationship between Behn's characters and relevant historical figures, and for an account of the sordid details of the scandal, see Janet Todd's introduction to the Penguin edition of *Love-Letters*, pp. xii and following. For a more sustained explication of what she sees as the extended "political allegory" of the novel, and its proposed expression of the distinctly "Protestant" politics of individualism, see Alison Conway, "The Protestant cause and the Protestant whore: Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25.3 (2001): 1–19.

Having drest her exactly, as she felt herself us'd to be, when she receiv'd Octavio's visits in bed, [Silvia] embraces her, and fancy'd she was much of her own shape and bigness, and that 'twas impossible to find the deceit... 'twas not easie to distinguish 'em. (*LL*, 211)

The series of mistaken identities that ensues—not all of them intended by the scheming ladies—points to the fungibility of identity even according to the most superficial definition, and to the consequent difficulty of distinguishing between distinct persons, never mind judging between an individual's true nature and her fraudulent account of herself. Behn raises questions about the distinctiveness of character, and the usefulness of characterological distinction in mitigating the epistemological and moral confusion produced by a social marketplace replete with counterfeit representations.

Behn's fraught attempt to make inner character visible points to the need, recognized by commentators of British political economy during the credit debates of the early eighteenth century, to recover what John Locke calls "demonstrable truth" in an economy founded on the exchange of mobile property. Reputation (character in another sense) is no longer a limiting factor in a system governed by protocapitalist institutions, so written and spoken pledges are not in and of themselves binding. Instead, Behn's traders in credit pay homage to the presence or promise of a mediating third party like God, as in the *Love-Letters* and *Oroonoko*. But, as the scenes of reciprocal oathing in *Oroonoko* demonstrate, Behn is at pains to show that faith in God can be counterfeited. The burden of weighing the truth-claim inherent to any promise, any assertion of credit, falls on the individuals involved in the exchange. Ideally, the legibility of character mitigates the vulnerability of that position. But in practice, physiognomy is an unreliable tool for interrogating claims to personal creditworthiness within overlapping economic, religious, and romantic contexts.

A further episode of *Love-Letters*, in which Silvia experiences profound moral confusion of her own because of her failure to assign categories to the other parties in her love triangle, points to the constraints of taxonomic logic and presages Behn's interest in Oroonoko as a failed type or emblem. In an early letter, Silvia insists on a classification for Philander:

You grew up a brother with me; the title was fixt in my heart, when I was too young to understand your subtle distinctions, and there it thriv'd and spread; and 'tis now too late to transplant it, or alter its native property: who can graft a flower on a contrary stalk? The rose will bear no tulips, nor the hyacinth the poppy; no more will the brother the name of lover (*LL*, 13).

Silvia insists on the unnatural quality of Philander's erotic attachment, weaving an extended horticultural metaphor in order to stress the concreteness of his fraternal relation to her. According to her argument, the boundary between "brother" and "lover" is as distinct and impermeable as those between different species of flower. Silvia's comparison between "grafting" and Philander's endeavor to dissolve the distinction between the categories of relation in play only reaffirms the moral grounds of her objection and the impossibility of his project. Later, though, Silvia succumbs to her as-yet inchoate passion for her seducer, and she laments the dangerous familiarity sanctioned by their legally prescribed bond. The closeness characteristic of the tie between brother and sister (eighteenth-century law and custom did not formally distinguish between consanguineous and legal variants of the relationship) encourages Philander to press his case and obliges Silvia to hear him out. As Mertilla points out in an accusatory letter, the overlap between the category of brother and lover in Silvia's mind puts her in danger of making a "rival" of her sister (*LL*, 76).

Available types of filial and institutional relationships are inadequate to Silvia's attempts to classify the forms of desire and affective affiliation at play. In Behn's fiction, classes of relation are not mutually exclusive, nor do they help her characters to order the worlds in which

they circulate. In that sense, Silvia's vexed efforts to classify Philander and Mertilla according to familiar categories of relation functions as a metonymy of Behn's broader method of characterization. The final pages of this chapter document the instability of such categories within *Oroonoko*, focusing primarily on Behn's treatment of the protagonist. Like the inadequacy of Sylvia's classifications and the inconsistent legibility of exterior character in both works, *Oroonoko*'s ambiguous allegorical status foregrounds the threatened failure of two-dimensional representation.

READING OROONOKO

Through her characterization of the prince himself—at first glance, the example par excellence of legible character—Behn at once courts and problematizes allegorical and emblematic readings of her novella. *Oroonoko* exhibits the perfect consonance between interior and exterior: the surfaces of his body convey his nature. During her initial sketch, the narrator observes that both the prince's "soul and body" are "admirably adorned" and that "the perfections of his mind" do not "fall short of those of his person" (*O*, 12). *Oroonoko* is remarkable for his innate and transparent gentility, in the dual sense of nobility of birth and mind: "he was adorned with a native beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy race, that he struck an awe and reverence even in those that knew not his quality" (*O*, 10). Even after exchanging his "rich habit" for blander garb, *Oroonoko* inspires admiration in colonists and fellow slaves alike. He

shown through all, and his osenbrigs (a sort of brown Holland suit he had on) could not conceal the graces of his looks and mien; and he had no less admirers than when he had his dazzling habit on; the royal youth appeared in spite of the slave, and people could not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it. As soon as they approached him, they venerated and esteemed him;

his eyes insensibly commanded respect, and his behavior insinuated it into every soul. (*O*, 39)

Despite his best efforts to blend in, Oroonoko's "looks and mien" betray his singularity.³² There is something less tangible at work as well, an air or aura of nobility emanating from his manner rather than a localized effect of any specific physical feature or "grace"—something about the way he unconsciously carries himself, the way he "behaves." In keeping with her Tory sympathies, Behn pays tribute to the absolute authority of a hereditary monarch: royalty is undeniable and irresistible, and it is "insensibly" projected rather than announced or performed.³³

Yet Behn's ambivalence about the possibility that persons readily submit to interpretation is nowhere more evident than in her initial sketches of Oroonoko. Despite his transparent qualifications and royal status, Oroonoko ultimately fails to embody the model of character he espouses during his confrontation with the English slave-trader. Upon finally seeing Oroonoko

³² For an alternative account of Oroonoko's status as a visual spectacle, and in this case as the object of a distinctly European gaze, see Ramesh Mallipeddi, "Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Sympathy in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45 (2012): 475–96. Mallipeddi draws a connection between the "hyperbolic intensity" of visual description in the novella and Behn's acknowledgement of slavery's transformation of the black body into a form of commodity (476). I focus instead on what I see as Behn's interrogation of the status of all bodies—of the superficial plane of personal and literary character—as legible objects within circuits of symbolic exchange. That is not to say that Oroonoko's blackness does not matter; rather, I propose that his blackness (and the particularity of his blackness, which Behn differentiates from the common order) is one of several features that problematizes his ostensible function as an allegorical personification or moral type.

³³ The failure to acknowledge royal status (and, by extension, the legitimacy of a sovereign) requires willful misrecognition and perverts what both Behn and Oroonoko see as a natural hierarchy among men. Contrary to some modern critics' inclination to read *Oroonoko* as a proto-abolitionist tract, the enslavement of a prince, and not slavery itself, counts as the great injustice in the novella. Oroonoko keeps and trades slaves himself, but he follows an ethics that preserves the natural order and protects nobility from falling into that low state (see his treatment of the captured Jamoan, 31–2). After his rebellion unravels, Oroonoko bitterly regrets "endeavoring to make those free who were by nature slaves, poor, wretched rogues, fit to be used as Christians' tools" (*O*, 62).

with her own eyes, Behn stresses that circulating reports fall short of a giving a full account.

“This great and just character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme curiosity to see him,” she writes,

But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprised when I saw him as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond all report I found him ... He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied. The most famous statuary could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not that brown, rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony, or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen and very piercing, the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His mouth, the finest shaped that could be seen, far from those great turned lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes ... [B]ating his colour, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. ... [W]hoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom, and would have confessed that Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well and governing wisely, had as great a soul, as politic maxims, and was as sensible of power, as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts. (O, 11–12)

What Behn has “heard” cannot prepare her for what she “sees” first hand, and what she sees outpaces her powers of description. Her awed depiction of Oroonoko’s person and qualifications dwells on the inexpressible particularity of her subject. According to Behn, Oroonoko threatens to exceed the standards of analogical representation: his form is the “most exact”; his nose of the “finest shape that could be seen” and his skin a “perfect ebony;” and the art of statuary itself cannot furnish a better example of the male form.

Faced with Oroonoko’s jarring exceptionality, Behn turns to available categories for sorting persons—black and white, African and European, royal and slave—but none adequately contains the object beheld. Oroonoko, advertised in very title of the work as a character type (“the royal slave”) actually exhibits an overloading of types: as Behn surveys his body, categories accumulate without coalescing into a comprehensible whole. The visible overloading of type on Oroonoko’s countenance forecasts his ultimate failure to signify in the manner of

Bunyan's emblems—in this case by “setting forth” Stuart kingship (or kingship in general), ideal male virtue, or the archetypal hero of romance.

In order to demonstrate Oroonoko's failure to serve as a paragon or an embodiment of Behn's conservative position with respect to the economic debates of the 1680s, I turn now to Behn's complex attitude toward the commercial principles that distinguish British Suriname from Coramantien, and Oroonoko from his English enemies. Biographical evidence of Behn's political orientation supports a reading of Oroonoko's character as a mouthpiece for Behn's critique of the Whig economic paradigm. The novella does not bear this reading out, however. Behn clearly sympathizes with Oroonoko's plight, but she stops short of endorsing his conservative attitude toward economic credit. The narrator's accounts of the colonist's interactions with the people of Suriname, for example, reveal conflicting attitudes toward the Indian's implicit faith in parole, a feature of their pre-commercial society and an extreme version of Oroonoko's trust in the integrity of a person's word.

Early in the narrative, the Indians appear as inhabitants of a prelapsarian society, men and women who in their blissful ignorance resemble “our first parents before the Fall” and represent “an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before Man knew how to sin” (*O*, 7–8). For the Indians, an oath is an absolute truth: “they once made mourning and fasting for the death of the English governor, who had given his hand to come on such a day to 'em, and neither came nor sent; believing, when once a man's word was passed, nothing but death could or should prevent his keeping it” (*O*, 8). Further in the paragraph, Behn channels the spirit of Michel de Montaigne's *Essay On Cannibals* (1580), deploying a society of Noble Savages free from corrupting “inventions of man” like “law” and “religion,” as a foil for European hypocrisy. The passage also suggests an interesting parallel to John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*

(1689), which figures the changes effected by the advent of money as a “fall from a state of nature into a state of culture.”³⁴ Behn attributes the Suriname Indians’ similar fall to the influence of the English colonists, who introduce them to commerce and to corrupting institutions like religion and law. In Behn’s formulation, it is not money specifically that introduces a dangerous acquisitiveness to man in his natural state, but modern commerce generally.

But the logic of commerce colors both the narrator’s explanation for the colonists’ decision not to exploit the Indians as human labor and her support of the colonial enterprise more broadly. The colonists, she writes, “caress [the Indians] with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world” because it is in their interest to do so:

With these people, as I said, we live in perfect tranquility and good understanding, as it behoves us to do, they knowing all the places where to seek the best food of the country and the means of getting it; and for very small and unvaluable trifles, supply us with what ’tis impossible for us to get...So that they being on all occasions very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress ’em as friends and not to treat ’em as slaves; nor dare we do other, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent. (*O*, 6 and 9)

The motivation for the colonists’ fraternal bond with the Indians is economic pragmatism rather than recognition of the Indians’ moral superiority or even their shared humanity. One paragraph after unequivocally praising Indian society as a prelapsarian utopia, the narrator observes without either explicit criticism or irony that the English reluctance to enslave the Indians stems exclusively from the colonists’ awareness that the latter are more useful as “friends” and too dangerous to subjugate.

³⁴ For this characterization of Locke’s economic theories, see John O’Brien, “The Character of Commerce: Persons, Property, and Imaginary Wants in Eighteenth-Century British Writings,” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995, 31.

While these early passages convey the narrator's admiration for the Indians' "natural simplicity," her description of the colonists' expedition to an Indian village later in the narrative reveals "that natural simplicity is an invitation to imposture."³⁵ She relates that "by the extreme ignorance and simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant religion among them, and to impose any notions or fictions upon 'em" (*O*, 54). The narrator describes the Indians' "ignorance" and "simplicity" as susceptibility to deceit—credulity in the pejorative sense—rather than as a sign of their moral superiority. But the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive: a population living in a Rousseauvian state of nature, however admirable their qualities in the abstract, are extremely vulnerable when thrust into contact with the English, representatives of "a society more Hobbesian than Hobbes himself could ever have envisaged."³⁶ The colonists brought with them to Suriname the contaminating influence of England's commercial society, polluting the Indian's innocence by educating them in "fraud," "vice," and "cunning" (*O*, 8). Behn's ambivalence to their credulity, like her depiction of the conflict between Oroonoko's notions of honor and the colonists' conception of economic credit, registers the tension between the nostalgic pull of pre-commercial morality and the inevitable triumph of the principles of credit.

Support for the colonial venture shines through the narrator's distaste for the acting authorities' mistreatment of Oroonoko. Twice during her "digression" from Oroonoko's tale, the narrator laments the loss of gold and other superabundant natural resources occasioned by England's concession of Suriname to the Dutch in the 1667 Treaty of Breda.³⁷

Certainly had his late Majesty of sacred memory [Charles II] but seen and known what a vast and charming world he had been master of in that continent, he would

³⁵McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 111–13.

³⁶Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 112.

³⁷In exchange, England acquired present-day Manhattan.

never have parted so easily with it... 'tis to be bemoaned what His Majesty lost by losing that part of America. (*O*, 47 and 57)

Both her endorsement of colonial expansion, understood as an extension of British dominion in the West Indies, and her fascination with the superabundant fruits of the land (“real” property by the most fundamental definition of the term) are consistent with the royalist model of political economy. But colonial expansion is a commercial endeavor driven as much by the principles of protocapitalism as it is by nationalist zeal. Anita Pacheco attributes the ambiguity to the unusual project of colonial expansion, which “reconciled ruling-class royalist discourse with the discourse of bourgeois mercantile capitalism” and brought about a gradual increase in “collaboration among elite groups—landed, mercantile, and professional—which brought with it an intermingling of cultural systems of value.”³⁸ This “intermingling” of traditional aristocratic and modern economic values, which obviated the code of masculine virtue based on honor, was not specific to colonial society. From the founding of Jamestown in 1607 onward, colonial expansion was at once a symbol of royal authority and an agent of the steady rise of commercial society and the bourgeoisie.

Oroonoko's New World context, then, helps to explain its narrator's seemingly contradictory support of her subject's code of honor and the colonists' economic practices. Caught in the transitional moment and in the site of that transition, Behn's narrator extols the ideal of honorable masculine virtue even as she illustrates its incompatibility to a project that interested merchants and landed nobility, Whig and Tory alike. In Behn's view, English society in 1688 was already “commercial.” Despite its obvious appeal for supporters of traditional aristocratic values and even viewed from a royalist perspective, *Oroonoko*'s honor had become tragically anachronistic. In a world so ordered, *Oroonoko* cannot be, as Vernon Guy Dickson has

³⁸ Pacheco, “Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*,” 502–3.

argued, “absolutely exemplary”; indeed, critics in search of Behn’s “pattern for moral action” within market society might be better served by turning to her late comedies.³⁹ *The Widow Ranter* (1689), for example, introduces characters like Friendly and Hazard, who occupy a middle ground between Oroonoko’s faith in a system of verbal contracts dependent the mutual intelligibility of personal character, on the one hand, and the English slave-trader’s willingness to exploit that faith, on other hand. They exhibit Odyssean cunning rather than Achillean strength, and they are successful in the implementation of their schemes to achieve economic solvency.⁴⁰ Behn’s nostalgic admiration for Oroonoko’s ethical code never evolves into a condemnation of the new economic order. She neither celebrates nor rejects that paradigm shift. As a result, the novella offers no clear pattern of action, no exemplar suited to the experience of the credit-based marketplace. Part of the project of *Oroonoko* consists in reckoning with the harsh reality of the emergent system of credit, both by acknowledging the morally deleterious effects wrought by the financial revolution and by examining potential avenues for negotiating the new economic order.

On this reading, Oroonoko is not simply a “conservative protagonist, an archaic remnant of the world before its fall into modern depravity,” as Michael McKeon proposes.⁴¹ Rather, he is a threat to the stability of the colonial enterprise. This accounts at least in part for the narrator’s ambivalence toward her subject in the novella’s dénouement. Presumably because she shares the

³⁹ Dickson, “Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” 578.

⁴⁰ Behn sets these characters against a rigid adherent to aristocratic virtue, Bacon, who suffers for his inability to adapt to the economic conditions of colonial Virginia. Friendly’s assertion that “to take advantage any way in war was never counted treachery” captures his and Hazard’s general philosophy for navigating power relations in the colony. Behn resolves the plot with the promise of a series of marriages, and deputy governor Wellman announces that Friendly and Hazard will join the governing council. The play’s optimistic conclusion suggests that Friendly and Hazard are positive models for an aristocratic virtue that works within social environments governed by the laws of the market without sacrificing the aristocracy’s distance from middle-class upstarts. That optimism veils Behn’s resignation, much more obvious in *Ornoonoko*, to the extinction of an aristocratic ethos.

⁴¹ McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 250.

general concern at the first signs of Oroonoko's restlessness, the narrator makes false promises to stall him and colludes with the other colonists to keep him under close surveillance once he makes it clear that he will no longer countenance slavery. Oroonoko has given the narrator every assurance that he will not harm his white friends, but when news reaches the colonists that he has led all the slaves off Parham plantation, she shares in their vivid fear of his capacity for violence: "we were possessed with extreme fear which no persuasions could dissipate that he would secure himself till night, and then, that he would come down and cut all our throats. This apprehension made all of the females of us fly down the river to be secured" (*O*, 64). When recounting Oroonoko's feats of martial courage or relishing in the description of his triumph over ravenous "tigers," as she frequently does in the first two-thirds of the novella, the narrator celebrates her subject's hypervirility as a sign of innate nobility. In this passage, though, his physical strength is the stuff of nightmare; confronted with a rebellious Oroonoko, the narrator and her fellow female colonists forget their shared, intense admiration of his mind and person as they imagine, contrary to both his character and their first hand verifications of it, that he would have no reservations about "cutting all our throats."

Suddenly, Oroonoko's otherness matters as something more than a backdrop against which to set his superlative traits. The noble savage—the apotheosis of masculine, European honor, despite his blackness—stands revealed as, simply, savage. In the following pages, heroic romance gives way to realism in the graphic descriptions of Imoinda's mutilation (the colonists locate Oroonoko by following the fulsome odor of her decaying body), Oroonoko's failed suicide by self-evisceration, and his castration and execution by dismemberment. The jarring transition, and the subsequent characterological instability, suggests the failure of the hero's generic type (a hero of tragedy or romance) to bridge the gap between the romantic and realistic

elements of Behn's generically promiscuous work. Although Oroonoko is not entirely out of place in his narrative (moments abound in which character and context accord), the shifting modes of the final third of *Oroonoko* unsettles his function within an overarching system of meaning at which Behn hints in the first parts of the novella.

The excessive violence of the novella's conclusion also troubles arguments that Oroonoko stands, through political allegory or analogy, for the Stuart kings or for kingship in the abstract. Such arguments cannot accommodate Oroonoko's feckless efforts to revenge Byam's perfidy and, when grief causes his plan to sputter, to take his own life with dignity.⁴² The ambivalence of the end of the narrative suggests that the novella cannot be read as a straightforward endorsement of the antiquated code of aristocratic virtue espoused by Behn's hero, or even as a nostalgic tribute to a moribund tradition. Moreover, it suggests the incompatibility between the character of Oroonoko and the mode of representation toward which the novella, with its obvious topical resonances and frequent invocations of royalist notions of kingship, clearly tends. Critics like Guffey are not wrong to point out these resonances, but they do fall short of reconciling the inconsistencies and ambiguities of the narrative with the allegorical schema it invites and ultimately withholds.

⁴² George Guffey offers the most sustained inquiry into the novella's political dimensions, arguing for Oroonoko's status as a pliable allegorical figure, a representative of different Stuart kings at different moments, and of the divinely inspired authority of the bloodline throughout. "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*." Guffey argues for a parallel between the executions of Oroonoko and Charles I. While Oroonoko does bear his death with stoic dignity (as Charles reportedly did), the narrative's unsparing description of the brutality of the act distracts from Oroonoko's handling of the ordeal. And, of course, Charles received a comparatively clean death. Guffey's dismissive remark that such violent acts were commonplace during the Restoration and would not have made a strong impression on Behn's readers is unconvincing. Catharine Gallagher argues in a similar vein, reading *Oroonoko* as an embodiment of sovereignty in the abstract and, thus, of Behn's "high Tory" orientation. *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Univ. of California Press, 1994).

Imoinda presents a similar challenge to the expectations. As Pumla Dineo Gqola has pointed out, Imoinda “figures in the narrative only in terms of her corporeality,” and her complementary function within Oroonoko’s tale frames her as “the typical and recognizable heroine of courtly love.”⁴³ But the narrator clearly sets her apart from both English women and Oroonoko, whose participation in (an admittedly outmoded) cult of aristocratic, masculine virtue distinguishes him from other African characters: Imoinda’s African-ness is inscribed on her very body, and repeated invocations of her status as Oroonoko’s property pass by without reflection or critique.⁴⁴ On Gqola’s reading, Imoinda’s character, however “flatly” rendered, outstrips simple generic categories and exhibits the strain of making her worthy of Oroonoko’s attachment without glossing over her racial otherness. I would add that her brutal death at the hands of her husband seems out of step with the almost exaggerated sentimentality of the early episodes of courtship, communicative silences, and dramatic reunion in the New World. Moreover, I contend that Imoinda’s incompatibility with the category of the “typical heroine” of courtly love narratives mirrors Oroonoko’s ultimate failure to serve as a “type” of (Stuart) kingship, an archetypal hero of romance, or a moral model. Taken together, the narrator’s treatment of the two lovers registers the tension between Behn’s method of characterization—her use of ostensibly flat and effable figures—and her commitment to represent the pitfalls and confusion that distinguish experience within a society governed by the forces and principles of modern economics.

In Behn’s hands, the question of whether personal character functions as a form of assurance begets a self-conscious inquiry into the possibilities and constraints of two-

⁴³ Pumla Dineo Gqola, “‘Where There is No Novelty, There Can Be No Curiosity:’ Reading Imoinda’s Body in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko or, the Royal Slave*,” *English in Africa* 28 (2001): 105–117, 108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

dimensional representation. Can allegory or emblem deliver on the promise to compensate for the conditions of the social marketplace, or does the imperative to represent those conditions accurately exhaust the resources of those modes? A sequence unfolds on both the thematic and formal planes of the novella: a problem is identified and its solution promised, and then that solution is exposed as fantasy. Oroonoko discovers to his dismay that the evidence of demonstrable character (the knowledge made accessible by reputation and physiognomic reading) does not reliably index interior character (the truth of intention, or of a person's ethical content). Despite Oroonoko's initial confidence, claims to creditworthiness cannot be grounded in "good" character.

At the formal level, the collapse of analogical representation plays out in the same way. Behn entertains the possibility that the discursive world of her novella constitutes one of several coherent systems of meaning of the sort that critics like Lynch see at play in early eighteenth-century fiction. But that coherence hinges on the protagonist's status as a figure for either the Stuarts, the hero of romance, or exemplary behavior within market society. The conclusion of Oroonoko's tale forecloses each possible frame. That Behn unsettles the picture in the last pages of her work suggests that she borrows a central lesson from Calvinist theology. Like Bunyan and other proponents of predestination, Behn suggests that the end of the story is what matters. However consumers of narrative strive to line up expectations with available evidence—asking, what sort of story is this, or what sort of man is he?—those expectations are often disrupted at the last moment. Just as a Calvinist believer discovers his true salvific state on the Day of Judgment after passing his life as a saint, Behn reveals the disorder of her discursive world in the final strokes of her pen. If she remains committed to narrative ways of knowing (to the project of representing experience through fiction as well as the task of evaluating claims to credit through

external evidence), Behn is equally invested in revealing the inadequacy of the typological reflex toward which she is drawn.

Through her careful attention to the flatness and legibility of personal and literary character, Behn exhibits the Calvinist framework under pressure to articulate and resolve the problem of conferring credit in its overlapping economic, religious, and romantic applications. Pressed into the service of documenting this crisis of credit, characters like Oroonoko become unwieldy amalgamations that map out onto several axes (e.g. spatial, geographical, and temporal) at once. As such, they fail to serve as accessible objects of interpretation. Such characters, like the forms of relation confronted by Silvia in *Love-Letters*, cannot be separated into their constituent parts or organized into mutually exclusive categories. Their illegibility derives in large part from their status as the nexus of an extensible list of binaries like inside vs. outside, projected vs. essential natures, past vs. future, the commercial vs. the extra-economic.

Behn's preoccupation with the pressures and pitfalls of immediate experience reflects—and demands—her adoption of an increasingly capacious, horizontal perspective. That perspective seems opposed to the vertical orientation favored by the sanctioned Christian history and the typology that unifies it, but one self-styled translator of sacred narrative, Bunyan, initiates the work of re-narrativization that Behn carries forward. Like Bunyan, Behn struggles to find the form or forms for representing an experience in which the sacramental order no longer coheres. The felt need to locate grace—and its economic analog, credit—in the word and words of other agents shapes the work of both writers, despite their disjunctive fronted positions vis-à-vis organized religion. Unlike Bunyan, whose implicit critique of the Bible's authority (its ability to tell us all that we need to know) is balanced against his confidence that the believer has final recourse to God, Behn attempts to translate into discursive form a world in which complex social

negotiations vex efforts to locate grace or credit in the personal character of agents who come into view and in which one can no longer look up to God as an arbiter.

CHAPTER THREE:
DESIRE AND PERSONHOOD IN ELIZA HAYWOOD'S AMATORY FICTION

Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725) depicts the erotic adventures of a protean heroine. An unnamed young lady of "Quality and reputed Virtue" poses as a prostitute in a theater and then falls in love with the libertine Beauplaisir.¹ She circumvents her lover's inconstancy by adopting a series of disguises as she pursues him from London to Bath and back. Her facility in manipulating superficial details like attire, hair color, and accent "made it impossible [for her] to be known, or taken for any other than she seem'd" (*F*, 52). She is unrecognizable except as the "characters" that she inhabits: the prostitute *Fantomina*, the country maid *Celia*, the *Widow Bloomer*, and the fair incognita (*F*, 57). Per the young lady's design, *Beauplaisir* regards each persona as a discrete individual, conflating character in the sense of *dramatis persona* with personal identity.

Even as she oscillates between characters, however, the heroine's identity as "that lady whom she really was" remains fixed, continuous with her desire for *Beauplaisir*. While meditating on the difference in his reception of the *Widow Bloomer* and *Fantomina*, the young lady introduces a category consistent with her sense of "who and what she was": the person (*F*, 42). Haywood writes,

WHEN the expected Hour arriv'd, she found that her Lover had lost no part of the Fervency with which he had parted from her; but when the next day she receiv'd him as *Fantomina*, she perceived a prodigious Difference; which led her again into Reflections on the unaccountableness of Men's Fancies, who still prefer the last Conquest, only because it is the last.—Here was an evident Proof of it; for there could not be a Difference in Merit, because they were the same Person; but the *Widow Bloomer* was a more new Acquaintance than *Fantomina*, and therefore esteem'd more valuable. (*F*, 60)

¹ Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works*, ed. Alexander Pettit, Margaret Chase Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 42, henceforth cited parenthetically as "*F*."

Haywood often uses “person” to denote outward appearance, but here the sense accords with the first definition listed in Samuel Johnson’s dictionary, an “individual or particular man or woman.”² The accompanying citation from John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) elaborates on the nature of this particularity. “A *Person*,” Johnson quotes, “is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places.”³ Haywood, too, identifies the discreteness of individual men and women with Lockean personhood. The young lady remains the “same person” across her various roles, the “thinking intelligent being” capable of reflecting on Beauplaisir’s infidelity and her own purpose: to sate Beauplaisir’s hunger for novelty while indulging her own, more constant appetite.

She considers herself as herself, to paraphrase Locke. Desire, thus, promotes self-consistency. Its effect in this case runs counter to Jonathan Kramnick’s influential reading of Haywood’s scenes of seduction in *Love in Excess* (1719–20) and *Fantomina*. In those works, Kramnick argues, Haywood’s method of description projects interior states like consent and desire onto the world, dissolving boundaries between subjects and between consciousness and the external environment. Such a model of representing mental experience would seem to preclude the continuous, bounded subjectivity that defines personhood for Locke and, apparently, Samuel Johnson.⁴ The young lady’s assertion in the passage cited above nevertheless

² Samuel Johnson, “PERSON, n. s.,” *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755–6).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 190. For a similar perspective, see Helen Thompson, “Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton’s *Ephesian Matron* and E. Haywood’s *Fantomina*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.2 (2002): 195–214. My interpretation aligns more closely with that of Emily Hodgson Anderson, who sees a single, self-conscious actress unifying the young lady’s separate performances.

invokes the Lockean paradigm. A potential slippage between representation of mental experience and editorial aside—manifest in the impossibility of deciding whether the “reflections” following the dash belong to the young lady, the narrator, or both—complicates but does not foreclose the promise of continuity. Consider an earlier description of the young lady’s decision not to refuse Beauplaisir’s gift while in the character of Celia. “Generous as Liberality itself to all who gave him Joy this way,” the narrator explains, “he gave her a handsome Sum of Gold, which she durst not now refuse, for fear of creating some Mistrust, and losing the Heart she so lately had regain’d” (*F*, 53). Grammatical proximity suggests that the gendered pronouns in Haywood’s subordinate clause refer to the proper noun “Celia” in the preceding sentence, yet both content and context demand another antecedent. “She” is the young lady who has already won and lost Beauplaisir’s favor while in the character of Fantomina and who “regain’d” it under another guise. Her cognizance of loss and recovery—and there is no question that the thoughts recorded here are her own—reflects a subjectivity that pre-dates and survives her turn as Celia.

Though perhaps the most familiar to modern readers, *Fantomina* is not the only text that documents Haywood’s fascination with the operations of desire. In the roughly contemporaneous *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1724–5), Haywood revises her theory of desire in order to reckon with the South Sea Bubble, which precipitated the catastrophic stock market crash of 1720–1. While works like *Love in Excess* and *Fantomina* often underscore the positive consequences of sexual desire, *Memoirs of a Certain Island* addresses its power to delude. Haywood responds to an implicit question that haunted early eighteenth-century commentators and that abides to the present day. Why would investors rush with such unrestrained enthusiasm to exchange their money and government annuities for stock

“Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* and *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*,” *The Eighteenth Century* 46 (2005): 1–15.

in a company with evidently meager trading prospects? Modern economic historians attribute their behavior to a culture-wide speculative mania. Haywood's answer is to extend the logic of eros to the realm of speculative finance and imagine desire as a catchall behavioral determinant. As if to anticipate the "irrationality argument" advanced by modern scholars, Haywood points to the South Sea Bubble as evidence of the ascendancy of passion within the credit-based marketplace.⁵

The recent explosion of scholarly interest in Haywood's fiction has not, for the most part, extended to *Memoirs of a Certain Island*.⁶ Prominent accounts of Haywood's literary productions from the 1720s and '30s have elevated *Fantomina* to the teaching canon, but they pay only passing notice to the more widely read *Memoirs of a Certain Island*.⁷ John Richetti describes the latter work as a "slavish imitation" of Delarivier Manley's 1709 *New Atalantis*, and both he and Ros Ballaster regard *Memoirs of a Certain Island* as a mercenary effort to capitalize

⁵ Richard Dale, *The First Crash: Lessons from the South Sea Bubble* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 1–6 and 136. For earlier iterations of the "irrationality argument," see John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1960) and P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (New York: St. Martin's, 1967). See also Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*. Helen J. Paul offers the lone dissenting voice, wedding advanced mathematical concepts and behavioral finance theory to argue that investors had good reason to risk their money in South Sea Company stock. *The South Sea Bubble: An Economic History of its Origins and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁶ Marta Kvandé's examination of the political undertones of *Memoirs of a Certain Island* counts as one exception. "The Outsider Narrator in Eliza Haywood's Political Novels," *SEL* 43 (2003): 625–43. For the recent uptick in scholarly engagement with Haywood's life and works, see Margaret Case Croskery, "Whose Afraid of Eliza Haywood?" *Literary Compass* 4 (2007): 967–80.

⁷ Jonathan Kramnick observes that critical attention to *Fantomina* far "outstrips its initial notice," a phenomenon he attributes to the influence of Ros Ballaster's treatment of the novella in *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684–1740* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992). Kramnick, *Actions and Objects*, 182 and 182n21.

on the reading public's taste for scandal.⁸ For William Warner, it represents an outlier. As he charts the rise of fiction as a de-politicized mode of popular entertainment, Warner dwells on those of Haywood's fictions that eschew the "elaborate allegorical machinery" common to romans à clef.⁹

This chapter brings the distinctiveness of *Memoirs of a Certain Island* into focus. In that work, Haywood's confrontation with economic calamity motivates a shift in her understanding of the relation between desire and personal identity. She uses the "machinery" to which Warner refers to establish a homology between sexual and economic appetites. Desire accounts not only for erotic coupling, but also for investors' irrational behavior during the stock-market bubble. The passion, thus, takes on some of the unsettling properties of speculative finance—most strikingly its problematic orientation toward futurity. Because it prioritizes unknowable outcomes and imaginary objects, this variant of desire undermines self-consistency in the women and men actuated by it. Some of the villains depicted in *Memoirs of a Certain Island* count as bad faith actors, promoting false "characters" or issuing false claims to credibility. More frequently, they change their minds. Motivated by a passion at once inconstant and amorphous, Haywood's lovers and speculators prove capable of defaulting on even those promises issued in good faith. Whether they avow their fidelity, their creditworthiness, or both, these characters cannot speak for future versions of themselves. Recalibrated to the conditions of economic modernity, desire poses an even greater threat. It disrupts continuous, self-conscious personhood, rendering the subject inscrutable to herself as well as to potential partners in erotic and economic exchange.

⁸ Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700–1739* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), 152–3, and Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 154–6.

⁹ Warner, *Licensing Entertainments: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1998), 112.

The texts examined to this point in my dissertation foreground the constant threat of slippage between external and internal dimensions of personal and literary character—an extension of “the problem of representation” that Mary Poovey identifies with eighteenth-century Britain’s credit system and that I have traced back to the Calvinist theology of grace.¹⁰ Like John Bunyan and Aphra Behn, the subjects of the previous chapters, Haywood dwells with evident concern on the importance of and obstacles to character discernment within economies founded on good faith promises. For Eliza Haywood, as for those authors, the problem of knowing other people indexes broader epistemological concerns exacerbated by the rise of economic credit. Haywood goes further, however, in her critique of protocapitalist institutions and practices. Compared to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Oroonoko, Memoirs of a Certain Island* is at once more specific about the source of confusion within the market and more pessimistic about the capacity of Calvinism’s typological, two-dimensional approach to character to promote mutual intelligibility. Haywood suggests that the form of desire that motivates speculative investment makes character unstable rather than merely opaque. There is no stable, inwardly held truth to be recovered. To overcome the ensuing crisis of discernment, Haywood’s speculators depend upon the intercession of supernatural agents, such as Cupid and the goddess Astrea. Through such figures, Haywood transposes concepts of particular providence and an overarching cosmic order onto a familiar neo-classical structure.

Haywood also departs from the examples of Bunyan and Behn through literary practice. I argue in Chapters One and Two that those authors foist the difficulty of reading character onto their audiences. Haywood, by contrast, insulates her readers from the interpretive pitfalls confronting her characters. She adapts the formal properties of the roman à clef as a way to

¹⁰ Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*, 5.

articulate and even overcome (with respect to her discursive project if not to her readers' material reality) concerns about the intelligibility of character brought to the fore by the crash of the financial markets. Haywood coordinates a near-omniscient narrator, an elaborate allegorical frame, and the method of characterization conventional to secret histories in order to extract her reader from the interpretive morass through which her inscribed investors and lovers suffer financial and psychological ruin. Just as her allegorical personifications are rooted in familiar traditions of classical myth and Protestant morality, so the dramatis personae of her collected tales of intrigue function as barely coded reflections of historical individuals. Such characters are tied through both implicit and explicit indicia (like the interpretive "key" appended to the first addition of the book) to real world correlatives and, thus, to the pervasive, multimedia cult of celebrity that made them widely accessible to Haywood's audience. In the service of demystifying the epistemological crisis attendant on the rise of credit and speculative investment, Haywood spares her reader the symbolic experience of it. She dramatizes the dangers of credit without enacting them on a formal level. True, Haywood populates her fictional island with characters that dissemble, commit vow-breach, and expertly avoid detection, figures that outpace the evaluative strategies of observers. For all that, she nonetheless makes these characters intelligible to the reader of *Memoirs of a Certain Island* through her adroit use of the resources of allegory and scandal.

SEX AND SPECULATIVE INVESTMENT

For many contemporaries, the South Sea Crisis revived epistemological concerns associated with the rise of the credit system in Britain. The South Sea Company had taken on the massive national debt incurred by England during the War of Spanish Succession in exchange

for a monopoly on trade with Spain's South American colonies. Faced with the Company's dubious prospects, as well as with the inherent uncertainty of speculative finance, early eighteenth-century Britons sought a stable foundation for trust. Carl Wennerlind shows that proponents answered fears about the market's volatility by extolling the probity of the nation's financial managers.¹¹ "Credit" became an "effect of character" as writers on both sides of the ideological divide yoked the promises of the South Sea Company's promoters and the stability of the stock market in general to the demonstrated or reputed rectitude of political elites.¹² Confidence in the financial system depends on the familiar task of evaluating the credibility of other people.

In the immediate aftermath of the Bubble, however, commentators like Haywood recognized that character, too, is subject to problems of intelligibility and futurity. Writing in late November of 1720, the essayist John Trenchard blames the "confusion and misery" wrought by the crash on the "credulity of the people, throwing their all upon the mercy of base-spirited, hard-hearted villains, mischievously trusted with a power to undue them."¹³ He ascribes the South Sea Bubble to investors' collective failure to recognize duplicitous operators as such. Haywood's representation of the events of 1720 in *Memoirs of a Certain Island* exhibits a similar emphasis on credulity and the discernment of personal character. But she takes her argument about the

¹¹ Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*, 85–89.

¹² John F. O'Brien, "The Character of Credit: Defoe's 'Lady Credit,' *The Fortunate Mistress*, and the Resources of Inconsistency in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain," *ELH* 63 (1996): 603. The phrase is O'Brien's, but Wennerlind develops the connection between character and credit in the context of early eighteenth-century debates about the best way to promote confidence in public credit. *Casualties of Credit*, 180. For the Whigs, the Lord Treasurer (Godolphin) replaced the monarch as guarantor of the state's economic credibility. His ouster, they argued, threatened the stability of the entire financial system. Tories countered that public credit wasn't lodged in any particular person, but they did locate it in the investing public's faith in the "honor, probity, and respectability" of state financial administrators more generally.

¹³ *Cato's Letters*, No. 3 (Saturday, 19 November 1720), reprinted in John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, Vol. 1, ed. Ronald Hamowy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 44.

perils of speculative finance a step further by showing how the determinant of market behavior, desire, skews valuations of stock and people alike.

Haywood's structure suits her project of imagining the conditions of Britain's "culture of credit" through the lens of sexual desire.¹⁴ The work consists of multiple tales of amorous intrigue—most of them elaborations of topical scandals—framed by the allegorical "Story of the Enchanted Well." In the frame narrative, a strange youth journeys to the island in pursuit of education and entertainment. He finds a Virgilian guide in Cupid, the island's erstwhile patron deity. Cupid shows the Stranger the causes and consequences of a moral fall lately suffered by the island's inhabitants. They travel to an Enchanted Well flanked on either side by statues of Pecunia, Goddess of Interest, and Fortuna. Throngs of islanders congregate around the structure in various attitudes of nervous expectation. The Well is the site of an elaborate illusion perpetrated by the necromancer Lucitario, whom the skeletal key at the end of the book identifies as the politician James Craggs the elder. Investors are "transported" by the expectation of tremendous riches. To the deluded masses, "common Water" now seems a "miraculous Spring" of liquid gold, the Well's "bottomless Abyss" a network of channels for the circulation of wealth.¹⁵ The story of the Well, which stands in for the South Sea Company itself, figures speculative investment as a sweeping infatuation. Lucitario's black magic represents the methods, legitimate or otherwise, by which the Company's directors and state-appointed financial managers cultivated assurance of the project's commercial viability. Mirroring the response of real-life investors, Haywood's islanders rush en masse to convert real wealth—

¹⁴ Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*, 3.

¹⁵ Eliza Haywood, *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia*, ed. Josephine Griener (New York: Garland, 1972), 7–8, henceforth cited parenthetically as "MCI." For speculative investment as "magic, witchcraft, alchemy, delirium, and epidemic," see Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694–1994* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 58.

“some came loaded with Plate,—others with Jewels, rich Furniture, Pictures, Beds” (*MCI*, 8)—into empty promises. Through her frame narrative, then, Haywood highlights the fictiveness of the value of South Sea Company stock and the insubstantiality of property within the credit system.¹⁶

Inevitably, the bubble bursts. But for Haywood, the actual crisis consists in rampant speculation itself—the rapid increase in the value of stock during the period between the ratification of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and the crash in the late summer of 1720. She represents the crash, which causes widespread disappointment and ruin on the island, as an opportunity to undeceive the islanders and recuperate their moral losses (though not their financial ones). The restoration of order demands the intervention of personifications of justice and reason, and revelation comes at a tremendous economic cost. Haywood suggests that members of the cults of interest and fortune find themselves crushed under the weight of their false idols. That she recasts the crash as the return of clear-sighted reason and the dissolution of infatuating desire betrays an uneasy optimism about the possibility for reform. Though Haywood threatens a sequel, implying at the conclusion of her book that the Cupid and the genius will carry their crusade to the seats of political power, the specific nature such reform would take remains unclear.

Haywood makes a *pro forma* call for a return to the virtues of a previous epoch. She follows Delarivier Manley and Aphra Behn in seeking to cultivate nostalgia for the conservative

¹⁶ Haywood participates in a robust eighteenth-century tradition of allegorizing the operations and effects of credit. Foremost among these representations is “Lady Credit,” a figure innovated by Daniel Defoe and then appropriated by both sides of the partisan debate about the direction of Britain’s political economy. See Paula Backscheider, “Defoe’s Lady Credit,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 45 (1981), 89–100; O’Brien, “The Character of Credit”; and Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fiction in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996); and Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 110–13.

principles that informed Tory economic positions. Yet her exposé on the form of desire that operates within the financial system reflects a general conservatism rather than a specific political agenda.¹⁷ She offers no alternative economic model. Viewed as a whole, Haywood's allegory is didactic without being prescriptive. *Memoirs of a Certain Island* illustrates the deleterious effects of a protocapitalist economy, but it fails to measure up to Mary Poovey's vision of the pedagogical function of eighteenth-century fictions of credit. Rather than teach readers how to "practice trust, tolerate deferral [of referents], evaluate character, and...believe in things that were immaterial," Haywood's text dwells on the practical dangers of trusting the immaterial, of investing one's money or belief in the empty promises and imaginary property of the new culture of credit.¹⁸ Haywood stops short of disseminating a practicum for navigating these dangers. The object is to wave the "fraud-disclosing wand" over the glittering surfaces of Exchange Alley and, in doing so, reveal the influence of desire on financial behavior.

To that end, the internal narratives in *Memoirs of a Certain Island* elide the boundary between romantic and economic domains. The people gathered around the Enchanted Well, Cupid instructs the Stranger, honor the joint reign of Pecunia and the demon "Lust." Cupid selects illustrative cases from the crowd, acting as narrator except where he invites a principal character to give his or her own account. As they chronicle the machinations of lovers and speculators, the tales demonstrate the near-total authority of erotic and economic desire. Haywood establishes the connection between sex and speculative investment primarily through her overarching allegory, which substitutes the settings and subjects of erotic desire for those of

¹⁷For the persistence of Tory ideology in Haywood's amatory fiction, see Marta Kvanne, "The Outsider Narrator in Eliza Haywood's Political Novels," and Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 156.

¹⁸Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*, 89.

Exchange Alley. Several individual tales make the coincidence of those appetites quite explicit.¹⁹

One male seducer, Aristus, moonlights as a stock-jobber and profits from the credulity of both sexes (*MCI*, 55–57). Cupid gives a brief sketch of his background, explaining that Aristus

has a very great concern in the *Enchanted Well*, is one of Lucitario's Party, and consequently a gainer by it.— He passes most of his time here, where he finds everyday opportunities to advance his Interest with those of either Sex, who can be any way of advantage, either to his Ambition or his Pleasure.— He is not less successful in one than the other. (*MCI*, 57)

“Ambition” in this context refers to the pursuit of capital rather than political influence. Aristus gratifies that passion alongside his sexual desire “here,” at the site of financial speculation. In fact, his lust and his avarice are two prongs of a more general behavioral determinant, two forms of “Interest” varying only according to the sex of their objects.²⁰

Later in the compilation, Haywood introduces Hortensia, a female predator who learns to reconcile economic interest with sexual pleasure when she joins a cabal of similarly appetitive women:

This Triumvirate had a League amongst themselves, never to interfere with each other's Property, and to be aiding and assisting to each other as much as possible in the procuring new Conquests, and securing former ones.—[Hortensia] now gave a loose to Desires of a far different nature than the Love of Gold, but had the Address to divide herself between the two Passions, so as to prevent the one from being any way prejudicial to the other.— One Hour of Love was succeeded by another of Interest.—She was so exact an Oeconomist, and made so good use of her Time, that she had always an Opportunity of being happy with the Man she lik'd, and never miss'd one with the Man whose Purse was at her devotion. (*MCI*, 127)

¹⁹ Ros Ballaster proposes that, for amatory fiction writers, “sexual desire is too protean and absolute a quality to be the vehicle for any other form of interest.” *Seductive Forms*, 154. I would argue that Haywood is attracted to sexual desire as a metaphor precisely because it is protean and absolute—properties it shares with economic interest in a stock market bubble.

²⁰ Ambition, lust, and love of gain coalesce under the heading of “interest,” which in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries “comprised the totality of human aspirations.” Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (1977; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), 32.

Hortensia follows Aristus's pattern of alternating between the gratification of "interest," or "Love of Gold," and sexual desire. Although Cupid describes interest and sexual desire as fundamentally distinct in this passage, Haywood demonstrates through her overarching allegory as well as through the episode itself that the two passions differ in object rather than in "nature." The pursuit of interest and the pursuit of pleasure both entail "conquests" over members of the opposite sex; these women make men their "Property," whether they exploit their wealth or their bodies. Hortensia discovers that coordinating interest and desire is as simple as balancing her attention between the "Man she lik'd" and the "Man whose Purse is at her Devotion."

While Hortensia's balancing act suggests the possibility that the two passions might conflict if she were a less "exact Oeconomist," Haywood also includes episodes in which interest and desire coalesce around the same victims of seduction. The philandering Romanus, whose catalogue of successful depredations initiates Cupid's sequence of narratives, feels a "passion" for Graciana that is coextensive with his acquisitiveness. Despite Graciana's abundant personal qualifications, "when once the Scene was chang'd, and she no more could be subservient to his *Interest*, she ceas'd to be of consequence to his *Wishes*" (MCI, 15). Several characters, Hortensia among them, dissemble love or lust in order to cozen their targets out of money. That is not the case with Romanus, whose sincere, though base, desire for Graciana diminishes along with her financial prospects.

Within overlapping economic and erotic contexts, desiring subjects assume all of the capriciousness of future-oriented thought and action.²¹ The affair between Amabella and Bellario, a brief episode nested within the "History of Hortensia," documents one character's

²¹ Like the social theorists surveyed by Thomas Laqueur, Haywood recognizes that "the future is sought passionately and inconstantly in love and speculation." "Sex and Desire in the Industrial Revolution," *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, ed. Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 101.

struggle to preserve a small measure of control in the face of indeterminacy. Attending to her failure helps us to see the crucial differences between Haywood's representations of desire in *Memoirs of a Certain Island* and *Fantomina*. Cupid presents the Stranger with a letter (inscribed for the reader's benefit) from Amabella to her unfaithful lover. Amabella begins by acknowledging her vulnerability to Bellario's professions of fidelity:

Your Inconstancy, that cruel Mutability of Temper which renders it impossible to have any Dependence on your Words or Oaths, makes you the most dangerous of all created Beings—'tis unsafe to hear you, sure Destruction attends the unwary Nymph, who listens to your deceiving Accents—I know I am lost—I see my Ruin, yet have not power to shun the dear Deceit—In pity come no more near me—do anything rather than undo me by a pretended Softness which I well know your Heart is incapable of feeling. (*MCI*, 133)

By the time she puts pen to paper, Amabella needs no evidence of Bellario's perfidy. She recognizes his "softness" as feigned, possesses hard-won knowledge of his mutable, insensible character.

Yet her plaintive request to spare her the pain of continued correspondence immediately gives way to an enjoiner to shower her with oaths and promises that she knows to be false. "But Oh!," she exclaims,

The mad Request! how could I support the Grant of it!—How bear the Pangs of an eternal Absence! I live but in your Love—false tho' I know your Vows, they yet are all that my fond Soul can cherish as a Blessing—haste then to repeat them—to charm me to an Exstasy—regard not the wild Extravagancies of a Passion which knows not what to wish, to hope or fear.—Do you instruct me, inform my wandering Sense, convert the less pleasing Agitations all into Desire, and raise to Immortality the whole Soul of the Distractedly Enamour'd Amabella.

Though experience confirms the impossibility of depending on Bellario's parole, Amabella begs him to repeat those utterances anyway. For his asseverations lead inevitably to assent, and her assent to a pleasure that has been intensified to a bodily need. Confronted with proof that Bellario's desire cannot survive the linear progress of time, Amabella indulges in a

compensatory fantasy of reenactment. She pleads with him for a repetition of their seduction, that she might convert the “pangs of absence” into a more pleasing form of uneasiness.

Amabella’s eager consumption of Bellario’s promises even after his betrayal serves as a comment on the perpetration of the South Sea scheme and similar projects. Like her, investors are vulnerable to imposture. They devote pecuniary and emotional resources to the South Sea Company despite its slim trading prospects and the questionable personal character of its directors.²² Amabella’s letter would also seem to suggest an affinity with the young lady of *Fantomina*. Desire leads both characters to seek out repetition as a safeguard against the inconstancy of male partners. Yet Amabella’s desire does not produce a coherent person. Instead, it yields irresolution and self-contradiction—wishes contrary to her interest. Amabella’s plea highlights a crucial feature of the kind of desire licensed by a credit-based marketplace: it holds no stable shape. Instead, it presents as a “passion which knows not what to wish, to hope or fear.” Amabella hungers for promises that, however dubious, lend direction to desire, molding it into a form at once recognizable and conducive to gratification.

Throughout *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, Haywood adjusts her theory of desire to the institutions and practices of the financial marketplace, and vice versa. As Catherine Ingrassia points out,

The new financial instruments of Exchange Alley were largely immaterial forms of property that could be realized only imaginatively. When investors bought stock or an annuity, they received nothing tangible for their purchase[. . .] Consequently, there was no apparent relationship between sign and signified, between the paper receipt and the value it represented.²³

²² John Trenchard refers to the members of the South Sea Company’s leadership and the politicians who mixed in its affairs as “known knaves.” *Cato’s Letters*, 42.

²³ Catherine Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 5.

Writing from a decidedly conservative position vis-à-vis the culture of credit, Haywood exaggerates the immateriality and groundlessness of South Sea stock. She portrays investment as a blithely self-destructive substitution of tangible forms of property (money, jewels, furnishings, etc.) for mere “pleasing *Dreams* of coming Happiness” (*MCI*, 285). To explain the underlying psychology, Haywood inverts the relationship between desire and proximity that Locke posits in the *Essay*. Both writers recognize the threat posed by desire to the continuity of personal identity, but Locke sees desire as a present feeling of “uneasiness” proportioned to the accessibility—the temporal or physical immediacy—of its object.²⁴ Haywood turns Locke’s influential paradigm on its head. In *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, desire conditions men and women to pursue imaginary, future goods at the expense of proximate, substantive ones. Locke strains to imagine a “free Agent” who might act outside of desire by using deliberative reason to make future concerns loom larger than immediate impulses.²⁵ Haywood takes pains to illustrate the fatal consequences of assenting to fictions of futurity. She does so specifically by introducing characters, such as Amabella, who strive and fail to navigate the fault line between sign and signified, promise and performance.

PROJECTING DESIRE

Though decried for their “inconstancy,” unfaithful lovers like Bellario and Beauplaisir are nothing if not consistent. In *Fantomina*, Beauplaisir’s inclination toward new “conquests” makes him eminently predictable, allowing the young lady to lock him into an iterative plot of

²⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Pauline Phemister (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), II.xxi.30–48.

²⁵ Locke, *Essay*, II. xxi.12.

seduction, consummation, and abandonment.²⁶ In the corresponding episode in *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, both the inauthenticity of Bellario's professions and the ethical content of his character are similarly transparent to Amabella. These characters and their various female counterparts in Haywood's amatory fiction are inconstant in the sense that their desires change objects in quick succession.²⁷ Yet their desires also follow the same, easily discernable pattern, marking them for what they really are: ardent but fickle lovers. It is Amabella's desire, and not Bellario's, that poses a threat. Her halting sentences, replete with dashes and exclamations, and the conflicting impulses they express hint at the indeterminacy that plagues exchange relationships—whether overtly economic or erotic—in the time of the Bubble. Like the passion they follow, speculators in love and finance exhibit a striking mutability.

The interpolated, first-person “History of the Chevalier Windusius and the fair, false Wyaria” exemplifies the “changeableness” of desiring subjects (*MCI*, 110). Having been cozened into a tryst with a superannuated beauty, Windusius takes the first opportunity to flee into the arms of a more agreeable companion: Wyaria, the daughter of a country gentleman. Windusius judges the sincerity of Wyaria's professed love by the frequency and tenderness of her letters, as well as by interpreting somatic clues like the language of her eyes and her “Look of Innocence and Sanctity” (*MCI*, 75). Yet Wyaria ultimately betrays his trust. She renews her affair with her brother-in-law, Batharius, and conspires with her father to accuse Windusius of slander. Cupid ascribes Wyaria's falsehood to the familiar vices of “Hypocrisy” and “Artifice.”

²⁶ William Warner relates the “seriality” of *Fantomina*'s plot to a feature of eighteenth-century media culture: “seduction of the reader depends upon the appearance rather than the fact of novelty.” *Licensing Entertainments*, 114 and 126. A similar dynamic applies to the protagonist's seduction of Beauplaisir. The young lady satisfies her lover's novelty-driven desire without becoming a new object in “fact.”

²⁷ *Memoirs of a Certain Island* includes numerous female predators. One, Hortensia, makes men her “property” by exploiting their wealth, bodies, or both (*MCI*, 127).

His gloss on the episode falls short of capturing the specific threat that underlies Wyaria's betrayal of Windusius. The former character never feints—neither when she avows her preference for Windusius over Batharius, nor when she declares her disgust and shame at the sin (incest) to which she had been forced, nor when she swears to shun her seducer going forward. As Cupid remarks of a character in a subsequent narrative, Wyaria's utterances reflect her "true Sentiments ... at that Time" (*MCI*, 209). If her father is guilty of the deception Cupid cites in his synopsis, Wyaria's own crime consists of changing her mind. The erratic movement of her desire, which fixes first on Windusius and then on Batharius—with whom it may well originate, if not in discursively intelligible form—represents the principal danger recorded within Windusius's history. Through her depiction of a fickle lover, Haywood invokes the uncertainty of financial speculation. Just as the instruments of credit provide no tangible evidence of their future value, so the promises issued on behalf of a future self offer no "security" against a change of heart (*MCI*, 74).

While Wyaria's desire changes objects without warning or reason, Windusius's passion takes several different forms over the course of his narrative. His desire resists classification even according to the simple binary on which the moral schema of *Memoirs of a Certain Island* depends. Cupid draws a sharp distinction between pernicious "lust" and the socially constructive erotic attachment that he promotes and embodies. He stresses the close resemblance between himself and his impersonator, another personified abstract:

So exactly, sometimes, does that Demon, *Lust*, resemble me, that, 'till the fatal Consequences of his Inspiration convinces the mistaken Judger of his Error, the Difference between us is not to be distinguished;—'tis by my *Unchangeableness* alone I am proved the *God*:—those other Flames may burn as fierce,—may seem as bright,—but soon the Blaze goes out, leaves not a Glow to warm the Heart which lately was all on fire, and is no more remembered but by the Smoke of Infamy's black Vapour. (*MCI*, 112)

Haywood suggests that only the “fatal consequences” of an affair resolve confusion about the motivation in back of a given profession of love. She echoes both Bunyan and Behn, for whom only the end of given narrative (e.g. of journeys of reprobation or election, of Oroonoko’s personal history) confers certain knowledge of character. But Cupid also betrays a hint of optimism, implying that differentiating refined, sanctioned desire and its counterfeit using measures such as “constancy” (as opposed to the short-term intensity that they share) might preserve the islanders, however difficult that task may “sometimes” prove. The distinction holds in the abstract—allegorical personifications of love and lust behave as discrete entities within the narrative frame—but in practice these taxa of desire share a porous boundary.

Cupid’s binary strains as Windusius attempts to describe the nature of his passion for Wyaria. Early in their affair, Wyaria inspires Windusius with “eager cravings,” the virtuous resistance of which wracks him with physical pain (*MCI*, 70). When she returns his advances, Windusius promises to fulfill all of the duties of a composite type of the sincere lover—“if there be a name which can comprise the Truth, the Tenderness, the Fondness of ’em all [i.e. friend, lover, and husband], call me by that”—and seals his promise with an oath to Jupiter (*MCI*, 80–1). His eventual discovery of Wyaria’s sexual relationship with her brother-in-law “erases” the purity and reverence of his honorable love and invalidates his pledge: “the humble, perfect lover was extinct, and I was now all Man” (*MCI*, 82–3). Knowledge of her defiled state allows Windusius to cast off the strictures imposed by the roles he had assigned himself. He strips himself down to a basic ontological category, uninhibited “Man,” and acts with according freedom. Windusius immediately gratifies a sexual desire now unmingled with the awed respect and virtuous intentions that had hitherto restrained it within the bounds of propriety. His “perfect” love proves contingent on Wyaria’s perceived social value as a virginal maiden.

After enjoyment, Windusius's passion is less inconstant than amorphous. His persistent sexual attraction "join'd with a little Self-Interest" to suggest a new plan: he might serve his sexual and economic appetites simultaneously by cajoling Wyaria's father into compensating him for marrying his daughter in spite of her diminished value. Windusius follows an admission that his "Soul has no Part" in his desire for Wyaria with lamentations of "disappointed love" (*MCI*, 87 and 90). That the revival of his "love" and the formation of his expectation of a hefty payday arise simultaneously indicates that his passion has transformed into an admixture of pecuniary self-interest and the base sexual appetite characteristic of mere "man." Yet Windusius pursues Wyaria to her family's country estate well after the disappointment of his "golden Expectations" (*MCI*, 88). Reflecting on his choice, he claims to act out of a combination of obligation, human decency, and an admittedly diminished but sincere tenderness for her. By the end of the episode and on his own account, neither love nor lust nor any other mutually exclusive category of feeling accounts for Windusius's behavior.

The inconsistencies in his self-assessment reflect the difficulty of distinguishing, in oneself as well as in others, desire from the myriad forms of affiliation that it resembles in a given moment. Although Windusius briefly recognizes his feelings for Wyaria as base appetite—the kind of attachment in which the soul plays no part, as he puts it, and which harmonizes with economic interest—this naked, unrefined desire quickly transforms into a more complex orientation toward its object. Desire can look like love, as Cupid insists in the passage quoted above, but it can also look like platonic friendship, common humanity, or social obligation. Windusius's failure to give a coherent account of his desire points to the indeterminacy of the emotional states by which characters are sorted into stable, ethically charged categories of relation in *Memoirs of a Certain Island*. Changeableness alone defines the character of the

desiring subject. Instead of presenting a continuous, knowable “self,” he presents shifting states that must be tracked over time and projected into an uncertain future. Windusius himself must work to construct a coherent self through narrative. In doing so, he has recourse to the logic of type. But none of the roles he assigns himself (whether that of friend, lover, husband, or mere, appetitive Man) forestalls the disruption of Lockean personhood. His tale stands as an artifact of his vexed effort to create continuity where there is none, to impose a sequence and an explanation onto varied and loosely connected experiences of desire.

As the history of Windusius and Wyaria attests, persons moved by desire prove difficult to read. Another inconstant lover thwarts efforts to sort her into even the most fundamental moral categories. Flirtillaria exemplifies the relationship between personal character and desire in the time of the Bubble:

The Winds are not so uncertain as her Temper, and tho’ her Behaviour from fifteen has remark’d her for a zealous Devotee of that *Idol* for whom I am dethron’d, yet the Objects in whose favor she was possess’d of those Desires, have been so various, so often Chang’d, that the World has ever been at a loss on whom to fix the Scandal of her Affections. (*MCI*, 34)

Her worship of the demon lust, the usurping “idol” of the above passage and the personification of Haywood’s erotic analogue to economic self-interest, leads to a succession of objects that outpaces the machinery of scandal. Although her actions mark her from a young age as a devotee of sexual desire—that is to say, her “behaviour” betrays her governing passion—the inconstancy of that passion makes it impossible to predict or even to track its progress from one erotic partner to another, impossible to relate the history of her amours.

More ominously, Flirtillaria’s moral nature resists classification. As Cupid goes on to explain, Flirtillaria marries the best and worst of human nature:

That Woman, *said he*, is a Paradox even to him that created her.—Endu’d by Heaven with a thousand Graces, she was sent on to Earth to charm and bless the Age she liv’d in;

but not content with what she receiv'd from the bounty of the Gods, she enter'd herself a Subject to the *infernal* Potentate, and from his mischief-teaching Court, brought with her all the Venom of the place (*MCI*, 34).

Insofar as her capacity for moral action far exceeds her divine dispensation, Flirtillaria embodies the threatening power of free will. The “Extreams of Good and Evil” exhibited by her behavior reflect a complex relationship to the spiritual seats of virtue and vice, the combined effect of her ordained function within the moral order and her decision to eschew that purpose. Cupid traces the roots of Flirtillaria’s choice to her dissatisfaction with the gifts afforded by “him that created her” and her desire for a “bounty” of a different kind than the vague rewards of virtue. Self-interest, then, brings Flirtillaria to the devil, an ambiguous “infernal potentate” in whom Haywood’s readers may recognize Lucitario, the demon Lust, and the Satan of Christian tradition.

Flirtillaria’s paradoxical spiritual and moral condition marks the erosion of the simple taxonomy upon which the stability of the Calvinist moral universe depends. She is neither elect, nor damned, at least not according to the straightforward criteria that Bunyan applies in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Rather, Flirtillaria is “sent,” chosen to “bless and charm” the world, and then she herself chooses a different orientation toward “Heaven” and something like hell. As a result, she alternates unpredictably between the poles of virtue and vice. In the sense that Flirtillaria’s virtues are not merely performed or professed, she presents an even greater threat to the task of detecting character than the false professors and hypocrites of Bunyan’s imagination. Unlike them, her virtues are substantive, more than a façade to be penetrated through evidentiary protocols. Here, and throughout *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, Haywood avoids direct reference to the Protestant tradition, yet she brings both the language and logic of Christian morality to bear on her description of a typically inconstant lover. In doing so, she demonstrates how the

defining “inconstancy” of desiring subjects—the indeterminacy of character exhibited by Windusius and Flirtillaria—renders them incomprehensible to conventional systems of moral classification like the one provided by the Reformed Protestant tradition.

SELF-LOVE, OTHER-LOVE

Within an economy predicated on futurity, desire looks like a problem. It changes shape as well as objects. As it fixes indiscriminately on goods remote and imaginary, desire also exhausts classificatory logic. Windusius’s case suggests that individuals motivated by desire become inscrutable to themselves and, thus, exhibit disordered subjectivity incompatible with Locke’s conception of the person. In *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, desire also skews evaluations of others participants in romantic and economic relationships. A baron who succumbs to Hortensia’s charms exhibits the romantic corollary of speculative infatuation. Not only does he marry the seductress despite abundant evidence of her “Faults,” but he also chooses this “Object undeserving of Affection” over a woman of more substantial personal qualifications (*MCI*, 127–8). The baron’s choice reflects the broader failure to value properly both personal attributes and financial opportunities. Votaries of the Enchanted Well, correlatives to the actors of Exchange Alley, prioritize imaginary over real forms of wealth, vague prospects over certain economic wellbeing. Similarly, lovers like the Baron eschew “excellent Qualifications of the Soul” in favor of “a little superficial beauty or the Reputation of a trifling flashy Wit” (128). Delusive sexual desire induces a stilted valuation analogous to the kind that leads, on the level of individual investors as well as on the scale of the economy at large, to a stock market bubble.

Haywood repeatedly stresses that failures to read character correctly—to sort Flirtillaria into a recognizable classification, to predict Wyaria’s about-face—owe less to the flawed

judgments of individual characters than to the effects of desire. Cupid explains that the “wisest and best are most easily betray’d” because they possess a “Generosity and open Candor” that Haywood seems loth to discourage (*MCI*, 188). Lest her reader ascribe failures of detection exclusively to preventable lapses in the perception or reason of her characters, Haywood demonstrates the limitations of even acutely observant and “penetrating” intellects. Rather than blame the ruin of constant female lovers Graciana and Miranda on their arrant credulity, for example, Cupid attributes their deception to their seducer’s virtuosic performance of complex psychological and affective states. This rakish gentleman, Romanus, possesses a “destructive Art to appear what he pleas’d, and knew how to disguise the truth so well that by the most penetrating Eye he might be taken for what he seem’d” (*MCI*, 23). He successfully disguises his violent desire for Miranda as platonic “Esteem” and later counterfeits both the experience and suppression of a “Secret Woe” (*MCI*, 24–6). Pressed, according to his design, to disburden himself of this affected pain, Romanus executes a “Swoon” so “well-feign’d” that a physician’s “Art might have been deceiv’d, and he mistaken it for real” (*MCI*, 27). His powerfully felt desire neither reveals itself to Miranda’s penetrating eye, nor does it preclude the performance of an artificial inner conflict between romantic love and the strictures of virtue. Unable to invalidate Romanus’s “protestations” of disinterested friendship or penetrate the façade of honorable, sympathetic attachment, the chaste and quick-sighted Miranda eventually yields (*MCI*, 24).

Romanus acts as a proxy for the necromancer himself: he plays Lucitario’s role in the domestic arena of love and lust. His oaths and performances of emotional states bear the power of enchantment. Miranda, like the victims of the South Sea scheme, finds herself “infatuated by his wiles” (*MCI*, 25). Romanus’s credibility proves unassailable until it is too late to preserve Miranda’s virginity. Cupid’s reluctance to deflect blame from Romanus to his victims—“there

was no room,” he prefaces, for either Graciana or Miranda “to suspect his Designs were any other than honorable” (*MCI*, 14)—conveys Haywood’s skepticism about the possibility of circumventing fraud within a moral arena structured by desire. By attending to these ladies’ adjacent tales of woe, “mortals may learn how little they ought to depend on human Wit” to navigate the economic and erotic domains of desire (*MCI*, 14).

Withdrawal from rampant speculation is the only practical recourse entertained in *Memoirs of a Certain Island*. A nobleman called Communus, identified in the key as the Duke of Chandos, models the proper orientation toward “Fortune,” as well as the proper level of participation in speculative finance:

His mighty Influence may be known by his success in the *Enchanted Well*, not like the Wretches, who, prompted by the ruling Demons of this Isle, throw in their All, he sacrific’d a Trifle at the Shrine of *Fortune*, and, unconcern’d what the Event should be, or how repaid, while they, with anxious Eyes, beheld their Hopes sink with their Offerings to the bottomless Abyss; his Agents brought him News of floating Heaps of Gold waiting for his Acceptance. (*MCI*, 279)

In contrast to characters who court their own ruin by hazarding everything in the South Sea scheme, Communus recognizes the gamble for what it is, so he risks only a fraction of what he can easily afford to lose. His economic well being does not depend on the “Event,” and he leaves his “trifle” to its fate, “unconcern’d” about any return on investment. That tranquil indifference to the commercial success of the company and the price of its stock sets him apart from the unlucky wretches who comprise most of the island’s population. Because he is above the influence of the “ruling Demons” of the island, lust and interest, Communus is exempt from the states of tortured expectancy and abject disappointment that generally define the emotional experience of speculation.

The particularity of Communus’s fate provokes the question of whether his approach to investment is extensible—that is, whether Haywood implies that her readers might duplicate his

success by imitating his posture of indifference. Both his avoidance of the infatuation experienced by his countrymen and women and his unusually successful foray into finance reflect the “Care of Heaven,” Cupid informs the Stranger, the nobleman’s reward for unstinting charity and general moral rectitude (*MCI*, 280). He remains “unprejudic’d by the Folly of engaging in” speculative investment by the grace of the gods. Haywood suggests that, absent the protective hand of providence, to risk even a pittance is to risk triggering incendiary economic desire. The safer bet, we may infer, is to avoid “engaging in” the marketplace at all. Haywood’s conservative response to the South Sea Bubble sharply contrasts that of Daniel Defoe. Sandra Sherman has shown that Defoe’s mature economic philosophy was shaped by the crash, which proved the uncertainty of market forces and the necessity of accommodating morality to market praxis rather than adapting the latter to fit *a priori* standards of virtue rooted in honesty and performance.²⁸

In fact, the philosophy of minimal or non-participation advanced through Cupid’s panegyric on *Communis* aligns Haywood with the Protestant moralists against whom Sherman sets the Defoe of *The Compleat English Trades-man* (1725–7). Like those “Religionists,” Haywood subordinates economic imperatives, which license dishonesty and excuse non-performance of promises as a necessary consequence of the credit system, to moral imperatives.²⁹ As Sherman points out, moralists’ unified call to “rein in aspirations” and seek only “the credit equal to [one’s] calling and condition” is tantamount to advocating retirement from a credit-based financial marketplace.³⁰ *Memoirs of a Certain Island* echoes their call, but

²⁸ Sandra Sherman, “Promises, Promises: Credit as Contested Metaphor in Early Capitalist Discourse,” *Modern Philology* 94 (1997): 327–49.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 335–6. Sherman considers sermonists from London and New England, with special emphasis on William Fleetwood’s “The Justice of Paying Debts” (1718).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 335.

where Protestant writers argued that speculative investment lead to sinful behavior, Haywood dissuades readers from such activity by harping on its immediate social consequences.

Haywood's critique of speculative finance contradicts a prominent eighteenth-century understanding of economic behavior. In his intellectual prehistory of capitalism, Albert O. Hirschman traces the origins and the appeal of the "interest paradigm," which accommodated the doctrine of countervailing passions to the economic realm. According to this paradigm, economic self-interest functions as a check against impulses like "lust for power, or sexual lust."³¹ The moral philosophers and economic writers that Hirschman consults take a more optimistic view of commercialization than does Haywood. They inject an element of "calculating efficiency" and prudence into avarice, positioning interest as a category intermediate to passion and reason—a "calm desire for wealth."³² Interest, on this model, carries the promise of predictability. Hirschman's version of *Homo economicus* is marked by "constancy, doggedness, and sameness," and "his course of action becomes thereby transparent and predictable almost as though he were a wholly virtuous person."³³ Not only does interest make economic agents stable and intelligible; it also supplies the place of morality. Those prompted by interest are guaranteed to behave predictably and harmlessly—*as though* impelled by virtue rather than by love of gain. Hirschman argues that this characterization of economic man plays a central role in the increasingly prevalent argument that commercial activity is not merely innocuous but beneficial. For in pursuing his calculative interest, economic man also promotes the public good.

Memoirs of a Certain Island suggests that this picture is difficult to reconcile with the events of 1720–1. Investors in the South Sea Company, Haywood is at pains to demonstrate,

³¹ Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 39–42.

³² *Ibid.*, 65, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 50–4.

exhibit characters quite opposed to the generalized sketch offered by Hirschman. She rejects the identification of economic interest with sameness. For Haywood's purpose, fictional narratives offer a built-in advantage over the forms of transactional writing gathered together in Hirschman's study. Because it represents individuals across time, narrative tests the continuity of character in both the formal and the moral senses of the term. Even where they tell their own stories, characters like Windusius demonstrate a fundamental inconsistency. Haywood's speculators behave self-destructively, losing themselves—their very status as “persons”—in pursuit of an interest that resembles rather than overrides erotic desire. Their frequently immoral behavior also put pressure on Hirschman's conditional, unsettling the equivalence he draws between virtuous and self-interested actions.

To the extent that Haywood envisions a solution to the problem of economic self-interest, she does so by situating that impulse alongside rather than against the passions. Hirschman's cases rely on the concept of dispassionate acquisitiveness in order to reconcile self-love to the general welfare. Haywood, by contrast, turns to salutary forms of erotic attachment. Though she underlines the disordering effects of the desire that motivates speculative investment, Haywood stops well short of representing that passion as a universal ill. Her conservatism with respect to Britain's political economy does not extend to her views on sex, in other words. The differences between *Memoirs of a Certain Island* and *Fantomina* suggest that Haywood conceives of desire as a highly differentiated passion. *Love in Excess*, Haywood's most influential work, makes this thinking explicit.

The narrator of that novel alludes to a robust taxonomy of desire before highlighting two antonymical “kinds:”

That passion which aims chiefly at enjoyment, in enjoyment ends, the fleeting pleasure is no more remembered, but all the stings of guilt and shame remain; but that, where the

interiour beauties are consulted and *souls* are devotees, is truly noble; love *there* is a divinity indeed, because he is immortal and unchangeable, and if our earthy part partake the bliss, and craving nature is in all obeyed, possession thus desired, and thus obtained, is far from satiating; *reason* is not here debased to *sense*, but *sense* elevates itself to *reason*, the different powers unite, and become pure alike.³⁴

The first kind aims and ends at consummation. It is a corporeal appetite fixed on superficial (as opposed to “interiour”) beauties and attended by the familiar stigma of “guilt and shame.” But Haywood treats the second kind of desire with an almost religious reverence. Insofar as it is both internally consistent—unchanging—and permanent, this taxon partakes of divine properties. “Noble love” bridges the Cartesian divide by orienting body and soul toward a single, meritorious object. Lovers simultaneously obey and transcend “craving nature” by having sex. Haywood rescues desire from unqualified moral condemnation, though not by effacing its association with sensual pleasure and sexual “possession.” Rather, she highlights its capacity to coordinate and, in the process, purify the ostensibly opposed categories of sense and reason. The novel bears this capacity out through the actions of its principal characters. Haywood’s privileged taxon of desire inspires the hitherto unfeeling D’Elmont with pity for sufferers of unrequited passion. Violetta’s selfless intervention in the affair between Frankville and Camilla in “Part 3” confirms that positive benefits attend even thwarted desire: “it was feeling the effects of it [i.e. her desire for D’Elmont] in herself, that inclined her so to so much compassion for the miseries she saw it inflict in others.”³⁵ Where desire of this kind predominates, sympathy flows outside the one-to-one channel predicated on heteronormative coupling, creating an extensive network of affiliations and motivating benevolent acts.

Even in *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, Haywood acknowledges the recuperative power of “craving nature.” Cupid’s proposed binary between deleterious and beneficial iterations of lust

³⁴ Haywood, *Love in Excess*, ed. David Oakleaf (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), 224.

³⁵ Haywood, *Love in Excess*, 234.

(the latter corresponding to “love” in Haywood’s vernacular) hints at the possibility that sex might serve as the emotional medium through which self-love and other-love are made to harmonize. As if anticipating the efforts of David Hume and Adam Smith to adjudicate between egotism and benevolence, Haywood introduces a lasting, reciprocal form of erotic attachment that serves equally the interests of the self and the interests of the other. Read alongside *Love in Excess*, Cupid’s reflections suggest that it is the perversion of erotic desire, and not the passion itself, which offers harm on interpersonal and societal scales—and which provides an analog to the version of interest that structures the credit system. Cupid’s central position within the narrative frame betrays the full extent of Haywood’s optimism about the constructive potential of desire. The god, Eros himself, oversaw the island’s halcyon days, and without his influence even the bonds of consanguinity lose their coercive force: “The Power of Blood and Kin, all Alliances, all Ties Relative, or Obligations lose their force” (*MCI*, 274). Since he alone can make the islanders feel those ties with renewed vigor, the long-dormant genius of the isle enlists Cupid’s support in restoring order at the end of the book. That the salubrious form of passion embodied and championed by Haywood’s narrator generally eludes her characters need not militate against the possibility of forming such a reciprocal erotic attachment. The conspicuous absence of those relationships more likely indexes a casualty of the transition to a credit-based economy. Although she stops short of delineating the economic and social conditions under which the “noble” kind of desire might flourish, Haywood intimates that it cedes pride of place to a more dangerous form within the early eighteenth-century financial marketplace.

CHARACTERS OF SCANDAL AND ALLEGORIES OF CREDIT

As things stand, Haywood's speculators face interpretive difficulties similar to those which threaten to halt Christian's progress and which precipitate Oroonoko's grisly demise. Yet her readers do not partake of the same ineffectual toil. In this section, I argue that the formal properties of *Memoirs of a Certain Island* offer a solution at the level of the reader that is unavailable within the diegesis. I shift focus, then, from the challenges facing the readers that populate Haywood's island to the perspectival advantages enjoyed by readers of her text. Beyond providing an iterative structure perfectly suited to capture the reading public's bent for novelty, the roman à clef allows Haywood to anchor her characters in an accessible popular mythology of sorts, supporting but not completely obviating the reader's interpretive responsibilities. Briefly situating *Memoirs of a Certain Island* within the early eighteenth-century tradition of allegorizing credit and speculative financial activity illuminates the ways in which Haywood uses allegory to redefine the relationship between reader and narrative authority and to exempt the former from losing epistemological battle fought by her characters.

Haywood's argument about the cause of the South Sea Bubble depends on the stability of the overarching allegory that I have been tracking in this chapter, whereby desiring subjects and scenes of erotic pleasure stand in for financial speculators and sites of speculation. But her characters function allegorically on a more local scale, as well, especially insofar as they correlate to recognizable figures of myth and scandal. Just as the deities who struggle for control over the island in the frame allegory find external referents in Classical mythology (in addition to Cupid and Astrea, Venus, Neptune, Apollo, and Jupiter each make several appearances within the interpolated narratives), so the actors within Haywood's tales of amorous intrigue frequently

correspond to real-life aristocrats whose personal histories circulated widely in the scandal literature of the early eighteenth century.

When readers thumbed through the “History of Masonia, Count Marville, and Count Riverius,” for example, they would have recognized the characters as principal players in a public drama that unfolded a generation prior to the publication of *Memoirs of a Certain Island*. Masonia is the Countess of Macclesfield, formerly Anne Mason, whose contentious relationship with her husband (Marville here) led to an affair with Richard Savage the elder, Fourth Earl Rivers, and ultimately to divorce by parliamentary decree.³⁶ A poet infamous for squandered talent, Richard Savage (c. 1697–1743), issued persistent but apocryphal claims to be the cast off, illegitimate son of Lady Anne and the Earl Rivers. He added a contemporary voice to published accounts of the divorce proceedings and kept the affair current for Haywood’s readers in the 1720s.³⁷ Haywood’s elaboration of the affair “appealed to an immediately available and more or less communal myth,” to borrow John Richetti’s apt description of scandal in general.³⁸ In this case, the myth consists of a well-worn tale of aristocratic passion that had been enlarged upon in recent years by a popular poet whose unrecognized claim to identity precipitated allegations of maternal neglect and cruelty.³⁹ Haywood’s method of characterization, familiar to the “secret history,” encourages a straightforward form of allegorical reading, a bridging of each character’s

³⁶ For a synopsis of the affair, see Richard Holmes, *Dr. Johnson & Mr. Savage* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 59–61.

³⁷ Savage versified his claim to birthright and his grievance against his supposed mother in the years immediately following the publication of Haywood’s scandal chronicle. See *The Bastard* (1728) and *The Wanderer* (1729). But the poet had achieved notoriety well before then, and the legend of his parentage preceded Haywood’s account. See, for example, the sympathetic personal history that appeared in the first volume of Giles Jacob’s *Poetical Register* (1719).

³⁸ Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*, 125.

³⁹ Samuel Johnson’s famous literary biography of Savage assails Lady Anne’s character, attributing her self-proclaimed son’s vices and failures to her own unaccountable cruelty. Johnson, *Life of Richard Savage*, Ed. Clarence Tracy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

function within the unfolding narrative and his or her external referent. Haywood locates her inscribed persons in extant, accessible plots, and she counts on their ready recognition—which, in turn, engages the reader’s taste for aristocratic scandal.

The model of character exemplified by the Masonia episode, then, ties the symbolic world of the text to a network of portable narratives, lending order and dimension to the former. It does not, however, render the meaning of the narrative self-evident. In Haywood’s hands, the bare plot of the Macclesfield affair provides a skeletal structure for her psychologically rich depiction of the conflict between the “Love and Soft Desire” shared between Masonia and Riverius on the one hand and external standards of propriety on the other (*MCI*, 167). While Haywood’s model renders transparent the relationship between the narrative episode and the real-life scandal to which it refers, full comprehension of her representation (i.e. its sympathetic, even exculpatory, treatment of Lady Anne’s and the elder Rivers’s reciprocal desires) depends upon the narrator’s insight “into the Secrets of both their Sentiments” (*MCI*, 176). The particular argument of this episode, its deflection of blame from Lady Anne to her husband and its attempt to account for her estranged relationship to her two illegitimate children by Rivers, hinges on an entirely fictional account of the organic progress and sudden transformation of Lady Anne’s passion.

Merely recognizing Haywood’s *dramatis personae* as reflections of historical personages memorialized through scandal (reading the characters allegorically, in other words, by making simple connections between “Masonia” and the erstwhile Anne Mason, and between “Riverius” and the Earl Rivers) yields an incomplete picture, naked facts for which Haywood provides a more robust explanation. Beyond instancing the stupefying effects of even that desire which attends sincere love—Masonia’s neglect of her two children stems from a “long Lethargy of

Amorous Stupidity” (*MCI*, 178)—this story joins with other early eighteenth-century fiction in suggesting the appeal and the limits of two-dimensional representation. Neither the identities of the characters nor the bare plot of the real-life scandal settles the issue of interpretation. The characters themselves, grounded as they are in a form of history or myth, yield up their referents. Yet the mental states that clarify their moral statuses remain oblique. The strange youth and his counterpart in the reader depend on the voice of narrative authority for such knowledge.

I want to pause over the moments in which that voice speaks self-consciously, and to suggest that the relationship between Cupid and the strange youth models Haywood’s ideal dynamic between author and reader. Early in the frame narrative, Cupid directs the Strange Youth to a beautiful woman named Marthalia in order to reveal a disharmony between form and essence that confounds mortal perception:

Venus has been liberal enough in giving her Attractions—Her Face is perfectly lovely—her Eyes want not Vivacity nor Sweetness—her features are regular ... She appears altogether compleat ... But I can no longer endure to look upon her—the Object is too foul—for whatever may appear to you, I, who see into her Soul, and detest the Impurity of it, grow sick at the Reflection. (*MCI*, 12–13).

Cupid revives the two-dimensional model of personal character familiar from both Calvinist doctrine and its application to economic contexts. He sees past Marthalia’s outward beauty and “into” her very soul. His omniscience, which extends to past as well as present frames of heart and mind, does more than grant him access to the contents of her character. It also stabilizes the two-dimensional model that allows us to conceptualize character in just that way, as a concept with surfaces and interiors. Cupid’s position as a vector for a kind of revealed knowledge—he announces early on that he has been granted access to “Secrets, to which the greater part of the World were wholly Strangers” (*MCI*, 3)—allows him to reformulate the indeterminacy exhibited by the likes of Windusius and Flirtillaria as a less threatening contest between outward loveliness

and secret impurity. Per the culture-wide fantasy I have been tracking throughout this dissertation, such a dislocation might be bridged.

Through Cupid's efforts to enable that fantasy, Haywood dramatizes her own role vis-à-vis her readers. She removes readers from the fray, positioning them to "see into" otherwise obscure and unstable characters. Haywood literalizes that project when she has Cupid carry the Stranger to a secure location from which to eavesdrop, unseen, on the conversation of intimates so that he might "let you into their Characters more effectually" (*MCI*, 199). Taken as a whole, these passages present a figure for the author-god whose omniscience supplies the information withheld by extrinsic measures of credibility and personal character. That conception of narrative authority points back to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and forward to one of the most celebrated formal features of Fielding's novels—a feature that I address in the context of Fielding's complex theological inheritance in my next Chapter Four.

By allegorizing the events of 1720–1, Haywood participates in a rich tradition of applying that mode to the operations and effects of credit. Foremost among early eighteenth-century representations is "Lady Credit," a figure innovated by Daniel Defoe but appropriated by both sides of the partisan debate surrounding the rise of modern financial instruments.⁴⁰ Laura Brown treats Lady Credit, as she appears in 14 installments of Defoe's *Review* and elsewhere in contemporaneous economic writings, as the central character of a "cultural fable" that represents Britain as a victim of female hysteria.⁴¹ To Defoe, Lady Credit is a figure of ambiguous moral standing and social function. Though her health is tied to the stability of Britain's government and economy, she proves mercurial, embodying the dangerous stereotypical qualities of the

⁴⁰ For the relevant political history behind writers' use of the figure of Lady Credit, see Paula Backscheider, "Defoe's Lady Credit," 89–100. For further instances of feminized representations of credit and trade, see Sandra Sherman, *Finance and Fictionality*, 53–4.

⁴¹ Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, 110.

female constitution.⁴² Crucially, in the hands of writers like Defoe and Joseph Addison, Lady Credit outstrips her emblematic function: “she remains unknowable” throughout her long history of literary relevance, and she fails to “explain, rationalize, or simplify the problem of finance for her own audience or for us.”⁴³ On Brown’s account, Lady Credit doesn’t solve the “mystery” of modern finance, but “deepens” or even constitutes it.⁴⁴

The failure of the fable of Lady Credit to account for economic modernity gives the lie to the promise of Haywood’s own attempt to translate the South Sea Bubble into allegory. By populating her symbolic world with knowable personifications like Pecunia, Lust, and Astrea, Haywood works to demystify economic experience for her audience. In doing so, she elevates the reader to the privileged vantage of the Stranger. Unlike Defoe’s Lady Credit, whose genealogy proves incoherent and contradictory, Haywood’s characters belong to a coherent network. The narrator’s efforts and the characters’ origins in Augustan appropriations of classical mythology render that network transparent. Moreover, the forms of desire that she seeks to explain and relate to contemporary events aren’t centralized in a single, female figure. Instead, Haywood personifies each passion, letting her characters’ actions within the collection of narratives clarify their natures and functions within contiguous economic and erotic domains.

⁴² Ibid, 110–3.

⁴³ Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, 120 and 129. In addition to Defoe’s *Review*, Brown discusses the appearance of Lady Credit in Addison’s essay in the *Spectator* dated March 3, 1711.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 129. For a more likely precedent to Haywood’s approach, we might turn an essay by Sir Richard Steele’s in *The Spectator*, No. 460 (August 18, 1712). Writing almost a decade prior to the South Sea affair, Steele attributes less catastrophic but nevertheless alarming crisis of public credit to the machinations of Self-Conceit and Vanity. Though he builds an extended analogy to architecture rather than to necromancy or sex—he imagines Britain’s economy as an ornate building without a foundation—Steele anticipates Haywood’s claim that the failure to distinguish between substance and superficiality explains the “broken credit” of the nation. Moreover, Steele’s dream vision forecasts her turn to allegory as the representational mode best suited to the task of expressing the precariousness of credit. Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, Vol. 4, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965): 121–5.

Rather than accept the fable that, according to Brown, traces the volatility and inconstancy of the financial marketplace back to the female body—attributing the epistemological crisis exacerbated and exemplified by the Bubble to distinctively female traits—Haywood develops an alternative mode of explanation. She writes a secret history of the South Sea Bubble, blending the myths of antiquity with the “communal mythology” of contemporary scandal and projecting the changeableness and unpredictability of finance unto a pair of mirrored passions equally prevalent (as she is at pains to show) in both sexes.

RELIGION AND JUSTICE IN THE TIME OF THE BUBBLE

Given the subject matter and Haywood’s reputation for personal and literary licentiousness, the recurrence of religious language in *Memoirs of a Certain Island* comes as something of a surprise. To be sure, Haywood avoids explicit reference to the tenets of Christian morality, and she replaces the trinity with a pantheon of supernatural agents. But she also describes the island’s halcyon days as a prelapsarian “Paradise,” a land of superabundant natural resources and an orderly chain of being. As in Genesis, the “Brute Creation” submits to human stewardship, and the birds “warble” their “Maker’s Praise” (*MCI*, 2). Tropes of creation and toil-free harvests give way, of course, to the toxic influence of the Enchanted Well, and Haywood’s narrator styles the islander’s vulnerability to Lucitario’s design (and to one another’s false promises) as a crisis of religious belief. “Had thy degenerate Race,” Cupid angrily informs the genius of the isle, “believ’d thus justly of me, they had not banish’d from their ungrateful Breasts my Inspiration, nor would those few who still continue to obey my Laws, become the Objects of Contempt and Ridicule.—The Name of Cupid is despis’d, and *Lust*, and *Avarice*, those undoing Harpys, honour’d and rever’d” (*MCI*, 274). The islanders “believe” in the wrong gods,

committing within the religious context the same kind of evaluative error (substituting imaginary for real value) witnessed in the tales of amorous intrigue and at the site of the Enchanted Well. To the injured patron god of the island, the islanders' assent to the demons' claims is tantamount to blaspheme and "idol" worship (*MCI*, 275). How should we account for the religiosity of Haywood's text, for the narrative authority of Cupid and the practical agency of his fellow deities, as well as for the propensity of human characters to use terms like "apostasy," "sin," and "faith" in condemning perjured lovers? The final pages of this chapter offer a preliminary answer to this query, relating the appeal of religious systems of meaning to the sweeping problem of credibility.

Haywood's deities enforce a coherent, consistent ethical system superintended by the very embodiment of "Supreme Justice," the goddess Astrea (*MCI*, 71). After Montreville spurns Martasinda, leading to the young lady's suicide, Astrea demands an eye for an eye: "Whatever he suffered, unless he suffered by that very crime he had been guilty of himself, was too little an Expiation of Justice to allow as such" (*MCI*, 270). Because Montreville cannot be placed in the position of the female victim, his seduction and abandonment of Martasinda must "be retorted onto himself in the Person who was nearest and dearest to him"—his mother (*MCI*, 271). Thus, his mother takes her own life after she is herself abandoned by a sham-husband. Reflecting on the episode, Cupid declares that all who "are guilty of betraying an Innocent" live to see the pain they inflict redound back onto them, either directly or mediated through a beloved relation; they shall "some time or other feel the Woes they inflict" (*MCI*, 271). Though vulnerable to deception and injury, the inhabitants of Haywood's island may take solace in the execution of a code of justice that transcends the limitations of both the legal system and the available methods of evaluating character and creditworthiness. Astrea levies punishments in exact proportion to

crimes, and she does so, significantly, in the here and now. Such penalties may be delayed, but on a shorter temporal scale than the Christian scheme allows. Where Behn's Oroonoko frets over the deferral of punishments for violated parole to the afterlife, Haywood's characters are assured that perjurers meet their just rewards in their own lifetimes, "some time or other" if not immediately. The spiritual agents of Haywood's imagination ensure that "justice" works itself out, inevitably and in the world, satisfying grievances that neither human nor goddess can preempt.

Even where she flirts with the efficacy of human reason in mitigating the uncertainty of a world principled by desire, Haywood ultimately leans on the same notion of divinely enforced justice.⁴⁵ The love triangle between Olimpia, Silenia, and Blantier features an injured lover's attempt to use clues to bridge the gap between suspicion and conviction. After her unmarried and pregnant sister disappears from the family manse, Olimpia discovers a snippet of love poetry that arouses painful suspicions that her husband, Blantier, may have ruined the girl and carried her into hiding. Olimpia presents Blantier with the same fragmented verses and watches him carefully for a reaction:

She looked earnestly in his Face while she was speaking, and perceiv'd a visible Alteration in it ... 'Tis impossible to represent in what manner he look'd, when reaching his hand, which trembled as he took [the paper], but all that can be conceiv'd of Horror, of Shame, of Guilt, was too conspicuously delineated for his unhappy wife not to perceive it. (*MCI*, 232–3)

⁴⁵ Like the early eighteenth-century political economists Carl Wennerlind discusses in *The Casualties of Credit*, Haywood weighs the usefulness of probabilistic reasoning to evaluations of creditworthiness. As debates about how to instill confidence in new forms of property raged along party lines, writers imported the probabilistic epistemology spearheaded by Hobbes and Locke into the financial domain. They promoted "qualitative probabilistic reasoning" as a guide to decision-making in the absence of the "indisputable knowledge" that, as even the empiricist Locke concedes, is rarely available in practice (85–89). Haywood, as we have seen, is skeptical of such a solution.

To her dismay, the “visible Alteration” in Blantier’s countenance confirms her tentative interpretation of Silenia’s text. Olimpia’s “little Tryal” of her husband provokes him into a fully intelligible display of spontaneous emotion. It is a rare—for this novel—instance of transparency, one that might be more accurately attributed to Blantier’s unguarded condition than to a broader optimism about the reliability of physiognomic evidence. Here, at any rate, Blantier’s concatenation of horror, shame, and guilt is “conspicuously delineated” through the physiological effects of those emotional states—even if those particular effects defy Cupid’s powers of narrative description. His evident disorder, in turn, supplies evidence of a more fundamental and hitherto well-disguised condition: his depraved, inconstant character. Olimpia effectively reasons from these clues to the conclusion that her husband is guilty, converting “Suspense” into “Certainty” through an evidentiary protocol similar to the one employed by the characters in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (*MCI*, 232).

The evidence she produces, however, damns the offender only in her own “opinion” and in that of her family members (*MCI*, 235). In order to expose Blantier to the instruments of justice, Olimpia must achieve a “perfect Discovery” that holds up to the more rigorous standards of the courts of law and public opinion (*MCI*, 234). After the initial effects of Olimpia’s touchstone subside, Blantier regains his poise, meeting the family’s accusations with vehement denials. Olimpia’s focus shifts from validating her own fears to accumulating the incontrovertible evidence required to “convince the unbelieving World” of Blantier’s guilt (*MCI*, 238). But he expertly evades her attempts to gather intelligence—Cupid remarks that “it would not have been in the Power of all the Eyes of *Argus*” to have followed his movements—and Silenia’s death while in hiding threatens to preserve Blantier’s false character and thwart

Olimpia's quest for "reparation" once and for all (*MCI*, 234–5). A familiar figure intervenes to forestall that outcome:

The secret he had been so fortunate to preserve in [Silenia's] Life-time, was after her Death reveal'd at full, and by a way that should, methinks, deter offending Mortals from persevering in their Crimes, when what is most conceal'd from human sight is to the Eye of Heaven explored, and by the most unthought-of means oftentimes discover'd.—Divine Astrea would not permit the mournful Parents of this undone Departed to remain in an uncertainty so perplexing; but to the holy Priest, who, unknowing who she was, had ministred the funeral Rites, appear'd in her own heavenly Form, and told him all the Mystery. (*MCI*, 238)

Astrea's revelation leads the family to Silenia's body, the discovery and positive identification of which "serv'd as a Demonstration to those who at first seem'd to make a doubt" of the family's claims (*MCI*, 238). Through her emphasis in the above passage on visual acuity, her juxtaposition of "human sight" to the "Eye of Heaven," Haywood sets the knowledge conferred through (temporary, mediated) access to divine perception above the fruits of semiotic, or clues-based, inquiry. Two forms of knowledge are made to harmonize as Astrea guides her mortal charges through "mystery" to discovery: "reveal'd" religion leads to empirical proof, to the "demonstration" that Olimpia's family uses to satisfy their doubters.

Olimpia's interpretive prowess starts her down the path toward demonstrable knowledge, but the execution of justice ultimately demands a pagan version of particular providence. Astrea's intervention catalyzes the "Enquiry" that, in turn, bolsters the family's legal case against Blantier: "after having by diligent Enquiry trac'd out the Truth of every thing, they commenc'd a Suit of Law with Blantier, which was near being the Ruin of his Fortune, as it was of his Character with all Men of Honour, Virtue, or common Morality" (*MCI*, 239). With Astrea's guidance, and not without "diligent" effort on their part, the family brings Blantier to justice and brings his circulating, public "character" into line with his moral status. Revelation doesn't resolve characterological questions immediately, as it does in the sequel to Bunyan's *The*

Pilgrim's Progress, but it does prove instrumental in the detection and punishment of evil.

Through Olimpia's tale, Haywood adds her voice to the chorus of writers expressing skepticism about the efficacy of probabilistic reasoning in stabilizing a system built on promises of future performance. Contrary to the optimistic view espoused by proponents of the Financial Revolution, that epistemology fails to offset the unpredictability and confusion of the culture of credit. To the extent that such a model works to uncover the truth of character in *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, it works toward reparation of past injuries rather than the prevention of future ones.⁴⁶ Moreover, it works through the intervention of supernatural forces rather than the intellectual activity of rational agents.

Haywood implies that justice is out of the hands of individual moral agents and secular legal institutions, that it depends on the gradual machinations of a version of providence—even if the agent of providence does not in this case correspond to the Almighty of the Protestant Christian tradition. The system of belief operative in *Memoirs of a Certain Island* provides a more immediately gratifying fantasy than that afforded by Christian doctrine, and it invokes a spirituality at once rooted in Classical literature and secular moralism and calibrated to the experiences of fallen man. Haywood's islanders (and her readers) may as well believe in the promise of retroactive punishment if they cannot forecast and thwart worldly evils. Astrea's role in the bursting of the Bubble and the restoration of order on the island suggests that Haywood's ethical program translates to the broader iniquity of the South Sea scheme, as well. The knowledge that justice applies to the broader scale of national economic calamity salves wounds

⁴⁶ Olimpia's approach bears fruit in part because Blantier's false heart has already manifested in the material realm of action, as an investigable "crime." She doesn't try to predict whether he will prove false, but to assess his culpability for a past transgression.

sustained by speculators who were not sufficiently wise to withdraw from the marketplace, a la Commodus.

Haywood's response to the problem of establishing credibility is therefore two-fold. First, she creates a symbolic world, defined by its accessibility and coherence, that confronts and assuages fears of epistemological failure by putting them into discursive form. She also gestures toward an ethical system that promises complete justice *qua* retribution and mitigates personal moral responsibility. Since interpretive effort cannot avail the "stander-by" in his dealings with hypocrites and stock-jobbers, those men and women must trust to the agency and wisdom of divine forces to preserve the social order. Haywood's tacit argument suggests the continuity of religious and economic approaches to epistemological problems. Bunyan's overtly Calvinist concerns have not so much been displaced by as translated into a topical financial crisis.

Although it manifests in the South Sea Bubble, the problem of evaluating claims to creditworthiness antedates and outlives that event. As John Trenchard observed in the aftermath of Britain's first great financial crash, "No experience or sufferings can cure the world of its credulity. It has been a bubble from the beginning."⁴⁷ Trenchard and Haywood concur that the Bubble results from men hurrying after "advantages which are purely imaginary," that the speculators are victims of their own deluding desire.⁴⁸ But they also see that crisis as a symptom of the general conditions of sublunary experience, namely the prevalence of deceivers (be they false religious professors, inconstant lovers, or stock-jobbers) and the fatal credulity of their prey. Haywood is less willing than Trenchard to condemn her fellow Britons for their vulnerability, however. Like Bunyan and Behn before her, Haywood highlights the elusiveness of dependable indicia of character and creditworthiness. As she decries the fictitious narrative of

⁴⁷ John Trenchard, *Cato's Letters*, 55 (No. 6, 10 December, 1720).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

future wealth promulgated by the politicians and projectors behind the South Sea scheme, Haywood also asks, alongside her narrator, “How might not anyone by such a Tale have been deceiv’ d?” (*MCI*, 18).

CHAPTER FOUR:
HENRY FIELDING, GEORGE WHITEFIELD, AND THE “DIAGNOSTICS” OF
HYPOCRISY

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan passes “unperceiv’d” through celestial and earthly spheres, “For neither Man nor Angel can discern / Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks / Invisible, except to God alone” (III. 681–4).¹ Henry Fielding shares Milton’s concern about the mortal capacity to “discern” hypocrisy, but not his resignation to its invisibility. “An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men,” published in the first volume of Fielding’s *Miscellanies* (1743), describes hypocrisy as a pervasive threat to the virtuous, whose open hearts render them vulnerable to false professions of friendship and faith. Fielding arms his innocent readers with a set of rules, a “system” of “diagnostics,” by which they might detect and thwart “imposition” of this kind.² Balancing a broadly pessimistic outlook with confidence in his epistemological program, Fielding compares mid-eighteenth-century British society to a controversial form of popular entertainment:³

The whole World becomes a vast Masquerade, where the greatest Part appear disguised under false Vizors and Habits; a very few only shewing their own Faces, who become, by so doing, the Astonishment and Ridicule of all the rest.

But however cunning the Disguise be which a Masquerader wears: however foreign to his Age, Degree, or Circumstance, yet if closely attended to, he very rarely escapes the Discovery of an accurate Observer; for Nature, which unwillingly submits to

¹ Reprinted in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merrit Y. Hughes (1957; Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 275.

² Henry Fielding, “An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men,” *Miscellanies by Henry Fielding, Esq.*, vol. 1. Ed. Henry Knight Miller (Oxford: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1972), 155 and 172, henceforth cited parenthetically as “E.”

³ Arlene Fish Wilner reads the essay as ironic, pointing to Fielding’s frequent qualifications and exceptions to Fielding’s rules as evidence that he meant to undercut his own proposed program in order to emphasize the impossibility of constructing standardized diagnostics of character. “Henry Fielding and the Knowledge of Character,” *Modern Language Studies* 18 (1988): 181–194. My reading accords with that of Jenny Davidson, who attributes Fielding’s inconsistencies to “defensiveness” and a genuine ambivalence about the efficacy of his project. *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 138–141.

the Imposture, is ever endeavouring to peep forth and shew herself; nor can the Cardinal, the Friar, or the Judge, long conceal the Sot, the Gamester, and the Rake.

In the same Manner will those Disguises which are worn on the greater Stage, generally vanish, or prove ineffectual to impose the assumed for the real Character upon us, if we employ sufficient Diligence and Attention in the Scrutiny. (*E*, 155)

The masquerade metaphor establishes a two-dimensional and typological model of moral character that Fielding develops over the course of the essay. Just as the participants in a masquerade ball disguise their own faces “under” literal masks, so the hypocrite conceals his “real character” under an “assumed” one. Fortunately for Fielding’s target audience, “nature” and, with it, the moral content of character, strains to reveal itself to the acutely perceptive observer, unmasking superficial professional types to reveal the pernicious moral-social type lurking beneath the surface.

Fielding goes on to instruct his readers how to cooperate with nature’s efforts to “shew herself.” He offers three forms of evidence of “real character”—physiognomy, behavior toward the evaluator, and observed behavior toward third parties—and adds several further classes of hypocrite to the ranks of the sot, the gamester, and the rake. Rendering explicit the exterior/interior binary implied by his masquerade metaphor, Fielding promises to sketch the “outside” of each kind, then “takes some Pains in the ripping it up, and exposing the Horrors of its Insides, that we may all shun it” (*E*, 168). He depicts persons as at once bifurcated and subject to classificatory logic; within his schema, hypocrisy takes several forms, but it always reduces to the dislocation of interior (or “real”) and exterior (“assumed”) character. Discovering that dislocation requires penetrative scrutiny troped as crude vivisection, as a “ripping up.”

How does the epistemology of personal character developed within Fielding’s essay relate to the methods of characterization exhibited by his novels? Studies of Fielding’s fictional characters tend to elaborate on Samuel Johnson’s unfavorable comparison of Fielding to Samuel

Richardson. Johnson famously remarked to Hester Thrale that Richardson “picked the kernel of life...while Fielding was contented with the husk.”⁴ Modern critics have followed Johnson’s lead. They treat Fielding’s characters, variously, as allegorical personifications, embodied ideas, and fully legible, circulating surfaces. Martin Battestin describes them as elements of a “quasi-allegorical” system that reproduces Fielding’s vision of a providentially directed, orderly creation. Put simply, the characters in his novels “objectify” abstract ideas.⁵ In *Tom Jones* (1748), for instance, Sophia Western embodies the perfect wisdom for which she is named, combining “beauty of form” with “spiritual perfection.”⁶ More recently, Deidre Lynch has argued that Fielding’s characters, like those depicted in a Hogarth print, exemplify the “coping mechanism” afforded by early eighteenth-century fiction. They populate a “symbolic environment that was founded on principles of perspicuity and accessibility, and in which truths could be self-evident,” ameliorating the confusion of Britain’s protocapitalist market via their ready intelligibility.⁷

Reading the “Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men” alongside *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* (1751), this chapter takes up Fielding’s preoccupation with the unstable relationship between the two dimensions of personal and literary character, the “husk” and “kernel” of Johnson’s metaphor. Although *Joseph Andrews* (1742) largely circumvents the problem of

⁴ Quoted in Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 261. Watt proposes that Fielding’s “external and somewhat peremptory approach” to characterization reflects his interest in social taxonomy over and above psychological intensity. Fielding concentrates on surfaces “because the surface alone is usually quite sufficient to identify the specimen” and then “assign him to his moral or social species” (272).

⁵ Battestin, *The Providence of Wit*, 147–185. Battestin develops a line of argument introduced by Sheldon Sacks, who analyzes Fielding’s characters as “walking concepts,” personifications of particular virtues and vices. *Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding, with Glances at Swift, Johnson, and Richardson* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1964).

⁶ Battestin, *The Providence of Wit*, 181–5.

⁷ Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 5.

hypocrisy by promoting a unification of qualities of body and soul, Fielding's last two novels betray his ambivalence about the dependability of evidence of character. *Tom Jones* (1748) upholds the two-dimensional model of the essay, but the novel also repeatedly demonstrates the practical difficulty of bridging the gap between inside and outside, assumed and real character. In *Amelia* (1751), by far the least celebrated of his productions, Fielding shifts ground as he shifts focus to the preservation of female virtue. He introduces a hypocrite, Colonel James, who not only resists efforts to ascertain sincerity but also threatens the integrity of both Fielding's "moral and social species" and the interior/exterior dichotomy central to his epistemology of character.⁸

As it is outlined in his periodical essay and tested in his novels, Fielding's program of discernment reveals a complicated theological inheritance. Fielding was an adherent of the liberal Anglican orthodoxy, which in his day espoused Latitudinarian positions. Anglicans like Fielding asserted universal eligibility for salvation, advocated tolerance of ecclesiastical and doctrinal matters indifferent to that salvation, and imagined religion as a brotherhood among men superintended by a benevolent deity.⁹ They also subscribed to the teachings of Arminius, which repudiated the intertwined Calvinist doctrines of justification by faith alone and double predestination because they attenuated, if not abrogated entirely, free will. Indeed, Fielding's novels witness his rejection of Calvinist doctrine on the grounds that it subordinates good works to empty professions of belief—a subordination at odds with Fielding's commitment to the Arminian argument that salvation must be achieved through muscular virtue. He seeks to develop develop a semiotic program by which a careful observer might interpret the outward signs of an interior condition. This impulse reveals an unexpected affinity to Calvinism,

⁸ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 272.

⁹ For an overview of Fielding's religious orientation, see Homer Goldberg, "Political and Religious Background," in *Joseph Andrews* by Henry Fielding, ed. Goldberg (New York: Norton, 1987), 388–92.

especially as it was revived within George Whitefield's strain of Methodism in the 1730s and '40s.

By highlighting this affinity, I do not mean to cast Fielding as a Calvinist in the strict sense. After all, Fielding never abandons the Arminian notion of human cooperation with divine grace in favor of the predestinarian position. Rather, I wish to recover the complexity of Fielding's engagement with Protestant theology, and specifically his struggle to reconcile Arminian latitudinarian principles with a Calvinist understanding of character. Scholarship on Fielding's novels, like scholarship on eighteenth-century lay literature more generally, tends to underestimate their theological richness—or to misconstrue it as evidence of eroding belief. Influenced by a powerful historical narrative of secularization, critics like Claude Rawson and J. Paul Hunter neglect Fielding's capacity to generate extraordinarily textured engagements with the world precisely because he is not in the thrall of a particular system of meaning.¹⁰ This chapter emphasizes the nuance of Fielding's religious thought as a part of a reinterpretation of his place in the history of the novel as a genre.

Attending to the religiosity of Fielding's approach to character puts him into conversation with the other writers examined in this dissertation. Fielding shares with John Bunyan, the "high" Calvinist subject of Chapter One, a willingness to use fiction as a testing ground for the efficacy of his epistemological program. Like Bunyan, he responds to the problem of knowing other persons by conceptualizing character as both two-dimensional and typological. Each individual is divided into a fixed, essential nature and an outward, possibly counterfeit face, and, under the proper evidential and taxonomic protocols, discrete characters submit to moral

¹⁰ See Rawson, *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress* (New York: Routledge, 1972), and Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chain of Circumstance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975).

categorization. In *Part II* of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan acknowledges the undecidability of spiritual character, prioritizing revelation over interpretation. But he never budges from his conviction that the sublunary, social arena is populated by two kinds of person, each with a public and a private dimension—however oblique the relation between them. By contrast, Fielding's sensitivity to the realities of experience in a postlapsarian, protocapitalist milieu—and especially to the ascendancy of desire—eventually begets skepticism about the integrity of the Calvinist model. Free from Bunyan's inflexible doctrinal position but energized by Calvinism's promise to stabilize the knowledge of character, Fielding applies the logic of that theology to the mid-century culture of credit.

As I argued in chapters two and three, Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood take pains to show the ways in which character becomes increasingly unreadable as forms of property undergo transformation and the grounds of personal creditworthiness shift underfoot. In *Amelia*, Fielding confronts the effects of desire within the now-entrenched marketplace, exposing the failure of his epistemological system to contain the threat of characterological inconsistency more fundamental and more ominous than the disjuncture of inside and outside explored by Bunyan's narratives and by his own *Tom Jones*. This chapter's focus on Fielding's complexly evolving depiction of both the dangers of hypocrisy and the resources of Calvinism, then, clarifies the place of *Amelia* within his corpus. Viewed by this light, Fielding's last novel appears not as a feckless imitation of Richardson's sentimental mode but as the coda to his decade-long project of articulating and resolving the problem of discernment. Of his literary productions, *Amelia* is the most vexed by this issue, and in it both the terms of the problem and Fielding's proposed solutions lead him away from the Calvinist-inflected epistemology that informs both his essay and his earlier novels. For in *Amelia*, the embodied virtues of *Joseph Andrews* and the

undetected but ultimately discoverable hypocrites of *Tom Jones* give way to an enemy who, to paraphrase Alexander Pope, has no real character at all.¹¹

FIELDING'S ESSAY AND WHITEFIELD'S SERMONS

Fielding's novels are replete with evidence of his disdain for the Calvinist theological tradition. Through his remarks on the Methodist preacher George Whitefield in *Joseph Andrews*, Abraham Adams acts as a mouthpiece for Fielding's unsparing critique. Having granted the accuracy and usefulness of Whitefield's attack on "Luxury and Splendor" among the clergy, Adams turns his attention to the Calvinist strain of Whitefield's thought:

When he began to set up the detestable Doctrine of Faith against good Works, I was his Friend no longer; for surely, that Doctrine was coined in Hell, and one would think none but the Devil himself could have the confidence to preach it. For can anything be more derogatory to the Honor of God, than for Men to imagine that the All-wise Being will hereafter say to the Good and Virtuous, *Notwithstanding the Purity of thy Life, notwithstanding that constant Rule of Virtue and Goodness in which you Walked upon the Earth, still as thou didst not believe everything in the true Orthodox manner, thy want of Faith shall condemn thee?* Or on the other side, can any Doctrine have a more pernicious influence on Society than a Persuasion, that it will be a good Plea for a Villain at the last Day; *Lord, it is true I never obeyed one of thy Commandments, yet punish me not, for I believe them all?*¹²

Echoing a familiar refrain of Anglican Arminians, Adams casts Whitefield's reassertion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone as an outright rejection of pious living in favor of empty professions of assent to "orthodox" tenets. Adams also does violence to the Calvinist conception of "faith." What for adherents like John Bunyan and Whitefield reflected the otherwise invisible operations of prevenient grace and provided evidence of the individual believer's election becomes a voluntary, cognitive act on the part of the professor. Worse still, it may become the

¹¹ Famously, the opening couplet of Pope's *Epistle II. To a Lady. Of the Characters of Women* (1743) reads: "Nothing so true as what you once let fall / 'Most Women have no Characters at all.'"

¹² Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 64–5, henceforth cited parenthetically as "JA."

mere gesture of that “belief,” a “plea” to issue on Judgment Day in defense of a vicious life. Adams argues that Whitefield sets faith, emptied of its genuine spiritual content, “against” good works rather than prioritizing Christ’s redemptive power over the agency of the sinner. Calvinist thinkers like Bunyan and Whitefield tread carefully to avoid such imputations, arguing for the coordination of grace and sanctification without compromising their conviction that the depraved state of fallen man precludes fulfillment of God’s perfect justice. Thus, “good works” alone cannot secure salvation for creatures tainted by both original sin and particular transgressions against the first covenant.¹³ Speaking through the parson, Fielding vehemently insists on salvation as an achieved outcome rather than an assigned destiny. Though he stops short of naming the concept, Fielding criticizes double predestination when he has Adams lament that the “detestable doctrine of faith” arbitrarily disqualifies the “good and virtuous” from salvation and encourages vice by indulging hopes of deathbed repentance. Fielding articulates the crux of Arminian responses to Calvinism’s diminution of personal agency. Such a subordination of works to faith transforms religious duty, which ought to consist of performing public “promises of being good, friendly, and benevolent to each other,” into mere words (*JA*, 65).¹⁴

¹³ For the dual tincture of sin in the Calvinist imagination, see George Whitefield, “Sermon I: Of Justification by Christ,” in *The Doctrines of the Gospel Asserted and Vindicated* (London: C. Davis, 1739), 10–16. John Bunyan addresses directly the differing responsibilities of the believer under the first and second covenants in *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* (see Chapter One, above).

¹⁴ Insofar as Fielding targets the specifically Calvinist elements of Whitefield’s Methodism, his critique diverges from the general cultural response outlined by Misty G. Anderson in *Imagining Methodism in 18th-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012). Anderson shows how the popular press used Methodism to interrogate the boundaries of modern selfhood, focusing primarily on the anxiety and fascination provoked by the movement’s emphasis on communal and felt spirituality. For Fielding’s direct confrontation with Methodism *per se*, and especially with a transformative religious enthusiasm that shares a permeable boundary with erotic desire, see *Imagining Methodism*, 29–30 and 70–129.

Although Adams's diatribe in *Joseph Andrews* counts as the most sustained attack, Fielding takes a number of less direct shots at Whitefield's strain of Methodism. In *Tom Jones*, he invests the hypocritical Thwackum with vaguely Calvinist principles: though ostensibly an Anglican like Fielding, Tom's erstwhile tutor and tormentor emphasizes human "Iniquity" and the necessity of purification and redemption through "the divine Power of Grace."¹⁵ Thwackum also chastises a young Tom for arguing, contra Blifil, "That there was no Merit in Faith without Works" (*TJ*, 107). Before dying in destitution, Blifil himself "converts" to Methodism (*TJ*, 639). Fielding goes on to caricature Whitefield's thought through the Methodist pick-pocket in *Amelia*, who posits a directly proportional relationship between sin and grace: "Perhaps the worse a man is by Nature, the more Room there is for Grace. The spirit is active, and loves best to inhabit those Minds where it may meet with the most Work."¹⁶ Yet the vexing epistemology of character brings Fielding and Whitefield into surprising proximity. Because they share his preoccupation with the efficacy of extrinsic measures of interior states, with the problem of smoking hypocrisy, Calvinist thinkers provide Fielding with a precedent for the "true practical System" for "understanding the Characters of Men" (*TJ*, 317).

Of the "sorts" of hypocrite catalogued in Fielding's "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," the false "saint" receives by far the most attention. Fielding deploys the term ironically, highlighting the absurdity of affecting perfect "Sanctity," but the overlap with Bunyan's vocabulary bears remarking, especially in the context of avoiding the socially deleterious influence of false religious professors, a central concern of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In fact, as he "venture[s] to caution my open-hearted Reader against" religious hypocrisy,

¹⁵ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 2nd edition, ed. Sheridan Baker (London: Norton, 1995), 83, henceforth cited parenthetically as "*TJ*."

¹⁶ Fielding, *Amelia*, 71. Henceforth cited parenthetically as "*A*."

Fielding asks a version of the question that haunts Bunyan's allegory: "The Sanctity which I mean is that which flows from the Lips, and shines in the Countenance. It may be said, perhaps, that real Sanctity may wear these Appearances; and how shall we then distinguish with any Certainty, the true from the fictitious" (*E*, 167). When believers and hypocrites look alike, how are we to distinguish between the "true" and the "fictitious"? Later in the essay, Fielding turns to the New Testament, and particularly Mathew 23, for "rules" by which "honest Men" might "discover" the sanctified hypocrite (*E*, 172–3). The rubrics he uncovers there parallel his more general system of diagnostics: they stress the distinction between profession and performance and assume that actions will disclose the "Inside of this Character" of the counterfeit saint just as they will expose the pretenses of a false friend outside of the religious context (*E*, 171).

Whitefield's sermons, published together in 1739 as *The Doctrine of the Gospel Asserted and Vindicated*, exhibit a similar interest in both the social dangers of religious hypocrisy and the fraught relationship between the content of character and its outward marks. In "Sermon IV: The Necessity and Benefits of Religious Society," Whitefield argues that "the Communion of Saints" insulates the believer against the corrupting influence of "horrid, though seemingly friendly Counsels."¹⁷ These hypocrites would convince true saints that "the Way [is not] so narrow as others imagine it to be" (*WS* IV.13). Whitefield urges his audience to "walk circumspectly toward those who are without" (i.e. outside) their congregation in order to preserve a "conversation" consonant with their sincere professions of faith (*WS* IV.22). When he further enjoins them to "let your Practice correspond to your Profession" and to show "that you are willing, not barely to *seem*, but to *be* in *Reality, Christians*," Whitefield acknowledges the

¹⁷ George Whitefield, "Sermon IV: The Necessity and Benefits of Religious Society," in *Doctrines of the Gospel*, 13–14. Henceforth cited parenthetically as "*WS*." N.B. Each sermon in the collection is paginated independently.

possibility, even the prevalence, of the disjunction that so fascinates Fielding (*WS* IV.23). Claims to saving faith may be “fictitious” as well as “real,” and a professed Christian may not “be” so “in reality.” Whitefield’s theology features a strong social component. As he delivers his vision of ecclesiastical polity—a fellowship of true saints—Whitefield also raises the specter of religious hypocrisy, underscoring the necessity and difficulty of authenticating professions of faith.

Although his categories are generally less sweeping than the two classes of spiritual character created by Calvinist theology, the saved and the damned. Fielding shares with Whitefield a taxonomic impulse, an instinct to impose order on the sublunary moral realm. Hence his turn in the essay, as in his novels, to the logic of “species,” and to an extensible list of “sorts” of false friends (*E*, 164). When he deduces from the evidence of children and “savages” the existence of “some unacquired, original Distinction, in the Nature of the Soul of one Man, from that of Another,” Fielding strays quite close to the Calvinist, predestinarian approach to character (*E*, 154). That “original distinction” is an inborn propensity toward good or evil, rooted in the very “soul.” It is true that Fielding allows for the refinement or correction of such a propensity and suggests that the “original distinction” between good and bad nature ramifies into a number of further moral types. His proposal that, at some level of abstraction, people may be classified according to one of two fundamental natures nevertheless accords with the duality promoted by the doctrine of predestination.

Whitefield’s “Sermon XII: The Marks of the New Birth; Or, The Different States of Nature and Grace Described” shows how the inscrutability of fundamental states (in this case spiritual states) can push an overtly Calvinist thinker past the simple taxonomy prescribed by doctrine. Instead of the two familiar classes that structure Bunyan’s moral arena, the elect and

the reprobate, the reader finds a list of “several distinct Classes of Professors,” as well as a set of diagnostics useful in distinguishing between them (*WS* XII.16). Like Fielding, Whitefield derives the “marks” of election from the gospel of Mathew. Signs of the operation of grace and, by extension, election are themselves inward states. But these frames of mind and spirit bear outward proof in the form of specific, correspondent actions; unlike spiritual regeneration itself, these qualities are self-evident. For example, an impulse to pray indexes the “spirit of supplication,” charitable deeds give evidence of benevolence, and good works signal an aversion to sin (*WS* XII.9–13). He “that is joined to the Lord in one Spirit will so order his Thoughts, Words, and Actions aright, that he will evidence to all, that his Conversation is in Heaven” (*WS* XII.13). Whitefield attempts to inspire confidence as he surveys these criteria, declaring that thoughts, words, and actions align to distinguish a true believer in the eyes of the world.

Here, Whitefield appeals directly to those sufficiently self-aware to recognize themselves in these classes after an “impartial Examination” (*WS* XII.15). His focus, like Bunyan’s in *Grace Abounding*, rests on the individual’s need to cultivate assurance of election. Yet his frequent recourse to third-person point-of-view, to the view from the outside, betrays an interest in the task of interpreting these marks in other people (*WS* XII.10–11). Whether they stand in for discrete types of professor or stages in the narrative of spiritual awakening and regeneration associated with the elect—and Whitefield suggests that they do both—the “classes” outlined in “Sermon XII” are literally visible to those who know how to interpret evidence of the “new birth” (*WS* XII.15). As in Faithful’s optimistic account, “Grace” is something that we “see” in other men (*WS* XII.13). Whitefield’s confidence erodes somewhat when he sketches the classes intermediate to the doctrinally mandated, absolute categories of “abandoned Sinner” and “happy Saint” (*WS* XII.16). Significantly, “those who deceive themselves with false Hopes of Salvation”

also threaten to deceive third party observers: these men and women “appear a little beautiful without, but [are] inwardly full of Corruptions and Uncleaness” (*WS* XII.18). Whitefield here alludes to the threat of religious hypocrisy thematized in “Sermon IV,” even invoking the inside/outside disharmony upon which Fielding bases his definition.

Read together, Whitefield’s sermons show the social, practical application of Calvinist theology, echoing Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography and allegorical fiction by foregrounding the need to classify people according to external signs of their religious and ethical characters. The Arminian conception of the will also holds a place in this genealogy. Insofar as they imply that a failure to judge other people with accuracy jeopardizes election, Calvinists, like Bunyan and Whitefield, who elaborate their theological system in narrative and exegesis also acknowledge the role of free will in the determination and detection of character. Bunyan’s narratives and Whitefield’s sermons, thus, anticipate the tension between human intellectual agency and divine authority evident in Fielding’s novels. As the following readings aim to show, Fielding’s major works of fiction pursue the problem of hypocrisy beyond the immediately religious context. His conviction that the kinds of false friend overlap in the challenges they present to judges of character allows him to explore a range of variations on the same theme. Fielding, thus, fleshes out the fundamental epistemological problem posed by counterfeit saints, giving more sustained attention to the difficulty of applying Calvinist diagnostics to the various domains of this life than Bunyan’s twinned commitments to doctrinal exposition and figurative representation would allow.

EMBODIMENT AND MISREPRESENTATION

In “An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men,” the body, and especially the face, is the first index of character (here denoting the essential nature or moral character) and,

therefore, a useful instrument of moral ratiocination. “The Passions of Men,” Fielding declares, “do commonly imprint sufficient Marks in the Countenance” to allow an “accurate and discerning Eye” to distinguish the “assumed” from the “real Character” of a hypocrite (*E*, 155–161). He proceeds from an explicit comparison between the diseases of the mind and those of the body, positing equivalences between the discernment of hypocrisy and medical “diagnostics,” unwitting external signs of intention or disposition and “symptoms” (*E*, 156). The analogy at once provides a vocabulary for Fielding’s treatise and appropriates the authority of a pseudoscience for his program.¹⁸ We are in the realm of “Nature,” which “kindly holds forth to us” visible markers of inner meaning; the responsibility for error, and for the general skepticism about the efficacy of physiognomy, falls squarely on the “physician”/observer (*E*, 156–7). The claim accords with Fielding’s method of characterization in *Joseph Andrews*, in which faces, like inn signs, are fully legible. The characters in Fielding’s first novel unify interior and exterior character so fully in the case of the novel’s eponymous hero that those divisions become irrelevant. As a result, they readily submit to the physiognomic and taxonomic reading practices outlined in the essay.

Working to preempt “malicious applications,” Fielding’s narrator famously pauses midway through *Joseph Andrews* in order to clarify the external referent of his characters:

I declare here once for all, I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual but a Species. Perhaps it will be answered, Are not the Characters taken from Life? To which I answer in the Affirmative; nay, I believe I might aver, that I have writ little more than I

¹⁸ Fielding’s idea of physiognomy deals almost exclusively with facial expressions and with the presence or absence of physical beauty. He does not advance rules for the measurement of certain features or argue for a correlation between the moral and emotional dispositions of individuals and the animals they can be said to resemble in the proportion and arrangement of those features. In that sense he is closer to Sir Thomas Browne’s vision than to John Evelyn’s. See Browne, *Religio Medici* (1642), 2.2 and *Christian Morals* (1716), 2.2 and 2.9 in *The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne*, Ed. Norman J. Endicott (New York: Norton, 1967) and Evelyn, *Numismata, A Discourse of Metals* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1697).

have seen. The Lawyer is not only alive, but hath been so these 4000 Years, and I hope G— will indulge his Life as many yet to come. He hath not confined himself to one Profession, one Religion, or one Country; but when the first mean selfish Creature appeared on the human Stage, who made Self the Centre of the whole Creation; would give himself no Pain, incur no Danger, advance no Money to assist, or preserve his Fellow-Creatures; then was our Lawyer born; and whilst such a Person as I have described, exists on Earth, so long shall he remain upon it.

There are besides little Circumstances to be considered, as the Drapery of a Picture, which tho' Fashion varies at different Times, the Resemblance of the Countenance is not by those means diminished. Thus, I believe, we may venture to say, Mrs. *Tow-wouse* is coeval with our Lawyer, and tho' perhaps during the Changes, which so long an Existence must have passed through, she may in her Turn have stood behind the Bar at an Inn, I will not scruple to affirm, she hath likewise in the Revolution of Ages sat on a Throne. In short where extreme Misery, with a Degree of Hypocrisy, have united in a female Composition, Mrs. *Tow-wouse* was that Woman. (*JA*, 148)

The two characters in question, a lawyer who briefly shares a stage coach with Fielding's heroes and the hostess of an alehouse at which the company refresh themselves, differ from the thinly veiled targets of Eliza Haywood's scandal chronicle. Where Haywood's inscribed persons often correlate to historical persons or mythological figures, Fielding's characters exemplify moral and social types that transcend "profession," "religion," and "country." The lawyer embodies a specific disposition toward his "fellow-creatures," standing in for "such a person" so perversely selfish that he would restructure Christianity's cosmic order by installing himself "at the Centre of Creation." Mrs. *Tow-wouse*'s character is explicitly compound: she "unites" into a single, gendered "composition" of hypocrisy a quality of temper, a socially deleterious passion ("avarice"), and an emotional incapacity (sympathy). Both of Fielding's species are profoundly stable, their essential natures persisting through the "revolution of ages." The "little circumstances" which distinguish the lawyer and Mrs. *Tow-wouse* from other examples of their respective species are the mere "drapery of a picture." Changing those details to reflect the fashion of the age or the fortune of the man or woman in no way diminishes the "resemblance of the countenance." Whether she sits behind the "bar at an inn" or upon a "throne," Mrs. *Tow-*

wouse is recognizable as a member of her species, as “such a person.” Fielding’s portraiture metaphor points back to the lesson of Mrs. Tow-wouse’s first appearance in the narrative, wherein the reader learns that the sign of her inn (a dragon) and her physical ugliness announce her uncharitable and irascible disposition. In this novel, Fielding locates the key to character in the countenance.

As an example of the unification of surface and essence, Joseph Andrew’s own body furnishes the physiognomist with especially cooperative reading material. The name of Fielding’s title character, of course, ties him to the biblical archetype of chastity, forecasting his virtuous resistance to Lady Booby’s advances.¹⁹ But it is Joseph’s body that conveys both his good nature and the class identity later confirmed by his strawberry birthmark in the novel’s famous recognition scene. Having sketched Joseph’s beautiful features—perfectly proportioned limbs, Roman nose, rosy cheeks, etc.—Fielding observes the communicative quality of his face and presence: “His Countenance had a Tenderness joined with a Sensibility inexpressible. Add to this the most perfect neatness in his Dress, and an Air, which to those who have not seen many Noblemen, would give an Idea of Nobility” (*JA*, 31). Like Aphra Behn’s displaced African prince, Joseph exhibits visible clues to lost social standing. According to Fielding’s descriptive mode, characteristics of heart and mind, such as “tenderness,” “sensibility,” and “nobility” become external features at once indescribable and transparent. When he proposes that Joseph’s “air” would “give an idea of nobility” to those totally unfamiliar with noblemen, Fielding means to lash the upper class by hinting at the difference between gentility, greatness of birth, and *gentillesse*, greatness of mind and soul. (Those used to the “nobility” of debased noblemen won’t recognize the quality in a moral paragon like Joseph.) But he also stresses the extent to which

¹⁹ For the significance of names in *Joseph Andrews*, see Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middleton: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959).

Joseph literally embodies the latter “idea.” By Joseph’s “air,” Fielding refers to the cumulative effect or impression of his physical person; the word carries the sense of “outward appearance, impression, look; apparent character.”²⁰ Joseph’s character of nobility is so readily “apparent” that his body “gives” the idea directly.

With no prior knowledge of true nobility, the hypothetical observer in Fielding’s second sentence doesn’t so much recognize the abstract quality in Joseph’s face or form as receive an impression. She sees it and grasps its meaning in the same instant—the moment in which she surveys Joseph’s body. When Fielding turns to the mock-heroic later in the novel, he can “find no simile adequate to our purpose” of representing Joseph:

For indeed, what Instance could we bring to set before our Reader’s Eyes at once the Idea of Friendship, Courage, Youth, Beauty, Strength, and Swiftnes; all which blazed in the Person of *Joseph Andrews*. Let those therefore that describe Lions and Tigers, and Heroes fiercer than both, raise their Poems or Plays with the Simile of *Joseph Andrews*, who is himself above the reach of any Simile. (*JA*, 188)

Fielding’s hero cannot be defined via comparison. The same coincidence of “idea” and “person” evident in Joseph’s physical description obtains in this example, as well. It accounts here for the failure of the analogical mode demanded by Fielding’s self-conscious generic shift. The directness and simultaneity of the relationship, the capacity of Joseph’s apparent character to “set before our reader’s eyes” several abstract and traditionally interior qualities, and to do so “at once,” as if they were a single idea, vexes “simile.” Joseph may enable figurative representation, but only as its fixed point of comparison. He is not “like” anything that more perfectly communicates “friendship,” “courage,” or “youth.” Instead, he serves as their physical incarnation.²¹

²⁰ *OED Online*, “Air, n.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed February 28, 2014.

²¹ Joseph’s visible moral perfection complicates Thomas G. Pavel’s argument that Fielding’s approach to characterization reveals his comic anti-idealism. Pavel sets Fielding against the

“Real character” is often less perspicuous in *Tom Jones*. As Arlene Fish Wilner has observed, Fielding’s second novel demonstrates “how difficult it is to draw proper conclusions about character and motive from human behavior.”²² Fielding’s approach to character in the novel, then, undermines his claim in the “Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men” that “the Actions of Men” offer the “surest Evidence of their Character” (*E*, 164). In that piece, he insists that people would be less vulnerable to imposition if “they would believe their own Eyes, and judge of Men by what they actually see them perform towards those with whom they are most closely connected” (*E*, 175). Careful observation of a professed friend’s treatment of intimate acquaintances provides the empirical evidence necessary to decide whether to credit or discredit his asseverations. Just as the types depicted in *Joseph Andrews* persist through the ages, so the essential nature of an “undutiful, ungrateful Son” or a “barbarous Brother” translates across categories of relation (*E*, 176). To assume that such a person would prove a “sincere and faithful Friend” despite demonstrable evidence of his mistreatment of a father or brother is to commit an inexcusable error. One guilty of such absurd “credulity” mistakes a change of perspective for a more fundamental change of disposition.

In *Tom Jones*, Allworthy’s misdiagnosis of Tom’s and Blifil’s antithetical relationship dramatizes the practical challenge of putting the proper construction on outward evidence of character, and particular another person’s actions. When Blifil sets out to sink Tom’s character in the eyes of their benefactor, he misrepresents incontrovertible “fact” rather than relying on

general trend in eighteenth-century novels toward “plausible ideal characters,” paragons, like Richardson’s Pamela, made believable by their placement in familiar settings and by the narrative’s psychological intensity. *The Lives of the Novel: A History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013). The characters in Fielding’s novels, by contrast, are “neither absurdly burlesque nor excessively admirable, but stand halfway between caricatures and icons” (141). Pavel’s generalization proves apt enough with respect to Parson Adams or Tom Jones, but it fails to not acknowledge Fielding’s enduring fascination with exemplarity.

²² Wilner, “Henry Fielding and the Knowledge of Character,” 181.

outright lies: Blifil gives a “malicious Turn” to Tom’s behavior during Allworthy’s illness (*TJ*, 201). By concealing the sentiment in back of Tom’s drunken riotousness—joy at the news of Allworthy’s expected recovery—Blifil suppresses a “real Truth” incommensurate with naked fact (*TJ*, 201). The narrator excuses Allworthy for judging Tom harshly under the circumstances, making an allowance for “the Light in which Jones then appeared” to him (*TJ*, 202–3). By manipulating that “light,” Blifil exploits Allworthy’s forensic approach to assessing character, his commitment to “mak[ing] proper judgments based on limited and insufficient information.”²³

Fielding describes Allworthy’s failure to discern Mr. Thwackum’s religious hypocrisy in similarly exculpatory terms. The narrator warns against condemning Allworthy for his mistaken conclusion that Thwackum’s evident “Infirmities” are “over-balanced by his good Qualities:”

For the Reader is greatly mistaken, if he conceives that *Thwackum* appeared to Mr. *Allworthy* in the same Light as he doth to him in this History; and he is as much deceived, if he imagines, that the most intimate Acquaintance which he himself could have had with that Divine, would have informed him of those Things which we, from our Inspiration, are enabled to open and discover. (*TJ*, 89)

Fielding elevates his readers above the interpretive struggle facing his characters by conveying the knowledge required to set Thwackum’s flaws in the proper “light.” In doing so, he also hints at the impenetrability of spiritual states. Over time and through close contact, Allworthy’s “Wisdom and Penetration” allow him to see that Thwackum’s “great Reputation for Learning,

²³ Wilner, “Henry Fielding and the Knowledge of Character,” 184. Glen McClish analyzes Fielding’s use of “forensic rhetoric” in his novels, drawing a distinction between the “diegetic realm of his narrators,” in which rhetoric is treated with confidence, and the “mimetic worlds of the stories themselves,” which undermine that optimism. “Henry Fielding, the Novel, and Classical Legal Rhetoric,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 14 (1996): 413–40. McClish focuses on the novels’ “use and depiction of the rhetorical forms of eighteenth-century law” rather than on contemporary principles of legal evidence, but I would argue, alongside Wilner, that Fielding regards the use of imperfect evidence to draw conclusions and pass sentence with the same ambivalent eye. For new insight into Fielding’s own career as a barrister, see Frederick G. Ribble, “Henry Fielding at the Bar: A Reappraisal,” *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013): 903–13.

Religion and Sobriety of Manners” exaggerates his virtues (*TJ*, 88–89). Yet even the most “intimate Acquaintance,” the kind of privileged access upon which Christian relies in his confrontation with Talkative, fails “to open and discover” the character of an arrant hypocrite. Nor would such intimacy avail the reader under similar circumstances, the narrator cautions. For the “Things” to which he refers are intrinsic truths alienated from outward evidence such as reputation, appearance, and action—truths inaccessible except by dint of a narrative authority that stands in for God’s. Fielding seconds Bunyan’s call for receptivity to revealed knowledge, in this case delivered by the self-styled “history” writer, an author persona “inspired” with semi-omniscience. Figures like Thwackum (and Talkative before him) reveal a tension inherent to a Calvinist paradigm based on penetrative scrutiny of outward markers. The “real character” behind our self-presentations is both profoundly stable and potentially inscrutable.

Blifil’s and Thwackum’s successful misrepresentations confirm a “very useful Lesson” for which the narrator had promised exemplification. “Well-disposed Youths” like Tom, he writes,

may here find that Goodness of Heart, and Openness of Temper, tho’ these may give them great Comfort within, and administer an honest Pride in their own Minds, will by no Means, alas! do their business in the World. Prudence and Circumspection are necessary even to the best of Men. They are indeed as it were a Guard to Virtue, without which she can never be safe. It is not enough that your Designs, nay that your Actions, are intrinsically good, you must take Care they shall appear so. If your Inside be never so beautiful, you must preserve a fair Outside also. This must be constantly looked to, or Malice and Envy will take Care to blacken it so, that the Sagacity and Goodness of an *Allworthy* will not be able to see thro’ it, and to discern the Beauties within. Let this, my young Readers, be your constant Maxim, That no Man can be good enough to enable him to neglect the Rules of Prudence; nor will Virtue herself look beautiful, unless she be bedecked with the outward Ornaments of Decency and Decorum. (*TJ*, 92-3)

Fielding acknowledges the flip side of his two-dimensional model of personal character:

“prudence and circumspection” are required of both the observer and the observed. Just as the observer addressed in his essay must work to “rip up” the hypocrite’s surface and reveal the

secret, “hideous” truth of his nature, so the good-natured object of scrutiny must work to make his intrinsic merit transparent from the “outside.” Because even the most discriminating and sympathetic judge must evaluate character according to its outward appearance, Fielding urges his readers to cultivate an outside to match the “beauties within.”

The threat posed by “malice and envy” is two-fold. First, a deceiver actuated by those passions may act the part of Blifil, striving to “blacken” his enemy’s exterior character to the point that it becomes impenetrable, even to the likes of Allworthy. Such is the power and the danger of reputation within Fielding’s schema: second-hand reports of a person’s actions are at once unreliable—subject to misrepresentation—and indispensable. Secondly, Fielding’s reassertion of the inside/outside binary carries the implied threat of hypocrisy, the possibility that a shrewd operator like Blifil might also project a “fair outside.” Thus, the “outward ornaments of decency and decorum” might not only lend beauty to virtue, but also pass for that virtue. The threat is realized in the figure of Blifil, whose outward ornaments (his professed piety and his grave affect) belie what a disabused Allworthy later calls “the deepest and blackest Villainy” (*TJ*, 614). Because it gives false evidence, Blifil’s façade proves as difficult to “see thro” as Tom’s undeservedly “blackened” character. Allworthy’s “sagacity and goodness” do not avail in this case, yet Allworthy eventually “discovered” his nephew “to be a Villain” (*TJ*, 621). Allworthy’s realization, as well as his discovery of Tom’s true identity and good character, requires a series of “strange Chances” and “odd Accidents” that put him within reach of more honest witnesses than he has hitherto found, including a repentant Mr. Square, Jenny Jones, and the lawyer Mr. Dowling (*TJ*, 600, 614). Both Tom’s “great Goodness of Heart” and Blifil’s evil are knowable, however difficult such knowledge is to come by in practice. If Blifil’s case provides evidence that divine “Providence interposes in the Discovery of the most secret

Villiany,” it also suggests that discoveries of this kind depend on the integrity of Fielding’s two-dimensional model, and especially of the stable truth “at the Bottom” of character (*TJ*, 600 and 621).²⁴

The novel’s dénouement, however, raises questions about the extensibility of this conception of character. For the work to end, per generic expectation, in marriage, the pristine Sophia Western must be reconciled to Tom’s infidelities at Upton and London. Their exchange in Book XVIII, Chapter 12 reveals the limits of the semiotic approach to discernment operative elsewhere *Tom Jones* and consistent with the program outlined in Fielding’s essay. To fulfill his comic destiny, Tom must cast off the “Character of a Libertine” which Sophia has assigned him by persuading her of the sincerity of both his repentance and his promise of future constancy (*TJ*, 627). Sophia rejects Tom’s conflation of her own willingness to forgive and God’s “mercy,” pointing out the gap between mortal and divine capacities to authenticate his professions. “Sincere Repentance,” she observes, “will obtain the Pardon of a Sinner, but it is from one who is a perfect Judge of that Sincerity. A human Mind may be imposed on; nor is there any infallible Method to prevent it” (*TJ*, 634–5). Sophia stresses that God alone can settle the question of authenticity: human faculties and strategies of detection are ultimately fallible, vulnerable to hypocrisy. She therefore disavows available “methods” for preventing imposition, methods that fall short of “perfect” certainty, and demands the “strongest Proof” of his sincerity (*TJ*, 635).

Sophia’s request initiates the following exchange:

‘O! name me any Proof in my Power,’ answered *Jones* eagerly. ‘Time, alone Mr. *Jones*, can convince me that you are a true Penitent, and have resolved to abandon these vicious Courses, which I should detest you for, if I imagined you capable of persevering in them.’

²⁴ For the “balanced architecture” of Fielding’s plot as a symbolic approximation of God’s design, see Battestin, *The Providence of Wit*, 151–63. For the tension between human prudence and divine providence in Fielding’s novels, see Richard Rosengarten, *Henry Fielding and the Narration of Providence*.

‘Do not imagine it,’ cries *Jones*. ‘On my Knees I intreat, I implore your Confidence which it shall be the Business of my Life to deserve.’ ‘Let it then,’ said she, ‘be the Business of some Part of your Life to shew me you deserve it. I think I have been explicit enough in assuring you, that when I see you merit my Confidence, you will obtain it. After what is past, Sir, can you expect I should take you upon your Word?’ (*TJ*, 634–635).

Tom implicitly recasts their relationship as a form of credit-based exchange, promising to repay Sophia’s trust with future constancy but asking for that “confidence” up front. Sophia resists this arrangement. In the absence of God’s absolute knowledge of Tom’s sincerity, she has recourse to “what is past” for evidence against his urgently pressed claims. She is unwilling, based on his previous behavior, to take him at his “word.” Instead, she proposes a trial period of indeterminate length, which would allow Tom to match promise to performance and, thus, to “shew” his fidelity.

Sensitive to the weaknesses of her “human mind,” and wary of the leap of faith involved in every decision to credit a promise of future performance, Sophia seeks an alternative temporal scheme. The proposed course requires that Sophia invest her trust in demonstrable actions, a form of evidence on which Fielding casts doubt through Allworthy’s vexed attempts to construe rightly Tom’s and Blifil’s actions, as clues to real character. Fallible as such evidence may be, it constitutes stronger proof than mere parole. But this course, and the episode more broadly, presages Fielding’s wholesale shift, in *Amelia*, away from Calvinist protocols of discernment and the two-dimensional conception of personhood that underwrite them. The point at issue between the two lovers is the same slippery relationship between promise and performance, assumed and real character that troubles Fielding, Bunyan, and Whitefield. Yet that distinction no longer maps neatly onto an inside/outside binary. Knowing Tom’s real character does not entail the kind of vivisection that Fielding gleefully imagines himself performing in the “Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men;” it is not a matter of “ripping up” the outside to disclose an interior

truth. Rather, deciding whether Tom is a libertine or a “true Penitent” requires either projecting his character into an uncertain future or, as Sophia prefers it, deferring judgment long enough for Tom to demonstrate the veracity of his profession.

As impatient to complete his happiness as Fielding is to effect the narrative’s comic resolution, Tom changes tack:

He replied, ‘Don’t believe me upon my Word; I have a better Security, a Pledge for my Constancy, which it is impossible to see and to doubt.’ ‘What is that?’ said *Sophia*, a little surprised. ‘I will show you, my charming Angel,’ cried *Jones*, seizing her Hand, and carrying her to the Glass. ‘There, behold it there in that lovely Figure, in that Face, that Shape, those Eyes, that Mind which shines through those Eyes: Can the Man who shall be in Possession of these be inconstant? Impossible! my *Sophia*: They would fix a Dorimant, a Lord Rochester. You could not doubt it, if you could see yourself with any Eyes but your own.’ *Sophia* blushed, half smiled: but forcing again her Brow into a Frown, ‘If I am to judge,’ said she, ‘of the future by the past, my Image will no more remain in your Heart when I am out of your Sight, than it will in this Glass when I am out of this Room.’ (*TJ*, 635)

Tom offers Sophia her own image as “security” against his defaulting on his word, grounding an otherwise suspect “pledge” in her fully legible virtues of person (her “figure,” “face,” and “shape,” etc.) and “mind.” In doing so, he recovers the model of character exemplified by the hero of Fielding’s first novel, in which beautiful insides and outsides coincide as a rule, and suggests that such character might serve as a ground for assurance. To be sure, Tom praises his lover’s perfections, asserting their power to “fix”—in the sense of “fastening” or making “(a person) constant in attachment”—the desire of infamous Restoration libertines, the Earl of Rochester and George Etherege’s Dorimant.²⁵ But Tom also implies that Sophia’s character has the power to “fix” him in another sense, to correct the relatively minor blemishes on an otherwise good nature. By “possessing” Sophia’s person through marriage, Tom suggests, he might also take possession of the “spiritual perfections” and specific virtues manifest in her

²⁵ *OED Online*, “Fix, v.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, March 10, 2014. The *OED* cites this sentence as an illustration of the first definition.

physical charms, including the “ideal wisdom” for which she is named and which she exhibits when she meets Tom’s promises with skepticism.²⁶

Tom’s idea of matrimonial possession is also central to his rebuttal to Sophia’s parting shot in the passage quoted above. When she observes that his past behavior gives his argument the lie (her beauty hasn’t actually fixed his desire on her to this point), Tom counters that his earlier inconstancy reflected the remoteness of the object of his true passion. Her distance and his despair of overcoming the obstacles to their love gave license to his baser appetite. Yet “the first Moment of Hope that *Sophia* might be my Wife” renders Tom incapable of infidelity, in large part because it is at this moment that her character, both the “image” in his mind’s eye and the abstract moral qualities it communicates, becomes his to claim in expectation (*TJ*, 635). Tom’s argument brings together the idea of unification through marriage with the ideal of a unified inside and outside character. In this scenario, the coupling of distinct individuals becomes intertwined with the promise of coupled physical and moral qualifications. Sophia need not take Tom at his word, nor strain to interpret his outward behaviors for clues to his real character: once the lovers are married and constantly in one another’s presence, Tom intimates, they will share a transparent character that weds outward and inward perfection.

The couple’s interview clarifies the nature of the fantasy behind the novel’s conventional happy ending. At the close of *Tom Jones*, Fielding resolves the problem of discerning character by imagining marriage as character-sharing, as a form of affiliation that obviates the fraught, interpretive work of bridging the gap between subjects. Tom posits a conjugal love that transcends the challenge of reading other people by collapsing the distance between them. The success of his arguments suggests that Sophia, too, stands to benefit from such a relationship—

²⁶ Battestin, *Providence of Wit*, 181–5. Battestin makes much of this scene as an assertion of Sophia’s “allegorical identity.”

and not simply by securing a constant spouse. Though Sophia quickly disguises her pleasure and reiterates her demand for the proofs afforded by time, she acquiesces (readily if demurely) to her father's importunities to marry her lover the very next day. Fielding's narrator remains uncharacteristically silent on the question of why, exactly, Sophia relents. Only Squire Western offers an explanation, dismissing his daughter's objections as a "Parcel of Maidenish Tricks" (*TJ*, 636). On my reading, Sophia's change in countenance—that quickly suppressed blush and half-smile—signals a genuine change of heart and, by extension, the appeal of the underlying promise of Tom's gesture. In the aftermath of Tom's affair with Mrs. Waters/Jenny Jones at Upton, Sophia had expressed less concern about Tom's infidelity than about his alleged freedom with her "name" in public. His unwarranted freedom, in Sophia's eyes, represented the greater "Outrage against his Love" (*TJ*, 422). Here, Tom's devotion to Sophia's reflected image functions as a pledge to represent her character faithfully rather than traducing her reputation as Partridge, the real culprit at Upton, had done. Their proposed marriage would "fix" Sophia's character as well as Tom's, in her case by preserving the correspondence between her name and her transparently virtuous nature. In a world in which character is so easily given a malicious turn—in which even a paragon like Sophia is susceptible to misrepresentation—this form of fidelity has as much value as sexual constancy.

KNOWING COLONEL JAMES

Amelia has long registered as a departure from its comic predecessors. The novel's inconsistencies of tone and character frustrated contemporary readers, and modern critics have dismissed it as a poor imitation of Richardson's sentimental mode. They cite Fielding's impoverished vocabulary for expressing personal, felt experience and his poor instinct for the

nuances of individual psychology.²⁷ Richard Rosengarten resets the stakes of the conversation, reading the novel as a fitting terminus to the author's prolonged engagement with contemporary debates about deism and the coordination of human prudence and particular providence.²⁸ I see *Amelia* as both a departure and a capstone to Fielding's career as a novelist. It represents his most sustained, sober examination of a favorite social evil, hypocrisy, and a break from the methods of characterization in play in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In his final novel, Fielding's two-dimensional model of character proves inadequate to his avowed project of depicting "Human Nature as it is, and not as we would wish it to be" (*A*, 424). Human nature "as it is" includes a form of hypocrisy rooted not in a disjunction of interior and exterior character, but in a fundamental incoherence caused by sexual desire. What Fielding does borrow from Richardson is an emphasis on the threat posed by masculine passion to female chastity. *Amelia*, thus, confirms something at which Fielding hints through his extended meditation on Sophia and Tom's reconciliation: the discernment of character is increasingly the province of women.

The narrators of *Amelia*, both the remarkably subdued author-narrator who addresses his readers and "critics" by name and the characters who relate their histories within the larger frame of the narrative, devote considerable attention to the play of passions on human faces. Miss Mathews demonstrates a neat correspondence between the body and the passions through the

²⁷ In *Occasional Form*, J. Paul Hunter enumerates the "charges" commonly lodged against *Amelia* (199–206). Chief among them are the novel's "emotional cheapness" and its uncharacteristically ham-fisted moral didacticism. For his part, Hunter sees *Amelia* as Fielding's ineffectual attempt to placate a moral establishment for which Richardson spoke. In miscasting himself as a "dour and melodramatic lecturer," Fielding sacrificed the rhetorical strategies honed over the course of his first two novels (194, 210). Peter Sabor departs from this tradition, holding up *Amelia* as a successful, if uncharacteristic, foray into the realm of individual suffering. "Amelia and *Sir Charles Grandison*: The Convergence of Fielding and Richardson," *Wascana Review of Contemporary Poetry and Short Fiction* 17.2 (1982): 3–18. For background of the contemporary reception of Fielding's novel, see also Linda Bree's introduction to the Broadview edition.

²⁸ Rosengarten, *Henry Fielding and the Narration of Providence*, 91–115.

paroxysm of vengeful rage which accompanies her premature murder confession: “her Voice, her Looks, her Gestures, were properly adapted to the Sentiments she express” (*A*, 77). A horrified Captain Booth blanches in spite of himself at her declaration. Booth describes the language of “looks and sighs” by which he and Amelia involuntarily communicate their reciprocal desires during otherwise silent private interviews (*A*, 100). His countenance frequently betrays concerns or distresses (e.g. guilt about his infidelity in IV.3, fear about disclosing the extent of his gaming losses in X.6) he would prefer not to disclose to Amelia. Both husband and wife must manipulate the truth to disguise the genuine causes of anxiety (in Amelia’s case about the Captain’s potential reactions to her suspicions about Colonel James) when the other observes its physical signs. Later, disturbed by the possible motivations of the Noble Peer’s effusive liberality, and by the evil consequences that may attend it, Booth’s body “confesses” the anxiety he attempts to dissemble: “How impossible was it therefore for poor *Booth* to succeed in an Art for which Nature had so entirely disqualified him. His Countenance indeed confessed faster than his Tongue denied; and the whole of his Behaviour gave *Amelia* an Alarm” (*A*, 233). Such examples highlight Fielding’s tacit acceptance of the same understanding of the relationship between the passions and the body that underwrites his essay on character.

Those examples do not, however, amount to an endorsement of physiognomy as a reliable instrument of discernment. Fielding’s narrator provides an example, supposedly drawn from experience, of the inefficacy of outward marks of moral character. “I happened in my Youth to sit behind two Ladies in a Side-Box at a Play,” he writes,

where, in the Balcony on the opposite Side was placed the inimitable B—y C—s, in Company with a young Fellow of no very formal, or indeed sober Appearance. One of the Ladies, I remember, said to the other—‘Did you ever see anything so modest and so innocent as that Girl over the way? What Pity it is such a Creature should be in the Way of Ruin, as I am afraid she is, by her being alone with that young Fellow!’ Now this Lady was no bad Physiognomist; for it was impossible to conceive a greater Appearance of

Modesty, Innocence and Simplicity, than what Nature had displayed in the Countenance of that Girl; and yet, all Appearances notwithstanding, I myself (remember Critic it was in my Youth) had a few Mornings before seen that very identical Picture of all those ingaging Qualities in Bed with a Rake at a Bagnio, smoaking Tobacco, drinking Punch, talking Obscenity, and swearing and cursing with all the Impudence and Impiety of the lowest and most abandoned Trull of a Soldier. (*A*, 80)

The subject of physiognomic study, identified by later editors as the infamous courtesan Betty Careless, stands in sharp contrast to Joseph Andrews and Sophia Western. Where those characters unify exterior and interior character, Fielding's Betty Careless exhibits no symptoms of her thoroughly depraved moral condition. Rather, her "countenance" gives false testimony to the highest degree of feminine virtue: it would be "impossible to conceive" an "appearance" better suited to modesty and innocence.

In the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," Fielding qualifies his endorsement of physiognomy by acknowledging the possibility of misreading. But he attributes such failures to practitioner error. The general public is an "insensible Audience," attuned to respond to the exaggerated gestures and expressions of the actors of farce. The "true Symptoms being finer, and less glaring, make no Impression on our Physiognomist; while the grosser Appearances of Affectation are sure to attract his Eye, and deceive his Judgment" (*E*, 162). In *Amelia*, the play-going lady's misjudgment of Betty Careless stems not from "bad" physiognomic reading or "insensibility," but from the mismatch between the ideas that "Nature had displayed in the Countenance of that Girl" and her true character as an arrant "trull." Distinguishing between genuine and counterfeit "modesty, innocence and simplicity" is not as simple as recognizing the difference between caricature and reality, gross "affectation" and the "finer" symptoms of emotional states. Perspicuity rather than perspicacity is at issue in this instance. Even before Miss Mathews and Booth begin their fateful exchange of personal histories, Fielding alerts his readers to a shift from the emblematic world of *Joseph Andrews* to a

social arena in which only overt action demonstrates real character. As in *Tom Jones*, however, actions prove to be troubling objects of interpretation.

Amelia's use of actions as evidence of character yields a faulty interpretation in the case of the Noble Peer, whose great generosity and polite reserve conceal the motives of a "wicked and voluptuous Man" (*A*, 268). The narrator alerts the reader to the lord's intentions early on, remarking that "few Men, as I have observed, have such disinterested Generosity to serve a Husband the better, because they are in Love with his Wife, unless she condescend to pay a Price beyond the Reach of a virtuous Woman" (*A*, 211). As he discloses the lord's motivations, Fielding also harkens back to Haywood's depiction of the financial marketplace, pausing over the entanglement of economic credit and sex in the novel. Benefactors like the nobleman and, later, Colonel James are really creditors in disguise. They seek to impose "obligations," which Booth regards as the "worst kind of Debts" because they tacitly coerce a nonmonetary form of repayment that ruins the wife and cuckolds the husband (*A*, 255). In Fielding's *Verge of the Court*, at once a legal haven and a prison of shame and anxiety for debtors like Booth, exchange relationships are structured by a version of economic interest indistinguishable from sexual desire.

Booth, of course, recoils at the thought of entering into this perversion of the creditor-debtor relationship. Spurred on by Colonel and Mrs. James's synthesis of the lord's reputation for "being extremely generous—where he likes," he confronts Amelia about "the Snares which might be laid" for her "innocence" (*A*, 264 and 269). In her response, Amelia follows the protocol recommended in Fielding's essay:

Besides his Service to you, which for the future I shall wish to forget, and his Kindness to my little Babes, how inconsistent is the Character which *James* gives of him, with his Lordship's Behaviour to his own Nephew and Niece, whose extreme Fondness of their

Uncle Sufficiently proclaims his Goodness to them—I need not mention all that I have heard from Mrs. *Ellison*, every Word of which I believe. (*A*, 269)

Apart from her readiness to credit Mrs. Ellison's "word," based on the (as yet defensible) judgment that the latter is a "very good Sort of Woman," Amelia's approach accords precisely with Fielding's program of discernment. She dismisses the lord's reputation, following instead the evidence of her immediate experience and observation: she privileges the lord's "behavior" towards herself, her immediately family, and the lord's own intimate relations over James's report. By leaning on experience and the testimony of a "very good sort" of witness, Amelia adopts the approach of Bunyan's pilgrims, Christian and Faithful. But her task is more complex: while the evidence of character qua reputation and first- and second-hand observation harmonize in the case of Talkative, those two indicia yield contradictory evidence in the case of Amelia's lord. To reconcile the "inconsistency" of his reputation with his demonstrations of disinterested benevolence, Amelia simply sides with the empirical evidence. She fails to see that an "Act of Beneficence" can be an "Effect of Art," as Booth puts it.

For her escape from the designs of this noble peer, Fielding's heroine depends on the intervention of Mrs. Bennet (later Atkinson), a character who has lived out the consequences of an identical plot. Amelia's new friend offers the hard-earned wisdom of the proverbial "burnt Child," though her lesson is not simply prescriptive (*A*, 351). Instead, she relates the tale of her own abused credulity and subsequent rape at the hands of the same nobleman. Mrs. Bennet gives her full history from the age of sixteen, trying her auditor's politeness and patience until she mentions an invitation she had once received "to go to a Masquerade at *Ranelagh*:"

At these Words *Amelia* turned pale as death, and hastily begged her Friend to give her a Glass of Water, some Air, or any Thing. Mrs. *Bennet* having thrown open the Window, and procured the Water, which prevented *Amelia* from fainting, looked at her with much Tenderness, and cried, 'I do not wonder, my dear Madam, that you are affected with my mentioning that fatal Masquerade; since I firmly believe the same Ruin was intended for

you at the same Place. The apprehension of which occasioned the Letter I sent you this Morning, and all the Trial of your Patience which I have made since.' (*A*, 307)

Mrs. Bennet intercedes once she sees that Amelia is headed for the “same ruin” that befell her at the “same place,” that the two women are correspondent characters in an iterative narrative of female chastity under siege. Amelia recognizes the key detail, as well, her violent reaction to the word “masquerade” indicating her sudden realization that Mrs. Bennet’s story is also her own. Fielding reinforces their correspondence at the level of physical description, pointing out in two places their close resemblance in “Form of Person” and voice (*A*, 256 and 416).²⁹ Read back against these remarks, the narrator’s initial sketch of Mrs. Bennet confirms her status as a blasted or withered version of Amelia: “She was about the Age of five and twenty; but Sickness had given her an older Look, and had a good deal diminished her Beauty; of which, young as she was, she plainly appeared to have only the Remains in her present Possession” (*A*, 210). Amelia’s silhouette, Mrs. Bennet’s bears only the residue of her former beauty.

As the two women go on to “compare Notes,” they uncover the full extent of their parallelism: “it appeared, that his Lordship’s Behaviour at the Oratorio had been alike to both: that he had made Use of the very same Words, the very same Actions to *Amelia*, which he had practiced over before on the poor unfortunate Mrs. *Bennet*” (309). Up to the point of the masquerade invitation, their narratives are exactly “alike” in plot, setting, and character: Mrs. Ellison brings both women to market, so to speak, at the oratorio, where they encounter the lord in disguise, and both women thereafter become the victims of a “long, regular, premeditated Design” that culminates at Ranelagh (*A*, 309). To accept the lord’s invitation hither would be to

²⁹ Indeed, read back against these remarks, the narrator’s initial sketch of Mrs. Bennet confirms her status as a blasted or withered version of Amelia: “She was about the Age of five and twenty; but Sickness had given her an older Look, and had a good deal diminished her Beauty; of which, young as she was, she plainly appeared to have only the Remains in her present Possession” (210). Amelia’s silhouette, Mrs. Bennet’s bears only the residue of her former beauty.

fulfill the dark typology forecast by the two women's physical likeness. Lest Amelia pay the same staggering "price" for her misplaced trust in Mrs. Ellison and the Noble Peer, Mrs. Bennet interrupts the cycle by making Amelia a consumer of their parallel narratives. Mrs. Bennet, thus, supplies the place of the authoritative narrator of *Tom Jones*, whose acts of disclosure—often flagged by the phrases like "in reality" (*TJ*, 91)—fill in the gaps of readers' discernment. Suffering purchases a kind of omniscience with regard to Amelia's unfolding story. Her rescuer's own completed tale of ruin provides full knowledge of the lord's intentions, as well as of Mrs. Ellison's function as his procuress.

Though pursues a similar end, Colonel James presents a greater threat to Fielding's epistemological program than does the Noble Peer. James initially appears in Booth's interpolated history as a genuine friend and a counterexample to Mandevillean arguments about the ascendance of self-interest, which Booth regards as "universal Satires against human Kind" (*A*, 149). According to Booth, James's predominant passion is one that "Mandevil" left out of his "system:" "Love, Benevolence, or what you will be pleased to call" the emotion which motivates acts of disinterested generosity (*A*, 141 and 149). After Booth reconnects with his friend in London, the narrator echoes the former's character evaluation:

Thus did this generous Colonel (for generous he really was to the highest Degree) restore Peace and Comfort to this little Family; and by this Act of Beneficence make two of the worthiest People, two of the happiest that Evening.

Here Reader give me leave to stop a minute, and to lament that so few are to be found of this benign Disposition; that while Wantonness, Vanity, Avarice and Ambition are every Day rioting and triumphing in the Follies and Weakness, the Ruin and Desolation of Mankind, scarce one Man in a thousand is capable of tasting the Happiness of others. (*A*, 190)

James exemplifies men of a "benign Disposition" who deviate from the general rule of human depravity. In these initial sketches, James's sympathetic capacity, his ability to "tast[e] the happiness of other people," sets him apart—both from what Booth characterizes as a

wrongheaded social theory and from Fielding's own cynical view of the viciousness of "mankind." His capacity to derive pleasure from the happiness or relief of a beneficiary is a prerequisite to the benevolence that the Noble Peer merely feigns. To feel as James does in these instances is to step outside of the economy of obligation operative in the novel; gifting motivated by the constructive passion of benevolence confers no obligation beyond gratitude. Yet James ultimately betrays the objects of his friendship and generosity, both in his intention to enjoy Amelia and his temporarily successful efforts to put Booth out of the way of his schemes.

How should we account for this inconsistency? According to the narrator's reflections on James's "great and sudden liking" for his friend's wife, we should attribute the Colonel's betrayal to the transformative power of lust:

The Admiration of a beautiful Woman, though the Wife of our dearest Friend, may at first perhaps be innocent; but let us not flatter ourselves it will always remain so; Desire is sure to succeed; and Wishes, Hopes, Designs, with a long Train of Mischiefs, tread close at our Heels. ... [O]f all Passions there is none against which we should so strongly fortify ourselves as this, which is generally called Love. ... [T]here is none to whose Poison and Infatuation the best of Minds are so liable. Ambition scarce ever produces any Evil, but when it reigns in cruel and savage Bosoms; and Avarice seldom flourishes at all but in the basest and poorest Soil. Love, on the contrary, sprouts usually up in the richest and noblest Minds; but there unless nicely watched, pruned, cultivated, and carefully kept clear of those vicious Weeds which are too apt to surround it, it branches forth into Wildness and Disorder, produces nothing desirable, but choaks up and kills whatever is good and noble in the Mind where it so abounds. In short, to drop the Allegory, not only Tenderness and Good-nature, but Bravery, Generosity, and every Virtue are often made the instruments of effecting the most atrocious Purposes of this all-subduing Tyrant. (*A*, 252)

James's newfound desire for Amelia represents a singular threat because it "sprouts" up, unlike those familiar social evils, ambition and greed, by swift and imperceptible degrees in the best of men. What begins as socially acceptable "admiration" for Amelia grows into an illicit desire that takes hold of James, the narrator adds, "before he had observed it in himself" (*A*, 253). Such desire does not so index a "cruel and savage" heart as corrupt "good-nature" itself. As it

flourishes in that substrate, desire perverts entrenched virtues into instruments of gratification. Fielding's horticultural "allegory" images James's heart as a patch of land caught between anthropogenic efforts to impose order and the irresistible force of wild, unproductive growth. He proposes that such wildness might be checked by self-command—figured here as cultivation, meticulous pruning—but his metaphor confers a sense of inevitability to the triumph of "Wildness and Disorder."³⁰ Desire takes on the organic force as well as the stigma of overgrowth. Once it takes root, this passion is "too apt" to become destructive, to "choak up and kill" the fruits of an unwatched virtue. The garden of James's moral character, in the span of an evening spent in the Booths' company and in the space of a paragraph, is overwhelmed with "vicious Weeds."

While the conception of this passion is initially unintelligible to James himself, the subsequent alteration in his motives escapes the perception of other characters. James lacks the wherewithal to prevent his passion from taking hold and perverting his virtues, but self-knowledge and a modicum of self-command arise simultaneously: "His Mind however no sooner suggested a certain Secret to him, than it suggested some Degree of Prudence to him at the same Time; the Knowledge that he had Thoughts to conceal, and the Care in concealing them, had Birth at one in the same Instant" (*A*, 253). Although bodies witness the play of passions elsewhere in the novel—indeed, James's stolen glances at Amelia eventually betray him to the ever-watchful Mrs. Bennet/Atkinson—the relation between inward states and outward

³⁰ The alternative contingency does play out in the case of Sgt. Atkinson, whose quietly nurtured love for Amelia proves compatible with his friendship to Captain Booth. Beyond the theft of Amelia's portrait miniature on the eve of the men's departure for Gibraltar, Atkinson's passion never moves him to transgress standards of propriety. Atkinson's desire provides evidence of the kind of "pruned, cultivated, and carefully kept" attachment against which Fielding sets James's wild, unchecked lust. I am indebted to Alison Conway for this observation. Personal communication, March 22, 2014.

expression proves unstable in *Amelia*. James's mastery of the "noble Art" of dissimulation allows him to escape notice in this case, and, later, to counterfeit joy at the unwelcome sight of his friend when he had hoped to find Amelia alone. After relating this detail, the narrator laments that "Men are enabled to dress out their Countenances as much at their own Pleasure, as they do their Bodies, and to put on Friendship with as much Ease as they can a laced Coat" (*A*, 366). Once genuine, James's friendship is now another article of clothing to "put on," a mere ornament. His skill in "dress[ing] out" his face with the mere trappings of friendship, of assuming a false character, thwarts the end of physiognomic reading. Both the narrator's simile comparing artifice to dressing and Dr. Harrison's reflections on James's intended betrayal capture only part of the problem: "I am shocked at seeing it [i.e. villainy] disguised under the Appearance of so much Virtue [...] he hath the fairest and most promising Appearance I have ever yet beheld" (*A*, 377). In focusing on James's artifice, the narrator and Dr. Harrison treat him as an example of the form of hypocrisy, which consists of incongruity between appearance and essential nature, familiar to readers of the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" and *Tom Jones*.

Before she puts Amelia on her guard and sets the exposure of James's "villainy" in motion, Mrs. Bennet/Atkinson actually joins Amelia in commending the colonel's character. Their dueling panegyrics, read alongside the above description of James's burgeoning passion, specify the nature of his hypocrisy. Both ladies misinterpret the colonel's latest kindness as a continuation of his past behavior, another instance of his benevolent nature. Amelia's

Heart so boiled over with Gratitude, that she could not conceal the Ebullition. *Amelia* likewise gave her Friend a full Narrative of the Colonel's former Behaviour and Friendship to her Husband, as well Abroad as in *England*; and ended with declaring, that she believed him to be the most generous Man upon Earth.

Mrs. *Atkinson* agreed with *Amelia*'s Conclusion, and said she was glad to hear there was any such Man. They then proceeded with the Children to the Tea Table, where

Panegyric, and not Scandal, was the Topic of their Conversation; and of this Panegyric the Colonel was the Subject; both the Ladies seeming to vie with each other in celebrating the Praises of his Goodness. (*A*, 332)

Why do two ladies who have spent hours in uncovering the wicked intention behind one aristocrat's apparent generosity compete to "praise" similar gestures in another professed benefactor? The difference rests in the instability of James's character. The noble peer of the earlier episode continually reenacts the same story of depredation, following his hunger for "Novelty and Resistance" from one object to another (*A*, 315). In his pursuits, the lord exploits his victims' conflation of assumed and real character, thereby fleshing out exactly the threat Fielding imagines in his "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men." Colonel James, by contrast, suddenly and secretly veers away from the pattern exhibited by the subject of Amelia's "full narrative." He was, indeed, "such [a] Man" as deserves the ladies' praises, but his lust retroactively invalidates the evidence of Amelia's experience, the fully transparent clues afforded by "his former behaviour and friendship" on which Amelia, Booth, Mrs. Bennet/Atkinson, and Dr. Harrison all rely for knowledge of his character.

The kind of narrative exposition to which Amelia owes her deliverance from the clutches of the lord does not serve her purposes here. For Colonel James is a character in a new narrative, detached from the "Hero of her Tale" of selfless friendship as well as from its logic of plot (*A*, 343). James neither remains constant nor exhibits character development in the modern, narratological sense. Rather, his established character ruptures on contact with his illicit desire, a phenomenon that defies articulation in the terms provided by the Calvinist paradigm to which Whitefield has recourse in his sermons. As Leopold Damrosch points out in *God's Plot and Man's Stories*, the insistence within Calvin's teachings on "providential determinism" precluded characterological transformation. Calvinists conceived of the fallen world as divided between the

damned and the saved, but they also advanced a “two-part conception” of the self.³¹ Genuine conversation consisted not in moral rehabilitation but in the stripping away of a false self to reveal the true nature of the soul. When successful, the individual believer’s self-examination unveiled the prior truth of election. Unlike Bunyan’s Talkative, young Blifil, or even the Noble Peer, James possesses no “real Character at the Bottom,” no stable identity ripe for discovery (*A*, 350). It is this fundamental instability, and not the opacity or multiplication of surfaces, that makes him unclassifiable. In her comically inept attempt to denigrate Amelia’s physical beauty, the jealous Mrs. James inadvertently captures the monstrous quality of her husband’s character: James, not the object of his adulterous desire, “is a Kind of Something that is neither one Thing or another” (*A*, 447).³² Her formulation conveys Fielding’s ambivalence toward the project he initiates in his essay. The logic of “kind” retains its allure, but not its power to organize the field of ethical-religious subjects.

PARADISE AND SUSPICION

Reading Fielding’s novels alongside his essay reveals a trajectory in his attitude toward the diagnostic approach to character that links his religious thought to that of the Calvinist Methodist George Whitefield. The confidence in somatic and typological truths evinced by *Joseph Andrews* gives way in *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* to ambivalence about the efficacy of not

³¹ Damrosch, *God’s Plot and Man’s Stories*, 28, 37–40.

³² To the extent that Colonel James acts “in direct contradiction to the Dictates of his Nature,” or, rather, to the extent that he demonstrates a changeable nature, the character violates the Aristotelian principle of “Conservation of Character” that Fielding espouses in *Tom Jones* (*TJ*, 261). My reading of James’s character, thus, runs counter to Arlene Fish Wilner’s generalization that “the changes are not in [Fielding’s] characters, but rather in the reader’s—and the characters’—perception” (“Henry Fielding and the Knowledge of Character,” 187). Neither the reader’s nor other characters’ discernment lags behind the truth of James’s moral nature. His nature changes abruptly with the onset of his desire for Amelia.

only physiognomy but also the evidence of past, public actions. In Fielding's final novel, the Calvinist conception of selfhood that underwrites his epistemological program collapses under self-generated pressure to respond to a problem, masculine desire, that had captured the imagination of Britain's reading public thanks largely to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748). Fielding's skepticism creeps into the "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," as well, specifically through his endeavor to preempt objections about the inscrutability of religious hypocrites. Where Whitefield declares that "Marks upon [another person's] Soul" yield "certain" knowledge of his spiritual status, Fielding confronts the limitations of his epistemological system in his initial sketch of the false saint in "The Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" (*WS* XII.15). How can we "distinguish with any certainty" real from counterfeit sanctity when they share the same outward appearance?

Fielding's answer, it seems, is to admit the defeat of his diagnostic protocol: "as in Fact it is so [counterfeit] Ninety Nine Times in a Hundred; it is better that one real Saint should suffer a little unjust Suspicion, than that Ninety Nine Villains should impose on the World, and be enabled to perpetrate their Villainies under this Mask" (*E*, 167). Significantly, it is religious hypocrisy that threatens to undermine Fielding's program even before he lays it out in complete form. Since sincere and performed religiosity can look the same when viewed from the outside, no hard and fast rule for differentiating between them obtains. Absent the "inspiration" of the author-narrator of *Tom Jones*, what avails readers, like those of the essay, cast in Allworthy's benighted position? Fielding proposes that we play the percentages suggested by his cynical outlook, assuming that all such claimants—anyone whose sanctity "flows from the Lips, and shines in the Countenance"—are, in fact, hypocrites. This default posture of suspicion

compensates for inevitable lapses in discernment, indemnifying us against the consequences of successful fraud.

In both the essay and *Amelia*, Fielding introduces “suspicion” as a failsafe against characters whose actions give false evidence—whether due to their failed correspondence between surface or essence or because of the instability of their inward selves. The narrator of *Amelia* hails suspicion as the “great Optic Glass helping us to discern plainly almost all that passes in the Minds of others, without some use of which nothing is more purblind than Human Nature” (*A*, 366). If he can be said to succeed, through these gestures, in overcoming the epistemological questions that haunt his writings, then Fielding also raises an ethical concern. Suspicion is out of character, so to speak, for people like Amelia. “Openness of Heart” is a concomitant of good-nature, Fielding repeatedly stresses, and engaging suspicion in such a person as Amelia or Captain Booth requires the intervention of those whose suffering precipitates a lopsided exchange. Characters like Mrs. Bennet/Atkinson, who adopt the default posture Fielding introduces as a last line of defense in his essay, trade a key ingredient of the “true Christian Disposition” for their quick-sightedness (*A*, 388). Cultivating suspicion demands that one either become the object of care for a “burnt Child” or suffer the burns of experience herself. Under these circumstances, discovering hypocrisy comes at a tremendous cost. That cost—the partial loss of humanity, of Christian-ness—accounts for Fielding’s ambivalence toward his own proposed failsafe, and especially for his frequent injunctions to forgive Amelia and Booth their lack of circumspection.

Amelia offers one alternative to indiscriminate suspicion: retirement from a social marketplace crowded with schemers and dissemblers. Booth’s plight, in particular, suggests that the only sure course for preserving good nature from the snares of the world is to withdraw into

paradisiacal seclusion. His vulnerability to the depredations of creditors and the legal institutions that empower them stems from the indiscretions by which he forfeits the insulated peace of domestic life (*A*, 169). In that “former Scene of Life,” he informs Miss Mathews, “nothing I think, remarkable happened; the History of one Day would, indeed, be the History of the whole Year” (*A*, 169). Booth’s worldly interlocutor presses him to particularize, announcing that “I will have no *usually*” (*A*, 170). Booth cannot oblige, so he reiterates the temporal homogeneity of his and Amelia’s life as small tenant farmers: “I scarce know any Circumstance that distinguished one Day from another. The Whole was one continued Series of Love, Health, and Tranquility. Our lives resembled a calm Sea” (*A*, 170).

This short portion of Booth’s interpolated, first-person narrative inspires Miss Mathews with “the dullest of all Ideas,” but for Fielding it represents the closest approximation of paradise available to fallen man. Fielding attempts to recover undifferentiated, a-historical time, a scheme in which units of measure blend together and the events that structure a typical narrative (including Booth’s to this point) give way to a stasis of domestic bliss. To the extent that it invokes a state prior to the incursion of evil, in the form of Christian history’s first and greatest hypocrite, Satan, Fielding’s fantasy of stasis counters the threat of discontinuity manifest in Colonel James. Booth casts himself and his dependents out of this Edenic scene, first by overdrawing on his credit and then by committing adultery. Read together, his indiscretions and subsequent rehabilitation represent the moral center of the novel. They serve to caution readers against indulging desires alien to the forms of exchange and affiliation that structure the domestic sphere.

The novel’s resolution signals a change in Fielding’s thinking about the problematics of character. In *Amelia*, as in the final pages of *Tom Jones*, the proper course is to restrain desire

within the rules for erotic coupling that leads to or sustains conjugal union. Tom's capacity to fix his desire, once and for all, on Sophia obviates the nagging question of his real character. Because it promotes the stability of the domestic sphere, conjugal desire preserves Booth and Amelia from the material and psychic harms of the world forecast in *Paradise Lost*—one in which the truth of character is mutable and evil “walks / Invisible.” Both the question that Fielding poses and his answer unfold in the ethical rather than the epistemological register. He no longer asks what and how we might *know* under the new economic regime, as earlier writers such as Bunyan and Behn had done. Instead, he considers what and how we might *act* in a world so constituted. To read *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia* in sequence is to witness Fielding's abandonment of the ideals of transparency and perspicacity. But as he eschews a symbolic vision in which names and faces convey the full knowledge of character, Fielding also re-conceptualizes the marketplace. What his earlier writings depict as a field of apprehensible objects, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* present as a theater for action and, especially, feeling. His example demonstrates the limitations of not only Calvinist hermeneutics but also the overarching framework of epistemology. Fielding must think outside of that framework in order to articulate the pressures of acting and feeling rightly in a fallen world.

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