MONEY, CLASS, AND REALISM IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH FICTION FROM
ROBINSON CRUSOE TO AMELIA

A Dissertation in

English

by

David Spielman

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012
The dissertation of David Spielman was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Robert D. Hume  
Evan Pugh Professor of English  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.  
Professor of English  
Director of Graduate Studies

John T. Harwood  
Associate Professor of English

Philip Jenkins  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of the Humanities, Emeritus

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

This project challenges a number of long-held assumptions about some of the most studied novels in the period (such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, and *Tom Jones*) by asking how their original readers might have responded to them when they were first published. I focus on representations of class and sums of money to gauge whether readers would have been likely to believe the claims to authenticity made in the prefaces to some of the novels and whether the fiction could have appeared realistic, even if it was not being presented as a genuine memoir. Throughout I offer approximations of present-day buying power for the sums given in the novels and compare them to historical sums in order to understand their value and their interpretive significance. I argue ultimately that discussing realism in eighteenth-century fiction requires awareness of relevant historical, contextual information, rather than asserting that an event or plot seems realistic to us now as modern readers.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LIST OF TABLES**

| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1: Income and Class Structure in Eighteenth-Century England | 14 |
| Income Strata, Social Hierarchies, and “Sorts” of People in England | 16 |
| The Upper Sorts | 23 |
| The Middle Sorts | 30 |
| The Lower Sorts | 38 |
| Prices and Readership | 43 |
| Chapter 2: Authenticating Fiction in Prefaces | 46 |
| Published Memoirs | 47 |
| Letters | 68 |
| Chapter 3: Daniel Defoe, “His” Novels, and Eighteenth-Century Readers | 76 |
| Defoe’s Changing Reputation | 77 |
| *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* without Defoe | 86 |
| Realism and Sums of Money | 105 |
| The Novels with and without Defoe | 127 |
| Chapter 4: “Class” and Money in *Pamela* | 132 |
| “Class” and the Social Order | 133 |
| Social Stratification and Characterization in *Pamela* | 137 |
| Money, Particularity, and Realism | 153 |
| Richardson and Class | 175 |
| Chapter 5: Henry Fielding’s Economic Worlds | 179 |
| The Hard Reality of *Amelia* | 181 |
| Economic Life in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* | 188 |
| The Consistency of Fielding’s Economic Worlds | 196 |
| Money and Morality in Fielding’s Fiction | 205 |
| Epilogue: Literary Realism, Believability, and Authenticity | 210 |
| Realism in the Novels | 212 |
| Four Sources of Realism | 218 |
| Believability vs. Authenticity | 225 |
| Bibliography | 229 |
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1-1: Gregory King’s Revised Social Table. .................................................................18

Table 1-2: Joseph Massie’s Revised Social Table. ...............................................................20
Introduction

As the title of this study suggests, I am concerned here with three, related issues in eighteenth-century fiction: money, class, and realism. Though certainly they can be treated in isolation, each of these focuses relates to and illuminates the others. Writers of fiction used specific sums of money to illustrate socioeconomic standing and to enhance a feeling of verisimilitude in stories often presented as authentic, first person accounts. They also delineated social distinctions between characters in ways that agreed with (or violated) readers’ expectations and supported their characterizations with appropriate sums of money. Realism is much the broadest of the three and is reinforced or undercut by the presentation of “class” and money. At base, realism will always remain a treacherous subject for literary studies because so much depends on the particular reader and his or her sense of what is believable. My attempt throughout has not been to model an actual eighteenth-century reader when gauging believability but instead to ask what, given what we can learn from economic history, some likely responses to the sums of money and the handling of the socioeconomic world of a novel might have been. We cannot accurately reproduce eighteenth-century reader response simply by learning about the historical contexts in which readers lived, but the attempt to see things as they might have, in a responsible manner and drawing on particular evidence, has seemed worthwhile to me and is the aim of this book. Ultimately the purpose of the following chapters is to estimate eighteenth-century reader response with special attention to how writers supported or betrayed their claims to realism with their depictions of economic life.

Money provides an especially useful way of thinking about believability. James Thompson has argued that “Traditional historicism is not well-equipped to answer questions about how a culture conceives and represents value”; and, though I think he is right to worry about how to “model” value, his position here seems a bit extreme. Putting aside the obvious question of what “traditional historicism” might mean, other than “naïve empiricism,” one of the functions of contextual historicism is to

---

understand a perspective that is not one’s own, which can be drawn from as recently as last year or as long ago as one would wish.\(^2\) Money affords us quantifiability and a fixed point from which to discuss value and particularity. However much one might be able to purchase for, say, £20, the sum itself is not subject to interpretation. It can be counted, compared with other sums very easily, and used to establish hierarchies such as income strata. Attempts to translate eighteenth-century sums into modern equivalents are notoriously difficult and at best informed estimates, but historical sums can be compared to each other without the imposition of modern bias and even without understanding the sum in terms of present-day buying power or relative to an average earnings index.\(^3\)

Take for example the £100,000 that Roxana and her husband wind up with toward the end of her memoir. We can get a sense of the sum’s value by comparing it with other capital sums, such as the £1,200,000 on which the Bank of England was founded. Realizing that the couple commands one-twelfth of the start up cost to establish the Bank gives one an idea of just how extraordinarily wealthy they have become. Similarly, one might compare the incomes reported in the novel against income strata for the period that has been made available by economic historians. I use both methods in each of the literary chapters to try to understand how contemporary readers might have responded to the sums when they encountered them and how their responses might have influenced their sense of believability in the text. I offer approximations of modern buying power, as well, to help present-day readers feel the emotional force that such a stunningly large sum appears intended to have had on a reader but that is lost on us now. These estimates are simply estimates and not intended to be accurate translations of value over time, but they are useful for gauging magnitude and understanding the dramatic purposes to which even numbers


\(^3\) The Economic History Association provides an online calculator, “Purchasing Power of the British Pound, 1264 to Present,” that can be used to estimate the value of a sum in pounds against a retail price index or an average earnings index. At the time of writing, it is available at http://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk. If the address changes, it will likely be available through the Association’s website eh.net.
may be put by writers of fiction. My contention throughout is that monetary sums can carry interpretive significance beyond simply the value of money itself.\(^4\)

Unlike money, which has been largely ignored by literary critics, “class” has seemed hugely important to the history of the novel in particular. The eighteenth-century has long been associated with two interrelated emergences: the rise of the novel and the rise of the middle class. We have Ian Watt to thank for advancing the idea that the novel appeared to satisfy a middle-class reading public who prized Lockean individualism (or else would not have bothered to read long memoirs) and who could afford to read for pleasure. Revisionist histories of the novel have challenged Watt’s main thesis about the “rising” nature of the novel, expanded the canon dramatically, and urged us to rethink the novel’s origins and its place in English history and culture. Yet Watt’s sense that the novel existed for the middle class who produced and consumed it remains widely influential. This persistence is surprising given the regularity with which economic issues have received attention in studies of eighteenth-century novels and novelists and even more so after the appearance of The New Economic Criticism.\(^5\)

While class presumably matters greatly to the story of the novel, it has not actually been studied with attention to economic historical contexts very often. One of my tasks in this study has been to ask what we mean by class when we apply it to the eighteenth century, often fairly heedlessly, and how readers in the first half of the century might have understood socioeconomic stratification in various

---

\(^4\) Though sums of money have been a curiously neglected subject of literary criticism, notable exceptions include Samuel L. Macey’s *Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983) and Edward Copeland’s *Women Writing about Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The study of class has been a hot topic among social and economic historians for decades, and an alarming amount of what we have said about novels and novelists comes off outdated research. I have tried to revise these assumptions based on the recent work of historians where possible, and the majority of the first chapter is dedicated to offering a more nuanced picture of the social strata than the usual tripartite class model derived from Marx.

Realism is the most treacherous and difficult to manage of the three focuses. The second chapter deals primarily with claims to authenticity in the prefaces to fictional works from Aphra Behn to Frances Burney. These prefaces are well known and have received quite a lot of commentary. Lennard J. Davis surveys them helpfully and astutely in *Factual Fictions* (1983) and writes, “the use of authorial disavowal was so widespread in the beginning of the eighteenth century, it should be clear that its effect on the reading public surely would have become hackneyed and overused.” Davis adds, “If the aim of distancing an author from his work is to create heightened realism, the technique could only have worked if most readers had a dulled if not retarded sense of observation after seeing the same device for so many years.”

This would certainly seem a reasonable assumption about eighteenth-century readers, if one took for granted a reading public that purchased new works of long fiction over a long period of time and had access to a mechanism for determining the works’ authenticity or fictionality. In truth, books were hideously expensive, and the novels were regularly sold alongside studies of anatomy, biographies, sermons, histories, and a variety of nonfiction texts.

We cannot take as a given that most readers consumed novels as one might today, picking up something new from Oprah’s Book Club or The New York Times Best Seller list. We might also do worse than to remember the recent scandal involving the revelation that *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) was not a genuine memoir. Oprah had endorsed the book, brought the author on to her show to talk about it, and later condemned him on her show for lying to the world. If we still struggle to tell genuine from fictional memoirs today, we should not have much trouble understanding the difficulties eighteenth-

---

century readers would have faced with drastically reduced access to information and no tradition of something called “the novel” to draw on. We might also remember that works of fiction today almost universally carry “A Novel” on the cover and are sold in sections of bookstores clearly and helpfully labeled “Fiction” or “Literature.”

At the heart of the issue of whether a novel might have appeared realistic to a contemporary reader is the question of access. Who was reading these novels? How did they get them? Many books are cheap today, and lending libraries have been around for quite some time. Electronic devices now exist that allow a person to download copies of books without even needing to obtain physical copies or leaving their homes. Our world is a very far remove from the first half of the eighteenth century in England. I cover the issue of access in some detail at the ends of the first two chapters, but it will suffice here to point out that more than 40% of families at mid-century lived on an income below £25, while Robinson Crusoe, Memoirs of a Cavalier, and Moll Flanders all sold for 5s in octavo, and Pamela sold in two duodecimo volumes for 6s. The first editions of most of the novels included in the following chapters would have cost about 3s per volume, putting the seven volume Clarissa and six volume Tom Jones well out of most people’s reach. These were major purchases, which tells us two things: the readership for first editions of big, fat books—the kind that we study in English departments today—was very small and financially elite.

Before launching into the first chapter, I want briefly to explain the critical context for my project. The study of economics and literature has a long history and has if anything become increasingly popular in the past two decades. Writing in 1997, Robert Markley said, “Arguably, the most significant development in the field is the rapid ascendancy of what we might call the new economic criticism.” Markley rightly hesitates in naming the books he discusses as “the new economic criticism” with confidence. This is sensible for a couple reasons. The first is that, despite an essay collection adopting the

---

7 The advertisements appear in The Post Boy (23-25 April 1719), The London Journal (4 March 1721), and The Evening Post (27-30 January 1722), respectively.

8 The London Evening Post (8-11 November 1740).

phrase, no school of new economic criticism had appeared then or has since. The books by James Thompson, Sandra Sherman, and Patrick Brantlinger that Markley treats in his review essay have relatively little in common with regard to method or even interests and goals. They do not represent a coherent group of projects, and so “the new economic criticism” is really more an indication of a seemingly new or renewed attention to economics and literature in eighteenth-century studies. Within this general interest, a few strands emerge if we group similar books together.

One strand of criticism within this broader economic focus is feminist. Mona Scheuermann’s *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen* (1993) traces representations of women in Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Austen, and others. She explains in her introduction that “The greatest surprise in this research has been that the ubiquitous concern in these novels is money.” This claim would lead one to believe that her book would focus on money, which appears in the title’s subhead, but in fact Scheuermann deals mainly with how writers represent women in a variety of ways. Her chapter on Defoe makes much of Moll Flanders and Roxana as positive female figures for their ability to survive and thrive in a male-dominated economy and lauds Defoe as a protofeminist. Her chapter on Fielding, however, hardly brings in money at all, despite its significance in all the major novels, especially *Amelia*. Scheuermann’s readings of the major novels are stimulating but not always particularly centered on economic issues. The point really is the representation of women, positive or negative. In a similar way, April London helps us read a number of eighteenth-century novels, such as *Clarissa* and *The Man of Feeling*, in terms of women’s relationship to property in *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (1999). Her study proceeds from the assumption that “Representations of women in fiction provided a vehicle for the debate concerning the relationship of property (the ownership of things) to propriety (the possession of one’s person). That debate as conducted within the novel had significant implications for the disciplinary terms of such discourses as philosophical history, aesthetics, and political

theory.”London’s particular focus on property as a way of analyzing female characters offers new insights, though the bulk of what she deals with is off the beaten path.

Conflicts between morality, feeling, and economics have received a fair amount of attention from new economic critics. Liz Bellamy’s stimulating *Commerce, Morality, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (1998) offers something much closer to a contextualized approach to analyzing literature. Bellamy begins with a chapter each on economic and literary theories that provide the context for her analyses of major mid-century novels like *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*. Her focus veers heavily toward morality, though, rather than commerce, in her discussions of the novels. She argues that “The eighteenth-century novel therefore represents a kind of Mandevillian Moment, in which the contest between public and private morality was brought to the fore, and the novel became the ground on which it was fought.” Eighteenth-century economic theorists inform Bellamy’s arguments about how novelists represent morality, but the point is the representation of morality, not commerce or how economic history helps us understand the novels themselves.

Gillian Skinner’s *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800* (1999) focuses on sentimentality and might usefully be considered alongside Bellamy’s book. Skinner interestingly links sensibility in the novel with the economic, particularly with money. As she says, “Eighteenth-century sensibility is linked inescapably to the economic. The classic sentimental tableau [. . .] is based not simply on feeling, but on feeling and money: money which the spectator generally has, and which the object of his or her gaze does not.” The link between feeling and money clearly matters, and Skinner argues rightly that “In the sentimental scale of value, the ability to dispose of money charitably becomes a measure of personal worth. The more you give, the more you prove your feeling response to the sentimental stimuli of suffering and distress” (4). While this is probably not always true, it seems

---

convincing; however, Skinner does not actually estimate the value of money in context in the novels and so cannot really capitalize on the nice point she makes here. Without knowing how much, say, Squire Allworthy gives to Square and Thwackum on his deathbed, we have no way of knowing how charitable eighteenth-century readers might have been expected to consider him. Skinner helpfully demonstrates an important interconnection between apparently unrelated discourses—economic treatises and novels—but her aim is not to explain how the economics represented in the novels affect interpretation.

The most common approach falls under the history of ideas. Colin Nicholson’s *Writing and the Rise of Finance* (1994) argues that Swift, Pope, and Gay cared a great deal more about the economic issues of their time than we have tended to think and that this concern appears in their literary work. He reads *Gulliver’s Travels, The Beggar’s Opera*, and *The Dunciad* against the major economic changes occurring in the eighteenth century in England such as the appearance of the Bank of England or the South Sea Bubble. Nicholson’s method is what we have come to call discourse analysis and a combination of concerns brought by Marx and Foucault, as the following quotation from the preface makes clear: “The readings of *Gulliver’s Travels, The Beggar’s Opera*, and *The Dunciad* developed here bring into debate the conflict between traditional forms of civic personality grounded in real property and endowed with classical virtue, and market-oriented perceptions of individuality where passion and fantasy are encouraged to operate in constant flux.” He goes on to say, “As the wealth of imaginative construction negotiates credit-based constructions of imaginary wealth, versions of history are fought for which in Tory apprehensions repeatedly challenge an increasingly settled system of usurping dominance.”

Throughout, Nicholson reads works for how they might engage with contemporary economic shifts and for the commentary they provide, sometimes as kinds of resistance, but his goal is clearly to analyze ideology and philosophy, not to clarify the economic issues in the texts.

James Thompson’s impressive *Models of Value* (1996) takes a similar approach. Thompson sees his project as investigating the concept of value as it emerges in the eighteenth century, and he bases

---

much of his study on the assumption that “In eighteenth-century England, both political economy and the novel grow out of concerns with value and variables,” that both political economy and the novel respond to a crisis in trying to understand value. In some cases, Thompson focuses on changes in money in the eighteenth century because he sees the reconceptualization of physical money as a significant historical event that transformed how people thought about value. He is quite clear that, theoretically, his study owes much to Marxist analysis and centers on discourse analysis, rather than historical criticism. His purpose is not primarily to elucidate the content of the novels, though he discusses the major novels of Defoe, Fielding, Burney, and Austen in ways that should make us rethink some long-held truths about them. His interests, like Nicholson’s, are largely ideological and philosophical, and he sees the novel as interrelated to political economy as part of public discourse. He cites particular sums of money on occasion, though what the sums mean (and coincidentally their value) tends not to receive much comment. The point is the value of money-as-concept—not actual money, as is also the case in Mary Poovey’s massive Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain (2008), the follow up to her History of the Modern Fact (1998). Poovey offers six parts with multiple chapters each, dealing with a wide variety of texts. She brings literary texts in to her discussions, though they are part of the larger story, and interpretation is not at all the point of this book. It is not really about literature, though literature has a role to play in the history Poovey provides. This is perhaps the most historically-grounded of the books discussed here, which should not be surprising as it is a history in its own right, rather than a work of literary criticism. The point is certainly not to explain how economics affects possible reader responses or why.

The approach I have taken in this project differs significantly from those covered here. It is not as philosophical as the history of ideas approaches used by, say, Thompson or Poovey, but neither it is an attempt at historical reconstruction. It might be called something like reader response approximation, which needs to be distinguished from reader response theory and historical reception studies. My aim has

---

not been to understand reading conceptually or to offer a model of reading in the eighteenth century. I have also rarely consulted eighteenth-century reviews or published commentary on the novels. I have nothing to say about marginalia in texts, reading habits and tastes of particular readers, or whether these might usefully indicate broader trends.

Instead, I have tried to guess how at least some readers might have responded to the texts in light of very specific historical, contextual information about class and money. Always the point has been about interpretation, how the contextual changes the way we read the texts. This alone distinguishes my approach from most of what might properly be called “the New Economic Criticism,” which most often involves a larger focus on British culture, not just the literary artifacts and how they are read. With each of the authors covered in this project, I have been concerned primarily with reviewing the standard takes on the novels and asking how well these stand up when compared with the interpretations suggested by the addition of the contextual information about class and money.

This turned up useful, often surprising, results in each case. The novels associated with Daniel Defoe have long been seen as indicating a turn towards increased realism in fiction, and the particularity of the description tends to provide the evidence for such claims. The author of the novels gives dates and times, various measurements, and sums of money. These things contribute to a sense of being in the real world for someone reading these novels, or so the idea goes. I argued that the sums, seen in context, were much larger in many cases, particularly in the endings of the novels, than modern readers had assumed, and this argument leads to another: eighteenth-century readers who understood the value of money would not have read the sums as suggesting the everyday real world but would instead have known how big the amounts were and seen them as fantastic. Richardson has been taken as offering a middle-class challenge to the ruling order in Pamela, but not only would the idea of a middle class have been foreign to Richardson himself, Pamela assimilates into the upper classes cheerfully, and the revolution is over before it begins. Richardson’s use of specific sums of money helps us see his conscientious handling of details and the care with which he worked in constructing Pamela, but the interpretive intervention offered here comes from an understanding of class that approaches better what many eighteenth-century readers could
be expected to have brought to bear on the text when they read it. Replacing the tripartite class model of Marx helps us see social stratification and Richardson’s social satiric aims closer to the way the original readers would have. Fielding has become a great moralist since Martin Battestin, but he was not seen this way by everyone in his time. His showering of money on the deserving and the undeserving alike in large quantities at the ends of his novels seriously undermines the image of him as trying to impose order on a world of chaos and to guide his readers with his overarching moral purpose. Fielding clearly has messages to impart in his novels, but his handling of money shows us that wrapping up stories with a fun, happy ending mattered more to him than sending his readers off with life lessons.

These were just some of the points I make in the respective chapters based on an attempt to see things the way the original readers might have seen them. To do this, I appeal to context and try to supply information to understand a variety of socioeconomic aspects of the novels that would not have required explanation in their time and so, almost universally, are not explained in the novels themselves. We are hardly ever told after even a staggeringly large sum of money that the sum is very large. Authors tended to think this sort of information would have been sufficiently obvious to their readers. How social hierarchy works within a wealthy household also goes largely unexplained. Readers unfamiliar with servants and how they interact might have benefitted from the clarification, but in almost all cases, it is not provided.

An obvious limitation of trying to estimate reader response based on supplying contextual information about class and money is that we cannot generate any one context that would apply to all readers. Any claims about how readers would have taken a particular scene or how they might have understood the point of a book has had to be hedged and admittedly not with much precision. I have simply used my best judgment in these cases and said “many readers” or “surely some readers,” depending on how reasonable a population size seemed to me, but the inability to say with great precision and confidence something like “56% of readers would have known this and so read the novel this way” is a real limitation. I have been able to identify interpretations that are likely given the available evidence but am not able to say how widespread the interpretations would have been in any reliable way. This
should not, I hope, undercut the value of the approach. Testing modern responses to eighteenth-century novels against believable approximations of eighteenth-century original reception still offers us a useful basis for comparison with our own interpretations and a helpful check against readings informed either by modern prejudices or ignorance. Not knowing, for instance, how much £500 would have been worth in 1749 makes reading Tom Jones’s exile an exercise in guesswork that has mostly gone wrong.

I also take a simpler stance with regard to the concept of value than, say, Thompson or Poovey. Both critics helpfully and cleverly interrogate value as an idea and are understandably skeptical about the notion that money has a value that can be fixed reliably. This makes a great deal of sense, given the major shifts in eighteenth-century economics, particularly in technology. Banking emerges, and paper money and credit rise in prominence. What money means in a philosophical sense undergoes a major shift. Without disputing these points, I have tried to identify the purchasing power of a sum of money irrespective of the technology used to spend it or the idea behind it. However confusing paper money might have been for a person, the sum conveyed could get you some things and not others. I have tried to understand incomes slightly differently by comparing them to social strata provided by contemporary political arithmeticians and social theorists but also by using the Economic History Association’s online calculator as a check (currently available at http://measuringworth.com). Whatever someone’s idea of value, comparing incomes does at least tell us whether one character makes more than another and has more cash to spend. Because compensation packages often included things other than cash, income charts do not precisely establish economic hierarchies, especially between those at the lower end of the spectrum. The value of the housing and food included in a laborer’s total compensation might put his overall income above a lower artisan, but he would still have less cash to work with, and his sense of scale with respect to a given sum would be greatly influenced by how much money he had to spend.

In each chapter I have tried to indicate which sections of the population might have responded one way or another where possible. People with incomes above £1000 could be expected to respond very differently to Roxana’s husband squandering her £2000 than a lower clergyman earning £35. The price of books helps us understand that the reading public for first editions was generally either in a financial
position to make an expensive purchase or spending a recklessly large sum on a luxury. Even without getting into the literacy rates among the lower sorts, one need only look at the prices of the books compared to the cash incomes of such families to see how unlikely they were to buy these novels. If they read them, they were much likelier to buy them used or to get short, cheap chapbook versions, in which case we are no longer talking about the same texts at all, and the issue of reader response is a moot point. The reading public for new novels had to have been very small and economically elite, and this matters if we want to guess how they responded to the texts, particularly how they would react to money.

At base, my approach comes down to an attempt to read the socioeconomic, particularly monetary, elements of the novels more like eighteenth-century readers than has been the case by appealing to historical context. Specifically I have tried to gauge the value of capital sums, prices, and incomes by comparing them to historical sums and by using relatively simple conversion methods for approximating present-day buying power. My major intervention with regard to class has been largely to alert literary scholars to the innovations in social and economic history, where scholars have abandoned the tripartite class model that still dominates the imaginations of those in English departments. None of these activities requires intellectual gymnastics. They are fairly simple, and a wide range of novels yet remains that would yield interesting results if read using these techniques.
Chapter One

Income and Class Structure in Eighteenth-Century England

What does “class” mean in reference to English society of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Historians have largely abandoned the language of class in recent years. The long-standard tripartite model of a landed gentry, middle class, and laboring poor has seemed more and more an unlikely ex post facto construction of modern historians than an accurate representation of English social hierarchy as people actually experienced it. The word class appears in the title of this chapter and of the book, not because I disagree with these historians, but because the language of “sorts” and the revisions to the tripartite model are largely unknown to those of us in English departments. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how historians have challenged the old class-based model and what they have offered by way of replacement in order to understand how hierarchies formed, on what bases, and what characterized the different levels.

Class has long been a subject of interest to literary critics, though usually in Marxist, ideological terms. Social stratification based on income and wealth rarely receives much attention.\(^{16}\) Those of us with Marxist theoretical leanings would argue that class is ideological, and that class consciousness is the major distinguishing factor in the social hierarchy. This objection is not unreasonable. Distinctions in class rely on more than just income brackets, particularly in England, where titles complicate matters. The main difference methodologically is between emphasizing external or internal criteria for identifying a group of people as a class. The primary external criterion that has been used is money, especially income. Historians have tended to want to identify, say, those belonging to the middling sorts as earning between x and y per year with no real agreement in these figures. Like-mindedness and shared values have then

been assumed to exist among these people of roughly equal financial status. Others do not take shared social experience and values as a given and use these instead as their primary criteria for identifying groups according to internal means.

In the literary chapters that follow, I do a bit of both, but I rely heavily on brackets of wealth because of my focus on money in the novels and because I can demonstrate incomes with much more confidence than class consciousness in most cases. Money functions in a variety of ways: to facilitate exchange and to establish value but also to make social distinctions between people. Though money is not the only constitutive element of class, the vast majority of people living in England would have experienced “class” as an effect of how much money they possessed. The social hierarchies of the gentry and peers pertain to an extremely low percentage of the population. What is more, these elites were already well aware by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that land and title made one a gentleman but not necessarily a wealthy one. As a result, members of these families married below their rank for money, making class distinctions even more complicated. To make matters worse, a person could adopt the fashion typical of a station above his or her own to pass as a member of a class to which he or she did not truly belong. In the works of fiction discussed in the following chapters, a person’s class is often determined by their appearance. So far as I am aware, in and out of literature, people equate expensive clothing and possessions with wealth and elevated status in this period.

In broad terms, each of these contributing factors involves money. Even simply pretending to possess a fortune requires spending sometimes a great deal of money to maintain the illusion. For these reasons, I present in the first section information about the income strata in England according to the political arithmeticians of the time. Writers of literary works often use monetary sums to indicate a character’s social standing, and these are very difficult for us to understand out of context. The purpose of the income strata is to allow us to see how many people in the country could have earned or accumulated as much as the characters we are being shown. We get a better sense, as a result, of how contemporary readers and audience members might have responded to these characters and what expectations they might have had for them. The financial hierarchy created by the income strata tells us who could afford
what and how many families fell into which brackets of wealth. To better understand the social
distinctions made at the time, however, we need to know more than just how much money people made.
To this end, I include in this section an explanation of “sorts of people” as a way of describing England’s
social hierarchy, which historians have come to prefer to the old three-class model based on Marx’s
landowners, bourgeoisie, and proletariat.

I follow this overview of incomes and social differentiation with a section each on the upper,
middling, and lower sorts. These are not rough-and-ready substitutes for the elements of the three-class
model. Nothing like class conflict of the sort that Marx or his followers imagined appears to have taken
place during this period. People divided over religious, geographic, political, or local issues of various
kinds, rather than as one class against another. Members of the groups that I have clustered together here
would not necessarily have had much to do with each other at all. My goal here is to offer an explanation
of the English social order in this period drawn on the current work of historians that functions as the
context in which I will analyze the literary works in the following chapters.

**Income Strata, Social Hierarchies, and “Sorts” of People in England**

This section aims to answer two related questions. How much did people in this period earn from various
sources of income, and how might their social order be understood? The first is, in many ways, easier to
answer than the second. Wage rates in England have received quite a lot of attention from economic
historians. Significant advances have been made in the past few decades, but much of the older
scholarship retains its value. As a subfield of economic history, studies of wage rates have withstood
repeated testing and scrutiny surprisingly well. James E. Thorold Rogers’s now ancient *Six Centuries of
Work and Wages* (1884) remains a worthwhile resource. Elizabeth W. Gilboy’s *Wages in Eighteenth
Century England* (1934) has been replaced in many respects by the data presented by E. H. Phelps Brown
and Sheila V. Hopkins but is still regularly consulted and included in studies of eighteenth-century

---

17 James E. Thorold Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages: The History of English Labour*
(1884; repr. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949)
incomes. These have been revisited and revised by successors.

The work of Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson is of primary interest to the discussion of incomes and class that appears in the following chapters. In “Revising England’s Social Tables 1688-1812,” Lindert and Williamson examine and revise the income strata provided by Gregory King and Joseph Massie, the two principal contemporary sources for national incomes. Gregory King’s “Natural and Political Observations,” which includes “A Scheme of the Income & Expence of several Families of England Calculated for the Year 1688” is essentially a table listing types of families in England and Wales by the head of household’s profession, the number of such families, how many people belonged to these families, what their incomes and expenses were, and so on. King’s accuracy has been called into question by G. S. Holmes, who argues that King wrote his tract to advantage himself politically and that he knew relatively little about the economic realities of the time in which he lived. Lindert and Williamson have subsequently revisited King’s figures and tested them against parish records and other contemporary sources. Lindert and Williamson found King’s figures reliable in some but not all cases, and they corrected his table with their own data where appropriate.

This revised table forms the basis for my comparisons of incomes in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Prices fluctuated within relatively stable limits from roughly 1600 to 1770,


making King’s social table extremely useful for our purposes, since we do not have to worry much about inflation. The following table was created using data extrapolated from Lindert and Williamson’s revisions of King. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred and indicate (a) how many families in England and Wales fell within a given range of incomes and (b) how many averaged above what income level.

Table 1-1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Total Numbers of families</th>
<th>Income ≥</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200 (0.01%)</td>
<td>£6,000</td>
<td>200 (0.01%)</td>
<td>£6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 (0.06%)</td>
<td>£1,500-5,999</td>
<td>1,000 (0.07%)</td>
<td>£1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 (0.04%)</td>
<td>£800-1,499</td>
<td>1,600 (0.12%)</td>
<td>£800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8,300 (0.60%)</td>
<td>£400-799</td>
<td>9,900 (0.71%)</td>
<td>£400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47,800 (3.44%)</td>
<td>£200-399</td>
<td>57,700 (4.15%)</td>
<td>£200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13,100 (0.94%)</td>
<td>£100-199</td>
<td>70,800 (5.09%)</td>
<td>£100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32,600 (2.34%)</td>
<td>£75-99</td>
<td>103,400 (7.44%)</td>
<td>£75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125,400 (9.02%)</td>
<td>£50-74</td>
<td>228,800 (16.45%)</td>
<td>£50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>441,000 (31.71%)</td>
<td>£25-49</td>
<td>669,800 (48.17%)</td>
<td>£25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>384,200 (27.63%)</td>
<td>£10-24</td>
<td>1,054,000 (75.79%)</td>
<td>£10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>336,700 (24.21%)</td>
<td>≤ £9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lindert and Williamson estimate that approximately 1,390,600 families lived in England and Wales in 1688 and that they had an average income of roughly £39. These figures show how prevalent low incomes were. 720,800 families (51.83%) averaged less than £25 per annum, and nearly a quarter made 23 Peter H. Lindert, “English Population, Wages, and Prices: 1541-1913,” 614.  
24 Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “Revising England’s Social Tables 1688-1812,” 393.
less than £9. Laboring families (of whom there were about 285,000) averaged only £15 a year.

Joseph Massie’s useful but not unproblematic *A Computation of the Money that Hath Been Exorbitantly Raised upon the People of Great Britain by the Sugar Planters* (1760) provides the best contemporary source of information for the middle and latter part of the century. A political arithmetician with aspirations of becoming the official economic historian to the government, Massie produced more than 80 pamphlets between 1750 and 1784 and was not without his biases. Perhaps deservedly, Massie has gained a reputation as a polemicist. In a sober and thorough consideration of Massie’s work, Peter Mathias argues in favor of the value of *A Computation*, stating that “Advocacy ceases if such circumstantial evidence about his other writings and the kind of man he was can overcome the instinctive resistance quickened by Joseph Massie’s polemics.” As with King, Massie’s figures have been revisited by Lindert and Williamson. They found that in a surprising number of cases, Massie’s data was reliable. Where possible, they revised his table using external sources and updated information. If clearly superior data was not available, they preserved Massie’s estimates. Massie cannot yet be confirmed or discredited with certainty given the paucity of available evidence, but his figures should certainly be used with caution.

Lindert and Williamson’s table of revised figures offers average family incomes by profession, from which we can abstract some useful statistics about income strata in England. The following figures are based on Lindert and Williamson’s revisions of Massie, and indicate (a) how many families in England and Wales averaged above what annual income level and (b) how many fell within a given range of incomes (396-7). Population figures over one thousand are rounded to the nearest hundred and the relevant percentages are rounded to the nearest hundredth. Smaller population groups are rounded to the nearest ten to retain detail in the highest incomes with percentages rounded to the nearest thousandth.

---

Table 1-2
Income Strata in Pounds for c. 1,539,400 Families in England and Wales, 1759

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Total Numbers of families</th>
<th>Income ≥</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 (0.001%)</td>
<td>c. 27,000</td>
<td>10 (0.001%)</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 (0.001%)</td>
<td>c. 13,500</td>
<td>30 (0.002%)</td>
<td>13,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 (0.003%)</td>
<td>c. 10,800</td>
<td>70 (0.005%)</td>
<td>10,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 (0.005%)</td>
<td>c. 8,100</td>
<td>150 (0.01%)</td>
<td>8,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160 (0.01%)</td>
<td>c. 5,400</td>
<td>310 (0.02%)</td>
<td>5,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>320 (0.021%)</td>
<td>c. 2,700</td>
<td>630 (0.041%)</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>640 (0.042%)</td>
<td>c. 1,300</td>
<td>1,300 (0.08%)</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 (0.052%)</td>
<td>c. 1,100</td>
<td>2,100 (0.14%)</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,600 (0.1%)</td>
<td>c. 800</td>
<td>3,700 (0.24%)</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13,500 (0.88%)</td>
<td>400-600</td>
<td>17,200 (1.12%)</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35,900 (2.33%)</td>
<td>200-399</td>
<td>53,100 (3.45%)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51,200 (3.33%)</td>
<td>100-199</td>
<td>104,300 (6.78%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46,300 (3.01%)</td>
<td>75-99</td>
<td>150,600 (9.78%)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89,400 (5.81%)</td>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>240,000 (15.59%)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>660,600 (42.91%)</td>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>900,600 (58.5%)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>446,500 (29%)</td>
<td>10-24</td>
<td>1,347,100 (87.51%)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192,300 (12.49%)</td>
<td>9 or less</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some contrasts with King’s table are readily apparent. Lindert and Williamson estimate that a total of c. 1,539,400 families lived in England and Wales in 1759 and that they had an average income of roughly £46, up from roughly £39 at the turn of the century. Low incomes were still prevalent. A total of 638,800
families (41.5%) averaged less than £25 per annum, down from 720,800 families in King’s day. Given the relatively stable rate of inflation during this period, the mid-century figures demonstrate a noticeable improvement.

The majority of England’s wealth was controlled by a fairly small number of people. Even in Massie’s day, in which more people were able to earn higher wages, only about 10% of the population made more than £75 per annum. Out of a total 1,350,000 families, more than 1,100,000 were unable to net even £50 a year. If we take £50 as a lower boundary for inclusion among the middling sort, as is often done by modern historians, we see just how few families would be included in anything but the lower sorts. Most of the English population during this period consists of laborers and wage earners of one sort or another at different levels of prosperity and poverty. This is a sobering fact but an important one for the study of literary representations of social and economic life in this period.

The cross-sections provided above are the results of extrapolating income data from the tables provided by King and Massie. Neither presented the social order of England in purely financial terms. They were trying to make points about how to classify the population by rank and occupation, not just to estimate what people’s incomes amounted to. King and Massie were not the only writers to attempt to stratify the social hierarchy, however. In 1688, King separated English society into twenty-six groups. These he presented in order from temporal lords down to vagrants. He distinguished “merchants and traders by sea” from those by land. His hierarchy is based entirely on occupation and rank. He was followed by Richard Gough, writing in 1700, who took his hierarchy from the church seating plan in the parish of Myddle in Shropshire, which he was studying. Unsurprisingly he listed them starting with the gentry, who sat in the front, and ended with cottagers, who were in the back.28 When he clustered these groups, he organized them into just four categories: the “chiefe inhabitants,” “the best of the parish,” “good substantiall persons,” and “poore people.”29 In 1709, Daniel Defoe offered seven clusters: “the

great, who live profusely,” “the rich, who live plentifully,” “the middle sort, who live well,” “the working trades, who labor hard, but feel no want,” “the country people, farmers etc. who fare indifferently,” “the poor, who fare hard,” “the miserable, that really pinch and suffer want.” Here the station is associated with a standard of living. Interestingly Defoe’s stratification spends only three categories on the upper and middle sorts and four on the lower sorts. Given the actual demographics of eighteenth-century England, his scheme makes a good deal more sense than a tripartite model in which the laboring families and the poor seemingly share significant affinity with each other as one-third of the overall social order. Massie included fifty-one socioeconomic groups, which, for the purposes of his polemic against the sugar traders, he sorted into “Labouring Families, &c.,” “Families which drink Tea or Coffee occasionally,” “Families which drink Tea or Coffee in the Morning,” and “Families which drink Tea, Coffee, or Chocolate, Morning and Afternoon.” Fortunately the merits of his social table were not in his classifications.

The social hierarchy was not clearly established and agreed-upon during this period. We find writers lumping people together with as few as four major categories and as many as fifty-one particular occupations and ranks. What we do not find in any of these, however, is a tripartite model, though several of these can be made to fit one. Keith Wrightson argues that such a model developed alongside understandings of the social order as a series of ranks, orders, and degrees—the kind of hierarchy produced by the writers above. In this alternative understanding of the social order, distinctions were made between “sorts” of people, rather than lists of groups. This was done in a dichotomous fashion in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with the purpose of illustrating contrasts, as in “the better sort” versus the “poorer sort.” Not until about 1640 was “the middle sort” used in a sociological context. Wrightson explains that “In the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was routinely adopted as an established mode of summing up the tradesmen, manufacturers, and farmers who occupied the middle ground in the hierarchies of wealth, status and power, and the outcome was the consolidation of a tripartite perception of the social order” (49). How well this tripartite perception actually took hold of

---

writers in this period is questionable. Wrightson surveys the social orders offered by some of the writers above and explains how their ranks and degrees collapse into essentially three categories. This is true but ignores the manner in which these writers actually categorized people. This problem aside, the language of “sorts” has gained tremendous currency with social and economic historians for its flexibility and as a useful replacement for “class,” which is a phenomenon of the end of the eighteenth and primarily the nineteenth centuries.

The following survey of occupations and social ranks has been divided according to a tripartite model but does not represent a social hierarchy that contemporaries necessarily would have agreed with. The distinctions between the groups made by historians, particularly in the case of the middling sort, are explained, as are the difficulties in lumping together those who might belong to the upper, middle, or lower sorts. I have used the language of sorts throughout instead of class in an attempt to avoid giving the impression of coherent social groups with broadly held political, social, and economic values and interests. The purpose of the survey, ultimately, is to offer the necessary background in which to interpret socioeconomic representations and distinctions in the literary works in the following chapters. As such, I have included as many illustrative sums, particularly incomes, expenditures, and budgets, as possible to ground the analysis of literary sums in historical particulars.

The Upper Sorts

The upper ranks of English society in this period consisted largely of landowning elites. They ranged considerably in wealth, social position, and political power from the peers to freeholders. These are not the kinds of people belonging to “the mercantile sorts,” the various types of capitalists proliferating during the period. Members and indeed heads of these families certainly made money in ways other than

---


simply through rents and agriculture, but the foundation of their social and economic position was usually land.\textsuperscript{33}

At the top of the upper sorts were the peers and a few great, non-noble landowning families.\textsuperscript{34} This group was very small, highly exclusive, and relatively stable. In 1688 England had only 160 lords temporal, with an additional 100 or so non-noble families that owned huge estates of 10,000 acres or more. Two factors contributed to the stability of this group: inheritance and marriage. Keeping an estate together was important to maintaining social position, and inheritance laws helped make this possible. Male primogeniture dictated that only eldest sons inherited estates and titles, which meant that the number of members possible in this club stayed low. The family did not share the estate in any strict sense. The title-holder inherited lands as an entirety and functioned as essentially a steward, handing the position off to another male member of the family after his death. This was not a perfect system. Sons were disinherited. Title-holders died without heirs. On the whole, however, the system prevented estates from being broken up and kept them within particular families.

For one hoping to enter this exclusive club, then, the key would be to marry into it. This would have been more easily said than done. Members of this group largely married between and among each other, further consolidating their holdings.\textsuperscript{35} Heirs tended to marry heiresses. Sons of great families might marry the daughters of families below their station fairly safely in order to increase the wealth of the estate. Marrying daughters down was undesirable if one wanted to keep estates among the upper ranks and form alliances between great families. One hardly wanted the husband inheriting the land and title after the death of the current holder. This might not have been such a problem in the case of a family with an heir and a spare, but such a marriage still created the possibility of losing control of family continuity.

Sons who did not inherit wound up in very different economic circumstances than their elder


\textsuperscript{35} For marriage patterns in this period, see Lawrence Stone, \textit{The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800} (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).
brothers. Usually they were given some money in cash and help getting started in a profession of some sort. They remained gentlemen and still firmly situated above the middling ranks but with much less money and no land or title. The Duke of Devonshire granted his sons £1,000 each and some aid setting up in politics. Ralph Sneyd of Staffordshire likewise gave £1,000 each to his six sons, who went into the Church, the military, and the East India Company. These are not paltry sums, to be sure, but would likely have been a disappointment in comparison with inheriting the estate. The amounts are one-time cash payments, after all, not annual incomes, and these men would have to find ways of earning their living, preferably in respectable means.

Pensions and sinecures were important sources of income for those in the upper sorts. Roughly one-fourth of the peers held government offices by the early eighteenth century. Horace Walpole received £1,200 a year from his Tellership of the Exchequer. George Rose made more than £11,600 annually from his combined positions under William Pitt the Younger toward the end of the century. A secretary of state in the middle of the century could earn between £6,000 and £9,000 a year. James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos, increased his fortune by £600,000 during his time as Paymaster of the Forces Abroad from 1705 to 1713. The qualifications of those holding the offices were often not the point. Many were not expected to carry out the duties themselves in the first place. Brownlow North, for instance, made his seven-year-old grandson Registrar of the Winchester diocese. John Boscawen Savage became an ensign in the 91st Foot Regiment in 1762 when he was two years old. The practice of hiring others to do the actual job was common. These were plums to be used for patronage and political purposes, which helped funnel money through official offices back into the upper ranks of society.

Positions in the Church were highly desirable and could help their holder to significant personal wealth. The Bishops of Durham and Winchester made £6,000 and £5,000 per annum respectively. Multiple tithes could be combined to increase earnings potential. Bishop Richard Watson drew his income of £2,200 a year from nine churches in Shropshire, Leicestershire, Llandaff, and Huntingdonshire.

---

supplemented with impropriations. With some exceptions, these elevated clergymen were eligible to serve as Lords Spiritual, who occupied twenty-six seats in the House of Lords, as is the case now. They could serve as potentially useful political supporters for those who had helped to elevate them, making the ties between elite social, financial, religious, and political status readily apparent.

Members of this group spent incredible sums of money, as well. Despite having amassed huge wealth, Brydges left his estate so deeply in debt that his successor, Henry, held a demolition sale of Cannons in 1747, selling off furniture and parts of the structure itself. Sir Robert Walpole spent more than £90,000 on personal expenses between 1714 and 1718 or £22,500 a year over four years. He is estimated to have spent £1,500 a year in wine entertaining guests at Houghton Hall in Norfolk and £15 a night in candles to light the place. Many of those among the laboring poor in the early part of this period earned around £15 annually. Fabulous sums of money were spent on building and remodeling projects for country estates. The Duke of Chandos’s Cannons required £200,000 over a building period of nearly ten years. The Earl of Leicester spent £90,000 erecting Holkham Hall. Woburn Abbey cost the Duke of Bedford £84,000 to restore between 1747 and 1763. The Marquis of Rockingham built Wentworth Woodhouse for £83,000, and the maintenance and upkeep of the property required £5,000 a year.

The law in this period greatly supported the upper echelons. Mortgages gave landowners the power to improve their lands, pay debts, settle money on their children, and raise capital without having to part with any acreage. Entail prevented those holding estates from chopping them up and selling parts off. In effect, the inheritor was basically an occupant of the estate for life who did not have supreme authority over it. Cannons was sold off for parts to pay off James Brydges’s debts, but the acreage remained intact. This would surely not have been the case without the legal restrictions imposed on landholders in this period. An entailed estate could usually not be inherited by any but legitimate male heirs, taking illegitimate children out of the line of inheritance. These institutions helped to ensure that estates would remain whole and in the hands of the few.

---

37 Woburn had been an expensive estate to keep up in the latter part of the seventeenth century, as well. See Gladys Scott Thomson, *Life in a Noble House, 1641-1700* (1937; repr. The University of Michigan Press, 1959).
Daughters and younger sons could be expensive propositions for estate holders. Marrying off a daughter typically cost the estate a lump sum of cash to be paid to her husband as her portion. Some of this money could be reserved to sustain her after her husband’s death in a jointure. This was usually determined during the outlining of the marriage settlement. Women who wanted jointures after they had already become married could still arrange to have them created but often with fees attached and a fair amount of hassle. The jointure was typically money from which the widow could draw an annuity and was an important kind of early life insurance policy. As the jointure depended largely on the size of the woman’s portion to begin with, families were encouraged to settle reasonably significant amounts on their daughters for their maintenance and support—to say nothing of the desirability of making them attractive to others in the gentry.

Younger sons were expensive because they required cash settlements to begin professional lives, and a good deal of money could be sunk in setting these gentlemen up in politics, the Church, or the military. Advancement in those realms tended to follow one’s connectedness more than his abilities, and some promotions were only available to those who could afford to pay for them. Those who were not entered into the professions could be apprenticed to masters of various trades in London, a practice more and more common among the upper sorts through the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This could be a very costly proposition, depending on the trade. Families paid premiums to masters to take their sons as apprentices, and these ranged from £860 for a Levant merchant’s apprentice to £10-£50 for artisans’ apprentices. Penalties paid for apprentices who broke the terms of their contracts with their masters were very high, as well: £1,000 to a Levant merchant, £500 to a goldsmith-banker, and £150 to a linen-draper. Apprentices also needed to be clothed appropriate for their trades, and outfitting them could

---

38 For a lucid explanation of the handling of “younger children” in great families, see Eileen Spring, Law, Land, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300-1800 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), ch. 3.
easily cost between £10-£50. A younger son entirely cut off from the resources necessary to help him begin his career and advance in it was very badly off, and families with younger sons could expect to pay quite a lot of money to have them well settled in the world.

Holders of estates played important roles in their communities and the nation in a number of realms, but their power was contingent on local support. As candidates for parliamentary power, they relied on the ratepayers and tenants for votes. Courting favor required spending a good deal of money and fraternizing with even the poor, laboring folk. Near election time, owners of country houses could be expected to host extravagant social engagements for their local populace. Without private armies to enforce their authority, these wealthy elites ruled by consent and through reciprocity. The Duke of Norfolk held a dinner for 350 laborers. This kind of paternalism had its benefits but was also intended to make the obvious social and financial inequality more bearable. It extended only so far, though. The game laws in force after an Act of 1671 made hunting game illegal, even on one’s own property, unless the estate generated above £100 per annum. This functionally restricted hunting to great landowners and excluded even well-to-do farmer-tenants and freeholders. Open-handed and interested in equality, these people were not. They consolidated local power through obtaining high offices in the government and the Church, which carried with them power, authority, and the ability to grant patronage. Their importance as local consumers cannot be underestimated, and many depended on them for their livelihoods. In 1700, between 15 and 20 per cent of English landed wealth was controlled by the peers. This figure rose by the end of the century to between 20 and 25 per cent, with many peers owning more than 100,000 acres each. One is not terribly surprised then to find the political power of the landed elites largely unchallenged in this period.

Below the magnates were 15,000 or so landed families. These were proprietors who did not work the fields themselves and relied on local influence and offices for power. At the upper end of this category we find baronets, who could earn above £1,500 per annum in 1700 and nearly £4,000 by the end of the

---
century. At the lower end of this group were squires, who might earn around £300—not a paltry sum but not always an income that paid maintenance and labor costs sufficiently well to produce great comfort. On a social, if not always economic, par with the squires were the parsons. James Woodforde, for example, made £400 a year and lived more than comfortably, not having to worry about the costs of agriculture. Some families at this level were able to make serious improvements to their standard of living and increase their wealth. In the early part of the century, the Archer family in Warwickshire added to their earnings from lands by expanding into forestry and iron mining, resulting in £3,000 a year. The Whitbreads were small-time squires in Bedfordshire early in the century but by its end had greatly increased their fortunes, earning £8,000 per annum from a brewery in London and another £22,000 from land. The Curwens, Liddells, and Cooksons made their fortunes in coal in the north. Not everyone did so well. The Verneys of Buckinghamshire were badly hit by their unsuccessful jockeying for political power with the Grenvilles.\footnote{On the Verneys, see Susan E. Whyman, \textit{Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). A good account of their fall can be found in John Broad, \textit{Transforming English Rural Society: The Verneys and the Claydons, 1600-1820} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 8.} The estate Edward Gibbon inherited had been seriously diminished by his father’s extravagant living. Spending beyond one’s means and risky ventures in business and politics were always potential disasters.

One notch down from the landed gentry we see a split in English landed society. One group consisted of those who owned land, and the other of tenant-farmers. Prosperous farmers could enjoy better economic circumstances and living standards than freeholders, though Gregory King thought that the roughly 100,000 freeholders he identified in 1688 were better off. Freeholders’ incomes tended to range between £50 and £150 a year, but they were restricted in how well they could advance themselves. They generally lacked income to invest, limiting their ability to grow their fortunes and keep pace with the farmers. By contrast, farmers invested in their own agricultural business, which could become increasing more profitable. George Culley earned £4,000 a year by the end of the century, having built up his business of stock breeding in Northumberland. For the industrious, tenant farming was a sound
prospect. Landowners were keen to rent to productive farmers who could improve the land and were wise to subsidize these improvements. Some of these leases involved very favorable terms for long periods, and farmers could get quite a lot of land to work with, up to 600 acres in some cases. By the end of the century, three-fourths of England’s farmland was cultivated by tenant-farmers such as these.

Those lumped together here as belonging to the “upper sort” exhibit tremendous range in earning potential, political power, social status, and population. The elites in the highest places numbered no more than a few hundred, yet they controlled an incredibly disproportionate amount of the nation’s land and wealth. They often had little in common with even those among the upper ranks, such as the country squires, who earned significant amounts of money and exerted serious local influence. What holds them together is their economic dependence on land. We see a direct correlation in most instances between the amount of land owned and a person’s social and economic position. Earning a fortune from positions in the government or the Church was entirely possible, but such plums were not handed out to the needy. Upward mobility was possible but very difficult, and one was at a distinct advance to come from a rich family already, rather than trying to build up a fortune and establish a family among the gentry.  

Typically this could not be done in a single generation because of social stigma. As a group, in other words, these various clusters of people cohere badly. The variety of ranks and degrees here should illustrate plainly that, although all of these might fairly be called England’s “aristocrats,” the term comes to mean relatively little when broadly applied.

The Middle Sorts

Who exactly belongs to the “middling sort” is a thorny definitional question that ultimately depends on changing standards applied fairly unsystematically by contemporaries. The economic historian Peter

Earle distinguishes middling people from the laboring poor with essentially one major characteristic: “What lifted them out of the mechanick part of mankind was the fact that their activities not only fed and clothed them but also enabled them to accumulate on a regular basis and so improve themselves. It was, then, accumulation and improvement, as well as the employment of capital and labour, which were the essential features of the middle sort of people.” As with the upper sorts, no amount of capital and no particular income placed one firmly in or out of this middling group. As Paul Langford describes the situation: “In the countryside small farmers, without property of their own, joined freeholders, perhaps possessing a small patrimonial estate, to provide the landed interest with an outlying flank of modest respectability. At least in the eyes of those who claimed such status, it separated them from the great mass of labourers and cottagers.” He adds, “In the towns, too, some of the smallest self-employed businessmen, shopkeepers, tradesmen, craftsmen, even artisans, would for some purposes be counted with their more august mercantile and professional superiors. But the uncertainty of the criteria makes categorization extraordinarily difficult.” Agreed upon definitions from which to judge social standing appears altogether absent. Instead we get demarcations hazarded by individuals whose authority cannot be taken to apply to the English in toto but which are nevertheless useful indicators of how people stratified their society in economic and social terms at the time. Gregory King stratified England and Wales in his social table of 1688 using both income levels and occupations or social ranks to distinguish one group from another. He did not bother with a “middle” group and largely stayed away from class as a concept altogether. Massie’s categories follow King’s to a significant degree. Neither political arithmetician seems to have worried much about labeling with precision the lines at which one class ended and another began or what marked people as belonging to one and not another.

Social and economic historians appear to have a much easier time identifying who belongs among the upper and lower sorts than who fits in the middle. Much depends on the criteria used. As H. R. French


45 Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 5.

puts the problem, “Apart from the landed aristocracy and those in receipt of poor relief, it seems that almost everyone in between was a possible candidate for ‘middling’ status in the early modern period.”

This middle category’s borders are troublesomely fuzzy, but generally speaking we are talking here about those who did not earn their money from land but instead made money as shopkeepers, merchants, tradesmen, or working in the professions.

Those who could have been assigned to the middling sort in mid-century England according to their incomes make up a relatively small portion of the overall population, whether they would claim affinity on social grounds or not. An income of £50 per annum, for example, is commonly treated as the minimum necessary to count as belonging to the middling group—£500 to be considered a “gentleman.”

Using Massie’s revised figures, which provide more detailed income strata at the upper end, we see quickly enough that only about 1% of the populace could claim to belong to a family headed by a gentleman, and just 15% or thereabouts could fairly align themselves with the middling sort. Perhaps those making between 50 and 500 pounds per annum can rightly be described as falling in the middle of landowners and laborers, but this middle is relatively small. We are dealing, then, with a particularly financially elite “middle” sort.

Distinguishing the middle from the upper sort is a real problem. They intermingled in trade and sometimes intermarried. Thousands of the people in this category earned their living supplying goods and services to the upper sorts. Lawyers served in litigation disputes for landowners. Physicians tended to their illnesses. Manufacturers produced expensive jewelry, clothing, wigs, carriages, furnishings for the home, and so on. This sort of “client economy” enabled some members of the middle sorts to live off the wealth of the landowners and upper clergy. This economic dependence on the upper sorts, however, did not result in cheerful attitudes among the middle sorts towards their betters. Those providing the merchandise and services were often expected to do so on credit and were not always swiftly or fully

---


Those belonging to the professions cause a real definitional problem here. Do they properly belong among the upper or middle sorts? Gentlemen were characteristically idle, not having to pursue a living on their own. However, many multiplied their wealth in capitalist enterprises, owned shops and breweries, invested in the exchange, and participated in other forms of trade. The younger sons of the landed quality essentially had to join the professions to support themselves but were still members of great families in good standing if they became lawyers, clergymen, physicians, or officers in the military. There they would rub shoulders with middling men who had ascended to these positions from the lower social spectrum but were de facto peers professionally speaking. In many cases, men from both groups would have attained their positions through the same route: apprenticeship. Earle tells us that “in relatively prestigious London livery companies, such as the Grocers, Goldsmiths and Fishmongers, over a quarter of all apprentices described themselves as gentlemen. Gentry recruitment on this scale meant that, after a few generations, there would have been few members of the London business world who were not quite closely related to county families” (7). The identification of a gentleman, then, depended in many cases on context: who the person’s family was, how he supported himself, and whether he was moving up or down in the social hierarchy by entering the professions.

Fashion had much to do with presenting oneself as a gentleman, as well. Members of the upper sorts were not the only people to whom the term “gentlemen” might be applied (or who might apply it to themselves). Those among the middling sorts aped the fashions and behaviors of their betters, making the identification of authentic, proper gentlemen a tricky business. The term gained wider usage and was applied to and by persons neither of whose social or financial characteristics would have qualified them as being such before. Langford points out that “It was a common observation that in England the appearance of a gentleman was seemingly sufficient to make him one, at least in the sense of his acceptance as such by others. The Swiss traveler De Saussure, at the end of George I’s reign, noted that any well-dressed person wearing a sword was treated as a gentleman” (66). Again we see the seeming irrelevance of real
incomes to social status: appearing to have an income of 500 pounds a year will do as well as producing proof of that income for some purposes. While prices remained relatively stable for the early to mid-century, social categories did not. The adoption of titles and appellations by those to whom they would not normally apply makes the groupings more inclusive, and in doing so they lose their distinctness. Much depended on the performance of status, and that performance in turn would usually require some money.

Not everyone in the middle ranks wanted to belong to the upper sorts, but for those who did, upward mobility was possible, if difficult. Marrying well was the quickest, though perhaps not always easiest, way to move up the social ladder. Sir James Bateman’s son married the daughter of the Earl of Sunderland, becoming Viscount Bateman. Bateman served as both governor of the Bank of England and director of the East India Company. While he did not become a peer himself, his family leapt over several ranks in one generation. Typically upward mobility affected the next generation, as in this case. Often those who made the money that made their children attractive matches for the upper sorts retained a kind of stain of trade and could face real difficulties distancing themselves from this background. Josiah Tucker writes that such a man, elevated by trade, “may not always meet with respect equal to his large and acquired fortune; yet if he gives his son a liberal and accomplished education, the birth and calling of the father are sunk in the son; and the son is reputed, if his carriage is suitable, a gentleman in all companies.”

Perhaps not everyone would have agreed with Tucker, but his explanation of the process of social upward mobility is telling. Acquiring money retained, at least for some, a stigma that was not necessarily possible to overcome except over time and through multiple generations, after which the importance of where the money came from apparently disappears, and all that matters is that it exists and is spent in appropriate ways on education, upbringing, and proper fashion.

The boundary between the middle and lower sorts tend to be receipt of poor relief. Those attempting to align themselves with the middling sort, elevating themselves above the laboring poor, were unlikely to provide proof of income to substantiate their claims. An easy way of making clear that one

49 Quoted in Earle, *English Middle Class*, 7.
belonged above the lower sorts was to pay the poor-rate. Being exempt from paying the poor-rate marked a family as belonging to the lower sort. Applying for aid would seal the deal. Interestingly, though, the number of families paying the poor rate seems to have been higher than those making £50 or more. As Langford says, “In some places the poor-rate payers were more than a third of the population, and even in industrializing cities notorious for their populous slums, they were unlikely to constitute less than a quarter” (63). Unsurprisingly, then, not everyone thought 50 pounds was the minimum to distinguish oneself from the lower groups, and we see the likelihood of families paying the poor rate when their financial means to do so were not ideal.

What sorts of occupations might one associate with this middle group? Clustering the wide variety of particular occupations into categories helps make sense of the realms in which middling people were employed. Broadly speaking, they worked in the professions, commerce, and manufacturing. These categories are not exhaustive. Some successful writers might fall into the middling sorts, for example, but these are the major arenas in which middling people earned their money and multiplied their fortunes. Most of those employed in the professions performed their jobs without much guidance from governing bodies. The College of Physicians and the Inns of Court, for example, were not open membership organizations. The College of Physicians included only forty-five fellows in 1745. Most working physicians and lawyers were not allowed to partake in their professions’ governing bodies. To belong to the Royal College of Physicians, one needed a degree from Oxford, Cambridge, or Dublin. Surgeons and apothecaries, lower down in the social order from physicians, did not attend anything like medical schools but were trained as apprentices on the job. Whatever annoyance one might have felt at the exclusionary state of their field, quite a lot of money could be made in these occupations, which made them attractive. The number of lawyers swelled dramatically over the course of the eighteenth century. In Bristol and Liverpool alone, more than seventy attorneys were practicing by 1800. Joseph Banks, working in Sheffield as a money-lender, acquired £40,000 worth of land from 1705 to 1727. Erasmus Darwin, working as a provincial doctor, brought in £1,000 annually in fees. John Lettsom, working in London, netted £12,000 a year in fees. Lord Kenyon made £80,000 as Master of the Rolls over a period of twelve
years, having begun life as an attorney. These are clearly standouts, but the possibilities for making significant sums of money in these professions needs to be taken onboard.

Those in commerce and manufacturing were able to earn serious wealth, as well. In 1744, Sampson Gideon subscribed £300,000 to a Government loan and left a fortune of more than £500,000 after his death. Sir Peter Delmé, Lord Mayor of London in 1724, owned £118,000 of stock in the Bank of England and £122,000 in the South Sea Company. Lots of money could be made in overseas trade. Born to West India merchants, John Pinney began his career with £70,000 and multiplied it into a fortune of £340,000. For those who dealt in money and high-end trade, huge incomes were possible. These were by no means the bulk of the middle sort. They account for around 2,000 families in 1700 and 3,500 in 1800. They illustrate, however, the earning power of those at the top of the middling sorts.

Thousands of others made their livings as inn-keepers, builders, manufacturers, artisans, and petty traders. William Hutton began his career as a stockinger in 1741 in Birmingham, after which he established a small bookshop and library. He was worth £2,000 by 1768 and lost £8,000 worth of property in the Birmingham Riots of 1791. Similarly Francis Place worked as a breeches-maker and elevated himself to the top of London manufacturing tailors, earning £3,000 per annum. William Strahan moved to London in 1738 to begin his career as a printer, having been apprenticed in Edinburgh. He published the work of famous writers such as Adam Smith, David Hume, and Samuel Johnson and became printer to the King. At the time of his death, he was worth £95,000. Money was certainly available to those with business sense, self-control, and good connections. James Lackington established himself as a seller of second-hand books in Finsbury Circus in 1774. He introduced some innovations to his trade by standardizing book prices and selling through catalogues. He did not offer credit and kept his prices as low as possible. He was selling 100,000 books per year by 1791 and generating £5,000 annually. Wholesaling worked for men like Lackington, who made their money through small profits and huge volume.

Shopkeepers working on a more modest scale still did quite well and were numerous. Toward the end of the century, shopkeepers of one type or another accounted for 170,000 people. Petworth, a town in
Sussex with a population of about 1,000, gives a sense of the size of this group proportional to the general population. While only about 5% of the town’s inhabitants belonged to the professions, working in the clergy or as doctors and lawyers, 20% belonged to the middle sorts involved in commerce. Roughly a third of these left personal fortunes in property and goods worth between £100 and £500. This is not staggering wealth, but would have supported a family very nicely in a small country town and gives a better sense of what a more common standard of living looked like for the majority of those in the middle sorts.

H. R. French has recently argued for an understanding of social stratification within the middle sort based on clusters of trades that were “statistically more likely to associate together for the purposes of marriage and apprenticeship than they were to form connections elsewhere.” These clusters form a hierarchy, at the top of which were those in the professions including merchants in foreign trade, followed by those in “clean” trades such as large-scale shopkeepers, wholesalers, and innkeepers. Next down were those in well-paying “dirty” trades, involving manual labor and using one’s own hands, such as butchers, tanners, or skilled metal and wood workers. At the bottom of the list were manual laborers whose trades tended not to earn as much money, those working as tailors, weavers, or petty retailers. French explains that “Members of the top occupational ‘cluster’ were very unlikely to marry or apprentice their children (willingly) to those among the bottom grouping, while ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ trades also tended towards endogamy” (284). A split appears between these two groups across which relatively little interchange occurs, and the major distinction that mattered for contemporaries seems to have been how a person made his money.

As with the upper sorts, the variety of people to whom the middling sort might apply as a term suggests that, as a group, members often had very little in common. The novel has long been associated with the rise of a so-called middle class, who was ready and willing to consume it along with the sermons, trade books, travel narratives, and pamphlets being produced for a new reading market. Who exactly these people would have been, though, is usually not explained and for good reason. Those to whom something

---

like “the middle sort” might apply do not constitute anything like the middle class of the nineteenth century in terms of class-consciousness or a feeling of solidarity. In fact, the term “middling sort” was applied by contemporaries to indicate the groups above but also just the very top, sometimes with yeomen and freeholders added in, as in Guy Miege’s *The Present State of Great Britain* (1748). The important point is to recognize the complexity of the term and the variety of occupations, lifestyles, and incomes potentially associated with it.

**The Lower Sorts**

When we get to the lower orders, one finds a motley crew that might easily be referred to as “the rest.”\(^{51}\) The majority of the English population fell into this category, from weavers to coal miners. The bulk of this group is usually referred to as “the laboring poor,” as their defining characteristic is manual labor and lots of it. We come quite a ways down in terms of the standard of living in the lower sorts, though some had worse circumstances than others. Families at this level tended to make their money from a combination of part-time and seasonal jobs, rather than long-term careers, such as those surveyed above. One might take up fishing, hop-picking, and working a loom, or any combination of such employments. Included in this lower order are those not earning a living at all—paupers, vagrants, the ill, old, or unemployed.

An important fact to take onboard is that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, about half of all families in England relied on wage labor, were relatively poor, and suffered a low standard of living. Here we are talking about farmhands, those employed to perform the actual labor in manufacturing, building, making clothes, and other capitalist industries owned by those in the middle and upper sorts. Entering the skilled workforce required apprenticeship. Those in their early teens became apprentices for seven years in a particular trade. They became journeymen in their twenties and could marry. These

---

laborers could potentially become masters in their own rights and move up in station, but the likelihood of this happening diminished as the century wore on and industries became ever more capitalized and consolidated in the hands of a relative few. The cost of setting oneself up in a trade grew to be too much for most to manage. Whereas mining gangs had previously been self-employed, they could not compete with businessmen using winding and pumping gear operated by badly paid laborers. They simply could not afford to acquire the equipment needed to dig deeper mine shafts and had to take jobs working for the owners of the capital. In the latter part of the century, the population rose and resulted in an abundance of laborers who ended up working essentially as hands and who had no stake in the business for which they worked. These are quite clearly the ancestors of Marx’s proletariat, and in the main, their lot was a hard one.

Workdays were very long for many in this category. Some journeyman were able to manage ten hour workdays through combining the right trades, but those not so lucky found themselves working from sun up to sun down. Those in the upper and middle sorts tended not to notice these long hours, somehow, as the poor were usually thought to deserve their circumstances because they were too lazy to work and provide better lives for themselves. Apprentices and servants usually had no lives outside of work. Working as an assistant to a haberdasher, Robert Owen would frequently work into the early morning hours. Miners had the habit of sleeping down in the mines. Apprentices in particular were expected to live chaste lives and had functionally no personal lives. Servants might suffer the indignity of losing their own names, being referred to as “Betty” or “John Thomas.”

The conditions in these jobs were dangerous and reduced a person’s health and life expectancy. Working around furnaces, for example, exposed one to sulfurous gases and produced lung disease, as did coal mining and a variety of other activities in which gases or fumes were inhaled. The physical demands of these occupations put terrible strain on laborer’s bodies. Those working in industries like sawing died of diseases they developed as part of their jobs and appeared physically diminished and prematurely old.

and enfeebled. Lead miners acquired lead poisoning, resulting in symptoms from memory loss, abdominal pain, and nausea to insomnia, neurological problems, and anemia. No legislation appeared in response to the danger of these trades and the conditions that workers had to endure, and families could hardly afford for a member of the family to get sick or injured and be unable to work. Without child labor laws, children of these families could and often did work. Women worked. The family pieced together what income it could from as many contributing members as possible, exposing a massive number of English people to seriously deleterious conditions.

Compensation for this risk and labor was low. Women were paid only two-thirds what men earned. Seasonal employment meant that working year-round required finding new jobs throughout the year. Most did not work a twelve month year. Laborers either had to save up to sustain themselves through periods of unemployment or face dire circumstances. They did not receive any form of financial assistance during times when work was unavailable or they could not perform their duties because of weather or some other interruption. Not all remuneration came in the form of cash, either. Many were paid in room, board, and minor perks or hand-me-downs. A maid could expect to earn £3 per annum for long days, little time to herself, and grim working conditions.

The best one could hope for was to enter a trade protected by the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers. The guilds and companies covered by the statute included tailors, tanners, and a number of other urban trades. These were able to maintain their restrictions on entry into the trade and to require the seven-year period of apprenticeship, as well as how many apprentices a master was able to take on at a time. Pay rates could be regulated and enforced by these organizations, and workers enjoyed some level of protection against exploitation in these trades. The collective bargaining of these groups loosely resembles modern unions, and their power meant that those belonging to them could expect better treatment than those outside the system. Sometimes this bargaining was backed up with organized violence to let owners know that the laborers meant business. In 1753, John Kay’s house was attacked by

---

protesting workers. Spinners in Blackburn wrecked Hargreave’s spinning jennies. In 1779, hosiers in Nottinghamshire destroyed Arkwright’s stocking frames by the hundreds in an outraged response to the refusal of the minimum wage they had asked for. The effectiveness of these organizations and the laws that empowered them were seriously limited at the end of the century. Protections were not extended to new trades that developed with changes in technology, and combinations of these groups into protean unions was punishable by imprisonment. Workers required legislative support simply to organize and create an instrument for defending themselves from exploitation—and usually they did not get it.

Domestic life changed for the worse for laboring people over the course of the century. While those in the upper and middle sorts were furnishing their homes according to this or that fashion, those in the lower orders, who spent relatively little time at home, enjoyed fewer and fewer domestic comforts. Increasingly laboring families did not have wood to burn to keep themselves warm, a cow to milk or chickens for eggs, and they bought bread in shops. Some simply spent themselves into debt to buy the small comforts they were unable to afford. As an example, consider the annual budget from a laborer in Oxfordshire, who planned out a year’s worth of expenses for his three children and himself:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 ½ peck loaves a week at 1s. 2d. each</td>
<td>£13 13s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea and sugar</td>
<td>£2 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter and lard</td>
<td>£1 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer and milk</td>
<td>£1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon and other meat</td>
<td>£1 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap, candles, etc.</td>
<td>about 15s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House rent</td>
<td>£3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coats</td>
<td>£2 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes and shirts</td>
<td>£3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other clothes</td>
<td>£2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total expenses £31 8s.
Working as a carter and digger at a pay rate of 8s. or 9s. per week, this man would earn about £22 a year if he were lucky enough to be employed year round and never took any time off. His budget would run him almost £10 in debt, in other words, every year. Where would a person start making cuts? Clothing? Tea and sugar? Food? Rent was mercifully cheap, but food was not, accounting for nearly seven times as much as the rent in this budget. These circumstances are grim.

Working in urban areas presented its own problems, but those employed by farmers were in a much worse situation and faced increasingly harder times throughout the century. Game laws prevented poaching animals on private lands, but common areas had been available until enclosures for pasturage were created, restricting the land available to these laboring families for feeding what little livestock they might have or simply hunting animals and acquiring wood for heating and cooking. This might not have been such a problem except that farmers had begun to move away from providing annual contracts to their employees, who would then live on their premises as part of the package. Instead they turned to seasonal wage labor when needed, as when harvest time came, thus reducing the number of laborers who had employment year around and increasing the costs faced by families working the land. As a result, laborers were became dependent on their cash wages, which were largely insufficient to support them in the absence of the perks they had customarily received.

By the end of the century, the standard of living that could be expected by the lower sorts was very low indeed. Unemployment was high as a result of a rising population coupled with a decrease in the number of jobs available. By 1800, more than a fourth of the English population relied on the poor relief for support. The cost of the poor relief had nearly quadrupled over the course of a century. In 1680, £532,000 was paid to the poor per year. This figure had risen substantially by 1780 to nearly £2,000,000. This was small comfort to those who received some of the money, however, as rapid inflation meant that one’s income diminished in purchasing power at an alarming rate. At the end of the century, inflation greatly outpaced wage increases, and the situation went from bad to worse. Wheat, for example, rose from 34s. a quarter in 1780 to 58s in 1790 and 128s in 1800. As more families relied on supporting themselves primarily from cash wages, their costs rose without raises in income to match. This was the reality
experienced by hundreds of thousands of people living in England during this period.

**Prices and Readership**

This survey of England’s social order conveys a more realistic sense of the social and economic hierarchies of the century than the old tripartite class model, but it also helps us see how few people could afford to purchase the books we read and study today in English departments. Critics tend to take for granted that anyone who wanted a copy of an eighteenth-century novel could have gotten it and would have been able to read it. This belief likely results from not knowing the prices of the books or the incomes of the people who might purchase them. By way of conclusion to this chapter, I want to illustrate just how small the audiences for some of these novels would have been by comparing their prices at publication with the income strata provided above.

Prices of novels have received scant attention, likely because they have not been especially easy to find until recently. Very few of the major eighteenth-century novels give their purchase price on the title page, and one would have to page through advertisements in contemporary newspapers, many of which also do not list the price. This is slow-going work, and the newspapers are notoriously difficult to work with. At best, one must scan through pages of text, item by item, looking for what might very well not be there. Little wonder, then, that the prices of the novels are not well known. Fortunately with the digitization of the Burney Newspaper Collection, the newspapers have become much more accessible, and combing through advertisements can be done as never before.\(^{54}\) Prices are relatively easy to locate now, and their implications for who might have had access to novels need serious consideration.

A brief survey of just a few of the major novels quickly illustrates how much more expensive these books were than we have assumed. The novels now associated with Daniel Defoe fetched a surprisingly high price. *Robinson Crusoe, Memoirs of a Cavalier,* and *Moll Flanders* all sold for 5s in

---

octavo. By contrast, Richardson’s *Pamela* is practically a steal, appearing in two smaller, duodecimo volumes for 6s. *Shamela* is advertised for sale at 1s 6d. This is actually quite pricey given how short *Shamela* is when compared with a volume of *Pamela*. One paid half the price but received only about 75 pages instead of over 300. *Roderick Random*, like *Pamela*, appeared in two volumes for 6s. Each volume of the seven-volume *Clarissa* was priced at the usual 3s, bringing the total to £1 1s and making *Clarissa* a very expensive entertainment indeed. *Tom Jones* was published in six volumes and came to 18s in toto. The first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were priced at 5s for the pair. The rest of the novel appeared in three installments of two volumes for 4s or 2s a piece and a final ninth volume also for 2s. The installments are slightly cheaper than the usual 3s per volume because they are sewed, not bound. Before the publication of the ninth volume, a bound eight-volume set was available for £1. Once the ninth volume had been on the market a while and gone through multiple editions, a new six-volume edition of *Tristram Shandy* was produced, which sold for 18s bound.

Given that about 95% of the populace earned less than £50 a year at mid-century, novels priced at £1 seem unintended for the common people. They were not sold in installments in order to make them more affordable. *Tristram Shandy*’s sewed binding suggests a bit of concern with broadening the potential readership for the novel. It was also advertised much more heavily than the others, including announcements that more volumes should be expected or that a fraudulent continuation had been produced. A serious effort seems to have been made to sell as many copies of *Tristram Shandy* as

56 *The London Evening Post* (8-11 November 1740).
57 *The London Evening Post* (4-7 April 1741).
59 The three installments are advertised in *The London Evening Post* (21-24 November 1747; 26-28 April 1748; and 3-6 December 1748).
61 *The London Evening Post* (1-3 January 1760).
63 *St. James’s Chronicle; or, the British Evening Post* (25-27 February 1766).
64 *The General Evening Post* (8-11 September 1770).
possible, even at a lower price. The other novels surveyed here sell for at least 3s a volume. At the time of publication, these novels could not be had for less than 5s-6s for the smaller ones and quite a lot more for Clarissa, Tom Jones, and Tristram Shandy. Looking back at the household budget of the carter, one sees clearly that the prices of these novels put them out of reach for the laboring sort. If the same carter bought Clarissa, he would be spending about the same amount of money for a novel as he spent for meat year-round. Robinson Crusoe would cost him as much as a week’s worth of bread. How willing would a sensible person be to spend this kind of money on books—or to lend volumes to friends? We can certainly get cheap paperback copies of these novels now, but this was not always the case. The sort of person who could afford the works of fiction we study today belonged to the upper 4-5% of the income strata. If the novel really was produced by and for the members of the middle classes, the purchase price would have had to be lower. The eighteenth-century novels we study and teach today were almost certainly produced as elite entertainments and should probably be read with this in mind.
Chapter Two

Authenticating Fiction in Prefaces

At least as far back as Sir Walter Scott’s *Lives of the Novelists* (1825), literary realism has been the defining characteristic of the novel. We know that the novel has risen when a certain level of realism has been achieved. For Scott, no author before Henry Fielding painted characters out of ordinary life so convincingly, for which Scott gave Fielding the honor of being the first English novelist. In the twentieth century, Ian Watt likewise considered realism the identifying feature of the novel. His astoundingly influential *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) relies on the assumption that the novel may be detected primarily through the investigation of realism, and in Watt’s estimation, Samuel Richardson’s portrayal of English life, characters, psychology, and relationships were so accurate, particularly in comparison with his immediate predecessors, that Richardson should be seen as the father of the English novel. This emphasis on realism as the most basic, fundamental feature of whatever “the novel” is has not disappeared in the half century since Watt. As Michael Seidel said in a retrospective on Watt’s theory of formal realism and its influence, “no one, to my knowledge, has ever convincingly displaced Watt’s notion of formal realism as a dominant characteristic of narrative during the early eighteenth century, particularly in England.”

Our fixation with the relative realism of eighteenth-century fiction comes largely off a shared sense among critics that authors presented day-to-day life as it would have appeared to readers at the time. The plots concern people’s lives, often serving as cautionary tales, rather than a grand quest in which fantastic, impossible events and creatures are encountered.

The irony that has largely gone unexplored is that works of fiction should have the appearance of reality as their major characteristic. Critics tend to feel fairly confident that they can sort the fictional

---


biographies of people like Moll Flanders and Tom Jones from those of actual living persons—and that by extension eighteenth-century readers would have been able to do the same. Yet, many of the fictional works we commonly teach and write about from this period begin with serious claims not to an imaginative world made to look like real life. What we get instead are authors and publishers insisting that the stories in the ensuing pages are true, that they happened to people who actually lived and may be living still, and the elaborateness of these claims strongly suggest that readers were not expected to doubt their veracity, certainly not from the outset. Any teacher of eighteenth-century fiction should be familiar with the curious openings to *Oroonoko* (1688), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and *Pamela* (1740), in which we are told that these tales are true. These are easy to skip past, since we as twenty-first century critics know that they are works of fiction, but how would their original readers have known when they picked up the pages in a bookshop?

This chapter concerns the attempts at authentication to be found in prefaces to works of fiction and in their opening pages. These framing devices would have been the first parts of a work after the title page encountered by readers, who would have drawn their expectations for what was to follow from them. The primary question I want to answer is how these works were made to look real, not just believable. Several approaches can be found in the prefaces, but I focus here on works meant to look like published memoirs or collections of letters. Not all works of fiction appear with claims to truth at their outset, and I have included a number of examples in which the artificiality of the text is made apparent from the beginning. Not everyone tried to make readers believe that what they were selling was a true story, and some of those who published self-consciously fictitious works found the claims to truth in other books tiresome. For those authors and publishers who did make claims to truth, however, realism was clearly a major concern, although as we shall see not in the ways Scott and Watt might lead us to expect.

**Published Memoirs**

Writers wanting to convince readers that the books they were looking at in bookshops were true had a
common problem: unless they were claiming to be the narrators of the stories themselves, they had to explain where the text came from. In some cases, as we shall see, quite a lot of work went into explaining how a manuscript found its way to its publisher. The author might claim to have simply found the manuscript, to have gotten the story firsthand from personal experience or to know the person being described, to have found a cache of letters, to have received manuscript material through some acquaintance and decided to publish it as an editor (for the public good, of course), but in any case, the task at hand is to distance oneself from the creation of the story.

The method discussed in this section is perhaps the easiest kind of authentication to provide, a claim that the text is a memoir that found its way to an editor, who in turn published the contents with an explanatory preface. This technique provides some obvious benefits. The person publishing the story need not have any demonstrable association with the figure presenting his or her story. Manuscript memoirs have a way of traveling through mysterious means to persons unfamiliar with each other, and one need not have any special reason to have obtained one. The presumed editor does not need to prove that he or she has traveled abroad where the story takes place and witnessed the events. In the highly unlikely event that a reader wanted to fact check the possibility that a firsthand account was really reliable, a remote possibility exists that an author could be found out. Claiming simply to have found the first-person account of the actual person concerned, however, is the much cheaper, more convenient expedient.

Robinson Crusoe (1719) offers an excellent example of this technique. From the title page, the contents and their author are made perfectly clear. The full title given on the first edition, reproduced as Figure 1, clearly communicates the part of the story for which the book has become famous.
Figure 1: Title Page of the First Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*
From this alone a reader knows that this is the memoir of a sailor writing about a remarkable experience, having somehow survived for nearly three decades on a far away island. This is not fantasyland, though. We are told where this island may be located. We are also told on the title page that the work has been written by Robinson himself. To add to the authenticity of Robinson Crusoe as a real person, the memoir begins with Robinson explaining his family background. He tells us that his family’s name had been Kreutznaer and his father a foreigner. He had been born in the city of York, and his first name derives from his mother’s family name of Robinson, and Crusoe tells us that the Robinsons are a very good family in that area. The name Crusoe, he explains, is an English corruption of the family name Kreutznaer, which they have apparently adopted for convenience. This is not the memoir of an Italian merchant with family, friends, and acquaintances abroad but someone with English heritage whose actual existence could be double-checked if one wanted to go to the trouble.

The editor’s preface to the work is short but effective. All we are told is that Robinson’s life is full of various adventures that are very interesting and which have religious applications that should be taken seriously as they would be useful to any reader. To this end, the editor says, he has published the memoirs for the public good. As to whether the thing is true, we are told that “The Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it.” We might quibble with this claim, as the plot of Robinson Crusoe gives us many reasons to suspect the appearance of fiction, but this is the manner in which the book is presented nonetheless. To any but automatically skeptical eighteenth-century readers, this would simply have looked like the life of a very resourceful, lucky man from the outset.

Robinson Crusoe was followed in the same year by The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe the same year, in which the pretense that Crusoe is a real person writing about his travels continues. Again the title page indicates that the work was written by Crusoe himself, about his journeys to "three Parts of the Globe," and as an added enticement, readers are told that a map of the world has been

67 [Daniel Defoe], Robinson Crusoe (London: W. Taylor, 1719), 1.
included, showing the places to which Crusoe travels. The map, which appears after the preface, is quite elaborate and functions to add weight to the authenticity of the text. The editor’s preface is intended to respond to criticisms leveled against Robinson Crusoe and to put forward the claim that, just as the first volume of this series was true, whatever detractors might say, so too is this one: “All the Endeavours of envious People to reproach it with being a Romance, to search it for Errors in Geography, Inconsistency in the Relation, and Contradictions in the Fact, have proved abortive, and as impotent as malicious.”

Defoe was presumably responding primarily to Charles Gildon, who attacked Robinson Crusoe as false and puffed up to an absurd length just to sell a more expensive book, not to aid in readers’ moral instruction. Defoe responds particularly to this point about length, saying that abridging the story in any way would diminish it seriously and make the moral points that give the text its worth ineffective. Perhaps, though, Gildon might have been on to something. This preface is a red-faced defense of the truthfulness of the text of both volumes, their correctness in terms of geography, and their lack of contradiction and error—all except one odd sentence. Having argued that no one could detect genuine inconsistencies in Robinson Crusoe, Defoe says that “The just Application of every Incident, the religious and useful Inferences drawn from every Part, are so many Testimonies to the good Design of making it publick, and must legitimate all the Part that may be call’d Invention, or Parable in the Story.” This seems pretty clearly to indicate that not all of the story is true and that parts were made up but that, because these are useful to religious instruction, they are justly included. Defoe’s use of the verb “legitimate” here demonstrates that, at least to him, so long as the ends are worthwhile and beneficial, the means should not be an issue. This moment is a bit of an awkward admission, which undermines the whole pretence. Realism is at once defended strenuously and haphazardly dismissed as less important that the ultimate effect of the text on the reader.

Defoe followed Farther Adventures the next year with the final installment in the Crusoe trilogy,
Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720). As with the previous two, the title page indicates that Crusoe wrote the text. Defoe gives readers a new twist with the preface. In the previous two books, an impartial editor prefaced the main text with the explanation of its usefulness and a defense of its publication and truthfulness. In Serious Reflections, Crusoe provides the preface himself. He begins by saying that Serious Reflections is not a continuation of the previous two books but that they really derive from this one. As he explains, “The Fable is always made for the Moral, not the Moral for the Fable.” This seems in line with the statement made in the preface to Farther Adventures that the invented parts of the story are acceptable because of their instructive value. Similarly, this statement undercuts the supposed realism of the Crusoe trilogy, persona, and enterprise. Yet Defoe does not seem to see this, as Crusoe goes on to say that he has heard, presumably from the editor of the previous installments, that critics have called into question the factuality of his stories. They have claimed that his stories are “all a Romance; that there never were any such Man or Place, or Circumstances in any Mans Life; that is all form’d and embellish’d by Invention to impose on the World” (sig. 2Av). To these charges he answers, “I Robinson Crusoe being at this Time in perfect and sound Mind and Memory, Thanks be to God therefore; do hereby declare, their Objection is an Invention scandalous in Design, and false in Fact; and do affirm, that the Story, though Allegorical, is also Historical.” He adds to this affirmation “that it is the beautiful Representation of a Life of unexampled misfortunes, and a Variety not to met with in the World, sincerely adapted to, and intended for the common Good of Mankind, and designed at first, as it is now farther apply’d, to the most serious Uses possible.” Defoe has moved a long way from the preface to Robinson Crusoe here and is no longer trying to pass off the work as entirely true without the appearance of fiction. What he offers instead is something that is a mix of invention and historical fact. Which parts are true and which not, he does not say and does not really seem to think that the distinction between the two should matter to anyone, since his purpose legitimizes the story, whether fact or fiction.

70 [Daniel Defoe], Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (London: W. Taylor, 1720), sig. A2r.
The conclusion to this defense is interesting for its presentation of a fairly sophisticated theory of realism. Crusoe insists that a man does in fact exist “to whom all or most Part of the Story most directly alludes,” a claim he says “may be depended on for Truth, and to this I set my name” (sig. A3r). He does not, however, immediately say that he is this man, though what follows clarifies that this is what he means. He goes on to give a scene-by-scene defense of Robinson Crusoe, arguing that Friday is real, as is his parrot, which he taught to talk. He takes the reader through a list of events and people from Robinson Crusoe testifying to their being based in fact. They are not fact, per se, though. What he is describing is not quite realistic fiction, as he insists that the majority of Robinson Crusoe corresponds to people, things, and events in the real world, not imaginative creations that resemble the real world and could be taken as real. Neither is he claiming that the story is a pure history of fact. Rather it is something in between, which he calls “Allegorick History.” This is a story based predominately on the world as it is, from real people and places, but which is not a retelling of those things. Whether it should be understood as a blend of fact and fiction is not explained here. What emerges is storytelling that involves taking a real history and adapting it for didactic purposes. Why one should bother making these alterations is also unclear, though presumably they enhance the effectiveness of the delivery.

The prefatory material published with Memoirs of a Cavalier ([1720]) presents an interesting and elaborate attempt at authentication. The title page announces that these are the memoirs of a cavalier beginning in 1632 and ending in 1648, and that the author is an unnamed English gentleman. These accounts were written “Threescore Years” ago and concern military duty under the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus and King Charles I during the English Civil War. The preface begins by reiterating the age of the manuscript to support its authenticity, and readers are assured that “As an Evidence that ’tis very probable these Memorials were written many Years ago, the Persons now concerned in the Publication, assure the Reader, that they have had them in their Possession finished, as they now appear,
Multiple editors have helped to produce this text from a manuscript that they have had for nearly two decades. Why they waited so long to publish it and why 1720 seemed like the opportune moment are not explained. The editors encourage readers, in fact, not to ask too many questions of this sort. After explaining that the manuscript was supposedly found among the papers of one of William III’s Secretaries of State, the editors caution that this is all that is known about the manuscript’s provenance and “As it is not proper to trace them any farther, so neither is there any need to trace them at all” (sig. A2r). We are also not told the name of the Cavalier who wrote the memoirs and, in a similar vein, are told in the opening pages of the main text not to be “very inquisitive” about it (sig. B1r). The editors admit that readers would naturally want to know the name of the author and “assure them no small Labour has been thrown away upon the Enquiry” (sig. 2Av) but without results. The best they can offer is a short note by someone who claimed his father got the manuscript as plunder from a battle at Worcester. The editors claim this was found with the manuscript and signed “I.K.,” which they judge to be “of no Use but to terminate the Enquiry after the Person.” Both the editors and the narrative persona in the main text are in a marked hurry for readers to abandon their skepticism and simply focus on the story, the main virtue of which, according to the editors in the preface, is its immediacy and vividness. This approach differs significantly from Defoe’s in the Crusoe novels. Rather than a strident defense of the existence of the author, either written by himself or editors on his behalf, readers of Memoirs are simply told not to worry too much about attribution. A confident assertion that the information is not available takes the place, in this instance, of an elaborate back-story, which might reveal the artificiality of the manuscript.

The editors praise the memoirs for their historical accuracy, which they say can be determined by comparing representations of major battles and events with available published histories. They argue, however, that the real value of Memoirs is its ability to present the past from a first-person perspective, allowing the reader to experience the events related in ways that the histories could not achieve. The

editors go on to claim that “He that has read the best Accounts of those Battles, will be surprized to see the Particulars of the Story so preserved, so nicely, and so agreeably describ’d; and will confess what we alledge, that the Story is inimitably told” (sig. A3r). The cavalier, the editors claim, is much more evenhanded than later historians had been, particularly in his representation of Charles I’s flaws, his willingness to acknowledge the merit of the cause of the Puritans and to praise particular figures, such as Sir Thomas Fairfax, even while fighting against them, and his depiction of the Scottish soldiers. As a result, the editors call Memoirs “a Confutation of many Errors in all the Writers upon the Subject of our Wars in England, and even in that extraordinary History written by the Earl of Clarendon” (sig. A3v), adding that, someone had wanted to borrow parts of the Memoirs twenty years earlier to support a challenge to Clarendon’s history, on which this person was working, but that the editors refused. Perhaps they waited to publish the manuscript out of respect to Clarendon, though they do not say so explicitly and did not have to point out to readers that Memoirs contradicts Clarendon if they were primarily worried about being deferential. The only objection the editors say they can find in the work is that it is not complete, and they conjecture that a third part likely exists, adding that “Nor is it very improbable, but that if any such farther Part is in Being, the publishing these Two Parts may occasion the Proprietors of the Third to let the World see it” (sig. A4r). They hope also that the publication of this missing third part might lead to the identification of the author, which they say would satisfy them and the reader.

As Memoirs has long been considered the work of Defoe, one might reasonably wonder at this point how it enriches the theory of allegorick history Defoe put forward in the Crusoe prefaces. I hesitate to do so, however, for a number of reasons that need to be explained. In A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe, P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens explain that Defoe’s name was not associated with Memoirs until Francis Noble included it among Defoe’s works as “published from the original manuscript, By the late Mr. Daniel Defoe.”72 The preface was also altered in Noble’s edition to bear Defoe’s signature at the end. Furbank and Owens find a few correspondences between Memoirs and other works by Defoe, concluding

that “The overall plan of the work, according to which the Cavalier, from his experience in the Thirty Years’ War, is qualified to criticize the amateur strategy on both sides in the Civil War, strikes one as very Defoean” (194). Perhaps, but this is not strong enough evidence on which to base an attribution, for which reason Furbank and Owens consider it “probably” to have been written by Defoe.

Whoever wrote it, Memoirs of a Cavalier is offered as a competing history, not a novel or historical fiction. The editors present it as a competitor to the currently available histories of the battles and events related and want to convince readers that Memoirs is superior in its judgments and vividness and just as accurate in factual detail as other histories. It is, of course, more than a history, and the editors are quick to point this out to readers. It is, presumably, a primary source from which historians should be working, and its contents make possible the refutation of some of the popular, standard assumptions about the English Civil War, its events, and participants. The supposed authenticity as a manuscript written by a gentleman from Shropshire has been largely dismissed by modern scholars. N. H. Keeble argues in his introduction to his edition of Memoirs that the book’s “undoubted historical accuracy is evidence not of its authenticity as a personal record but of the creative manipulation of primary source material into a compelling narrative.”

He bases this judgment on 1) Sir Walter Scott’s recognition in his 1810 edition of a remarkable correspondence between Memoirs and events reported in The Swedish Intelligencer and 2) source studies published by John Campbell Major and Arthur W. Secord. Though these are not proof of the text’s artificiality, they strongly suggest the Memoirs are not the firsthand accounts they appear to be. To an eighteenth-century reader, however, Memoirs of a Cavalier probably looked like the real thing.

Some of the contents might give a skeptical reader reason to wonder. The Cavalier finds ways of being in the right place at the right time and is able to relate events from spectacularly advantageous vantage points, but people have been known to be lucky on occasion, and the value of the Memoirs, according to its preface, is precisely in the Cavalier having the good fortune to provide such excellent first-hand witness. Whether these happy coincidences would be enough to suggest to readers that they were taking

---

in an artful imaginative work based on research in secondary sources is impossible to say for sure, but the Memoirs appear intended to look absolutely real and undoubtedly fooled some people.

Captain Singleton (1720) is interesting, by comparison, for its lack of apparatus. The title page functions as a survey of the contents. Readers are told they will be given accounts of Madagascar, mainland Africa, the people and customs of each, an encounter with an Englishman living among “Indians,” the amazing wealth Singleton acquires, and stories about his life as a pirate with “the famous Captain Avery.”74 Descriptions of faraway places and people are emphasized, rather than plot and action. Readers are promised a tour through a variety of real locales with which they are likely very unfamiliar, unlike the undiscovered islands of Gulliver’s Travels. Presumably the use of locations known to exist is intended to enhance a sense of realism conveyed. No author is given on the title page. The main text begins in the guise of Singleton, though, whose name appears at the end of the book as a signature. He explains that autobiographic memoirs of the sort he is writing typically begin with the person’s family history and the circumstances of their birth and heritage. He attempts to provide something similar, though, as he says, he knows relatively little about his actual parents and origins. His begins, then, in a self-conscious fashion, aware of the conventions of the genre in which he is participating. He does not explain how his manuscript came to be published or why it was written. Its ability to instruct us morally is not the point. Singleton is identified in the title page as “the Famous Captain Singleton,” and the life is presented as worth recording for posterity for its own sake, as a thing of interest to readers who are imagined already to be curious about this notorious figure. This puts us at a far remove from the loud defenses of Defoe in the Crusoe volumes that readers could become better people by taking in the lessons of those novels.

Moll Flanders (1722) is similarly the memoirs of a supposedly famous felon, and readers are assumed to have heard of her already. The title page calls attention to her fame, and Moll begins the main text by saying that she cannot tell us her actual name because of ongoing legal problems and a desire not

to incriminate herself or others by telling her story. The editor states in the preface that “she gives the Reasons why she thinks fit to conceal her true Name, after which there is no Occasion to say more about that.” As in Memoirs of a Cavalier, readers are told that the author’s name is not available and so not to inquire further in the preface. Unlike Captain Singleton, the title page of Moll Flanders emphasizes events over foreign places. Readers are told even the duration of certain parts of Moll’s life, that she was “Twelve Year a Whore,” “Twelve Year a Thief,” “Eight Year a Transported Felon,” and that she lived for more than “Threescore Years.” This sort of chronological specificity is no doubt intended to contribute to the believability of these memoirs as legitimate. Later in the preface readers are also told that the editor has manuscripts about the lives of Moll’s governess and her Lancashire husband, the latter of which was written by an unknown third person, relating events as an outsider. These are not likely to be published, the editor says, and include material too long to be added to the current work, which is already quite long, though their alleged existence further substantiates the authenticity of Moll Flanders’s memoir.

They are written, as we are told on the title page, “from her own Memorandums,” yet these are not her memorandums exactly. This is not an unadulterated manuscript faithfully put to print, as was the case in the Crusoe stories or Memoirs of a Cavalier. As we are told by the editor, “It is true, that the original of this Story is put into new Words, and the Stile of the famous Lady we here speak of is a little alter’d, particularly she is made to tell her own Tale in modester Words than she told it at first; the Copy which came first to Hand, having been written in Language, more like one still in Newgate, than one grown Penitent and Humble, as she afterward pretends to be” (iv). The decision by this supposed editor to clean up Moll’s language presents a significant shift in attitudes towards authenticity. Rather than giving us the raw material, written in Moll’s own words, the famous criminal has been censored and made less offensive to genteel readers. Interestingly the editor objects not just to the indecency of her language but to the fact that it seems not to fit with the person Moll claims to have become. He seems even to doubt the truth of her repentance, telling us that a humble penitent is who she “pretends to be.” A more polite way of speaking would be more believable from such a person, or so the editor claims, and so he changes the

style to suit the persona.

Readers are then assured that “The Pen employ’d in finishing her Story, and making it what you see it to be, has had no little Difficulty to put it into a Dress fit to be seen” (iv). The changes have in fact been fairly extensive and go beyond mere style. The editor says, “some of the vicious part of her Life, which could not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other Parts, are very much shorten’d” (v). The significance of the document as a primary source, then, is functionally nil, in the editor’s opinion. He sees nothing wrong with chopping out sections of the life, abridging others, and doing whatever violence he chooses to the text in order to make it palatable to “the chastest Reader, or the modestest Hearer.” Yet the editor continues with a seemingly contradictory defense of the importance of presenting such material in the rough for the sake of authenticity: “To give the History of a wicked Life repent’d of, necessarily requires that the wick’d Part should be made as wicked, as the real History of it will bear” (v). Exactly what this means is unclear. The distinction made between history and real history suggests that the editor sees history as retrospective construction, not a report of people and events as they were. His claim, then, is that writing a history such as this one, which is intended to serve as a cautionary tale, requires showing readers immoral acts and choices, which might offend them, and that these should be presented in as dramatic a fashion as possible without exceeding the events of the actual life on which the history is based. One is bound to restrict the story to what supposedly happened and not to exaggerate. This sounds like fine editorial policy but seems wildly to conflict with the editor’s actual practice.

The editor’s main concern (so he claims) is with producing a didactic text that aids in religious instruction and would make better people of his readers. Faithful representation of historical reality is not his goal. Readers are not given reasons to imagine that the main text will offer incidents that did not actually happen to Moll Flanders but neither should they, given what is said in the preface, expect to find Moll as she intended to present herself. The editor is quite explicit that the work is based largely on a theory of proper didactic narrative, which he has borrowed from playwrights, who claim their plays expose vices as warnings. He says he has adopted this aim and that, in the text he has produced, “there is not a wicked Action in any Part of it, but is first or last rendered Unhappy and Unfortunate: There is not a
superlative Villain brought upon the Stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy End, or brought to be a Penitent: There is not an ill thing mentio’d [sic], but it is condemn’d, even in the Relation, nor a vertuous just Thing, but it carries it’s Praise along with it” (ix). This is not a description of real life as most would likely describe it. Even readers who believe seriously in divine providence would tend to find a world in which justice operated this way unrealistically tidy. Believability, though, is not one of the editor’s stated concerns. Unlike other prefaces, this one does not include much defense of authenticity at all. What we get instead is something approaching historical fiction or a representation of the life and times of Moll Flanders that might today carry the disclaimer “based on a true story.” The truthfulness of the memorandums on which the text is based is assumed, never defended, and somewhat beside the point. The effect of the text is what matters, and perhaps the most interesting aspect of this preface is the editor’s apparent sense that real history is not as usefully instructive as it might be and benefits from adaptation into narrative following a particular moral formula of rewards and punishments. The moral purpose supersedes the memoir and is forced upon it in this case. The editor does not spend time worrying about whether readers will find the events believable, the geographic locations accurately depicted, or any such thing. Instead, he spends a rather long time explaining the proper way to read the work for its moral value and what the characteristics of good and bad readers are.

A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), like Captain Singleton, appears without a preface or any kind of framing device. The title page announces that these are “Observations or Memorials, Of the most Remarkable Occurrences” during the plague of 1665. The author is reported to be “a Citizen who continued all the while in London.” Like Memoirs of a Cavalier, A Journal of the Plague Year appears to be a primary source, a firsthand account of the events taking place during the plague, rather than a retrospective historical reconstruction from other sources. The author evidently consulted records of some sort for his tables of statistics, but he relies primarily on his own experience of having been in London during the plague for his history. Its veracity, however, is not attested to in any kind of prefatory matter.

---

and the text is simply offered as is. The title page states that the journal has never been made public before, though there is no explanation anywhere as to why nearly sixty years passed between the events described in the text and the time of its publication. Neither can we be entirely sure when the journal was written. We get some sense at the very end of the journal that the current text is, a bit like *Moll Flanders*, constructed from memorandums set down at the time. Clearly the narrative style is not that of someone witnessing the spread of the plague in the present but rather an explanation of what happened from someone who claims to have been in London at the time. Readers are not given any real reason to doubt the authenticity of the work based on the claims made by the title page. The work is simply presented as a published memoir kept in manuscript for some undetermined amount of time and would likely have appeared real.

The preface to *Colonel Jack* (1722) repeats some of the techniques already seen but is interesting for demonstrating awareness that this type of preface has become as a kind of genre unto itself. The preface begins, “It is so customary to write Prefaces to all Books of this Kind to introduce them with the more Advantage into the World, that I cannot omit it,” after which the editor lists the virtues of the book in a kind of sale’s pitch.77 The editor seems to think that readers pay attention to prefaces, particularly attached to works like *Colonel Jack*, and that if such a work were published without a preface, it would fail to compete successfully with others that had one. The editor appears to take prefaces seriously not just as framing devices but as marketing tools, suggesting that potential buyers decided what to purchase and what to ignore largely based on the contents of the prefaces. Francis Kirkman offers a strongly dissenting opinion in one of his prefaces discussed later in this chapter, in which he complains that in fact no one reads prefaces, though they should. Whether prefaces actually mattered to readers very much is impossible to judge, but the fact that the editor here defends the inclusion of a preface in terms of readers’ expectations is significant and not to be dismissed out of hand.

Presumably Colonel Jack is the author of his own story in the main text, giving us another

example of an autobiographical memoir published by an anonymous editor as an intermediary. As in other examples, one of the main selling points of this book, according to its preface, is the social good that the Colonel’s memoir can do. Just as Moll Flanders blames the sinful life she eventually led on the lack of orphanages in England, the editor explains that, in the story to come, “Here’s Room for just and copious Observations, on the Blessing, and Advantages of a sober and well govern’d Education, and the Ruin of so many Thousands of Youths of all Kinds, in this Nation, for want of it; also how much publick Schools, and Charities might be improv’d to prevent the Destruction of so many unhappy Children, as, in this Town, are every Year Bred up for the Gallows” (iv). The editor makes his point quite directly, arguing that “The miserable Condition of unhappy Children, many of whose natural Tempers are docible, and would lead them to learn the best Things rather than the worst, is truly deplorable, and is abundantly seen in the History of this Man’s Childhood” (v). The editor introduces Jack to readers as a genuinely good person, whose circumstances forced him to become a criminal, claiming that “If he had come into the World with the Advantage of Education, and been well instructed how to improve the generous Principles he had in him, what a Man might he not have been” (v). The editor sees Jack’s life as proof that inadequate social services for the young produce criminals. The story highlights current problems in English society, rather than simply encouraging moral behavior and discouraging vice. Readers are not asked to take scenes representing fantastic people and places and apply them to their lives in some way. The world presented is the world in which readers find themselves now, not a far away land of long ago, and the problems and realities are theirs as much as those of the narrator. The editor’s preface is an early defense of what critics see in Charles Dickens and Benjamin Disraeli as “social problem fiction,” which relies for its effectiveness on producing a heightened sense of realism in readers through seemingly accurate representations of the world as it is.

The factuality of this memoir, however, is not asserted by the editor. As in the case of some of the previous examples, the usefulness of the book as a tool of moral instruction outweighs the importance of whether it actually reports the life of a real person faithfully. The editor says that readers “will see Virtue and the Ways of Wisdom, every where applauded, honoured, encouraged, rewarded; Vice and all Kinds
of Wickedness attended with Misery, many Kinds of Infelicities, and at last, Sin and Shame going
together, the Persons meeting with Reproof and Reproach, and the Crimes with Abhorrence” (v-vi). The
scales of justice will appear balanced to readers, who will learn to be better people as a result of seeing
the ends to which people come in the course of the story. The editor does not simply imply that the text
will have this effect on readers but in fact argues explicitly that “Every wicked Reader will here be
encouraged to a Change, and it will appear that the best and only good End of a wicked mispent Life is
Repentance” (vi). The editor tells his potential readers that, as this is the aim of the book, no one can find
fault with wanting to publish it. As to whether the events actually happened, the editor says no one should
“inquire whether the Colonel hath told his story true or not; If he has made it a History or a Parable, it will
be equally useful, and capable of doing Good; and in that it recommends it self without any other
Introduction” (vii). The distinction between history and parable illustrates a dichotomous view of truth
and fiction without the overlap and mix of the two discussed by Defoe.

This preface departs significantly from the other prefaces of supposed found memoirs in that the
attitude toward realism conveyed is one of ambivalence. The text is presented as is, and someone named
Colonel Jack is assumed to exist. Whether what appears in the main text is true, however, cannot be
proven, and readers should not worry about that. The purpose of the book is not to represent a person’s
life accurately but to do good in reforming wicked readers (surely a lost cause), in calling attention to
social problems facing the young and poor, and in reinforcing the balanced nature of justice, punishing
the wicked and rewarding the virtuous. What exactly to make of this dismissal of the importance of
authenticity is hard to judge. Reality and realism are apparently not important at all. Yet the authenticity
of the text matters enough that the author still uses an editor persona, who offers a framing narrative in the
form of a preface and tells readers that the author of the text is a real person. This preface gives nothing
like the lengthy, theoretical approach to believability that can be found in some of the other prefaces of
this type. It is relatively brief and seems more like a boiled down version of an increasingly standard
formula. The messiness of the attitude toward authenticity presented here may simply be an effect of
carelessness or sloppiness on the part of the author, but if we accept it as is, the seeming disregard of the
importance of “history” is striking. The editor clearly worries about the salability of this work but not about its believability, contradicting any sense that readers were attracted to books of this type primarily for their authenticity as reliable reconstructions of the past.

In stark contrast to what we have already seen, Henry Fielding’s prefaces tend to draw attention to the fictionality of his work, and Fielding seems not to have wanted to pretend that what he wrote was actually written by someone else, found by him, and published for the good of his countrymen—with one exception. *A Journey from this World to the Next* appeared as the second volume of *Miscellanies, by Henry Fielding Esq* (1743). The title page indicates that *Miscellanies* was published “for the Author.” *A Journey from this World to the Next* rarely appeared on its own and was sometimes published along with *Jonathan Wild*, which occupied the third volume of *Miscellanies*. *Jonathan Wild* evidently proved the more interesting to readers as editions in which the two appear together list it before *A Journey*. Nothing about these circumstances suggests that *A Journey* is anything but Fielding’s creation. It is published along with his other works, and he is named as the author on the title page.

The preface, however, offers a totally uncharacteristic example of Fielding using the found memoir technique. Fielding claims not to have written the text but instead to have discovered the manuscript through very unlikely means. He tells the reader that the stationer Robert Powney gave him pens bundled in paper, on which Fielding realized something was written. Fielding struggled to discern what the page said but could not understand it and went to ask Powney if he had the others. He explains, “I immediately repaired to Mr. Powney, and inquired very eagerly, whether he had not more of the same Manuscript. He produced about one Hundred Pages, acquainting me that he had saved no more: but that the Book was originally a huge Folio, had been left in his Garret by a Gentleman who lodged there, and who had left him no other Satisfaction for nine Months Lodging.”

Powney had tried to get some money for publishing the manuscript but failed to do so. Powney apparently told Fielding “that the Manuscript had been hawked about (as he phrased it) among all the Booksellers, who refused to meddle; some

---

alledged that they could not read, others that they could not understand it. Some would have it to be an atheistical Book, and some that it was a Libel on the Government; for one or other of which Reasons, they all refused to print it. That it had been likewise shewn to the R--- Society, but they shook their Heads, saying, there was nothing in it wonderful enough for them” (3). Not knowing what else to do with the manuscript, Powney tells Fielding that, “believing it to be good for nothing else, he had used it as waste Paper” (3-4). Fielding says he offered to pay something for the remaining part of the manuscript but that he got it for essentially nothing.

This seems an entirely believable provenance for a discarded manuscript, which had been surrendered by its author, not for the value of the words written on it, but for the paper itself. Powney was in fact a stationer who worked, as Fielding reports, in the Strand. The fate described by this unpublished book was entirely common. In an economy in which paper is fiendishly expensive and the price of books corresponds fairly closely to the number and size of its pages, a manuscript of big folio sheets that could not be sold to a publisher still retained some worth as paper for wrapping, as Fielding describes here. Readers by this point would not have any good reason to doubt Fielding’s story about how he received the pages.

Fielding continues the pretence of a found manuscript in the main text and presents it with features consistent with the provenance he describes in the preface. Quite late in the book, the narration breaks abruptly, and a footnote is provided that reads: “Here Part of the Manuscript is lost, and that a very considerable one, as appears by the Number of the next Book and Chapter, which contains, I find, the History of Anna Boleyn: but as to the Manner in which it was introduced, or to whom the Narrative is told, we are totally left in the dark” (216). The chapter concludes there, giving the appearance of an actual incomplete manuscript rendered faithfully into print. The whole book ends in a similar manner with a footnote explaining, “Here ends this curious Manuscript; the rest being destroyed in rolling up Pens, Tobacco, &c. It is to be hoped, heedless People will henceforth be more cautious what they burn or use to other vile Purposes; especially when they consider the Fate which had likely to have befallen the Divine Milton; and that the Works of Homer were probably discovered in some Chandler’s Shop in Greece”
(249-50). Assuming that Fielding did not really find someone else’s manuscript (as is extremely unlikely given the contents of the main text) and that the whole pretence is just a framing device, he seems to be going further with it than necessary, reinforcing the claims he makes in the preface more than two-hundred pages later and at the text’s conclusion.

The manuscript’s authorship is supposedly in question. All that readers are told in the preface about who wrote the main text is: “Whether the ensuing Pages were really the Dream or Vision of some very pious and holy Person; or whether they were really written in the other World and sent back to this, which is the Opinion of many, (tho’ I think, too much inclining to Superstition;) or lastly, whether, as infinitely the greatest Part imagine, they were really the Production of some choice Inhabitant of New Bethlehem, is not necessary nor easy to determine” (1). This opening line is interesting because Fielding presents the question of the text’s authorship as though it has been the subject of debate for many people, who have not come to any consensus. The events described in the manuscript are not presented as real, but the experience of the dream or the madman’s hallucinations in fact are genuine, and the manuscript itself is offered as having been written by someone who believed it while writing it. The creation of an artifact by someone other than Fielding is put forward as real. Yet readers are told very little about this author. The gender of the supposed author is not specified, and in the main text, more than one narrator appears, both male and female. The gender of the narrator, of course, is no sure indicator of the gender of the author, but Fielding cannot avoid relating the two: the footnote that addresses the incompleteness of the text calls the gender of the author into question and supposed that it was likely written by a woman because the persona in one of the stories is female. As he says, “I have only to remark, that this Chapter is in the Original writ in a Woman’s Hand: And tho’ the Observations in it are, I think, as excellent as any in the whole Volume, there seems to be a Difference in Style between this and the preceeding [sic] Chapters; and as it is the Character of a Woman which is related, I am inclined to fancy it was really written by one of that Sex” (216). This complicates the state of the text’s authorship as presented in the preface. Presumably the manuscript was written by several hands, which Fielding had not said. The claim that a woman wrote a section narrated by a female persona is probably intended to heighten a sense of
believability, rather than to advance a simpleminded notion that women write women.

All of this elaborate apparatus and pretence seems intended as a joke, given the clues Fielding leaves for readers. In the preface, Fielding says that he showed the manuscript to a Parson Abraham Adams, who judged that its author(s) was familiar with Plato. Adams follows this comment with a complaint about those who pretend to have read classical authors but who cannot read Greek and so have only read translations—a complaint fairly characteristic of Adams as presented in *Joseph Andrews* and which seems intended to make readers of that novel laugh at seeing Adams’s pedantry again. In the course of the main text, readers are introduced to Thomas Thumb, who gives his take on literary representations of him (69). These hints require some familiarity with Fielding’s other works, but to those who have seen *Tom Thumb*, read *Joseph Andrews*, or are at least aware that Fielding wrote them, this should be sufficient to let them know that Fielding is the author of *A Journey* and just playing a relatively elaborate joke on readers who would not be able to spot the clues. This probably amounted to a fair number of people, given that Tom Thumb is a character in *Tom Thumb* (1730) and *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731), which had appeared in print more than a decade before and were attributed on the title pages to Scriblerus Secundus, not Fielding. *Joseph Andrews* (1742) was published only one year before Fielding’s *Miscellanies* and not with his name on the title page. One would in fact need a fairly strong grip on Fielding’s literary career in 1743 to recognize the hints that he includes, and though some readers undoubtedly were familiar enough with Fielding’s work to do so, not everyone who picked up this book would have been. The fact that the book is included as part of Fielding’s *Miscellanies* suggests that anyone interested in it would have been curious primarily because of some knowledge of Fielding and what to expect from him. Whether this translated into an ability to recognize characters from his literary works in *A Journey* is impossible to say. However, the elaborateness of Fielding’s pretence as editor and the apparatus provided to make the text seem like the published remains of a ruined manuscript suggest he meant at least some people to fall for his ruse, especially given the difficulty of associating him with the works from which his characters are drawn in the main text. This kind of game playing is consistent with Fielding’s approach in *Shamela* and seems intended to expose found memoirs of this sort as
artificial—and to poke fun at readers who lack the knowledge or ability to tell the difference between a
genuine, discovered manuscript and a contemporary author’s work of fiction.

Letters

Attempts to authenticate “epistolary fiction” rely on very similar techniques to those of the found memoir. The previous examples tend generally to involve the persona of an editor publishing someone else’s manuscript account of his or her own life. Epistolary novels are presented as the edited correspondence of actual, living people, detailing the events of their lives and interactions. Epistolary fiction might be seen, then, as a subtype of the found memoir. Though the texts are presented in radically different forms—one as a collection of letters and the other as continuous narrative—the means by which they are made to look like genuine historical artifacts appears surprisingly similar.

The most conspicuous epistolary novel of the eighteenth century, both to present-day critics and contemporaries, is likely Samuel Richardson’s Pamela ([1740]). The title announces that the work is “a SERIES of Familiar Letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel, To her PARENTS,” which are being published in order to “cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes.” Why the youth of both sexes would have any interest in the letters of a pretty girl to her parents is not explained. Instead, the title characterizes the work as “A Narrative which has its Foundation in TRUTH and NATURE; and at the same time that it agreeably entertains, by a Variety of curious and affecting Incidents, is entirely [sic] divested of all those Images, which, in too many Pieces calculated for Amusement only, tend to inflame the Minds they should instruct.” Presumably young people would have appreciated Richardson leaving in images that would inflame their minds, whether they were instructed or not. The stated purpose here, though, differs in some important ways from other works, whose presumed purpose is to instruct in moral and religious terms. Pamela entertains but only incidentally. The book is not presented as a way to pass the time. Its didacticism trumps its ability to engage and divert readers. Amusement is not an aim as much as an added benefit, a nod to the fact that a spoon full of sugar helps
the medicine go down. The preface to the work reinforces the attitudes expressed on the title page. Rather than a defense of realism, an explanation of how the letters were found and published, who Pamela was or her relationship to the editor, readers get a list of the editor’s goals. Chief among these is the ability to amuse and instruct young men and women.79

The believability of the text is assumed both in the preface and on the title page, yet with an interesting qualification. Readers are told that the narrative has its foundations in truth and nature, not that the narrative reproduces these things. The editor freely admits the occasional artificiality of the text, its events, and the persons represented in a manner similar to what one finds in Robinson Crusoe. The editor lists as one of his aims a desire “to paint Vice in its proper Colours, to make it deservedly Odious; and to set Virtue in its own amiable Light, to make it truly Lovely” (sig. A3v). A collection of real-life letters might accomplish this but only as a happy coincidence. What the editor has in mind is something different, a story engineered to produce particular desired effects in readers. He says he hopes “to effect all these good Ends, in so probable, so natural, so lively a manner, as shall engage the Passions of every sensible Reader, and strongly interest them in the edifying Story” (v). The believability of the letters is in their manner, not necessarily in their authenticity as someone’s actual letters published in their raw form. A guiding hand has altered them. Yet believability still matters. The editor assumes a causal relationship between convincing readers that what they reading is true and their investment in the story. This is one of the few attempts to explain the function of authenticity in didactic texts. Readers learn the intended lessons more easily and more effectively if they see the work as probable and natural, perhaps because they can identify with the people and events in ways not possible when reading something obviously fictitious. The editor admits to making alterations, though their degree and kind are not described. Readers are told that the work is “embellished with a great Variety of entertaining Incidents,” although it is still founded “in Truth and Nature” (v). Embellished here could mean simply that the editor selected amusing moments from the letters to increase readability of the text or that the editor took a more active

role and added text to the letters to make them more pleasing. Presumably the editor’s additions to the
text are slight if any, though, as he claims that he knows the value of the work because “an Editor may
reasonably be supposed to judge with an Impartiality which is rarely to be met with in an Author towards
his own Works” (vi).

The most famous aspect of Pamela’s prefatory apparatus is likely the inclusion of letters to the
to the editor responding both to the preface and to the work. These “puffs” serve the obvious function of further
advertising the book’s virtues to potential buyers, but they also comment on the claims put forward by the
to the effectiveness and character of the main text. The first such letter, contributed by “J. B.
D. F.,” remarks that “the several Passions of the Mind must, of course, be more affectingly described, and
Nature may be traced in her undisguised Inclinations with much more Propriety and Exactness, than can
possibly be found in a Detail of Actions long past, which are never recollected with the same Affections,
Hopes, and Dreads, with which they were felt when they occurred” (vii). This is essentially an argument
about realism. Written just as events unfolded, the letters better represent the reality experience by the
writer because of their immediacy. Little is required of the author’s ability to remember what happened to
her and how she felt about it, and presumably readers receive a more accurate report than would be
possible for an author to create after the degenerating effects of time on her memory. This is, to some
degree, a ridiculous assessment of the letters in Pamela, some of which are much too long and include too
much detail to be believable as reliable records created from memory. Pamela’s ability to remember just
what people said, sometimes days after the fact, is either extremely remarkable or just highly suspect. The
point, however, is clearly valid in general terms. Pamela recounts the events of days or weeks and writes
down her reflections piece at a time. This method of composition stands in serious contrast to the way in
which, say, Moll Flanders was supposedly written, as a memoir of events long since past written all in
relatively few sittings, or Oroonoko, which Behn claims to have written in a matter of hours.

J. B. D. F addresses the alterations made by the editor, which are not explained in the editor’s
preface. He points out that these should be made clear to readers in the work’s prefatory material, and
presumably the editor considers reproducing this letter sufficient. The writer comments that “it will
appear from several Things mentioned in the Letters, that the Story must have happened within these
Thirty Years past: That you have been obliged to vary some of the Names of Persons, Places, &c. and to
disguise a few of the Circumstances, in order to avoid giving Offence” (viii). When exactly Pamela wrote
her letters is unclear, but J. B. D. F. speculates that they should not be more than thirty years old. Where
they have been kept during this time is not explained. The editor changed certain names to protect the
identities of the people involved in the letters. However, the editor’s intrusions into the text do not appear
to extend much further, as J. B. D. F. goes on to say, “as you have in Confidence submitted to my
Opinion some of those Variations, I am much pleased that you have so managed the Matter, as to make
no Alteration in the Facts” (ix). Whatever embellishments or variations the editor produced, he preserved
the events as Pamela described them.

The following letter contains an appeal to the editor to publish the letters as they are without
changes. Presumably the editor has shown the letters to this reader, who remarks that “I could wish to see
it out in its own native Simplicity, which will affect and please the Reader beyond all the Strokes of
Oratory in the World; for those will but spoil it: and, should you permit such a murdering Hand to be laid
upon it, to gloss and tinge it over with superfluous and needless Decorations, which, like too much
Drapery in Sculpture and Statuary, will but incumber it” (xii-xiii). Pamela lacks a formal education and
learned most of what she knows how to do while serving great families, sometimes as on-the-job training
or because of her own desire to learn. She writes, then, without much flourish, in plain language, which
this writer thinks might seem unpolished or raw. Yet he or she addresses the consequences of altering
Pamela’s natural writing style, explaining that such variations “may disguise the Facts, marr the
Reflections, and unnaturalize the Incidents, so as to be lost in a Multiplicity of fine idle Words and
Phrases, and reduce our Sterling Substance into an empty Shadow, or rather frenchify our English
Solidity into Froth and Whip-syllabub. No; let us have Pamela as Pamela wrote it; in her own Words”
(xiii). This is perhaps the strongest claim to the authenticity of the letters made in *Pamela*’s prefatory
materials. An actual person wrote a series of letters about her experiences, and these should be published
just as she wrote them without ornamentation, addition, or emendation. This takes us quite a long way
from the editorial policy of *Moll Flanders*, in which the editor persona claims cheerfully and without hesitation to have made serious revisions to Moll’s manuscript.

*Pamela* ultimately offers one of the very strongest claims to an authentic report of human experience. The immediacy of letter writing allows a person to record events as they happen and to reduce the distorting effects of a degenerating and unreliable memory on the story. The letters to the editor not only offer positive reactions to the content of the letters in order to sell the book, but they attest to the authenticity of the letters as genuine artifacts, which presumably these writers were able to see before publication. One supposes that the editor agreed with the appeal not to change Pamela’s writing style and to leave the letters as she wrote them, as the editor does not say this was advice not heeded and the other puff writer applauded his restraint in making alterations. Eighteenth-century readers, then, are being presented a fairly elaborate apparatus before the main text begins. A circle of people have supposedly looked at these letters and deemed them worth publishing, and an editor carried out the task making only minimal substantive changes if any. Whether the reader will continue to believe this pretence after reading the main text is hard to say, but Richardson seems to intend that they believe it from the outset and goes to a fair amount of trouble to make this so.

Evidently Richardson’s attempts to authenticate *Pamela* were not entirely successful. Within the next year, a number of parodies and responses to *Pamela* appeared. Among these were *Anti-Pamela: or, Feign’d Innocence Detected* (1741), sometimes attributed to Eliza Haywood, and Henry Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741). *Anti-Pamela*, as the title suggests, reverses the formula found in *Pamela*. Rather than virtue rewarded, we get feigned innocence detected. The title given before the main text differs from that on the title page. It reads, “*Anti-Pamela, or, Mock-Modesty Display’d and Punish’d,*” an even more direct reversal. The work contains no preface, but the title page includes a statement about the purpose of *Anti-Pamela* and its uses, describing it as “A Narrative which has really its foundation in Truth and Nature;
and at the same time that it entertains, by a vast variety of surprizing Incidents, arms against a partial Credulity, by shewing the Mischiefs that frequently arise from a too sudden Admiration. Publish’d as a necessary Caution to all Young Gentlemen.” This is not a reversal but a twist on Richardson’s description of *Pamela*, which similarly instructs as it entertains and is published for the improvement of young people. In this case, young men especially are the audience, and the goal is to show them the trouble they can find themselves in as a result of believing a woman to be innocent and good too quickly. The concern is with preventing readers from falling for con artists, such as Pamela, rather than with moral or religious instruction. Interestingly *Anti-Pamela* is an attack on the believability of Pamela’s professed intentions and virtue but not on the authenticity of her letters, the facts of her story, or her existence. *Anti-Pamela* follows a character named Syrena, who uses her supposed virtuousness as a lure. She is an obvious parody of Pamela and her motives but not an attempt to expose Pamela herself as a fraud.

Fielding goes quite a lot further in *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*. The title continues with a description of the work and its purpose: “In which, the many notorious Falsehoods and Misrepresentations of a Book called *Pamela*, are exposed and refuted; and all the matchless Arts of that young Politician, set in a true and just Light.” Whereas *Anti-Pamela* calls particular elements of *Pamela* into question, *Shamela* is intended as an outright demolition of it. The piece was published without Fielding’s name attached to it and is attributed on the title page instead to Conny Keyber, who presumably worked from authentic papers that he discovered, which expose Pamela as a fraud.

To carry out this demolition, Fielding follows Richardson’s formula very carefully. He begins with letters to the editor, in the same manner, and makes his parody obvious and blunt. The first letter to the editor happens also to be from the editor and reads, “Dear SIR, However you came by the excellent Shamela, out with it, without Fear or Favour, Dedication and all; believe me, it will go through many Editions, be translated into all Languages, read in all Nations and Ages, and to say a bold Word, it will do more good than the C---y have done harm in the World.” The letter is signed, “I am, Sir, Sincerely your Well-wisher, Yourself.” No need to wonder whether Fielding considers the letters of praise in *Pamela’s*
prefatory material authentic. This is a fairly clear attempt to expose them as fraudulent and ridiculous. Praise here is taken to an extreme, mocking the confident approval expressed in Richardson’s letters that *Pamela* would be well received. The next letter, by John Puff, Esq., advances Fielding’s attack from the authenticity of Richardson’s letter to the editor to the main text itself. Puff addresses the editor with some opinions about the supposed author’s “inimitable Performance” (xiv). Puff always refers to this author, however, as a man, though presumably these are real letters written by Shamela and a few others. Puff seems to assume that the book was written entirely by one person, as he praises the author’s ability to characterize Parson Williams. This essentially denies the existence of a Shamela Andrews whose letters appear in this book.

Yet Fielding carries on with his pretence, satirizing attempts at authentication by using them in a work that seemingly admits its own artificiality. The main text of *Shamela* begins with letters exchanged between Parson Thomas Tickletext and Parson J. Oliver, the former praising a book called *Pamela* with which he has become familiar and the latter exposing it as a fraud. About the authorship of *Pamela*, Oliver tells Tickletext, “though we do not imagine her the Author of the Narrative itself, yet we must suppose the Instructions were given by her, as well as the Reward, to the Composer. Who that is, though you so earnestly require of me, I shall leave you to guess from that Ciceronian Eloquence, with which the Work abounds; and that excellent Knack of making every Character amiable, which he lays his hands on” (6). This brings us back to an obvious practical problem in taking *Pamela*’s letters as genuine, namely that without any real education, she would hardly have been likely to write in the style in which the letters appear. Though this style is characterized as plain, country, and raw by the prefatory letters to *Pamela*, Fielding counters that what readers find instead is Ciceronian eloquence of the sort not at all to be expected from a member of the laboring sort, who has spent a good deal of her adult life as a household servant. In reality, then, a ghostwriter is much more likely, though Oliver guesses that she had the idea to hire this person to write the letters in order to make money from their publication. Oliver criticizes Shamela’s character and complains that the only lesson to be learned from *Pamela* by young serving women is how to be debauched by clever masters who can outmaneuver them or how to marry foolish
ones. He exposes Pamela’s true name as Shamela and then offers to Tickletext a set of letters revealing her true character and intentions, after of course testifying to the authenticity of the letters (7-9).

From the beginning, then, Shamela offers refutations of the legitimacy of Pamela’s letters to the editor, Pamela’s letters, and the existence of such a person. The entire pretence making the epistolary novel appear authentic appears flimsy indeed and convincing only to gullible readers, of whom Fielding seems to think there are many. Pamela seems much more likely the work of a single person, writing multiple voices, as in the case of this closely matched parody. Fielding associates Pamela and Shamela effectively and exposes the artificiality of the former by making the latter an obvious fraud. This same technique appears in A Journey from this World to the Next, in which Fielding supposedly publishes the remains of a manuscript he has found by accident. In that example, as here, Fielding carries out his imitation of the sort of document he intends to parody down to small details, including footnotes explaining the condition of the manuscript, comments on the kind of hand in which parts are written, and making the story break off in places where parts of the manuscript have been lost. Fielding’s technique appears to involve following the formula of the sort of authentication he wants to undermine very closely in the construction of a detectable, if not necessarily apparent, fraud. Fielding was evidently well aware of various attempts at authentication in eighteenth-century fiction and enjoyed satirizing them and readers who fell for them, as in the case of poor Tickletext.
Chapter Three

Daniel Defoe, “His” Novels, and Eighteenth-Century Readers

This chapter addresses a question of fundamental importance to Defoe studies and the literary history of the novel in English: how does separating Daniel Defoe from the novels associated with him change what we know about him and how we interpret the novels? We have two good reasons to consider this question with more than speculative curiosity. First, Robinson Crusoe (in three parts), Captain Singleton, Memoirs of a Cavalier, Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, A Journal of the Plague Year, and Roxana were all published anonymously. This has not really been a problem for critics, who tend to assume knowledge of their authorship as part of the interpretive process. Most of the work on these texts has been carried out from a modern perspective. Critics have assessed the quality of the works as novels, placed them along a trajectory in the rise of the novel form, used them as evidence for what Defoe the man thought about a long list of topics, and brought new theories to bear on the texts to offer innovative readings. Rarely have we worried much about how eighteenth-century readers would have come to these novels. If we want to read them in a historicized way, however, we must confront the simple fact that quite a lot of the information commonly brought to bear in readings of these works would not have been available to their original readership. The novels would have been taken on their own, individually, without a sense of how they fit together or reflect the development or changing attitudes of a particular author. Readers would not thought about the works in light of what they thought they knew about Defoe, the man, if they knew anything about him at all.

Even if we are not interested in viewing the texts from a historicized position, however, we have a second important reason to think about the novels and Defoe separately. As Defoe scholars are becoming increasingly aware, we simply do not have a reliable canon from which to work. Scholars have challenged the solidity of many attributions to Defoe even in the much-reduced canon offered in 1998 by...
The evidence for attributing even the principal novels to Defoe is extremely unsatisfactory. *Robinson Crusoe* was ascribed to him in a hostile pamphlet of 1719 as part of a personal attack; attributions of *Moll* and *Roxana* to Defoe come nearly half a century after his death and were made by the unscrupulous publisher Francis Noble; and the reasons for considering the other novels Defoe’s are unfortunately little better. We may never have anything like certainty about the authorship of these important texts. If Defoe wrote them all, then he varied his approach significantly. If one or more were by other hands, then the differences between them are not surprising. A serious problem arises, though, when we use these novels to develop a theory about Defoe’s fictional technique or when we offer generalizations about Defoe’s attitudes towards anything based on these novels.

For both of the reasons I have identified, this strikes me as an ideal time to distance Defoe from the novels and to reevaluate what we think we know about both as a result. This requires testing a number of commonly held assumptions and long-standard interpretations. In some instances, we will have to revise the old wisdom, while in others we simply have to start over. To that end I will ask how satisfactory what we have said about Defoe and the novels looks if we do not take his authorship for granted.

**Defoe’s Changing Reputation**

Daniel Defoe’s place in literary history has been established primarily on a remarkable reversal of opinion about his abilities as a writer, particularly of fiction. At the time of the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* in

---

1719, he had already made a name for himself as a polemicist and as a satirist. He was not, however, looked on as a great author, in any genre, or ever likely to become one by accident or effort. This is not the Defoe of present-day English departments. Defoe is now regarded as a major literary author, whose novels should be read slowly, repaying close attention, and that they reflect an artist at work, who took pains with his craft. Not for nothing is Maximillian E. Novak’s biography of Defoe called Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions (2003). Before launching into a serious reconsideration of the long fiction associated with Defoe, I want to review Defoe’s changing reputation from hack scribbler to candidate for fatherhood of the English novel. The shifts in Defoe’s critical fortunes tell us quite a lot about how his works were received over time and how we ended up where we are. They should remind us, also, that the status enjoyed by both Defoe and the novels today is a fairly recent turn of events and not the way things have always been.

A Hack and A Jacobite

Early commentary on Defoe tends toward fairly hostile criticism of both his ideals and ability as a writer. He was seen as a scribbler writing for money, without loyalty and certainly without art. He is frequently painted as an opportunist engaged in politics, not as a literary figure. As the anonymous author of The True-Burn Hugonot, &c A Satyr (1703) tells us,

Hymns let him write, when he should Mercy pray,
And Satyrize the State, The Shortest Way;
Invectives against Monarchy indite,
To make his Impudence surpass his Spight.
In Publick View he shall again appear,
Nor shall his City Friends protect him here. (34)

This is hardly flattering and illustrates the sort of language used to characterize Defoe. The author here doubts the legitimacy of Defoe’s religious convictions and condemns him for criticizing the monarchy.

---

84 The extent to which Defoe’s satiric career has been neglected is remarkable. For an excellent corrective and overview, see Ashley Marshall, “Daniel Defoe as Satirist,” Huntington Library Quarterly 70 (2007): 553-76.
He continues, “A true Malignant, Arrogant and Sour, / And ever Snarling at Establish’d Power” (34).

Defoe is not a satirist with a just cause but an arrogant, impudent, and nasty person who does not know his place and would complain no matter who was in power. Defoe comes off, in this portrayal, as a megalomaniacal crank, writing for attention and to upset the general peace for his own gain.

Defoe receives similar treatment in the pamphlets of John Clark, a minister of the Free Church in Glasgow. In A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe (1708), Clark describes the state of Defoe’s reputation, saying, “I doubt not if I had been at pains to gather Informations anent Mr. De Foe’s Morals and Politicks from England, and other Places of his Residence and Conversation, but I might be able to present the Publick with a ridiculous foul Portrait of this Thrasonick Zoilus” (35). He goes on to encapsulate Defoe’s motive for writing in a couplet: “To get my Bread no other way I ken, / But by the Clatters of my Tongue and Pen.” This is the Defoe of contradictions, lacking in principles and social decorum, making a fool of himself in public because he has no other way to support himself.

The harshest attacks involve associating Defoe with Jacobitism and aligning him with France. Remarks on a Scandalous Libel, Entitl’d A Letter . . . Relating to the Bill of Commerce (1713), attributed to John Oldmixon, includes some blatant remarks to this effect: “Principles he has basely Sold for a Precarious Subsistance, and while he pretends to Liberty and Fanaticism, he Labours with equal Industry and Impudence in the Service of Popery and France” (35). The picture becomes even blacker, as the author comments with frustration that “He had as good e’en throw off the Vizard and own himself a Jacobite or a Hireling, for there is no Man so dull but to see he will write any thing, do any thing, Pro or Con, according to the Cue that’s given him.” These sentiments are echoed in Read’s Weekly Journal on 20 September 1718: “From a vile Presbyterian, with a Jacobite Face, / Who writes on both Sides with an insipid Grace, / Yet demurely on Sundays in the Meeting Takes Place” (37). Defoe is simply a pen for hire—and not even a particularly good one. He pretends to serious principles but will easily and cheerfully take any position for money. This is a far cry from the Defoe we tend to think of today, a seriously engaged religious commentator and satirist, suffering in the pillory for his convictions.

Much of Defoe’s trouble came from negative reactions to The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters
(1703). The anonymous author of *Reflections upon a late Scandalous and Malicious Pamphlet Entitl’d, The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1703) complains, “It were endless to animadvert upon all the extravagant Passages of this envonom’d Libel, which is writ on purpose to set the Nation in a Flame, and to engage us in an intestine War, that the French King may have an opportunity to force the Pretender upon us” (34). The author portrays Defoe here as a person with genuine loyalties and serious, personal investments in politics and the future of the nation. Unfortunately the loyalties are to France and Catholicism, and the personal investments are in revolution and treason.

Even Defoe’s apologists cannot help wishing he had not written or had at least seriously altered *The Shortest-Way*. John Dunton explains in his *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705) that “Mr. Daniel De For is a man of good parts, and a very clear sense: His conversation is brisk and ingenious enough. The World is well satisfied that he’s enterprising and bold; but, alas! Had his prudence only weighed a few grains more, he’d certainly have writ his *Shortest Way* a little more at length” (34). He complains, “had he writ no more than his *True-Born Englishman*, and spared some particular Characters that are too vicious for the very Originals, he had certainly deserved applause.” *The True-Born Englishman* (1701) had been well-received, and one can understand, in hindsight, the desire to see Defoe quit while he was ahead.\(^{86}\) By 1705, Defoe’s reputation had deteriorated to the point that Dunton could say with frustration, “Should I defend his good-nature and his honesty, and the world would not believe me, ‘twould be labour in vain.” In at least Dunton’s mind, the association of Defoe’s name had been blackened so universally and thoroughly that no positive case for him could be attempted.

and *Jure Divino* (1706). In 1719, all but *The Review* were about decade and a half old. When Jonathan Swift and John Gay took shots at Defoe in 1710-11, they targeted *The Review*. Swift characterizes Defoe in the *Examiner*, no. 15 (16 November 1710), as one of “two stupid illiterate Scribblers, both of them *Fanaticks* by Profession: I mean the *Review* and *Observator,*” going on to dismiss Defoe’s writing style:

“The mock authoritative Manner of the one [Defoe], and the insipid Mirth of the other, however insupportable to reasonable Ears, being of a Levil with great numbers among the lowest Part of Mankind” (38). In *The Present State of Wit* (1711), Gay says,

> As to our Weekly Papers, the Poor REVIEW is quite exhausted, and grown so very contemptible, that tho’ he had provoked all his Brothers of the Quill round, none of them will enter into a Controversy with him. This fellow, who had excellent Parts, but wanted a small Foundation of Learning, is a lively instance of those Wits, who, as an Ingenious Author says, will endure but one Skimming. (39)

Gay pays Defoe a kind of backhanded compliment here, stating that he possessed natural intelligence but lacked education and then continuing on to dismiss his work out of hand.

The appearance of *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 did not improve Defoe’s reputation as a writer. Instead both novel and author were attacked in the same year by Charles Gildon in *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr. D . . . De F . . ., of London, Hosier*. Gildon’s response took the form of a dialogue parody between Defoe and Crusoe along with reflections on the novel and severe complaints about a variety of weaknesses Gildon identified. His reading runs directly counter to modern takes on *Robinson Crusoe*. We take for granted that Defoe cared seriously about his religious and economic beliefs, which he then represented in his first novel. Novak called attention to the importance of economics to the novel in his chapter “The Economic Meaning of *Robinson Crusoe*” in *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (1962). G. A. Starr and J. Paul Hunter pointed out the significance of Christianity in their books of the mid-1960s. These are well-established, longstanding areas of concern for Defoe in constructing this novel, or so we tend to think.

Gildon attacks *Crusoe* on both of these fronts. About Crusoe’s life offering any kind of useful

---

model for religious or moral instruction, Gildon says,

**Robinson Crusoe**, even when he pretends to repent, is for throwing the Guilt of his Sin upon others, who, as far as we can possibly discover, did not at all deserve the Charge; and I dare believe, that he was in reality the only person among them, who ever liv’d so many Years without saying his Prayers, or acknowledging God and his Providence, and is likely therefore rather to have been the Corrupter, than the Corrupted. (45)

Gildon sees no value whatsoever in Crusoe as a didactic figure. Quite the opposite: he is dangerous. This is not a reading of Crusoe that one is likely to find in books and articles today, and one might well feel that Gildon is a poor reader of the novel. Resisting the temptation to dismiss Gildon for a moment, however, we should be struck by the fact that the first major response to the novel is a multiheaded attack and that, in the eyes of at least one contemporary, the novel’s supposed religious utility is fraudulent. Gildon calls the moral reflections “every where insipid and awkward, and in many Places of no manner of Relation to the Occasion on which they are deliver’d, besides being much larger than necessary, and frequently impious and prophane” (46). The reason that these have been added is not to make better Christians of the readership, contrary to the claim made in the preface about the usefulness of the book for moral and religious instruction, but instead to make the book more expensive. As Gildon explains, “always canting are the Reflections which you are pleas’d to call religious and useful, and the brightest Ornaments of your Book, tho’ in reality they were put in by you to swell the Bulk of your Treatise up to a five Shilling Book; whereas, the Want of Variety in your Subject, would never have made it reach to half the Price” (46). Anyone who has tried to teach *Robinson Crusoe* has likely heard a similar complaint from the students, that the section on the island tends to drag on and seem overblown. Gildon complains, “you have been forc’d to give us the same Reflections over and over again, as well as repeat the same Fact afterwards in a Journal, which you had told us before in a plain Narration.” These are not entirely baseless charges.

Gildon charges Defoe with being a public menace for discouraging international trade in *Robinson Crusoe*. He argues, “I think there can be no Man so ignorant as not to know that our Navigation produces both our Safety, and our Riches, and that whoever therefore shall endeavour to discourage this, is so far a profest Enemy of his Country’s Prosperity and Safety; but the Author of *Robinson Crusoe*, not
only in the Beginning, but in many Places of the Book, employs all the Force of his little Rhetoric to
dissuade and deter all People from going to Sea, especially all mothers of Children who may be capable
of that Service, from venturing them to so much Hazard and so much Wickedness, as he represents the
Seafaring Life liable to” (44-5). Gildon interestingly points out a seemingly contradictory element of the
plotting of Robinson Crusoe. The eponymous hero chooses between the life of a sailor and that of a
Yorkshire attorney, and Gildon sees the novel as engineered to make the former appear dangerous and
unattractive and the latter a safe, easy life. Crusoe’s deliberations on these two paths when he was a
young man bear this argument out fairly plainly; but, as Gildon notes, the end Crusoe meets badly
illustrates the lesson suggested here. Crusoe gains a fortune and comes off relatively unharmed, despite
God apparently intervening (unsuccessfully) to deter him from becoming a sailor by creating two storms
and destroying the ships on which he sailed. If the point is to make a sailor’s life of risk and potential
reward attractive, why make it appear to have been the wrong choice in the first place? For Gildon,
Crusoe is intended as a deterrent to readers to become sailors and engage in naval trade, which then
contradicts itself by showering riches on Crusoe for doing the exact opposite of what it seems to endorse.

In light of the extreme hostility of Gildon’s response to Robinson Crusoe, the satisfactoriness of
using him as our primary source for attributing the novel to Defoe should seem more than questionable.
Defoe had complained about his enemies putting his name on things he did not write in order to attack
him for having written them. Is it impossible to imagine that Gildon linked Defoe to a newly published
novel in order to paint him as a hypocrite and traitor to his country? We tend not to see Robinson Crusoe
as a dangerous book ideologically, but the way Gildon describes it, the novel promotes profane ideas
about Christianity and harmful depictions of seafaring that lead to a weakened national economy and
maritime defense. Robinson Crusoe, to Gildon, is not the adventure story fit for small children, as it later
became in the nineteenth century, but a sneak attack on important, core English values—secular and
sacred. If so, we should not have too much trouble entertaining the possibility that Gildon would want to
associate Defoe with it to rubbish his name, especially given Defoe’s already fairly poor reputation for
being an opportunist who writes for his own gain, frequently to the detriment of the nation. Gildon was
evidently not a reliable enough source for eighteenth-century booksellers, as subsequent editions continued to appear without Defoe’s name on the title page. This is a problem.

Defoe is sometimes associated with *Robinson Crusoe* the eighteenth century but not always. Giles Jacob says of Defoe in his *the Poetical Register: or the Lives and Characters of all the English Poets* (1723), “This Author was formerly a Hosier, but since he has been one of the most enterprising Pamphleteers this Age has produc’d; some Parts of his Life his Inclinations have led him to Poetry, which has thrown into the World two pieces very much admir’d by some Persons,” after which he names *The True-Born Englishman* and *Jure Divino* (48). He has nothing to say about Defoe having written *Robinson Crusoe*. Joseph Spence reports Alexander Pope as having said of Defoe: “The first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, good. DeFoe wrote many things, and none bad, though none excellent. There’s something good in all he has writ” (40). He is identified as the author in *The Lives of Poets* (1753) in the entry on Defoe, though very little is said about the novel except that it was highly innovative, imaginative, and “written in so natural a manner, and with so many probable incidents, that, for some time after its publication, it was judged by most people to be a true story” (49-50). Jean-Jacques Rousseau does not seem to have known who wrote *Robinson Crusoe*. In his famous description of the novel and its usefulness in educating Émile (1762), he never names Defoe or identifies its author (52-3).

By the end of the century, *Robinson Crusoe* was being called Defoe’s greatest creation. Jabez Hirons says, in his review of George Chalmers’s edition of the *History of the Union*, “He is chiefly known as an author: his *Robinson Crusoe*, which has passed through seventeen editions, and been translated into other languages, will still preserve his memory: but his distinguished sphere, or that to which he principally applied himself, appears to have been policy [i. e. politics] and trade” (56, brackets in original). Hirons interestingly distinguishes here Defoe’s reputation from what he seems to have cared about, calling attention to a rift between the two. In the course of the eighteenth century, Defoe appears to have become increasingly associated with *Robinson Crusoe*, which comes to overshadow his other productions. Even as early as Hirons, we can see Defoe’s fame as a political and economic commentator becoming eclipsed by Defoe-as-novelist.
Defoe as Novelist

Defoe’s fiction receives very little attention in the eighteenth century, and this has been assumed to result from a lack of literary journals in which to discuss the novels. The dearth of commentary on Defoe-as-novelist in the early part of the eighteenth century (and for a good while later) derives at least as much, though, from the fact that most people simply would not have thought he wrote fiction, unless they knew Gildon’s parody. Not until Sir Walter Scott does anyone attempt seriously to assess the literary merit of Robinson Crusoe, and Charles Lamb is the first to call attention to the “secondary novels”—Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack, Captain Singleton, and Roxana. In the nineteenth century, Robinson Crusoe was most commonly read as an adventure story for children, and this became such a commonplace about the novel that Virginia Woolf felt the need to argue forcefully that it is intended for adults and repays close reading.

Much of the attention Defoe and the novels have received in the twentieth century results from responses to Ian Watt’s The Rise of the Novel (1957), which places Defoe at the head of the literary history of the novel. Watt was not especially keen on Defoe as an artist, however, and expressed a variety of criticisms about his failings in this realm. Subsequently critics spent a great deal of time and energy rebutting Watt, attempting to demonstrate Defoe’s artistic technique through close reading and literary appreciation.88 He is now considered a great literary author, and the fiction occupies much more of our critical attention than anything else he wrote. The works for which he was famous during his lifetime and which would have been associated with his name at the time the novels were published are hardly ever read anymore. Defoe has become the literary pioneer whose innovations in fiction deserve a special place in the history of the novel. He is often seen as attempting to develop as an artist and as having some sense

of his own growth as a writer of long fiction. I will say more about the trends that generated his current reputation among fiction scholars in the next section. The point here is that Defoe has become a central figure in the history of the novel, and at least a few of the novels themselves have gained sufficient popularity among critics that they have been the subjects of highly specialized topics, even at book length. Very recent examples include Stephen H. Gregg’s *Defoe’s Writings and Manliness* (2009), Dennis Todd’s *Defoe’s America* (2010), and Leon Guilhamet’s *Defoe and the Whig Novel* (2010).\(^{89}\) These books would be inconceivable without the growth in interest in Defoe as a writer of fiction and in the novels themselves as objects of study.

Defoe’s reputation is a curious development given that he never claimed any of the novels associated with him. Neither did he attempt an aesthetic theory in the manner of Richardson or Fielding. In fact, assuming he wrote the novels at all, he seems not to have cared much about being a novelist or what that might mean. He would no doubt be very surprised to learn that “As the author of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* he can claim with some justification to be the first English novelist and the father of the novel as we know it today.”\(^{90}\) This brief survey of Defoe’s changing reputation makes one serious problem for literary critics plain: for most eighteenth-century readers, these novels were not the products of the scathing verse satirist and sociopolitical commentator Daniel Defoe—if they even knew who that was. This is the context we should be considering when thinking about how the original readership came to the novels and what they might have made of them.

**Moll Flanders and Roxana without Defoe**

Among Defoe’s novels, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* have long been favorites. The importance of *Robinson Crusoe* to Defoe’s place in literary history and the advent of the novel are unquestioned, but *Crusoe* has

---


seemed to lack the interior psychology, depth of character development, and interpersonal conflict that we associate with the novel. *Crusoe* is an example of travel and adventure narrative and relies heavily on reportage of places and events far more than on Crusoe’s growth or struggles. Ian Watt recognized the significance of *Crusoe* to the history of the novel but focused on *Moll Flanders* in order to build his case for “Defoe as Novelist.” Since Watt, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* have commonly been used in stories of Defoe’s development as a writer of fiction. They look very little like the high seas adventures of *Crusoe* (volumes one or two), *Captain Singleton, Colonel Jack,* or *A New Voyage Round the World.* Their protagonists have seemed more fully formed to critics, who see Defoe as moving closer toward the sort of fiction Richardson would produce years later. They are also outliers in the canon for being written from a woman’s perspective, an aspect that has animated many feminist critics.

Given the shakeup of the Defoe canon, however, most if not all of this needs reconsideration. In a recent article, Ashley Marshall demonstrates the insufficiency of the evidence to support the attributions of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* to Defoe. Though she insists she does not mean to de-attribute the novels, the obvious consequence of her argument is that we can no longer take the novels seriously as Defoe’s and will continue to do so only at our peril. She says bluntly that “We do not need to abandon study of these works, in other words, but we do need to approach them in their own terms. We cannot reasonably do anything else. They are works associated with Defoe by us, and he is a candidate for authorship, but to deploy our understanding of “Defoe” the man or his alleged canon in determining their interpretation is unwise and unsound.” In the same issue of *Philological Quarterly,* the Defoe canon specialists P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens responded to Marshall’s article by providing evidence of stylistic similarity between phrases and sentences in the novels and in other things known to be written by Defoe—sometimes more than a decade earlier. How likely are any of us, for example, to reuse phrases from letters we wrote years ago in our present-day work, consciously or unconsciously? The corroboration

---

seems highly suspect in many cases. Robert Griffin offers another response in the issue, arguing that Francis Noble would have known the people who published Defoe’s work and therefore can be trusted as a source for the attributions, even though he did not make them in the 1740s when we might have and instead waited thirty more years to identify Defoe and even then on bowdlerized versions of his texts. He concludes his case saying,

Does it matter? Of course it matters. Historical accuracy is demanded by scholarly protocols. As we learn more, we correct ourselves and each other. In some matters, though, we cannot arrive at definitive answers, and a radical skepticism such as Ashley Marshall’s, itself wanting to know the truth, might easily raise objections to my speculations. Nonetheless, whether the issue is settled, or left open, it seems to me salutary to be forced to examine the grounds of one’s assumptions in radical ways.93

“Radical skepticism” is of course a philosophical belief in the impossibility of knowing the truth. This is hardly Marshall’s position, and I find this characterization worrisome. Calling attention to a lack of solid evidence bears little resemblance to refusing to believe a solid case when presented with one. To my mind, both responses to Marshall’s article betray a troubling and powerful desire within Defoe studies—even among those who truly have no real stake in persevering these attributions—to maintain the link between Defoe and the novels and to substitute speculation and bad evidence for proof. If we cannot prove he wrote the novels, we are operating in very unsatisfactory circumstances and generating criticism that is alarmingly ill-founded. In the absence of new and better cases for these novels as Defoe’s, we need to come to terms with what Defoe studies looks like without them and how they might be read without Defoe.

Books and articles on Defoe as novelist and on *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are numerous, and what I present here is not intended as a comprehensive survey of everything we have said. What I offer here, instead, is an early attempt to come to grips with the implications of removing *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* from Defoe’s canon and moving forward. The loss of these two novels will not bring an end to the study of Defoe as a writer of fiction any more than their not having been written by Defoe would cause us to stop reading *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. The point is to see what sorts of arguments we have

made about Defoe and these novels that we need to rethink and which we should outright abandon. The first step is to take stock of what we think we know about Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana*.

Morality in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*

One of the most famous conflicts critics writing about these novels have dealt with is the seeming contradiction between the characters’ apparent financial success and their equally apparent moral depravity. The prefaces to the novels offer what appear to be serious moral agendas. The texts are intended to serve as negative examples of how one should not live, and we read them to become better Christian people. We might easily dismiss these prefaces as relatively flimsy attempts to excuse the contents of the novels if not for our belief that Defoe wrote them. Defoe, we know, was a moral man and a serious Christian, and so the prefaces appear more sincere in light of his supposedly having written them. As a result, critics have found Defoe’s religious views a useful key to his purpose in the novels. Novak explains that “In *Roxana*, Defoe had attempted to write a moral version of the Haywood love novel, turning it on its head in the process” (Novak, *Daniel Defoe*, 624). Marilyn Westfall clearly agrees with Novak, saying in a recent article, “this study affirms Novak’s proposition that Defoe’s Puritanism provides a template for a coherent analysis of the text. I contend that the novel’s “inner logic” (to borrow Damrosch’s phrase) is based on the sermon, specifically the Puritan jeremiad sermon.” Westfall’s purpose is to “place *Roxana* within the context of Defoe’s other late works to subdue the notion that *Roxana* represents a dead end for Defoe, particularly concerning the moral content of his writing.”

Obviously the context for arguments about the seriousness of the moral message in *Roxana* comes off Defoe’s reputation as a man with a moral agenda. This is a problem, not just because the novel may very well not have been written by him but because, even if it had been, eighteenth-century readers would not have known and would have not been able to make use of that context in interpreting the novel. If Defoe’s purpose was to make a real moral satire for the betterment of English Christians (especially

---

Puritan ones?), he went about it in a highly inefficient and ineffective way. Why reward Roxana to such a fantastic extent and make her career path seem attractive, at least to those acquisitively minded readers? The early eighteenth century is a period of very low incomes in England and widespread poverty. Those of the so-called rising middle class, for whom novels were supposedly written, would no doubt have struggled themselves with the problems of making money in a capitalist society often through exploitation of others, unfair labor and trade practices, and outright cheating people. If this sort of thing bothered them, perhaps they could see themselves in *Roxana* and worry along with her about how God would judge a person who heaps up great riches through immoral means. Anyone more concerned with having money than God’s wrath, however, would simply enjoy what Paula R. Backscheider rightly calls “a rags-to-riches fantasy.”

Roxana tells us, particularly toward the end of her story, that she has nightmares and senses impending judgment because of the wicked life she has led and that she fears her money is emblematic of that wickedness and might even curse her Dutch merchant if she were to mingle her money with his. A certain portion of the readership for this novel would undoubtedly have registered this concern and made something of it, but I have to think that, given the economic conditions of the early eighteenth century in England, seeing this much wealth accumulated would have been a pleasure for quite a lot of readers, too. Without assuming Defoe wrote *Roxana*, the moral message of it is cloudy at best and feels tacked on at worst, though at least she does meet punishment of a sort.

No such punishment awaits Moll Flanders, and this has been a real problem for critics trying to understand how the text operates from a moral standpoint. *Moll Flanders* begins with a ponderously elaborate preface claiming that the eponymous heroine actually exists and that the present text is taken from her own memorandums, though it has been heavily cleaned up because of her vulgar writing style. Also some scenes were simply too indecent to see print and had to be excised. The editor admits to a fair amount of poetic license in reworking her autobiography from the material he had available and then stresses that, although the events of her life and her actions might be appalling to some, the purpose in

---

publishing them is to demonstrate the bad ends to which such actions bring a person. No bad deed goes unpunished, we are assured, nor any good one unrewarded. The proper moral judgments will be made explicit. Yet an anxiety remains. The editor warns against reading the novel simply for the crime and scandal and skipping the good, Christian messages. He argues that the problem with publishing material of this kind is not that the text itself is corrupting or immoral but that the wrong kind of reader will make bad use of it. He protests against the idea that the moral parts of the story are not as interesting as the darker bits, saying, “this Work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to read it, and how to make the good Uses of it, which the Story all along recommends to them; so it is to be hop’d that such Readers will be much more pleas’d with the Moral, than the Fable, with the Application than with the Relation” (iv).

Any reader who bothers to read this preface, whether they think Defoe wrote the novel or not, should expect a wicked life justly repented of in the end with good didacticism and Christian guidance all along the way. What readers of this novel know all too well is that, instead, we get a fairly unconvincing conversion by Moll, brought about almost exclusively out of her powerful desire for self-preservation, after which she seems hardly changed at all. She buys her way out of indentured servitude and escapes the labor requirement of her transportation sentence. She does nothing charity or especially Christian in the remainder of her life. The best she can do is simply to stop stealing and prostituting herself, and this we must admit is a modest penitence indeed. She is not even forced to stay in America and returns to England after a few years, once her plantation has grown in profitability and she feels safe to leave it.

I think we have tended to take the preface too seriously. Hal Gladfelder reads these comments about reading the novel improperly as indicative of Defoe’s strategy: “Such readerly depravity, however, is the basis for identification with the pre-penitent outlaw; and this identification, as I have suggested, is indispensible to Defoe’s moral aims of self-recognition and self-reproof.” 96 Perhaps, though if we do not assume Defoe’s authorship, the preface might very well be nothing more than a flimsy pretence or a

promise badly fulfilled, if ever. What we know for sure is that the events of Moll’s life badly reflect the claims of the preface. This is either the result of a botched effort at moral didacticism or evidence that the morality functions to ward off critics who would object to the book’s publication on the grounds that is obscene. Without believing Defoe wrote *Moll Flanders*, and thus the preface, I do not see critics putting much stock in the preface or worrying much about it. I suspect eighteenth-century readers thought very little about it and probably skipped it. The publisher and writer of fiction Francis Kirkman had complained at length about the common practice of passing over prefaces roughly half a century earlier in *The Unlucky Citizen* (1673): “It is usual for most Readers, so soon as they have read over the Title of a Book, (and that but by halves too) to skip over the Epistle and Preface (if there be any) and immediately jump into the matter: so that I doubt I shall be so served and lose my design in writeing one.” Unless a vogue for reading preface had taken hold in the 1720s, we can assume the situation Kirkman describes held true then, as well. Kirkman not only wrote fiction but also published and sold it in his own shop. He would have a great deal of familiarity with how readers interacted with books for the first time when they picked them up in a shop, what caught their attention and what did not. We have, then, two possibilities. Either the author of *Moll Flanders* was unaware that readers mostly did not read prefaces and so naively made a serious appeal to his audience there, or the preface is just *pro forma*. A writer aware of the likelihood that the preface would not be read would be unwise to put this kind of material in one and would be better served putting such comments into the mouth of the character in the main text.

Not everyone has been convinced by the idea that Defoe set out to convey moral points in these novels, particularly in light of the financial success the characters achieve. Bram Dijkstra argues,

In *Roxana* he followed the same procedure [as in *The Complete English Tradesman*], tracing his heroine’s progress from innocence to economic mastery, thus making his narrative into a prototype of the *Bildungsroman*, with the important difference that where the later versions of this genre were to concern themselves primarily with the spiritual education of the hero, Defoe’s primary objective was the practical education of the reader, a purpose in which Roxana’s soul was a subject of secondary importance – to be considered, of course, but not so as to get into the way of the author’s lessons in good economic theory and practice.  

This position stands in radical opposition to Novak’s belief in an underlying Puritan ideology guiding the novel and relies for its effectiveness on an argument about Defoe the man. The assumption here is that Defoe cared more as a writer about economic than religious instruction, as evidenced by the seeming similarity between *Roxana* and *The Complete English Tradesman*. We really have no way of telling which Defoe cared more about, and *Roxana* would be a shaky source of proof for arguments one way or the other, even if Defoe’s authorship were certain. The fact remains that *Roxana* contains a troublesome conflict between extraordinary monetary gain and appalling immorality, both of which the text seems to endorse. This is certainly one of the most fascinating aspects about reading *Roxana*, assuming one cares about making money or being a good person, but we should avoid using the novel as evidence in discussing what Defoe cared about.

Ultimately the problem is that both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* can easily be read as financial fantasy and seem more effective as intriguing tell-all biographies of thieves, fortune-hunters, and whores than spiritual autobiographies about the path to redemption. *Robinson Crusoe* really does involve quite a lot of soul-searching and wrestling with one’s faith and a relationship to God. The case for this was made, convincingly and long ago, by J. Paul Hunter. Whether G. A. Starr is right that the spiritual autobiography genre actually matters to *Moll Flanders* or *Roxana* is questionable. If those novels are read as products of the same mind that produced *Robinson Crusoe*, the similarity to spiritual autobiographies appears to be evidence of Defoe’s moral purpose. If not, any similarity to spiritual autobiographies of the time seems potentially coincidental or, worse, fraudulent. We need to rethink how much trust we want to put into the belief that these works really are intended to convey some kind of serious moral message if they were not the work of Daniel Defoe.

---


Defoe and Feminism

As the only two novels among the works associated with Defoe written from a woman’s perspective, Moll Flanders and Roxana have been used as evidence of Defoe’s attitudes towards women and even to make the case that he counts as an early protofeminist. For some critics, Defoe’s feminist agenda is at odds with his moral one, since both novels seem, at least superficially, to condemn their protagonists, even as they expose the harsh realities faced by women in England. Alison Conway argues that Defoe modeled Roxana largely on Nell Gwyn because of his obsession with the Restoration. She explains, “In evoking [Nell Gwyn’s] legacy and the Restoration’s struggle to sustain the dream of a Protestant community, Defoe maps out the narrative opportunities afforded by the term “Protestant Whore.” Most profoundly, Defoe refuses the idea that the answer to “what are we for?” could reside in any theological or moral abstraction, insisting rather on the gendered and embodied status of the individual who responds to the question.”¹⁰¹ Conway redirects our attention from searching out the religious message of Roxana to seeing the text as Defoe’s attempt to wrestle with the limitations experienced by women. Novak offers a similar, though a bit more measured, take on Roxana:

Defoe is less interested in making Roxana into another version of Pilgrim’s Progress than in showing what her world is like and what it takes to succeed in it. Defoe provided some answers (as well as questions) for his religious readers, but he also wanted us to appreciate how powerless women were in his world and what it took for a woman such as Roxana to achieve a degree of power.

For Novak, one of Defoe’s major aims in Roxana is the demonstration of women’s hardships and the obstacles they have to overcome. He goes on to argue that this purpose bears heavily on Defoe’s judgment of his heroine: “Defoe liked to allude to Hercules’ advice to the carter whose wagon fell in a ditch and who prayed to the god to rescue him. Hercules advised the carter to put his shoulder to the wheel if he wanted to get out, and Roxana, who has her shoulder to the wheel from the time she takes Amy’s advice, could never be wholly villainous in Defoe’s mind.”¹⁰²


The Defoe who emerges from reading *Roxana* this way is a social commentator, worried about the plight of women, and advocating on their behalf by bringing to light the dismal circumstances they face when marriage fails and they are forced to rely on themselves. Defoe becomes a forward thinker, sensitive to women’s struggles, and rises somehow above the prejudices of his time. Lois A. Chaber, writing about Moll’s ability to succeed in a patriarchal, capitalist society, says, “Both the disbelief and the horror Moll’s adaptability provoke spring, I would suggest, from expectations rooted in a sexist myth that reserves for women the “humanity” atrophied in men competing in a vicious capitalist society. [...] Defoe had no such illusions about women.” Moll is hardly the angel of the house, and Chaber imagines male readers being shocked and frightened by her ability to traverse the boundaries set in her way and to defy gendered expectations. Mona Scheuermann endorses this interpretation with great enthusiasm, arguing, “Defoe believes in the self-made man, as *Robinson Crusoe* exemplifies. What is wonderful is that, almost alone among novelists of his century, he believes equally in the self-made woman.” Scheuermann is talking here about both Roxana and Moll Flanders and casts them as female Crusoes of a sort. She continues, “Since the possibilities for her to work are obviously narrower, Defoe grants her less than entirely legal options. Aware that society victimizes women by limiting her means of earning money, Defoe shows us the woman functioning within these constraints that she has not created.” Like other critics, Scheuermann presents Defoe as championing women’s causes by giving us capable female characters who adapt to their circumstances and not only survive but succeed.

Helene Moglun goes even further in linking Defoe’s presentation of women to a larger project in fiction. She takes for granted the importance of individualism to Defoe, a characteristic associated with him going back at least to Ian Watt, and claims that in *Roxana* Defoe was “Writing a story of a female individualist that demonstrates the impossibility of female individualism,” and that in so doing “Defoe lays bare a central paradox of the ideology that shaped his thinking, as it also shaped his life.” Elsewhere

---

she argues that “Misogyny is clearly woven into Defoe’s representation of Roxana, but the female struggle for self-awareness that he describes offers an implicitly radical, even protofeminist critique of the individualism that he celebrated in *Robinson Crusoe* and tried, in his own life, to embody.”¹⁰⁵ Moglun attempts here not only to explain Defoe’s stance towards women in *Roxana* but to see *Roxana* as a revision of Defoe’s ideas about individualism put forward in *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe’s protofeminism infiltrates and modifies his social critique and ideology. Obviously this latter claim requires awareness of Defoe’s authorship and of his concern with individualism in *Robinson Crusoe*. Moglun is trying to determine Defoe’s goals, rather than gauging how the *Roxana* might affect its original readers, who would not have any of these assumptions or information.

Defoe’s adopting a female voice in these novels has caught many critics’ attention and led to some striking assertions about Defoe himself. Madeleine Kahn calls Defoe a transvestite narrator in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. She takes for granted that we, as readers, know that the texts were written by Defoe, a man, and so our reading experience is significantly shaped by this knowledge. About *Roxana*, Kahn argues, “Roxana’s conviction that she is a man—and an articulate creature—when she has money, but a woman when she is helpless and silenced by her passion for her daughter Susan, precisely mirrors Defoe’s own progress back and forth—in this transvestite narrative—between man and woman and between self and others.” Taking this argument even further, she claims elsewhere, “Roxana is, for example, deeply ambivalent about being a woman. But of course she is not a woman; she is Defoe’s other, a construct which allows him to complete himself and so to express that self in narrative. Thus her ambivalence is his narrative device and a gamble that affects the way we read the novel.”¹⁰⁶ Roxana and Defoe are two parts of a whole, which Defoe is able to construct through adopting a female voice in the novel.

John Martin likewise imagines the duality of Defoe and Roxana in his recent biography, referring

---

to them as “Daniel/Roxana” or “Roxana/Daniel.” Characterizing the novel at the beginning of his discussion, Martin says, “what Daniel Defoe provides is, as ever in his fiction, a reading of his life and social and material aspirations and a critical moral commentary.” How could Defoe write about a prostitute seducing men for patronage and upward mobility? Because Defoe was a gay prostitute and wrote from firsthand experience. As Martin explains, “For Harley’s money, Daniel did more than write: he gave sex and he procured it.” Of the incredulous, Martin asks, “If this is seriously doubted, how does any biographer explain Harley’s overwhelmingly generous financial support of Daniel over so long a period of time, and his willingness to finance Daniel’s public office with the Glass Commissioners for thirteen years past its due-by-date and at risk to himself?”

Hardly any support is brought by these critics in favor of Defoe-as-feminist (let alone metaphorical transvestite or literal prostitute) from outside these novels. This is a serious problem. Without a doubt, the most powerful evidence for Defoe’s supposed feminism comes from these two novels. In light of the fact that Defoe may very well not have written them, we need to take seriously the possibility that Defoe was not the forward thinking protofeminist we might like him to be. This is really not that surprising, given the presentation of women (and their relative unimportance or even near absence) in the other novels. How much do women matter in Robinson Crusoe? How about the sequel? Crusoe’s wife dies promptly at the outset of the story, and he promptly sets off for new adventures. Are the tales told by Colonel Jack, Captain Singleton, H. F., or the Cavalier helpful at all in revealing the hardships women face? Supposing these were Defoe’s novels, they represent vastly different takes on women, their importance, and what their lives are like than we find in Moll Flanders and Roxana, which have always seemed like outliers in the canon for this reason. John F. O’Brien and Sandra Sherman have called attention to Defoe’s “Lady Credit” as an important source for discussing Defoe’s attitudes towards not just credit but women. Critics wanting to see Defoe as a feminist would be well advised to follow

their lead, make greater use of The Review, which hardly ever receives any attention, and steer clear of Moll Flanders and Roxana. Basing arguments on the political concerns and ideology of Defoe the man based on his fiction is a dodgy business to begin with, but given the paucity of solid evidence to attribute these novels in particular to Defoe, we have even more reason to abstain.

Individualism and Realism in Moll Flanders and Roxana

In Watt’s influential readings of Defoe’s novels, the two most important aspects of Defoe’s fiction are his focus on individualism of various types and his “formal realism.” These have become so well associated with Defoe that we take for granted that Defoe cared about both and tried to represent them in his work. Robinson Crusoe has long been seen as marking a turn in fiction toward realism, with its high level of quotidian detail, and as an emblem of individualism, Crusoe alone on the island, away from society, making it on his own.

As texts supposedly written by Defoe, Moll Flanders and Roxana have been assumed to contain and continue these elements so characteristic of Crusoe and Defoe’s fictional technique. Critics regularly use Defoe’s presumed interest in individualism to make interpretive points about the novels. Gladfelder argues that Moll’s avoidance of long-term social entanglements “exemplifies a quality common to all of Defoe’s protagonists, which lies at the heart of his conception of the pleasures and costs of individualist self-assertion: an irremediable sense of apartness which is, for better and for worse, the corollary to his characters’ restless pursuit of ‘a little more, and a little more’” (Gladfelder, “Defoe and Criminal Fiction,” 77). Moll in fact marries for long periods of time, forms friendships, and established a long-term relationship with her governess. Srividhya Swaminathan has argued that Moll survives, not because of her successful exploitation of men or her self-reliance but because of her “female network” of friends, especially the governess.109


I find Swaminathan’s case convincing and have a hard time seeing Moll as a reasonable exemplar for individualism, economic or otherwise, given her parasitic behavior. She is a fortune hunter who turns thief and then prostitute before establishing herself as a plantation owner well into old age. Several times in the novel, she considers the possibility of supporting herself with needlework, which she knew how to do from an early age, and the idea repulses her, partly because she would hate to live on so little money but also because she genuinely craves the attention of men and has an essentially pathological need to be in a romantic relationship. A point that most critics have largely passed over when they discuss Moll’s desire for money is her reaction to being abandoned by her Lancashire husband. She tells us, “after Dinner I fell into a violent Fit of Crying, every now and then, calling him by his Name, which was James, O Jemy! said I, come back, come back, I’ll give you all I have; I’ll beg, I’ll starve with you” (157). She says earlier in the novel, at a moment much-quoted by critics, “I had been trick’d once by that Cheat call’d Love, but the Game was over, I was resolv’d now to be married or nothing, and to be well married or not at all” (59). Moll would evidently have liked, after her bad experience with her first love, to be a mercenary and marry for money. In practice, however, we see that she would readily trade love for money, even to the point of begging to support herself and her lover, despite her childhood dream of becoming a self-sufficient “gentlewoman.” If this is an individualist, she is a very bad one.

Critics have similarly found individualism significant in the interpretation of Roxana. John Richetti has argued that, “Considered together, Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Roxana (1724), Defoe’s first and last fictions, represent diametrically opposing attempts to solve the unique dilemma posed by his intensely individualized renderings of character. Both books record the exuberance of masterful social movement as well as the deep anxiety that accompanies the acquisition of such power.” Roxana is seen here as a twist on something Defoe had tried in Robinson Crusoe, an attempt to come to grips with the problems posed by attaining the individualism he champions. Richetti continues, “each of them may be said to exemplify the Mandevillean pattern whereby individual and selfish action (vice) produces social benefits – an increase in the production of goods and services, a contribution to the accumulation and circulation of wealth that constitutes an economically healthy society (as Defoe would have defined it)”
(Richetti, *English Novel in History*, 65). *Crusoe* and *Roxana*, then, reflect Defoe’s particularly economic individualism, which in Richetti’s view here trumps moral concerns. Defoe is showing us that vice can benefit society when it contributes to a healthy economy. This is an ambitious attempt to resolve the long-recognized and vexing problem of the contradiction between economics and morality in Defoe’s fiction, and, if we were certain Defoe wrote *Roxana*, it would be an elegant explanation of Defoe’s developing thought process as a social commentator.

Critics often cite Moll’s breathless retreat through the streets of London as evidence of Defoe’s characteristic literary realism. The scene is discussed as an authentic representation of London, rendered by a serious realist with the background to know how to do it. As Richetti says, “Defoe was a born and bred Londoner, so Moll’s terrified escape from the scene of her first crime is strikingly accurate in its rendering of her route home.”

Also discussing this scene, Robert Mayer remarks, “this passage is a touchstone for Defoe criticism. The spatial, geographical, physical, and psychological particularity of it make it a hallmark of Defoe’s realism.” Mayer’s comment is especially troubling if Defoe did not write *Moll Flanders*. It means that, the hallmark of Defoe’s realism was quite likely written by someone else. This is a possibility we need to contend with. The other novels arguably include elements that we find typical of “Defoe’s realism,” and we need to revise what this term means and what kind of technique it reflects in the absence of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*.

**The Development of Defoe’s Novelistic Career**

*Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* have been incredibly important in shaping our understanding of Defoe’s development as a fiction writer. Ian Watt saw *Moll Flanders* as “representative of what Defoe could achieve in the way of the novel proper”; and, while he acknowledged the significance of *Robinson Crusoe* in establishing Defoe’s place in literary history, he called *Moll Flanders* “the best single work for the

purpose of investigating Defoe’s methods as a novelist and his place in the tradition of the novel.”

Since Watt, critics have taken for granted that *Moll Flanders* is evidence of Defoe’s increasing control and skill as a novelist. They tend also to see *Roxana* as the next big step after *Moll Flanders*, and the two novels serve as the major milestones in Defoe’s novelistic career. David Blewett’s description of this process reflects this way of thinking:

> During the brief five-year span in which he wrote his novels Defoe took two steps that were to be of major importance in the history of the novel. To *Moll Flanders* he brought from *Robinson Crusoe* the protagonist’s moral problem, the clash between his worldly ambition and his sense of wrong-doing, and gave it a social context. […] Then in *Roxana* the social context is shown to have a direct bearing on the inner life of the heroine; personal relations are destroyed by the pressure of social demands.

Each of the two novels represents a significant addition to Defoe’s repertoire and a refinement of a project in narrative stretching back to *Robinson Crusoe*. This theory of Defoe’s growth as a novelist depended on the rehabilitation of *Roxana*, which had been seen as unfinished. Robert D. Hume’s analysis of the ending of *Roxana* recast the abrupt ending, not as an incomplete disaster, but as artistically defensible. He concludes, “(a) that *Roxana* may well have been left as Defoe conceived and wanted it, and (b) that if we examine the progression of Defoe’s novels from *Captain Singleton* to *Roxana* it is evident that he had increasingly good technical and moral command of them.” The development Hume argues in favor of here allows him to see *Roxana*’s ending as possibly intentional and as evidence of Defoe’s maturation as a writer.

Since Hume, the idea that the novels proceed along a kind of trajectory toward *Roxana* has become a critical commonplace. Michael M. Boardman’s assessment of *Roxana* makes clear that he sees the novel as a significant milestone for Defoe. He explains that “Defoe achieves what success he does with his last important narrative because he has finally discovered the virtues of authorial distance and control. Defoe is in no important sense Roxana. He stands back and, with unusual detachment, arranges

---

113 Blewett, *Defoe’s Art of Fiction*, 147.
the details of Roxana’s tragedy so that the reader may be affected by it.”115 Ian A. Bell endorses this trajectory enthusiastically in his explanation of the shape of Defoe’s novelistic career: “Starting from the conventional traveler’s tale in Crusoe, we see Defoe gradually lessening his dependence on generic supervision until we arrive at the integrated, sophisticated narrative of Roxana, self-conscious, ironic and capable of standing on its own.” He concludes forcefully, “With the benefits of hindsight, we can express this change in Defoe’s writing by saying that he started producing chronicles, and ended up writing a novel.”116 Richetti echoes this story of development in his history of the novel: “In the transition from his first to his last novel, Defoe stages a version of the debate about the proper subject for serious fiction that was taking place within English narrative in the first half of the eighteenth century: a rivalry for the attention of sober readers between the novel of external and inevitably masculine exotic adventure and the novel of domestic happenings, of courtship and (often) of turbulent female interiority.”117

The only problem with the idea that Roxana represents some kind of culmination for Defoe is that he apparently kept on writing and followed up Roxana with the nearly universally ignored A New Voyage Round the World (1724). This is awkward because New Voyage is another high seas adventure story with little character development and a seeming return on Defoe’s part to what James Sutherland called “imaginative reporting,” in which one simply gives details about what happens next.118 Plot, as such, goes by the wayside, and one comes closer to something like news. As Novak explains, “Defoe did not abandon narrative after Roxana; what disappeared was the interest in creating a complex character and seeing the world through her eyes. A New Voyage Round the World, which Defoe wrote at the end of 1724, is truly not only a novel without a hero, it is a novel without any real characterization” (Novak, “Defoe as Innovator,” 66).

Why Defoe would lose interest in his novelistic project and continuing development is anyone’s guess. Whatever had encouraged him to take the steps that critics identify in Moll Flanders and Roxana

115 Boardman, Defoe and the Uses of Narrative, 155.
had apparently vanished after *Roxana*. Everett Zimmerman offers the possibility that, “Having created a character who reveals the limitations of his own and his previous characters’ moral assumptions, Defoe could only stop writing novels—or write a new kind. Sin and repentance, the conceptions that he had used to order his works, gradually diverged from their traditional religious meanings.” Zimmerman’s explanation assumes that Defoe made decisions about what to write based on artistic choices. Novak offers another explanation in his biography of Defoe:

> A more practical consideration may have turned him away from novels. *Robinson Crusoe* had been an enormous success, and *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* had both rapidly gone to three editions. *Roxana*, on the other hand, appears not to have been half so successful, and neither was *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Defoe and Eliza Haywood had both come on the scene at approximately the same time, creating a mass market for prose fiction, but after five years public interest may have started to decline. [. . .] He probably thought it was time to move on to other, more profitable enterprises.”

Perhaps profitability was the problem. This is not a particularly artistic motive but one that we could easily imagine Defoe caring about.

Then again the revisions to the canon do make a third possibility fairly obvious. If Defoe did not write *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, his career as a novelist did not involve the two major steps critics have identified but was instead a fairly consistent approach to writing adventures and fake histories. The reportage style is present in everything but *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, and *New Voyage* (if it is in fact by Defoe) is not a radical departure but simply more of same from a writer who liked to tell stories about travel, pirates, and faraway places. Marshall points out in her article that *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are not the only fictions we should worry about, and I will resist the temptation to redraw the trajectory of Defoe’s development in fiction by simply removing these two novels and starting over. I will, however, hazard the observation that, without *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Defoe comes across as a remarkably consistent writer of long fiction in terms of style, method, delivery, and choice of subject.

* * *

---


Defoe scholars and students of the history of the novel have their work cut out for them. If we ignore the canon problems and, instead, continue writing about Defoe as though he wrote *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, we are quite possibly perpetuating a fantasy, one that would not even have been worth preserving half a century ago. Much of the criticism of the last fifty years on Defoe’s fiction implicitly or explicitly responds to Watt’s summary dismissal of Defoe as a novelist. Defoe scholars are understandably proud of their author and his place in literary history as a great novelist. Without *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Defoe becomes admittedly less great, and to some this is reason enough to excuse the unsatisfactory basis of these shoddy attributions. If we really care about getting Defoe “right,” to the extent that that is possible, we really must take the attribution problems seriously and limit ourselves as often as possible to claims either about the novels in their own right or about Defoe with reference to works we have a solid case for considering Defoe’s.

This brings us to an awkward state of affairs when talking about these novels. One wants to avoid referring to “the fiction-formerly-known-as-Defoe’s” when discussing *Moll Flanders* or *Roxana*. We should also avoid the solution adopted by Gladfelder, who after a brief discussion of the canon problems brought up by Furbank and Owens, cheerfully concludes, “I am satisfied here to let the name Defoe—a name, in any case, that Daniel Foe invented for himself—stand for an indeterminately plural author, a multiply embodied voice. The mystification of textual origins gives the ventriloquist-writer the last laugh.”¹²¹ This won’t do. I have adopted the phrase “fiction associated with Defoe,” as this is currently true. I genuinely hope that, unless evidence can be brought to make these attributions convincing, the novels become unassociated with Defoe in time. For now, distancing Defoe from these novels seems the only responsible thing to do, and we might either simply refer to them individually or acknowledge their association with Defoe.

Undoubtedly Defoe scholars, many of whom specialize in fiction, will be highly resistant to the

problems addressed here. The changes in how we view the novels and Defoe are serious and necessitate a major reevaluation of both if they are taken seriously. Without *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Defoe loses his status as protofeminist, champion of the plight of women. He also loses his claim to being a “great” novelist, unless we launch a campaign to puff the other novels to fill the void. He does not really even appear to have been much of an artist, if we remove these novels, though Defovians have had a sneaking suspicion about that for years. *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* will need reconsideration, as well. The shadow of *Robinson Crusoe* has loomed large in the interpretation of these novels, and we have long assumed that, as Richetti says, “*Robinson Crusoe* sets the pattern for Defoe’s subsequent fictions” (Richetti, “Defoe as Narrative Innovator, 124). Just how important realism, individualism, and morality really are to these novels is worth investigating. Without bringing assumptions to the texts based on what we think we know about Defoe, we can judge what to make of them in their own right. Quite a lot of criticism has been written without the application of Defoe’s biography to make interpretive points, and it ought to remain useful. What remains to be done is to disentangle Defoe from these novels and vice versa. This process will likely be unpleasant for critics who love Defoe, the great novelist and feminist, but we stand to gain far more from limiting the claims we make about the man and the novels to what we can prove from evidence than to risk perpetuating a fantasy and calling it scholarship.

**Realism and Sums of Money**

Lacking the biographical and contextual information that modern critics tend to employ in interpreting the novels, eighteenth-century readers would have had to take the texts on their own terms. Whether they would have tried anything like “close reading” or literary appreciation with any of these texts is uncertain but unlikely, judging from the few responses the novels received toward the end of the century. One issue, however, which seems to have animated readers of these sorts of books was their authenticity, and at least some readers (Gildon, for example) appear to have read skeptically with an eye toward evaluating the claims to authenticity made in the novels’ prefaces. I discussed these in detail in chapter two, but here
it is sufficient to remember that the majority of the novels associated with Defoe bear a preface making a fairly strong claim not only to the believability of the contents to follow but also to the legitimacy of the text as the product of the supposed author, who is presumed to be a real, living person telling his or her story as it happened. *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana’s* prefaces offer twists on this formula, but the set up is essentially the same. *Robinson Crusoe* begins with a short, blunt statement that the story is true, and more than a few people reportedly believed this to be the case. Samuel Johnson did not know that *Memoirs of a Cavalier* was not a genuine historical memoir when he first encountered it. We cannot take for granted that eighteenth-century readers knew they had encountered “a novel” when they picked one up or even that they were dealing with fiction, especially when the work begins with assurances that the events described really happened and the lack of access to information that would discredit such assertions.

One way of testing the reliability of the world being presented would have been to compare the particulars relayed with what the reader had experienced for him or herself. A number of these novels include specific sums of money that would have signaled to readers whether they were either looking at a genuine memoir or something else. Although centuries of inflation and variable prices in goods have made one-to-one equivalencies impossible, we can get a sense for how readers might have responded to the sums by (a) evaluating the wealth of the characters in the novels against the income levels reported by the late seventeenth-century political arithmetician Gregory King, and (b) offering approximate calculations of what the particular sums specified in these texts would be worth in terms of present-day buying power. I discussed King and eighteenth-century social strata in detail in chapter one and will refer back to the table extrapolated from the revisions to King published by Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson. \(^\text{122}\) The method for arriving at my buying power estimates is explained in the introduction, though I should reiterate that these are very rough guesses, not attempts at accurate conversions. What we want is a sense of magnitude and the emotional impact the sums were intended to convey, and we can achieve this perfectly well with approximations.

---

The point here is to determine whether the sums support or undercut an overriding sense of realism conveyed by the text to a person familiar with their value. I assume a reader who is not reading particularly closely in what follows and take for granted that not all readers would respond uniformly. I am addressing readers who would have known the value of the sums and been able to judge whether they were witnessing everyday financial circumstances or the extraordinary. They would hardly have had access to King’s table, and I do not presume that they possessed a high level of economic competence. I do, however, contend that the examples that follow would have registered in the minds of a vast majority of readers, who would have understood their worth. A number of influential, modern readings stand at odds with how the original readership would likely have responded. In light of the sums specified, we need to rethink how realistic these novels appeared when they were published and whether the characters properly belong among the middle to lower sorts.

*Robinson Crusoe’s Untold Millions*

Critics have largely ignored the numerous sums of money in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) because of their seeming insignificance to the novel’s events. Crusoe spends more than three-quarters of his story shipwrecked on an island, during which money is scarcely mentioned and plays no very significant role in the plot. This part of Crusoe’s tale has attracted critics’ attention to the exclusion of the remaining third of the text, during which Crusoe is a highly successful entrepreneur. Economic theory in *Robinson Crusoe* has caught critics’ attention, while actual money has not. Novak calls the novel an “attack on English economic life” and argues that “By isolating first his hero and then a small group of settlers and returning them to a primitive economic condition, Defoe was attempting to illustrate some of his basic economic concepts” (Novak, *Economics*, 49). Geoffrey M. Sill contends that Crusoe discusses economics “not to support a particular theory of value, but to present in a new way the virtue of moderation and self-restraint.”

---

The problem with money, then, is not its absence but that critics seem to find it insignificant. As John J. Richetti puts the matter, “Once Crusoe leaves the island (now a full-fledged colony), the rest is rather tedious accounting of the wealth he richly deserves for his extraordinary feat of survival and mastery.”124 When Michael McKeon reaches the novel’s conclusion, in which Crusoe sells his plantation and makes his fortune, he skips the scene, concluding that “What is crucial about Robinson Crusoe’s achievement of social success is not the degree of his elevation but his capacity to justify each station to which he attains as the way of nature and the will of God.”125 This claim seems reasonable enough if one does not actually know about the degree of his elevation. The Robinson Crusoe who emerges from this novel, however, is not a shipwreck survivor who returned to civilization and regained a bit of money with which to sustain himself. What we get, instead, is the altogether different story of Robinson Crusoe the multi-millionaire, rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

Crusoe becomes quite wealthy very early on in the novel. The plot up to the point of the shipwreck shows us a fairly rapid accumulation of wealth culminating in the establishment of his plantation. The first sum named is £40, which Crusoe spends for, as he says, “Toys and Trifles as the Captain directed me to buy” to go on his first successful trip.126 When he returns from this expedition, he earns £300 for the sale of “5.9 Ounces of Gold Dust” (18). Before heading to sea again, he gives £200 to the widow of his former captain for safe keeping, leaving him nearly £100 (19). During Crusoe’s next time out to sea, he is much less lucky and ends up in Brazil after escaping enslavement. He sells the majority of his amassed possessions upon arrival, including his boat and his slave boy, and uses this money to establish his plantation (38). Crusoe estimates that, had he not left for Guinea to procure slaves for himself and the other plantation owners, he would have been worth between £3,000 and £4,000 in no more than four years (45). The fortune Crusoe supposes that he would have attained would have come to

126 All citations are to the first edition: The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (London: printed for W. Taylor, 1719), 18.
between £600,000 and £900,000 or £800,000 and £1,200,000 today.

These figures show us that Crusoe would have achieved very elite economic status in relation to England’s income strata had he not left Brazil. If he were to retire, never work the plantation another day, and simply invest the money at 3%, which is a conservative rate of return in the period, he would have received between £90 and £120 per annum in a time of no income tax.\(^{127}\) This income would place Crusoe among the top 5% of English families in the late seventeenth century. Crusoe tells us he “might have been worth an hundred thousand *Moidors*” or roughly £137,000 had he stayed (230). His fortune would have more than qualified him to be called a “plum”—the eighteenth-century equivalent of “millionaire”—or a person possessing £100,000. A modern equivalent for £137,000 would be between £27,000,000 and £41,000,000. Why, then, bother to go back to sea at all? Ostensibly he hopes to make some money by acquiring slaves from Guinea, but what he tells us here shows that he expected to become extremely wealthy simply by maintaining his plantation. Economic motives fail to explain his decision. As Crusoe himself says, “for me to think of such a Voyage, was the most preposterous Thing that ever Man in such Circumstances could be guilty of” (45). By his own estimate, Crusoe would have achieved multimillionaire status before ever leaving on the trip that resulted in his being shipwrecked.

The conclusion to the novel presents the reader with the fantastic circumstances in which Crusoe regains his super elite financial status. He had been in excellent financial circumstances before leaving Brazil but has no reason to expect to recover any of his former wealth. He tells us that he receives a reward of “almost two hundred Pounds Sterling” or £40,000-£60,000 for saving the captain of the ship on which he escapes (331). Given that most families lived on less than £25 a year and laboring families averaged £15, this is a very generous gift indeed and elevates Crusoe immediately out of the condition of bankrupt shipwreck survivor. He returns to Lisbon and meets his old friend, who tells him that he owes Crusoe “470 Moidores of Gold” or about £644 (334). To repay this debt, the old man gives Crusoe “160 Portugal Moidores in Gold” or £219 and grants him ownership of half his son’s ship (335). Crusoe finds

this offer too generous and takes only 100 moidores (£137), returning his share in the ship. We then hear the state of Crusoe’s fortune. His friend had kept good records of the profits generated by Crusoe’s plantation in Brazil and gives Crusoe “the Account Current of the Produce of my Farm, or Plantation, from the Year when their Fathers [the two merchant trustees who currently manage it] had ballanc’d with my old Portugal Captain, being for six Years,” amounting to 1,174 moidores or £1,608, and “the Account of four Years more while they kept the Effects in their Hands, before the Government claim’d the Administration,” totaling 3,241 moidores or £4,400 (336, 337). Judging by these totals, the plantation generated about £260 annually during the first six-year period and about £1,100. Evidently his plantation had improved dramatically. Additionally, Crusoe is owed 872 moidores in undistributed funds from the “Prior of the Augustin’s Account, who had receiv’d the Profits for above fourteen Years” (337). We are also told that Crusoe’s old partner sends him 100 uncoined gold pieces, “not quite so large as Moidores” (337). Hearing that Crusoe is alive, the merchant trustees deliver to him a great deal of wealth in goods and cash money. Having received these, Crusoe remarks that “I was now Master, all of a Sudden, of above 5000 l. Sterling in Money, and had an Estate, as I might well call it, in the Brasils, of above a thousand Pounds a Year, as sure as an Estate of Lands in England: And in a Word, I was in a Condition which I scarce knew how to understand, or how to compose my self, for the Enjoyment of it” (338). One need not convert these sums into present-day buying power to appreciate that Crusoe has received an enormous amount of money. He tells us that “It is impossible to express here the Flutterings of my very Heart, when I look’d over these Letters, and especially when I found all my Wealth about me” (338). The shock Crusoe feels at the sight of this wealth creates extremely negative, physical effects: “In a Word, I turned pale, and grew sick; and had not the old Man run and fetch’d me a Cordial, I believe the sudden Surprize of Joy had overset Nature, and I had dy’d upon the Spot” (338). Crusoe could hardly describe a more violent reaction, save actually dying of surprise, and eighteenth-century readers would have had good reason to sympathize with his reaction.

Determining how much money Crusoe has just acquired is difficult due to an inconsistency in the text. The entire amount he is owed from the income of his plantation alone comes to 5,287 moedas. He
says that the amount is above £5,000, though we are not told by how much. He seems, in fact, to be just offering a best guess. According to McCusker, one could get £1.37 per moeda around this time, which would mean that Crusoe actually gains about £7,243 (12). Crusoe’s math is wrong, as £7,000 is well above £5,000. Getting the exchange rate wrong here can be explained away as simply the author not worrying about the details of something Crusoe was unlikely to know at the time, but Crusoe gets the exchange rate right when estimating his annual income from the plantation. He tells us that he expects above £1,000 a year, and that the plantation made 3,241 moidores over four years, which would equal about £4,400 or £1,100 annually if the income did not fluctuate much from year to year. Whether this inconsistency is a result of a lack of attention to detail on Crusoe’s part or the author’s is hard to say. At the very least we can say that Crusoe takes great care to represent in full detail how much he receives, for what, and that he attempts to translate the combined sum into money recognizable to contemporary, English readers. The fact that his estimate is low by £2,200 is curious but would probably not have been noticable to the original audience. If they simply assumed £5,000 to be correct, Crusoe would still have received between £1,000,000 and £1,500,000 in present-day buying power and appeared very rich indeed. His income equals between £200,000 and £300,000 today in addition to the huge capital sum. His strong reaction seems perfectly understandable in light of these figures. We can see that, when he tells us he “scarce knew how to understand” his new financial state, he means it. The majority of families in England and Wales lived on £25 or less and would have needed to save this entire amount for at least 200 years in order to accumulate the amount of money Crusoe has just received. He has become too rich for most contemporary readers to comprehend or identify with at this point.

When Crusoe sells his plantation, his fortune rises above the super elite and into the realm of pure fantasy. His friend in Lisbon estimates that the two merchant trustees would pay between 4,000 (£880) and 5,000 (£1100) pieces of eight more than he could get from another buyer (361). He advises that Crusoe make an offer to sell to them. Crusoe tells us that he “agreed, gave him Order to offer it to them, and he did so; and in about 8 months more, the Ship being then return’d, he sent me Account, that they had accepted the Offer, and had remitted 33000 Pieces of Eight, to a Correspondent of theirs at Lisbon, to
pay for it” (361). Judging by this statement, we would assume the sale price of Crusoe’s plantation to be 33,000 pieces of eight. This appears, however, to be simply a down payment, since he goes on to say, “In Return, I sign’d the Instrument of Sale in the Form which they sent from Lisbon, and sent it to my old Man, who sent me Bills of Exchange for 328000 Pieces of Eight to me, for the Estate; reserving the Payment of 100 Moidores a Year to him, the old Man, during his Life, and 50 Moidores afterwards to his Son for his Life, which I had promised them, which the Plantation was to make good as a Rent-Charge” (361). Whether the figure given—328,000 pieces of eight—is a printer’s error or what was intended has never been investigated. Despite the careful attention that the textual history of Robinson Crusoe has received, no one has even noticed a problem.128 “328000” appears in the first six editions of the novel issued by William Taylor and a number of modern editions.129 The seventh edition, published by William Mears and Thomas Woodward in 1726, drops the last zero without explanation, and some modern editors adopt this sum as accurate.130 None of these recent editors mentions the discrepancy or the textual problem raised by it, which is alarming given that Crusoe’s wealth at the end of the novel changes by a factor of ten depending on which is used. A simple comparison of the first seven print editions alone would have revealed this inconsistency, but scholars have obviously not thought of these sums—even a huge one such as this—as contributing much to the meaning of the text and worth getting right.

Given these difficulties, the best we can do is work with estimates. If we take the smaller sum to be the correct one, Crusoe sells his plantation for 33,000 pieces of eight or roughly £7,000 at a rate of

---

130 The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner, ed. J. Donald Crowley (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). Crowley tells us that “about half of the substantive changes first occur in the seventh and eighth editions, which were printed for a new publisher” and says the alterations “are the work of printers and reflect the imposition of a new printing house style on Defoe’s original text” (307). He goes on to call these changes “misguided” but adopts the lesser sum given in the seventh edition as the correct one without explanation (306). The sum appears also in Robinson Crusoe, ed. John J. Richetti (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 239.
£0.22 per piece of eight (McCusker, 10). He tells us earlier that it generates an annual income of £1,000, which amounts to about 15% of the total sale value (338). If we take the larger sum, which is greater by a factor of ten, Crusoe would have been paid £70,000, and his plantation’s annual income would come to around 1.5% of its total worth. Determining which ratio of income to overall sale price is more likely would require more information than we are given. Obviously if the trustees could expect to recover the purchase price of the plantation from its annual profits in only seven years, we can see why it would be an attractive business proposition. A 1.5% return on an initial investment is not terrific, especially given that one could acquire 3% and double the rate of return simply by buying bonds in England. The textual evidence strongly suggests that 328,000 pieces of eight might reasonably be preferred. This sum appears in all of Taylor’s editions without correction, and no justification is offered for the change in the seventh edition. Perhaps the trustees are willing to pay this price because, as Crusoe’s old friend tells him, they know the value of the land. The plantation has improved its profits recently and might do even better in the future. If Crusoe were paid 328,000 pieces of eight for his plantation, he would end the novel having earned something between £14,400,000 and £21,600,000 in modern terms. Even if we were to grant the smaller sum to be preferable and reduce Crusoe’s earnings tenfold, he would have made between £1,440,000 and £2,160,000 today. Not bad for “the third Son of the Family, and not bred to any Trade” (3).

The unbelievability of the novel’s conclusion bears heavily on how we interpret its message, if it has one. Since the publication of Starr’s *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (1965) and Hunter’s *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (1966), this novel has often been read as a “spiritual autobiography,” and the ending explained as God delivering Crusoe from ruin because he becomes a good Christian and is thusly rewarded. Given the incredible financial heights to which Crusoe is elevated, however, original readers must have regarded this story as a fable, not anything resembling what goes on in real life or the relationship to God any of them likely experienced. The idea that any of them would receive this kind of

good fortune just for becoming a true believer is likely to have seemed about as unrealistic as the presentation of money in this novel.

*Marrying for Money in Moll Flanders*

*Moll Flanders* is most often read as a criminal’s autobiography. Ian A. Bell gives it as an example of “the literature of low life.”132 Most critics regard Moll’s illegal activities with some sympathy, feeling that, as Macey puts it, “Again and again Moll is driven by economic necessity” (55). The Moll Flanders we imagine begins life in extreme poverty, faces ruinous financial circumstances after a series of failed marriages, and then turns to thievery out of desperation, after which she reforms and lives a meager existence as a transported criminal in Virginia. Moll becomes a thief late in life, however, and is not really a criminal before that. What a survey of the monetary sums given in the course of the novel shows is that Moll faces real poverty pretty infrequently. She talks as though what she has is very little, but she is not always a trustworthy reporter on her own financial state—a point that would not likely have been lost on the original readers. Very little of what she does, in fact, can be explained in terms of economic necessity, and the sums provided make this point clear. Most of her story involves, not thieving, but trying to trick well-to-do men into marrying her, an enterprise that rarely leaves her bankrupt but fails also to make her rich. The bulk of *Moll Flanders* is, in fact, a cautionary tale for fortune hunters and, despite the strongly worded preface to the contrary, a difficult one to see as authentic.

We are told early on that Moll, like Crusoe, loves money and will sacrifice a great deal to get it. As a child, she lives as an orphan who wanders the streets with gypsies. Her first encounters with significant sums of money occur when she meets her first romantic interest, the elder son of her guardian, who kisses and flirts with her, giving her five guineas (£1050-£1575 in current buying power) before he leaves. She tells us that “I WAS more confounded with the Money than I was before with the Love” (22)

and seems not to understand what the gesture means. He later says that he wants to marry her and gives her 100 guineas, promising 100 more annually until they are married (28). He adds that if she becomes pregnant, he will take care of her and the baby. Moll says that “so putting the Purse into my Bosom, I made no more Resistance to him, but let him do just what he pleas’d; and as often as he pleas’d; and thus I finish’d my own Destruction at once, for from this Day, being forsaken of my Vertue, and my Modesty, I had nothing of Value left to recommend me, either to God’s Blessing, or Man’s Assistance” (28). Moll makes clear that her virtue and modesty were the only things of real value she had—and that she sold them for 100 guineas and some flattery (24).

Selling one’s virtue at any price is hardly heroic, and the sum given is meant to help readers understand how much Moll’s virginity is worth to her. A rough estimate puts 100 guineas (£105) at between £21,000 and £31,500. No doubt 100 guineas seems low by some readers’ standards (though some may have found it surprisingly high), but one should keep in mind how much we are talking about in context. Assuming Moll’s gentleman had actually paid this amount annually, she would have received an income placing her in the top 5% of the English population—pretty attractive financial circumstances, especially for a girl born in Newgate prison who spent her childhood wandering with gypsies and living as a foster child. Such an income would provide Moll the economic independence she associates with being a “gentlewoman.” Women have precious few ways of earning an honest living in this novel, and the security promised by this financial arrangement is irresistible. Readers may have disapproved of her behavior, but they would have been hard-pressed to deny the attractiveness of these financial circumstances.

Moll tells us repeatedly how much she loved her suitor, but money seems to influence her more than sentiment. He marries her off to his younger brother by threatening her with the dismal lifestyle in which she would find herself if she refused and offers her £500 to agree to the marriage (62). In spite of her feelings for this man (and her lack of interest in his brother), Moll consents and gives up the

133 All citations are to the first edition: The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (London: printed for W. Chetwood and T. Edling, 1722).
possibility of pursuing him. Whatever love she feels is not worth potential financial ruin, and £500 (worth between £100,000 and £150,000 today) is awfully hard for her to refuse. The younger brother dies suddenly after they are married and leaves Moll a widow with a total fortune of “about 1200 l.” (66) or between £240,000 and £360,000 today. Moll seems not to have been very impressed by this sum, calling it “a tolerable Fortune” (67). However, she is understating her economic position here again. At 3%, Moll could have drawn an income of £36, roughly equivalent to King’s estimated average income for families in England and Wales, not rich but certainly not poor. She would have achieved her much-desired financial independence at a very young age and without having to work for it. She clearly lacks the expertise to invest her money herself and loses money when she tries to invest with a goldsmith, but £1,200 would have registered as a significant fortune to the majority of the novel’s original readers, who would have some reason to doubt Moll’s reliability as a narrator.

Moll decides to try getting rich quick by marrying a wealthy man, a scheme she attempts multiple times with little success. Her next husband spends their money freely and abandons her. She says, “I found I could hardly muster up 500 l.” (72)—but we need to remember that contemporary readers would have been highly unlikely to agree with her that surviving on £500 was terribly difficult or that she had been delivered to the brink of destitution. Moll is unrealistic here, as earlier, in describing her financial situation. She seems to expect great wealth for herself without any good reason. She tries again to marry a rich man, and this time employs a ruse to catch a well-off fortune hunter. A friend of hers claims that Moll has an income of £1,500 a year, a lure that attracts a suitor (90). We are never told exactly how one pretends to have an income this size, which in current buying power would equal between £300,000 and £450,000 a year. Anyone paying attention to these sums would have reason to wonder at her suitor’s inexplicable gullibility and to have little sympathy for him once she reveals that, in fact, she has only £440 (97). They have three children and live happily until Moll discovers he is her half-brother and returns to England. Moll tells us her fortune amounts to “between two or three Hundred Pounds in the whole” and that her goods being shipped to her from Virginia had been severely damaged, the loss of which she estimates at £500 (125, 128). In other words, she leaves Virginia with a sum worth between
£140,000 and £210,000 in present-day terms on the low end, £160,000 and £240,000 on the high, of which £40,000-£60,000 survived. Clearly she has reason to complain about the loss of her goods, but she is not exactly poverty-stricken, as she says herself: “I liv’d pleasantly enough, kept good Company, that is to say, gay fine Company” (126). She lowers her living expenses by moving to Bath and regains some of her wealth through her relationship with a married man there, who gives her 200 guineas and another 50 guineas after taking care of him when he falls ill (133, 136). He eventually severs their relationship, giving her 100 guineas and leaving her with a total fortune of “above 450 l.” or between £90,000 and £135,000 (153). The key is that at no point in the course of these relationships does Moll experience anything like poverty, however disappointed she might be in her oft-diminishing fortune, and the original readers would not have had much reason to see this as the literature of low life so far.

Moll’s next attempt to marry a wealthy fortune hunter involves some preposterously large sums and seriously unbelievable events. Moll’s friend hears that she has a fortune of £500 and amplifies the amount to £5,000 and then to £15,000 when telling the suitor from Lancashire about her. Moll describes him as “stark Mad at this Bait” (173). His reaction makes sense if we realize how large a sum he is presented with. In present-day buying power, Moll’s fortune would equal between £3,000,000-£4,500,000. Hoping to acquire this money for himself, her suitor promises her a yearly income of £600, though she estimates that he lived extravagantly enough to cost him £1,000 a year (173, 174). Only 0.12% of the population earned £800 or more, so Moll’s suitor is spending truly incredible amounts of money to impress her. Eighteenth-century readers would likely have had no way to know what percentage of the population earned £800, but they would not have needed to in order to recognize how rare an income of that size was at the time. Their relationship comes to nothing when they reveal that each was trying to fool the other. Moll in fact has only £50 and 11 guineas (180,181). Unfortunately for her suitor, he pretended to have a great fortune by spending huge sums of money and is now in terrible debt. Contemporary readers would have been unlikely to feel too much sympathy for him, however, given that he (like her half-brother) was fooled by Moll without seeing any evidence of the fortune she pretended to have. This is doubly foolish behavior from a person whose scheme relied on spending a lot of money to
prove the existence of great wealth. Not expecting at least some show of wealth in return is idiotic.

Moll experiences her most humble financial circumstances since childhood while living in Manchester and later as a thief. She is told that in Manchester one can live on £6 a year (181). To put this figure in context, Moll had estimated earlier that living in London and entertaining friends required at least £100 annually (156). She tells us that she makes not more than £15 a year now, putting her toward the bottom of the social table, though by what means she gets this money, we are not told (181). Moll demonstrates that she is capable of living frugally. She simply does not want to. Repeatedly in this novel, Moll attains financial independence, but greed and acquisitiveness undermine her satisfaction with living a modest lifestyle. Moll’s career as a thief allows her to accumulate “near 500 l. by me in ready Money, on which I might have liv’d very well, if I had thought fit to have retir’d” (271). She seems much more pleased with £500 than she had previously. Her total fortune has amounted to nearly £500 on more than one occasion, and she had regarded it as little money indeed. Her reliability as a narrator has to be questioned as a result. Her perception of her financial state tends not to reflect reality, and readers who take her at her word would be mislead.

Moll finally abandons fortune hunting and thieving, instead turning to agriculture. After reuniting with her Lancashire husband in Newgate prison, Moll plans to move into farming for a living. Between them, they have £354, which they use to get started (384). Moll’s governess pays £100 for planter’s equipment (392), and her husband reimburses the governess £180 for her assistance (393). They leave for Virginia with £200 (£40,000-£60,000) and, once there, buy a plot of land for £35 (410) or £7,000-£10,500. Moll is reunited with her son, who promises her £100 a year from the plantation she inherited from her mother (418). She then receives her remaining wealth from her governess in England, and her husband gives an account of her wealth: “Hold lets see, says he, telling upon his Fingers still; and first on his Thumb, there’s 246 l. in Money at first, then two gold Watches, Diamond Rings, and Plate, says he, upon the fore Finger, then upon the next Finger, here’s a Plantation on York River, a 100l. a Year, then 150 in Money,” going on to list “a Cargo cost 250 l. in England, and worth here twice the Money, well, says I, What do you make of all that? make of it, says he, why who says I was deceiv’d, when I married a
Wife in *Lancashire*? I think I have married a Fortune, and a very good Fortune too” (421-422). About her plantation, Moll tells us that “in eight Year which we lived upon it, we brought it to such a pitch, that the Produce was, at least, 300 l. Sterling a Year; I mean, worth so much in *England*” (422). About this outcome, Lincoln B. Faller asks, “though Moll succeeds beautifully over the short term, who is to say that over the long run – retiring from her ‘trade’ with 700 or 800 pounds and a one-way ticket to Virginia – she does better in her line of work than the mercer in his, or even the journeyman?” In fact Moll does quite a lot better: her earnings place her among the top 1.5% of families. She ends the novel in circumstances similar to Crusoe’s: repentant, rich, living abroad, and having made a great deal of money owning a plantation.

In light of its economic particulars, *Moll Flanders* comes across as a cautionary tale about the dangers of trying to marry for money and the reliability of agriculture. Moll’s biggest failing is relying on men to support her through marriage, which results in her major financial losses. Because she has no means to support herself and does not know any trade besides needlework, she cannot sustain the lifestyle in London she becomes used to. Very little of this story is a criminal’s autobiography. For most of her life, Moll Flanders is a fortune hunter and cannot even rightly be called guilty of fraud in her pursuits of a wealthy husband. Only when Moll establishes a plantation in Virginia does she establish a settled income for herself and, in time, a lifestyle that she finds pleasing. The novel (and Moll in particular) clearly have messages to convey, but contemporary readers would have had trouble taking Moll’s advice or an implicit warning very seriously, given the implausibility of the plot and the story’s lack of resemblance to recognizable reality. Readers would have seen numerous examples of Moll describing her own wealth inaccurately and have had reason to read skeptically.

*Money and Morality in Roxana*

Roxana meets an abrupt end that, although foreshadowed vaguely in previous episodes, comes as a

---

surprise. This tragic ending has lead most critics to assume that we are meant to dislike her, since she seems to be held up for critique and to represent the wrong way to live, for which she is justly punished. However, critics such as Bram Dijkstra and Mona Scheuermann have pointed to the fact that Roxana succeeds in business as a redeeming quality, suggesting that the novel can be seen as proto-feminist.¹³⁵ The image of Roxana as a capable businesswoman (and therefore a proto-feminist figure) has recently been challenged by D. Christopher Gabbard who argues convincingly that Roxana cannot even read her own account books.¹³⁶ Whatever we think of Roxana as a person, two things are clearly true: she becomes outstandingly wealthy, and she comes to a bad end. The moral and monetary strands of the narrative exist in tension, as Roxana’s accumulation of wealth undermines the moral message being developed.

Roxana experiences an abrupt and upsetting fall in financial status very early on in the story, which influences how she relates to men and how she controls her money. Her father arranges for her to marry an English brewer at the age of fifteen and gives her “25000 Livres, that is to say, two Thousand Pounds Portion” (4).¹³⁷ After Roxana had been married four years, her father dies. He had left her 5,000 more livres but entrusted it to her older brother, a merchant, who lost it in trade (7). Two years later, her husband’s father dies, leaving him the brewhouse, which he sorely mismanages, going into debt. He sells the brewhouse, pays his debts, and manages to come away with “between Two and Three Thousand Pound in his Pocket” (8). Roxana tries to convince him to secure his money with a worthwhile investment, but he spends his money as well as hers. Finding himself broke, he abandons her with five children and only £70 to survive on (11). We know that Roxana and her husband combined had between £4,000 and £5,000 three years before their ruin. £2,000 of that money had been hers alone. If we estimate that her personal fortune at the time would be worth today something between £400,000 and £600,000 and their total worth at £800,000-£1,200,000 or £1,000,000-£1,500,000, we see how catastrophically her

financial status declines—and how dramatically the novel begins. The original readers would not have been surprised to find her very anxious to keep her money securely under her own control in the future. Because of this terrible marriage and disastrous outcome, Roxana learns early to invest her money and to maintain control of her finances, building an incredible fortune over a long span of time.

Roxana’s method of increasing her wealth involves using her money to make more money. She gains the fortune necessary to begin serious investing through highly improbable means. She begins a relationship with her landlord, who eventually provides for her financial future in his will. When he is killed, Roxana takes possession of “almost ten Thousand Pounds Sterling,” even though his actual wife attempts to recover this money, and Roxana’s only claim to it is that she has lived as the man’s wife (64). If the original readers needed stronger clues than have already appeared in the course of the novel that they are not witnessing the events of an authentic memoir taken from everyday life, this plot twist ought to have alerted them to read skeptically. Richetti offers one of the only attempts by a Defoe critic at making sense of these sums in terms of modern equivalency, rightly pointing out that “Ten thousand pounds was an enormous sum, in early eighteenth-century purchasing power well over a million pounds.”¹³⁸ My own estimate puts the sum between £2,000,000 and £3,000,000 today, but what matters is the magnitude of what Roxana has inherited, and Richetti is practically alone in trying to help us understand it. Having acquired this money, Roxana begins developing her investment portfolio. As to her first big investment, she tells us, “I got a substantial safe Mortgage for 14000 Pound, by the Assistance of the famous Sir Robert Clayton, for which, I had an Estate of 1800 Pounds a Year bound to me; and had 700 Pounds per Annum Interest for it” (200). She estimates that her estate now brings in about £1,000 a year total (200). As a mere 0.07% of families averaged £1,000 per annum or more, Roxana has by this point already achieved a status so elite as to be just about inconceivable in realistic terms by the vast majority of contemporary readers.

Her acquaintance with Clayton continues to benefit her as he teaches her to save and invest, helping her amass greater and greater wealth. He advises her to invest £1,000 a year of the £2,000 a year,

for which he says she will have £21,058 extra in the bank in twelve years (205). In terms of present-day buying power, Roxana’s £21,000 would be worth between £4,200,000 and £6,300,000. Roxana is initially hesitant, as she enjoys living expensively, but she finally agrees and begins to set aside £700 (206). She tells us that, seven years after her initial investment with Clayton, “I had now five and thirty Thousand Pounds Estate; and as I found Ways to live without wasting either Principal or Interest, I laid-up 2000 l. every Year, at least, out of the meer Interest, adding it to the Principal” (223). She marvels that “I had laid-up an incredible Wealth, the time consider’d; and had I yet had the least Thought of reforming, I had all the Opportunity to do it with Advantage, that ever Woman had; for the common Vice of all Whores, I mean Money, was out of the Question, nay, even Avarice itself seem’d to be glutted” (223). The fortune she now possesses might be estimated at between £7,000,000 and £10,500,000, increasing at the rate of £400,000-£600,000 a year. The amount of money she possesses is staggering and would not likely have been lost on eighteenth-century readers, nor would it have been regarded as a typical result of investing—especially in 1722 with the collapse of the South Sea Bubble so recent. The manner in which she builds her wealth, however, should have appeared legitimately like real life to readers. The math adds up, and the advice is relatively sound, even if the profits Roxana rakes in seem implausible.

Toward the end of the novel, Roxana and her merchant husband reveal their fortunes to each other, seemingly for the sole purpose of entertaining the readers. Her husband presents her with £16,000 worth of stock in the English East Indian Company, “nine Assignments upon the Bank of Lyons in France, and two upon the Rents of the Town-House in Paris, amounting in the whole to 5800 Crowns per Annum,” “30000 Rixdollars in the Bank of Amsterdam,” jewels and gold worth £1,500-£1,600, and a pearl necklace worth £200 (317). He adds to this “an eighth Share in an East-India Ship then Abroad; an Account-Courant with a Merchant, at Cadiz in Spain ; about 3000 l. lent upon Bottomree, upon Ships gone to the Indies ; and a large Cargo of Goods in a Merchant’s Hands, for Sale, at Lisbon in Portugal ; so that in his Books there was about 12000 l. more; all which put together, made about 27000 l. Sterling, and 1320 l. a Year” (317). After including a few more items, he tells Roxana that, after paying off some considerable debts, he will still have “17000 l. clear Stock in Money, and 1320 l. a-Year in Rent” (318).
Roxana easily outdoes him, placing on a table a mortgage worth £14,000 earning £700, another that she says “at three times, had advanc’d 12000 l,” and several small mortgages and securities “amounting to 10800 l. principal Money, and paying six hundred and thirty six Pounds a-Year” (318). She points out that from these she earns a total of £2,056 annually. In time, her husband acquires the title of Count and she Countess, and she estimates their combined fortunes at no less than £100,000 or between £20,000,000 and £30,000,000 (325-326).

Critics who have noticed the sums in this novel have not known what to do with them. James Thompson goes to the trouble of recounting in detail the trajectory of Roxana’s fortune, giving specific sums along the way, and then ends his paragraph and changes subjects without telling us what we are to make of the capital sums, the incomes, or the rate of accumulation: “Charting this rise, on page 12, Roxana is left with her five children and £70; on page 17, she is down to nothing; on page 55, after the death of the jeweler, Roxana has £10,000; on 182, her fortune is at £35,000, and by page 202, it is at £50,000; by page 264, upon marrying the Dutch Merchant, it is at £100,000 and her yearly income is £4,000” (117). Paying attention to the sums is good, but without trying to explain their magnitude, they are not very helpful. The point is that we cannot tell how much money is being shown to us without a sense of scale, from comparisons with historical sums or in terms of present-day buying power. Calling attention to some of these particular sums, David Blewett blunders, arguing that “Finally even Roxana, now worth ‘fifty Thousand Pounds’ (p 202) a year, sees that she can make no more excuses to herself.”139 While Roxana does become staggeringly rich, an income of £50,000 is far beyond the wealth she gains. An income this large would equal half what the Bank of England itself earned annually from the government for interest on the war loan of 1694 (Homer and Sylla, 148). The purpose of the scene appears to be not just to catalogue the fortunes of two very wealthy characters in the novel but to give readers a sense of pleasure in viewing this kind of money put on display. This raises problems for the moralistic reading, as the money is obviously ill gotten gains, and readers ought to disapprove of its existence. The way the money is described, however, seems intended to make the wealth attractive, not to

139 Blewett, Defoe’s Art of Fiction, 135.
arouse moral disgust.

*Roxana* consists of at least two major narrative strands, one ethical and the other financial. Exactly how eighteenth-century readers would have responded to the novel is difficult to say. Those interested in the financial side of the story would surely enjoy the accumulation of wealth. Those worried about the moral that the novel is intended to convey would see Roxana as the target of criticism. The text clearly supports both responses, which seem to conflict and undermine each other. A reader would have a very difficult time reconciling feeling pleasure in seeing Roxana heap up cash through sinful living with condemning her for it. Perhaps the money functions to raise Roxana to an incredible height from which to fall. Roxana herself sees an important relationship between her money and her morality in the story. Having confessed her fear that her ill-gotten money will somehow bring about her new husband’s ruin by being mingled with his, she tells us, “This is the true Reason why I have been so particular in the Account of my vast acquir’d Stock; and how his Estate, which was perhaps, the Product of many Years fortunate Industry; and which was equal, if not superior, to mine, at best, was at my Request, kept apart from mine, as is mention’d above” (319). The detail in which Roxana and her husband catalogue their possessions, their relative value, and the incomes earned from them seems to suggest that readers were expected to take pleasure in seeing fantastic wealth displayed before them. This novel is not an earnest moral sermon given the prominence of something like what Paula R. Backscheider has called “rags-to-riches fantasy.” I would not go so far as to argue that this is an amoral book but simply that, whatever the moral message intended, a clear tension exists between the pleasure that readers would be expected to feel watching Roxana’s spectacular gains and the intended moral meaning. Roxana’s accumulation of wealth can be subsumed into a moral reading of the novel as following a fairly standard formula for dramatic tragedy, but the pleasure and excitement involved in witnessing Roxana’s meteoric rise in financial status will still undermine the effectiveness of the text as a cautionary tale and would have generated something like guilty pleasure in more than a few readers.

---

Realism and the Implications of Money

These novels are perhaps most famous for representing a move in fiction towards realism, but what exactly counts as “realistic” remains a serious conceptual problem. The two most influential proponents of realism in these novels have been Ian Watt and Novak. Watt argues forcefully that “Defoe’s novels are landmarks in the history of fiction largely because they are the first considerable narratives which embody all the elements of formal realism.” He defines formal realism as “a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the time and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms” (32). Watt’s point seems to be that the inclusion of references to the “real world” existing outside the text should correspond to reality as the reader experiences it. One major problem with Watt’s definition if we try to apply it to these novels is that he does not clearly distinguish between the possible and the plausible. Talking horses are impossible and therefore unrealistic. Crusoe’s inheritance at the end of his story is implausible in the extreme but not impossible. I do not tend to think that contemporary readers would have needed something to be impossible, though, before they no longer considered it an “authentic report of human experience.” Within Watt’s long standard description of realism, the novels under consideration here clearly contain fantastic economic situations that undercut any overriding sense of realism.

Novak has been the most outspoken proponent of the novels’ realism, particularly in economic terms. He calls Robinson Crusoe in particular “England’s first sustained work of realistic fiction.” He remains convinced of this argument, recently insisting, “at the outset it is important to state two critical notions with which I am in complete agreement. The first is that Robinson Crusoe is a realist text,”

---

142 Novak, Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe’s Fiction (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 123.
point which he says “has been argued forcibly by what seems like an army of critics from Walter Scott in
the nineteenth century to Ian Watt and Michael McKeon in the twentieth.”¹⁴³ He goes on to say that
“Defoe was not willing to compromise the general level of realism that distinguished his work from the
romance, with its miraculous events and turns of plot, that was always threatening to overwhelm the
fledgling novel” (457) and that “If Defoe flirts with the numinous, he always returns to his true love—
narrative anchored in historic and economic reality” (466). Novak has argued elsewhere that “Economic
realities are never far away from his [Defoe’s] fictions. He preferred to treat characters among the middle
or lower ranks of society” (Realism, 8). About Crusoe’s status at the end of the novel, Novak says that he
“emerges from his experience moderately wealthy, but not rich” (Economics, 163 n29). These statements
seem drastically to misrepresent the novels.

Obviously Watt and Novak are not alone in claiming that these novels are particularly realistic.
Sutherland tells us, “At all events, Robinson Crusoe shares with most of Defoe’s later fiction a firm basis
in actuality.”¹⁴⁴ Boardman states that “To some extent Defoe always expects his stories to be taken as
true, even those in which the evidence is ambiguous because the pleasures of autobiography have been
refined into a kind of artful principle.”¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Hudson sees these three novels in particular as
evidence of “Defoe’s mastery of novelistic realism.”¹⁴⁶ The question ultimately is how scale and
proportion influence a reader’s belief in the reality presented. Could the characters have obtained the
kinds of wealth represented in these novels? Perhaps, but their doing so is incredibly unlikely. If by
“realism,” we mean plausible and recognizable presentation of the world external to the text, the financial
pictures given seem pretty unrealistic.

The presentation of money in each of these novels is handled with care and seems clearly
intended to communicate significant information to readers about class, characterization, and realism.

¹⁴³ Novak, “The Cave and the Grotto: Realist Form and Robinson Crusoe’s Imagined Interiors,”
¹⁴⁵ Boardman, Defoe and the Uses of Narrative, 63.
¹⁴⁶ Nicholas Hudson, “Social Rank, ‘The Rise of the Novel,’ and Whig Histories of Eighteenth-
Apart from these functions, though, I want to suggest that the money also serves psychological and aesthetic purposes in all three novels. The attention devoted to counting money and to displaying it with fascinating detail strongly suggests that readers are supposed to take vicarious pleasure in the protagonists’ accumulation of wealth. The magnitude of the sums makes one think that eighteenth-century readers (who had to comprehend the amounts involved) were not meant to take the stories as “real” but to revel in the fantasy. The stress on heaping up assets in each book seems pretty clearly designed to delight readers for its own sake, quite apart from any morals or lessons. Longstanding critical claims that these novels represent a turn in fiction towards “realism” may have some plausibility in terms of their presentation of individual psychology and quotidian detail. The idea that they are “realistic” in economic terms, however, is seriously misguided. Readers would have had good reason to doubt the claims in the novels’ prefaces to their supposed authenticity.

The Novels with and without Defoe

I want to conclude with an overview of the fiction from several standpoints, depending on how one decides to group the texts. Although I have argued for taking the texts individually, no doubt critics will continue to want to see them as a group and to resist disassociating them from Defoe and each other. We need then to decide how much faith we want to put into each attribution, on what basis, and what picture emerges as a result.

Obviously we can ignore the attribution problems and the unsatisfactory evidence. Many scholars have and will continue to do so. Separating Defoe from the novels associated with him is an upsetting process for people who have something to lose, and many of us stand to lose something by abandoning Defoe the novelist. If Defoe did write all of these novels, and the attributions are legitimate, much of what we have said about his development as an artist and his place in the literary history of the novel seems reasonable. Taken this way, he is a writer who varied his technique considerably and wrote novels that
fall into a few highly distinct categories. The first two *Crusoe* novels, *Captain Singleton*, and *A New Voyage Round the World* give us high seas adventure, sometimes very far ranging indeed. The protagonists make startling amounts of money through highly improbable means in each case, and much of the point seems to be to entertain more than to instruct. The seriousness of the moral messages of these books comes almost entirely off our sense that Defoe was a moralist who used fiction to teach. Certainly the prefaces to the first two *Crusoe* novels, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana* claim that the works were published for this purpose, and if we assume Defoe wrote them all, we might go even further and generalize that his other novels are similarly didactic, explicitly or implicitly.

Morality seems to matter less in the travel narratives than in *Colonel Jack*, which appears to be a clear precursor to *Moll Flanders*, if we think Defoe wrote both. Jack starts out a castoff son who becomes orphaned when his guardian dies, leaving him to turn to thievery at ten years old. He has conflicts of conscience about stealing and would like to be a gentleman some day. Also like Moll, he marries multiple times but ends the story with a spouse from fairly early on in life. He too witnesses his criminal colleagues being hanged for theft, though this makes less of an impression on him than on Moll. Unlike Singleton, Crusoe, or Roxana, Jack doesn’t have a sidekick or confidant character, again drawing a similarity to Moll, who spends the majority of her story on her own with occasional assistance from her governness. He becomes an indentured servant in Virginia, a fate Moll was supposed to meet but bought her way out of. He becomes a plantation owner and is somehow able to find someone to manage the plantation for him in a trustworthy and competent manner while he returns to England and gets married. This ends badly, and he joins the French military against the English. Ultimately he repents of his wicked life, settles in England, and praises God. This is a similar but more overtly religious conclusion than what we get in *Moll Flanders*. The plots are really not very similar, but a number of elements line up very conspicuously. This was evidently not lost on eighteenth-century readers, as a couplet published anonymously in *The Flying Post* (1 March 1729) illustrates: “Down in the kitchen, honest Dick and Doll Are studying *Colonel Jack and Flanders Moll*.” The supposed purpose of both novels is to instruct readers to be better Christians and live proper, virtuous lives by showing them how not to live. We might
lump *Roxana* in with *Colonel Jack* and *Moll Flanders* as morally instructive novels presenting increasingly complex psychological conflicts.

*Memoirs of a Cavalier* and *A Journal of the Plague Year* represent a kind of historical fiction. Neither has a named narrator that we get to know very well, and both are mainly interesting for their dramatic reenactments of important historical events. Both narrators luckily happen to be in the right place at the right time to see and experience what they are able to relate from firsthand experience. Neither comes to harm. They escape the wars and sickness more or less unscathed and function as reporters, chronicling famous moments in history at roughly the middle of the seventeenth century. Scholars have found secondary sources that were available from which these novels could have been constructed, and *Memoirs* explicitly aims to replace some of them. A reader in the eighteenth century would have been hard pressed to challenge the authenticity of either, however, given that anyone able to remember the 1660s was quite old by the 1720s and that the secondary sources were unlikely to be familiar or on hand.

Other combinations are possible, but these make clear how various the novels are. Even in these groupings, each particular example is noticeably different from those we might compare it to. Radical diversity would best characterize Defoe’s novelistic output in this case. The trajectory that places *Robinson Crusoe* at the beginning and then leaps forward to *Moll Flanders* and again to *Roxana* leaves out quite a lot that does not fit and oversimplifies Defoe’s possible career in fiction. If he wrote these novels, he apparently did not see himself moving from one place to anywhere else. *A New Voyage Round the World* makes for a sad follow up to *Roxana* if Defoe really thought of himself as a developing artist trying to work out a new literary form. If we refuse to rethink the canon and cling to the belief that Defoe wrote all these novels, we can at least say that he was much more of an experimental writer trying to entertain (and sell stories) than someone trying to father the English novel.

If we remove *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Defoe’s career looks much more consistent, and he appears even less interested in literary writing. He creates high seas narratives and historical reconstructions from secondary sources, apparently for the purpose of entertaining an audience with a
kind of tour guide approach, showing readers far away places and famous events they would want to see. These lack the psychological, narrative, and moral complexity of *Moll Flanders* or *Roxana*, and the idea of a trajectory from *Crusoe* to *Roxana* becomes impossible. *Colonel Jack*’s similarity to *Moll Flanders* appears either coincidental or simply overstated given that we have long assumed they were written by the same person. *Roxana*’s strange ending and tragic form, which have made it an outlier among Defoe’s novels, would instead seem to be just an abrupt ending to a dark novel, not a remarkable shift in Defoe’s technique and approach. Removing these novels makes Defoe appear vastly less feminist and calls into question how much we should really worry about the moral purpose behind the other novels. Without *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, the other novels appear much less seriously didactic. Seen this way, Defoe appears to have been writing for sales appeal and not offering anything anticipating Richardson, Fielding, or much of anyone. *Robinson Crusoe* might have caught Watt’s attention for its quotidian detail and “realism,” but he skipped past it to *Moll Flanders* when trying to assess Defoe’s place in literary history—with good reason. Losing *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* would essentially do away with the idea of Defoe the artistic novelist.

Though the evidence for attributing *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* to Defoe is bad, the same can be said for the other novels, as well. Someone prepared to say Defoe might have written one, none, or all of them faces the daunting and ultimately profitless task of trying to guess, based on content, which novels seem more like Defoe. If we feel confident that he wrote the Crusoe narratives, then we might be inclined to keep *Singleton* and *New Voyage*, since they are high seas adventures. This might lead us to want to include *Colonel Jack* and then to bring in *Moll Flanders* for its similarity to *Jack*. We have some reason to think Defoe owned some of the books that would have been used to write *Memoirs of a Cavalier*. If we take that attribution seriously, we can easily imagine him trying a similar trick a second time and producing *Plague Year*. The results of these speculations would be interesting and probably stimulating, but we would be no closer to the truth and would not be getting much of anywhere.

My purpose here has been to reexamine what we think we know about both Defoe and the novels associated with him if we do not take for granted that he wrote them. Doing so helps us to appreciate how
eighteenth-century readers might have responded to the novels when they first appeared—published anonymously and with no reason to be linked together in any meaningful way. As modern critics, we take for granted that Defoe wrote the Crusoe novels, *Captain Singleton*, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, and *Roxana*. Even without the serious attributional problems in Defoe’s canon, we should still want to understand how the original readers might have taken the books, and to do so we have to take seriously how little they would have been likely to know about what they were dealing with. We have every reason to believe the anecdotes that some readers considered *Robinson Crusoe* an authentic memoir. Many of the claims made in that novel would have been difficult to disprove without access to reference works readers were unlikely to have on hand. They would have had to take the novels on their own terms and judge the claims to legitimacy made in the prefaces based on attention to detail—if they even bothered. This is the method that critics really ought to adopt going forward, given how unsatisfactory the evidence is for attributing even the major novels to Defoe. The novels are readable and interesting in their own right and were read without a sense of their connection to each other or in light of their supposed authors’ biography, politics, religious beliefs, or anything else. The criticism that has been written that adopts this approach, focusing on individual texts on their own, will withstand even radical shakeups to the canon. Criticism that relies on Defoe’s having written the novels for the interpretation being offered is much riskier to build on and needs to be reexamined, rethought, and in many cases replaced, working from the ground up.
Chapter Four

“Class” and Money in *Pamela*

One of the great clichés about Samuel Richardson is that he was a middle-class writer, embodying the values of his station in his fiction. His modern biographers casually refer to him as “a conventional middle-class businessman,” which they take to mean that he belongs to the merchant class, believes in improving oneself socially, spiritually, and financially through hard work, and that some kind of pro-Christian morality underlies his.\(^{147}\) This picture has not been challenged. A little over twenty years ago, Siobhán Kilfeather wrote in a review of modern Richardson criticism that “the feminist, Marxist, and post-structuralist readings which have dominated Richardson criticism in the 1980s have been largely uninterested in revising the biographical interpretations, and the most radical new readings often rely on some very dated historical research and class perceptions.”\(^{148}\) This should have been a strange claim to make in 1989, given the appearance of Michael McKeon’s *The Origins of the English Novel* (1987) and Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), both manifestly concerned with class and indebted to Marxist theory. Yet even these careful and influential analyses dealt with class and economic history only superficially.

Not much has changed since Kilfeather’s assessment, despite the rise of the so-called “New Economic Criticism.” Catherine Ingrassia stands out in her helpful and acute attention to money and paper credit in *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (1998), but she often repeats and endorses McKeon’s sense of class in the novel and in history (and is understandably not trying to explain how class works except as it pertains to her argument).\(^{149}\) The importance of what we...

call “class” in Pamela is essentially taken for granted among critics, yet very little attention has been paid to what we mean when we invoke the term or how it operates in the novel. As Laura J. Rosenthal argues in a recent article: “Most critical responses to Pamela have focused on the tensions that the novel so relentlessly negotiates between middle-class and aristocratic ideologies, represented in the sorting scene by Pamela’s rejection of the ‘wicked’ bundle and thus her rejection of aristocratic luxury and moral laxity.” This is undoubtedly an accurate characterization of Richardson criticism, but are we sure Pamela dramatizes class conflict at all, let alone between the middle class and aristocracy? The question I want to ask in this chapter is what we mean by “class” when we talk about Pamela, particularly “middle class,” and how money and class affect the interpretation of the novel—issues that are in surprising need of clarification.

“Class” and the Social Order

The first thing we need to know in a treatment of class is what this word means when applied to eighteenth-century people. The idea of a “middle class” in the sense that we typically use the word today would have been incomprehensible to Richardson’s readers. The term is almost never used and does not begin to take on much of a meaning until the 1750s and much later. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall start their history of family fortunes among the middle class in the 1780s for good reason, and Peter Earle’s provocatively titled The Making of the English Middle Class (1989) relies heavily on the word “making” for its validity. Earle does not claim to have found the middle class and is instead trying to demonstrate where it seems to come from later in the century.

In fact, “class” as an idea tends not to gain much purchase until rather late. Eighteenth-century writers had a frustrating habit of dividing up the social order into a wide range of hierarchies and seem not to have cared much about standardizing their language. And why not? The English government itself officially recognized only two social groups according to socioeconomic status: the peers and those

---

receiving the Poor Relief. A rather large number of families existed that did not fit into either group. This is a middle of sorts but would include everything from tenant farmers earning hundreds of pounds a year to ditch diggers and laborers in what we would call “manual labor” jobs making hardly enough to live on. As I discussed in chapter one, the differences from one commentator to another when describing the social strata could be significant. Gregory King offered a social table in 1688 that gave annual incomes for families in England and Wales according to income source and type of job. Unsurprisingly, the peers and gentry are difficult for him to manage, and he can be unhelpfully vague as to what these people do to earn their money. His table divides up society in twenty-six different groups. Richard Gough, writing about the parishioners of Myddle, separated them into “the chief inhabitants,” “the best of the parish,” the “good and substantial persons,” and “the poor people.” Daniel Defoe preferred seven categories with the briefest sense of what holds them together: “The great, who live profusely; The rich, who live plentifully; The middle sort, who live well; The working trades, who labour hard, but feel no want; The country people, farmers, &c, who fare indifferently; The poor, that fare hard; and The miserable, that really pinch and suffer want.”

As should be obvious, these are more impressionistic descriptions than serious attempts at taxonomy. The categories invented often do not include all and only what should belong, while excluding the rest, nor do they account for, say, gentlemen with little money. Things do not improve much at mid-century. Joseph Massie lists seven categories, while James Nelson gives five. Clearly the old tripartite model favored by Marxist critics and historians held little sway, and a real “middle” is hard to find in these much longer lists of ranks, degrees, and stations. Most of the categories depend on a mix of lifestyle and income.

Historians have begun to favor the term “middling sort” to refer to the group who would become the middle class. By this they tend to mean merchants. Peter Earle roughly identifies people in the

---

middle station as those who had enough money to invest and to better their economic situations, unlike the laboring sort, who lived hand-to-mouth and spent what they had.\textsuperscript{152} This picture becomes further complicated by the notion of a bifurcated middle sort, as described by H. R. French, drawing on the work of V. Brodsky-Elliot and R. A. Houston: “Members of the top occupational ‘cluster’ were very unlikely to marry or apprentice their children (willingly) to those among the bottom grouping, while ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ trades also tended towards endogamy.”\textsuperscript{153} Thus even within what we might think of an identifiable middle, distinctions were made by eighteenth-century people to whom the term might apply and whose similarity to each other and affinity with each other is presumed by labeling them together as a class.

Perhaps even more frustrating, the language of social classification did not develop in a linear fashion, one set of terms and vocabulary neatly replacing the last. They coexisted and were used by the same people, seemingly without trouble. One of the oldest and most pervasive ways of dividing up the social order, as Keith Wrightson and David Cannadine have pointed out, was simply a binary between the great and the common.\textsuperscript{154} This appears to have been how Richardson thought about class, as we shall see, and is largely the manner in which the supposed class conflict in \textit{Pamela} tends (understandably) to be read. These are a far cry from classes, however, and more useful for separating persons of quality from the rabble than for serving as a form of social identity—political, economic, or otherwise. Nothing like

\textsuperscript{152} Peter Earle, \textit{The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 5. As he says, “What lifted them out of the mechanick part of mankind was the fact that their activities not only fed and clothed them but also enabled them to accumulate on a regular basis and so improve themselves. It was, then, accumulation and improvement, as well as the employment of capital and labour, which were the essential features of the middle sort of people.”


class consciousness appears to have existed among any of these groups, however specified in various taxonomies, with the possible exception of those at the very top, which represents a tiny minority of the population.

I have scanned the first and sixth editions of Pamela without finding “class” used to refer to a group of people in the social order with a shared ideology, lifestyle, and similar economic circumstances. Richardson uses the term instead just to mean “group” of people, as in this description of Pamela: “I honour her Resolution, and should rank such a returning dear Lady in the Class of those who are most virtuous” (2:413). Richardson does use the term “middling sort,” but he also collapses it into the “genteel.” In the continuation to Pamela, Mr. B.’s mother says of Pamela: “I doubt not, if it please God I live, and she continues to be a good Girl, but she will make a Man of some middling, genteel Business very happy” (3:193). In other places he seems to place the middling sort much lower. We hear of Clarissa that, “By the poor and middling sort especially, no young lady was ever so much beloved. And with reason: She was the common patroness of all the honest poor in her neighbourhood” (273). Here the middling sort seems lumped in with the poor as a discernible unit.

Richardson does not seem to have thought in terms of class, per se, though social stratification is clearly important to him and matters in the interpretation of the novels. Richardson paid special attention to how he depicted both Pamela and Mr. B. to make sure they seemed accurate representations of the kinds of people who inhabited their stations. He tends simply to distinguish the great from the common

---

and not spend much time on particular distinctions between ranks and degrees of people, let alone
discussions of classes or sorts. If Pamela represents a class struggle, it is fought primarily between two
people in a very tiny microcosm and seems to have little resemblance to the larger world, an aspect of the
novel that critics have found fascinating and confusing. I want, therefore, to turn to Pamela and address
some of the issues related to class and money in an attempt to clarify what Richardson shows us and to
hazard some guesses as to what eighteenth-century readers (apart from literary elites like Aaron Hill or
the women of leisure in Richardson’s circle) might have made of it.

Social Stratification and Characterization in Pamela

Despite critics’ reservations about some of his arguments, Terry Eagleton’s characterization in The Rape
of Clarissa of how class operates in Richardson’s novels remains standard: “These novels are an agent,
rather than mere account, of the English bourgeoisie’s attempt to wrest a degree of ideological hegemony
from the aristocracy in the decades which follow the political settlement of 1688.” Armstrong ringingly
endorses this statement, saying that she is “indebted to Terry Eagleton’s discussion of Richardson as a
middle-class intellectual” (277). Christopher Flint also cites this line and, before going on to qualify
Eagleton’s claim, agrees that “Richardson’s stories show the imprint of a cultural revolution involving the
rise of the bourgeois class.” This assessment of the novel arises primarily from two contributing
factors: biographical readings of the novel that take for granted Richardson’s middle-class background
and that he was interested in using his novel as a vehicle for challenging the ruling order on behalf of his
class. Pamela and Mr. B. are then read through these assumptions, sometimes with strange results. If we
do not begin interpreting the characters through Richardson’s biography, we get a very different picture of
them in socioeconomic terms.

Scholarship 2 (1985): 229-44; and Tom Keymer, “Clarissa’s Death, Clarissa’s Sale, and the Text of the

Terry Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel

Christopher Flint, “Anxieties of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in Pamela: or, Virtue
Mr. B. is a fairly terrible representative of the “ruling order” and not as high up in the social hierarchy as some critics think. As Armstrong argues, “On Pamela’s power to effect a marriage that moves her from the bottom of the social ladder to the top depends the conversion of the aristocracy and upper gentry to her domestic values, which is actually the formation of a new ruling class” (131). A lot is going on in this statement, but I want to focus on “the aristocracy and upper gentry.” Mr. B. inhabits, Armstrong says, a “significantly higher station than his own servant” (113), but just how much higher? We know that he is a Member of Parliament and a Justice of the Peace in two counties. He is called “Squire.” This places him in what we might call the “squirearchy,” to distinguish his position a bit from the more general “gentry” or even more nebulous “landed elite” or “ruling sort.” James M. Rosenheim offers a helpful description of where the squires fit in the social order: “Even though they could not keep up with the age’s Dukes of Omnium, thousands of country squires embraced a mode of living and set of values that left no doubt that they were persons of quality, a cut above virtually all of the rest of society.”

Rosenheim points to a “demographic crisis” in identifying how many such people lived in England in the eighteenth century: “Titled members of the landed elite – dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, and barons among the nobility, baronets and knights among the gentry – can be counted with some accuracy, but the absence of comprehensive sources makes it impossible to identify esquires and gentlemen as precisely” (14). Rosenheim reminds us that, in 1688, Gregory King counted “160 holders of noble titles, 800 baronets, 600 knights, 3000 to 4000 esquires, and 12,000 to 20,000 gentlemen, for a total ranging from under 17,000 to over 25,000 landed aristocratic families” (16). Esquires occupied a place above “gentlemen” but below the knights and baronets and were hardly the “upper gentry.” Mr. B. lives toward the bottom of the landed elite in terms of socioeconomic standing, if not in wealth. His exact fortune is not described to us, and those reporting his wealth are not in much position to judge it. To Mr. B.’s servants, he is no doubt exceedingly rich, whatever anyone else possessed and with or without a title. Samuel L. Macey’s assertion, however, that “The male protagonists in all three of Richardson’s novels

either have or are heir to sufficient assets to place them on a financial level with the peerage” seems highly unlikely.\textsuperscript{159}

Mr. B. also makes a rather bad representative of the aristocracy, if that was his intended purpose. As Macey observes, “Although he is ostensibly a fox hunter and a rake, there is much about his characterization that simply does not ring true” (99) and elsewhere, “One begins to suspect that the man who is so worried about his reputation and keeps such precise hours is hardly the prototype of a fox-hunting rake. Squire Western who rides off to the hounds while chasing after his runaway daughter would at least be closer to type” (100). Macey uses these points to argue that Mr. B. better represents the middle class than the ruling class, a point with which Michael McKeon would be in agreement. McKeon describes Mr. B. as “quite decidedly a ‘modernized’ aristocrat: convinced that many ‘Persons of Title [have] no Honour,’ contemptuous of ‘the titled Ape,’ his brother-in-law, and indifferent to acquiring a title for himself; possessed of ‘Puritan’ ideas (his sister’s word) on the relation of birth to worth and the preferability of love to convenience in making the marriage choice; and a monied man who industriously improves his estate, accumulates capital, invests in stock, and enjoys running his household like a ‘Piece of Clockwork’.”\textsuperscript{160} McKeon concludes that “Mr. B. is, in short, as transitional a figure as Pamela is, and they are equally and symmetrically representative of that complex social phenomenon which their posterity learned to call the rise of the middle class” (366).

For Macey and McKeon, Mr. B. fits badly within his own class and seems instead to represent middle-class values. This makes him a difficult figure for Richardson to have Pamela rail against. If the purpose of the novel is to have the servant Pamela reform the libertine, he had better stand in for the degenerate upper class as a whole, or the satire will miss its mark entirely. Mr. B. would simply be dismissed as eccentric or anomalous. One can turn to Lady Davers as the representative of the ruling class, but she comes along rather late in the book and is not really reformed by anyone, though Pamela

\textsuperscript{159} Samuel L. Macey, \textit{Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors} (Victoria, B. C.: Sono Nis Press, 1983), 121.
wins her over. The conflict between Mr. B. and Pamela really cannot be about class conflict, unless they function as representatives of their classes, and Mr. B. is typical (at least to some modern readers) in some ways and not in others. One might keep in mind that Mr. B. claims repeatedly to behave differently around Pamela than around everyone else, which the servants from Mrs. Jervis to Mrs. Jewkes agree with, and that some of his behavior recalls parts of both Squire Western, in his impatient and petulance, and Squire Allworthy, in his paternalism and generosity toward the poor. What we can say with confidence is that he inhabits a place at the lower end of the landed elite, that he exerts serious influence locally in his county and a neighboring one, that he is from an old family, and that he possesses significant though undefined personal wealth.

Surprisingly little use is made of what Richardson apparently thought readers were supposed to think of Mr. B. As he tells us in his appendix, designed to help readers interpret the novel the way he intended them to:

First, then, in the Character of the Gentleman, may be seen that of a fashionable Libertine, who allow’d himself in the free Indulgence of his Passions, especially as to the Fair Sex; and found himself supported in his daring Attempts, by an affluent Fortune in Possession, a personal Bravery, as it is called, readier to give than take Offence, and an imperious Will; yet as he betimes sees his Errors, and reforms in the Bloom of Youth, an edifying Lesson may be drawn from it, for the Use of such as are born to large Fortunes; and who may be taught, by his Example, the inexpressible Difference between the Hazards and Remorse which attend a profligate Course of Life; and the Pleasures which flow from virtuous Love, and virtuous Actions. (2:393)

He goes on to a second paragraph full of praises for Mr. B. taking care of Pamela’s family, showing generosity to the poor, being kind to Pamela, and so on. Mr. B. receives very gentle handling here, and Richardson offers him as a model for real-life libertine elites, though one wonders whether they ever read the book or would have read the appendix.

Some important points to be drawn from Richardson’s characterization of Mr. B. are worth considering. For one thing, we are not entirely sure how old he is. Evidently the events of the novel take place in the flower of his youth, though I suspect modern readers assume he is in his 30s or at least late 20s. Mr. B. claims to have “grown up” with Pamela, during which time he fell for her while she was his mother’s servant: “Yet, I do assure you, upon my Honour, that she shall be safe and inviolate; and I hope
you don’t doubt me, notwithstanding any Airs she may have given herself, upon my jocular Pleasantry to her, and perhaps a little innocent Romping with her, so usual with young Folks of the two Sexes, when they have been long acquainted, and grown up together” (116). Pamela is fifteen and had been her lady’s servant three years (6, 98). If Mr. B. considers himself her contemporary, one of the “young Folks of the two Sexes” who have “grown up together,” one wonders just how young he must be. If we assume Richardson knew that MPs had to be at least twenty-one to stand for election, we have at least a lower boundary. Evidently both he and Richardson consider him quite young, whatever his age, and that this is intended to excuse some of his behavior as the rashness of youth and inexperience. Interestingly, although Richardson indicates that he experiences reform, Pamela is not given the credit in this summary (though Mr. B. himself credits her in the main text). Richardson sees Mr. B. as an exemplary character and is very positive about him. In light of this, one would be surprised to find Richardson agreeing that Mr. B. is the representative of the landed order to be struggled against.

If Mr. B. is a troublesome figure to place in the social hierarchy, particularly for ideological reasons, Pamela is far worse. Critics have identified Pamela with all three of the major classes of Marxist analysis. Her outlook and opinions tends to tempt critics into claiming bourgeois status for her, if not in socioeconomic terms then at least ideologically. She appears then as the mouthpiece of her middle-class author. A complicating feature of Pamela’s narrative, however, is her background. As her father says in a letter to her, “We are, ’tis true, very poor, and find it hard enough to live; tho’ once, as you know, it was better with us. But we would sooner live upon the Water and Clay of the Ditches I am forc’d to dig, than to live better at the Price of our dear Child’s Ruin.”161 Critics have often noted that her parents were not always laboring people, though their characterizations of her family’s decline and how this should influence our response to Pamela differ.

Pamela’s parents, as she says repeatedly, currently live as poor laborers in dismal circumstances. Rosenthal rightly calls attention in a recent essay to just how bad the life Pamela pretends not to mind

descending to could be for her and how the actual possibility of her having to make this transition is never taken seriously in the novel beyond Pamela playing a bit of dress up.\textsuperscript{162} The fact is that her parents’ circumstances are fairly grim, and Pamela gives us reason to think they have been this way for some time. Mr. B. asks about her father’s fortunes: “Well, Pamela, let me know in what Situation of Life is your Father; I know he is a poor Man; but is he as low and as honest as he was when my Mother took you?” (104). Pamela looks down before answering and “felt my Face glow like Fire” and says yes. She is proud of him for being “poor and honest” but not for being poor, and Mr. B. tries to use his wealth to his advantage, offering to raise her family up if she will be obedient. Clearly they are genuinely poor and struggling to survive. Margaret Anne Doody characterizes her family background as follows: “Richardson does not make Pamela’s parents poor cottagers by birth (this not so much perhaps from snobbery as from the practical difficult of explaining the Andrews family’s degree of literacy) but the better days which they have seen are only moderately bright. We see enough of Pamela’s situation at the beginning of the novel to be convinced that she is really a servant, despite the generous care of her former mistress in her upbringing.”\textsuperscript{163} For Doody, Pamela is firmly settled among the lower sorts by this background, and Pamela appears to agree. She repeats often enough that her family is poor and that she is from a low background. In a poem that she writes about social distinctions and the behavior of the great and common, Pamela says, “I from a State of low Degree / Was taken by our good Lady. / Some say it better had been for me, / I’d still been rustick Pamela” (112)—and so on in this vein, repeatedly emphasizing that she is from a “Station low” and “low Degree.” If one were simply to believe Pamela, one would see her as quite far down the in the social strata, and a number of critics have done precisely this.

Other critics, however, see the change in Pamela’s parents’ fortunes as evidence that she belongs more properly among the middle classes, whatever her current circumstances. Macey characterizes Mr. B. as a “remarkably bourgeois aristocrat” and says, “Pamela is bourgeois too. Although her father is reduced to being a farm labourer, he had once lived creditably and brought up a large family of which Pamela is

\textsuperscript{162} Rosenthal, “Pamela’s Work,” 252.
\textsuperscript{163} Margaret Anne Doody, \textit{A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 42.
the youngest. He had lost his money by standing bond for the debts of ‘two unhappy brothers, who are both dead.’ After trying to set up a little country school without success, he had been ‘forced to take to hard labour,’ but did so without complaint.” The effect this background has on interpreting Pamela is that “Pamela then is from a bourgeois background, but her parents are now members of the industrious and deserving poor” (101). Similarly John Richetti pushes this line of thinking further and argues, “As a privileged ‘upper servant’ who served as a sort of companion to her late mistress, as the child of literate but downwardly mobile and economically demoted parents (they had once ‘lived creditably’ and ‘brought up a great family,’ but by ‘doing beyond their abilities for two unhappy brothers, who are both dead’ (475), they lost everything, and her father is now a day laborer), Pamela is a complex figure far removed, obviously, from the back-breaking realities of domestic service in the early eighteenth century.” Richetti sees Pamela as “by education and experience a dispossessed but finely tuned member of the middle ranks.”

I have already cited McKeon’s sense that Pamela represents the soon-to-be middle class, though he does not draw on her family background as evidence, more on her ideology. He does, however, call attention to what Richetti calls the “downwardly mobile” aspect of her family and likens Pamela’s parents to Mrs. Jervis as evidence of “status inconsistency” in the novel (365). Ingrassia sees Pamela as essentially “middle class” in outlook and interests, endorsing McKeon’s characterization of Mr. B. and Pamela as representatives of the rise of the middle class and thinks Pamela may accurately be characterized as “a subject more generally concerned with commerce, money, and accounting in a manner consistent with the middle classes” (200), though she goes on to refine this image and to advance her interesting argument about Pamela the stockjobber.

Critics have not gone so far as to assume Pamela’s background makes her anything more than middle class. Admittedly, we are not told exactly how far down Pamela’s family has descended in status, but her father would presumably have lived off the income of the school and was imagining the business venture as providing a livelihood. This kind of entrepreneurial economic activity fits nicely with Earle’s distinction that the middle class was made up of those with enough money to invest it and to accumulate

---

wealth. In all likelihood, unless Pamela is grossly exaggerating her parents’ former status, Doody is probably right that they were never that well off and were instead going to be earning a respectable income from the school that would have placed them among the lower merchants.

Comparing Pamela or her parents with Mrs. Jervis misleads more than it clarifies. Mrs. Jervis was born a gentlewoman, and so the servants hold her in high regard because this. As Jonathan Barry explains, “In so far as birth determined gentility, so all the children of a gentry family had some claim to a common social status throughout their lives, although lack of wealth or the appropriate life-style might jeopardize society’s willingness to accept this claim.” This residual status, granted by birth, does not extend to those born to merchants or “the middling sort.” McKeon sees Jervis and Pamela’s parents as indicative of “status inconsistency,” but in truth their status is quite fixed and apparently comprehensible to others around them without any real difficulty. Jervis retains some of the respectability due her as a gentlewoman and is one of the most socially elevated servants in Mr. B.’s household. Pamela’s family, by contrast, is simply poor now, though as Richetti points out, they retain their education and values, for which reason they can read hundreds of pages of letters and her father can write careful, articulate prose.

When trying to place Pamela in the social hierarchy, McKeon seems to struggle to find where she belongs, seemingly to further this idea of “status inconsistency” in the novel. He explains that “Socialized to the very top of what J. Jean Hecht has called the ‘chain of emulation’ in Lady B.’s household, Pamela has learned to internalize and to project an expectation of herself for which no accessible social category exists” (371). In this instance, comparison with Mrs. Jervis perhaps makes sense. Pamela regularly enjoys being treated as someone above her station, and the position of someone like Mrs. Jervis is in fact quite high. Sophia Western’s maid Honour sneers as innkeepers, and this is probably funny to modern readers (and Honour is a silly character most of the time), but she has some justification in doing so. She is a member of the Western household and occupies a privileged position as her lady’s favorite. She sees herself as not a gentlewoman herself but part of the gentry in a tangential way, and she is right to an

extent. A social category for Pamela, in other words, manifestly does exist, among the highest servants in a great country estate. Servants of the gentry would fall into the “laboring sort” in the tripartite class model, but the upper servants would have borne little resemblance in dress, attitude, and lifestyle to ditch diggers. Even within the text of Pamela itself, the hierarchy among the servants comes across plainly. Upon leaving Mr. B.’s house, Pamela receives gifts from the upper servants but refuses those of the lower: “I had taken my Leave of my Fellow-servants over-night; and a mournful Leave it was to us all: For Men, as well as Women-servants, wept much to part with me; and, for my Part, I was overwhelm’d with Tears, and the Instances of their Esteem. They all would have made me little Presents, as Tokens of their Love; but I would not take any thing from the lower Servants, to be sure” (126). Notice that she does not include herself among these lower servants. In another instance, Mr. B. says to Pamela, “All the Servants, from the highest to the lowest, doat upon you, instead of envying you; and look upon you in so superior a Light, as speaks what you ought to be” (105). This is stratification within stratification, and though it might seem confusing to us now, I have found no evidence that it was to the characters in the novel and suspect it was not a difficulty for most eighteenth-century readers either.

McKeon rightly points out that Pamela exhibits innate gentility, and this comes across to the other servants, who hold her in regard for something other than wealth or status. This brings her as close to Mrs. Jervis as she can get without actually having Jervis’s background. When Mrs. Jewkes calls Pamela “madam” and treats her with a respect not due her station, Pamela protests: “Pray, Mrs. Jewkes, said I, don’t Madam me so; I am but a silly poor Girl, set up by the Gambol of Fortune, for a May-game; and now am to be something, and now nothing, just as that thinks fit to sport with me: And let you and I talk upon a Foot together; for I am a Servant inferior to you, and so much the more as I am turn’d out of Place.” Pamela recognizes her place and reminds Mrs. Jewkes of the servant hierarchy. Jewkes has received instructions from Mr. B., however, to treat Pamela differently and explains, “Ay, ay, says she, I understand something of the Matter; you have so great Power over my Master, that you may be soon Mistress of us all; and so I would oblige you, if I could. And I must and will call you Madam; for I am instructed to shew you all Respect, I’ll assure you” (139-40). Jewkes imagines that Pamela holds power
over Mr. B. and might hold more still in times to come and so intends to play it safe and be respectful—in addition to the fact that Mr. B. has told her to do so, and she obeys him. None of this, however, represents status inconsistency, and no one seems to struggle to understand Pamela’s social position or to struggle to find a category into which to place her. She is a favored servant who receives inappropriate attention from Mr. B. because she is pretty and plays hard to get. McKeon sees Mr. B.’s offer to have Pamela become a kept woman as “B.’s sincere attempt to invent a status dignified enough to accommodate Pamela’s elevated position at the top of the servant hierarchy. If he cannot conceive of marrying her, marriage becomes at least his model for this rather touchingly inadequate invention” (371). This seems to ignore entirely the unoriginality of keeping a mistress. Roxana and Moll Flanders both were supported for years entirely by occupying this rather old social position, and becoming elevated to the top of the servant hierarchy was probably not a common way to initiate this sort of relationship. Mr. B. is not trying to accommodate a young woman who has nowhere higher to go than revered servant. He is trying to convince her to become a kept woman, and she is well aware of this. Her parents suspect this motive from the very opening pages of the novel when Pamela explains with naïve glee how kind he has been to her and how generous. Clearly the characters get what is going on.

Richardson has quite a lot to say about how he thinks Pamela should be interpreted in his appendix. His comments are too numerous to quote at length but essentially instruct particular types of readers to learn specific lessons from her. Richardson shows himself well aware of reader response and that different groups take different meanings from a text. The downtrodden should maintain their faith in Providence; the rich and those who rise from low status should be humble because Providence has raised them up (and so they are responsible for doing good for others); the wise and pious should similarly be grateful for these gifts, rather than being prideful of them; children should learn how to treat their parents, however poor they may be, “And that the only Disgrace is to be dishonest; but none at all to be poor”; women of good households should learn to help take care of them; and everyone should learn the importance of truth. The importance of these attitudes and behaviors should come across through Pamela’s example, as she functions, like the other characters, as an example of what happens when a
person acts a certain way. Although Mr. B. reminds us throughout the novel that Pamela is one-of-a-kind and the exception, not someone to extrapolate generalizations from, she still functions as an unattainable ideal for actual people, and this would obviously be no new concept to eighteenth-century readers.

Whether Pamela belongs to the lower sorts, as she claims, or higher because of her family’s former relative prosperity, both she and Mr. B. (and later Lady Davers) make quite a lot out of the inappropriateness of getting married because of the social distance between them. This is not the only time when they bring up social distance—they bring it up quite often, particularly when Pamela is chiding Mr. B. for being too familiar with her. Their marriage, however, is probably the most shocking (and for some readers disappointing) event of the novel. Doody is likely right that Pamela makes perfect sense as a choice for Mr. B. when considering the match in terms of temperament and what each wants to get out of a relationship. Doody points out that Mr. B. would not have been happy with a woman from his own station and much prefers Pamela’s docility and eagerness to please, though Doody qualifies this by arguing that “if he likes docility, he does not wish it exaggerated, even in a wife—submissiveness has to be spiced with a dash of the spirit that he admires in his own family” (68). Carol Houlihan Flynn likewise sees Pamela as a reasonable choice for Mr. B., given his temperament and desire to control his wife and not be contradicted by an equal: “To avoid such a fate, Mr. B. solves the problem neatly by marrying his servant, who eagerly undertakes the tasks B. sets before her. For Pamela, compliance is a way of life. Pamela’s zeal for housewifery expresses Richardson’s most conservative ideas about the role of women. She is a throwback, gladly filling those humble tasks that the Georgian lady of the manor would have scorned.”

Doody and Flynn make sensible arguments for the compatibility of Mr. B. and Pamela, though of course they are entirely ignoring the chief issue that makes the match highly implausible, if not impossible. Mr. B. explains the situation clearly enough, telling Pamela, “I cannot endure the Thought of Marriage, even with a Person of equal or superior Degree to myself; and have declin’d several Proposals of that kind: How then, with the Distance between us, and in the World’s Judgment, can I think of making a relationship.

---

you my Wife?” (288). Even if Pamela’s education and values raise her above the laboring sort, she is far enough beneath Mr. B. to make marrying her seem highly undesirable.

Richardson’s answer as to whether the marriage is appropriate seems to be that Pamela deserves to rise in social status to reflect her inner value. This is a charming, if unrealistic, conclusion and one that has pleased and annoyed readers since the novel’s initial publication. This solution, however, is all that is available to Richardson. Pamela could hardly be discovered—in the manner of Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, or Roderick Random—to be a foundling and to have a dowry after all and be descended from an appropriately high station, thus explaining her gentility. This would alienate the parents to whom almost the entire book is addressed and for whom Richardson seems to have a soft spot, if his appendix is any indicator. In terms of social class, the marriage between Mr. B. and Pamela is completely inappropriate and totally outlandish. The novel itself grants this. They marry because Pamela’s virtue must be rewarded, and inexplicably she wants Mr. B. Unfortunately, as readers often note, the reward comes about halfway through the novel, and we spend hundreds of pages watching Pamela win over the gentry in what seems to be Richardson’s attempt to defend the union to skeptical readers, whose responses no doubt echo those of Lady Davers and others.

Pamela’s assimilation into the gentry has been interpreted as an indication of eighteenth-century upward mobility and the permeability of the landed elite. Rosenthal says enthusiastically, “Without a doubt, Pamela’s ultimate transition from servant to wife rather than mistress suggests the new forms of upward mobility available in the eighteenth century, and Pamela herself stands out as a new kind of heroine” (246). Citing Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone’s An Open Elite?, Armstrong says, “The gentry was permeable, a class one could enter through marriage, and its features as a group, like those of the manor house, could be remodeled to the specifications of the middle-class family” (112). Armstrong draws these assertions, however, from a section on “perceptions” about upward mobility held by eighteenth-century writers, intended to set up Stone’s conclusion, particularly the section “The Myth of Upward Social Mobility.” In that section, Stone tells us, “Given the very small numbers of business men who bought seats, and the large proportion of them who were merely transients who came and went in a
single lifetime or at most two, the idea that the fundamental cause of English political stability has been the perennial openness of its landed elite to penetration by large numbers of newly enriched bourgeoisie is clearly no more than a hoary myth, which should now be laid reverently to rest. The traditional concept of an open elite—open to large-scale infiltration by merchant wealth—is dead” (403). This runs counter to the “extremely fluid socioeconomic group” Armstrong describes (277), and though we might see Pamela’s marriage, as Rosenthal does, indicating a way into the gentry, it was clearly not a typical one. Those of the landed elite tended, on the whole, to hold on to their estates and persist over time.

That upward social mobility into the gentry was highly uncommon should not really surprise anyone who has read Pamela. Just about everyone in the novel, including Pamela herself, finds her marriage to Mr. B. preposterous. As Pamela says to Mr. B.: “But, Oh! what Proposals can one in your high Station have to make to one in my low one! I know what belongs to your Degree too well, to imagine, that any thing can be expected but sad Temptations, and utter Distress, if you come down; and you know not, Sir, when I am made desperate, what the wretched Pamela dares to do!” (182). The plausibility of the marriage as a model for others to follow after reading the book is not defended by Richardson, which is telling because Pamela is at base exemplary fiction full of models to imitate. In fact, he describes the marriage in the appendix as a miraculous act of Providence. We might recall Providence rescuing Robinson Crusoe from his island after nearly three decades and consider these events about as likely. The point in both cases seems, instead, to point out how deserving the protagonist is in order to receive such rewards, which are not impossible but hardly everyday occurrences.

Pamela’s assimilation has also been read as Richardson abandoning his challenge to the upper classes by having his reforming, middle-class mouthpiece join them, adopt their behaviors, and lose her characteristic fieriness and independence. Flint sees the novel as espousing in the character of Pamela the ability to assert one’s individuality but also the power of the social hierarchy to assimilate her. He argues that “The novel seems to move ideologically in at least two incompatible directions” and that Pamela’s “is a story in which the system of status seems emphatically subverted but which, nonetheless, strengthens the very system it attacks” (511). McKeon deftly points out the necessity of Pamela’s assimilation: “if
Pamela’s reward for virtue is to have meaning, the moral authority of the social order by which it is conferred must remain intact despite the evidence of social injustice manifest in the very need for her reward” (364). Richardson, we should remember, did not see Pamela’s marriage as her assimilation into the upper classes, as surrendering the class struggle to the ruling elites, or as her loss of self. He quite clearly thought of it as her reward for being virtuous. Pamela claims not to care for wealth and genuinely to love Mr. B. for reasons even she cannot understand. If this is the reward she wants, her good behavior allows her to have it in a manner similar to Santa Claus’s rewarding of the deserving at Christmas time. In the end, Pamela makes for a very weak challenge to the landed elites.

Richardson does not seem to conceive of Pamela’s world in terms of class, but he does use the language of stations, ranks, and degrees to describe the stratification in contemporary English society. The argument between Mr. B. and his sister about marrying below oneself illustrates how “class” distinctions are framed in the novel. Since the language itself that Lady Davers and Mr. B. use matters at least as much as the points they make, much of the scene is quoted here and worth close attention. Lady Davers has found out that Mr. B. and Pamela actually are married and upbraids her brother in this scene for disgracing himself. She begins, “Suppose, said she, I had marry’d my Father’s Groom! what would you have said to that?” He asks, “Does your Pride let you see no Difference in the Case you put? None at all, said she. Where can the Difference be between a Beggar’s Son marry’d by a Lady; or a Beggar’s Daughter made a Gentleman’s Wife?,” to which he responds, “The Difference is, a Man ennobles the Woman he takes, be she who she will; and adopts her into his own Rank, be it what it will: But a Woman, tho’ ever so nobly born, debases herself by a mean Marriage, and descends from her own Rank, to his she stoops to” (2:284). He illustrates his point by asking, “When the noble Family of Stuart ally’d itself into the low Family of Hyde, (comparatively low, I mean) did any body scruple to call the Lady Royal Highness, and Duchess of York? And did any body think her Daughters, the late Queen Mary and Queen Anne, less Royal for that? When the broken-fortun’d Peer goes into the City to marry a rich Tradesman’s Daughter, be he Duke or Earl, does not his Consort immediately become ennobled by his Choice? and who scruples to call her Lady Duchess, or Countess?” (2:284-5). The key difference for Mr. B. is that
men serve as heads of the household and so occupy a position above their wives. This causes an unfixable problem for women trying to marry below themselves but for men. As he explains, “when a Duke marries a private Person, is he not still her Head, by virtue of being her Husband? But, when a Lady descends to marry a Groom, is not that Groom her Head, as her Husband? And does not that Difference strike you? For what Lady of Quality ought to respect another, who has made so sordid a Choice, and set a Groom above her?” (2:285).

As this scene demonstrates, Richardson makes for a very poor protofeminist. Mr. B.’s sense of how marriage affects social standing differently for the two sexes reminds us that he has no intention of seeing Pamela as an equal. Marriage gives him the power over Pamela he has desired over the course of the whole novel, and Richardson spends a remarkable amount of time showing us Pamela obeying him, being grateful to him, and behaving with obsequious deference that pleases him to no end. We should not be surprised, then, to find his theory fall in line with his practice. Richardson does not punish Mr. B. for his sexism or for attempting (and succeeding) to assimilate Pamela into a subaltern, unequal position through marriage. Pamela and a legion of onlookers approve of their marriage and the relationship between the two by the end of the novel. Lady Davers objects initially, sniping, “I’d have you, said she, publish your fine Reasons to the World, and they will be sweet Encouragements to all the young Gentlemen that read them, to cast themselves away on the Servant-wenches in their Families” (2:285-6). Parson Oliver says something similar about Mr. B. and Pamela’s relationship at the outset of Shamela when he complains that all Pamela teaches serving maids to do is to seduce their masters and either marry or be debauched by them. Expressing a sentiment Lady Davers would no doubt agree with, Parson Oliver concludes of these two outcomes, “Neither of which, I apprehend, my good Friend, we desire should be the Case of our Sons.” Mr. B. responds, “if any young Gentleman stays till he finds such a Person as my Pamela; so inrich’d with the Beauties of Person and Mind, so well accomplish’d, and so fitted to adorn the Degree she is raised to, he will stand as easily acquitted, as I shall be to all the World that sees her” (2:286). Parson Oliver would probably not have been convinced, but Lady Davers is won over

eventually and gives up this way of thinking. This is strange, given that she objects not to Mr. B.
marrying Pamela in particular but to marrying below himself, and he responds not with Pamela’s specific
virtues but with a general theory of how marriage relates to social status differently for men and women.
Making Lady Davers come around to Pamela and approve of the marriage later in the novel also means
forcing her to subscribe to Mr. B.’s line of argument and to give up a position she seemed fairly
convinced of. This change of heart seems more a convenient plot choice than the faithful representation of
believable psychology.

_Pamela_ does not in truth reflect a world susceptible to class analysis. Eighteenth-century readers
no doubt saw social conflict between persons of different levels in society but not in the terms modern
critics use. Rather than “class,” Richardson has Mr. B. talk of “rank” and “degree” interchangeably. We
get no indication from Lady Davers that he has misused these terms or misunderstood them. No one
objects to the imprecision with which he uses them or worries that a distinction should be observed
between “rank” and “degree” as types of categorization. They are either in agreement with how he
employs this language, or they simply do not care about precise terminology for discussing social
stratification in the manner of economic historians. This is a very important point. One does not replace
the language of class with that of sorts when discussing _Pamela_ and call it good. Richardson appears not
to have worked from a theory of tripartite socioeconomic categorization but rather to have relied on the
great versus common method of structuring society while observing numerous degrees of elevation in the
social hierarchy. We need to resist the urge to transform Richardson into a cultural critic speaking on
behalf of an emerging middle class, challenging the ruling elite, and offering a protofeminist critique of
patriarchal authority in economic terms. Unless we impose ahistorically an understanding of class
Richardson does not use in _Pamela_, the text will not bear out these critical commonplaces.
Money, Particularity, and Realism

Daniel Defoe is famous for a certain attention to particularity in describing physical items, which has long been associated with a turn toward increased realism in fiction. He is thought of as a great lister, as when Robinson Crusoe takes stock of what he has salvaged from the wreckage of his ship or when Roxana and her husband-to-be show each other their accumulated wealth in glorious detail. Richardson has seemed, by contrast, to have advanced psychological realism but to have been much less concerned than Defoe with accounting, physical details, or such grubby things as, say, money.

In fact Richardson appears to have cared very much about exactly these sorts of details and taken care to get them right and keep them consistent. In the course of Pamela’s many hundreds of pages and across two volumes, we get over fifty sums of money in the first edition, and we are told about how many sheets of paper Pamela gets from Mr. Longman, how many bottles of ink, and how much sealing wax. Sums and paper do not exhaust the things Richardson quantified and kept track of in the course of writing Pamela, but they do illustrate the trouble Richardson evidently went to in order to make his figures add up, to avoid contradicting himself within the text, and to heighten a sense of realism. He makes quite clear in the preface to Pamela that realism matters to his purpose of inculcating values to the young by means of exemplary characters and didactic storytelling. As he explains, his purpose is “to effect all these good Ends, in so probable, so natural, so lively a manner, as shall engage the Passions of every sensible Reader, and strongly interest them in the edifying Story” (v). Probability and naturalness draw readers in and make them invest in the characters and what happens to them. Didactic fiction essentially requires that readers have this experience to get the intended message, and exemplary characters need some resemblance to actual people in a world that looks something like what one expects in order to be effective. Pamela and Mr. B. are highly improbable people in a number of ways, and Richardson appears to have tried to counter some of their unbelievably with carefully handling the details of the world they inhabit. Pamela, we are told often enough, is atypical and more symbolic than common and relatable. She represents a standard for regular people to live up to, which has made her a joy to some readers and obnoxious to others. We are told, however, a great many things to convince us that she is real, that the
events could have happened, and that they took place in believable ways. For example, Pamela tells her parents, “I had hardly time to transcribe these Letters, tho’ writing so much, I write pretty fast” (193), seemingly anticipating a reader asking how she could copy such long letters in such a short span of time. Richardson imagines skeptical readers and tries to satisfy them where he can. Apart from helping us understand just how wealthy Mr. B. is or what the characters’ attitudes towards money might be, the sums specified contribute to a world drawn in detail. Though we can hardly afford to suppose all readers responded the same way to reading *Pamela* the first time, certainly some would have taken these carefully handled particulars as evidence of its authenticity.

Pamela’s accounting for how she acquires sheets of paper and writing instruments demonstrates this kind of control and Richardson’s habit of calling attention to details to satisfy potentially skeptical readers. *Pamela* is, after all, supposedly produced from actual letters and a long journal written by a young girl to whom these experiences happened (though the editor admits to having tampered with the raw, primary material in some undefined way in the service of illustrating a moral point). If so, she wrote quite a lot and required paper, pens, ink, and wax to write, seal, and send the letters, of which there are many. The journal itself runs to several hundred pages, and even written in a very small hand would have necessitated a great deal of paper and ink, which were hardly cheap to acquire. A skeptical reader might ask just how Pamela, constantly complaining of having little to no cash money, could afford to purchase these things, let alone pay the postage to send so many letters.

Richardson anticipates these possible objections and provides simple answers for them (if perhaps overly convenient ones). Mr. B.’s footman, John, carries letters for Pamela to her parents, which saves her having to pay the post (1:4). Later, Mr. Williams also transports letters for her (1:172). Pamela receives the sheets of paper and the rest from Mr. Longman, Mr. B.’s steward, and for no clear reason tells her parents (or us as the implied readers) how much she takes. The first time, she tells us, “I had lost my Pen some how; and my Paper being wrote out, I stepp’d to Mr. Longman’s our Steward’s Office, to beg him to give me a Pen or two, and a Sheet or two of Paper. He said, Aye, that I will, my sweet Maiden! And gave me three Pens, some Wafers, a Stick of Wax, and twelve Sheets of Paper” (1:57). In this instance,
quantification serves the purpose of illustrating just how fond Mr. Longman is of Pamela and how she has begun to undercut Mr. B.’s authority with his servants. Mr. B. complains about Pamela spending too much time writing and not enough time on her work, while his steward provides her with several times as many pens and sheets of paper as she had even requested.

Once aware of this source, Pamela makes serious use of it. While trapped at the Lincolnshire estate, Pamela complains that she has nothing to do to keep her entertained except to write, though she worries that Mrs. Jewkes has instructions to prevent her from writing letters and to seize and read them if she tried to send one. She worries that Jewkes would not have provided paper for her and is pleased that she had already gotten some from Mr. Longman. Reflecting on her good fortune and his generosity, she explains, “This was lucky; for I should have had none else, but at pleasure of my rough-natur’d Governess, as I may call her; but now I can write to ease my Mind, tho’ I can’t send it to you; and write what I please, for she knows not how well I am provided. For good Mr. Longman gave me above forty Sheets of Paper, and a dozen Pens, and a little Phial of Ink; which last I wrapt in Paper, and put in my Pocket; and some Wax and Wafers” (1:127). One wonders where she kept all this and how it escaped the notice of Mr. B.’s watchful servant Jewkes. This much paper would be difficult to conceal, as would a dozen pens. The quantities must be large, however, since the journal she writes during her time in Lincolnshire necessitates many pages and a sufficient supply of pens and ink. If Pamela hopes to send any letters, she will require her own sealing wax, as Mrs. Jewkes can hardly be expected to share these with her. In fact, as she tells Pamela herself, “I am told you are a great Writer, and it is in my Instructions to see all you write; so, look you here, said she, I will let you have a Pen and Ink, and two Sheets of Paper” (1:144). By comparison with Mr. Longman, this is miserly indeed. Richardson uses quantities here to draw a contrast between Pamela’s treatment by the friendly servants in Bedfordshire and her “rough-natur’d Governess.”

Mrs. Jewkes seems to think that giving Pamela only one pen and two sheets of paper makes her job of observing what Pamela writes easier to do. She does not call Pamela a “great” writer as a compliment. This simply means that Pamela spends much of her time writing and produces quite a lot of
it, which no doubt Mrs. Jewkes does not want to have to read. Limiting Pamela’s resources makes her job easier. Unfortunately for her, Pamela has no intention of relying on Mrs. Jewkes’s generosity, explaining, “I resolv’d to hide a Pen of my own here, and another there, for fear I should come to be deny’d, and a little of my Ink in a broken China Cup, and a little in another Cup; and a Sheet of Paper here-and-there among my Linen, with a little Wax and a few Wafers in several Places, lest I should be search’d” (1:144).

Pamela has no plans to help Mrs. Jewkes account for all her supplies or observe everything she writes. Writing is a source of power for her, helping her to undermine and resist Mr. B.’s socioeconomic power. Pens, paper, and ink, then, are her tools of escape, and she hides these in stores around what she sees as her prison.

Pamela’s ability to write offers her not only an imaginative egress from Lincolnshire but a way of resisting Mr. B. It allows her to tell the story of what is being done to her and how she experiences it (to herself and others) but also functions as a device, later in the narrative, to reform Mr. B. and his sister, Lady Davers. As a result of the power that writing affords Pamela, controlling her supplies takes on great significance. Much of her energy in Lincolnshire is spent disguising what she is writing and hiding pens and paper. She asks Mrs. Jewkes “for more Paper, and she gave me a little Bottle of Ink, eight Sheets of Paper, which she said was all her Store, (for now she would get me to write for her to our Master, if she had Occasion) and six Pens, with a Piece of Sealingwax. This looks mighty well!” (1:196). This, combined with what Mr. Longman gave her, allows her to continue her secret journal, which requires more paper and ink than the contents alone would suggest. Pamela writes meaningless trifles in Mrs. Jewkes’s presence to give her a false sense that she spends her time scribbling nonsense not worth policing. She imagines that, if Mrs. Jewkes sees her writing frequently enough and finds the subjects insignificant enough, she will not suspect Pamela of writing anything important when she is actually adding to her journal in her room.

Pamela learns that crossing Mrs. Jewkes leads to restrictions on her freedom to write and her access to supplies. As she explains, “I must add, that now this Woman sees me pick up so fast, she uses me worse, and has abridg’d me of Paper all but one Sheet, which I am to shew her written or unwritten on
Demand, and has reduc’d me to one Pen; yet my hidden Stores stand me in stead” (1:238). Mrs. Jewkes thinks limiting Pamela’s resources will help her keep track of what Pamela writes, though she does not know about the hidden pens and paper. Pamela can easily show her the sheet Mrs. Jewkes has given her whenever asked without revealing the others Jewkes does not know about. Mr. B., having instructed Mrs. Jewkes to read what Pamela writes, finds the number of letters and the length of her journal surprising. He asks, “Let me know then, where you have found Supplies of Pen, Ink, and Paper; when Mrs. Jewkes was so vigilant, and gave you but two Sheets at a Time? ---Tell me Truth” (2:19). Mr. B. and Mrs. Jewkes did not anticipate that Mr. Longman would have supplied her so well or that she would think to hide such stores. The fact that she succeeds in doing so may seem a bit implausible, though Mrs. Jewkes does claim to find the ink in the broken cup. Quantification in this case demonstrates the frustration of Mr. B. and Mrs. Jewkes’s attempts to censor and restrict Pamela, whose support from other of Mr. B.’s servants enables her to maintain her resistance to their control. Pamela accounts for the pages, pens, and ink to illustrate how generous particular servants are toward her or how well they like her and also how loyal they are to Mr. B. She also provides an explanation for how she obtained the supplies to create the letters and journal pages from which Pamela has been constructed.

Richardson would have run into a fairly obvious awkwardness had he not gone to the trouble of specifying how much paper Pamela receives and when: a skeptical reader would have been tempted to ask just how the girl kept hostage in Lincolnshire under the watchful eye of Mrs. Jewkes managed to generate so much writing, which would require noticeable time, labor, and fairly expensive supplies. Paper was hardly free in the early eighteenth century, and Pamela would have had a very hard time procuring it for herself. As we will see, she would have had no way of paying for the amount of paper or her writing supplies in the quantities necessary to produce the relevant sections of Pamela on her own.

Richardson tracks not only paper and pens but also particular sums of money. As these have hardly ever been the subject of critical comment, they deserve some fairly detailed coverage. To that end, the rest of this section surveys these sums, focusing on where they appear, how they change the interpretation of particular passages, and what they tell us about value, class, and realism. The sums
contribute to a sense of Richardson’s attention to detail and would have helped eighteenth-century readers judge how to place some of the characters in the social order in financial terms but would also have helped some readers assess how reliably the characters estimate value. What counts as “rich” or “poor” differed from one person to another then as now, but the sums of money afford readers a means to measure wealth more objectively than these descriptive terms would on their own.

Money becomes an issue very early on in *Pamela*. When Mr. B. takes Pamela into his service after his mother’s death, he offers her “with his own Hand Four golden Guineas, besides lesser Money,” which she sends to her parents. As she explains, “I send you these four Guineas for your Comfort; for God will not let me want: And so you may pay some old Debt with Part; and keep the other Part to comfort you both.” A modern reader would no doubt pass over this sum and the commentary about it without making much of it, as hundreds of years of inflation have radically changed the purchasing power of twenty-one shillings. How much then has Pamela been given?

She gives us some hints as to the value of four guineas. She tells her parents, “I send it by John our Footman, who goes your way; but he does not know what he carries; because I seal it up in one of the little Pill-boxes which my Lady had, wrapt close in Paper, that it mayn’t chink; and be sure don’t open it before him” (1:3-4). The instruction not to open the money in front of Mr. B.’s footman taken together with Pamela’s suggestion that her parents might pay old debts with the money and still have some left over to improve their lot somehow ought to convey some sense that the sum is not as insignificant as it likely sounds. In modern buying-power, a conservative estimate puts the sum’s value between £840 and £1,260 in a world in which laboring people were paid not only with cash wages but also in trade, making the relative purchasing-power of money higher than it would be today.

Another way of understanding the value of four guineas in context is to compare it with contemporary incomes. Joseph Massie’s social table helps make such a comparison possible. Although Massie’s table appears two decades after the publication of *Pamela* and even longer after the events

---

168 See chapter one for income levels extrapolated from Massie’s *A Computation of the Money that Hath Been Exorbitantly Raised upon the People of Great Britain by the Sugar Planters, from January 1759 to January 1760* (London, 1760).
supposedly take place, this is a period of negligible inflation, making Massie useful for approximations. Gregory King’s figures referring to the socioeconomic circumstances of England and Wales in 1688 probably come too early to be preferred over Massie’s when discussing the 1730s-40s. Massie estimated that 638,800 families (41.5% of the total population) averaged less than £25 per annum, with 192,300 making £9 or less. Four guineas or £4.2 given to someone who dug ditches for a living for a local farmer would have made a significant impact on his personal finances. The sum amounts to nearly a fifth of the average yearly wages for all families and about half of what those in Goodman Andrews’s socioeconomic level were making. No wonder Pamela warns her father not to open the gift in front of John or why she imagines he could pay debts with it and still keep some left over.

Pamela and her parents refer twice more to these guineas and further indicate their sense of their value. Worried that Mr. B. intends to ruin his daughter by seducing her and that his monetary gift signifies a kind of payment for doing so, Goodman Andrews write to Pamela, “But I am thinking about those same four Guineas: I think you should give them back again to your Master; and yet I have broke them. Alas! I have only three left; but I will borrow it if I can, Part upon my Wages, and Part of Mrs. Mumford, and send it to you, that you may return it, against John comes next, if he comes again, before you” (1:40). One guinea amounts to so much money that Andrews expects to have to borrow against his wages from a friend to pay it back. This passage should make much more sense in light of the income comparisons above. One guinea likely equals a significant portion of Andrews’s annual wages, perhaps as much as he earns in two months. In all probability Andrews receives compensation in other forms than just cash money (such as housing, food, or goods), making a guinea hard to come by, let alone four. Upon reading that her father intended to repay this money, Pamela replies, “Don’t trouble yourself, now I think of it, about the Four Guineas, nor borrow to make them up; for they were given me, with some Silver, as I told you, as a Perquisite, being what my Lady had about her when she dy’d; and, as I hope for no other Wages, I am so vain as to think I have deserv’d them in the fourteen Months, since my Lady’s Death” (1:52). Earning four guineas or the equivalent of about £1,000 today for working fourteen months no doubt seems truly bleak to modern readers, but of course Pamela paid no rent and had her meals and
expenses provided for by her employer. Essentially all of this money was what we might call “spending money.” The value of her total compensation is impossible to estimate, as Pamela herself acknowledges when she says, “she, good Soul! overpaid me before in Learning and other Kindnesses,” which is no doubt entirely true. Pamela’s confidence in asserting to her father that she deserves this money abandons her later, and she asks Mrs. Jervis whether she really has earned it and can keep it (1:99-100). That four guineas represent a serious chunk of money to Pamela and her family in the cash economy of the 1730s should appear obvious in context. No doubt eighteenth-century readers would have understood its value to those of Goodman Andrews’s station without having to be told, and Pamela and her father’s reactions to the money should have been sufficient to make it clear to anyone who would otherwise have been unsure. The number of people able to afford to purchase the first edition of Pamela who kept close acquaintance with ditch diggers was probably low, but Richardson provides not only the specific figures that allow eighteenth-century readers to make their own judgments about value but the impressions of his characters to help guide interpretation.

The four guineas also show us how carefully Richardson handled details in Pamela. The sum appears for the first time at the very beginning of the book and resurfaces on pages 40, 52, and 99. Richardson brings this figure back repeatedly over the course of 100 pages, and we learn something new about Pamela, her family, and Mr. B.’s possible intentions each time. The sum clearly functions as a symbol of Mr. B.’s hope to use his wealth to buy Pamela’s virtue (and more), but Richardson could easily have referred to it as “the money” or “the pieces of gold,” rather than continually specifying the amount and having to remember what it was. Similarly, Mr. B. tells Pamela that she will receive an allowance from him of £200 annually to spend however she wishes on page 206 of the second volume. Almost 150 pages later, Mr. B. instructs Mr. Longman to pay Pamela the first quarterly installment of £50 and explains to him how the arrangement should work, going back over details we have not heard for quite a long time (2:344). This is just one more thing for Richardson to have to keep straight over a long narrative, and the variety of such details and his ability to remember and reuse them without contradicting himself demonstrates the time and trouble he took composing and revising Pamela. For further evidence
of this, one need only look at the section in which Pamela summarizes the contents of each of the letters she has written by the outset of volume two (2:10-11). Whatever we might think of Richardson as an artist, he certainly seems to have built *Pamela* on a plan that was clear in his own mind, and he possessed an impressive mastery of the details of the world he was creating.

Pamela’s sense of the value of money helps to make her seem more believable to readers (if they can interpret the sums). She reacts appropriately for a person of her station and financial status. We saw this with regard to Mr. B.’s gift of four guineas, but Richardson provides other moments to demonstrate Pamela’s sense of what money is worth. She writes to her parents that Mr. B. “has this Moment sent me five Guineas by Mrs. Jervis, as a Present for my Pocket; so I shall be very rich; for as she brought them, I thought I might take them” (1:112). Suddenly flush with cash, Pamela reflects, “John is very good, and very honest, God reward him! I’d give him a Guinea, now I’m so rich, if I thought he’d take it. I hear nothing of my Lady’s Cloaths, and those my Master gave me: For I told Mrs. Jervis, I would not take them; but I fansy, by a Word or two that was dropt, they will be sent after me. Dear Sirs! what a rich Pamela you’ll have, if they should!” (1:112). Clearly she likes money and would be happy to have more of it. She says that, if she gets to keep the clothes, she will sell them rather than wear them. The idea of being “rich” bothers her not at all, however much we might think of Pamela as taking wealthy people to task for how spoiled and badly behaved they become as a result of their wealth. She is obviously amenable to doling out money to those she considers deserving—a role she actually comes to inhabit after she marries Mr. B. One guinea represents no small amount of money, especially to Pamela at this point in her story as she heads off to Lincolnshire. If we consider a guinea’s value to equal between £210 and £315 today, we see how generous Pamela feels at this moment and that her feelings of goodwill and impulsiveness can trump her frugality or good sense pretty easily if the mood takes her. She seems to know the value of money but will part with it so readily as to make one wonder whether she really appreciates it.

Pamela’s openhandedness with money causes her problems in Lincolnshire. Aware that Pamela has cash of her own and that the money might be used to help her escape, Mrs. Jewkes plays a trick on
her. Pamela complains that Mrs. Jewkes tells her, “I have a Bill I cannot change till to-morrow; and a Tradesman wants his Money most sadly; and I don’t love to turn poor Tradesfolks away without their Money: Have you any about you? How much will do, said I? I have a little! Oh! said she, I want eight Pounds. Alack, said I, I have but between five and six. Lend me that, said she, till to-morrow. I did so; and she went down Stairs: And when she came up, she laugh’d” (1:172). Mrs. Jewkes explains that she had no need of Pamela’s money and that she simply wanted to get it away from her so that she could not bribe the other servants or use it to escape. Pamela feels justly foolish, and readers ought to notice how surprisingly credulous Pamela has been in this scene. She has no real affection for Mrs. Jewkes or any good reason to trust her. She knows how hard money is to come by and has a reasonable sense of the value of what she has been able to accumulate. She considers it necessary to getting away from the Lincolnshire estate, which she repeatedly says she wants to do. Yet, despite all of these seemingly strong reasons not to hand over her money to Mrs. Jewkes, she does so anyway. This is appallingly reckless behavior, particularly from a character considered shrewd in how she handles other people. Richardson gives us plenty of reason here to question Pamela’s judgment and her capacity for self-preservation. This scene comes two pages after Pamela had offered to give all her money to Mr. Williams to have him carry letters for her and seems to punctuate and emphasize how worrisomely naïve Pamela can be in how she trusts people and how quickly she hands others all the money she has accumulated.

One of the most famous scenes in the novel takes place when Mr. B. presents Pamela with a proposal to keep her as a mistress, which takes the form of enumerated articles and involves some very significant sums of money. Mr. B. offers Pamela a variety of presents apart from just cash, but the sums deserve some special attention, as they are difficult to interpret on their own. Mr. B. tells Pamela in his proposal, “I will directly make you a Present of 500 Guineas, for your own Use, which you may dispose of to any Purpose you please: And will give it absolutely into the Hands of any Person you shall appoint to receive it; and expect no Favour in Return, till you are satisfy’d in the Possession of it” (1:252-3). In addition to this lump-sum cash gift, Mr. B. “will likewise directly make over to you a Purchase I lately made in Kent, which brings in 250 l. per Annum, clear of all Deductions. This shall be made over to you
in full Property for your Life, and for the Lives of any Children, to Perpetuity, that you may happen to have: And your Father shall be immediately put into Possession of it, in Trust for these Purposes” (1:253). Mr. B. guarantees this sum as the income of the estate and adds that, if it should produce anything less than £250, he will make up the deficiency himself. As for Pamela’s father, Mr. B. promises to “allow him 50 l. per Annum besides, for his Life, and that of your Mother, for his Care and Management of this your Estate” (1:254).

As critics well know, Pamela turns down all these offers, but we should pause for a moment to consider how receiving this money would change her life and that of her parents. No doubt eighteenth-century readers would have found these articles very interesting and seen, as we have great trouble seeing now, the sharp contrast Richardson presents between living richly and living morally. Pamela says repeatedly before this that she would rather return to her parents’ poverty and perform hard, manual labor than give up her virtue and goodness. She rejects the idea of becoming wealthy at the expense of her good, Christian soul. We do know, however, that she likes money and would appreciate being rich. To get a sense of how much she gives up here, we can consider the sums in context. According to Massie, only about 53,100 families (3.45% of the total population) lived on household incomes greater than £200. We can extrapolate from his figures that about 35,900 families (2.33%) had between £200-399 a year. An annual income of £250 would place Pamela among the top 3% of families in England and Wales. In modern buying-power, this sum might come to between £50,000 and £75,000 after all expenses. No doubt those of us in English departments can appreciate the attractiveness of receiving £50,000 to £75,000 a year in cash in a world of no income tax from a guaranteed source not only for the remainder of our lives but for our children, as well.

The importance of being able to leave the estate to heirs cannot be overstated. The ability to hunt, even on one’s own land, and to hold public offices such as magistrate depended on one’s owning land that produced a sufficient amount of money. Mr. B. turning this land over to Pamela launches her up from the laboring sort, right past the merchants, the lower clergy, the professionals, and much of the elite military into the lower gentry. Whatever family she ends up having will be able to live off the income of the
estate, and it will remain in her family forever. This is hardly a short-term or even lifetime gift from Mr. B. This would fundamentally change Pamela’s life and her family’s, as Mr. B. says, in perpetuity. Add to this the £500 cash gift Mr. B. promises to give her immediately, which can be estimated at between £100,000 and £150,000 today, and the mind boggles at Pamela’s refusal. Feminist critics have seen her turning Mr. B. down with great approval, and no doubt those eighteenth-century readers inclined to see Pamela defend her goodness no matter the cost would, too. Her reaction, however, would appear to take us out of the believable world of probable cause and effect and into a moral fantasy. Certainly a servant girl in the eighteenth century with parents burdened with debt and hard labor could refuse these life-changing, astonishing improvements to her socioeconomic and financial circumstances—but it seems unlikely. Not for nothing does Richardson tell us over and over again that Pamela is unique. She represents a standard to strive after, rather than the usual behavior of actual people.

The income Mr. B. offers Pamela for her father would significantly change his lifestyle, as well. About 240,000 families (15.59%) lived on £50 or more, and only 89,400 made between £50 and £75 a year. Massie’s figures make £50 a tricky income to evaluate, however, because the average income for the entire population came to £46, which is no great step down from £50. About 660,600 families (42.91%) earned between £25 to £49, pulling the national average income up from 1688. To say that living on £50 a year would place Goodman Andrews above all but 15.59% of the population is likely an overstatement, but we can confidently situate him securely above the national average. As incomes increase above £50 per annum, the number of families decreases dramatically in Massie’s table. In all likelihood, this new income would multiply his current wages by four to five times and would certainly elevate him from the laboring sort into a station among the lower merchants. His position as manager of Pamela’s estate in Kent would also contribute to his increased social standing, and he would doubtless live creditably again. He would have a claim to respectability within the English social order all his own, even without being trustee of his daughter’s estate or the father of a gentlewoman. For all that Pamela cares about her father and mother and wishes their circumstances were better, she turns Mr. B. down flat, arguing that “you know not the poor Man, and the poor Woman, my ever dear Father and Mother, if you
think that they would not much rather chuse to starve in a Ditch, or rot in a noisome Dunghil, than accept of the Fortune of a Monarch, upon such wicked Terms” (1:253-4). These are very good people indeed, though probably not very typical ones. This is not to say that Pamela’s claim here misrepresents her parents or that turning down Mr. B.’s proposals would be unlike them. Her parents lost their former status and live in poverty because they assumed someone else’s debts out of their boundless goodness. Finding their like outside the novel, however, would have been decidedly difficult.

Mr. B. relies on his wealth for his power, much more than his social position. Being a squire is obviously no bad thing, but in the end Mr. B. manipulates people using money. In the above examples, he tries to persuade Pamela by offering to change her financial circumstances. Money does not convince her to violate her ethical code, though he is able to detain her in Lincolnshire at one of his estates in the custody of his servants. Pamela is not the only person Mr. B. affects with his monetary power. Mr. Williams lives on an income provided by Mr. B., which turns out to be a problem for him when Mr. B. becomes suspicious that Williams wants to marry Pamela to prevent him from getting to her. Mr. B. responds by claiming that Mr. Williams owes him money by pretending that Williams’s wages for the past three years were actually borrowed sums. As Pamela explains, “My Master, it seems, will have his Money from him. This is very hard; for it is three fifty Pounds, he gave him, as he thought, as a Salary for three Years that he has been with him. But there was no Agreement between them; and he absolutely depended on my Master’s Favour” (1:264). Mr. B. has Mr. Williams thrown into gaol over the money, and Williams has no hope of paying it back or raising that much money. If we estimate its present-day buying power at between £30,000 and £45,000, the difficulty of producing this much cash at all, let alone on short notice, becomes apparent. Money allows Mr. B. to have Mr. Williams imprisoned, and there is nothing he can do about it.

Although we are not told the value of Mr. B.’s estate or how much money he has at his disposal, Richardson does give him opportunities to suggest the scope of his wealth and to express his attitudes towards money. We learn a bit about Mr. B.’s inheritance when he talks about giving money to his sister. He says, “I am sure I have been a kind Brother to her; and gave her to the Value of 3000 l. more than her
Share came to by my Father’s Will, when I enter’d upon my Estate” (2:60). This is little help but does at least give us a faint sense of scale. Whatever Lady Davers received, Mr. B. augmented it by £3,000. He thinks she should feel grateful to him for this money, which suggests it is more than a trifle to both of them. No doubt this increased her attractiveness in the eyes of Lord Davers. Richardson reuses not only this sum but in a similar manner when Mr. B. refers to a marriage proposal he refused from one of Sir Simon Darnford’s daughters. Mr. B. tells Pamela, “a foolish Proposal was once made me of that second Sister, who has two or three thousand Pounds more than the other, left her by a Godmother, and she can’t help being a little piqu’d; tho’, said he, it was a Proposal they could not expect should succeed; for there is nothing in her Person nor Mind; and her Fortune, as that must have been the only Inducement, would not do by any means; and so I discourag’d it at once” (2:163). Richardson, again, does not tell us the base sum being discussed and only specifies that, whatever the amount, the proposal he turned down was worth £2,000-£3,000 more. He also demonstrates his lack of interest in marrying for money. The girl’s only valuable characteristic in his eyes is her money, which he finds insufficiently persuasive. Presumably she had many thousands of pounds, as casually referring to the total as being “two or three thousands Pounds more than the other” suggests the base sum of her fortune was high to begin with.

Readers might also note that Mr. B. cannot bother to remember whether she had two or three thousand more pounds. A thousand pounds here or there is seemingly beneath his notice, which tells us either that he is very rich or has no sense of the value of money. Even just the £3,000 added to Lady Davers’s inheritance or to Miss Darnford’s proposal would come to between £600,000 and £900,000 today—to say nothing of the unspecified sums to which £3,000 has been added. Though we do not know how much money Lady Davers was supposed to inherit or how much Miss Darnford would have brought to the marriage without the additions Mr. B. specifies, we are likely dealing with quite a lot of money in both cases. If Mr. B. finds £1,000 unimpressive, most eighteenth-century readers would have been hard-pressed to agree. Someone earning the national average income rounded up to £50 would require 20 years to save up £1,000 without spending any of it in the interim. Even a genteel Pamela living off her Kentish
estate of £250 a year would have to save for at least four years, spending none of it, and would realistically need many more than that.

Mr. B. speaks directly to the size of his fortune and of what it is composed in at least two conversations with Pamela toward the end of the novel. In the first, he offers her £200 a year as a sort of allowance. He tells her, “I will allow you Two hundred Pounds a Year, which Longman shall constantly pay you, at Fifty Pounds a Quarter, for your own Use, and of which I expect no Account; to commence from the Day you enter into my other House; I mean, said he, that the first Fifty Pounds shall then be due; because you shall have something to begin with” (2:206). Pamela cannot believe his generosity, throws her arms around him, and expresses her gratitude. Interestingly this is £50 less than the £250 income he had promised her if she had become his kept mistress. Marrying Mr. B. actually pays less well, evidently, than his proposed arrangement would have, though Pamela cares much more about living according to her moral code than making as much money as possible. In response to Pamela’s appreciation for this allowance, Mr. B. explains that, truthfully, he is not being so very generous, as £200 means little to him: “He was pleased to say, Don’t be uneasy, my Dear, about these Trifles; God has bless’d me with a very good Estate, and all of it in a prosperous Condition, and well tenanted. I lay up Money every Year, and have besides, large Sums in Government and other Securities; so that you will find, what I have hitherto promised, is very short of that Proportion of my Substance, which, as my dearest Wife, you have a Right to” (2:206). Given what how he spends money and his attitude toward it, his claim here is no doubt true. He rents farmland to tenant farmers and has successfully found people to occupy his available properties. He lives well within his means and both saves and invests money every year. Why he would put large sums in government securities is a bit of a mystery.

In the second conversation with Pamela about his finances, Mr. B. further demonstrates his attitude towards money and adds to our sense of his wealth. Complaining to Mr. Longman, Mr. B. says, “I have too much Money, Mr. Longman, continu’d he, lies useless; tho’, upon this Occasion, I shall not grudge laying out as much in Liveries, and other things, as if I had marry’d a Lady of a Fortune equal, if possible, to my Pamela’s Merit; and I reckon you have a good deal in Hand.” Mr. Longman replies, “Yes,
Sir, said he, more than I wish I had. But I have a Mortgage in View, if you don’t buy that Kentish thing, that I believe will answer very well; and when Matters are riper, will mention it to your Honour” (2:342). However well invested Mr. B.’s estate may be, he feels he still has too much cash on hand, and his steward clearly agrees. Mr. Longman evidently handles Mr. B.’s investments for him, doing the research, acquisition, and maintenance required. Mr. B.’s supervision of his fortune seems to amount mostly to approving Mr. Longman’s recommendations. This exchange between Mr. B. and Mr. Longman might tempt critics like McKeon, who see Mr. B. as crypto-middle-class, to interpret Mr. B.’s feeling that money should be properly invested as evidence of bourgeois ideology. In truth, the gentry and aristocrats were frequent investors and owners of their own businesses. One can assume Mr. B. has no intention of running the day-to-day operations of a farm he purchases, but wanting to make his money work for him and a fondness for accumulating wealth through investment would not have made him seem peculiar for a squire. He thinks money should be put to a purpose, but this does not make him “middle class.”

Mr. B. can, in fact, be surprisingly casual about managing even large sums and often shows a fair lack of concern for how he spends his money. In the same conversation, he tells Mr. Longman, “I took with me to Lincolnshire, said my Master, upwards of Six hundred Guineas, and thought to have laid most of them out there (Thank God, thought I, you did not! for he offer’d me Five hundred of them, you know!) But I have not laid out above Two hundred and fifty of them; so Two hundred I left there in my Escritoire; because I shall go again for a Fortnight or so, before Winter; and Two hundred I have brought with me.” He continues, “And I have Money, I know not what, in three Places here; the Account of which is in my Pocketbook, in my Library” (2:342-3). If we have some sense of the value of these sums, we can see how Mr. B.’s attitude here towards them clearly demonstrates how little he worries about tracking his spending or hoarding money. He expects to spend most of 600 guineas or £630 in the course of his short trip to Lincolnshire. This would come to between £126,000 and £189,000 today or what a family earning the national average income of £50 brought in over twelve and a half years without spending any of it. He is not really careless with money. He knows where most of it is and has a record that he can retrieve in his library for money he cannot remember at the moment. The point is that he spends large sums of money
without worry, leaves cash around his house in places he cannot recall from memory, and seems not at all concerned about money management. We can assume that more than a few people reading *Pamela* in the 1740s had to have known the value of 600 guineas and been able to see Mr. B.’s attitude towards freely spending hundreds of guineas as indicative either of a vast fortune or craziness. Whichever they decided on would easily have been reinforced later in the novel when Mr. B. explains that he gave Sally Godfrey 500 guineas upon leaving to help sustain her and to help convince her to stay with him. Only someone very rich or very crazy (and maybe some of both) brings a sum in cash that might come to between £105,000 and £157,500 today with them on a breathless chase after a mistress they would realistically be well rid of. However one responds to such spending, Richardson makes clear that Mr. B. is capable of great generosity (and impulsiveness) with his money.

Mr. Longman helps flesh out the scope of Mr. B.’s fortune later in this scene. Pamela is told that she will receive 200 guineas to pay to the servants in Bedfordshire, as she did in Lincolnshire. She responds with her usual emphatic gratitude and self-effacement, saying, “I am asham’d, good Sir, said I, to be so costly and so worthless!” Mr. B. dismisses her comment, replying, “Pray, my Dear, said he, say not a Word of that,” and Mr. Longman adds, “Why, Madam, with Money in Stocks, and one thing or another, his Honour could buy half the Gentlemen round him. He wants not Money, and lays up every Year. And it would have been pity, but his Honour should have wedded just as he has” (342-3). This is an interesting way of describing Mr. B.’s estate. Mr. Longman does not emphasize the amount of land Mr. B. owns or his income from tenant farmers and mortgages. He boasts, instead, of Mr. B.’s investments, particularly in stocks. This recalls Mr. B. himself saying he put a substantial amount of money into “government and other securities” from earlier in the novel. Mr. B. possesses what we might now call a diversified portfolio and presumably has Mr. Longman to thank for this. Though we are not told the specific manner in which Mr. B. invests his money, Richardson portrays him in scenes like this one as setting aside enough to feel comfortable spending whatever he likes.

Beyond giving us a sense of Mr. B.’s vast wealth and his relaxed attitude toward money, this scene attempts to make his marriage to Pamela more plausible. Obviously the socioeconomic distance
between Pamela and Mr. B. represents a significant enough concern to both that they bring it up repeatedly, and Lady Davers reacts so harshly and negatively to the marriage that she threatens Pamela with physical violence. Richardson could easily explain away Mr. B.’s decision to marry Pamela as a surprising and unlikely change of heart brought about by his esteem for Pamela’s virtue. This is a bit fantastical, and Richardson seems to have wanted a more believable explanation. In several scenes, Mr. B. tells Pamela that he would not have been happy with a lady of his own station because the well-born (including himself) tend to get spoiled by having their desires satisfied and hardly ever being told that they cannot do what they want. He admits that he would become frustrated and angry with Pamela because he was similarly spoiled and that marrying a woman with the same background could only make him unhappy. Essentially he wants a wife from a lower social position who will adore him, not an equal.

As Mr. B. says of the proposal brought to him by the Darnfords, he looks for personality in a woman, not money. For this reason Mr. Longman tells Pamela that Mr. B. marrying other than “as he has” would have been a pity. Marrying for money would not please him, since he has more money than he knows what to do with, and he wants nothing to do with a woman of his own degree, who might feel entitled to tell him what to do and make demands of him. She would also likely expect Mr. B. to provide for her in ways that Pamela finds extremely generous and for which she expresses her gratitude enthusiastically.

Richardson appears to want his readers to believe that someone like Mr. B. might actually prefer someone like Pamela in the real world, and the truly interesting thing is that the reasons why Mr. B. would prefer Pamela have little to do with her virtuousness and much more to do with her socioeconomic inferiority, her finding him impressive, and her willingness to obey him as a wife.

One wonders why Richardson does not specify somewhere Mr. B.’s total wealth. For the sake of the moral part of the story, knowing the exact extent of Mr. B.’s estate is unnecessary. He is rich, and that is enough to know. But Richardson does name particular sums throughout with a care that suggests he saw money as capable of conveying meaning, and the lack of specific information about Mr. B.’s estate or the principle sums inherited by Lady Davers or promised in the proposal from the Darnfords is strange. We can gather from his conversations with Pamela that he possesses a remarkable amount of money, that
he invests frequently and well, and that he can marshal substantial sums of cash if he desires. His wealth is interesting given his social position, and perhaps Richardson himself was not really sure how rich a squire could reasonably be in the real world. Mr. Longman claims that Mr. B. could buy half the gentlemen around him, but of course England had no shortage of men who could claim the title of “gentleman,” and this might refer to anyone from professionals working to support themselves in law, medicine, the clergy, and the military to the peers. In all likelihood, Mr. Longman refers in that scene to the lower gentry, the bottom of the landed elite, but Mr. B.’s open contempt for “the titled ape” that her sister married could easily suggest that Longman means lords, as well. We cannot know for sure, as Richardson does not specify. Since he does not tell us how much money Mr. B. possesses, readers cannot object to the realistic presentation of the character as an implausibly rich squire.

Toward the end of the novel, Pamela rewards the servants of Mr. B.’s Bedfordshire estate, each according to their station and how well they had served her. Ironically Mr. B. gives her the money to do this and thus pays for a good deal of insubordination and disloyalty from his servants, as those most useful to Pamela tended to undermine Mr. B.’s plans and disregard his commands. Mr. B. had shown her how to carry out this task earlier in the novel, when he instructed her to distribute money to his servants in Lincolnshire. As Pamela explains, “To me he gave no less than One hundred Guineas more; and said, I would have you, my Dear, give Mrs. Jewkes, when you go away from hence, what you think fit, out of these, as from yourself!--- Nay, good dear Sir, said I, let that be what you please” (2:189). This response results likely in part from her own sense of unworthiness and gratitude towards the now-kind Mr. B. but also from the fact that she does not know how much to pay someone of Mrs. Jewkes’s rank. Mr. B. replies, “Give her then, said he, Twenty Gineas, as a Compliment on your Nuptials. Give Colbrand Ten Guineas: Give the two Coachmen, Five Guineas each; to the two Maids at this House, Five Guineas each: Give Abraham Five Guineas: Give Thomas Five Guineas; and give the Gardeners, Grooms and Helpers, Twenty Guineas among them” (2:189). Mr. B. may have Mr. Longman see to his investments, but he clearly knows the value of money and what will do as an appropriate level of compensation for each of his servants’ stations. As we have seen, these are not sums that any of these people would likely have
received all at once in such a manner and are not being presented as wages but rather as gifts of small extravagance both for their service and in celebration of the marriage to come.

Having paid the Lincolnshire staff as Mr. B. instructed, Pamela now must reward the Bedfordshire servants and relies on Mr. B. to reassure her that she has determined appropriate amounts. As Pamela says, “I looked upon my dear generous Master, and on Mrs. Jervis; and he gave me a Nod of Assent; and I took Twenty Guineas, and said, Dear Mrs. Jervis, accept of this; which is no more than my generous Master order’d me to present to Mrs. Jewkes, for a pair of Gloves” (2:343). Pamela imagines this sum appropriate given that Mrs. Jewkes received the same, and this is interesting given that Mrs. Jewkes followed Mr. B.’s orders closely, while Mrs. Jervis defied him to help Pamela. Both Pamela and Mr. B. reward their favorites with 20 guineas, which Mr. Longman also receives. These are the chief servants, and their monetary reward is the highest, whether they obeyed or undermined Mr. B. Reflecting on this sum, Pamela says, “[Mrs. Jervis] gratefully accepted them, and thank’d us both: But I don’t know what she should thank me for; for I was not worth a fourth Part of them myself” (2:343). This is of course true. Pamela keeps account of the money she has on her, and at that point commands a fortune no greater than about five guineas, which Mrs. Jewkes had stolen from her and later returned. Pamela does not see herself yet as entitled to Mr. B. vast fortune as a woman of his degree might, and he reminds her repeatedly that, as his wife, she can expect to have the use of quite a lot of money, well above the £200 a year that he leaves her as an allowance. If anything, paying Mrs. Jervis this money reminds her that, if not for her marriage to Mr. B., she would fall well below Mrs. Jervis both in rank and in what she might receive on such an occasion.

After rewarding the major players, Pamela continues with the rest of the servants of Mr. B.’s house. Mr. B.’s maids are brought in, and Pamela describes their reaction to seeing her: “They seem’d quite transported with me; and my good Master was pleas’d with the Scene. See here, my Lasses, said he, your Mistress! I need not bid you respect her; for you always lov’d her; and she’l have it as much in her Power as Inclination to be kind to the Deserving” (2:346). Now playing the part of the grand lady, Pamela adds, “Indeed, said I, I shall always be a kind Friend to you; and your dear good Master, has order’d me
to give each of you this, that you may rejoice with me, on my Happiness. And so I gave them five Guineas a-piece; and said God bless you every one. I am overjoy’d to see you!--- And they withdrew with the greatest Gratitude and Pleasure, praying for us both” (2:346). Paying this money offers Pamela her first real moment of inhabiting her new position. This might be because she had felt inferior in rank to Mrs. Jervis, Mrs. Jewkes, and Mr. Longman as part of Mr. B.’s household but was on the same level as these maids. She continues on in this persona, saying, “My Maste [sic] sent for Jonathan, and I held up all the Fingers of my two Hands; and my Master giving a Nod of Approbation as he came in, I said, Well, Mr. Jonathan, I could not be satisfy’d without seeing you in Form, as it were, and thanking you for all your past Good-will to me. You’ll accept of that for a Pair of Gloves, on this happy Occasion; and I gave him ten Guineas, and took his honest Hand between both mine” (2:347).

Richardson shows us Pamela trying out her new role with Mr. B. approving of the decisions she makes, even as she somewhat comically signs with her hands how much she would like to pay particular servants. Seeming to slip into the part of lady of the house ever more comfortably, Pamela adds to Jonathan, “God bless you, said I, with your Silver Hairs, so like my dear Father!--- I shall always value such a good old Servant of the best of Masters!” (2:347). Mr. B. reinforces her position further when the gardener, grooms, and other male servants are brought before them. He announces to them, “You see her Goodness and Condescension! Let your Respects to her be but answerable, and she’ll be proportionably as great a Blessing to you all as she is to me. Harry said, In the Names of all your Servants, Sir, I bless your Honour and your good Lady: And it shall be all our Studies to deserve her Ladyship’s Favour, as well as your Honour’s” (2:348). She tells us that she pays five guineas to each of the six men, but the point in this case seems to be to show Mr. B. lending Pamela authority as lady of the house and to see the servants accepting her in that role. We might note that Mr. B. steps in here more than he had with the others and wonder if this is because Pamela finds herself dealing not with maids and old men but with a group of younger men. Mr. B.’s boy servants are ushered in afterward, and Pamela says, “my Master holding three Fingers to me, I gave the Postilion and Helpers three Guineas each, and the little Boy two; and bid him let his poor Mother lay it out for him, for he must not spend it idly” (2:349). Pamela and Mr.
B. continue their gesturing system to determine amounts to pay here, and Pamela likely needs the help, given that she would have no idea how much to offer these boys otherwise. One might have imagined that the two of them would have worked out the amounts before the ceremony began, rather than continue to gesture to each other across the room, but the point seems to be to give Pamela some practice being the magnanimous gentlewoman Mr. B. intends her to become and to cease thinking of herself as part of this social group.

These are not all the sums in the novel, but they convey the sense of how money operates and what Richardson uses it for as a storytelling device. He stratifies the socioeconomic world by specifying amounts and gives us a sense of Mr. B.’s wealth and attitude toward it. Perhaps most interestingly, virtuousness and goodness do not lead to rewards. Jervis and Jewkes receive the same sums. Richardson emphasizes in his descriptions of the recipients why they deserve the money, but the amounts relate more to their station than to their behavior. Though the scene ostensibly offers Pamela a chance to reward the servants for being good and to encourage them to continue being thus, in truth she and Mr. B. simply offer gifts of varying amounts according to station to celebrate their upcoming marriage. This is an unexpected way for Richardson to handle what should be a reward scene in which the actions of each are weighed, judged, and justice meted out. Where the servants fall in the hierarchy ultimately trumps what they do, and this is not what one expects from an author seemingly making a serious moral point. We might recall that Mr. B. chooses to marry Pamela because she is beautiful and will adore and obey him, not actually because she deserves him and is such a good person. Perhaps modern readers, who tend to associate Richardson with moralizing in fiction, would see a twist here that eighteenth-century readers would not, but even the preface to the first edition makes perfectly plain that the purpose of the book is to inculcate moral values and to offer the story and characters as didactic and exemplary. Strange, then, not to get a serious moral ending but one that reinforces socioeconomic hierarchy in Mr. B.’s household, with Pamela in her new position, condescending to the servants of whom she was recently one.
Richardson and Class

Richardson’s use of class and money in *Pamela* forces us to rethink some of our assumptions about what he thought he was doing in the novel and how to read it. They require a shift in focus from what we think we know about Richardson and his goals to how eighteenth-century readers might have responded to the novel when it first appeared. The sums and socioeconomic stratification mean little without a fair amount of historical context to help make sense of them. They would, however, have been much more useful to contemporary readers than biographical information about Richardson. From a historical standpoint, readers would not have known he was the author to begin with. His name does not appear on the title page, and he seems to have wanted the anonymity to persist. Duncan Eaves and Kimpel explain in their biography that “Richardson wrote to his brother-in-law James Leake that he ‘did not intend [his authorship] should be known to more than 6 Friends, and those in Confidence’. On 3 September he wrote to Mrs. Barber that he did not want it to be known that he was the author, but three or four friends whom he could not help owning it forced him to change his opinion” (119). His authorship became gradually better known, but what help that would have been to most readers is hard to determine. Anyone not acquainted with Richardson personally would have gotten little from knowing he was the author other than feeling secure that the work was fictitious, and most simply would not have known.

We use Richardson’s biography to interpret *Pamela* now in ways that would have been impossible for the majority of contemporary readers. The result is that we produce interpretations Richardson at least claims not to have intended. This is not to say that one reads *Pamela* better or more accurately the less one knows about Richardson but simply to remind us that eighteenth-century readers would not have responded to it as Richardson’s work or brought assumptions about him to bear on the text. They were limited to what they found in the text itself, particularly if they wanted to judge whether the story was believable or could actually have been the edited letters of a living person who had experienced the events reported. We have good reason, then, to ask how reliable some of the readings we have come to see as standard are if we do not read *Pamela* through Richardson’s life and values, as we know them, and simply rely on what we find in the novel.
This chapter began with the question of what we mean by “class” when we talk about *Pamela*, particularly “middle class,” and how money and class affect the interpretation of the novel, both for modern and for eighteenth-century readers. A fairly clear answer to the first part of the question emerges from the opening section of this chapter: we impose ideas of class that developed in the nineteenth century and later on *Pamela* and read class struggle backward onto it. Without a doubt, Richardson wrote a story centering on a poor girl and a rich man and emphasized the socioeconomic differences between them. Critics have wanted to make more of this than seems defensible if one sticks to the text. Pamela’s parents were better off than they now are and might have been equals to lower merchants, though we have no real way of judging this beyond Pamela saying they lived “creditably” once. This does not make her “middle class.” She credits Mr. B.’s mother for her education and the skills that make her an attractive servant in an upper-end household like Mr. B.’s. Perhaps her father, who ran a school before going broke, provided Pamela with the foundation for the education that she received in this kind lady’s service, but if so we are not told. Pamela simply reiterates that her parents are poor and that she inhabits a position radically different from Mr. B.’s.

Richardson does not provide more than a simple binary stratification between great and common because he appears not to have thought in terms of “class.” The characters in the novel speak of “degrees” and “stations,” and these terms reflect the highly stratified socioeconomic world of eighteenth-century England. As the classification systems of King, Massie, Defoe, and others illustrate, a class system composed of an elite, a bourgeoisie, and a laboring class did not obtain. Instead, one finds descriptive categories focused on occupations. Incomes alone did not provide the material for establishing a hierarchy in the English social order—either in Richardson’s novel or outside it. Take, for example, Mrs. Jervis, Mr. Longman, or Mrs. Jewkes. Mrs. Jervis belongs to the gentry by birth and commands an appropriate level of respect both from her fellow servants and from Mr. B. himself. Without money, she is not Mr. B.’s social equal but neither has she fallen below the status of gentlewoman. Mr. Longman serves as Mr. B.’s steward and would represent a very challenging figure to place in the tripartite class system. Doubtless he would have to fall in with the laboring class, as he works for a living. Yet Mr. Longman and
men like him in contemporary England would hardly have seen themselves as sharing any discernible experience of life with others who presumably would belong to that group. Mrs. Jewkes pities the poor trades people, as she characterizes them, and makes sure to pay with cash rather than on credit when dealing with them. None of these three would likely see themselves resting below quite a lot of merchants in the social strata because, at the very least, they occupy high places in the household of a wealthy squire. Yet, they clearly make less money than people to whom they would feel superior. Money matters in establishing the social hierarchy but is only one part to consider. A person’s occupation mattered a great deal, as the ranks within the servant society itself makes clear in the novel. Members of the lower clergy similarly could consider themselves gentlemen because of their education and occupation, despite lacking the wealth and incomes typical of the landed elite.

Richardson takes for granted in Pamela his audience’s awareness of how these systems of stratification operate and offers little help to the reader. He represents a society stratified according to a number of determining factors and then illustrates distinctions within those larger categories. Mr. B. displays an awareness of his standing among what we might broadly call the landed elites. He is a squire, an MP, and a Justice of the Peace. He controls a very sizable fortune, which allows him to exert significant influence and which places him above many of his gentlemen peers. He has no title, however, and belongs to the squirearchy. His sister evidently worries a great deal more than he does about what people will think of them, though he cares enough to lament more than a few times to Pamela about gossip and disgracing himself. He feels much more secure in his position among his peers because of his money and the fact that he is male. His debate with his sister about the difference between a gentleman marrying his maid or a gentlewoman marrying her groom demonstrates the inequality between the sexes in matters of respectability and Mr. B.’s fondness for being on the right side of that inequality. He also tells Pamela not to worry too much about his reputation because, although he expects to suffer initial joking and teasing, his wealth ensures that other men will put the matter aside in favor of doing business with him and keeping him as a contact in their social circle. Mr. B. expects to rely on a combination of chauvinism and acquisitiveness with his peers, and he is probably right in doing so.
We could do worse as modern readers to try and understand the world presented in *Pamela* as Richardson and eighteenth-century readers might have seen it. We cannot hope to respond to *Pamela* just as they did or to account for the multiplicity of historically plausible readings with anything like certainty, but the effort remains worthwhile. We do violence to the text by asserting that Richardson represented class conflict in *Pamela*, that he served as either a traitor to or champion of the middle class, or that Pamela and Mr. B. are representatives of the classes to which they seem to belong. Richardson was either ignorant of or did not care about “class” as a way of structuring society. He cared quite a lot about money and used it as a storytelling device to establish and demonstrate social hierarchies for readers. His attention to detail suggests that, if class critique had been his purpose, he would have clarified his terms and used them consistently throughout. Richardson obviously meant for *Pamela* to teach, and he explains his aims at the outset of the novel and in his curious appendix. Neither of these reflects a concern about class or even an awareness of what it is, and we do not get anywhere reading into the text what is not there.
The story of Fielding’s development as a novelist has been explained as a linear evolution. Fielding began from a satiric impulse to expose and ridicule in *Shamela*, introduced his comic epic in prose with *Joseph Andrews*, and brought this new form to his pinnacle with *Tom Jones*. *Amelia* has been difficult to explain in this narrative and comes as a surprise at the end of the career of a prolific writer of farces and bouncy comedies. Perhaps because readers expected something like *Tom Jones* in tone, they reacted negatively to *Amelia* in the eighteenth century. The novel has had few enough admirers among modern critics, who clearly prefer *Tom Jones*. In her introduction to the Broadview edition, Linda Bree calls attention to Arthur Murphy’s biographical sketch of Fielding published 1762 in which he divided Fielding’s career into three phases: “the sun in his morning glory . . . in meridian majesty . . . and . . . tending to its decline, like the same sun, abating from his ardor, but still gilding the western hemisphere.” As Bree explains, Murphy “then draws an exact correspondence between these three phrases of talent and Fielding’s three major novels, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*. And there, overshadowed particularly by *Tom Jones* and far down in the hemisphere, *Amelia*’s reputation has remained more or less ever since.”

In a recent review essay of the state of Fielding studies, Robert D. Hume states that “Longstanding discontent with *Amelia* contributed substantially to the widespread belief that Fielding had peaked with *Tom Jones*.”

For my purpose here what matters is that readers have long identified in *Amelia* a significant shift in Fielding’s fiction. How to define that shift and what it means differs from one critic to another, but most commonly scholars find a move toward increased realism and along with it a darker, less entertaining tone. Simon Varey’s description is representative: “instead of attempting anything we might

---

call a sequel to his masterpiece, Fielding adopted a new form of realism and changed his narrative
technique, setting, and overall tone.”171 John Richetti makes the link between realism and tone explicit in
his characterization, calling the novel “An odd mixture of degraded romance and social realism” that
shows us “human agency as real but exceedingly limited by moral weakness as well as by social
pathology and systemic malfunction.” He argues, “The occasional tedium of Amelia flows very precisely
from its realistic ambition to render these overseeing forces.”172 In other words, the seemingly depressing
or dark tone so ubiquitous in Amelia and so very different from Tom Jones derives from greater realism
and an attempt to deal essentially with poverty and social injustice in the class system. Booth remains
hopelessly in debt throughout the novel, fails repeatedly to advance himself socially and professionally,
and cannot support his wife and children successfully. Amelia seen this way anticipates the social problem
fiction of Disraeli and Dickens.

I want to argue that the tone and content are not inextricable in Amelia and that in fact the
economic world portrayed recalls the worlds of Joseph Andrews and especially Tom Jones, which has
long seemed so different. Critics have obviously been right to notice the shift in tone from Joseph
Andrews and Tom Jones to Amelia but have mistakenly associated this change with increased realism and
a harsher economic world. The dominant view among critics has been that Fielding, influenced by his
work as a magistrate, brought his experience on the bench into his fiction and portrayed low characters,
crime, injustice, and satirized the legal practice because of the cases he heard. This disregards the low
characters in the previous novels, the presentation of their circumstances, and the economic worlds
inhabited by Joseph and Tom. Undeniably these characters’ stories come to us through a more genial
narrator, but the actual socioeconomics given differ much less than critics have assumed, and this
continuity from one novel to the other has significant implications for understanding the worldview
underpinning them.

The Hard Reality of *Amelia*

Realism and particularity in fiction tend to go together. The novels associated with Defoe are considered “realistic” for their close attention to mundane details, the long lists, and what might be called thick description. Richardson keeps track of a myriad of specifics in his novels, and we might call this realistic, especially if the details coincide with our expectations as readers of what the world outside the novel looks like. Strangely attention to particulars alone has not much influenced Fielding’s reputation as a writer. We still tend to talk about a turn toward increased realism with *Amelia*, and the tone and presentation matter more for critics than the presence of things like sums of money or measurements of time. My interest with all three novels is to demonstrate their high level of specificity with regards to money in order to show how similar they actually are. This discussion opens with *Amelia* and works backward chronologically to disrupt the teleological narrative so persuasive among modern critics. Fielding’s technique as a writer clearly changes over time, and I do not object to arguments about his development. The purpose is to illustrate contrasts and similarities between the texts, and proceeding backwards allows us to see how well what happens in *Amelia* actually resembles what we get in the earlier, comic novels.

In the case of *Amelia*, we find emphasis on debt, poverty, and the use of money for exerting influence over others that seems lacking in the previous novels. *Amelia* has been seen as relaying in gruesome detail the various failures of Captain William Booth, who repeatedly finds himself in prison and bankrupt. James Thompson, in a chapter on Fielding and property, argues, “*Amelia* is Fielding’s most interesting novel with respect to its concern with economic exchange, for it images a world almost totally ruled by money.”\(^{173}\) We need not even go this far to recognize the significance of money in this novel, not just in how it functions as a plot driving element and a conflict generator for the characters. It seems also to ground the novel in a kind of reality, and it is this function that matters the most for my purposes.

Thompson’s chapter on Fielding is illuminating, but he has surprisingly little to say about *Amelia* beyond some general comments about how the novel fits with his interpretation of Fielding’s place in a broader context of economic thinkers. As one might expect, Samuel L. Macey lists a number of sums in his discussion of *Amelia*. His concern, however, is not with the value of money but with Fielding’s attitude toward money and London across the novels.\textsuperscript{174} I want therefore to focus on some specific examples from the text of how Fielding uses money and what we learn about the economic world of *Amelia*.

Very early on in the novel Miss Matthews explains in her own words how she feels about money. She offers Booth “upwards of 20 Guineas, being the Remainder of the Money for which she had sold a gold repeating Watch, her Father’s Present, with some other Trinkets.” For her this is no great sacrifice, as she says, “You know, I believe, dear Will, I never valued Money; and now I am sure I shall have very little Use for it” (1:92).\textsuperscript{175} Obviously she has quite a lot of use for money as an instrument for getting out of legal trouble and influencing her jailors, but what she means is that she does not feel an acquisitive impulse of any real kind or look to money as a way to purchase things to satisfy her vanity, as her husband does. This puts her immediately in stark contrast to characters like Roxana and Moll Flanders—and even Pamela—for whom money holds a great deal of value. They are women who would like to improve their situations financially, and this has been the primary criticism of Pamela in particular. Miss Matthews then is a different kind of anti-Pamela, not an unworthy woman living the life of an opportunist but rather a woman with different priorities.

Amelia appears to share this attitude towards money, as she sells her possessions to pay a gambling debt of £50 that Booth incurs after losing £12 he had on him in cash. Rather than paying off this debt, however, Booth uses it to try to win a commission. He had been told that he could bribe his way into a promotion, a not uncommon practice, but was without the means to act on the tip. As he says, “if fifty Pounds would save my Life, I assure you I could not command that Sum. The little Money I have in my


\textsuperscript{175} All citations are to the first edition: Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (London: A. Millar, 1752).
Pocket is all I can call my own; and, I apprehend, in the Situation I am in, I shall have very little of that to spare” (1:91). In Booth’s world, £50 is a very great sum of money indeed, one he cannot hope to amass himself. Always the gambler, he uses the money when he acquires it to try for this commission, which turns out to be a complete waste, and he ends up still in debt £50 and now down another. Amelia provides this money for Booth without complaint or reproach. This lack of concern for money would seem endearing were it not for her husband’s wasteful spending, gambling, and foolish business decisions. In fact it has sparked some of the most serious objections to Amelia as frustratingly naïve. Amelia quite clearly enables Booth, and the match leaves something to be desired as a result. Given the limitations on the rights of wives to control the family spending with much legal authority, Amelia cannot be faulted for not forcibly reigning him in, though one imagines with little difficulty that a strong-willed woman could convince Booth to do whatever she wished. Miss Matthews, after all, demonstrates this rather early on in the novel when she seduces Booth with nothing more than a single guinea and pleasant conversation. Knowing Booth’s financial troubles and irresponsibility with money, Amelia’s enabling would have to color how at least economically prudent readers receive her and what they anticipate from her. Whatever judgment we pass, one point seems clear: Amelia sees a problem and does nothing really to solve it. She gives Booth more money and keeps the cycle going. This is one among many instances of Fielding giving us a world in which change seems impossible, and people stay the way that they are, whatever their faults, with the exception of a chosen few who experience a miraculous conversion experience in the manner of Mr. B. and any of the “Defoe” protagonists.

In the course of the novel Fielding provides a significant amount of specific information about Booth’s spending and just how much he runs himself into debt and how. I focus here on just a few sums, but many more examples are easily locatable, and this is something about Amelia that merits highlighting. Booth manages to lose sums great and small. He loses £12 out of his wallet, runs his family a total of £100 in debt over gambling and seeking a commission, and mismanages the household terribly as manager of their farm. Amelia had come from a wealthy family, but her mother left her only £10 because she eloped with Booth, of whom her mother did not approve. Seeking to shore up their finances and
provide for the family, Booth takes up farming, which turns out to be a riskier gamble than he would like. He explains, “From want of my sage counselor, I now fell into many errors. The first of those was in enlarging my business, by adding a Farm of 100 l. a Year to the Parsonage; in renting which I had also as bad a Bargain as the Doctor had before given me a good one. The Consequence of which was, that whereas at the End of the first Year, I was worth upwards of Fourscore Pounds, at the End of the Second, I was near half that Sum worse (as the Phrase is) than nothing” (1:280).

This should be a shocking reversal of fortunes if one has a sense of the value of the money. Booth does not specify the income he received, but we know that his worth came to more than £800. If we round the average income of families living in England and Wales as reported by Joseph Massie and revised by economic historians up slightly to £50 per annum, we see that a family would need to save their entire income for no less than sixteen years to achieve this level of wealth. If Booth in fact means that the farm made £800 in a year, or near that amount, Massie’s social table would allow us to place him among the top 3,700 families in the country, a group occupying only 0.24% of the population. This seems unlikely, given the circumstances from which he comes before establishing his business, but the capital sum alone is significant. Booth and Amelia would have lived quite well on that money and on the income implied by Booth’s description, well above the laboring sort and artisans, something much closer to what Amelia had grown up with. Yet Booth manages to lose £400 in one year through mismanagement of his rents. He loses the rest in short order, winding up in the prison where he tells this story to Miss Matthews. If we take as an approximation the value of this sum to be between £120,000 and £180,000 in present-day buying power, we see how drastically Booth has ruined his family. Hardly anyone reading the novel would have been able to pass by this scene without stark recognition of how much has been lost and what a dire turn the family has taken. This recalls the opening of Roxana, in which her husband squanders the family brewery and loses the £2,000 her father had given her upon getting married. Yet, whereas Roxana had tried her best to coach her husband to successful business practices, Amelia remains a non-presence,

---

176 See the table provided in chapter one.
suffering the fate to which Booth’s decisions assign her without protest. If Amelia is meant to be
Fielding’s idealized woman, she is a rather weak and unimpressive sort of thing.

As in all three novels, inheritance plays a major role in *Amelia*. In hearing the back story for Mr.
Trent, we learn that “At the Age of fifteen Mr. Trent was put Clerk to an Attorney, where he remained a
very short Time before he took Leave of his Master; rather, indeed, departed without taking Leave; and
having broke open his Mother’s Escritore, and carried off with him all the valuable Effects he there
found, to the Amount of about fifty Pound, he marched off to Sea” (4:139). Trent’s mother keeping £50 in
cash in her escritoire conveys a sense of her financial standing clearly enough in comparison with
contemporary wages. One would have to be very bourgeois indeed to keep (or be able to keep) so much
money in cash in the house. Having made off with this sum to seek his fortune, Trent comes home to find
that “the Attorney had in his Absence married his Mother, had buried her, and secured all her Effects, to
the Amount, as he was inform’d, of about fifteen hundred Pound. Trent applied to his Step-Father, but to
no Purpose; the Attorney utterly disowned him, nor would he suffer him to come a second Time within
his Doors” (4:140). And just like that an inheritance of £1,500 is seemingly stolen from its rightful heir.
This story is a digression from the main plot involving Amelia and Booth but contributes to the economic
world in which they live. Amelia is not the only person in the novel who suffers from schemers taking
what ought to come to them.

Amelia’s inheritance, seemingly kept from her because of her marriage to Booth, would change
her family’s financial circumstances dramatically (at least for as long as Booth could hold on to it). We
are keenly aware of this fact throughout the course of the novel, and financial hardship appears to be
something experienced by the couple because of decisions they have made. This is a fluid socioeconomic
hierarchy of a kind: one falls downward, however, with much greater ease than one rises. Amelia tries to
get some kind of help from her mother but receives only a cold response from her sister, whom she later
finds inherits nearly everything. Not until the end of the novel do we find out that Amelia’s mother had
not intended this to happen. We are told, “Mrs. Harris of our Town had two Daughters, this Mrs. Booth
and another. Now, Sir, it seems the other Daughter had, some Way or other, disobliged her Mother, a little
before the old Lady died, therefore she made a Will, and left all her Fortune, except one thousand Pound, to Mrs. Booth; to which Will Mr. Murphy, myself, and another, who is now dead, were the Witnesses. Mrs. Harris afterwards died suddenly” (4:259). Amelia’s sister simply lied about it and stole the money, and Amelia did not find out until this point. Amelia fortunately recovers the money, and Booth claims that he will reform. They go on to live happy lives together, or so Fielding says.

Good comes to the good and bad to the bad. Of Amelia’s sister, Fielding says, “she lived three Years with a broken Heart at Boulogne, where she received annually fifty Pounds from her Sister, who was hardly prevailed on by Dr. Harrison not to send her a Hundred, and then died in a most miserable Manner” (4:295). This should remind readers familiar with Tom Jones of the ending to that novel, in which Blifil loses the estate and is sent away with an income. The twist here is that the antagonist does not get to convert to begin some other life. Instead Fielding kills her off in some undefined but terrible way. This is the same economic world and the same handling of economic reality: consistent presentation of a believable set of finances and socioeconomic circumstances completely violated by a *dues ex machina* conclusion that the author forces to work, seeming for the sake of order and justice in the universe, though how deserving Booth and Tom really are is debatable.

This is a miraculous turn of events and one completely in keeping with the surprise inheritances of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones. Yet critics have wanted to see Amelia as much more realistic and grounded in the actual world of eighteenth-century London and its real social and economic hardships. As J. Paul Hunter writes, “Fielding’s experience as a London magistrate and even his residence in London, with its escalating urban problems resistant to reasonable solutions, must have exacerbated his impatience and alarmed his lasting passion for stability and social order.” He adds, “Day-to-day encounters with the recalcitrance of reality clouded the sense of leisurely solution possible within a framework of formal comedy and providential order.”177 Hunter’s argument here follows from the belief that Amelia is a darker

---

...and more realistic book. It cannot (and certainly should not) have a cheerful happy ending arranged seemingly for no reason within the logic of the narrative by its overpowering author—and yet it does.

*Amelia* gives readers a serious focus on debt, the hazards of irresponsible spending and bad money management, and a world seemingly with consequences in it. Much has been made of Booth repeatedly heading to prison, though one could do worse than to recall that, miraculously, Miss Matthews bails Booth out of jail and that by the novel’s end all is well that ends well. Booth has been forcibly converted by Fielding, as Tom was before him, and we are left with good reasons to worry about the women who marry these men. These endings are typical of the reform-the-rake type of comedy, in which a bad boy meets a good girl and has to change his ways to win her over. This is Harcourt and Alithea in *The Country-Wife*. We see the same dynamic with Mr. B. and Pamela. The question, if one really buys into the realism of one of these stories, is whether the conversions are real and lasting. Not everyone would find such a conclusion realistic. Colley Cibber had the appropriately named Loveless reform at the end of *Love’s Last Shift* (1696) in exactly this sort of way, and John Vanbrugh countered with *The Relapse* (1696), in which Loveless relapses. *Amelia* is best understood as a combination of these. Loveless is unfaithful to his worthy wife Amanda, who in turn resists a would-be lover because of her integrity. This is essentially mirrored in *Amelia*, yet the novel concludes not with Vanbrugh’s vision but with Cibber’s: a reformed rake promising to be a good husband. By the end of *The Relapse*, audience members ought to have no faith in Loveless’s ability to change and stay changed, and trying to force them to believe he will would seem silly even to try. Yet this is what Fielding does. He shows us one set of circumstances and then wipes it out. This sort of writing reminds one of dramatic comedy rather than serious, social problem fiction. As we shall see, the similarities between the novels are more apparent than they might at first appear.
Economic Life in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*

*Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* are noticeably brighter and livelier throughout than *Amelia*, yet they contain many of the same elements, such as a high degree of particularity with respect to money, representations of the downtrodden poor, and concerns with legal justice. This section highlights a few key scenes in these two novels that stand out as reminiscent of what we think of as characteristic in *Amelia*. The point is not that the economic realism of the two novels overrides the feeling that all will work out for the protagonists but simply to demonstrate how Fielding creates an economic world in the novels and what that world looks like.

Debt is perhaps the most famous aspect of Booth’s life and adventures. As a result, *Amelia* has seemed for critics unduly focused on debt in a way that marks an important shift away from the aristocratic economic circumstances of the characters in the other novels. Yet debt appears fairly regularly in both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. We are told that Parson Adams was loaned “four Pounds thirteen Shillings and Sixpence, to prevent his going to Goal, on no greater Security than a Bond and Judgment, which probably he would have made no use of, tho’ the Money had not been (as it was) paid exactly at the time.” Adams runs into debt partly out of his incompetence with money but also because of his unfavorable circumstances. His financial situation is explained in clear terms, and we learn that “he was provided with a handsome Income of twenty-three Pounds a Year; which however, he could not make any great Figure with: because he lived in a dear Country, and was a little incumbered with a Wife and six Children” (1:10). No doubt “a little incumbered” is meant to be funny, as such a large family would require quite a lot of money to support it. He makes exactly half of the estimated average income for families reported by Massie in 1759. According to Massie, 638,800 families (41.5%) averaged less than £25 per annum, which was better than 720,800 families earning less than this in 1688, the year described by Gregory King’s social table. We should not be surprised then to find Adams hopeful about selling his

---

sermons in London. This is the catalyst for his journey and a major plot device, yet if he knew better the value of his sermons, he might have stayed home.

Fielding helps readers understand the value of money in both novels. Adams wants to make some money from his sermons, and he offers to sell them for about £10 a volume and make £100 total (1:106), but he meets someone else who has tried to make money this way and finds that his expectations are a bit off. He is told, “The Age was so wicked, that no body read Sermons: Would you think it, Mr. Adams, (said he) I once intended to print a Volume of Sermons myself, and they had the Approbation of two or three Bishops: but what do you think a Bookseller offered me?” Adams cheerfully if naively guesses twelve guineas, to which Barnabas replies, “Not Twelve Pence, I assure you” (1:111). This is a reality check for Adams and for us as readers. Adams had thought to improve his economic circumstances significantly through making a trip to London to sell his manuscript sermons. With £100, he would have earned a sum slightly greater than five times his annual wage. That he will not make this much is a distressing discovery for Adams, and if we know that his expectations were unrealistic, we can laugh at his naivety, especially given that we ought to have faith that somehow things will work out for him.

We get similar help reading sums of money and understanding how to respond to them in *Tom Jones*. The narrator explains: “When the two Gentlemen were both attired for the Masquerade, and Mr. Nightingale had given Orders for Chairs to be sent for, a Circumstance of Distress occurred to Jones, which will appear very ridiculous to many of my Readers. This was how to procure a Shilling.” As a shilling is no great sum of money, Fielding (or the narrator, if we consider it a separate persona) admits that some readers might find Jones’s concern about coming up with the amount silly. He responds, however, that “if such Readers will reflect a little on what they have themselves felt from the Want of a thousand Pound, or, perhaps, of ten or twenty, to execute a favourite Scheme, they will have a perfect Idea of what Mr. Jones felt on this Occasion” (5:54). Here a relatively small sum is used purposefully to illustrate a point about wanting money: that not having it, however little, is fundamentally debilitating and upsetting. Tom then borrows the money from Partridge, and we get yet another instance of deficit
spending. Unlike the previous novels, in Fielding’s we find an author willing and able to guide readers in their interpretation of the value of money and anticipating how they might react to sums in context.

Fielding even makes fun of people for not paying attention to sums of money and demonstrates how doing so leads to gross misinterpretation. When Tom is forced to leave Allworthy’s house, he gets £500 to survive on. When gossips discuss Tom being sent away, however, “none ever mentioned the Sum contained in the Paper which Allworthy gave Jones, which was no less than Five hundred Pounds; but all agreed that he was sent away Penniless, and some said, naked from the House of his inhuman Father” (2:306). The story sounds better if Tom receives nothing and must face the world naked and friendless. It is all the more sensational given Allworthy’s reputation for mercy and generosity in the area. Yet his circumstances are markedly different. If we consider that £500 might be worth between £100,000 and £150,000 in present-day buying power, we can see that Allworthy has provided very well for Tom. We also understand better the nature of Allworthy’s character. He makes no great show of giving this money to Tom and instead hides it, exposing himself to criticism for inhumane and unjust behavior. Yet his doing so is prudent given that some people hearing that Jones was on the road with so much money on him would have reason to try to take it from him.

We find quite a lot of commentary on the legal system and on social inequality and injustice in the earlier novels. Fielding gives us the figure of Peter Pounce in Joseph Andrews, a thoroughly nasty character who makes a fortune through usurious lending. Fielding tells us that Joseph earns £8 a year and sends half of that to help his parents. In describing this, he relates how Pounce made his money taking advantage of people like Joseph when they require an advance on their wages for some reason. “Peter,” the narrator says, “on urgent Occasions, used to advance the Servants their Wages: not before they were due, but before they were payable; that is, perhaps, half a Year after they were due, and this at the moderate Premiums of fifty per Cent . or a little more.” Fielding goes on to say that by these “charitable Methods, together with lending Money to other People, and even to his own Master and Mistress, the honest Man had, from nothing, in a few Years amassed a small Sum of twenty thousand Pounds or thereabouts” (1:55). If we know that Parson Adams lives on £23 a year and that Joseph makes £8, we can
guess that building up £20,000 in just a few years represents a very large annual income even without the help of King and Massie’s social tables to put the sum in context. Our sense of the relative value of money makes the joke here fall flat if we consider it an unimpressive amount, sort of funny if we think it might be a lot, or enjoyably biting and ridiculous if we know how great his income actually is. Only about 160 families in all of England and Wales earned c. £5,400. This comes to, at most, 0.002% of the population. Perhaps Roxana would have applauded herself at making money this quickly and tried not to worry herself too much about the means of getting it. Pounce seems totally unrepentant, though the narrator is clearly leading us to feel appalled at someone loaning money at 50% interest, particularly to his own servants, whose incomes are relatively small to begin with. The social injustice should not be lost on us here, and this is not a world without dangers and predators.

In *Tom Jones*, we get an interesting remark of the narrator’s about the treatment of debtors that strikes a similar kind of ironic tone. Squire Western, having found his daughter and thoroughly displeased with her, is described as follows: “he looked down on her with the same Emotions which arise in an honest fair Tradesman, who sees his Debtor dragged to Prison for 10 l. which, though a just Debt, the Wretch is wickedly unable to pay” (6:18). The size of the debt here should be fairly believable to most readers and is hardly inconsequential, amounting to more than a fifth of the average income earned at the time. Yet it is not so great as to hold us in awe and inspire outcry, as Defoe’s £20,000 of debt would have been. One might understand leniency over £10, yet in this scene the roles of tradesman and debtor are colored for us by the ever-helpful narrator. One doubts that he really means us to find the tradesman just in having a person confined for £10, though obviously he is within his legal rights to do so. Our disgust here should be with the system that makes such a thing possible and with a person who feels so little mercy. Readers who have any experience with unfeeling debt collectors would have a lens through which to view Squire Western, and given Fielding’s ironic characterization of the tradesman, we are likely not meant to sympathize with him very much.

Legal language also creeps into Fielding’s descriptions of thought processes. Black George considers stealing more money from Tom, after having taken the £500, and Fielding shows us his inner
debate: “his Conscience should have considered that Matter before, when he deprived poor Jones of his 500 l. That having quietly acquiesced in what was of so much greater Importance, it was absurd, if not downright Hypocrisy, to affect any Qualms at this Trifle.” This is George arguing against his conscience; however, “Conscience, like a good Lawyer, attempted to distinguish between an absolute Breach of Trust, as here where the Goods were delivered, and a bare Concealment of what was found, as in the former Case” (2:321). This is a strange way of describing what goes on in Black George’s mind. One suspects he would not have made legal distinctions in such explicit terms, and the imposition of this kind of language into the thought process of Black George seems intended to make us laugh at its implausibility. In this case, theft is not funny, but a low, uneducated thief thinking like a lawyer is. The world is no safer, but we can laugh at its absurdities.

In both novels, the road is dangerous, and robbery a menace. Light and bouncy as both novels are, the threat of violence and being preyed upon is a real one. On the road, Joseph finds that “He had not gone above two Miles, charmed with the hopes of shortly seeing his beloved Fanny, when he was met by two Fellows in a narrow Lane, and ordered to stand and deliver. He readily gave them all the Money he had, which was somewhat less than two Pounds.” Being a believer in the goodness of others, however unrealistically, Joseph “told them he hoped they would be so generous as to return him a few Shillings, to defray his Charges on his way home” (1:64). In *Tom Jones*, we are reminded that a stranger is a potential robber and that caution should be observed when revealing one’s money. Mrs. Waters, trying to get a traveling companion for herself, reveals that she has “in her Pocket three Bank Notes to the Amount of 90 l. besides some Cash, and a Diamond Ring of pretty considerable Value on her Finger. All which she, with the utmost Confidence, revealed to this wicked Man, little suspecting she should by these Means inspire him with a Design of robbing her” (3:366). There is a lesson here that even a dull reader ought to pick up: trust can be dangerous, and only a fool gives out trust in this manner. Described this way, Fielding suggests she practically invites robbery on herself. Tom meets highwaymen who attempt unsuccessfully to rob him, as does Squire Western’s sister.
Not all thieves are highwaymen. Upon hearing how much money she will receive after Squire Allworthy’s death, Mrs. Deborah Wilkins thinks to herself how unfair her share is and how badly it reflects her place in the servant hierarchy. She is also upset at how her loyalty has been repaid. She thinks, “Sure Master might have made some Difference, methinks, between me and the other Servants. I suppose he hath left me Mourning; but, i-faccins! if that be all, the Devil shall wear it for him for me. I’d have his Worship know I am no Beggar. I have saved five hundred Pound in his Service, and after all to be used in this Manner. It is a fine Encouragement to Servants to be honest.” She adds, with no apparent irony, “and to be sure, if I have taken a little Something now and then, others have taken ten times as much; and now we are all put in a Lump together (2:179). This is loyalty and justice indeed. Theft is excusable if everyone does it, and you take less than most people. Given Allworthy’s generosity with his servants, Wilkins’s admission of her own theft and her treatment of stealing among the servants as commonplace is distressing. No doubt those with servants worry about being robbed by them, and one would like to see Allworthy’s behavior rewarded. Instead, his household suffers badly from theft, and one assumes Wilkins did not put together the tidy sum of £500 entirely from her own wages. We can laugh at her hypocrisy, but she is stealing from a good man, and we are not meant to agree with her doing so.

The amount of detail covered in the sums in both novels is impressive and shows us a range of lifestyles and different attitudes about what constitutes a lot of money. Partridge “had a Wife whom he had married out of Mr. Allworthy’s Kitchen, for her Fortune, viz. Twenty Pound, which she had there amassed” (1:91). This is a far cry from Sophia Western’s fortune of £3,000 a year, plus whatever remains of her mother’s £8,000 that she brought to the marriage. Hearing about this from Lady Belleston, Lord Fellamar says, “I think her the best Match in England” (5:204). This is an extraordinary income, placing her high among the financially elite, and might be worth between £600,000 and £900,000. Yet at Partridge’s level, £20 is sufficient to entice him. He gets a £10 annuity from Allworthy and considers £20 quite a lot of money. Black George’s daughter is very proud of the money Tom gives her essentially in exchange for sex. She shows her mother and says, “See what he hath given me this Afternoon; he hath promised I shall never want Money; and you shan’t want Money neither, Mother, if you will hold your
Tongue, and know when you are well.’ And so saying, she pulled out several Guineas, and gave her Mother one of them” (3:214). Molly clearly regards “several Guineas” as a sizeable amount of money and is well pleased with the promise of more. She thinks one guinea alone sufficient to persuade her mother to play along and hold her objections. This family is poor enough that, like Pamela’s family, gold pieces are hard to come by and treasured.

In both novels, money comes as a reward at the end of the protagonist’s stories, and we get inheritance mix ups, as in *Amelia*, that are set right to the relief of the reader. In a truly ridiculous twist, Joseph turns out not to be Pamela’s brother at all but instead the lost heir of Mr. Wilson. Fanny is Pamela’s sister. To make her an appropriate wife for Joseph, who shifts from one good family to another, we are told that “Mr. Booby hath with unprecedented Generosity given Fanny a Fortune of two thousand Pound.” The supposed lack of precedent for his generosity is probably a dig at the conclusion of *Pamela*. Joseph spends some of that money establishing “a little Estate in the same Parish with his Father, which he now occupies, (his Father having stock’d it for him;) and Fanny presides, with most excellent Management in his Dairy” (2:309). Though Pamela had objected to Fanny as a possible wife for Joseph because of a mismatch in social standing (a very obvious joke on Pamela marrying above her station), she can hardly say anything against her own sister, particularly after she is provided for by Booby. All ends well, if in a ridiculously convoluted and miraculous manner, and the protagonists should be happy together. Even Parson Adams receives a reward: “Mr. Booby hath presented Mr. Adams with a Living of one hundred and thirty Pounds a Year. He at first refused it, resolving not to quit his Parishioners, with whom he hath lived so long: But on recollecting he might keep a Curate at this Living, he hath been lately inducted into it” (2:310). This is a major step up socially and financially for Adams, who has really done nothing to deserve it, but he was funny, and readers seem intended to like him, so he should have his situation improved along with Joseph and Fanny. Presumably his wife and children will also benefit from his change in circumstances, though they occupy remarkably little of his attention, and there is probably a satiric point being made as a result.
Squire Allworthy’s will reading scene is full of meaningful sums. Initially he leaves everything to Blifil except £6,000 and an income of £500 a year. Tom gets the £500 a year, and Thwackum and Square each get £1,000. This is extremely generous behavior toward all involved, though obviously only Tom feels grateful, the others considering themselves worth more somehow. Their ingratitude helps encourage us to dislike them further if we required encouraging. All these arrangements, however, come to nothing when Tom is revealed to be Allworthy’s sister’s firstborn son. Add to this Allworthy’s discovery from Square’s deathbed confession that Thwackum and Blifil are scoundrels out to deceive him, and Tom becomes the legitimate heir. Interestingly, Blifil receives £300, even though he has been sent away and never sees Allworthy again. Tom and Sophia persuaded Allworthy to send him £200 a year, to which they add another £100. This is quite better treatment than Tom received from Blifil. We are told that Blifil became Methodist to try to marry a rich widow and that he wants to buy his way into Parliament. For being the villain of this story, he ends very well.

Justice is a hard thing to get in *Tom Jones*. Black George’s theft comes to light, and though he flees, the money goes to his family anyway. Molly gets the majority of it. Why she should get any reward goes unexplained. Thwackum returns to his vicarage and gets no more help from Allworthy. Parson Adams comes in to replace him and to tutor Tom and Sophia’s children, when they have some. Partridge gets another school to operate and a living of £50 a year from Tom, while Mrs. Waters receives a pension of £60 a year from Allworthy (6:300-303). Essentially none of these characters deserves these rewards, strictly speaking, and the behavior being rewarded is questionable at best. This is, however, a cheerful, happy ending, and we are meant to go along with it because this is how Fielding wants the story to end, not because it is the logical conclusion of the narrative as it has progressed thus far. Miraculous turns of plot to settle money on everyone and make them happy appear in all three novels. This is a bit of a strange way for him to end the stories, though, given that comic drama usually ends with marriages and rewards for the good and punishments for the bad. No doubt Blifil feels punished with his income of £300 a year, but the fact that this income places him above all but about 3% of the population tells us that his
punishment is a mild one at best. If Fielding intended either novel to convey serious moral messages, these endings clearly contradict them, and the monetary rewards bestowed make this plain.

**Consistency among Fielding’s Economic Worlds**

My purpose throughout has been to call attention to some obvious similarities between Fielding’s major novels with regard to their socioeconomic presentation. The result is a different view of the novels and of Fielding’s purpose and worldview in each than has usually been assumed. In one of the best studies of eighteenth-century fiction, Jerry C. Beasley argues, “Tom Jones is the triumphant achievement of its author’s genius, and in an important way it represents the culmination of the development of the novel as a new form during the critical decade of the 1740s.”\(^{179}\) This claim gives Tom Jones almost hyperbolic importance within both Fielding’s particular career and the history of English fiction, yet it is hardly a controversial statement to make. Richardsonians might prefer to see Clarissa as the culmination of the development of the novel, but critics without an ax to grind could easily agree with Beasley without needing too much convincing. The reputation of Tom Jones has come a very long way since its original publication and now looms large in literary histories of the novel. Tom Jones may not be the pinnacle of Fielding’s achievement or the hallmark of the emergent novel, but as sound a critic as Beasley sees them this way. Amelia then cannot help but look unimpressive if we fault it for failing to be Tom Jones and focus on the ways in which it is not.

In truth more than just socioeconomics unites the major novels, and attention to the recurrent trends helps us understand what Fielding seems to have thought he was doing with fiction. Liz Bellamy has argued that “In representing the ‘mixed’ characters that so worried theorists of the novel, Fielding rejected the kind of didacticism advocated by those writers who identified a conflict between the moral and the realistic narrative functions.” She links the male protagonists, explaining that “Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, and William Booth are far from being perfect characters, but they do not set out to provide

\(^{179}\) Jerry C. Beasley, *Novels of the 1740s* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1982), 208.
models for unquestioning imitation. They are endowed with a natural predisposition to virtue, which is only converted into moral sense by means of experience.”  

Joseph Andrews comes quite a lot closer to perfect in at least a moral sense than either of the other two, but his naivety leaves a lot to be desired, and Bellamy’s assessment seems essentially true. The point is to see a trend in the fiction in order to get at Fielding’s larger purpose, in this case to experiment with different ways of making a moral case by requiring the reader to follow along as the protagonists learn and grow. How successfully Fielding does this might be worth asking. Tom Jones and William Booth make somewhat less than convincing claims to reforming their ways, and we do not see much evidence as to whether they make good on them.

The conflict between moralistic and realistic narrative functions seems to have mattered quite a lot to eighteenth-century writers of fiction, as a quick survey of the prefaces to novels like Robinson Crusoe, Pamela, or Joseph Andrews would make clear. Defoe, or whoever wrote those novels, falls victim to the charge of showing vice in too much detail in order to teach a lesson and seemingly knows it. The preface to Moll Flanders makes plain that the so-called editor believes that some people will read the memoir incorrectly and relish the details of criminal life, rather than recoiling from the bad in horror and applauding the good when it is justly rewarded. We are told that the world has been balanced by the editor of Moll’s papers with just deserts and punishments meted out in the end. Even so, at times we find ourselves quite far from moral preaching and into fascinating stories about prostitution and how to steal things while not getting caught. Some of Moll Flanders reads like a conduct book teaching readers how to live her sort of life and get away with it, and this is the problem created by trying to offer a narrative with lots of specific details.

Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia deal with this conflict in relatively similar ways. As Bellamy says, we get a male protagonist who needs to learn something (and often many things) about the world and how to behave in it, and we go along with him as he makes his journey. Strangely the women tend not to learn anything, which complicates the formula a bit, unless one assumes only male readers for

---

these novels or that Fielding could imagine only men needed moral instruction. Mona Scheuermann points out that “Fielding has a great deal of trouble with major female characters, and his heroines, Sophia and Amelia, are exaggerations of the good female just as his bad women are caricatures of female weakness.” About Amelia in particular, Scheuermann says, “Amelia is good beyond the point of admiration: in her uncomplaining support of her bumbling husband, at some point in the story she slips over the line from virtuous helpmate to willing victim.”181 I am entirely in agreement with Scheuermann here, though it is worth remembering that uncomplaining support of a bumbling husband only annoys readers who expect wives to do otherwise, and I am not sure everyone who picked up Amelia would have. What matters here is that Fanny, Sophia, and Amelia, unlike their male counterparts, do not learn anything or grow as people. They are not fallen women who struggle to become self-actualized persons or any such thing, and they tend to come off as created with unbelievable psychology. These are Fielding’s models of what women should be like, and they appear in each of the three major novels, paired with a man who also fills a similar role in the plot structure.

Fielding probably needs to be understood as a writer who experimented in radical ways but who still fell into patterns. Hume argues in a recent essay that “Fielding’s debts to earlier writers are unusually minimal, and he does not stick to one or two modes in drama or fiction. He innovates, experiments, and takes chances. Among long eighteenth-century writers I think only Swift and Blake are more completely original.”182 This is more or less true and a view of Fielding that critics tend not to adopt because they overemphasize his classical learning and make too much of his reliance on it. Discussions of Amelia, for example, will very often remind us that Fielding imagined the novel as modeled on Virgil’s Aeneid. Comparisons between Amelia and the Aeneid can be made, but the one looks nothing like a retelling of the other. I want to qualify this experimental, original Fielding by adding that quite a lot carries over from one novel to another.

---

182 Hume, “Fielding at 300,” 259.
One area in which Fielding remains fairly consistent across the three novels is in reportage of
details and creating a realistic background. Just how realistic these novels are and the nature of their
success or failure to achieve verisimilitude has been a recurrent topic in Fielding studies since at least
Michael Irwin’s *Henry Fielding: The Tentative Realist* (1967). I want by way of conclusion to revisit
some of what has been said about 1) Fielding’s realism in these novels and 2) how he handles money and
the relative significance of the socioeconomic context he provides in his stories.

Critics often associate *Amelia* with increased realism in Fielding’s work. Claude Rawson says of
*Amelia* that “It is no longer a matter of low subjects in high language or vice versa: there is instead a
leveling of both to an underisive reportage of ordinary life.”¹⁸³ This does not mean a focus on the lower
sorts, just suiting the subjects to the manner in which they would presumably present themselves in the
world outside the novel. We certainly get some underisive reportage of ordinary life, though we also get
derisive reportage of ordinary life alongside cheerful storytelling about bizarre circumstances. Fielding’s
realism seems more to do with the content than the plot. As Hunter explains, “The burden of the present
was heavier than the burden of the past for most thoughtful men in the eighteenth century, and Fielding’s
career embodies a series of attempts to work out artistically the implications of intrusive contexts.”¹⁸⁴
However fanciful or realistic the novels might seem, then, they reflect Fielding’s engagement with his
present-day surroundings, which cannot help but creep in. Fielding’s realism in this view follows
inevitably from dealing with contemporary life and wanting to reproduce the contexts in which people
actually lived in order to make some kind of point.

Hunter’s phrase “intrusive contexts” seems exactly right when one considers the apparent
contradiction between the inclusion of details from “real life” and the often wacky plot twists. We get a
plethora of specifics that one would assume were included to help convince readers that they are looking
at England, primarily in the 1740s, but what actually happens in that world ought to put all but the
wealthiest readers into a state of wonder, not recognition, even in the case of *Amelia*. Though presumably

¹⁸⁴ Hunter, *Occasional Form*, 214.
anyone capable of getting credit could empathize with Booth’s inability to pay it back, the sums Fielding tells us that Booth earns at various points in the novel and the amount of money brought by Amelia’s inheritance put them in an elite socioeconomic position. They do not actually grind through a life of poverty always and ever. Fielding presents a conflict, then, between accurate, believable details constructing a recognizable socioeconomic context for the stories and what actually happens.

Not everyone is convinced that Fielding’s novels are particularly realistic; or, if they are, the realism is not about everyday life but something else. James Cruise argues, “By the time Fielding published *Amelia* (1751), he shows signs of a shifting attitude about the ‘art of thriving,’ not that he discomfited it, but merely inverted it to recommend the more positive ‘Art of Life.’ With this principle he offers the hope of reform, again by positing an ideal form.”¹⁸⁵ Cruise sees Fielding moving away from a focus on life to a focus on art. John Richetti seems in agreement with this position when he says, of all the novels, that “The burden of the narrator’s conversation with his readers is precisely the necessity for reprocessing contemporary realities into these much more aesthetically pleasing and morally symmetrical patterns and repetitions, since the scandal of contemporary life, as Fielding’s novels approach it, is the absence or at least the continued erosion of traditional order and the rarity of virtuous action.”¹⁸⁶ What matters for Fielding, then, is not realism or believability but order and good actions, which have to be imposed by the author. Fielding aims to please in this formulation, and what might actually happen in the real world matters less to him than creating a world in which things happen the way they should. This would not set Fielding apart from most writers of fiction, of course, but it would provide one way of understanding the seeming contradiction between realistic contexts and implausible plots.

Beasley goes even further. He argues that that the models of life put forward in fiction “presumably coincide with possibilities inherent in the real world, or at least their authors claim insistently that they do, and this is their only apparent importance. They may be to a certain extent

composed on the principles of verisimilitude, but actually they serve as surreptitiously contrived substitutes for empirical reality—as disguised interpretations of real life, usually for some ostensible homiletic purpose, but projected as its mirror reflections.” Ultimately this artificial realism is what we get in most novels, though whether its artificiality matters depends on whether we know we are reading a novel. One hopes we could safely assume that readers of Fielding’s fiction were not searching around for the real Tom Jones, but this formulation works less well for something like Robinson Crusoe or even Pamela, at the beginning of the decade.

In the case of Fielding’s major fiction, we actually find a surprising amount of explicit attention to detailed contexts and the use of seemingly insignificant things like bank notes for literary purposes. James Thompson cleverly points out in his chapter on Fielding in Models of Value that the bank notes given to Tom travel quite a lot in the course of the novel and take on a kind of story of their own. The money itself never actually does anything as money, but Fielding uses it as a plot driver. I quoted examples above of Fielding helping his readers understand how money works, calling their attention to the importance of particular sums, and the narrator’s amusement at the readers he imagines losing track of important details, which he recalls for us. To return briefly to Hunter’s phrase “intrusive contexts,” I might add that contexts like the ‘45 or controversy related to Methodism might intrude on Tom Jones, but the specifics creating the world of the novel, of which these intrusive contexts are a part, seem to me entirely intentional.

This brings us to the significance of these details, especially money, which has been the focus of much of this chapter. Mary Poovey makes what seems at first a grand claim for the importance of money and credit in Tom Jones: “While Tom Jones is not usually read as a handbook about how to use (or avoid) credit, it contains so many examples of virtuous and criminal, productive and foolish behaviors with money and credit that we might be tempted to read it as such.” In fact, Poovey goes on to argue the exact opposite and cast the money as totally insignificant: “Tom Jones, by contrast, consistently

---

187 Beasley, Novels of the 1740s, 185.
188 Mary Poovey, Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 136.
subordinates its narratives about economic behaviors and credit instruments to its aesthetic and ethical rationales, which do not depend on understanding how credit worked or obtaining information about various levels of national productivity.” She adds, “While it is possible for a reader to determine the precise nature of the ‘bank-bills’ that Mr. Allworthy gives Tom when he sends him away early in the novel, in other words, it is not necessary to do so. In fact, figuring this out does not enhance one’s understanding of or appreciation for the novel because the fiction’s primary function is not to help readers obtain information about or understand the money economy but to encourage them to cultivate moral virtues like prudence, moderation, and generosity” (137). This seems to me a reasonable caveat that then goes too far. Understanding what the bank bills are in detail and how they work will not change a person’s reading of Tom Jones much.

The same cannot be said of knowing how much the bank bills are worth. If we think Tom is banished from Allworthy’s estate with hardly enough to sustain him, Allworthy appears surprisingly cruel and Tom’s circumstances and future prospects fairly bleak. When Black George steals the money, this is a kick to a man already down. If we consider the money actually very substantial, Allworthy is generous; Tom is well provided for; and Black George is a heinous criminal for ruining his friend. Poovey continues, “After all, throughout Tom Jones, Fielding depicts only the ‘low’ characters—ladies’ maids, manservants, and stablemen, thinking about money obsessively and in specific amounts” (138). This is a bald misrepresentation of the novel that requires ignoring readily apparent counterevidence. Mr. Nightingale obsesses over money and in specific amounts quite well. In fact, Lord Fellamar, Squire Western, and Lady Bellaston all express serious interest in money and give amounts. Money matters rather obviously to Mrs. Miller, who is hardly a “low” character, and one might do worse than recall Squire Allworthy himself giving specific amounts in his will to an audience standing around his sick bed. Fielding uses specific amounts to illustrate generosity and its converse, to help us establish relative levels of wealth and poverty among the characters, as a simple way to enhance verisimilitude, and to guide our interpretations of people’s actions and mindset. Tom gives away significant sums of money without a second thought. This is generosity but also dangerous irresponsibility. The money he gives to Mrs. Miller,
for example, he badly needs himself. Allworthy is in a position to give out pensions and to support people, but Tom is not. I agree with Poovey that one major purpose of the novel is to pass on some judgments about prudence, moderation, and generosity, but these virtues are demonstrated in many cases with specifically named sums of money, and we will not understand the points being made if we do not understand the money.

One somewhat disturbing point that we take away from paying closer attention to money and the socioeconomic background as Fielding provides it is that Fielding does not appear to believe in upward mobility or what would later be called “the American Dream.” Gillian Skinner rightly notes that "Amelia thoroughly undermines any system of benevolence, but the potentially radical discourses involving economic production and station in life which surface as a consequence of this at moments during the action of the novel, are effectively contained and neutralized by the romance ending.”189 Quite a lot that seems daring and interesting about Amelia and economic life disappears with the novel’s abrupt happy ending. Amelia comes as close as we get in the three novels to something like Moll Flanders or Roxana, in which a person really can improve his (and much more surprisingly her) life by accumulating money through a variety of means, from stealing to high-end investing. As Michael McKeon explains, “Attracted, on the other hand, to the energy of the career open to talents, Fielding was appalled by the vanity and pretension of those who enacted that career with any success or conviction. Accordingly, what ‘happens’ at the end of Joseph Andrews (and Tom Jones) is less a social than an epistemological event; not upward mobility but—as in the invoked model of Oedipus (IV, xv, 336)—the acquisition of knowledge.”190

Right. We hear of Blifil that he hopes to marry a wealthy woman and run for Parliament, but we will never see whether he succeeds, and we have no real reason to hope he does. If anything, having the villain attempt social climbing only satirizes upward mobility. Just about everyone’s financial circumstances improve at the end of Tom Jones but not for any good reason other than Allworthy’s generosity. People as a rule do not pull themselves up through talent and industry in Fielding’s novels. They are either the lucky

190 McKeon, Origins, 408.
chosen—or not.

This is a fairly bleak worldview in which improving one’s social standing and financial position cannot be done. One of the elites may condescend to grace you with his or her generosity, but that is the best you can hope for, and you had better remember that such generosity can be taken away. Partridge loses the pension on which he depends when Allworthy suspects he is Tom’s father. Black George likewise loses his living when Allworthy thinks he is responsible for the hunting incident on Western’s property. Both men find themselves ruined financially and turn desperate. Allworthy is kind and giving, but he can cut off his support in full knowledge of the consequences of doing so. Had “Defoe” written one of these novels, the protagonist would have learned a trade (or several), invested in property, and started a plantation in the Americas, becoming wealthy over a period of many years through competent management (or in Crusoe’s case, incredible luck). Samuel L. Macey draws a comparison between Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding with regard to their attitudes towards money: “In Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia, the goals of the protagonists are not those of accumulating sufficient capital to retire on, as in Defoe, nor those of marrying to run a large country estate with clockworklike efficiency, as in Richardson.” “Fielding’s goal,” he says, “combines instead the romance notion of living in a rustic golden age with the highly realistic monetary requirements of providing the funds to make such a promising outcome possible. In all three of Fielding’s major novels the necessary funds derive primarily from the female protagonists. Love is of course provided by both parties, but Fielding remains fully aware that a sufficient competence is also necessary.”191 This is precisely the point: the protagonists do get a lot of money in the end, but they get it by marrying wealthy women.

The parallel with the moral trajectories of the narratives should be obvious. The men begin at a low point and move up significantly by the end in both moral and financial standing, and it is primarily the women who raise them up in both cases. No one has to work to become good or rich. In fact we do not see most of the main characters do anything for money. Tom and Sophia support themselves entirely with other people’s money and are almost reckless with how much they spend or give away. They know

191 Macey, Money and the Novel, 144-5.
basically nothing about money management, which readers can easily interpret as a sign of immaturity. Booth and Amelia ought to know better than they seem to. Amelia feeds Booth’s habits, and the results are less than desirable. Joseph does in fact work for a living in the beginning of his narrative, and we even know how little he makes. We know also how much Parson Adams makes, but we never see him do anything that should count as “work” or that ought to earn him that money. Quite a lot of people have or get money in Fielding’s novels. Hardly anyone earns it.

Money and Morality in Fielding’s Fiction
Since the publication of Martin C. Battestin’s *The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art* (1959), Fielding has been increasingly seen as a moralist, particularly in his fiction. Critics interested in style and narrative have said much about his quirky and often intrusive narrators, and these two strands in criticism have reinforced each other. We know Fielding gives us highly opinionated voices telling us these stories. Surely they mean to teach us something. We also know Fielding held strong opinions of his own and expressed them in his journalism, his political and social satires in the theatre, and in his work as a magistrate later in life. Naturally enough then we tend to assume the existence of a message or didactic purpose and have found many of them, not all of which could coexist. The dominance of the Fielding-as-moralist interpretation has become widespread. It plays a major role in Battestin’s biography, in his annotations to the standard Wesleyan edition, and in numerous book chapters and articles. I want to conclude therefore with some brief points about how Fielding’s handling of economics, particularly sums of money, undercuts this interpretation.

---


Money changes hands quite a lot in these three novels, and we even see a few robberies, but the most significant uses of money come at the ends of the stories, when the protagonists are rewarded and the villains punished. *Joseph Andrews* lacks anything like a real villain, though Joseph’s employer and sister Pamela both play the role of antagonist at given points. Neither comes to any real bad end. Both begin the story wealthy and stay that way. Neither meets any serious reproach or comeuppance for how they have treated Joseph or the roadblocks they introduced. Mr. Booby serves as Fielding’s paternalistic, benevolent gentleman, setting things right and doling out money where appropriate and necessary. He urges compassion and patience and can be seen fairly easily as a protean Squire Allworthy. As for our heroes, Joseph finds out he belongs to a wealthy family and will inherit their money. Mr. Booby provides a significant amount of cash for Fanny to bring to her marriage to Joseph. In both cases, money essentially falls from the sky. The ending is famously convoluted, with its switches and back-switches, but the final result is that we have two characters abruptly yanked up in social standing so that they can marry respectably.

*Tom Jones* would seem the more complicated moral universe to deal with, then. In this case, we are given clear villains in Blifil, Square, Thwackum, and Lady Bellaston (to name just the major players). Would we say that each meets with an appropriate end if *Tom Jones* intends to communicate a moral message about right and wrong life choices? This is the standard reading, yet Lady Bellaston goes entirely unpunished, despite arranging for Sophia to be raped and essentially making a gigolo of Tom.\(^{194}\) She plays a significant enough role in the story that some kind of just end for her behavior would have seemed appropriate, perhaps in the way *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) would handle women like Bellaston later in the century. Thwackum’s cruelty comes to light, and he loses his inheritance and place in Allworthy’s house. He tries unsuccessfully to return to Allworthy’s good graces, and this seems a reasonable punishment and very in keeping with Allworthy’s consistent practice of cutting people off financially when they displease him. Square actually dies, which is surely punishment enough for anyone.

\(^{194}\) For an interpretation of *Tom Jones* that sees Tom as a kind of prostitute, see Laura J. Rosenthal’s *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).
He confesses the secret of Tom’s birth, the conspiring between Thwackum and Blifil, and helps to set the mistaken identity plot right. He dies a penitent and something of a pathetic hypocrite. Fair enough.

Blifil’s punishment, however, is not as clear-cut as these others. If the novel has a villain, surely Blifil is it. Battestin, who reads Tom Jones primarily in moral/religious terms, sees Blifil as Fielding’s attack on the Methodists. The smoking gun for him comes at the end of the novel, when Blifil is described as “lately turned Methodist, in hopes of marrying a very rich Widow of that Sect” (979-80). If Fielding is taking a shot at Methodists here, however, it is a very tame one. After all, we are told that Blifil winds up with £300 a year—£200 from Allworthy and another £100 from Tom. £300 a year happens also to be the amount settled on in 1745 as the minimum necessary to serve as a magistrate. As Pat Rogers explains, “The assumption still prevailed that the job required to be held by a ‘gentleman,’ that is, one who would not be tempted to take bribes—of course the post carried no salary.” Fielding tells us that Blifil saves £200 a year out of this income and is hoping to buy a position in Parliament. Blifil’s income may be a disappointment to him after expecting to inherit Allworthy’s estate for so many years, but in truth he remains in a very elite financial position, a fact that critics seem entirely unaware of. If Fielding meant to punish Blifil to make his moral point clear to the reader, he botched the execution. At £300 a year, Blifil resides among the top 2-3% of the income strata, wealthy but not ridiculously so. No doubt he would see his situation as a comedown from inheriting Allworthy’s estate and marrying Sophia Western, thus becoming master of a gigantic country property by combining the neighboring areas, but he has met with nothing like punishment fitting the crime. He tried to see Tom ruined and instead wound up partially financially supported by him.

The ending of Amelia suggests Fielding also thought stronger punishment necessary for people like Blifil. Amelia’s sister, who steals her inheritance and messes up her life, meets a much worse end.

---

She dies in a manner no disclosed, but we do at least hear that it was awful. Unlike Blifil, though, we know very little about this sister, apart from her bad behavior towards Amelia. Her motivations are unclear, as is the background between her and her sister. She cannot be taken seriously as a representative of a particular kind of evil being punished because we meet another character in *Amelia* whose inheritance gets taken in a similar way and never has any problems. Removing the sister and restoring the money need to happen in order for Fielding to give us the happy ending that Amelia seems to deserve. Yet Blifil’s example shows us that killing her off, however, is not the only option Fielding could think of and that, for some reason, she deserved something more or he felt differently. One wonders whether Fielding’s characteristically problematic attitudes towards women in the novels plays a role. Blifil and the lawyer who steals Trent’s inheritance do fairly well, while Amelia’s sister dies horribly. Morality, per se, does not seem to be the cause of what happens to this character, though one could not argue she gets punished.

Overall the distribution of money relates very badly to the behavior of the characters in any of these novels, though Fielding clearly uses money to strengthen his happy endings. Many undeserving characters, such as Black George’s daughter in *Tom Jones*, receive a cash prize for seemingly no reason other than Fielding’s desire to twist us toward a cheerful resolution in which most people end up well, regardless of desert. *Tom Jones* winds up better off by far than his behavior would seem to warrant, as does Booth. If they are rewarded for unconvincing, last-minute declarations to reform, what we have is something much more like a London comedy with the old reform-the-rake plot than any serious attempt to teach someone how to behave, even through flawed models. Joseph, Tom, and Booth do not really learn anything over the course of their stories, even if they say they do. They marry women who make them rich, and in only Fanny’s case do we have any good reason to suspect the ending is really a happy one for the woman. Unlike Richardson, Fielding did not provide lengthy appendices to his novels, explaining what he intended by each of the characters. He seems to want to impart all sorts of advice and to demonstrate a variety of situations, sometimes just for amusement, other times to teach, but he is totally inconsistent in how he handles characters of essentially the same type across plots and subplots. In
Richardson’s case, we have a very easy time figuring out how he wanted us to read his novels and what he thought the point was. Not so with Fielding, and we could do worse than ask whether he actually has a clear sense of a didactic purpose.
Epilogue

Literary Realism, Believability, and Authenticity

The idea of the rising novel has, since the publication of Watt’s highly influential The Rise of the Novel (1957), lost favor with critics as a simple formulation; yet the desire to find the novel’s telos has remained. Perhaps Watt’s most enduring critical legacy has been the belief that realism distinguishes the novel from whatever came before it, usually called romance. In his long-standard glossary of literary terms, M. H. Abrams explains, “Realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. The romance is said to present life as we would have it be—more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than actuality; realism, on the other hand, is said to represent life as it really is.”

Histories of the novel have long argued that it emerges from romance and that realism distinguishes the one from the other. As a result, realism has defined the novel more than any other feature.

Yet what we mean by realism, how it functions, and where have not been much addressed by studies of eighteenth-century fiction. As Rachel Carnell points out in one of the few books to deal with the problem of realism in the history of the novel, “In more recent decades, social and cultural theory has been a central feature of scholarship on the novel’s origins [. . .] The topic that has been of less interest to scholars over the last several decades is the category of narrative realism itself.” Carnell’s interest in realism stems from her argument that writers of fiction expressed their partisan politics in what we now

---


198 This really is surprising given the flood of books on nineteenth-century and modernist realism in fiction. Some notable, very recent examples include Katherine Kearns, Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tom Lloyd, Crises of Realism: Representing Experience in the British Novel, 1816-1910 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997); Peter Brooks, Realist Vision (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); George Lewis Levine, Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Daniel Novak, Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and John Robert Reed, Dickens’s Hyperrealism (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

call novels and that the versions of reality that they put forward served political agendas. This would require that readers believed what they read for the trick to work and keeps us essentially in the world of realism as verisimilitude. Jesse Molesworth departs radically from this sense of realism, explaining, ‘‘realism’’ refers not, as was once common, to any formal characteristic of narrative but, rather, following critics like Michael Fried and Catherine Gallagher, to a textual interface seeking to diminish, or even liquidate, the boundary between audience and text.’’ He goes on to say that he uses the term ‘‘verisimilitude’’ to describe narrative’s capacity, limited though it may be, to offer a mimetic representation of ordinary life.200 Realism as the term is most often used, then, is not under scrutiny. Hardly ever does Molesworth say anything about how eighteenth-century readers might respond differently based on a correspondence between what appears in a text and their sense of the world. The point is to demonstrate (I think convincingly) a fascinating link between discourses about probability that might appear to have nothing to do with literature and the history of the novel.

My purpose here is to argue in favor of thinking about fictional realism in the eighteenth century as an effect of reading that derives from a variety of possible sources and that requires an awareness of at least some of the contextual information readers could have brought to bear in order to understand it. This might seem like common sense, though I point out the treatments of realism produced by such writers as Erich Auerbach, Georg Lukács, and Hayden White (just to name a few) as evidence of the great philosophical complexity with which realism has been discussed among literary theorists.201 I would caution also against the temptation to feel that, with the benefit of history on our side, we as modern readers may safely condescend to eighteenth-century readers, who in their innocence could not tell a novel from an authentic memoir or history. In 2003, James Frey published A Million Little Pieces, which


he claimed recounted events in his life. The book was promoted on The Oprah Winfrey Show and promptly rose to the top of the New York Times Best Seller List. Only later did an investigation reveal that many of the events were fabricated, and this discovery caused a great scandal and much public outrage. Our ability to tell fact from fiction, particularly when encountering a supposedly true personal history, has not in truth improved so very much. Much of what we might say about realism in eighteenth-century fiction and how its original readers felt about it or might have experienced it applies perfectly well to modern readers and theater-going audiences. I would like, therefore, to review what contributes to or undercuts a sense of realism in the eighteenth-century novels discussed in this study by way of opening up a discussion of literary realism more generally.

**Realism in the Novels**

Each of the novels encountered in this study contains elements that we might call realistic and others that seem fantastic. *Robinson Crusoe* has long seemed like a turning point in fiction because of the author’s heightened attention to details (such as specific measurements of money, time, and space, about sailing, geography, and setting) supposedly with the purpose of conveying a sense that the world presented is the same as the one the reader inhabits and that the events are not just possible but true. The plot, however, is not always believable. Crusoe somehow rescues items from his shipwreck that would have sunk his raft. He is the lone survivor of the shipwreck and lives on the island for 28 years. His plantation and finances are maintained by honest business partners, who cheerfully return his money to him when he writes to them. Friday lures a bear into a tree and fights it. And so on. The events of the plot are often at odds with a sense of realism, and the reportage of particular details is often no help, either. Crusoe becomes staggeringly wealthy at the end of the novel because he receives money generated by a plantation he established in Brazil nearly three decades earlier. We are told how much money he receives with specific sums, and these details do not appear to help establish Crusoe’s story as one likely to happen in the world just about any eighteenth-century reader would recognize as their own. The novel purports to be an
authentic memoir of the actual person Robinson Crusoe, and almost nothing reported could not have happened. Much is simply very, very unlikely.

*Moll Flanders* is, in many ways, much more plausible than *Crusoe*, yet still *highly* unlikely in terms of plot. Moll is a gypsy castoff taken in by a woman who employs child labor and is abandoned again when the old woman dies—only to be saved miraculously by a rich lady who raises her along with her own children. She falls in love with the family’s eldest son, who seduces her with flattery, gold coins, and promises of marriage. She is then heartbroken when he turns out to be false and wants her to marry his brother, who is in love with her and surprisingly forthcoming to his family about this. She agrees and has children with this man, but he dies young, and she gives the children to his family, leaving her free to set off on an adventure. She marries several more times, sometimes legally, mostly not, and finds herself married at one point to her half-brother, with whom she has children and lives in Virginia. She later somehow convinces a would-be suitor that she has a fortune of 15,000 pounds, though she lives on hardly anything at the time. Once she grows past marrying-for-money age, she becomes a thief and prostitute. She escapes hanging by turning penitent and is reunited with a lover in Newgate prison. Both are released and transported to America through the intervention of friends and money. They arrive as free people, establish a very profitable plantation, and eventually return to England in very good circumstances. She reunites with her son from the incestuous marriage while in America, and their reunion is a happy one. Her story ends happily, despite the unlikelihood of its doing so. Much about the novel seems legitimate. We get seemingly believable explanations of pick pocketing and careful handling of sums of money. Moll gives birth to many children and seems hardly ever to be slowed down by giving birth or in any fear of complications and risks to her health, despite the regularity with which women died in childbed. All of her children survive the birthing process, as well, which is very surprising though hardly impossible. Moll attempts throughout to address readers’ possible objections to her way of explaining her motives, stressing that the state or the Devil were responsible for her actions, not her impulsiveness and vanity. The novel represents a complicated mix of unlikely but possible elements combined with seemingly dead realistic events and details.
Roxana is sometimes more, sometimes less believable as an authentic memoir than either of the previous two novels. Roxana becomes wealthy early on in the novel, as do Crusoe and Moll, through extraordinary circumstances. Left destitute after her first husband dies and ruins them financially, Roxana parts with her children and lives meagerly, until her landlord takes an interest in her. She eventually convinces this lover to treat her as a wife, and he includes protection for her in his will. When he dies in France, she inherits a large sum of money, which she uses to begin a new life, despite his actual wife’s attempts to get his money and property. She befriends a financial advisor who, for no reason, helps her invest, and she makes a staggering sum of money over the course of several decades by saving and investing each year according to a long-term investment strategy. She heaps up more money from gifts given to her by wealthy men, including one member of nobility, and eventually marries a Dutch merchant of equal wealth to her own, making them very, very rich indeed. She comes to an undisclosed but bad end after a discarded child pursues her, and her companion Amy either murders or somehow harms this girl. The means by which she becomes wealthy through investing are more likely than what Moll or Crusoe experiences. The chances of her finding a well-to-do man to leave her a huge sum to invest, the possibility of accumulating wealth through gifts from rich and socially elite men, and the likelihood of a financial strategist wanting to spend his time helping her accumulate more money are not high, but such things are possible. The novel gives us another mix of the unlikely grounded in a seemingly recognizable, contemporary world-as-it-is.

Pamela offers another unlikely but possible plot. The events were supposedly based on a true story that Richardson had heard about, and in most respects the occurrences reported in the novel would require much less suspension of disbelief on the part of readers than the “Defoe” novels. The extremely wealthy Mr. B. fails to seduce and then surprisingly marries one of his household servants. This aspect of the story is usually the hardest to believe. Mr. B. spends the second half of the novel, however, explaining to various characters, including Pamela herself, why this match is actually believable. His major reason given is that a woman at his socioeconomic level would expect to be treated like an equal, make demands of him, and not be grateful to him when he acts generously toward her. He very much prefers Pamela’s
attitude towards him, which is a bit strange, given that she makes demands of him, is not grateful toward him for anything, and gives him a pretty hard time as his servant. Not until they are married does she lose her edge and become the submissive wife he desires. Could a rich man prefer to marry a very beautiful, poor girl who would be dependent on him and amazed by his generosity? Absolutely. As he explains, he does not need to marry for money and is much more concerned with how his wife would behave.

The realism of the novel is increased by Pamela’s extraordinary memory and the care with which she records details, such as the time and date at which she wrote which letters, what events were covered in them, specific amounts of money or geographic spaces covered, and above all the contents of sometimes very long conversations. Her memory in fact becomes the least plausible characteristic portrayed in the novel (if not her unshakable moral principles), as her account of what happens hardly ever gets contested. The presentation of the social classes is relatively believable, particularly Pamela’s father’s appearance before Mr. B., trying to get his daughter back. We see just how powerless he is before a great man, who serves also as the local magistrate. If one were willing to concede that the events were unlikely to happen every day in England, the story is actually quite plausible if the actors involved are idiosyncratic enough. Onlookers, such as Mr. B.’s sister or his servants, give reactions that help readers understand that they find the courtship extraordinary, and this would help increase the possibility that a reader might take it as the authentic memoir it purports to be. The events are not presented as characteristic of the lives of members of the squirearchy, and so the memoir seems more plausible as possible in the real world if unlikely to happen often. In its way, Pamela can appear surprisingly realistic and believable, especially when compared with “Defoe” and Fielding—fairy-tale ending notwithstanding.

Joseph Andrews is presented as comic farce throughout, and Fielding makes no pretence of its authenticity as the story of an actual person. Lady Booby’s comment that Joseph cannot possibly resist her sexual advances because no man is actually chaste might make readers laugh, but they would be unlikely to see their world carefully and accurately rendered in fiction in Joseph Andrews. Did wealthy women abuse their power to seduce male servants? Probably, but the manner in which Fielding presents it here is pure farce. We never worry for a minute that she will succeed with him, and Joseph suffers no
psychological trauma. He does not, in fact, have much psychological depth to him at all. Parson Adams is a comic setpiece from London comedies of the previous decades, the country rube who comes to town and gets abused. He is naïve and good-natured. Some bad things happen to him, and his foolishness is punished, but ultimately he ends well and attains a better paying job at the end of the novel (and does even better at the end of Tom Jones).

The ending, with its inexplicably complicated mistaken identity plot, is again straight out of London stage comedy, not real life. Joseph and Fanny are not who they thought they were but, luckily, turn out both to belong to wealthy families and can therefore wed. Pamela’s insistence on her brother marrying someone on his socioeconomic level rings true (and is an amusing jab at Richardson), but the plot is outrageous, and the characters are characters, not people. The reactions expressed by the characters at the end of the novel to the surprising revelations of mistaken identity would grossly miss the mark if Fielding had attempted to draw actual people. The Andrews clan parts with Joseph as they would a spare mule, and he is welcomed into his new family as the son always looked for. One would hope real people would be slower to part with even adopted children. The novel is not particularly realistic in terms of plot, psychology, or setting, though the road to London is dangerous enough. This is comic entertainment and does not pretend to be anything else. If realism is the hallmark of whatever “the novel” is, then Joseph Andrews might need to be classified as something else.

Tom Jones is more believable than Joseph Andrews, though this is not saying much. Fielding gives us careful handling of small sums, which seem reasonable particularly as prices paid for things like beer or a sword. The historical backdrop is the ‘45, which would have been relatively fresh on people’s minds and would help ground the novel in contemporary England. The behavior of Squire Western is at best farcical. Most of the characters lack any kind of depth, and their motivations almost always go unexplained. No one has any idea why, for example, Blifil tries to ruin Jones, when he is the legitimate heir and is not threatened in any way by his older half-brother. Thwackum and Square seem more types than people, as their names suggest. Again, we get heavy influence of the theatre here. The socioeconomics presented are fairly complex. Honour snubs the owners of an inn because she serves a
great lady, even though they obviously make more money and occupy a higher place in the financial strata. These intricacies would be lost on modern readers but could help contemporary English readers recognize the world they inhabit. Settings are mostly not described very fully. Most of the attention is on plot and comic characterization, explained by a breezy and entertaining but intrusive narrative voice. The plot is not at all believable as a story that actually happened to a real person. Jones is supposedly a foundling and favorite of Squire Allworthy who grows up to be raucous but good-natured, falls in love with the neighbor’s heiress, is sexually promiscuous, and ultimately marries the heiress after promising to be good. Many of the narrator’s observations and maxims offered along the way ring true, and a good deal of the social commentary imparted by the novel’s satire applies perfectly well to actual persons living in England at the time, but hardly anyone would be expected to search the country for Tom Jones and Sophia Western.

*Amelia* is supposed by modern critics to be Fielding’s most realistic novel, yet it contains a highly implausible plot. Amelia’s sister steals her inheritance for reasons that go unexplained, and Amelia elopes with a military man who spends their money and repeatedly puts them in debt. She does not complain about his mismanagement of their finances and instead is an enabling figure. He goes to jail for debt but also somehow amasses significant sums of money from farming in just a few years. Their neighbors ruin them when he buys a coach, which they think represents his attempt to position himself above them. This jealousy might seem believable. Neither Amelia nor her husband Booth, despite their misfortunes and miseries, comes off as particularly well-developed psychologically. They lack the sophistication of a Moll Flanders or Roxana but are a noticeable step forward from Jones or Sophia Western. The events of Booth and Amelia’s life together are no more believable though than those of Fielding’s other characters. All in all, Fielding does not seem to have worried much about realism or representing life in a way that could correspond to the lived reality of much of anyone, even in what is supposedly his most realistic novel.
Four Sources of Realism

As even a quick survey of the novels dealt with in this study makes clear, the potential sources of realism in each text are numerous, and they often work against each other. A plot might undercut the novel’s believability, while the detailed descriptions of the settings do the exact opposite. I have dealt with very few of the hundreds of novels produced between 1719 and 1752, yet even these taken together represent a significantly varied sample, and we may usefully hazard some generalizations based even on this small sample. Four of the most significant and effective sources of realism in the novels covered have been: 1) psychological complexity, 2) socioeconomic accuracy, 3) presentation of setting, and 4) particularity. The list is hardly exhaustive, as no list of this kind could pretend to be, but it helps us think about where the effect of a text seeming realistic comes from as readers engage with a novel.

Psychological complexity can greatly increase a reader’s sense that the people in the novel could be real and that the narrator of a memoir might correspond to an actual person. We get evidence of psychological depth in various ways, including interior monologues, reactions to events, and interpersonal relationships. A narrator who explains his or her motives can seem more like a real person. When recalling why he left Brazil on the voyage that left him shipwrecked, Crusoe cannot remember what would have made him think the trip was reasonable and does not understand his own motives. Given that several decades separate the Crusoe writing the story down from the one who made that decision, we can sympathize with his inability to remember. In fact a clear sense of his motivations would be more remarkable than forgetting, especially given what he has been through in the intervening years. Moll Flanders offers attempts to justify her actions and explain what drove her to do certain things much more frequently than Crusoe does, though we have reason to treat what she says skeptically. She begins her story by blaming a lack of orphanages for how she turned out and later blames the Devil for seducing her to a life of sin. At another moment, she points to her own vanity as a weakness that allowed her, throughout her life, to be manipulated by others, particularly men. Perhaps all of these things motivated her at various moments in her life, but one gets the sense that she does not always tell us the whole truth. This aspect of her narrative style can increase a sense of realism for some kinds of readers. Just about
anyone could understand the tendency to blame faults and bad decisions on others and to conceal what one finds upsetting in a memoir. Moll has, after all, become a penitent by the time of writing the story, so her attitude toward her past motivations makes sense. This consistency with how we might expect people to behave lends credibility to the text’s claim that the memoir is authentic, and Moll is real.

Sophia Western and Amelia, as with many of Fielding’s women, are not at all well-developed psychologically and often hard to understand. Sophia agrees to marry Tom even after she learns about his affair with Lady Bellaston and has more than enough reason to doubt his fidelity and feel angry or heartbroken. Amelia gives her husband more money to lose and does not even raise objections to his behavior. Both women generally accept their men for who they are without asking much of them. Their happiness is either assumed or beside the point. Pamela, as she is portrayed before marrying Mr. B., is much more believable as a real person in this regard: she stands up for herself, expresses her own values, and insists that Mr. B adhere to them. Her invincible moral principles have seemed one of her most unbelievable traits, and this is probably a fair criticism. One wonders how many young girls in her socioeconomic position would treat Mr. B as she does and refuse his offer to make her and her family rich in the name of her Christian soul. Mr. B’s decision to marry her might seem hard to grasp, but then he does go to great lengths to explain to other characters what he was thinking and why he did it. Readers come to these novels with their own ideas about how people behave, what motivates them, and how they interact with each other. When their expectations are met by the characters in the novels, the characters seem more like real people.

Socioeconomic accuracy is another way of creating equivalencies between lived experience and a world represented in fiction. How an author represents classes and social relationships might seem typical to readers or out of the ordinary and perhaps just inaccurate. Perhaps the Daniel Defoe imagined by modern critics, who wrote hundreds of wildly different sorts of texts and had his hands in many kinds of businesses and dealt with all sorts of people, would have possessed the familiarity with a wide enough range of people to draw the social orders in different parts of England accurately. One doubts Richardson could, and of course we know that at least Lady Bradshaigh gave him suggestions for improving the
accuracy of his representations of landed elites with whom he had not a great deal of personal
interaction. We assume Fielding got things about right in Amelia after serving as a magistrate, though
he had been representing all sorts of people, from lords to paupers, in his previous novels. These writers
could consult their own experience or ask friends for help, but their knowledge of English
socioeconomics would be imperfect at best, and their characterizations depended largely on their own
sense of how people at this or that social level would behave, talk, and think.

Socioeconomic accuracy would obviously matter a great deal more to eighteenth-century readers
than modern ones. Even the best social and economic histories do not replicate the experience of living in
the culture represented in these novels, and the sense that one gets of social stratification based on, say,
parish records would differ markedly from the perceptions of an eighteenth-century reader. This potential
source of realism, then, requires bringing to bear contextual, historical information to gauge as best one
can how the original audience might have responded to such things as social standing and whether a
character behaves as one would expect someone of that sort to behave. Black George steals the £500 Tom
Jones leaves Allworthy’s estate with and is generally an unscrupulous character. The narrator takes us
through his mental processes as he debates the morality of stealing even more money from Tom. What we
get here is a kind of stereotype of the lowlife with no moral code, doing as he pleases. His daughter is
similar and essentially prostitutes herself both to Tom and, as we find out, to Square. She flaunts the
money Tom gives her in front of her parents and sees herself as a legitimate earner in the household.
Black George and his daughter differ in the extreme from Pamela’s parents, who would rather see their
daughter return home and turn her hands red scouring pots than live in luxury as a rich man’s plaything.
All that matters to them is doing the right thing, at any price, and nothing matters more than virtue. They
are not foolish but neither are they schemers. No doubt both types of people existed among the lower
sorts, though one suspects more of the former than the later, which represent a kind of ideal for
Richardson.

202 For their correspondence, see Samuel Richardson, The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson,
Squire Allworthy, Squire Western, and Mr. B offer another interesting contrast. They all occupy the same socioeconomic position, and both Allworthy and Mr. B serve as the local magistrate. Western is hard drinking, much-enamored of fox hunting, and has a terrible relationship with his family. He is loud, boisterous, and shows no real love for those with titles or for London. When given the chance for Sophia to become Lady Fellamar, Western scoffs and would much rather join his country estate to his neighbor Allworthy’s. He comes off less like a human being in many scenes and more like a type. Allworthy and Mr. B have more in common with each other than they do with Western. They are generally benevolent to their servants and try to do good in their local communities. They are respected by the good families in the area. Mr. B shares Western’s distaste for and lack of interest in titles, as he shows nothing but scorn for his sister’s husband. Each of these characters exhibits qualities one would readily associate with the squirearchy but also their own deviations. Mr. B’s marrying a lower servant clearly makes him unusual, as do his bizarre attempts to court her or his elaborate, farcical, and ultimately failed attempts at rape. Allworthy and Western seem to represent an ideal of what a great man with wealth and power should be in the former case and an exaggeration of the much more flawed but probably more common case in the latter. None of them would likely come across as typical, assuming the reader had any experience with how squires behaved.

The novels associated with Defoe sometimes handle socioeconomic accuracy very well and other times give us events that make us wonder whether the author cared about faithful, believable representation at all. Roxana is the daughter of a French family at the upper end of the spectrum. Her father marries her to an Englishman who inherits a brewery. Unlike Mr. B’s marriage to Pamela, this marriage ought to have come across to eighteenth-century readers as utterly commonplace, if they were aware of or cared about the appropriateness of matches between the upper middle sort and lower upper sort. Essentially Roxana has married into a family of upper end merchants, and her father has done very well for her. She can expect a genteel lifestyle, as her husband will work for a living in a manner of speaking, but he would not be the sort of man Moll dreads, one actually performs manual labor. Moll provides a useful contrast. She tricks men into proposing marriage by pretending to have huge sums of
money—£15,000 in one instance. While readers might certainly be expected to believe that a lower aristocrat would marry into a family of brewers, an author asks quite a lot by showing us men so foolish that they believe a woman has such extreme wealth with absolutely no proof and with no explanation of how one even pretends to have £15,000 in the first place. Moll’s Lancashire husband bankrupts himself showing off for her with no more assurance of her wealth than a rumor she does not even confirm. When her half-brother/husband finds out she has very little money and is not the rich woman he supposed, he rightly blames himself for being so gullible. Could such foolish men exist? Absolutely, but the improbability of Moll’s scheme actually working would undercut a sense of realism for some readers. Many of the characters in these novels would be considered extraordinary, for which reason their stories are interesting to read. The mundane activities of the everyman generate little excitement. Even so, the characters need to seem like examples of the type to which they supposedly belong, however eccentric they might be, in order to be believable.

Presentation of setting can ground even a wildly unlikely plot in a believable world and thus contribute to a sense of realism. Authors might include details about geography, distances traveled, descriptions of environments, weather conditions, the rigors of travel and its difficulties (mud, hard terrain, sea sickness.), and so on. A lack of talking horses helps here, as does the absence of cars exploding from gunshots or floating islands in the sky. Most of Robinson Crusoe takes place in locations readers would not have seen, so they would have been unable to judge the accuracy of Crusoe’s descriptions. They might express some skepticism about his haphazardly tossing corn seeds into mud, which luckily grew and provided the basis for sustainable agriculture. They might also wonder at his seemingly magical ability to command the loyalty of wild animals, such as the dog he acquires, or his luck in surviving a terrible fever by simply waiting it out in a cave. In general, though, Crusoe tells us about far away locations and can say just about anything, since readers would have no way to challenge him. Moll and Roxana do not enjoy this luxury. Though both novels take us to locations readers might not know, such as Virginia or France, they both involve numerous scenes set in London and in English towns. Moll guides us through the criminal underworld in London and then into Newgate Prison. Presumably
most readers would not have the expertise to contest her representation of the prison, though some might have heard enough to make some judgments. Neither Moll nor Roxana describes the streets of London in any great detail or makes much of the roads between towns. For all that these novels are supposed to be grounded in realism, they include relatively little detail about particular locations and hardly any descriptions of settings readers might be familiar with. *Pamela* in fact offers quite a lot more along these lines. When Pamela finally leaves Mr. B’s house and heads home to her family, she learns that he is sick and wants to return to him. She tells us that she worries, however, that the horses have not rested enough and that the pace she intends to push them on could put them in danger of serious injury. The characters created by “Defoe” do not worry about this sort of thing. Fielding’s characters are also less aware of such things as the physical difficulty of travel, but we do get robbers on the road to London and interactions with other travelers, as when Tom encounters soldiers at an inn.

Though none of the novels contains a preponderance of lengthy descriptions of surroundings, a little of this sort of thing goes a long way toward creating a sense of realism. A writer like J. R. R. Tolkien might spend pages upon pages showing us what seems like each rock encountered by the characters on the way to Mordor, but this is not always desirable and certainly not necessary. Of particular interest to this discussion, in fact, is just how little detail one needs to feel grounded in a believable location. Without hearing about the conditions of the streets or the city’s layout, simply knowing that a novel’s characters are in London puts us in England and not in a fantasy world of the author’s imagination. Authors could also assume that at least some readers were familiar with London and would not need to read about how accessible locations looked. Perhaps they did not think readers would be very interested in descriptions of places they had probably been to or could visit. Whatever the case, we get relatively little description of setting in these particular novels, especially when compared with later novelists like Austen or Dickens.

Particularity probably does more to establish a feeling of realism than any of the other sources dealt with here. By particularity I mean specifics such as sums of money, measurements of distances or time, or other kinds of quantification. This source of realism might overlap with socioeconomic accuracy
or presentations of settings but need not. Watt pointed to *Robinson Crusoe* as signaling a turn to realism in fiction largely because of its particularity. Crusoe is a great and enthusiastic lister. He tells us about the tools he purchases to begin his plantation, tries to offer a chronology of events and keep track of time spent on the island, and gives mostly round figures for sums of money he encounters. Moll and Roxana write similarly, trying to provide a chronology and giving mostly rounded sums when dealing with money. They all include at least one scene toward the end of their narratives in which they list their possessions and give a total account of their wealth, which is highly impressive in all cases. Crusoe receives his money from trustees in Brazil and spends a few paragraphs explaining the various payments in which the total amount arrives, from where, and for what. Moll shows Jemy her wealth when they arrive at their plantation in Maryland. Roxana and her husband both empty out their pockets in front of each other and itemize their mortgages, cash, and investments. In the latter two cases, the women want to impress and please their men by showing them what a good deal they have gotten. This is relatively funny in Moll’s case as she originally snared Jemy by pretending to be rich and ends up taking care of him financially after all.

The characters in these “Defoe” novels do not provide specific dates, times, or sums in many cases and instead tend to round and give approximations. As all three presumably wrote their memoirs late in life, from memory, and without the aid of much in the way of supporting documentation, we can forgive the lack of precision, but it is worth noting, especially when compared with Richardson or Fielding. Pamela tries to date her letters or at least specify the day of the week in order to keep a chronology going, but occasionally she even goes so far as to give the times during which this or that event took place. She tends to give highly specific sums when dealing with money, as well, and is generally more precise with names. Crusoe, Moll, and Roxana all either forget people’s names or simply do not bother to tell us. Hardly anyone is too minor in Pamela’s mind not to be named specifically. We even learn the names of most of the servants in Mr. B’s household, whether they actually speak or not. Fielding tends toward the kind of heightened specificity we find in *Pamela*. We hardly ever meet a person named by their occupation, religion, or some other kind of type. Not many people are called simply “my
Quaker friend” or “the old man,” especially if they matter to the plot. Sometimes the names given, however, suggest we are not viewing the same world as the one we inhabit. One would hope that any eighteenth-century reader familiar with London comedies would recognize the convention of naming characters in such a way as to indicate their place in the story and their type of person, as in Thwackum, Square, and Allworthy. These are clearly not real people and not intended to seem as though they are.

**Realism vs. Authenticity**

A point worth noting here is that Fielding’s novels generally provide more specific details than the novels associated with Defoe; and yet the latter could be mistaken as real memoirs, while the former could not. This brings us to a distinction between realism and authenticity. Fielding’s specificity grounds us in the world he has created and helps us believe in it, even though we do not expect to find the characters walking around London. The world provided is detailed for its own sake, not to convince us that it is our world. The other novels do not operate this way. *Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Roxana*, and *Pamela* all pretend to be authentic memoirs of people who either lived or are living and could be located. This pretension places a higher pressure on the novels to offer details that conform to a reader’s expectations about life as they have experienced it. Abrams continues his discussion of realism quoted at the outset of this epilogue by saying, “It is more useful to identify realism in terms of the effect on the reader: realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen.” To produce this effect, Abrams argues, “the novelists we identify as realists may or may not be selective in subject matter—although most of them prefer the commonplace and the everyday, represented in minute detail, over rarer aspects of life—but they must render their materials in ways that make them seem to their readers the very stuff of ordinary experience.”

---

such as being shipwrecked for nearly thirty years or becoming fabulously rich. Neither occurrence is strictly impossible, just highly unlikely. The distinction made here is worth bearing in mind: writers sometimes produce stories in which impossible events take place that are still set in a world we might consider comparable to our own, thus conveying a level of realism through setting and particularity.

Modern examples of this phenomenon are easy to find. Fans of the *Star Trek* universe might debate whether a particular engine discussed on the show would really be able to propel a ship to whatever speed given what they have learned about it from the show itself, even though the engine and the world presented are patently fictional. No one wonders about the authenticity of *Star Trek* as a genuine documentary of events that took place, especially since it supposedly takes place in the future. Yet the high level of detail in which, say, technological aspects of the world are handled provides audiences enough information to judge the believability of what happens according to rules offered within a fantasy. *The Matrix* famously operates along similar lines. Within the computer simulation in which the machines have trapped humans, supernatural events are possible because the rules of the simulated world can be violated. We know this because we are told as much in blunt terms by someone explaining how things work to the protagonist and, vicariously, to us. Though *The Matrix* gives us a futuristic dystopia no one would ever confuse with the world outside the movie theatre, the film still conveys a high degree of realism by providing the rules by which its fictional world operates and then adhering to those rules. The main character is supposed to be a “chosen one” figure who can manipulate the simulation and bend it to his will. When he finally learns to do this and survives an otherwise fatal gunshot wound, the computer program that shot him cannot believe he has survived. The rules of the simulation as he understands them have been violated, yet we know how and so have no problem believing, within the world of *The Matrix*, that the character has survived or any of the other seemingly impossible things he then goes on to do.

All that is required to convey a sense of realism, even within an apparent fantasy, is to have the rules of the imagined world explained and obeyed. In the movie *Thank You for Smoking*, two characters hit a snag while imagining a potential scene in a movie they are planning to make to promote smoking. The scene takes place on a space station, and when the lobbyist for the tobacco companies tries to
imagine the characters lighting a cigarette, he says, “But wouldn’t they blow up in an all oxygen environment?” The entertainment industry executive replies, “Probably. But it’s an easy fix. One line of dialogue. ‘Thank God we invented the… you know, whatever device.’” What this short interchange demonstrates is how little one needs to satisfy objections that would undercut a sense of realism, in this case in the presentation of setting. So long as we know that in this imagined world the events portrayed could happen for reasons specified, we should be happy. How or when someone invented “the whatever device” basically does not matter so long as it exists.

The distinction between realism and authenticity illustrates different expectations on the part of readers. Eighteenth-century readers appear to have cared much more about whether a narrative was true or false in its reporting of events, not whether it was realistic or fantastic. Most novels we encounter today have “A Novel” clearly labeled on the cover and are sold in bookstores or online in a category called “fiction.” The authenticity of a story, however realistically or believably presented, tends not to be the issue in such cases for modern readers, who feel drawn into the world portrayed and even convinced that much of what they are reading corresponds to their sense of reality without thinking that the characters are real people who could be located outside the novel. A concern with authenticity arises much more often when one reads biography but especially autobiography and memoir. A smart reader likely takes autobiographies as imperfect recollections and edited versions of reality that the author chooses to put forward, not as the whole truth and only the truth, but how to judge for certain is often impossible to tell without contextual evidence that often either does not exist or is not readily available to the reader. The novels associated with Defoe and Richardson’s Pamela pretend to be authentic memoirs, and eighteenth-century readers would have had to rely on the contents of the narratives to judge the truth or falsity of these claims.

My major contribution in this study has been to ground discussions of realism historically and to insist on the necessity of doing so. If we believe that realism comes down ultimately to an effect produced in readers’ minds by a correspondence between the world presented and their expectations of what is likely and possible in that world, then we should agree that studying realism in eighteenth-century fiction
requires trying to understand what eighteenth-century readers would have considered likely and possible. My focus throughout on sums of money has not been for the sake of demonstrating how literary texts contribute to the history of Economics. Instead it has been a way of centering on a specific type of particularity in order to gauge whether eighteenth-century readers of different kinds might have considered a text realistic or authentic in light of these particulars. Depictions of class operate similarly as part of the presentation of setting and are useful to judging whether a novel’s original audience would have found it believable. We cannot afford simply to say that this or that text is “realistic” when we discuss eighteenth-century novels. The historical, contextual information needed to make such a judgment has largely disappeared, and we can never read the way eighteenth-century readers did. The best we can do is to ground our discussions of realism in how we suppose the original readership might have responded based on contextual evidence that we bring to bear. A discussion of realism that substitutes one’s own modern sense of what is believable in an eighteenth-century novel misleads more than it clarifies.
Bibliography


Beasley, Jerry C. *Novels of the 1740s.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1982.


Curriculum Vita

David Wallace Spielman
139 Burrowes Building
Department of English
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
Phone: (214) 284-3846
Email: dws211@psu.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, The Pennsylvania State University, 2012
B.A., English, Southern Methodist University, 2005

PUBLICATIONS


NOTES AND DOCUMENTS