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The 1740s

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Exuberance marked British literary production in the 1740s. In prose and in poetry, the decade saw a vivid explosion of energy. Poetry ranged from Samuel Johnson's passionate *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), composed in heroic couplets and imitating a classical model, to William Collins's *Odes* (1747), innovative in form and content; from Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* (1743), a satiric anti-epic in couplets, to the final version of James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1744), a long blank verse poem with a rhapsodic view of the natural world. Prose fiction included moralized fable, social satire, imitation biography and autobiography, sentimental investigation, action narrative, erotic exploration, and various combinations. The many important published novels did not necessarily have much in common. *Clarissa* (1747–1748) bears little obvious resemblance to *Roderick Random* (1748). Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (1741) and Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) share almost nothing beyond their common satirical target of *Pamela* (1740). The efflorescence of fiction implied only a few widely held assumptions about what the novel is, does, or should do. Most of its manifestations, however, suggested a conviction that fiction, providing vicarious experience for its readers, should dramatize for them human experience in its common forms.

That rather obvious project carried significant weight in the 1740s. The notion that experience provides the only secure basis for knowledge was at the heart of philosophic empiricism, strongly articulated by the philosopher David Hume, whose *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740) insisted that we must content ourselves with experience as the stuff of knowledge and that experience provides sufficient basis for the conduct

of life. Hume elaborated the point in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) in terms suggesting the central principle of many novelistic plots:

There is no man so young and unexperienced, as not to have formed, from observation, many general and just maxims concerning human affairs and the conduct of life; but it must be confessed, that, when a man comes to put these in practice, he will be extremely liable to error, till time and farther experience both enlarge these maxims, and teach him their proper use and application ... Not to mention, that, to a young beginner, the general observations and maxims occur not always on the proper occasions, nor can be immediately applied with due calmness and distinction. (Hume 1998, 88)

The investigation of how a young man – or, often, a young woman – acquired and used experience provided a vibrant topos for the decade’s novels.

History, Hume believed, because factual, exerted great power over the human mind; but fiction, imitation history, could concern itself with ordinary individuals, whose version of experience might bear a closer relation to a reader’s than could happenings befalling princes or generals. Although novels throughout the decade explored many possibilities – as they would continue to do for the rest of the century – the pattern of following an imaginary young person’s acquisition of life experience persisted. Such narratives could provide vicarious experience, safer and less costly in emotional terms (particularly for women and young people) than direct experience of the world.

At the decade’s opening, terminology about fiction remained unstable, with *novel* and *romance* interchangeable labels for extended pieces of prose fiction. What we now call “romances,” fictions of a certain length that represent fanciful events, with no concern for probability, had long existed and were thought to have wide readership. Not many new ones, however, were being published. The Eighteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue indicates that between 1700 and 1740, on average, ten or fewer new works of prose fiction in English emerged annually. “A brief but limited upsurge” developed between 1719, the year of *Robinson Crusoe* and Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess*, both hugely popular, and 1726. After *Pamela* appeared in 1740, however, to wide acclaim, the average enlarged to about 20 novels a year, doubling again by the century’s end (Downie 2000). As the 1740s concluded, multiple possibilities remained in play. The novel had begun to solidify its authority as a form, but no one had won the struggle over its ongoing direction.

When Richardson and Fielding began writing, in the early 1740s, the novel could hardly claim a form at all. Fiction, of course, had flourished since ancient times, but the notion of an extended prose work focused on nonaristocrats was recent. The moral and aesthetic status of such a composition remained uncertain; novelists of the 1740s had to justify their enterprise. They did so most often by invoking a classical rationale: literature instructs and pleases. The first of these purposes carried more weight than the second. The familiar claim to offer moral instruction persisted in the eighteenth century – especially in the works of such writers as Haywood, where it might seem dubious. Fielding, though, a great innovator of the 1740s, offered a new kind of teaching. In *Tom Jones* (1749), he purported to instruct his readers about that large, vague concept, human nature: to teach them, along with his hero, how human beings operate in the world and on what principles. The claim aligned him with Hume, whose *Treatise of Human Nature*, his first major work, had similar aspirations if different methods.

Although not every novelist articulated the same justification, the emphasis of prose fiction in the 1740s, despite the novel's diversity in other respects, steadily moved in this direction. Instead of knights and ladies of high birth, novels now concerned themselves with men and women who might work for a living, whose origins might be indeterminate, whose fate depended not on heroic combat but on Providence as well as their own effort – effort that could prove, as often as not, misguided. Like the popular romances on our newsstands today, these fictions customarily had happy endings, but their protagonists typically faced arduous struggles, against internal as often as external obstacles. They thus educated their readers in the nature of moral endeavor, as well as in its proper goals, and they suggested the kinds of problem one might face in the world.

As for the other traditional justification, the pleasure literature provided, that too remained important to novelistic offerings, but now in new forms. The exuberance of Fielding's play with language and with plot, the abandon with which Smollett sends his protagonists on wild travels, the inventiveness of detail, of happening, and of characterization in many of the decade's novels: all promised and provided forms of lively delight.

While the British novel developed in new directions, attracting enthusiastic readers and listeners (reading aloud remained a common practice, and illiteracy, though decreasing, was still widespread), difficulties beset the country in which it pursued its course. During most of the 1740s, Great Britain was at war. The War of Jenkins' Ear, against Spain, began in 1739, provoked by a merchant captain, Robert Jenkins, who displayed to the House of Commons his ear, allegedly cut off by a Spanish official. It merged into the War of the Austrian Succession, which ended only in 1748. In 1743 and 1744, the nation experienced constant threats of invasion from France, in support of claims to the British throne by James III, son of the deposed King James II. In 1745, a small force led by James's son, Charles Edward ("Bonnie Prince Charlie") invaded Scotland and, joined by considerable numbers of Scotsmen, managed to get within 150 miles of London. War and rumors of war, in short, formed a constant background to English life.

And not a background only. The threat of French invasion and the actuality of Bonnie Prince Charlie's arrival stimulated divisions among the British. In 1689, after the so-called Glorious Revolution, Parliament had summoned the Protestant William of Orange and his wife Mary, daughter of James II, to the throne, replacing Mary's father, unacceptable mainly because of his Catholicism. By 1740, George II ruled, as he had since 1727, the second of the Hanoverian kings. His father, George I, had succeeded Mary's sister, Queen Anne, as her closest Protestant relative. German by birth and by residence, George I did not even speak English. His successor, without sharing this linguistic disability, likewise remained oriented toward Germany. Less unpopular among the English than his father had been, he was yet widely thought too bellicose, cause for anxiety in an era of widespread European wars.

Although relatively few British citizens had Catholic sympathies, many felt troubled at the breaking of the Stuart line when George I succeeded Anne, and many deplored the incursion of German rulers. Jacobites, as sympathizers with James's cause were called, wanted an invasion and a new king who would restore the old lineage. Most of their countrymen did not. Such political divisions within the nation, less

widespread than they had been 50 years before, yet contributed to national unease both before the 1745 invasion and after, when those who had provided military or financial support to Prince Charles were ferociously punished.

The custom of “impressing” soldiers and sailors – taking men by force from their usual pursuits – generated uncertainty and fear in the working classes. The wars might come all too close to home – as, indeed, they literally did in 1745 after Prince Charles landed from France and won a series of military victories that carried him from Scotland to within striking distance of London before his army was defeated by the English.

More than war troubled the nation. Corruption was thought to abound in the government. Money, as opposed to landed property, took an increasingly important place in individual lives. Both public and private corruption derived from desire for wealth and from easy possibilities for achieving it. The vast gap between the rich and the poor began to attract attention, as members of the growing mercantile class flaunted their money and its appurtenances. Possibilities for dealing with money had amplified: paper credit now existed, and stock trading was increasing – developments fraught with uncertainty. Anyone who looked around could find much to criticize – a situation familiar in every era. In the 1740s, however, the novel provided not only an imaginative escape from troubling actualities but also a fresh medium for conveying criticism. Tied to some version of ordinary life, the novel could attend both to the ways that human beings proceed through their careers and to matters that trouble them along their paths. Among these matters, in the 1740s as always, were national and international political issues.

To suggest that novels engaged the period’s large concerns is not to say that they focused as much attention on public as on private matters. But this fiction manifested not only intensifying interest in individuals, not only heightened concern for realism,¹ but also fresh possibilities for pondering authority, succession, legitimacy, negotiation – issues alive in national and international politics. Moreover, many novelists used fiction to criticize corruption, public and private, and to convey anxiety about, or condemnation of, the place of money in national life. Such actualities figure mostly as objects of overt or implicit criticism, and their incorporation suggests the novel’s ambition.

In *Clarissa*, a work conspicuously concerned with its characters’ intimate lives, social and political allusions occur mainly by analogy. Early in the novel, while Clarissa still believes that she can negotiate successfully for her own freedom, she comments that the “world is but one great family” (Richardson 1985, 62). Her comment acquires increasing ironic force as her own immediate family ever more clearly epitomizes the viciousness of the larger world. Helpless against her siblings’ machinations, her mother’s weakness, her father’s obsessions, and her uncles’ venality, she grasps with increasing clarity the degree to which, both before and after her defection from her father’s home, those around her, like most in society at large, operate on the basis of narrowly conceived self-interest.

A series of apparently casual analogies strengthens the connection between intimate groupings and larger ones. The early part of the narrative, before Clarissa’s elopement, offers frequent comparisons between happenings in the Harlowe family and what Clarissa at one point calls “intrigues and plots carried on by undermining courtiers against one another” (82). Anna Howe, imagining herself married to her meek and compliant wooer, Hickman, fancies “how he *ascends*, and how I *descend*, in the

matrimonial wheel, never to take my turn again, but by fits and starts, like the feeble struggles of a sinking state for its dying liberty” (277). Only two short paragraphs intervene before she begins generalizing about marriage. Two people who come together, she says, should have suitable tempers, yet need boundaries between them. Unless each holds the other to these boundaries, encroachment threatens. She illustrates her assertion:

If the boundaries of the three estates that constitute our political union were not known, and occasionally asserted, what would become of the prerogatives and privileges of each? The two branches of the legislature would encroach upon each other; and the executive power would swallow up both. (277)

The novel’s vocabulary reinforces the implications of Anna’s comparison. *Authority, liberty, independence* are key words in the early part of *Clarissa*, abstract but potent nouns familiar from public politics. Clarissa, having inherited a house and money from her grandfather, already potentially possesses independence (meaning, primarily, financial freedom). Fear lest she assert that independence torments her family. Although she has turned the management of her estate over to her father, she could assert her legal right to reassume it. She professes no desire to do so, yet her family’s fear remains: fear of an overturning of established order, a miniature revolution.

In this narrative the language of national politics, belonging to women as well as men, calls attention to the novel’s concern with sexual and familial politics, both in their operations reminiscent of national and international possibilities. Young women’s awareness of political issues informs their responses to personal dilemmas. Politics generates wars – in families and in erotic pairings as on a larger scale. Analogical references to politics interpret personal experience, reflecting characters’ and shaping readers’ understanding.

Roderick Random provides more direct reference to social and political actualities. The novel concerns a young man encountering unexpected situations that reveal at every social level the destructiveness of corrosive and apparently universal self-interest, focused mainly on financial gain. Roderick’s predicaments seem more or less arbitrary, exacerbated by his conflicted desire for wealth and importance, often resolvable only by providential happening. Whether comic or uncomfortable or desperate (and all these emotional registers occur), the protagonist’s perplexities demonstrate operations of a social world that rewards malevolence and encourages disregard for individual need. Roderick must endure a painful education – experience *is*, or should be, education – about his chaotic and perverse social environment. *Roderick Random*, suggesting that education in the world’s dangers facilitates maturity, finally rewards its central character both financially and erotically.

Late in the novel, Roderick sums up his moral experience and his conclusions from it. He speaks of “scoundrels, . . . habituated to falsehood and equivocation,” of “the knavery and selfishness of mankind,” and of the “perfidious world” (Smollett 1995, 394). He would seclude himself permanently from this world, were not his beloved Narcissa part of it. Thus he in effect accepts while acknowledging the imperfect state of being. The scoundrels who persecute one good man have persecuted others and will continue to do so. They epitomize human knavery and selfishness, about which nothing can be done.

The novel depicts war directly. At the moral center of *Roderick Random* lies Roderick's account of the Battle of Cartagena. The 1741 battle in the War of Jenkins' Ear produced an unexpected defeat for the British, who had sent a large fleet against a Spanish fort in present-day Colombia. Dissension among the expedition's leaders, as well as the wiliness of the vastly outnumbered Spanish, contributed to the British downfall.

Smollett interests himself in the battle primarily as an image of British society. Harsh, rather clumsy, but passionate satire creates a new narrative tone. As Roderick reports it, squabbles within the upper class effectually sacrifice thousands. Sheer stupidity appears to dictate British tactics; Roderick can only surmise that the tacticians, motivated by British sportsmanship, don't wish to take advantage of their opponents when they might easily do so. Dreadful conditions on board ship contribute to numberless deaths.

Wounds and stumps being neglected, contracted filth and putrefaction, and millions of maggots were hatched amidst the corruption of the sores. This inhuman disregard was imputed to the scarcity of surgeons; though it is well known that every great ship in the fleet could have spared one at least for this duty; an expedient which would have been more than sufficient to remove this shocking inconvenience: But, perhaps the general was too much of a gentleman to ask a favour of this kind from his fellow-chief, who, on the other hand, would not derogate so much from his own dignity, as to offer such assistance, unasked ... (190)

The narrative implicitly indicts "gentlemen," concerned with forms rather than substance, and the idea of "dignity" as a substantive value. The inhumanity that destroys human lives emanates from "chief[s]" of the expedition. The fierce understatement of calling enormous loss of life a "shocking inconvenience" ("shocking" an intensifier used casually and frequently by members of the upper class) emphasizes the narrator's perception that "gentlemen" ignore their social inferiors.

The character Roderick, like the novel he inhabits, throbs with energy, which informs frequent exposés of human costs generated by universal preoccupation with rank and wealth. Roderick's comprehensive view of the human condition discerns significant innocence or virtue only occasionally, as in an imprisoned playwright, helpless victim of injustice, and in Narcissa, barely sketched as a character, who exists quite outside the novel's dominant scheme and has imaginative power, if at all, only as a fantasy. All characters of fiction derive from fantasy, but Narcissa, a fantasy within a fantasy, seems Roderick's creation, and even he hardly believes in her. The novel's unconvincing resolution of happy marriage signals that Roderick responds to harsh experience by evasion, escaping into his own fantasy.

Novels can claim the significance of the stories they tell by hinting, as *Clarissa* and *Roderick Random* do, that the problems of private persons adumbrate those of public groups. Jerry C. Beasley speaks of the "elevation of private experience to the status of public history" in novels of the 1740s (Beasley 1982, 43). He means that novels take ordinary individuals as seriously as histories take the extraordinary. One way to do so, I would add, is to indicate connections between stories told by novelists and those that make the stuff of history. History can illuminate novels, these fictions suggest, and novels can shape public opinion.

Novelistic allusions to public events call attention to one aspect of fiction's ambitions. One of Fielding's half-playful claims for his own accomplishment suggests another aspiration: a formal one with large implications. *Joseph Andrews* originated in satiric impulse, as a comment on Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Colley Cibber's *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740). Predicated on the comic notion of a young man who, like Pamela, must defend his chastity, the novel soon goes far beyond its origins. It causes Fielding to hold forth on his invention of a new form of writing, albeit one with roots in classic tradition. *Joseph Andrews* is, he avers, a comic romance, by which he means "a comic Epic-Poem in Prose" (Fielding 1999, 3). The claim insists on the kinship between a mainly light-hearted narrative and the genre universally considered the highest literary form. Poetry provided the traditional medium for epic. Fielding argues by his practice for prose as appropriate to grand literary endeavor, and for the possibility of affirming positive values both by attacking the corrupt and by celebrating virtue. As revolutionary as his claim of a new form of epic is his use of an apparently low-born protagonist to embody goodness. Joseph's sidekick and mentor, Parson Adams, moreover, is inept, clumsy, and naïve, the butt of derisory jokes, yet also embodies the good man in action. Although the rich and powerful mock him, the poor parson with his tattered cassock emerges as heroic by virtue of his moral force.

In asserting the kinship to epic of a prose comic fiction while translating epic conventions into a modern key, Fielding in effect boldly intervenes in literary history, delineating his own place in it. As the word *novel* suggests, he is doing something new. He says so again, explicitly, in *Tom Jones*, where the narrator declares himself "the founder of a new province of writing" and therefore "at liberty to make what laws I please therein" (Fielding 1996, 68). Richardson, with none of Fielding's playfulness, makes comparable claims. First he tentatively suggests, in relation to *Pamela*, that he "might possibly introduce a new species of writing";² then he retrospectively proclaims his resolution, in writing *Clarissa*, "to attempt something that never yet had been done" (Richardson 1751, 8: 279). The sense of newness many novelists shared encourages inventiveness.

Cumulatively, the novels of the 1740s indeed did much that was new, innovating in characterization, in tone, and in substance, engaging moral, political, and psychological dilemmas, investigating society and individuals. Fielding may have been alone in his grandiose assertion of epic intent and achievement, but his contemporaries likewise demonstrate large purposes. Their heroes hardly resemble the epic variety, and the novels frequently articulate values by negation, through sharp criticism of perceived failures in fulfilling public obligations. Yet social values remain a central concern. Experience properly used, many novels suggest, teaches how to defend the good.

Their protagonists assume many shapes. *Clarissa* inhabits the most commanding position. She needs no education beyond her early religious indoctrination to combat evil, embodied in her family, in her would-be lover, and in many less intimate associates. Experience teaches her the intractability of omnipresent evil, although it also affirms the rare possibility of fidelity and virtue. She comes to think death a welcome escape from a corrupt world. An imperfect mortal, she yet approaches perfection.

Such a summary may raise questions about the degree of “realism” involved in Richardson’s construction and, by extension, about realism’s desirability. Samuel Johnson, agreed in his own time and ours to be the period’s greatest literary critic, pondered the matter in a 1750 essay, beginning with a salient definition of the previous decade’s novels:

The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind. (Johnson 1969, 19)

The essay meditates about verisimilitude: it’s all very well to imitate life, but not promiscuously; some things, Johnson insists, should not be imitated. “It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn” (22). Concerned with literature’s moral function, Johnson worries about the representation of imaginary persons who combine good and evil qualities. Such “mixed characters,” Johnson believes, endanger readers, who might choose to imitate bad behavior exemplified in attractive fictional figures. He recommends that novelists instead depict unmistakably evil and almost perfect human beings rather than ambiguous characters. Realism does not much matter.

Although Johnson does not name names, he seems to be denigrating books like *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random*, preferring to them such works as *Clarissa*, in which readers can know clearly whom to admire and whom to despise. Tom Jones has a good heart, but he also has a tendency to go to bed with every available woman. He is therefore “mixed,” a dangerous model. Roderick Random exploits women in order to solve his financial problems. Conversely, Clarissa, although (as Richardson himself pointed out) not devoid of human flaws, behaves for the most part admirably. She is thus essentially “unmixed,” or so Johnson believes.

But Johnson is wrong. Even Clarissa, examined closely, has traits a moralist would not wish imitated. Richardson’s epistolary technique encouraged, almost required, emphasis on his letter writers’ inner lives, enlarging the notion of experience and stressing intricacies and paradoxes of character. Readers have long found Clarissa compelling because of her complexity, ambivalence, and failures of self-knowledge: her divided nature. Despite Johnson’s objections, many of the decade’s novelists eagerly pursued the possibilities of such “mixed” characters, possibilities that potentially increased readers’ interest in imagined persons’ behaviors and their motivations. Richardson’s representations of Pamela and Clarissa and Lovelace, as even the earliest readers perceived, had more dimensions than their creator acknowledged. He repeatedly revised and enlarged *Clarissa*, in a vain attempt to make Lovelace, the novel’s villain, so villainous that readers would see nothing attractive in him. He never succeeded.

Other novelists deliberately employed unmixed characters, despite their implausibility, to chart contemporary experience. Henry Fielding’s sister Sarah, for instance, delineates a protagonist not only unmixed but “simple,” in name and in nature. In *Adventures of David Simple* (1744), Sarah Fielding imagines her central character as a good Christian man in a bad society. In a series of episodes that sometimes approach

Bunyanesque allegory, the eponymous figure, “simple” in the sense of “pure,” travels England in search of a friend. He witnesses hypocrisy, greed, and malice. He engages himself to a woman who turns out to care only for money, but he quite easily disengages. Eventually he acquires three friends, two female and one male, all victims of society. The novel ends with two marriages, involving all four friends, and with the promise of an idyllic future. More specifically, it ends with an emphatic statement of the characters’ relevance to the good of society at large, suggesting that every man of intelligence “make use of his Talents for the Advantage and Pleasure of the Society to which he happens more particularly to belong,” and that members of that society use their abilities on his behalf. Then, “what Happiness would Mankind enjoy, and who could complain of being miserable?” (Fielding 1987, 305).

Sarah Fielding’s imaginings evoke a utopian world apparently devoid of politics, in which the small society to which each person “happens more particularly to belong” determines well-being. Realistically implausible, this solution to the problems of a larger society apparently became in the long run unpersuasive even allegorically to Fielding herself, who in her sequel to *David Simple, Volume the Last* (1753), would represent the little community as bombarded by malice and avarice until three of the four die. Death rescues them from hardship. The narrator invites her readers, if they wish, to imagine David still bustling about on earth, but her final sentence suggests that only death can protect him from “falling into any future Afflictions” and ensure that no future suffering will “rend and torment his honest Heart” (1987, 432). As in *Clarissa*, death, given the Christian vision of an afterlife, provides the only solution to the problem of earthly corruption.

As *David Simple* illustrates, the “unmixed” character, relatively rare in fiction with realistic settings and circumstances, provides a ready instrument for social criticism. David Simple’s innocence, producing his astonishment at what he sees around him, facilitates satire; so does Clarissa’s initial idealistic vision. Such employment of the characters tacitly acknowledges the mixed nature of actual experience, which the pure figures that Dr. Johnson preferred have difficulty grasping. The reader – even the young or female reader – perhaps understands more than David does, particularly at early stages of his progress through the world.

Readers’ roles in relation to this early fiction of experience involve more than vicarious participation in the protagonist’s career. Readers enlarge their own experience by in effect watching and judging characters in action, as well as by imaginatively sharing their predicaments and solutions. They function simultaneously as spectators and as imaginative participants. That fact becomes especially apparent in works involving unmixed characters who do evil rather than good, as in as in Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* and Henry Fielding’s *Shamela*. Both works convey skepticism about Richardson’s Pamela, who guards her chastity against seduction and force and claims her primary commitment to Christian virtue yet, in the view of Haywood and Fielding, demonstrates an eye for the main chance that discredits her goodness. Richardson’s novel has long interested readers through the letters that convey Pamela’s lack of self-awareness despite her constant self-examination, and the degree of self-interest that sometimes motivates her without her conscious knowledge. Thus, for a minor instance, Pamela decides (in the course of elaborate delays about leaving her master’s house, despite her proclaimed desire to depart) that she must dress as a country girl in order to return to

her rural parents. She gradually acquires the necessary materials, attires herself in her new garb, and appears before her master. "To say Truth, I never lik'd myself so well in my Life," she writes, after looking at herself in the mirror (Richardson 2001, 55). That night, Mr. B for the first time attempts to rape her (rather halfheartedly, to be sure). Before he appears, Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper, remarks that she has never seen Pamela look so lovely as she did in her country dress, and that of course she struck Mr. B as attractive. Pamela declares that she "expected no Effect from [the clothes]; but if any, a quite contrary one" (62).

The remark seems disingenuous at best, in relation to her acknowledgment of how much she liked her image in the mirror. When Mr. B sees through what he calls her disguise, he accuses her of hypocrisy – the accusation that would be made by numerous critics in Richardson's time and later. In order to make that point, both *Anti-Pamela* and *Shamela* represent unmixed figures, motivated and acting entirely in terms of self-interest, hypocrisy their consistent resource. Syrena Tricky, the anti-Pamela, trained from girlhood by her mother to find and get a profitable man, learns her lessons well and thinks herself cleverer than her mother. She consequently loses her virginity early and inadvertently but goes on to effect one rewarding liaison after another, until she is disgraced and banished to Wales, with no men in the vicinity. Shamela, like Pamela a servant, has, like Syrena, a mother of dubious morals. Although she has already had a baby by Parson Williams (who figures in *Pamela* as an honorable although unrewarded suitor), Shamela successfully presents herself as a frightened and chaste young woman, concerned mainly about her "Vartue." Fielding has fun with his characters, making Mr. B into a man of dubious virility but extreme lewdness and having Shamela use talk about her Vartue as a resource in every extremity. Shamela gets her man, such as he is, and ends up pleased with herself. Experience teaches such characters nothing about virtue, and their machinations hardly invite imaginative participation. As spectators, readers witness their activities and perhaps internalize their implicit criticism of Pamela.

Shamela and Syrena differ from Pamela in their full awareness of what they are doing. Hypocrisy implies awareness, and Pamela's revealing letters to her virtuous parents suggest that she doesn't understand her own motives. But Haywood and Fielding implicitly mock Richardson for having it both ways: for representing Pamela as an innocent and demonstrating as well that more than innocence occupies her mind. They in effect criticize the character for being "mixed" while pretending otherwise, and they purport to demonstrate what Pamela might look like if truly "unmixed." Incidentally, though, they raise a question about the valorizing of experience in more realistic novels. Shamela and Syrena learn nothing that can change their direction in life. Experience in itself has no necessary effect. To be useful, it must intersect with specific human qualities.

Reflecting on Shamela and Syrena calls attention to the limitations of Pamela's education through experience. A good student, the girl has learned domestic skills and decorum from her late mistress. She takes advantage likewise of her experiences with Mr. B – but only, the perspective of *Shamela* suggests, to effect her advantageous marriage. Each encounter with her master sharpens her skills for dealing with him the next time. Experience demonstrates Pamela's courage, ingenuity, and determination. It teaches her how to get and keep a husband: precisely the skill she needs. It does not greatly enlarge her human capacities.

Joseph Andrews, Fielding's second satire of *Pamela*, surpasses his first not only by developing a novel that goes far beyond satire, but also by complicating the satiric point, adding Cibber's *Apology* as a target and pondering diversities of human response. Published, like *Pamela*, in 1740, the *Apology* constituted a new form of memoir. Its first paragraph proclaims that the author will publicize his follies because they have made him happy. At the beginning of Chapter 2, he announces with satisfaction "that nothing gives a Coxcomb more Delight, than when you suffer him to talk of himself; which sweet Liberty I here enjoy for a whole Volume together!" (Cibber 2000, 21). He also boasts of his own vanity, a note that he will strike often.

Pamela and Cibber alike manifest conspicuous self-absorption. Cibber acknowledges his delight in talking of himself; *Pamela* talks of little beyond herself, though she acknowledges nothing of the sort. Cibber cheerfully proclaims his follies, his vanity, and his egotism; *Pamela*, in Fielding's perception, possesses the same qualities without knowing it. Both use their experience to polish their self-representation. They share, most importantly, their marked theatricality.

Cibber deliberately forms himself on the page into something resembling a fictional character. He is his own creation, self-manufactured, a performer on his own stage. The metaphor of performer suits *Pamela* equally well, as she attires herself in country costume and appears before her master, or constructs her self-presentation in the letters to her parents, or dexterously carves a fowl for upper-class visitors.

Such staginess speaks to one of the period's central concerns: how to distinguish performance from straightforward action, fictional character from true character, role from substance.³ Experience presumably helps, but a masterful hypocrite can deceive even a person of much experience. (Squire Allworthy, the wise patriarch of *Tom Jones*, does not see through his evil nephew Blifil until the novel's conclusion.) Haywood and Fielding attack *Pamela* as a hypocrite partly because they can hardly imagine a more serious indictment. In their view, she not only claims her primary concern with virtue to disguise her seeking of personal advantage; she also conceals her sense of her own importance behind an appearance of humility.

During the 1740s, the idea of individual significance was taken seriously, pondered by philosophers and largely accepted by imaginative writers. Nonetheless, both *Pamela* and Cibber could be challenged as self-important: the significance of every individual does not warrant a claim of superiority over others. Cibber proclaims his own weaknesses, but, like *Pamela* enacting her humility, he glories in them. Both he and *Pamela* reveal – so Haywood and Fielding claim – a dangerous delight in their poses.

Fanny Hill, a heroine of pornography who happily violates professed social norms, feels no apparent need to pose for her readers, although she frequently deceives her clients. John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–1749), widely known by the name of its protagonist, provides unexpectedly useful perspective on other novels of the 1740s. Relying heavily on such models as *Pamela*, it conforms to and parodies the new pattern of romance in the lower social ranks, exposing some of its implications: with particular clarity: ambiguities of hypocrisy, and ambivalent attitudes toward sex and money.

Like *Pamela*, Fanny comes from poor-but-honest rural parents. When she arrives in the city seeking work, however, she quickly finds herself in a brothel. Her extensive sexual education yields to more intellectual pursuits in time to prepare her for the

return from enforced travel of the man to whom she had long before lost her virginity. Married to him, mother of a son, she announces herself a champion of morality. In the novel's final paragraph, she reports how her husband takes their son to a brothel in order to familiarize him "with all those scenes of debauchery, so fit to nauseate a good taste" (Cleland 1999, 188). Her memoir implicitly serves a comparable function.

The notion of hypocrisy as usually defined hardly applies. Fanny believes what she says; she has changed her mind as a result of her happy marriage. The narrative has previously emphasized her continued pleasure in the maneuvers and deceptions of her role as prostitute, as well as her pleasure in experience for its own sake. Now her delight in sexual relations with the man she loves provides new perspective. Yet her new morality rings false because she has neither repented nor essentially changed. Just as she comfortably assumed various roles in her life as prostitute, she now comfortably assumes the role of domestic partner. Like Colley Cibber, she postures happily on any stage. Like Cibber, too, she feels no need to conceal anything from the public – except the vast amount she can be thought to conceal from herself.

Fanny's role as what we might now call a sex worker makes transparent the connection between erotic attraction and monetary reward, a connection present although unemphasized in much fiction of the 1740s. Men and women alike, in this fiction, tend to marry prosperously, although money never consciously motivates their marriages. Every stage of Fanny Hill's career stresses the importance of money: testimony to her attractiveness, means of subsistence, temptation to deceit, source of luxuries, and, increasingly, index of respectability. It serves all these functions in other novels as well.

Before Fanny's reunion with Charles, she acquires, by inheritance from one of her lovers, a large fortune. Meeting Charles unexpectedly, she is thrilled to discover that he, in contrast, has lost all his money: now she can act as benefactor. She begs him to accept her fortune as a gift, but he insists on marrying her, although she worries about his possible social disgrace as a result.

But money, it turns out, makes everything all right: makes black into white. Fanny subsides into maternity and moral smugness. Nothing in the tone of *Fanny Hill* – a first-person narrative by its complacent protagonist – suggests any criticism of this development.

Criticism of misguided and misdirected acquisitiveness abounds in other 1740s novels. The Harlowe family's desire to increase their already significant wealth largely motivates their persecution of Clarissa. Roderick Random's desire (and, often, need) for money motivates his most morally dubious behavior, and he witnesses much similarly motivated reprehensible behavior in others. David Simple sees the corruptions of wealth everywhere. Corruption stems, many novels suggest, from caring too much about money, from wanting too much of it, and from being unscrupulous about acquiring it. Definitions of "too much" and "unscrupulous," however, remain vague; and the desirability of money continues to be assumed even as fiction castigates the evils it brings.

Fanny's large inheritance rewards fornication, which has been her career. The novel's romantic resolution asserts but hardly substantiates her new moral insight. This is, after all, pornography; one can hardly demand rigorous moral logic. The novel's crude construction exposes the comparable illogic implicit in more well-crafted novels of experience, which betray a love-hate relationship to money and discomfort at thinking too much about it.

Sex, along with money, is on everyone's mind in these novels, and it too makes everyone – even Lovelace, the great seducer – uncomfortable. *Fanny Hill* takes it for granted and describes its activities with cheerful detail. In *David Simple* it vanishes as a subject. In *Anti-Pamela* it assumes center stage but is represented as sordid and ugly rather than pleasant. Between these extremes – in *Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Tom Jones*, for example – it figures always in the background, sometimes in the foreground, but rarely as a subject for explicit consideration. Would-be rapists, who show up in all three of the works I just mentioned, are clearly reprehensible, but sexual feelings in male or female protagonists are typically obfuscated. *Fanny Hill* tells us that women as well as men enjoy sex and the prospect of sex, an idea just beneath the surface in other novels of the period. The pornographic novel tells us of experience commonly denied or obscured. For the reader, as spectator and as vicarious participant in the fiction, it may bring discomfort as well as titillation.

The trajectory of the novel of experience (a pattern followed even by *Fanny Hill*) typically begins with a young person in straitened economic circumstances and ends with the advent of money and permitted sex: marriage. *Tom Jones*, toward the very end of the decade, focuses especially sharply on the question of experience, its rewards and dangers. Experience informs Tom about money and sex. He encounters a doctor who diagnoses according to the fee he anticipates; innkeepers who charge what the market will bear; men who, for money, swear that an innocent man has committed a capital crime; a father who would happily make his son miserable in order to have him bring wealth into the family by marriage. Suffering from lack of money himself, Tom falls into the position of gigolo. He meets (and rescues) a family suffering the utmost miseries of poverty; the father of that family has in his desperation tried to turn highwayman. He sleeps with a woman who betrays him and with one who is thought to be his mother.

All these instances (and others) testify to the corruption that desire, for money or sex, can bring. Tom has demonstrated his fecklessness at the beginning of his travels, when he loses a £500 note given to him by Squire Allworthy. Although lacking other financial resources, he fails even to look at the note: he doesn't know how much he has lost. Nothing in the text directly shows that he will handle money better by the end, but the experience he is reported to have had provides abundant negative models.

His experience also presents him many monitory instances of hypocrisy. Blakey Vermeule writes, of *Tom Jones*, “the narrative energy comes from sex, the vast human quest for status, and hypocrisy. People care about these things most of all” (2010, 147). Tom certainly cares about sex. He doesn't start out caring about hypocrisy; he's lived with it for a long time, in the person of his foster brother, Blifil. His travels, however, educate him in its omnipresence, in those he trusts (like his friend Black George, who steals his money) and those he cares about not at all. His final willingness to retreat to the country may reflect his unwillingness to continue dealing with hypocrisy on a large scale. Status never matters to him, except inasmuch as it proves necessary in order to win the woman he loves. The novel tells us that money creates status, though, and Tom learns to take money seriously.

Sex, status, and hypocrisy are certainly on the narrator's mind. The presence of this narrator differentiates *Tom Jones* from all its contemporaries. He functions as a strong character, expressing himself on matters literary, psychological, and moral and stressing his role as artificer, even while insisting that he offers a “menu” of various forms of “human nature.” He claims wide knowledge derived from wide experience. Most

important, he claims absolute control over his characters and the happenings that involve them, and he makes that control convincing.

Most readers over the age of, say, seven know that authors invent and manage their characters, even though they (we) don't remember this every minute. Fielding's narrator, though, makes his presence constantly felt. Self-aware and domineering, he emphasizes his power; intersperses into his text essays about novelistic practice, the imagination, and moral responsibility; and calls upon readers to use their own experience as a basis for understanding his fiction. His voice generates much of the novel's pleasure. It also provides steady reassurance.

Narrative control displays itself in the ostentatious artifice of the plot, where everything connects. Unlike the loose structure of *Roderick Random*, in which chronological sequence often provides the only link between happenings, an intricate system of causes and consequences operates throughout *Tom Jones*. As the narrator frequently hints, he knows much more than the reader knows. When everything works out nicely in the end, the good rewarded and the wicked punished, the force of the narrator's repeated hints of his godlike power becomes apparent. Like a just deity, he has enabled his hero to acquire a moral education and to get his girl.

Fielding too recognizes that experience does not inevitably produce learning. He ponders what enables a young man to utilize what happens to him. Tom learns from his experience because of his ways of engaging with it. His antagonist, Blifil, like Syrena and Shamela before him, learns nothing because he believes that he already knows everything he needs. The young protagonist acquires prudence – capacity to discriminate in moral and in practical matters – from his adventures and misadventures; he can therefore be endowed with wealth and social position and marry his beloved Sophia.

Yet this happy ending, like the endings of other 1740s novels of experience, has its shadows, hinting that experience will not suffice to protect against the world's evils. Recognizing and exposing corruption change nothing at all. Endless negotiation succeeds Pamela's fairy-tale marriage; her husband proves imperfect. *Roderick Random* and *Fanny Hill* offer fantasy resolutions. David Simple's idyllic community will not survive. Shamela's marriage resolves nothing, and one suspects that the same is true of Syrena's banishment. The happy ending of *Clarissa* entails the deaths of its central characters. Experience may provide sufficient foundation for living, but it does not solve the problems it exposes. Hume's vision of time and experience enlarging maxims of conduct and teaching their proper use and application does not address the realities of what I earlier called a chaotic and perverse social environment. The novel of experience, in the 1740s, most often ends in a vision of escape.

NOTES

- 1 Since the publication of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957), what Watt called "formal realism" has generally been agreed to be a characteristic of the early British novel. Subsequent critics have modified and enlarged Watt's views – pointing out, among other things, that the notion of realism is itself a fiction.
- 2 Letter to Aaron Hill, 1741 (quoted in Bartolomeo 1994, 53).
- 3 For a thorough discussion of the place of hypocrisy in eighteenth-century thought and behavior, see Davidson 2004.

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