UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Modernity and Affliction:

The Making of British Bourgeois Tragedy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

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2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Modernity and Affliction:

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

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The middling sort was often thought to be immune or ill-suited to tragedy, its modest, commercial way of life ensuring, in the words of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), that those in the middle station went "silently and smoothly thro' the World." This project assembles an archive of eighteenth-century text and performance that contradicts this optimism. In contrast to the familiar critical narrative of tragedy's demise or stagnation in the eighteenth century, *Modernity and Affliction* argues that a body of work depicting the afflictions of the middling sort was vital to a series of cultural debates concerned with imagining modes of ordinary suffering and collective grief. Whereas heroic and neoclassical tragedy had rarified and idealized the afflicted subject, bourgeois tragedies probed the relation between existential misfortune and the emerging values that would define the everyday experience of the middle rank in Britain—among them domesticity, privacy,

capitalism, and Protestantism. Far from triumphalist or complacent in its ideology, the very emergence of the genre suggests that the Crusoevian "rise of the middle class" was met with ambivalence, haunted by the possibility of that newfound value's loss and anxious about suffering's lurid portrayal in various experimental forms of early realism. The dissertation ranges across a body of works that includes George Lillo's pioneering domestic dramas, *The London Merchant* (1731) and *Fatal Curiosity* (1736), Samuel Richardson's landmark novel, *Clarissa* (1748), Edward Moore's prose tragedy, *The Gamester* (1753), Sarah Fielding's sentimental novel, *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), Laurence Sterne's ironic exploration of bourgeois mourning in *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), and several others largely absent from our critical histories, redefining bourgeois tragedy in order to better account for its energetic movement between page and stage, as well as the changing aesthetic conventions that governed the archive's production and reception in the period. *Modernity and Affliction* thus ultimately historicizes modes of bourgeois affect through which suffering was embodied, represented, and consumed in the period, tracing a process whereby the narrowly defined poetics of tragedy gave way to a broader, melancholic sense of the tragic as a condition of all modern life.

The dissertation of Alex Eric Hernandez is approved.

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2014

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like so many of the tragic figures this project considers, I enter this stage having amassed several debts; unlike them, my experience ends in comedy. Indeed, and ironically, accumulating these debts has been the source of so much happiness, of so many pleasures derived from hours of work and study and play, from knowing so many good and intelligent people. Together, they have reminded me repeatedly of the tremendous value to be found in ordinary conversation and the everyday rhythms that make up our day-to-day lives. Here then, is some of what I owe.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the patient guidance, frequent encouragement, and sharp criticism of Felicity Nussbaum, who saw what this project could be well before I did. I only hope this work reflects adequately her wise influence. Helen Deutsch pushed me to think about the theoretical stakes of the project early on in its development, and on more than one occasion offered a suggestion that was so perfectly timed that it seemed fateful. Lowell Gallagher's honest, perceptive reading of my work challenged me constantly to do better. Jonathan Sheehan kept me historically honest, and was pivotal in turning a five-page idea into what it now is. Several other mentors I've come to know at UCLA—among them Sarah Kareem, Anne Mellor, Debora Shuger, and Kenneth Reinhard—have helped me more than they realize, I'm sure. Vivian Davis, Christian Reed, Cristina Richieri Griffin, Tara Fickle, Jack Caughey, Ian Newman, Fuson Wang, Michael Nicholson, Julia Callander, Taylor Walle, Cailey Hall, Katherine Charles, James Reeves, and Angelina Del Balzo provided feedback on earlier versions of several chapters and listened to me rattle off ideas on several occasions. I am better for having known them all.

Several institutions have also aided in this project's completion. I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council for their timely support of an interdisciplinary working group on "New Approaches to Religion and Modernity." I owe much to Vincent Pecora, my cohort of brilliant colleagues, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through which that period's research was funded. Support and research assistance provided by Yale University's Lewis Walpole Library and its staff was similarly formative. A great debt is owed to the staff of The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library and UCLA's Center for 17th- and 18th-Century Studies, who supported me through a dissertation fellowship and copious research help. Becky, Jennie, Scott, Nina, Shannon, and Gerald were essential to getting the work done—even rarer, they became friends. Funding for this work was also provided by UCLA's Graduate Division, for which I remain thankful. A portion of chapter three was published in an earlier form as "Tragedy and the Economics of Providence in Richardson's *Clarissa,*" in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22 (Summer 2010): 599-630. I appreciate their permission to reuse some of that material here.

My greatest debts, however, are owed to family and friends, whose household labor is present, silently, on every page of this manuscript. My parents, Alex, Alicia and Chris, Pam and Vince all nurtured me and provided more support than I can repay. I thank them for their indefatigable encouragement and profound influence in my life. Likewise, Abuela, Abuelo and Tati remain a constant reminder of what it means to strive against the pressures of economic precariousness by risking it all. Inspiration and mirth came courtesy of my siblings and their families: the Spitzers, Lesters, and Powells. Most of all, I thank my partner, Kelsie, and our little ones Ellie and Charlie, to whom this manuscript is dedicated and in whose presence it was written, my doorless office space permeated by the delightful

sounds of their voices at play. In a project so concerned with the fragility of our domestic pleasures, you have been a source of deep comfort, motivation, and affection, daily reminders of just how tough these bonds can be.

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"Curious Affects: George Lillo's Domestic Tragic Imagination," invited paper for The Material Cultures of Knowledge, 1500-1830 summer seminar, University of California, Berkeley, July 2012

"Historicizing Suffering: Bourgeois Tragedy and the Politics of Pity," American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Annual Meeting, March 2012

AN INTRODUCTION TO BRITISH BOURGEOIS TRAGEDY,

OR "SILENTLY AND SMOOTHLY THRO' THE WORLD"

I don't want a grand life for myself—
just to grow old with some security.
They say a moderate life's the best of all,
a far better choice for mortal men.
Going for too much brings no benefits.
And when gods get angry with some home,
the more wealth it has, the more it is destroyed.

-*Medea*, 149-55

The middling sort was often thought to be immune to tragedy. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), for example, famously begins by extolling a vision of modest productivity and social stability for what would become the middle class. Recalling those days before he set out to try his fortune, Crusoe narrates the chiding of his father, who warns him to adhere to the *via media* of a simple, commercial life:

> He bid me observe [this middle state] and I should always find, that the Calamities of life were shared among the upper and the lower Part of Mankind; but that the middle Station had the fewest Disasters, and was not expos'd to so many Vicissitudes as the higher or lower Part of Mankind; nay, they were not subjected to so many Distempers and Uneasiness either or Body or Mind, as those who, by vicious Living, Luxury and Extravagancies on one Hand, or by Hard Labour, Want of Necessities, and mean or insufficient Diet on the other Hand, bring Distempers upon themselves by the natural

> Consequence of their Way of Living…Peace and Plenty were the Hand-maids of a middle Fortune.[1]

It is a touching scene, Crusoe tells us: "I was sincerely affected with this Discourse, as indeed who could be otherwise?" (6). Resonating with a father's desperation and affection for his only remaining son, the elder Crusoe's fondness can find voice only in an absolute: "observe, and you will always find…" Neither precarious like the indigent, nor liable to the reversals of aristocratic fortune, bourgeois life was industrious and low-risk, "calculated for all kinds of Vertues and all kinds of Enjoyments." The familiar promise of prosperity in the middle rank, of a better life, lies behind the immigrant Kreutznaer's entreaties to his son. In this way, as Defoe elegantly phrases it, the middle station went "silently and smoothly thro' the World" (5).

In what follows, I assemble an archive of text and performance that contradicts this optimism. In contrast to the familiar critical narrative of tragedy's demise or stagnation in the eighteenth century, I argue that a body of work depicting the tragic misfortunes of the middling sort was in fact vital to a series of cultural debates concerned with imagining new modes of suffering and collective grief. Redefining the genre that has come to be known as "bourgeois tragedy" to better account for its movement between forms and media, as well as the changing aesthetic conventions that governed the archive's production and reception in the period, I am interested in the way the Crusoevian "rise of the middle class" is marked by a tension and anxiety over the possibility of that prosperity's loss. Tragedy posits the destruction or forfeiture of something valued, the loss of attachments, whether those

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[1] Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe,* ed. J. Donald Crowley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 4-5. Subsequent citations refer to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

attachments happen to be people or fantasies of the good life, or even (as I shall argue shortly) a newly materializing sense of the dignity of the ordinary. In the bourgeois tragic archive then, I find a haunting ambivalence towards the modernizing processes that went hand-in-hand with the creation of Defoe's confident middle class.

Now of course, Crusoe's father had reason to be optimistic. For decades now, economic and social historians have traced the growth of the British middling sort, that amorphous social category that encompassed, in fine gradations of perceived rank and standing, merchants of all stripes, tradespeople, shopkeepers and artisans, professionals, even (according to some contemporaries) country farmers, freeholders and well-off laborers and their families. In his now-classic history of eighteenth-century England, for example, Paul Langford paints a picture of steady economic growth in which a "powerful and extensive middle class [resting] on a broad, diverse base of property…increasingly decided the framework of debate."[2] "An English tradesman is a new species of gentleman," Samuel Johnson claimed, not without concern over the changing cultural landscape.[3] Standards of living were on the rise, with a steady if not modest estimated per capita income growth of 0.30% per year between 1700-60, according to the most recent accounts. If we talk of the "long eighteenth-century," those figures are far more impressive, curving upwards into what

[2] Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 68.

[3] Quoted in Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 50.

historians call the "hockey-stick graph" of GDP during industrialization.[4] Inventories, legal and marital records, as well as countless anecdotes confirm a sense of the expanding material comforts available to households with standards of living above mere subsistence, the numbers of which swelled and more and more defined Britain's culture.[5] A few years before the elder Crusoe's foreboding advice, Defoe characterized the nation's social fabric in terms of the comforts a bit of surplus could buy. Nestled between twin extremes—"The great, who live profusely" and "The miserable, that really pinch and suffer want"—were those most insulated from the "Disasters" and "Vicissitudes" we colloquially refer to as tragic: "The middle sort, who live well."[6]

It should be no surprise then, that the era witnessing the "rise of the middle class" is also often seen to mark the so-called "Death of Tragedy." I invoke here of course, George Steiner's influential—and unendingly controversial—argument that the seventeenth century

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[4] These figures refer to recent work on long-term per capita income growth, spanning the middle ages to the late nineteenth century. Comparing output-side GDP and population, its authors derive figures for per capita income and consumption in kilocalories, noting that while the period between 1270-1700 saw some growth, it was episodic and comparatively small at 0.19%. Beginning in 1700, however, and especially during the last quarter of the century, Britain's economic expansion was accelerated and lasting, slowing slightly 1801-1830, before resuming. See Stephen Broadberry, Bas van Leeuwen, et al., "British Economic Growth, 1270-1870: An Output-Based Approach," *Studies in Economics* 1203 (2012), accessed September 3, 2013, ftp://ftp.ukc.ac.uk/pub/ejr/RePEc/ukc/ukcedp/1203.pdf, esp. Table 22. The authors of this study note that their work largely confirms what has come to be known as the Crafts-Harley view of British economic development. See Nicholas F. R. Crafts and C. Nick Harley, "Output Growth and the British Industrial Revolution: A Restatement of the Crafts-Harley View," *Economic History Review* 45 (1992): 703-730. An important corrective to this is offered by the Marxist economic historian, Eric J. Hobsbawm, who influentially traced the slowing in growth in the per-capita figures to increasing numbers of laboring poor ("The British Standard of Living 1790-1850," *The Economic History Review,* New Series, 10:46-68).

[5] A number of studies confirm Langford's account of the growing cultural influence exerted by consumers and thinkers tied to the middle rank, and together present a progress narrative of rank's transmutation into a self-conscious discourse of middle-class ideology. See, for example, Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), and Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Throughout this study, I carefully avoid the anachronistic use of the term "class" to refer to social actors and collectivities in this state, preferring instead variations of the contemporary "middling."

[6] Daniel Defoe, *A Review of the State of the British Nation* 6 (25 June 1709).

is the "great divide" for the genre, the era after which a variety of historical forces (capitalism, Enlightenment, the loss of shared "mythological, symbolic, and ritual reference" to name a few) coalesce to make the tragic an impossibility.[7] This view seems to confirm the sense of Defoe's opening vignette in *Crusoe* that personal misfortune would in principle be avoidable in this new era of capitalism, if not understandable, the middling sort having squeezed out the "Hellenic forms" of high tragedy, leaving nothing behind but steady, epic-comic prosperity—or worse, the husk of sentiment. How, after all, can a life defined by its stability, by the ordinariness of everyday rhythmic getting and spending, foster the sort of convulsive passions necessary for tragedy? Isn't the very idea of "the bourgeois," as Franco Moretti suggests, predicated on values like efficiency, lawfulness, and comfort?[8] Hardly fodder for the tragic, it would seem. Echoing Walter Scott's complaint about the bourgeois tastes of modern audiences, Steiner thus goes on to claim that the values of middling life ensured that the market for tragedy gradually eroded or turned to the middlebrow, increasingly private, sentimentalized, flattened and secular in outlook.[9] Which is not to say that tragedies were no longer written (Susan Staves, for instance, points out that the latter half of the century alone saw more than a hundred new tragedies brought to stage[10]), rather that they failed to embody the essence of the genre, that the quality of its suffering was diluted or trivial. Thrust into a world of commerce and social mediocrity, tragic literature

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[7] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 292. For a sense of the persistence of this argument, as well as a series of powerful critiques, see Rita Felski's expertly curated collection, *Rethinking Tragedy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[8] Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (New York: Verso, 2013).

[9] See Walter Scott, "Essay on the Drama," in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Walter Scott,* vol. I (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1841).

[10] Susan Staves, "Tragedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, eds. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87.

loses the possibility of transcendence so that finally it "disappeared altogether or took tawdry refuge among the gaslights of melodrama."[11]

In place of tragedy, many have argued, the middling sort looked to another incipient literary form often linked to our narratives of eighteenth-century optimism: the novel.[12] Sandra Macpherson notes, in fact, that the history of the realist novel has largely been read as an explicitly anti-tragic tradition; Ian Watt's famed "rise of the novel" thesis has often been taken as more or less the flip side of the old "death of tragedy" coin.[13] "The suspicion that there is something inherently untragic about the novel-form is hard to shake off," adds Terry Eagleton, concluding that this assumption is largely a function of class: "The temper of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English fiction, the heyday of the making of the English middle class, is anti-tragic."[14] Tragedy hibernates in his view, suspended by the dynamism of what Georg Lukács called the novel's "extensive totality," its ability to draw in complex causal chains and diverse agencies, glossing over historical fissures and personal misfortunes. Thus: "[The novel] gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; [it] seeks…to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life."[15] Construction, revelation, meaning—like Crusoe's providences, novels disclose the secret fullness of the everyday,

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[11] Steiner, *Death of Tragedy,* 194.

[12] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), chap. 7. See also Henri Peyre, "The Tragedy of Passion: Racine's Phèdre," in *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, ed. Cleanth Brooks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 77; and cf. Steiner in *Death of Tragedy*: "The history of the decline of serious drama is, in part, that of the rise of the novel" (118).

[13] Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). The reference to Ian Watt refers, of course, to his critical landmark, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[14] Eagleton, *Sweet Violence,* 180; 179.

[15] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 60.

rescuing the quotidian details of the modern world from its veneer of banality and senselessness. A narrative exercise in the consolations of modern life, in which "the triumph of meaning over time" gradually emerges through the epic perspective made possible for its reader, the novel legitimates its evils. It exposes what seems to be the "intensive totality" of the drama—with its pitched suffering and claustrophobic plot—as merely one of a thousand counterfactual trade-offs necessary in order for the ascendent middle strata to "live well."[16]

Silently and smoothly thro' the world indeed. And yet despite this, for eighteenth-century Britons, depictions of middling misfortune seemed to be vital in a way that they had rarely been before. *Modernity and Affliction* seeks to account for this vitality and the lasting cultural importance of this genre (where genre is understood inclusively as spanning not only novel and drama, but also the particular practices and discourses that attend its production, a point I shall return to shortly). The central insight of my project is that the very historical emergence of a category of "bourgeois tragedy" represents a debate over the extent of tragic suffering: who precisely gets to suffer meaningfully, and what is the character of the affliction they undergo? Whose life, in the words of Judith Butler, is grievable?[17] Hence, the archive I trace imagines a particularly modern sort of suffering, an ordinary suffering proper to ordinary life, divested of the sorts of meanings, rhetorics, and affective resonances once deployed to redeem or at any rate, attempt to understand it. Bourgeois tragedy, in other words, names both an innovation in tragic aesthetics and an episode in the history of suffering. This is a complex claim, one whose nested elements

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[16] Thus, Franco Moretti argues that the signal genre activated by the modern novel is the *Bildungsroman,* which formalizes the process of becoming reconciled to the world. See his *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 2000), 55.

[17] Judith Butler expands on the notion of grievable life in her *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso 2009). See esp. her introduction and chap. 1.

unfold slowly in the ensuing chapters, and here I want only to further sketch an outline of my argument by reflecting on just what sort of cultural artifact a genre like tragedy is, and what that might imply about its eighteenth-century bourgeois form and the suffering it depicted.

Theatre historians will sometimes gesture towards the fresh urgency that middle-class figures displayed onstage in a series of dramas that, since Diderot's founding definition in the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* (1757), have been referred to as bourgeois tragedy.[18] In Britain, this tradition had a pedigree that dated back to the turn of the seventeenth century, when a series of tragedies began to focus primarily on the afflictions of recognizably British households. Plays like the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (1592, often credited to the Shakespearean apocrypha) and Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) and *The English Traveller* (1633), centered their plots on the homebound tensions that threatened the early modern family, utilizing a mixture of prose and verse by which to represent "the horror of the everyday ordinariness of it all," as Richard Helgerson strikingly observes.[19] Among the earliest forms of realism, Jacobean domestic tragic writers took common British people as their subjects, locating the tragic in their lives, those spaces they inhabited, and the circumstances that brought about their suffering.

While these plays remained seldom (if ever) performed in the eighteenth century, all but eclipsed by the high-minded Neoclassicism of the Restoration, the genre they bestowed upon British authors—hence, domestic tragedy (the "bourgeois" came later)—took root in a

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[18] Perhaps the best brief survey of bourgeois tragedy in the first half of the century remains Allardyce Nicoll's important history of the drama, *A History of English Drama, 1660-1900*, vol. 2 "A History of Early Eighteenth-Century Drama, 1700-1750" (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 114-24.

[19] Richard Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 15.

series of innovative texts concerned with the way ordinary people suffered under tragic conditions. This process was slow, but as Raymond Williams remarks, its preparation had been "long and deep" in the era's literature.[20] Indeed, critics in the eighteenth century often linked the Jacobean tradition of domestic tragedy to that of the much more recent she-tragedy, mapping the suffering female leads of the latter onto the domestic concerns of the former and thereby privileging "private woe." This shift in emphasis, Lewis Theobald claimed, was at the heart of domestic dramas like his *The Perfidious Brother* (1715). Thomas Otway's tragedy, *The Orphan* (1680), Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), and Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714) could thus retain valences of the heroic, and sometimes exotic, aristocratic worlds they ostensively depicted, even as they sought to explore what Charles Johnson called, in his 1717 revision to Racine's *Bajazet* (1672), "A sad, true Tale, a Modern Scene of Woe."[21] In this way, early realism and domesticity came to mingle gradually with notions of what it meant to suffer in a new, modern era.[22] As late as Hannah More's 1789 tragedy, *The Fatal Falsehood,* these elements trafficked together in a sometimes tacit category that encompassed she-tragic, domestic tragic, and realistic bourgeois themes and representational methods. Despite the fact that her tragedy represented members of the peerage, for example, More's prologue to *The Fatal Falsehood* claimed to continue this shift in the drama's interest towards the home and its "simpler,"

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[20] Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 28.

[21] Charles Johnson, prologue to *The Sultaness* (London: W. Wilkins, 1717).

[22] Thus, Samuel Johnson claims that Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* is "a domestic tragedy drawn from middle life," adding that "It's whole power is upon our affections" **(*The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets,* vol.1 [London: C. Bathurst et al., 1781], 339-40)**. That is, rather than move the intellect, Johnson claims that its force lies in the drama's power to "interest" the heart. On the relation of she-tragedy to later domestic or bourgeois tragedies, see Laura Brown's important work on *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

perhaps even quotidian, vicissitudes. Rebuffing the "*Drama's* nobler *strings, / The fate of nations, and the fall of Kings,"* More's bard was doing something fundamentally different: "*The humbler scenes of private life she shews, / A simple story of domestic woes.*"[23]

In the years that followed she-tragedy's vogue, however, tragedians decisively broke the noble-tragic linkage that barred depictions of middling misfortune. Although, as More's tragedy makes clear, domestic concerns would be explored through heroic personages well into the waning decades of the century, the Georgian stage saw common folk become an increasingly popular source of dramatic material. In a reversal of two thousand years of literary tradition, the afflictions of people in the lower and middling ranks came to be treated in eighteenth-century tragic literature with a measure of dignity and importance previously denied them. Thus, already by 1721, Aaron Hill (perhaps the most important English tragedian in the first quarter of the century) had published a domestic drama, *The Fatal Extravagance,* loosely based on *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608). George Lillo would achieve lasting fame in a pair of dramas spanning the 1730s, *The London Merchant* (1731) and *Fatal Curiosity* (1736), that dwelled largely on the economic pressures faced by the middle rank and drew upon popular ballads and accounts of domestic violence that made up local knowledge and rumor for common folk. Other experiments in domestic *cum* bourgeois tragedy, many of which utilized a stripped-down prose so as to both capture the middling status of their principal characters and foster modes of realism, cropped up often if not always successfully. Charles Johnson's *Caelia, or the Perjur'd Lover* (1732), Thomas Cooke's *The Mournful Nuptials, or Love the Cure of all Woes* (1739), and Richard Cumberland's *The Mysterious Husband* (1783), could be highly topical, concerned with violence and betrayal

[23] Hannah More, prologue to *The Fatal Falsehood* (London: T. Cadell, 1779).

by those nearest to oneself, and together began to imagine what would become Romantic-era and nineteenth-century melodrama. Excepting Lillo's early entries to the genre, the most influential of these new bourgeois plays was Edward Moore's 1753 drama, *The Gamester,* among the most frequently performed eighteenth-century tragedies over the next 125 years. With its careful prose and raw, deeply personal immediacy, Moore's tragedy would prove an important model for Diderot's "*tragédie domestique and bourgeois"* and Lessing's "*bürgerliche Trauspiel,"* dramatic modes which Peter Gay numbers as among the signal artistic achievements of the Enlightenment.[24]

Perhaps surprisingly, however, the case of bourgeois tragedy's profound influence is no different if one considers the novel, a form which—as we are increasingly discovering[25]—grew in close dialogue and mutual development with the period's drama, and was certainly not essentially opposed to its tragedy. If anything, a survey of the bourgeois and domestic tragic archive suggests that the opposite was much more the case, as the genre migrated amorphously between the aesthetic media of stage and print, self-consciously testing forms and modes of expression for modern tragic emotion. In fact, much of the discussion surrounding bourgeois tragedy in the period (and much hand-wringing, as will be clear) concerned precisely how to capture the suffering of regular people with a seriousness appropriate to the tragic, which is to say, how to negotiate simultaneously the high

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[24] See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation,* vol. 2 "The Science of Reason" (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1969), chap. 6.

[25] See for example, Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and the Theater, Haywood to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts,* trans. Laura Kopp (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012); and David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). In *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), G. Gabrielle Starr draws a connection in another direction, noting that Romantic poets drew on modes of self-expression highly indebted to the novel's own appropriation of earlier lyrical practices, a point of contact that will become important in later chapters.

sentiment of tragedy and a new aesthetics of the ordinary at its core realist, middling, and modern. This was a problem as much for the novel as it was for the theatre, although it was perhaps in the era's early bourgeois drama that eighteenth-century Britons were first exposed to "realism as a whole form." Another way to put this, is that a "particular attitude towards what is called 'reality'"[26] that entailed a "textual interface seeking to diminish, or even liquidate, the boundary between audience [or reader] and text" became newly possible in the conventions of the bourgeois archive.[27] Calling to mind Bill Warner and Clifford Siskin's recent claim that the Enlightenment is "an event in the history of mediation," tragedians, critics, readers, and spectators of eighteenth-century bourgeois tragedies repeatedly returned to trans-generic questions of the archive's aesthetic and affective experience.[28]

To be sure, the public's investment in domestic matters, private woe, and romantic and familial entanglement had already found an outlet for its mediation in a body of generically adventurous work by female writers like Mary Pix, Delarivier Manley, Aphra Behn, and Catherine Trotter, genealogically linking the she-tragedies of an earlier generation to the decidedly middle-class Georgian texts of later years. In this, they seem to have paved the way for the success of not only Lillo's *London Merchant* but also, as scholars have recognized for some time, Samuel Richardson's work at midcentury.[29] One need only

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[26] Raymond Williams, "A Lecture on Realism," *Screen* 18 (1977): 61-3.

[27] This is Jesse Molesworth's working definition for realism in his, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

[28] Clifford Siskin and William Warner, eds., *The is Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[29] Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). I thank Felicity Nussbaum for the suggestion that these authors may have enabled some of Lillo's innovations.

recall his epistolary tragedy, *Clarissa* (1747-8), to see the manner in which an archive of text and performance coalesced to place the suffering of middling people on the page and center stage. Celebrated as "the first book in the world" by figures as diverse as Samuel Johnson, Sarah Fielding, the Marquis de Sade, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (a staunch critic, as the *Lettre à D'Alembert* makes clear, of the heroic fancy that animated most of the era's theatre[30]), the novel was considered by many contemporaries to exemplify a careful dramatic style akin to stage tragedy or *tableau vivant*. Indeed, while Richardson initially claimed that the novel presented a true "History of a Young Lady," by its third edition in 1751, its author was arguing with some exasperation that what he was actually doing was experimenting in a new mode of tragedy that both drew on and departed from accepted poetic practices. *Clarissa*'s tragic ending and experimental realism served as a touchstone to generations of would-be thinkers on the tragic, even if only to reject Richardson's insights.

In the meantime, however, authors such as the Anglo-Irish Frances Sheridan, whose tragically-inflected *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) was dedicated to Richardson, continued to imagine how economic pressures, legal difficulties, and romantic intrigue could render the life of a middle-rank woman highly precarious in a manner that recalled the middling drama of midcentury. In fact, one early biographer noted that Sheridan had begun work on a prose dramatic adaptation of her novel before her death two months later in September of 1766. This manuscript is lost, but the permeability of bourgeois tragedy lives on in attempts to re-dramatize Richardson's texts in misfiring stage adaptations such

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[30] Rousseau's argument in the "Letter to D'Alembert," for instance, faults the theatre's ability to alienate the spectator from him- or herself in the viewing of "fables." Thus, the theatre paradoxically confirms the passions of its viewers, while disassociating them from the reality of human suffering. Interestingly then, bourgeois tragedies provide the exceptions to this and he cites both Lillo's *The London Merchant* and Richardson's *Clarissa,* a novel whose realism and delicate ear for dialogue and sentiment became a model for *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*,"* in *Politics and the Arts,* trans. and ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960).

as Thomas Hull's *The Fatal Interview* (a 1782 tragic version of Richardson's first epistolary novel, based loosely on a spurious 1741 continuation, *Pamela's Conduct in High Life*) and Robert Porett's *Clarissa: or, The Fatal Seduction* in 1788. As I will argue, however, among the most lasting effects of *Clarissa* was the gradual proseification of the drama in the works of admirers and collaborators like Moore, whose bourgeois drama sought to import the practice of "writing to the moment" to its performance onstage as a way to more authentically capture the gravity of ordinary suffering.

Still, recent work on tragedy has tended to overlook these sorts of formal contiguities in favor of grand, formalist claims that draw stark and definitive breaks in historical consciousness or emotional experience. These readings frequently display a keen insight into the century's literary and social history, and they continue to illuminate aspects of the texts we have tended to leave un-historicized or critically unexamined. Among the best examples is Macpherson, who offers a subtle argument about the novel form's importance to the conceptual histories of liability law, personal agency, and causality, observing that we have tended to miss, for example, Richardson's provocative collapse of events into event: "*Clarissa* opens in the middle of the middle of an action, literalizing what it means to begin in the middle of things." The novel, in her reading, is about finding oneself thrust precariously into a strange world of warring agencies. Citing Watt's conclusion in *The Rise of the Novel* that Richardson's "formal innovation" lied in "basing his novels on a single action," she argues that *Clarissa* strives to "represent a single action…the action of action itself: *plot*."[31] Thus, Richardson and the tragic novel are engaged in "a project of blame not

[31] Macpherson, *Harm's Way,* 61.

exculpation" where actions bring about unintended consequences for which persons nevertheless bear responsibility.[32]

My project, however, calls attention to the fact that this sort of claim—lodged in this way, with reference to the fatal emplottedness of the novel's tragic protagonists, and anchored in Watt's insight into the form's maturation away from the picaresque—sustains at best the historical conclusion that the novel form differs in degree or scale from the period's tragedy, but not (as Macpherson implies) in kind. In fact, this most essential of features in her reconstruction of narrative realism's development, "single action" or unity of plot, is just as fundamental to much of the era's tragic theatre and comes remarkably close to Lukács' capsule definition of the drama's essence as an "intensive totality," the sort of punctual time that seems to magnify moments of decisive action and reaction. Granted, the novel *is* markedly different in scale, prone to an epic scope, and it certainly allowed readers distinctive ways of mediating a represented world, so that a break of the sort imagined by Macpherson and others is a distinct possibility over the *longue durée*. But one has good reason to be skeptical, I argue, that it happens through the tragic archive extant at midcentury. At least in the eighteenth-century context I am tracing —and this temporal qualification is important—the two seem generically linked, of the same basic kind, where genre is meant as a holistic "field of knowledge," or as Clifford Geertz put it, a "blurred

[32] Ibid., 13.

genre" whose imbricated forms dilate on a shared semantic field of cultural concerns.[33] My point then is that, although it is often and easily overlooked, if we take *Clarissa* as a high water mark and one important pattern for the realist novel, as many influential histories of the form do,[34] the novel comes into its own precisely *as* a bourgeois tragedy. *Clarissa* indeed opens in the middle. Just as significantly, she dies there.

Equally interesting, however, bourgeois tragedy elicited artistic responses other than realism. The gauzy, occasionally overwrought form of the novel of sensibility, as I will argue, owes a great debt to the serious genre British authors were carving out in the first half of the century. In fact, works like Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1742) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) bear witness to the pervasiveness of modern affliction and an urgent need to mediate those distresses in the spectatorial aesthetics of tragedy. The general recognition that the ordinary has its proper dignity is, in this way, the historical condition upon which sentimentalism's tragic sense of life depends. A standing catalogue of the ways that everyday people suffer and look upon the suffering of others, the form arises out of the same context as the era's great experiments in British middling tragedy. In some cases, such as *David Simple*'s 1753 sequel, *Volume the Last,* they dabble in that very subgenre. Moreover, a series of texts born of the Continent's infatuation with British bourgeois tragedies began, by the end of the century, to return to the London of their

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[33] I take the former phrase from Wai Chee Dimock's introduction to a special issue of *PMLA* on genre studies, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," *PMLA* 122.5 (2007): 1377-88. There, she argues that "genre is best seen not flatly, as the enactment of one set of legislative norms, but as an alternation between dimensions, mediated by vectors of up and down, front and back, in and out…None does its work in isolation, and none without a continuous stream of input from other genres. Receiving and compounding are crucial to both, as are osmosis and sedimentation" (1380). The reference to Clifford Geertz cites his early analysis of interdisciplinary modes of inquiry in "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," in *Local Knowledges: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[34] Watt is careful to note, in fact, that Richardson called *Clarissa* a "dramatic narrative," just the sort of blurred genre I take the bourgeois tragic archive to encompass. See Watt, *Rise of the Novel,* chap.7. I shall return to this in some detail in later chapters.

source material, although often as sentimentalized novels or serialized amatory fiction. Thus, Diderot's archetype for "*le genre sérieux,*" *Le Fils naturel* (1757) was issued as a novel, *The Natural Son* in 1799, while Lessing's Anglophilic *Trauerspiel, Miss Sara Sampson* (1755), became *The Fatal Elopement* over a two-year period in the pages of the *Lady's Magazine,* and his *Emilia Galotti* (1772) gave rise to no fewer than three versions in the 1790s, only one of which finally made it to production for a lukewarm audience at Drury Lane.[35] By then, audiences seem to have preferred the tragedy's popular sister-forms in melodrama and the novel of feeling instead, for they seemed less invested in the realistic seriousness that had become the bourgeois archive's signature. As Wordsworth would make clear in his Preface to the 1800 edition of *The Lyrical Ballads*, aesthetic tastes had shifted by then, away from the heaviness of domestic tragic prose to soft-hued Romanticism and the fantastic technical effects and histrionic spectacles of the Gothic. Nevertheless, it is something of a puzzle in the social and literary history of the eighteenth century, that although the influence of bourgeois tragedy was felt across a broad swath of the period's culture, numerous bourgeois tragic texts—published, performed, and debated during the period—largely remain absent from our critical histories. Clearly, navigating the middle rank was more fraught than the elder Crusoe would have us believe, and yet we have tended to replicate his assurances in our account of the period's literature, as if convinced of the essential stability he claimed for middling life.

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[35] George M. Baker, "An Early English Translation of *Miss Sara Sampson*," *Modern Language Notes* 22.4 (April 1907): 103-104. On the three *Emilia Galotti*s, see David Erskine Baker, *Biographia Dramatica*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, and Co., 1812), 193.

For many critics even to this day, tragedy does not easily accommodate ordinary suffering; less so, when that suffering insists on the quotidian ordinariness of its expression. And so to appreciate the bourgeois tragic archive's intervention, we might think for a second about some of the claims made by the genre's detractors. Two lines of argument dominate, one broadly humanistic in orientation, the other, leveraging the insights of cultural studies. Humanistic defenders of heroic or "high" tragedy (from the many critics our own moment to bourgeois tragedy's Neoclassicist contemporaries) argue that its bourgeois form devalued the genre, bringing it low and thus making it mawkish and vulgar, unrecognizable as tragedy. Classist in orientation, although sometimes oblivious to its implications, this view holds fast to what it assures us is a "traditional" notion of tragedy that also happens to be, as *essentially* defined, unable to accommodate the middling. To represent the suffering of ordinary people *as if* it were tragic is to commit a sort of category error because tragedy is essentially heroic in nature, unordinary in expression, and concerned exclusively with an afflicted nobility whose suffering is held out as a kind of public atonement admired or feared from a distance. The height of the tragic protagonist's fall, in this case, is often interpreted as a function of social class or standing, although occasionally it can be inscribed by asserting simply, as Northrop Frye does, that "the tragic hero is very great as compared to us."[36] Indeed, in its most trenchant form, this view of tragedy draws a sharp distinction between the "formal, aesthetic structure" that is Tragedy *per se,* and the sort of suffering that haunts us all, arguing that the genre is "a kind of discourse, intended for stage performance" always to be disentangled from the colloquial usage of the term or even its

[36] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 207.

deployment in the long prose narratives of the novel.[37] Tragedy is defined as that which resists ordinary suffering and thus, Hegel argues in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (pub. 1835), it "strip[s] off the matter of everyday life and its mode of appearance."[38]

A much more subtle view, skeptical of the essentializing claims of humanistic theories of tragedy, argues that eighteenth-century bourgeois tragedies come up short of the genre's highest ambitions by virtue of their narrow or middle-class ideological investments. The trouble with bourgeois tragedy is its glorification of the patriarchal, of the mercantile and the pious—a line of argument that is strikingly difficult to sustain when one actually sits down to read the texts closely, riven as they are with the sorts of contradictions between law and desire that make up tragedy's stock and trade, contradictions that typically spark more questions than they answer. In truth, this charge is often advanced against *all* eighteenth-century tragedy,[39] but bourgeois tragedy seems to be a particularly egregious offender, its ideological commitments trumpeted in the dialogue of its central, recognizable figures (in some cases at least, without irony) and for this reason, taken to be an unsubtle declaration of Whiggish triumphalism.

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[37] Jennifer Wallace's opening discussion in *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) is exceptionally clear in laying out the terrain of tragic theory today, paying close attention to the tensions between humanist critics, formalists, and their various interlocutors in cultural studies. The quotations above cite Timothy Reiss's argument that our emotions are "not to be confused with [the] machine" of tragedy. See Reiss, *Tragedy and Truth: Studies in the Development of a Renaissance and Neoclassical Discourse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 2-3. For a critique of the humanist viewpoint's limitations for reading tragedy, see Jonathan Dollimore's influential New Historicist study, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[38] G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* vol. I*,* trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 289.

[39] For a view and discussion of eighteenth-century tragedy as a failure, see Eugene Hnatko, "The Failure of Eighteenth-Century Tragedy," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 11.3 (1971): 459-68. Felicity Nussbaum notes that this charge downplays the intense creativity and popularity of the stage in the period. It is not the failure of tragedy, in other words, but rather that of critics who have neglected to adequately account for the theatre's vitality. See her "The Challenge of Tragedy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832,* eds. Julia Swindells and David F. Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Hence, John O'Brien's otherwise sophisticated account of eighteenth-century harlequinade and pantomime entertainments reads *The London Merchant* as a means for policing the urban middle and working classes, without adequately answering why apprentices, tradesmen, and other middling and lower sorts originally flocked to these sorts of dramatic performances in the 1730s.[40] Of course, Lillo's play certainly depicted the type of moral that made it particularly appropriate for the tragic stage (and a favorite Christmas tradition for city apprentices), and was for this reason identified as particularly useful; Richardson's only exception to a general prohibition of the theatre in his *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734) was *The London Merchant,* precisely because of the salubrious effect it was thought to have on the nation's commercial virtue. But O'Brien's exposition of the way Lillo came to be enlisted in the maintenance of the artistic and social hegemony of patent theaters, as against the era's more scandalous and politically subversive performance genres, though correct in many of its particulars, tells us little about the initial skepticism that works like *The London Merchant* met with in coming to the stage. The result is an account which, because it takes the play's reception in the 1750s to be typical, largely elides the unprecedented urgency with which these dramas argued for the dignity of those afflicted, content instead to narrate the history of the play as if it was unproblematically accepted *as* tragedy to begin with. Its later canonization notwithstanding, however, that question was precisely the concern raised in those first performances in the latter days of 1731's theatrical season: could the life of an apprentice be properly understood as tragic? Even if Lillo's tragedy eventually came to be regarded as a "nauseous sermon," in Charles Lamb's cutting barb, what do we make of the countless other bourgeois tragedies that

[40] John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 154-75.

remained at the margins of legitimate theatre in the period?[41] What do we make of the recurrent controversies that surround the expression of ordinary suffering in the period's literature? These plays then, were much more ideologically ambivalent than we have so far realized, open to multiple, contradictory readings no less haunted by the anxieties, profanations, and subversive political energies they had the power to foment in a diverse middling public.

In one of the most studied recent accounts of tragedy, Vivasvan Soni is willing to go further, arguing that the result of the era's shifting ideological commitments is a body of work representing not so much tragedies as "trials" on the road to heavenly bliss, mechanical illustrations that serve the didactic (or as one critic characterized it "homiletic"[42]) ends of a bourgeoisie coming to grips with secular happiness. One of the signal achievements (or heresies) of modernity, the trial form in his view is a departure from tragedy that "set[s] aside the question of happiness, in order to make *meaning* out of suffering or dignify it with value."[43] What often goes by tragedy in the period is really just a formalized test of endurance, concerned more with the mere affects that make up a subject's experience than the demands that affliction foists upon a community of mourners.

And yet although Soni's politically urgent account ranges broadly and deeply across history in order to survey tragic narratives, he says shockingly little about the tragedies that played out on stage in the period. His account, for example, mentions not one drama in the

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[41] "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," in *The Life and Work of Charles Lamb,* vol. 4 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899)

[42] In one of the few monographs devoted completely to domestic tragedy, and much focused on Jacobean tragedy, Henry Hitch Adams argues that the subgenre is more fittingly termed "homiletic tragedy" on account of its strong didactic elements and the harsh justice of its depicted consequences. See *English Domestic, or Homiletic Tragedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

[43] Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 115 (emphasis in the original).

century he argues decisively reframes tragedy, as if the novel became the only or even the primary way to mediate afflictions. As should be clear by now, I too take the novel as a major player in rethinking tragedy, but certainly not the only locus of its innovation. With the exception of *Clarissa* (and perhaps, depending on one's point of view, *Pamela* and Rousseau's 1761 *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*), he eschews bourgeois tragedy completely, and refrains from commenting on the subgenre *qua* bourgeois tragedy. His claim that the period has no real tragedies is thereby strangely affirmed in the selective canon his history cites. In a strange of case of apples-to-oranges, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus* and Euripides' *Medea* (c. 430 BCE) are compared to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) as evidence that tragedy, and by extension our capacity to think happiness, has gone rotten. Certainly the picture would have been much different had Soni's account reckoned more fully with the causal opacity, semantic unintelligibility, and paralyzing ambivalence of bourgeois tragedy's ordinary suffering. While it's true that tragedy need not end badly or in death in order to be tragic, at the very least, his account might grapple more with what readers in the era took to be tragedy in the first place.[44] Perhaps more problematically though, implicit in this is the view that tragedy embodies a set of prelapsarian values, a fixed (largely classical) mode from which

[44] In a provocative revisionist account of tragedy, Blair Hoxby argues that post-Kantian and Romantic criticism on the genre too easily privileged questions of form and thereby read its plot into conflicts between the state and the individual. The effect of this was to obscure the central role of the genre in exploring the passions, a function which did not need to end in total catastrophe in order to do its cultural work. While I cannot finally endorse his claim that tragedy is essentially dramatic (it is all too easy to cite evidence of the participatory reading that attended tragic novels, we will see), his reconstruction of the genre's passionate effects is substantiated in my account of the period and confirms this aspect of Soni's argument. See Hoxby, "What Was Tragedy? The World We Have Lost, 1550-1795," *Comparative Literature* 64 (2012): 1-32.

eighteenth-century narratives of suffering decisively fall.[45] Tragedy *is* dead then, but only because the emptiness of modern happiness—he suggests we read "bourgeois complacency" there[46]—denies the gravity and urgency of its misery, stripping affliction of its political and ethical claims because, really, they are only temporary anyways. Strange bedfellows, Soni and Steiner end up agreeing on the genre's fate in the period, arguing that the quality of ordinary suffering on display in these texts is somehow not fully or properly tragic, a sentimental debasement of its pure generic coin. Why then, did eighteenth-century Britons argue that these texts *were* tragic? More to the point, what happens to our critical histories if we take those claims seriously?

To answer this, I take a very different approach. Following Raymond Williams, whose *Modern Tragedy* remains critical reading for criticism on the genre, I argue that "tragedy" emerges from a tension between the everyday experience of loss and misery, and the specific literatures and theoretical traditions that go by that name. A repository for many of a culture's deepest beliefs and contradictions, tragedy is not a stagnant category beholden to archaic rules, nor a "single or permanent kind of fact." Rather, I define it here as an unfolding cultural conversation about the ways in which we suffer and collectively mourn this in representation. "A series of experiences and conventions and institutions" marked by "tension and variation," to which, trauma-like, we nevertheless continually return, tragedy not only depicts a culture's suffering, but also gives it performative and imaginative shape.

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[45] I find much to praise in the politics and critical method of Soni's work, and his discussion of tragedy has reinvigorated work on tragedy by highlighting the real political stakes of the genre. But I cannot help but think that the story he wants to tell is more complex than he lets on, less the story of tragedy's inexorable fall, than that of a series of social actors jostling over how best to understand their adversities. Regardless, the close connection between emerging discourses of happiness in modernity, and watershed changes to depictions of suffering is a profound insight into the material history of such emotions.

[46] Soni, *Mourning Happiness,* 239.

The genre thus bleeds out of the formal categories that would seek to bind it transhistorically or too closely identify it with any given manifestation or medium, naming instead literary practices and representational strategies for the exploration of intractable distress and existential misfortune. Less a normative poetics than a dialectical process, what goes by tragedy documents a culture's experience of affliction.

Modernity and Affliction thus shifts attention away from recent formalist accounts of tragedy in favor of a renewed sensitivity to the emotions that made up tragic experience for the British middling sort. In doing so, the project aims to catalogue and investigate what Ann Cvetkovich has recently termed an "archive of feelings," artifacts whose performance history and publication, as well as critical reception and resistance, are the material traces of much more ephemeral (but no less material) modes of sensate being. Her notion of archive —a word virtually synonymous with genre in her account, and utilized similarly here— imagines an assemblage of texts that serve as sites of collective feeling, wrestling with shared anxieties and aspirations across aesthetic media. Evoking the slow, historical process Williams argues is so central to the development of tragedy, the critical emphasis of such an approach falls onto questions of "what counts as an archive," what sorts of concerns, and *whose* concerns, shape a body of textual practices.[47] In other words, how do innovations to tragedy in the period allow readers and viewers to take on new objects of feeling as constitutive elements of those same affects? In demanding public recognition and redress,

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[47] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 10. In her conclusion, Cvetkovich notes that the project of defining an archive of feeling boils down to asking the question of "Whose feelings count?" On the notion of archive, as against that of the repertoire, see Diana Taylor's influential, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). In trying to capture the multifaceted forms of bourgeois tragedy, and to emphasize in particular, the way that it moves between the media of page and stage, I have had to make use of the term "archive" in Cvetkovich's broad sense. Throughout the project, therefore, I use "bourgeois tragedy," "bourgeois tragic archive," "bourgeois archive," and even, "domestic tragedy," as roughly equivalent terms save only perhaps a particular beat of emphasis.

bourgeois tragedy asked of its eighteenth-century British context: what counts as tragic? Whose life is grievable and how might that mourning be performed?

These are, I want to emphasize, fundamentally historical questions that remain no less interested in the particular forms that structure affects associated with tragic experience in modernity; categories we take to be formal like prose, realism, and *tableau* turn out to be fateful to the history of ordinary suffering and tragedy alike. Form not only locates new objects of collective mourning, therefore—putting the bourgeois, as it were, in bourgeois tragedy—but also structures modes of their affliction in the theatrical and textual effects that mark these plays as not only socially, but also aesthetically and philosophically daring. Indeed, questions of aesthetic mediation repeatedly intrude in this way, much like they did for the genre's first and most experimental practitioners. What seem at first to be simple truisms on rhetorical style—traditionalists rebuffing prose or the vehemence with which poetic justice is demanded for instance—often turn out to be deeply invested in debates over suffering's meaning and emotional perceptibility. Recognizing this from the outset is important, because if we take ourselves to be historicizing affect, where—as "structures of feeling" in Williams' famous phrase—the precise relation of feeling to actual material practices and social experience could remain at the very edge of semantic availability, the task then is to locate its proleptic resonances in emerging cultural forms and conventions.[48]

The bourgeois tragic archive, I argue in the chapters that follow, offers us precisely this sort of artifact, its portending influence immediately felt in those first performances of *The London Merchant,* even though the full import of the genre's mark on British culture

[48] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132. While the task of historicizing affect has been a pressing concern in recent years, scholars of the eighteenth-century have long been attuned to the work feeling does in sustaining social actors. This will be clearer as my argument proceeds.

remained faint and unarticulated, vehemently contested, denigrated, or simply unrealized until quite some time later. What bourgeois tragedy does by imagining modes of literary mediation for ordinary suffering is broach new affective possibilities, lateral shoots in the tangled genealogical history of emotion that only gradually comes to bear the fruit of bourgeois (or here, "middle class" is perhaps finally appropriate) feeling. The punctuality of these original moments of formal inventiveness and social possibility exists precisely *as* possibility, as potentiality unfolding in ways that are in point of fact contingent and at every point contested even by those in the middle rank, but which from our vantage point seem to have always been articulated as an incipient order declared by the middle class. Acknowledging the unique difficulties of historicizing the affects circulating in a given historical present, Lauren Berlant notes that: "Affect's saturation of form can communicate the conditions under which a historical moment appears as a visceral moment, assessing the way a thing that is happening finds its genre, which is the same as finding its event." She suggests the term "intuition" as a way to name the punctual mediation of a moment's assumed possibilities, aspirations, and contradictions, a learned and historically contingent mode of apprehending the world that allows one to make its experience navigable. "Intuition is where affect meets history, in all its chaos, normative ideology, and embodied practices of discipline and invention." In this way, she concludes: "The aesthetic or formal rendition of affective experience provides evidence of historical processes."[49]

Hence, the general accuracy of O'Brien's account of the midcentury literary scene above and, from a different angle we will see, Simon Dickie's claim that the very same middling and lower stations that I argue demanded dignity in these tragedies were often

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[49] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16. She develops her notion of intuition as a mediator for the affective present in chap. 1.

subject to ruthless indignities in the forgotten comic genres of an otherwise vicious eighteenth-century milieu.[50] Like Dickie in particular, I see the century as much less sentimental than our accounts often make it out to be, even though (as I will argue) the bourgeois tragic archive makes possible the sentimentalism of the latter half of the century. As Moretti puts the political stakes of the move from middling comedy to *genre sérieux*: "Serious, is the bourgeoisie on its way to being the ruling class."[51]

What historians of bourgeois tragedy have long argued and what we are now in a position to appreciate more fully is that the genre came into being as one aspect of perhaps the most sustained period of social, economic, and intellectual development the world has ever seen, the result of which was a critical reassessment of tragedy's values, its passions and aesthetic possibilities, and inevitably, its felt experience. The modernization of tragedy went hand-in-hand that is, with that of the social imaginary.[52] So rather than viewing the rush of common figures and stylistic features into the tragic mode as a sentimental devaluation of the genre, or as a disastrous fall from an ideal form, here I propose that we read this archive as a token of what the contentious economic historian Deirdre N. McCloskey designates as the "Bourgeois Revaluation," an historical event in European (especially British) culture whereby the middle station gained a moral standing and liberty that were traditionally viewed as characteristics of the *ancien régime*.[53] While I do not

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[50] Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[51] Moretti, *The Bourgeois,* 74.

[52] Charles Taylor's influential concept of the modern social imaginary is defined in his *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) as a shift in Anglo-European culture's sense of the moral order, a shift that entailed the creation of new social forms and institutions (economic markets, the public sphere, political representation, varieties of secularism, among others).

[53] Deirdre N. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). On the concept of "revaluation" as opposed to "rise" of the middle class, see chap.3.

believe, as McCloskey does, that these changes were merely, or even mainly rhetorical in the ideological sense she indicates—perhaps one of the most interesting implications of the century's discourse of middle-class ascent is that the classical-rhetorical sense of *dignitas* as the noble orator's standing becomes, more and more, an essentialized quality of all persons, hard-won over decades of habits and performance—the emblematic status she claims for middling dramas like *The London Merchant* and Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) in the period is a point worth pausing over.[54] It is, however, only partially correct. What's crucial, in my view, is not that the bourgeoisie simply found its way onto the stages and into the book stalls of London, Paris, and Hamburg in the eighteenth century, for the urban merchant class had long appeared in city comedy and satires. Ordinary folk, as Erich Auerbach taught us long ago, have been objects of representation for quite some time.[55] Indeed, well before the appearance of those dramas McCloskey cites, Molière and Thomas Middleton made their names in this way.[56]

Instead, the innovation lay precisely in, and to the extent that, the middling sort suffered *tragically*, in the affective registers and symbolic forms of that old, fractured genre that they were, in turn, to refashion into an archive bearing their image. What had come into place, therefore, were conditions under which the lives of these people and their attachments could be understood, once violently destroyed, as having been *lost*. Which is to say, tragedy's bourgeois*ificatio*n (or, if one prefers, domestication) located worth and

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[54] Ibid., 403.

[55] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[56] This is Helgerson's point in *Adulterous Alliances*, and he cites not only the bourgeois and domestic tragedies mentioned here, but also comedies and portraiture depicting common peoples. Indeed, across media, as I have tried to qualify here, the ordinary came to be depicted with new sensitivity and yet on the tragic stage, these developments were opposed or resisted in ways that are telling.

dignity in common people, in the things they found delightful, and the shared way of life that gave them comfort and meaning. It provided a frame for recognizing the merit of this ascendant class built on family, capitalism, and piety, and just as importantly, a frame for displaying and exploring the "frailty and vulnerability" of both their bodies and ideals.[57] Ironically, these are broken, time and again, under the systematic weight of holding fast to these same values, ultimately calling their justice and truth into question—sometimes outrageously, as their reception by the public indicates. To paraphrase Helgerson, in weeping for this loss in bourgeois tragedy, we affirm the value of this middle-class against its own ideological assurances so that an authority is granted our shared object of lament.[58] Glossing a late essay of Freud's, "On Transcience" (1915), Stanley Cavell notes that paradoxically, our notion of the tragic is sustained by a deep affection for what we esteem and fear to lose in this world; mourning its future loss is the toll one pays in "accepting the world's beauty." This new, modern form of tragedy is symptomatic then of a cultural moment newly attuned to the possibility of happiness and the comforts of this life.[59]

This is where the subtle genius of Defoe's opening vignette comes fully into view. For what is the elder Crusoe's warning if not a claim about the deep worthiness of this bourgeois way of life, or an urgent petition for his son to find happiness in its simple pleasures? What is it, finally, if not a scene colored by the ordinary sufferings of bourgeois and domestic tragedy? "I say," Crusoe painfully recollects, "I observed the Tears run down his Face very plentifully, and especially when he spoke of my Brother who was kill'd; and that when he

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[57] Eagleton, *Sweet Violence,* xv.

[58] Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances,* 55.

[59] Stanley Cavell, "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary," in *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 172.

spoke of my having Leisure to repent, and none to assist me, he was so mov'd, that he broke off the Discourse, and told me, his Heart was so full he could say no more to me" (6). Father Crusoe imagines himself, in this moment, a spectator to his son's afflictions and cannot bear the weight of its pain. Indeed, one suspects he knew well about the frailty of his home and way of life—much more so than he lets on to his headstrong son. The vicissitudes of the middle class may swing in a narrower ambit, but they are not for that reason any less painful. This was to be the affective and ideological terrain explored by bourgeois tragedy, as I argue throughout the chapters that follow, mediocrity—which is to say, being in the middle—could be as precarious as the extremes that bound it at either end. The urban world of trade and financial obligation could be as hazardous to navigate as the sea, its failure as isolating as shipwreck. A woman need not be entangled in royal intrigue in order to find herself abused and wounded by those holding more power. And the family home, with its potential for cold, hidden violence, could be as alien and threatening as the savage abroad. The prosaic world had its own dangers and sufferings, for which a new aesthetic idiom, calibrated to the ordinary, came to be fashioned.

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Chapter one continues what appears at first an impossible argument: that the 1731 debut of *The London Merchant,* situated at the height of crude humor in the eighteenth century, also marks the beginning of a sustained period of bourgeois revaluation. Contrary to the narrative of tragedy's stagnation at the hands of this archive, I argue that Lillo's most famous drama was a radical theatre piece that asked its audience to pity and fear for the middling and lower rank characters that usually populated the era's cruel burlesque stage. So while noting that this sort of farce coexisted with tragedy throughout the century, and

frequently drew its impetus to heap scorn on the basis of a character's rank, I trace the play's original reception in order to locate a moment where tragedy's affective range was refigured to encompass ordinary people. Confounding spectatorial expectations, its debut audience came to the play jeering its ballad source material, and left unable to keep from weeping, Lillo's genre-bending appeal to middling dignity was an audacious challenge to entrenched ideas about one's lot in the *ancien régime*. Refashioning the bounds of tragedy, the aesthetic of the ordinary worked by extending the thematic social scope of the genre to average people, capturing this in prosaic expression. Pity signaled here a recognition of another's pain, no matter their social conditions.

Which is not to say suffering's pitiable consumption was unproblematic. In fact, Lillo's follow-up to *The London Merchant,* 1736's *Fatal Curiosity,* was deeply ambivalent about the spectacle of suffering, especially when it occurred in the spaces of domesticity. It was one thing for a beholder to identify with an object of pity, after all, and quite another for art or theatre to dissolve the mediating distance between subject and object. In contrast to, say, Addisonian schemes, which locate the aesthetic consumption of suffering in the imagination's comparative faculties, Lillo's later work theorizes a turn from the curious to the morbidly curious, from the intellective processes of rational judgment and experiential collection, to those embodied and often unspoken feelings that resist catharsis. So when eighteenth-century critics complained that domestic tragedy "struck too close to home," their equivocal usage collapsed heart and home, signaling at once affective and spatial understandings of interiority under negotiation in the period. In "striking close to home," the tragedy, by its verisimilitude, imagines an acute traumatic experience inexorably unearthed. The result is one of the century's most relentless explorations of the uncanny,

where those closest to us are those most strangely alien. In chapter two then, I argue that Georgian domestic tragedy, and in particular *Fatal Curiosity,* invites the viewer-reader to cross the threshold and abide in the paradoxically lurid and all-too-ordinary pain of the private home observed.

I turn from drama to narrative fiction in my third chapter, for while a series of domestic tragedies played with the ambivalences I have described, none was more important than Richardson's epochal novel, *Clarissa*. Famously, the novel's tragic turn elicited the public's disgust, with a variety of correspondents and cultural figures pleading with the author to reward his heroine's virtue. I argue that the poetic justice his readers clamored for was a mode of generic wish-fulfillment, that offered a way of redressing the injustice of this world by enacting a deep moral order in the one it represented. Richardson, however, categorically rebuffed calls for poetic justice, insisting on the impenetrable sublimity of the providential, a response that rendered Clarissa's suffering all the more urgent. Evoking the affect-soaked *why me?* of modern trauma rhetoric, the novel is much more ambivalent about tragedy than we have tended to notice, with the heroine's own reflections in the 1750 *Meditations Collected from the Sacred Books* raising the possibility that her afflictions were ultimately senseless and undeserved. Straddling the century, in this way, *Clarissa* provides the hinge to my argument. At once troubling and aesthetically seductive, its ending reflects a point at which providence becomes elusive even as it stubbornly grounds its protagonist's suffering in a rhetoric of pious resignation. Indeed, the failure of poetic justice implied that, for an increasing number of the reading public and a circle of *philosophes* and Enlightenment luminaries, happiness had to be found in *this* life—and not the next.

Chapter four considers Edward Moore's tragedy, *The Gamester,* as exemplary of the prose aesthetic of the ordinary*,* reinvigorated by the cultural ferment that surrounded Richardson's novel. Critics like Samuel Johnson dismissed the possibility of prose tragedy, maintaining instead that the genre's verse made suffering beautiful, paradoxically wresting an exquisite glory from the prose of the world. According to many rhetoricians, verse quite literally inscribed a dignity upon our afflictions, redeeming and refining pain in the nobility of neoclassical poetics. What is the significance then, that for Enlightenment thinkers like Diderot and Lessing, prose was the true medium of bourgeois suffering, its texture more real than ideal? As students of British bourgeois tragedy, they justified this view by citing *The London Merchant* and Moore's popular 1753 tragedy, the preface of which was something of a manifesto for the use of prose in serious drama. Moore argued, for instance, that *The Gamester* was "a natural Picture" of the tragic, merging form and content into what would be later known as the absorptive *tableau* of affliction. In chapter four, consequently, I argue that "prosaic suffering" marks a shift in the way tragic misfortune is understood and expressed, not only as an experience shared across social ranks but also one which might be problematically personal and banal. Seemingly extemporaneous and disenchanted—the theatre's adaptation of "writing to the moment"—prose tragedy denied the sort of rhetorical "elevation" that would render theatrical mourning an act of transcendence.

I turn next to consider the sentimental novel in chapter five, arguing that its often overwrought narrative form—whereby sensibility mediates one's pleasurable engagement with a world in pain —belies its origins as a response to bourgeois tragedy. Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple*, often cited as the first sentimental novel, illustrates this well, narrating the process by which the middling object of affliction (unfit for tragic

representation only a decade before, but center-stage here) became the feeling subject theorized decades later in Adam Smith's moral philosophy. In fact, Fielding was steeped in Lillo's, and later Richardson's work, and her novel carries on an intertextual commentary on the ordinariness of suffering, adopting what Paul Fleming calls bourgeois drama's "aesthetic of affective identification," and culminating finally, in the much-neglected *Volume the Last*'s depiction of bourgeois grief and grievability. Here, to love is to invite suffering, to register the possibility of an attachment's loss. In stark contrast to this, Laurence Sterne's wonderfully ironic meditation on the *pauvre honteux* in his *Sentimental Journey* (1768) satirizes the erotics of middle-class tragedy as a fantasy that enables both identification and disassociation for a sympathetic bourgeoisie. Vicarious suffering assures one that they are alive and well, subtly defensive in its apparent compassion, and exquisitely pleasurable in its spectatorship.

In the project's conclusion, I suggest that the emergence of an aesthetic theory that privileged the disinterested beholder—culminating in Kant's third *Critique* (1790)—became increasingly problematic for a genre that reveled in the effects of morbid curiosity. In contrast to earlier figures like John Dryden and Johnson (who bristled at the debasement of the genre's elevated poetics), Wordsworth and others worried that prosaic suffering weighed down and discomforted the viewer and reader. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century then, the aesthetics of the ordinary was thought to render what David Hume had called tragedy's "unaccountable pleasure" impossible, short-circuiting the genre's proper affects. Gesturing towards the archive's sublimated afterlives in sister-forms like melodrama, the Gothic, and nineteenth-century realism, I ultimately suggest that bourgeois tragedy helped to elevate a social class and to condition a range of patterns for suffering's performance and

consumption—in the theatre, the salon, and the closet—in ways that continue to resonate with us today.

1. Bourgeois Tragedy, Reconsidered:

Pitying the Ordinary in a Cruel Eighteenth Century

"I have attempted, indeed, to enlarge the province of the graver kind of poetry…"

-George Lillo, Dedication to *The London Merchant*

"The heroes and heroines of the age are cobblers and kitchen wenches."

-Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Bourgeois tragedy was once radical. And yet years of literary history—and particularly, the musty account of tragedy's decline and disappearance—have conspired to obscure this fact, so that today we tend to believe rather the opposite is true. Consider, for instance, the posthumous reputation of George Lillo's 1731 drama, *The London Merchant,* branded variously "a caricature" (William Hazlitt), "a nauseous sermon" (Charles Lamb), a "grimly prosaic" (George Steiner) exercise in "sentimental melodrama" (George Wallace).[1] Indeed, that "melodrama" is cited as generic kin is telling, suggesting an incommensurability between tragic *pathos* and the middling characters that populate these plays, a failure of character to correspond to "a great or heroic nature, which is the only worthy object of tragedy."[2] Thus, a good tragedy, claimed Sir Joshua Reynolds, depicted what he called "heroick suffering," and was thought thereby to "powerfully strike upon the publick

[1] The citations here make respective reference to Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage; or, A Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London: John Warren, 1821), 207; Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," in *The Life and Work of Charles Lamb,* vol. 4 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899), 43; Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 265; and Wallace, "Bourgeois Tragedy or Sentimental Melodrama?: The Significance of George Lillo's *The London Merchant,*" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25.2 (Winter 1991-1992): 123-43, 143.

[2] Lamb, "Tragedies of Shakespeare," 43.

sympathy."[3] To frame tragedy in this way is necessarily to exclude the common as an appropriate subject for the tragic. Taking it to be a kind of category error, critics often complain that the problem with bourgeois tragedy is that there is little heroic about a George Barnwell, the apprentice protagonist of the play, as indeed those mercantile burghers and middling ladies that animated the domestic tragic stage. (After all, isn't the idea of an apprentice suffering sort of an artistic non-starter? Why would a broader public care if he fell?)

Tragedies like Lillo's landmark play emerge as a curious paradox in this view, at once vulgar and overly particularized, a "caricature" that nevertheless fails to truly generalize, a popular form with somehow only narrow appeal. It demands our tears, but fails to give us anything worth crying over. It wants us to be bettered, yet it leads us to contemplate a social class and issues we don't find ennobling. In this way, bourgeois tragedy can be read as an ideological tool that works by reveling in sentimental emotion while simultaneously—as if by critical sleight of hand—excluded from an economy of theatrical pity, as somehow not *really* tragic, not really worthy of the sort of compassion necessary for a successful tragedy. The affective overreach of the play is inevitably read as a sign of its insincerity; rhetoric and performance function there as a "mode of excess," to repurpose a phrase that Peter Brooks applies to the *je ne sais quoi* of melodrama.[4] What these arguments do, in other words, is imply that the manner in which another person suffers is unworthy of its representation, and hence must be relegated—at once aesthetically and politically—to "tawdry refuge among

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[3] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* (London: Paul Mellon Center for Studies in British Art, 1975), 57.

[4] See Peter Brooks' argument in, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Since at least Lamb, however, the *pathos* of Lillo's work has been framed in terms of this sort of excess See his "Tragedies of Shakespeare," 43.

the gaslights of melodrama."[5] After all, what *really* is meant by qualifying tragic suffering with the modifier "heroick," if not a limiting of its representational scope and affective reach?

It's especially striking then that early audiences of *The London Merchant* reported almost exactly the opposite reaction to the play when it premiered. Where generations of later critics saw a shallow didacticism that foreclosed the possibility of tragic pity, contemporaries saw a radical broadening of its affective reach. For them, Lillo's text was far from narrow in its scope. As he was to put it himself in the dedicatory epistle to the printed play: "If tragic poetry be, as Mr. Dryden has somewhere said, the most excellent and most useful kind of writing, the more extensively useful the moral of any tragedy is, the more excellent that piece must be of its kind."[6] Lost in the moralism of eighteenth-century tragic rhetoric is the suggestive claim to "extensiveness" here, a claim almost always unrecognized. Yet extensiveness loosens the rule of heroic tragedy, marks a more generous model of social participation, so that we ought to read Lillo's claim here as self-consciously motivated by a desire for a more inclusive theatrical experience, one that sought to represent a broader swathe of social life as potential objects of pity. To do so would be to bring *The London Merchant*—and in fact, bourgeois tragedy—into a broader critical conversation about what we mean by "tragedy," not as the representation of some great man who struggles vainly against the gods, but as historical articulations of the meaning of suffering, its causes and effects, and the affective states that embody its performance and consumption.

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[5] Steiner, *Death of Tragedy,* 194.

[6] George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, ed. William H. McBurney (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3. Citations to the play throughout this chapter refer to this edition.

The London Merchant, I suggest, is a key moment in dramatic history as indeed for our conception of ordinary suffering, a moment invested in testing the bounds of pity as also its links to rank and merit. A politics of pity, in other words, operates in the class divides that animate contemporary responses to bourgeois and domestic tragedy, a distance perhaps narrowing during the period. Indeed, as Daniel Defoe so well-formulated in characterizing the age:

> Wealth, howsoever got, in England makes
> Lords of mechanics, gentlemen of rakes:
> Antiquity and birth are needless here,
> 'Tis impudence and money makes a peer.[7]

Lillo understood, like Defoe, that if there was now some fluidity to the social sphere, if the lines that separate the experience of the mechanic kind from that of a peer were at least theoretically blurred in the popular consciousness, then tragedy had become a site of new energies and anxieties. We tend to think of this period as one of the beginning of an unprecedented upward mobility, seizing on those accounts of windfall and prodigious fortune, but this fluidity entailed also profound anxieties, new modes of precarious existence and a changed relationship to personal loss. Suffering had to be newly drawn, therefore, imagined in dramatically extensive fashion as part of a common discursive field. Whereas "heroick suffering" signaled an emotive register that found meaning when tied to the symbolic forms of a privileged few, bourgeois tragedy represented ordinary suffering as a condition of everyday life. So it's not that Lillo's work remains unworthy of some mythical tragic canon because it fails to elicit the right sort of pity in its viewers or depict a particular

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[7] Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman: A Satyr* (London, n.p.: 1700), 24-25.

quality of affliction, it is, rather, the *very expression* of these bourgeois feelings, the very expression of an incipient sensibility in an otherwise cruel eighteenth century.

Indeed, as Simon Dickey has recently made clear, eighteenth-century Britain could be a mean-spirited and unforgiving place, a place where the middling and lower sorts were the objects of open derision and habitual abuse. Tracing a history of "the unsentimental eighteenth century," he argues that scholars have tended to overemphasize the period's sentimental canon, in the process neglecting the far more common burlesques, jest books, and everyday cruelties that made up the majority of that era's comedy. "It is hard for modern scholars to appreciate how absurd it could still be, in 1740 or even 1800," he notes, "to suggest that ordinary people had fine feelings. Early sentimental representations of peasants and housemaids were flagrant violations of inherited decorums….[since] neoclassical aesthetics allowed common people to be represented only as objects of laughter."[8] Comedy took delight in personal misfortune and profound suffering, maintaining both long-held assumptions about social order and the capacity of middling and lower sorts to feel supposedly rarified pains.[9]

Dickey's revisionist account has the added benefit of thrusting bourgeois tragedy's intervention into relief, allowing us a critical foothold by which we can begin to historicize its particular reconfiguration of suffering as well as the revolutionary political stakes of sensibility.[10] In this respect, Lillo's work is crucial in tracking the consciousness of a newly

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[8] Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 111.

[9] David B. Morris notes that well into the nineteenth century, slaves, the indigent, and miscellaneous "savages" were commonly thought to be relatively insensitive to pain. On the contrary, Europeans were often considered "hypersensitive," the result of "being civilized" See his *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 39.

[10] Ibid., 211-213.

pitiable social rank as indeed, marking the first tentative gestures towards a history of those affects that make up modern affliction. *The London Merchant,* I will argue, was experimental theatre that announced the arrival of not only Lillo as the "natural Shakespeare,"[11] but was also representative of the dignity of an ascendant (albeit heterogeneous) mercantile class previously relegated to the comic second plots in revenge tragedies and city comedies. I develop this insight in two ways: first, by looking to contemporary accounts that suggest the same viewers that came to ridicule the drama reported being profoundly moved by its foray into a strange new affective space; and second, by showing that the text emphasizes its audaciously self-conscious claim to national and metaphysical seriousness in the figures of Barnwell and Millwood, the confidence woman that precipitates his fall. With increased prosperity and rising standards of living came a new sense of that which might be lost; a greater share of political and economic influence meant that the middling sort were now implicated in vicissitudes of national importance and representable in registers legible as *gravitas,* which is to say they were the subjects of a literature treating them with dignity and moral seriousness. This process of increased legibility calls to mind Judith Butler's claim that "lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living."[12] She calls on us to analyze the "frames" by which "recognizability" is possible, "the general terms, conventions, and norms [that] 'act' in their own way, crafting a living being into a recognizable subject."[13] In like manner, *The London Merchant* meditates on the evils that precipitate suffering in the lives of people working in the city, thereby responding performatively to a changing set of

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[11] Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage,* 207.

[12] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), 1; cf. 13-15.

[13] Ibid., 5.

cultural assumptions about the scope of tragic misfortune. Such performances of public suffering are key moments in the emergence of a politics of pity, and hence offered theatrical spectators a moment of shared affective experience, an imagined sentimental community in which philanthropy was tacitly urged as one response to human misery, as well as a means for broader social stability.

Moreover, in using the expression, "politics of pity," I mean to draw on the work of a cadre of philosophers, social scientists, and media theorists who have sought to analyze the way in which suffering is represented to a viewing public, especially in the modern period. Hannah Arendt, who coined the phrase, notes in her essay *On Revolution,* that the politics of pity operates by distinguishing sharply between those who suffer and those who do not, and thereby emphasizes the spectacle of suffering.[14] The politics of pity stresses detached observation of the unfortunate by their fortunate or even perhaps, "luckier" counterparts. In contrast to the politics of justice, pity tends to lend less importance to the meritocratic aspects of suffering, that is, it tends to sunder misery from desert or rank. Luc Boltanski, whose *Distant Suffering* meditates at length on the implications of Arendt's formulation to media theory, adds that such a politics therefore suspends questions of justification: "For a politics of pity, the urgency of the action needed to be taken to bring about an end to the suffering invoked always prevails over considerations of justice."[15] It would be cruel, he

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[14] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, ed. Jonathan Schell (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Arendt's discussion of the politics of pity takes place in the second chapter, "The Social Question," where she contrasts the politics of justice at work in the American Revolutionary War against the French Revolution's descriptions of the suffering poor, the effect of which was profound pity and violent disgust. While I take Arendt's point on the link between the politics of pity and totalitarianism, my reading of Lillo seeks to locate a moment of discontinuity in the cultural imaginary, and is therefore revisionist and sympathetic to the extent that it sought the inclusion of political others.

[15] Boltanski's work is essential reading on the current theory arising from Arendt's thesis, as well as a tributary to other, diverse disciplines. See his *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics,* trans. Grahame Burchell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The quotation above occurs on p.5.

suggests, if we were to say that victims of a famine somehow deserved their own misfortune. Misery thus phenomenologically forces the philanthropic, the weight of its observation acting as affective irritant, if not oppressively burdening the viewer and interpellating them as moralized spectators (a dynamic we shall return to in later chapters). Another way of putting this is that the politics of pity bridges distances in a series of sympathetic obligations, so that it "aims to resolve the space–time dimensions of mediation in order to establish a sense of 'proximity' to the events and so engage the spectator."[16] This spectator is thus transformed into actor/witness, somehow not a party to the represented suffering, nor precisely responsible, even though they are nevertheless implicated in its mourning. An artifact of such mediation, Lillo's text imagines a moment of heightened sensitivity to an other's suffering, recasting the affective frames by which it this affliction is recognized. Read against the backdrop of a cruel eighteenth century, bourgeois tragedy represents a vigorous cultural debate over whose life is greivable and how that mourning might be performed.

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Of course, the point of much work on tragic theory during the period was that one wasn't supposed to cry for a middling hero. One needed a socially superior model, a noble, powerful figure to admire that would then elicit pity and fear by virtue of their fall from such great heights. This much goes back to at least Aristotle, who claimed it as the defining marker of tragedy as opposed to comedy, albeit in a way that leaves considerable ambiguity as we shall see. "Tragedy," he parses, "is distinguished precisely by this difference; comedy prefers to represent people who are worse than those who exist, tragedy people who are

[16] Lilie Chouliaraki, "Watching 11 September: The Politics of Pity," *Discourse & Society* 15.2 (May 2004): 185-198, 187.

better." (48a17-20)[17] While this formulation has been amongst the most lasting poetic distinctions, and rightly ensured the philosopher's place in our critical history, the terms "better" and "worse" here are veritable floating signifiers; better in what sense, exactly? And perhaps more importantly, better than *whom*? What this meant in practice however, was that heroes tended only to be cast from the narrow ranks of the well-born, a height presumably better than most if not all (in the case of a King, Queen, or Emperor, for instance). Better tended to mean social better, in part because, as critics of the period have often noted, a metonymic logic underwrote the ideology of neo-classical and Restoration tragedy. To care about the king's tragic fall meant also to care about the fall of the kingdom after which he was named. Kings and queens were largely pitiable because their tragic fall hinted at the ways in which their fortunes were wrapped up in that of the average spectator's, the way in which personal agency was bound in and complicated by the demands of governance.[18]

Even Samuel Johnson, who was remarkably pragmatic about what did and didn't count as tragedy in the period, draws a line at this point. In his discussion of tragic theory in *Rambler* 156, Johnson's views can be rather flexible as he attempts to argue that theory ought to follow nature and bend towards the didactic. According to Johnson, the rules for tragedy are largely the result of historical accident, and hence, tradition remains open to revision as the demands of probability and representation continually temper the action. So, for instance, in *The Rambler* 156 he is sympathetic to tragi-comedy because it adequately

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[17] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987).

[18] Wallace, "Bourgeois Tragedy or Sentimental Melodrama?," 141; cf. J. Douglas Canfield, whose appropriately titled, *Heroes & States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy*, makes clear what was thought to be at stake in tragic theatre and develops this as the centerpiece of his analysis (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2000).

represents the mixed-state of human life even as it holds the potential to spur moral improvement. Yet Johnson closes with a strong qualification that complicates this: "As the design of tragedy is to instruct by moving the passions, it must always have a hero, a personage apparently and incontestably superior to the rest [of the play's characters], upon whom the attention may be fixed, and the anxiety suspended."[19] Whereas the essentially complex condition of "real life" allows the possibility of mixed modes, there yet remains something unrealistic about an inferior personage really moving the spectator to catharsis. Reynolds' "heroick suffering" emerges in this passage as the *sine qua non* of tragedy. The noble figure, cast down from great heights of power and prestige, serves as the lynchpin of tragic affect, the figural point of reference upon whom the spectator projects their heart's "concerns."[20] Johnson's theory, unsurprisingly (given his traditionalist views on subordination and hierarchy), assumes an essential inequality between not only character and viewer, but also heroic protagonist and the balance of *dramatis personae*. The hero, he is quick to continue, must be singularly better since moral improvement is dulled by dueling affective allegiances. Pity must be unquestionably directed towards a superior, solitary sufferer. If in a good tragedy the hero moves our heart, the ordinary man or woman simply fails to excite our gravest concerns—or worse, becomes an object of buffoonish derision in comedy.

Indeed, the ordinary man or woman was not only thought to be unworthy of tragic representation, they could often be the butt of the joke. A wide range of canonical figures (from Shakespeare and Jonson to Wycherley and Behn) presented comic plots or secondary

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[19] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vols. 3-5 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Allen T. Hazen et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 5: 70.

[20] I take this language from Johnson himself; see Ibid.

plots that drew on the foibles of city merchants, petty bourgeoisie, and rural gentry. Tradesmen of various stripes were a persistent source of comic and tragi-comic laughter in the eighteenth century. Perhaps more tellingly, however, authors occasionally sought to represent the disconnect between Reynolds' "heroick suffering" and the common person in heightened relief by burlesquing the tragic itself. The formula then was simple: craft a seemingly tragic drama populated not by noblemen and their virtuous wives and lovers, but rather those "low" figures that were supposed to negate the very possibility of tragic affect. The premise of such burlesques was that there was an inherent incongruity between the seriousness of tragedy—and by extension, the depiction of suffering—and the mundane actions and vicissitudes of the working and middling classes. More importantly however, such instances illustrate the operative assumptions of the period's theatre, its general inability to imagine how the commoner might suffer with a dignity demanding fitting performative representation.

David Garrick's collaboration with Samuel Foote, *The Tailors, A Tragedy for Warm Weather* (1767), satirically trades on this conceit and suggests just how late these assumptions lingered into the century, signaling that bourgeois tragedy is perhaps more akin to the mock- than the heroic tragic tradition. Garrick's prologue, written for the original staging, downplays the stakes of bourgeois misfortune by questioning the very possibility that tragedy might arise from the commercial classes:

> But are these heroes tragic, you will cry?
> Oh! very tragic—and I'll tell you why—
> Should female artists with the male combine
> And Mantua-makers to the Tailors Join,

Should all, too proud to work, their trades give o'er,

Not to be softened by the sixpence more,—

What horrors would ensue!—First, you, ye beaux,

Would forfeit all existence with your clothes.

Then you, ye fair, where would be your defence?

This is no golden age of innocence.

Should drunken Bacchanals the Graces meet,

And no police protect the naked street,—

Beauty is weak, and passion bold and strong:—

Oh! then—but modesty restrains my tongue. [21]

Doused in epic language, his playful challenge to the audience acknowledges the incommensurability of *gravitas* and commoners while at the same time cheekily pretending to overturn this conventional poetic wisdom. The eponymous tailors are by extension then not only the object of satire but also figures for tradesmen or the Aristotelian "inferior" in general, manifestly unheroic. Occupation doubles as nature, delimiting the extent to which a rank can be rightfully extended the spectator's pity. As a consequence, the prologue's basic tactic is an appeal to the tailor's betters and an assertion of commercial-class importance only insofar as its serves the more refined sectors of the populace. What would be really tragic, he argues, is if *they* had no more new clothes. Tragedy is thereby located, albeit tongue-in-cheek, in the ability of the upper-class sort to suffer as a result of mercantile

[21] David Garrick, prologue to *The Tailors; A Tragedy for Warm Weather* (London: T. Sherlock, 1778), v-vi.

misfortune.[22] As late as Isaac Cruikshank's illustrations for the play in 1836 then, the tailors were depicted fundamentally as a study in the grotesque (figure 1.1); tradesmen, it seemed, were a far cry from subjects worthy "heroick suffering."

Even Lillo's friend and sometime collaborator, Henry Fielding, made repeated recourse to this burlesqued motif, and this, suggestively contemporaneous to *The London Merchant*'s debut on the stage. Though he would later praise *Fatal Curiosity* as "a Master-Piece…inferior only [to] Shakespear's [sic] best pieces,"[23] he tended to stress the comic potential of ordinary people. Fielding's rise in poetic and theatrical stature coincided with the *The London Merchant*'s debut, and with the performance and publication of his own genre-bending mock-tragedies, *The Tragedy of Tragedies; or, The Life and Death of Tom Thumb* (1731)*,* and later and less successfully, *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* (1732). Like Foote's *Tailors,* these texts played with the prevailing assumptions in the period's tragedies, and stressed the presumably inherently comical—or perhaps more accurately, anti-tragical—characters of their subjects: variously prostitutes, low-level gentlemen, service workers, or as in the case of *Tom Thumb,* the yeomen of English folklore. Mocking British tragedy as already too sentimental and uninterestingly formulaic, Fielding nevertheless stressed the narrowness of represented suffering and marked the tragic as ill-befitting the working class that the plays routinely depicted. Labeling them tragic was half of the joke; we are meant to read their titles, once we're in on it, with a measure of inflected irony. Even so, Fielding's

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[22] A coda of sorts to this reading would mention the London Tailor's Riots of 1805, which was in part a response to a staging of the play. As the story goes, London's tailors had banded together to buy out a benefit performance of the piece at the Little Theatre, Haymarket, intent on hissing it off the stage. But when thousands of tailors arrived and attempted to storm the house, a riot broke out and was, with great difficulty, put out by a regiment of the Army. See *The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilization*, vol. 15. ed. Alfred Bates (London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906), 101-102.

[23] Quoted in William McBurney's edition of Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966)*,* xiii.



Figure 1.1. Isaac Cruikshank, Illustration from *The Tailors,* 1836 (Courtesy of The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles)

irony also served to unsettle those assumptions that formed the tacit compact between author, player, and viewing public. Ambiguous and suggestive, his mock-tragedies were almost Brechtian in their commitment to estrangement and generic discomfort. "To tell you the truth," reported one would-be critic following a performance of *The Covent-Garden Tragedy*, "I know not what to make of it: one would have guessed from the audience it had been a comedy, for I saw more people laugh than cry at it."[24]

[24] Quoted in Henry Fielding, *The Works of Henry Fielding, Complete in One Volume with Memoir of the Author*, ed. Thomas Roscoe (London: Henry Washbourne, H. G. Bohn, et al., 1840), 943. It is worth noting that the critic mentioned here insists, as far as I can tell without irony, that the play is a tragedy. Even if the notice is meant to be satirical, however, it merely confirms my broader argument.

I stress this bit of critical history here because I wish to underscore that these plays were not precisely comedies in fable in that they routinely represented the downfall (rather than, say, the marriage) of a common sufferer. Unlike *The London Merchant*, these burlesques played with tragedy as a cultural ideal by pretending to ascribe the generic label erroneously not with respect to plot, but rather with respect to an *affective object defined primarily by class*. The joke worked by presenting a non-noble, an ordinary, seemingly un-heroic man or woman as someone who suffers publicly and then foregrounding the audience's expected lack of pity by cheekily suggesting, with a cutting irony, that this too is tragic. We laugh, not at the good outcome of the fable—since there was none!—but at the misfortune of someone unworthy of our sympathy. "Heroick suffering," transposed onto lower classes, becomes a farcical affair.

Given this fact, it is less surprising that crowds would have arrived at Drury Lane for *The London Merchant*'s premiere prepared to jeer it. In his chronicle of English literature, *The Lives of the Poets,* Theophilus Cibber (who staged Lillo's drama as manager of Drury Lane) notes that the play's opening night was initially inauspicious:

> The old ballad of George Barnwel [sic] (on which the story was founded) was on this occasion reprinted, and many thousand sold in one day. Many gaily-disposed spirits brought the ballad with them to the play, intending to make their pleasant remarks (as some afterwards owned) and ludicrous comparisons between the antient ditty [sic] and the modern drama.[25]

Like Fielding's mock-tragic works, the strange coupling of mercantile subject matter and tragic declamation in *The London Merchant* seemed, on the face of it, to demand the

[25] Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: R. Griffiths, 1753), 5:338.

audience's participation in a ritual of comic public ridicule. It didn't matter if the playbill assiduously indicated its tragic plot—how, after all, could there be a serious tragedy involving a London merchant? Moreover, as *The London Stage* makes clear, perhaps the most popular comic play in the months immediately preceding its debut performance was, in fact, Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies*.[26] London theatre-goers, with fresh memories of not only *The Tragedy of Tragedies* may have understood the ascription of tragedy to be another instance of tongue-in-cheek generic play. In showing up to the theatre, mocking ballads in hand, they were simply fulfilling what was expected of them as spectators of the middling sort. I emphasize this because, I believe, it goes a long way towards explaining the dynamic at play in oft-cited early notices of the drama emphasizing the unexpected gravity of Lillo's initial works. Even today, critics tend to look at such notices—in which, in the words of Cibber, the audience was so moved that they were compelled to "drop their ballads, and pull out their handkerchiefs"—with a measure of cynical disbelief or critical condescension.[27] But moments such as these mark the shift in affective possibilities, and not simply the experimental atmosphere of early Georgian theatre. Lillo's tragedies were, according to this, nothing less than a realignment of aesthetic and affective sensibilities, provisional meditations on what it meant for the middling classes to suffer and in turn. Whereas those early spectators arrived at a comedy of middling-class misfortune, they left something profoundly new; the middling was now a potential site of the tragic.

Furthermore, David Mazella reminds us that the play first appeared at a moment crucial to the development of theories of sensibility, bourgeois ethics, and modern

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[26] See Emmett L. Avery et al., eds, *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces,* vol. 3 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960).

[27] Cibber, *Lives of the Poets,* 5:339.

jurisprudence, discourses that together constituted something like a politics of pity. Much of what the play accomplished is illustrated in anecdotes where compassion of this sort becomes a marker of genteel refinement. He cites, for example, the "Introductory Anecdotes" in Mary Wortley Montagu's collected *Letters and Works*, in which the editor (her great-grandson, Baron Wharncliffe) avers her lifelong love for English drama, and seems to mark the significance of bourgeois tragedy's emergence:

> …she had several volumes of differently sized and wretchedly printed plays bound up together, such as the Duke of Roxburghe would have bought at any price; the works of Shirley, Ford, Marston, Heywood, Webster, and the rest, as far back as Gammer Gurton's Needle, and coming down to the trash of Durfey. But Lillo's domestic tragedies were what she most admired; for 'My lady used to declare,' said the old servant so often quoted, 'that whoever did not cry at George Barnwell must deserve to be hanged.'[28]

Montagu's gesture of simultaneous judgment and sympathy rests on the pitiability of Lillo's tragic protagonist, and seems at first to contradict her complaint about the novel's leveling tendency: "The confounding of all ranks, and making a jest of order, has long been growing in England; and I perceive…[it] has made a very considerable progress. The heroes and heroines of the age are cobblers and kitchen wenches."[29] Looking at the literary landscape, Lady Mary seems acutely aware of the changing winds on the horizon. Yet here, her positive verdict locates Lillo's work in a trajectory populated for the most part by Jacobean dramatists—many of which, we should note, wrote their own experiments in something like

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[28] "Biographical Anecdotes of Lady M. W. Montagu," in *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. James Stuart Wortley, Lord Wharncliff (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), 1:86.

[29] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Select Passages from her Letters,* ed. Arthur R. Ropes (London: Seeley and Co., 1892), 225.

domestic tragedy—becoming, essence, a guilty pleasure, "trash" that nevertheless serves as a bellwether of sensibility.[30] Much like Lisa A. Freeman, who rightly argues that *The London Merchant* disavows sexuality and empire, bringing them both under a rhetorical regime of benevolent trade in the finale's punitive resolution, Mazella senses the way in which the play's antagonist, Millwood, is invoked elliptically as the figure that refuses to extend pity, thereby necessitating communal exclusion. Millwood's name left unsaid, Montagu nevertheless draws on the "common prostitute"[31] as an example of moral coarseness, a figure for those misreading the play on account of a lack of compassion. By couching one's response to the tragedy in such playfully stark terms, pity functions as a litmus of potential just deserts. From the start, the play asked its audience to decide whether they were pitying Barnwells or pitiless Millwoods in sentiment. Hence, the threat of hanging "functions as both a dramatic device and a recognizable social institution, a social boundary mark designed to fix the relations between audience and dramatic characters, between Protestants and other Christians, and between human beings and God."[32]

But there's something rather more complex going on here. Cited approvingly by Montagu's servant—even, the editor reminds us, "so often quoted"—the anecdote becomes less of a platitude of eighteenth-century pity than a claim of solidarity, a claim, that is, of

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[30] I am thinking here of Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) as well as *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), which John Ford wrote in collaboration with William Rowley and Thomas Dekker. We might note, however, that Montagu's canon of preferences links domestic tragedy and Webster's revenge tragedy with Lillo's later, perhaps more influential iteration in *The London Merchant*. Taken together, these works resemble something like "true crime," a point I shall take up in chapter two.

[31] [Edward Cave], "Some Remarks on the Play of George Barnwell," *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1731), 340. This comment appears here along with a reprint of the play's August 21, 1731 review from the *Weekly Register*, vol. 71.

[32] David Mazella, "Justly to Fall Unpitied and Abhorr'd": Sensibility, Punishment, and Morality in Lillo's *The London Merchant,*" *ELH* 68.4 (2001): 795-830, 798. My reference to Lisa Freeman's argument refers to her *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), chap. 3.

Montagu's secret affection for the middling class. The anecdote's mediation matters here, and one senses that the memory has been burnished in the telling, that the "old servant" returned often to the story because it seemed to say something about the particular character of their relationship. Not only does domestic tragedy take its place (perhaps, secretly, pride of place) in this critical pantheon, but by this move, *The London Merchant* becomes an object of *shared* refined appreciation, between not only Lady and servant but also nobility and commoner. Pity denotes not condescension (as we normally take it) but rather an admission of another's worth. Unlike the mock-tragedies we have traced briefly above, "the art of the average," in Paul Fleming's paradoxical formulation, becomes a source of properly tragic representation to servant and aristocrat alike. Suffering then, becomes staged and appreciated as a fundamentally common language for pain. Fleming puts this nicely: "In bourgeois tragedy, both the class clause and the height of the fall are redefined through an aesthetics of identification: the standard of tragic responsibility is no longer an objective one based on social-political status, but a subjective one based on affective identification." Pity matters, in other words, and he goes on to add: "bourgeois tragedy doesn't invert the class clause…but suspends it, so that now *all* classes are seen as fit for tragic representation."[33] So if Montagu's words serve to exclude on the basis of sympathetic allegiances, as many would contend, they also serve, at this same historical moment, as a barometer of broadening cultural values—perhaps indeed, paradoxically, a certain liberalization of the public sphere.

Montagu's affection Lillo's work, seconded in its fond retelling and later publication as biographical factoid, complicates the Johnsonian line on Aristotelian "superiority." In

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[33] Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity:The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 46.

fact, the popularity of *The London Merchant* and other bourgeois and domestic tragedies during the eighteenth century, suggests that while poetic convention sided with the heroic tragic, audiences clamored for their Barnwells and Millwoods. So even though Johnson's theory glosses Aristotelian "superiority" as a conflagration of class and virtue, other critics during the period complicated this by arguing that the gravity of lower class desperation was sufficient to grant an intensity legible as "superior." The writer for *The Weekly Register,* to take one contemporary example, anticipates the traditionalist's rejoinder when he says: "The objection, that the characters are too low for the stage, the Register answers,——That 'tis lowness of action, not of character, that is not allowed there. The circumstances here are of the utmost importance, and rise as high in action, as any to be met with in the stories of more pomp and ostentation."[34] Seriousness of representation, in other words, provides more than sufficient "superiority." More importantly, however, Lillo's text and the public conversation that surrounded it tended to flatten the hierarchy asserted by Johnson and other traditionalists, displacing its sense of tragic intensity onto the ordinary conditions of everyday afflictions.[35]

A generation later, the noted grammarian and politician, James Harris, seconded this when he took Lillo's 1736 domestic tragedy, *Fatal Curiosity* (along with *Oedipus* and *Othello*), as prime illustrative examples for his *Philological Inquiries* (published posthumously in 1781).[36] Stressing that Lillo's later bourgeois tragedy offered a model of the "perfect fable," Harris argued that what was essential was that terror and pity were vitally

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[34] "Some Remarks on the Play of George Barnwell," 340.

[35] Similar arguments were anticipated by Richard Steele, in *The Tatler*, albeit in staunchly utilitarian terms. See *The Tatler* 167 in volume two of *The Tatler,* ed. Donald Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[36] James Harris, *Philological Inquiries* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1970).

activated in the represented action, that audiences were struck with profound emotion at the dreadful urgency of a play's catastrophe. This meant that "distress" was never far from "coming home," that suffering was literally a domestic affair and in this sense, tragic misfortune was dramatically universal, if not sometimes commonplace.[37] As if to signal this newfound consciousness of life's fragility, Harris summarizes the essence of tragedy in Virgil's epigram: "*Sunt lacrymae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt,*" [Here, too, are tears for misfortune and human sorrows pierce the heart].[38] Harris leaves the line untranslated in the *Philological Inquiries*, but its sense is that of a decidedly different, much more universal sentiment than that of Dryden and his contemporaries, who stressed Aeneas' "defined and individual emotion" in Virgil's phrasing.[39] Dryden's influential translation illustrates this difference well, spilling over several lines of expository verse:

> He stopped, and weeping said,—"O friend! even here
>
> The monuments of Trojan woes appear!
>
> Our known disasters fill even foreign lands:
>
> See there, where old unhappy Priam stands!
>
> Even the mute walls relate the warrior's fame,
>
> And Trojan griefs the Tyrians' pity claim. (1.644-649) [40]

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[37] See Harris, *Philological Inquiries,* 171. Harris stresses domestic tragedy's ability to evoke the threat of suffering "coming home" in a suggestive section of the text, which I treat in full with respect to Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity* in the following chapter.

[38] The reference is from *The Aeneid,* I.462; I have quoted H. R. Fairclough's Loeb Library translation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[39] See Arvid Løsnes, *"Arms, and the Man I Sing…": A Preface to Dryden's Aeneid* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 245. I am indebted, in my understanding and summary of neo-classical translation to Løsnes' comparative work.

[40] John Dryden, trans., *Virgil's Aeneid* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1997), 19.

Restrained in neo-classical pathos, and limited by its context in the epic, the English'd lines underscore Priam's ill-fated empire and were, for generations before Harris, the commonly accepted sense of the text.[41] Applied in the philologist's treatise to the misfortune of Old Wilmot and his wife, Agnes, in *Fatal Curiosity*, whose tragedy is precipitated not by imperial ambitions but by crippling debts and bare subsistence, the epigram takes on, instead, a universal cast. For Dryden, the "world of tears"—*lacrymae rerum*—refers to kingdoms lost, to mythical warriors mourned by a confederate Carthage; for Harris, its the weight of living hand-to-mouth. His repurposing of the Virgilian line so that it engages intertextually with Lillo's tragic corpus implicitly activates its later sense as an expression of general human misery and hardship, a sense cultivated later by Edward Young and the Romantic poets, as well as classicists to this day.[42] In doing so, Harris moves the affective scope of tragedy from an imperial register—which is to say, from the Aristotelian heroic—to that of the ordinary lives of common people.

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Lillo's bourgeois tragedy, in short, marks the beginning of a sea change. But what precisely did spectators of *The London Merchant* see in the text that demanded such a realignment in affective allegiances, even if only for the duration of its representation? What onstage brought about this change? In what follows, I turn to consider the play itself, tracing the unsteady emergence of a set of discourses and practices characteristic of modern suffering. Furthermore, in stressing the unsteadiness of this emergence, I again follow Freeman, who cautions against the anachronistic assumption that something like an intact

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[41] Løsnes, *A Preface to Dryden's Aeneid,* 245.

[42] Hence, Robert Fagles offers this elegantly modern gloss: "The world is a world of tears, and the burdens of mortality touch the heart." (New York: Viking Press, 2006).

sense of "bourgeois ideology" had arrived and was merely expressed in the plays of Lillo and his collaborators. That the play retrojects its setting onto Elizabethan England is only the most obvious proof of this, and often serves to comment ironically on Lillo's contemporary moment. Rather, as I'll seek to argue here, tragedy was a site of debate over what precisely was meant by burgeoning nationalist, commercial, and middling class discourses, as also the staging ground of sentimentality. Who suffers meaningfully, and why that matters to a larger British context, are the anxieties that most animate this play.

Of course, readers of the play are not wrong in noting the ideological work undertaken in the play. Indeed, Barnwell's master, Thorowgood, his fellow apprentice Trueman, and the text's implied mercantilists are living out a comedy of national influence. The play opens with the announcement of mercantilist influence, retrospectively imagining Elizabethan England's triumph over the Spanish Armada as a parable of bourgeois virtue, the triumph of common men doing uncommonly heroic deeds. Absent the play, except perhaps figuratively in the architecture of the gallows (to which we shall return), the Queen depends on these enterprising merchants, and solicits their influence in world affairs of near-epic importance. Lillo's work, in point of fact, looks back on this period with a nostalgic fondness appropriate to that genre; the Armada becomes for him a story of Englishness' inception—as essentially Protestant, free, and commercial. Hence, social relations in the play are refashioned as contractual partnerships of mutual interest; as the master benefits from the apprentice's labor, so too the queen over her subjects, while by turns subjects and apprentices both stand to gain. Several commentators on the play have noted that *The London Merchant* argues that such relations are natural, essential features of

a commercial, Protestant kingdom in which notions of political and economic consent are more or less enshrined as features of political moderation.[43]

Thorowgood assures us that the "method of merchandise…is founded in reason and the nature of things" and operates "by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole" (3.4-5; 8-9). And Trueman underscores this vision of benevolent liberality when he recasts English mercantilism as a good-will mission in which agents endeavor to "tame the fierce and polish the most savage; to teach them the advantages of honest traffic by taking from them, with their own consent, their useless superfluities, and giving them in return, what from their ignorance in manual arts, their situation, or some other accident, they stand in need of" (3.1.14-19). "Honest traffic" signifies, at once, the virtuous negotiation of public and private spheres. If any one is susceptible to a tragic fall, therefore, it ought to be Thorowgood, whose agency as head of household and mercantile kingmaker confers on him the "superiority" requisite for tragic pathos.

Instead, the play argues, the audience ought to pity the two figures who, either unwittingly or vindictively, circumvent "honest traffic": namely, Barnwell and Millwood. In the former's case, the language of natural, bourgeois virtue repeatedly runs up against a putatively unnatural compulsion to violate it. The public benefits of middling virtue are repeatedly thwarted by the sensual underworld that would stand in for the privacy of the domestic. In contradistinction to the willful consent claimed by Trueman, Barnwell, in the words of his master, "faintly contends or willingly becomes the slave of sense" (2.4.21-2). The ambiguity of Barnwell's moral agency is thus summed up in this vacillation, between the striving of virtuous labor and the insatiability of one's private fantasies. If bourgeois

[43] See, for instance, Freeman, "Character's Theater," 116-19; and Wallace, "Bourgeois Tragedy or Sentimental Melodrama?," 131-5.

virtue means “solid happiness” and prosperity, as it does for Barnwell, it is forcefully contrasted against that which often proves disastrous to domesticity: sexual desire. Barnwell characterizes his ambivalent surrender to Millwood as a move towards isolation, a wandering between two worlds uneasily shoehorned into the language of a capital venture:

> Reluctant thus, the merchant quits his ease
> And trusts to rocks and sands and stormy seas;
> In hopes some unknown golden coast to find,
> Commits himself, though doubtful, to the wind;
> Longs much for joys to come, yet mourns those left behind. (1.8.25-9)

The promise of middling-class stability—a promise everywhere asserted as natural and providential—is threatened by enthralling pleasures imagined, by the encroaching of some unnatural anarchic eroticism. As the apprentice characterizes this immediately before killing his own uncle:

> ’Tis more than love; ’tis the fever of the soul and madness of desire. In vain does nature, reason, conscience, all oppose it. The impetuous passion bears down all before it and drives me on to lust, to theft, to murder. Oh conscience, feeble guide to virtue, who only shows us when we go astray but wants the power to stop us in our course! (3.5.24-9)

Conscience is weak and here only serves to throw guilt into relief. As if to dress Attic drama in British cloth, desire becomes a fated compulsion, seeming to propel the tragedy’s plot inevitably forward. Between longing and mourning, Barnwell’s agency becomes a drama of personal conscience, an exploration of commonplace motivation and its consequences for regular people.

In this way, the personal is suffused with the intensity of tragic rhetoric. And this is key, for the play repeatedly turns over what it means to suffer if middling-sort prosperity seems so readily at hand, if virtue is tied to reason without complication. Trueman renders the optimism of this view in a manner that seems to preclude the very possibility of the tragic, the play anxiously rehearsing the essential benevolence of the providential: "…as Heaven can repair whatever evils time can bring upon us, he who trusts Heaven ought never to despair." The good apprentice doesn't miss a beat, adding: "—But business requires our attendance—business the youth's best preservative from ill, as idleness his worst of snares" (2.4.91-2). That conjunction—*but business*—is the nervous coda to their platitudes, the cure to proverbial idle hands. Barnwell, however, makes clear its unacknowledged tragic stakes when he considers whether to break off his relationship with Millwood, wary of breaking her heart and perhaps abandoning her to want or prostitution: "But what of Millwood? Must I expose her too? Ungenerous and base! Heaven requires it not. But Heaven requires that I forsake her!…Should I once more tempt Heaven, I may be left to fall never to rise again" (2.3.2-9). Immobilized by such Faustian angst (a figure haunting the demonic bargains that frame the play), his soliloquies are not at all unlike the Protestant self-examination Lillo would have known as an acknowledged Dissenter.[44] Barnwell's careful tracing of motivation and compulsion has the effect of transforming duty into a sort of virtuous suffering—or rather, it performs it as sentimental martyrdom. Left alone,

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[44] Lillo was, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* a Calvinist dissenter for most of his life, although he may have joined the Church of England sometime shortly before his death. (James L. Steffensen, "Lillo, George (1691/1693–1739)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/16657. In his introduction to the play, McBurney seconds this view throughout. David Mazella argues that this background is crucial to understanding the play, and that it takes part in a series of disputes between these two traditions with respect to law, guilt, and punishment earthly and divine which will have consequences to the way in which Enlightenment conceives sensibility. See especially Mazella, "Sensibility, Punishment, and Morality," 816ff.

Barnwell concludes: “If to resolve to suffer be to conquer, I have conquered. Painful victory!” (2.10.1-2)

More interesting, perhaps, are those instances in the play where genuinely benevolent motivation on the part of the apprentice results in his further entrapment in Millwood’s confidence game. Indeed, the play seems more concerned with these moments *precisely because* martyrdom fails as an adequate conceptual schema and suffering cannot be understood as virtuous. One way to read the last two-thirds of the play, given this fact, is as a complex meditation on precisely this problem, an imaginative attempt to bring suffering under some higher symbolic order. One senses that this is what audiences seized upon in the play, for Barnwell becomes pitiable as he in turn pities—wrongly, it turns out—Millwood. (Which is to say, the impetus to pity in audience and character alike signals that tragedy is now possible, signals that they are affectively co-implicated.) Upon Barnwell’s resolution to suffer in domestic duty, to return to a life of apprenticeship by forsaking Millwood, she proceeds by exploiting the very same pity that the apprentice seeks to emulate, casually intimating that her situation is far more dire than she’s let on. Barnwell, who just previous to this announces that Thorowgood’s “gratitude compels” his virtue, and that such “unlooked-for generosity has saved [him] from destruction” (2.5.4-6) is caught, unable to extend the philanthropic benevolence he has been a beneficiary of without compromising those same values. It’s his sensitivity to her precariousness that leads him to embezzle funds, as he muses to Millwood’s accomplice, Lucy:

BARNWELL

> To be exposed to all the rigors of the various seasons, the summer’s parching heat and winter’s cold, unhoused to wander friendless through the

unhospitable world in misery and want, attended with fear and danger, and pursued by malice and revenge. Would thou endure this all for me, and can I do nothing, nothing to prevent it?

LUCY

'Tis really a pity there can be no way found out. (2.11.68-74)

Lucy's linguistic play—in which "pity" suggests a loophole through which the law might be circumvented—is one of the play's few comic moments, but the set-up here is equally instructive for parsing the play's tragic work. For just as erotic desire becomes a compulsion that leads the apprentice to disaster, so does, on the other hand, the inclination to do good. Pity, here commingled with his misplaced affection for Millwood, moves Barnwell to action and presents him as a sympathetic figure. However, and in opposition to the neat providentialism so often claimed as the play's central argument, it proves costly to do so, and in actuality, far more costly than his brief sexual encounter earlier in the play.

Helen Burke, who has explored the play against the backdrop of England's Poor Laws, suggests that the drama's initial influence among British men of property, as well as its popularity in general, can be explained by its bleak depiction of the consequences attending law's transgression—even in those cases in which economic precariousness seemed a just reason for law's suspension. The play, in other words, depicted the harsh consequences for Barnwell's straying from "honest traffic" and thus pressed mercantile claims to stronger, more defined property rights while also legitimizing the heavy-handedness of Tyburn executions.[45] Yet, if this is so, on this point Barnwell is just as sympathetically portrayed as he is censured in the text, even if we consider that the play

[45] Helen Burke, "*The London Merchant* and Eighteenth-Century British Law," *Philological Quarterly* 73 (1995): 347-66.

eventually makes recourse to the gallows for its depiction of legal order. While Lillo's text certainly never exculpates Barnwell or his conning paramour, its rhetorical strength arises out of the conflicting demands for philanthropic benevolence and lawfulness, and hence, the spectator's compassionate consideration of Barnwell's miscalculated action. With respect to the embezzling of Thorowgood's assets, the apprentice defends himself by making explicit appeal to the messiness of an ethics of moral sentiment. "What am I about to do?," he asks in an aside, skeptically weighing his options: "Now you who boast in your reason all-sufficient, suppose yourselves in my condition and determine for me whether it's right to let her suffer for my faults or, by this small addition to my guilt, prevent the ill effects of what is past" (2.13.1-5). Caught up in the moral calculations at the heart of the text, the audience—here, ambiguously de-classed—is assumed to be a pitying, sentimental moral agent, one for whom Millwood's destitution might, did they not know it to be a ruse, compel charitable action.

Irony and sympathy depend, in such moments, on the audience's awareness that Barnwell's position is compromised and near intractable in the normative sympathetic terms elsewhere lauded in the text. So even though I concur with Burke's contention that Lillo's original finale—in which both Barnwell and Millwood are hanged—is crucial to the interpretation of the text despite its omission in eighteenth-century presentations, I do not take it to mean a hard-line stance on criminality. Indeed, that it was missing originally suggests to me a weakness in her overall argument that the play was taken up by city merchants as a method of policing. More suggestively, however, Lillo is surprisingly ambivalent as to the justness of both character's situations, and we can take this rhetorical vacillation to imply, if anything, a skepticism regarding the draconian harshness of the law.

What's more essential to remember is that this tension in the text itself represents a certain sympathy towards its two central, working class figures. In other words, the very fact that such a tension brings about the play's most moving ruminations on law, fate, the causes of suffering, and the attendant specter of cultural guilt is the very evidence of its aspiring towards a properly tragic affect, a mode of representation that assumes the dignity of other, different people.

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Imagine, for a moment, how fundamentally audacious the following monologue, spoken by an apprentice embroiled in a disastrous affair, must have sounded:

> What have I done! Were my resolutions founded on reason and sincerely made? Why, then, has Heaven suffered me to fall? I sought not the occasion and, if my heart deceived me not, compassion and generosity were my motives. Is virtue inconsistent with itself? Or are vice and virtue only empty names? Or do they depend on accidents beyond our power to produce or prevent, wherein we have no part and yet must be determined by the event?—But why should I attempt to reason? All is confusion, horror, and remorse. I find I am lost, cast down from all my late-erected hopes, and plunged again in guilt, yet scarce know how or why. (2.14.1-11)

Not simply for its elevated diction, the passage is striking because Barnwell understands his situation in the language of the heroic: as a contest between the will of the gods (or perhaps given Lillo's Protestant *bona fides*, the Christian God), and the will of a man trying to understand and do what is good. As he later characterizes this problem, in which evil is rendered somehow necessary by the complex parsing of sufficient reasons and seemingly

accidental circumstances: "The world is punished and nature feels a shock when Providence permits a good man's fall." (3.5.9-11) How is it that the providential can ordain human misfortune, can ordain the dissolution of putatively stable moral categories? Why, in other words, does bourgeois virtue—embodied in Barnwell's misplaced sentimental benevolence despite his otherwise naive susceptibility—sometimes entail profound suffering? Lillo's text continually returns to this theme, tentatively stretching the links that tie together moral intention and legal and theological consequence, refiguring them as, by turns, ordered and chaotic. The certainty of Thorowgood and Trueman's virtuous mercantile life, its essential rightness and moral benevolence, is repeatedly troubled by the "dreadful spectacle" of the apprentice's body hanging from the gallows, feared "justly to fall unpitied and abhorred" by the double spectatorship of audience and gawking crowd. (4.12.12-14) The fear of bodily display was a common trope of the period's theatre and the gallows alike, and this vulnerability was occasionally used to the advantage of a performance.[46] Here, Lillo's apprentice imagines himself as an object of communal derision, a body shamed and thereby stripped of life and agency by the left hand of God.

We shall explore bourgeois conceptions of providence in later chapters, but suffice it to say that here the providential is used to genuine tragic effect; if this is election, therefore, it is a deeply disturbing one in which he is fated to suffer and providence assumes the place of inscrutable necessity. While this is not, shall we say "secular suffering" yet, it is noticeably bourgeois in that it asks "why" where previously such a question might have been precluded or even, as I have tried to argue, mocked as ill-befitting a lower station. The apprentice instances this in his claim, whether quixotic or realistic, that he has been "cast down from

[46] Julia Fawcett, 'The Over-Expressive Celebrity and the Deformed King: Recasting the Spectacle as Subject in Colley Cibber's *Richard III*," *PMLA* 126, no. 4 (October 2011): 950-965, 954.

all [his] late-erected hopes." What exactly those hopes were, I think, is beside the point; it is the the cultural assumption that something better is possible, that something better is to be hoped for by the commercial and working ranks that marks something of a historical turn in early class consciousness.[47] So what is remarkable—even perhaps, unprecedented in the drama—is the very consciousness of the playwright, his characters, and a mourning audience that a profound injustice has occurred, a suffering needing to be answered either in the discursive soliloquizing of a working man or indeed, in the body of an actor staging its problematic, affective presence. Here again, the emergence of pitiable subjects—those performing it onstage and the spectator who sympathizes—is legible, stitching together what will become a cult of sensibility. It is, in this sense therefore, a radical moment of contingent, changing cultural affinities.

Indeed, in many respects the play stages the limits of the discursive when presented with bourgeois suffering. This is partly a function of its depiction of election to grief, the providentialism that haunts its easy collapse of virtue into success and is, in turn, repeatedly rendered impenetrably obscure. If we trace, for instance, the discursive chain of rationalizations that accompany Barnwell's fall, we repeatedly run aground, falling back, presumably, on the simple insistence that what happened has happened. As Maria puzzles

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[47] Thus, in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* Roy Porter quotes John Trusler's apprehensive assessment at the end of the century: "the great degree of luxury to which this country has arrived within a few years…[is] not only astonishing, but almost dreadful to think of. Time was, when those articles of indulgence, which now every mechanic aims at possession of, were enjoyed only by the Baron or Lord of a district." ([New York: Penguin Books, 1982], 222) While Porter's social history tracks the increased standard of living underway during the period, he also qualifies this by suggesting at several points that such a fundamental shift might have been overestimated in many of these (mostly traditionalist) commentators. Indeed, for vast amounts of Britons during the period, such upward mobility would have been near-impossible and conditions remained dire. In his economic history, Gregory Clark seconds this, arguing that the statistics we have on economic growth during the period suggest a much more gradual upward curve, that only finally explodes during the last quarter or so of the century. See his *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). Still, my own point here, and my argument in general merely relies on the cultural perception of widespread prosperity (or even less—the mere perception of its *possibility*) for an increased segment of the populace.

out: “I know I am unhappy, yet cannot charge myself with any crime…that should provoke just Heaven to mark me out for sufferings so uncommon and severe…Then it is just and right that innocence should suffer, for Heaven must be just in all its ways” (4.1.2-8). And so, the circle closes.

Lillo anxiously plays this out repeatedly in the text, culminating in perhaps one of the finest depictions of cynical cultural criticism in the character of Millwood. She reads her situation not as the negative election of the providential, but as systemic oppression by its apologists, the “shadow” of “conscience” made manifest as collective guilt (4.10.21). She repudiates Thorowgood’s attempt to mystify evil in ascribing her influence to the demonic—as if she was some Miltonic Satan—by locating the demonic, on the contrary, in “all mankind.” When Thorowgood attempts this maneuver (“I charge you as the cause, the sole cause of all his guilt and suffering,” he insists) the dialogue is subtle, and opens the possibility for us to read Millwood as at least not totally culpable for the situation in which Barnwell and she find themselves. She implies, in a rejoining half-truth, that the merchant’s asserted providence seems at least as culpable: “’Tis very strange…I never spoke to him till since that fatal accident, which I lament as much as you” (4.6.50-4).

Besides this implicit identification of accident and the providential (itself a loaded topic in the period, seized on here as a way to dissemble[48]), her response calls into question the ways in which agency is understood or exploited as broader social or religious forces. It gives the lie, in other words, to the system of master-apprentice indenture the merchant is a part of, the indenture that provides him with cheap labor everywhere asserted as benevolently consensual. If she’s devilish then, she’s no more so than the mercantile

[48] See Christian Thorne, “Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident If You Please,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 64.3 (September 2003): 323-47.

economy he claims is the savior of English freedoms, or even, as Freeman has so well shown, no more than those men who make women their "universal prey."[49] Hence, the devil is "emblem", an "imaginary being" that distills social evils so that their practice can be represented, projected out there, and thereby dismissed as Other. Like the providential in the text, Millwood maintains, evil is the collective will of disparate, violent men retrospectively assuming their actions to have been necessary (often, for some greater good). It has no clear rationale, no simple discursive rehearsal, because it is, in fact, fragmented and ad hoc. Still, this is not to say that Lillo's text sanctions this view—Millwood ultimately suffers not as a martyr but as a lost soul, cursing in despair. In recounting it here, I merely wish to suggest that the play is much more ambivalent on the providential than previously noticed; its obscurity here is therefore as much a source of angst as it is a fount of reasonable consolation in the face of human pain. "I now am—what I've made myself," cries Barnwell, uneasily absolving the divine in one of the play's strangest moments of theological doubt. (5.8.2)

More significantly perhaps, the pitiful body itself, enacted and imagined in turmoil, escapes the play's discursive frame, a remainder that solicits a politics of pity. "Tears, tears, for blood!," stammers the apprentice, noting that his murdered uncle, in viewing his nephew sees only the patricide's inexorable misfortune: "By Heaven, he weeps in pity of my woes" (3.7.18-20). In this way, the evocative phrase, "Tears, tears for blood" sentimentally expresses the limits of verbal representation here and initiates an exchange between poet and audience. In tragedy, the playwright stages bloodied hands, a hanging body, a figure

[49] Freeman's argument is exceptionally strong in its analysis of the way in which gender operates in the play, resisting its neat inscription into the providential, mercantile ideology and thereby troubling its generic form. See esp. pp. 119-22 of *Character's Theater*.

condemned to suffer unjustly, and asks, in turn, for the spectator's sympathetic approbation, for the audience's performance of collective mourning. "Tears, tears for blood" is the inarticulate call and response of the bourgeois tragic poet, the stammering invocation of pity by Lillo and Barnwell alike. Indeed, the play suggests that by such spectatorship, the tragic figure's suffering is somehow redeemed in the viewing. Barnwell's "violent and shameful death" is transformed by its ability to call into being a theatrics of affect. Indeed, shame—an affect predicated on collective judgment and cultural isolation—is silently disavowed in the text as its reader-audience learns to identify sympathetically with its pitiable subjects. Barnwell's "dreadful spectacle" becomes, as Thorowgood implores, an occasion in which both audience and company reflect seriously: "With pity and compassion let us judge him" (5.1.46-7). Or perhaps even ineffable: "Who can describe unalterable woe?" laments Millwood's accomplice, Blunt (5.11.4). No longer are they asked to ridicule tailors because they are tailors; their suffering—their blood for tears—is a corporeal reminder of a broader tragic dimension, palpably felt but perhaps left mostly unarticulated.

What then of Millwood, whose body—by her own admission—is deemed the alienated property of men? To this effect, recall her loaded assertion that "[women] are but slaves to men" (1.3.18). Perhaps surprisingly, I would maintain, her suffering body is also a powerful pitiful object in the text, even though it has not often been read in this way. As Mazella and others have claimed, and my own reading of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu above seems to confirm (think of her implicit distinction between those who pity and those who, like Millwood, refuse Barnwell tears), *The London Merchant*'s critical history has long been bound up in an implied question as to who deserves sympathetic allegiance. Yet while Lillo's text clearly means us to take Barnwell as the more sympathetic of the two—he is

saved, finally, from the despair that engulfs his confidence woman—the careful texture of Millwood's character and her deft troubling of bourgeois motivation and providential agency suggests that we are meant to sympathize with her too. Indeed, the play frames Barnwell's deliverance partly as a shift from pitiable object to pitying subject, a coming of age in sensibility: "O gracious Heaven, extend Thy pity to her!"[50] Considering this line was left out of the representation originally, it is perhaps a bit more understandable that Millwood became a term wholly synonymous with a treacherous woman in the eighteenth century. Compassion was never finally modeled in the play as so extensive as to apply to the ill-intentioned prostitute, leaving the none-too-subtle fable of justice's weighty hand relatively unproblematic.

But there is other evidence. Cibber's perceptive theatrical prologue makes clear that we are to consider her in a state of "sad despair," a state of British melancholia that Roy Porter reminds us was widely seen as a particularly stubborn problem for the island.[51] Thus coached by the actor-manager, she is sympathetic, perhaps even finally sadly suicidal in her resignation to the gallows. In fact, the play subtly parses the contingency of her condition, problematizing the too easy dismissal of social circumstance in behavior. "What are your laws," she asks, "[but] the instrument and screen of all your villainies by which you punish in others what you act yourselves or would have acted, had you been in their circumstances?" (4.18.60-4). Circumstance, if not exculpatory, is nevertheless a valid, if only partial, cause of social evils; as Thorowgood reluctantly notes, her arguments contain a

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[50] McBurney notes that Lillo's inclusion of "Scene the Last," which was held from representation onstage, was at least in part a tactic to combat later pirated editions of the text. McBurney's edition restores the scene, albeit as "Appendix B." For the reference above, see l.48.

[51] See, for instance, chap. four, "Fools and Folly" of Porter's *Madness: A Brief History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and his edition of George Cheyne's 1733, *The English Malady* (London: Routledge, 1990).

kernel of "truth" to them, and she nearly ensnares even him by the "powerful magic of her wit and form" (4.16.80-1). Millwood's desperation—never taken up in detail in the play—at least provides a certain depth to her motivation, traceable to the broader, social forces at play in early Georgian England.

We are not meant to agree with this line of argument presumably, but its force and vigor resonate throughout the text. So much so, in fact, that upon the play's revival in 1796, the part of Millwood was taken up—sharply against type—by the then *grande dam*e of tragic theatre, Sarah Siddons.[52] Millwood, the pitiable prostitute emboldened by her destitute circumstance, it seemed, had arrived. Now codified in the body of Siddons, that "icon of female suffering"[53], the prostitute too demanded a certain *gravitas*. Whereas such figures were previously fodder for a hundred mock-tragedies, Siddons' appropriation of the role meant that the very model of "heroick suffering"—Reynold's celebrated allegorical painting, we ought to recall, depicted the actress—linked despairing prostitute to *The Tragic Muse* in the vestiges of material culture (figure 1.2). Let us take this then, as evidence itself of the cultural shift in affective possibilities, as evidence, that is, of the cogency of Lillo's political project. I take it to be an indicator of a broadening understanding about who might suffer meaningfully and what shape mourning takes in response to this. And while this should not be taken to imply that such politics were wholly or even mainly in place by the end of the century, I do take this moment to be a marker of shifting cultural (if not, political) assumptions and aesthetic possibilities. The mystified causes of such suffering are repeatedly taken up and analyzed in the language of bourgeois tragedy, I argue. The

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[52] McBurney, "Introduction," xiii.

[53] Michael Booth, John Stokes, and Susan Bassnet, *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34.



Figure 1.2. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, 1784, oil on canvas (© Courtesy of the Huntington Art Collections)

rhetorics of suffering, even for Lillo, are very much in flux.

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So far, I have discussed the way in which Lillo's bourgeois tragedy works by broadening the affective range of the tragic, the way it encompasses new pitiable subjects in a performance of the suffering body, a performance that, while invested in portraying the coherence of commerce and the providential to middling class life, nevertheless tends also to necessitate a rehearsal of its rupture. Bourgeois tragedy, in other words, trades on the discrepancy between the seemingly natural fatedness of commerce and virtue on the one hand, and the uncertainty of putatively providential outcomes and hence, unaccountable pain on the other. In this sense, bourgeois tragedies mediate semantic rifts, turning over matters of religious and social concern as an expression of inchoate class anxieties. Aesthetically, and with respect to Georgian theatrics in particular, this means that Lillo and his contemporaries imagined a new spectacle of suffering whereby common misfortunes were increasingly treated with seriousness and urgency. Furthermore, I have chosen to call this, following political scientists, behavioral economists, and media theorists, the politics of pity, a sort of theory of moral sentiments—*avant la lettre*, of course, as inelegant as such formulations often are—in which such spectatorial practices elicit a sense of affective immediacy and philanthropic practices.

And here it's worth pausing, finally, since I think what we are seizing on gets to the heart of eighteenth-century bourgeois tragedy in its nascency. The clearer the line is drawn from poverty and social misfortune to tragedy, the more it is remarkable, for as I've traced in some detail above, these circumstances were once, though perhaps sad, certainly not widely understood to be aesthetically tragic. Indeed, we might say that suffering "meant

less" in this sense—it was, on the contrary, simply the way things were. Suffering of this type has to be imagined *as* tragic. There was, consequently, no sense of tragic injustice, no aesthetic rhetoric that would thereby encompass this sort of suffering as somehow needing to be dwelt upon as an object of collective social mourning. The clearer that social circumstance links tragic representation, conversely, the farther we are from the traditional discourses that underlie "heroic" or "classical" tragedies, the more radical are the shifts to those cultural assumptions that nevertheless marked this, for Lillo and his contemporaries, as a tragedy.

HOUSEHOLD GODS:

GEORGE LILLO AND THE DOMESTIC TRAGIC IMAGINATION

> To gape into any Dining-Room, or Parlour, where Company is assembled, as one passes along, is a most impertinent Curiosity.
>
> -*The Man of Manners: or, Plebeian Polish'd* (Anon. 1737)

Bath, 1808. A traveling theatre company is performing George Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity* (1736) to a packed house. As theatre historian, John Genest, records it, the play advances without incident for most of the night, depicting the return of Young Wilmot, prized son of the once-proud Wilmots, after years away on a merchant vessel.[1] The Wilmots had been poor—desperately so—and hard labor at sea was perhaps a final effort to shore up their finances. Rich with Indian treasure, Young Wilmot returns to marry his dear Charlot and restore the family name. But he has also changed. He is unrecognizable, and his mother, Agnes and father, Old Wilmot, have long since given up hope of his return, long since assumed he was dead. Then an idea occurs to Young Wilmot: he will stay at his old home, as if a stranger passing through town, before revealing himself to those family and friends he has gathered there.

And at first, all goes according to plan. When this rich lodger shows up at their door, the Wilmots take him in. They offer him a bed in which to rest, and a corner of the room to stow his articles. He asks them to look after a casket of exotic treasures, and wake him in an hour, before drifting off to sleep. Here the plot turns grisly. Agnes, seized by a fancy, convinces Old Wilmot to stab their visitor and hide his body, and so to steal his personal

[1] John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830,* vol. 8 (Bath: H. E. Carrington, 1832), 388.

effects. After some hesitation, he does so, when the rest of their circle—giddy with the prospect of the family's dramatic reunion—enters the scene. Wailing and lamentations ensue; self-imprecations and regrets are tenderly expressed. In Bath, the play is almost over now. Epilogues will follow shortly, then it's off to Bristol.

Suddenly, a door flings open and—in a break with the text and theatrical conventions, Genest makes clear—Young Wilmot staggers out, wounds bleeding. His body crumples, and he groans, dying in plain view. This shock is too much for some. In a box near the stage, two ladies are nervously shaking, almost hysterical at the sight. Earlier in the play, they had been talking, but with time the drama had won them over, engaged them in its verse and the single-mindedness of its plotting. At the catastrophe, they oscillated between rapt attention and the furtive glances of those who cannot but look away from such a picture of suffering. Now they just want it to stop, and when they tug at the sleeve of a gentlemanly companion he immediately obliges. "*Halt the play!*" he shouts over the assembly, "*Drop the curtain at once!"* Even though the final lines of Lillo's tragedy remain unperformed, the company scrambles to end its production mid-act. The curtain soon falls, and as the crowd looks around, it is clear that many others are relieved. Interest, it seems, had turned into disgust.

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Writing a year earlier, Elizabeth Inchbald had warned the reader of her introductory remarks to *Fatal Curiosity* that they would need a strong stomach to make it through the play. Lillo's follow-up to *The London Merchant* had a reputation for being a provocative, bloody spectacle, an exercise in the "horribly sublime." At the staging of George Colman's 1782 revival of the play, Inchbald and others recalled the manner in which, at the moment

of tragic catastrophe, "a certain horror seized the audience, and was manifested by a kind of stifled scream."[2] By this time, it was already something of a truism that Lillo's later domestic tragedies were too intense for the repertory, that the crimes and misfortunes depicted on stage were quite literally insufferable. Much like *Fatal Curiosity,* posthumous productions of the dramatist's version of *Arden of Feversham* (performed in 1759, but written sometime between 1736 and Lillo's death in 1739), were said to have been stopped by an anxious crowd of theatergoers, unable to proceed to the play's terrible *denouement*.[3] And even if such anecdotes were apocryphal, their tendency to turn up in introductory volumes, anthologized along with the plays they framed, suggest that such dramas were known as much for their chilling effects as for their generic audacity.

If *The London Merchant* trafficked in the pitiable then, Lillo's late bourgeois dramas tended to exploit that other locus of tragic pathos: terror. More so, in fact, because they seemed to reenact the real, true crimes that were said to have actually occurred. Proverbial urban legends, they manifested those same fears they purported to exorcise in the performance, and so became, Lillo's subtitle proudly avows, "True Tragedy." Thus, Inchbald again: "After having shuddered at this tragedy, even as a fiction, it is dreadful to be told, that the most horrid event which here takes place, is merely the representation of a fact which occurred at a village on the western coast of England." In her view, its factuality only intensified the tragedy's affective power: "That the direful circumstance thus brought upon

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[2] Elizabeth Inchbald, "Biographical and Critical Remarks" to the play in *The British Theatre; or A Collection of Plays,* vol. 11 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 5.

[3] See editor William H. McBurney's introduction to George Lillo, *Fatal Curiosity* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), xvii. This edition, despite its relatively outdated publication, remains the definitive scholarly version of the play. Citations will be to this edition and appear parenthetically here. On Lillo's reputation for theatrical horror, cf. Thomas Campbell, *Specimens of the British Poets,* vol. 5 (London: John Murray, 1819), 59.

the stage might probably occur, is the great hold which it has upon the heart. Had probability been violated, that powerful force would have failed."[4] Affect congeals around the actual, around the probable, almost as if the truth of its referent purifies those anxieties unearthed in the drama's performance.

This chapter explores this process of intensification and disclosure. Whereas in chapter one, I argued that Georgian bourgeois tragedy was involved in a performative extension of suffering's affective dimensions—that tragic suffering was being imagined as both part and parcel to the life of non-heroic, "common" actors—here, I attempt to bring this closer to home (that metaphor!). These tragedies, I will argue, stress the troubling familiarity of domestic tragedy, the sense of danger and the proximity to suffering that inheres in a space simultaneously imagined as inviolable; the "ordinary," in Lillo's later works, is shown to be alien and threatening. This is especially the case, I will suggest, when the tragedy stages this suffering in a space felt to be familiar, realistic, conditions which further problematize their collective display and sometimes necessitated the fearful abdication of their performance. Hence, the mapping of home onto heart in the period's criticism treating bourgeois tragedy—in which the plays' viewers argued that they brought terror *too close* to home—theorizes a turn from the curious to the morbidly curious, from the intellective processes of rational judgment and empirical collection to those embodied and often unspoken feelings that resist catharsis. In short, Lillo's domestic tragedies are invitations to cross the threshold and dwell on the pain there observed.

Indeed, Inchbald's verdict on the play is suggestive for a number of reasons, not least of which is its perception that what we now call formal realism is well-served on the stage,

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[4] Inchbald, "Biographical and Critical Remarks," 5.

and the recognition that, for this reason, it is a strength particular to bourgeois tragedy. James Harris, whose *Philological Inquiries* (1776) was important to my argument in chapter one, underscores the realist argument by lodging it in those everyday realities of domestic life that most likely concerned the average theatergoer. He strikes a tone remarkably close to Inchbald's when he argues: "Tragedies founded on domestic events in life, are more useful to the generality of mankind, than the catastrophes of kings and heroes—because they strike home to the feelings of every individual who is naturally more or less interested in proportion as the subject is more or less within the probability of happening to himself." [5] Proximity to the the real—indexed in an appeal to probability in both arguments—amplifies the felt qualities of the catastrophe represented on stage. There is, hence, a direct correlation between catharsis and likelihood, between the palpability of tragic affect and the threat of repeatability in the life of the spectator. Audiences mourn bourgeois suffering, this view contends, because they fear such misfortune might befall them as well.

There is some truth to this argument, but we might counter this line of reasoning by asking whether or not such tragic occurrences are indeed more likely than the pitfalls that plague more elevated, more traditionally "tragic" stations. On the face of it, at least, there is nothing to say that Young Wilmot's accidental murder is more probable than, say, Othello's jealous strangling of Desdemona. For all its realism in representing the social conditions of the broader viewing public, aren't the misfortunes depicted in Lillo's work still relatively unlikely to occur? And furthermore, isn't much of the point of tragedy—and perhaps, *especially* bourgeois tragedy—that the confluence of unforeseen events provides a singular

[5] The quotation, which is mistakenly claimed to be excerpted from Harris' *Inquiries*, can be found in the advertisement to Robert Porrett's 1788 stage adaptation of *Clarissa* (London: W. Lowndes). Elsewhere, Harris claims that Wilmot's parents "exhibit a distress, which comes home" (171). See chap. 1, pp.55-7 above. Despite the slight misattribution, I ascribe the sentiment's sense to Harris throughout this chapter.

instance of the improbable? Isn't this cruel unpredictability and its resistance to explanation precisely what proves so unsettling about such a turn of events? To murder a rich lodger—as in *Fatal Curiosity*—is one thing unlikely; for that lodger to be one's long-lost son, laden with a fortune that will restore the family name, is the awful irony of the tragic. Indeed, its improbability is felt in some sense as a betrayal of the providential by Charlot, the long-suffering betrothed to Young Wilmot as well as the play's moral center. "Welcome Despair! I'll never hope again," she cries, fearing to blaspheme the God who would allow "woes…more than human fortitude can bear." (3.1.255; 262-3)

What seems much more certain about Inchbald's and Harris' mimetic theory, on the contrary, is that its imagined probability is a striking token of fear's hold upon the spectator. The probabilistic intuition is an effect, I would argue, of the traumas reproduced onstage. Inchbald and Harris, in other words, have the causal arrow reversed; the perception that tragic misfortune is somehow more probable in the domestic sphere is a *symptom* of tragedy's affective potency, and not the cause that underlies it. Like one's misplaced fear that a turbulent plane is on the cusp of disaster, it belies the intensity of the anxiety, rather than the likelihood of its occurrence. After all, isn't it precisely the wrenching violence of such a demise amid the ordinary mundaneness of "occurrences, as in real life" that haunts its reader-viewer with the threat of its replication? In these cases, a visceral affective network overrides one's otherwise reasonable judgment, relentlessly asserting a danger's (false) imminence; the critical puzzle lies therefore in detailing a dread that resists its demystification.

While I want to remain sensitive to the the probabilistic thinking of these critics, especially as it underwrites a logic of early realism, this chapter utilizes instead a theoretical

language that privileges affect, enacted traumas, and other rhetorics of material experience that make sense of the ways in which suffering was perceived and feared by spectators of Georgian domestic tragedy. My hunch, in fact, is that Inchbald and Harris were correct insofar as they employed categories of mimesis—which emphasized the ordinariness of the extraordinary—in order to characterize the cultural work undergone in the performance of domestic tragedies. Their arguments rightly suggest a link between these fears and the verisimilitude of the suffering depicted on stage—the somewhat archaic sense of probable as simply "believable"—as well as its situatedness in an otherwise unremarkable Wilmot home. Perhaps a precursor to the psychoanalytic uncanny (albeit in ways that depart interestingly from the classic Freudian formulation and evoke Terry Castle's genealogy of the Gothic[6]), their insistence on the drama's realism suggests the eeriness of staging the home itself, of simulating its interiority, and of violently dissolving those bonds that constituted its social form. So when Harris says that Lillo's tragedy strikes home, we ought to read it in its literal *and* metaphorical sense, as a statement of domestic tragedy's representational setting as well as its embodied affective locale.

Critics, of course, have long sought to emphasize the role of domestic space to emergent notions of public and private, and the thresholds that demarcate domesticity and privacy have been a topic of analysis to scholars of the eighteenth century for some thirty

[6] Terry Castle argues that the gothic can be read as an historical allegory for the emergence of the uncanny. According to her, what the uncanny names is a state of "enlightened bewilderment" that paradoxically discloses that which resists the period's general narrative of rationalization, or more precisely, what Freud understands as the phantasmatic return of what is repressed in modernization. My argument, which conforms in broad strokes with this insight, nevertheless functions to extend its insights backward; there is, I would argue, an interesting critical narrative to be told about the gothic's pre-history which may be traced, in part, through domestic tragedy. See her *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

years now.[7] But with the exception of pioneering research into the material culture of Jacobean domestic tragedy, there remains surprisingly little work taking stock of the significance of the domestic—its contested spatiality, its material forms, and its ideological valences—to the way in which tragedy was experienced by early modern Britons, and in particular, Georgians.[8] Ironically, the same problematic notions of interiority characterizing domesticity in bourgeois tragedy—an interiority which, I repeat, is replicated in the playhouse and the critical language that attends it—remain a persistent blindness of its criticism. Encoded in *Fatal Curiosity*, the emerging cult of domesticity colors the Wilmot family's social isolation, makes sense of the early imperial world with which it operates, and proscribes one's response to its experience.

To regard bourgeois tragedy was to engage in an act of voyeurism. It was to turn the interior of the home, its inhabitants, and their pain into a spectacle surreptitiously observed, into the object of sanctioned public curiosity and personal concern—even if only virtually and ambivalently. That this intrusion exists in tension with its invitation is a running problem in Lillo's play. Unlike those Restoration comedies that encouraged the audience's raucous involvement, coaxing their engagement in arguably private affairs, for instance,

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[7] I am thinking here of a range of important scholarship that has considered the rationalization of private and public, ranging from Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), to Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), to, much more recently, Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2002). On domesticity in particular, the relevant texts include Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[8] See Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994). A brief treatment of domestic tragedy's domesticity can be found in her "Domestic Tragedies: Private Life on the Public Stage," in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). The most recent treatment of early modern domestic tragedy, equally sensitive to the interior contours of its staging, is Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England: The Material Life of the Household* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006). None of these, however, treat the eighteenth century.

bourgeois tragedies presented a scene which perhaps ought to have been hidden, a scene whose suffering was an instance of abjection and fearful discomfort because its gaze was felt as transgressive. Lillo plays with this when he has Old Wilmot complain aloud at the play's opening: "Since our misfortunes, we have found no friend, / None who regarded our distress…" Much of the play, therefore, imagines what engagement with such personal forms of affliction might entail. To look upon suffering is an act troubling to both viewer and sufferer—especially when this gaze occurs, the playwright's stage directions make clear, in "*A room in Wilmot's house*." His ironic (to us) complaint registers the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of witnessing a lurid scene, offering a novel gloss on the curiosity of the play's title. It also serves as an invitation to peer into the Wilmot home, to regard the pain of others, to pity and analyze it and thereby dwell in the strangeness of its verisimilitude.

Yet ascribing to Lillo this sort of savvy movement across thresholds (physical and imagined) calls to mind a series of aesthetic and psychoanalytic categories out of place in the period. Sigmund Freud's well known discussion of the uncanny, for instance, locates a certain alienation in the experience of the homely because it signifies the return of the repressed, the return of a traumatic kernel held at one's core. As Julie Carlson clarifies, the *Unheimlich* (a phrase which, Freud famously notes, can be taken to mean both "homely" and "unhomely") serves to "[somatize]…the proximity of the frightening" and hence, has been anticipated as a vital category for theorizing bourgeois tragedy since at least G. E. Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy*.[9] The uncanny renders legible, that is, that which is too

[9] Julie A. Carlson, "Like Me: An Invitation to Domestic/Tragedy," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 98 (1999): 331-53, 341. I am indebted to Carlson's insights on domestic tragedy in this essay, and in particular, Aristotle's foundational role in the history of fear's theorization. For Lessing on fear in tragedy, see *Hamburg Dramaturgy,* trans. Victory Lange (New York: Dover, 1962), 177-8.

painful to express. Such a move here carries with it the risk of anachronism, the precise contours of its ambivalence more felt than expressed in the language available to the theatergoer of Lillo's time, while also perhaps only problematically applied to an era with vastly different notions of what psychological interiority meant—let alone what precisely constituted "privacy" or "the home." My discussion of Lillo's late tragedy will thus serve to elucidate the ways in which a critical discourse arose to consider one's affective proximity to that which was feared, and likewise how this discourse was used to understand tragedy, particularly in its domestic guise. The persistent overlap between the heart and home, elliptically at work first in Aristotle's *On Rhetoric,* reappearing in *The Spectator*'s famed section on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," and Inchbald's commentary, and codified explicitly in Harris and Elizabeth Montagu, is a reminder that the play's contemporary viewers were very much attuned to what they perceived to be primal anxieties activated by Lillo's "True Tragedy." The significance of this to my broader claims will be, I think, obvious as we approach the essays final section, for what emerges finally is a making strange of the providential, as betrayer and benefactor, as both homely and darkly foreign, at once the cause and salve of human pain. As we'll see, in some ways the cold-comfort of suffering at the hands of such a terrible principle—reasserted almost pathologically, and thereby called into being—remains, for Lillo, less terrifying than a bald admission of its senselessness.

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Sir William Sanderson's *Compleat* [sic] *History of the Lives and Reigns of Mary Queen of Scotland, And of Her Son and Successor, James the Sixth* (1656) records the murder of a Cornwall man who, after years at sea, fell victim to his own father and mother for the sake of the treasure he carried. Sanderson's account anthologized and revised a

popular pamphlet from earlier in the century, 1618's *Newes from Perin in Cornwall Of a Most Bloody and Unexampled Murther,* and would itself go on to be collated as part of a little-read national history of the period, *The Annals of King James and King Charles* (1681).[10] Indeed, as late as 1762, the diary of a traveller to Windsor Great Park, in Berkshire, recounts a rudimentary form of the drama's plot being used by the local "Country People" to explain the origin of the nearby "Virginia Waters," an artificial lake added by the Duke of Cumberland some twenty years earlier.[11] In their version, the son's return from the American colonies is turned tragic when—again for the sake of his newfound wealth—he is murdered by his unsuspecting family, who thereupon secretly casts the body into a nearby river. Upon their discovery of his identity, the mother and father drown themselves in the same river, which eventually collects into a reservoir that later becomes the Duke's lake and bears the name of the fateful colony that, in many ways, precipitated their fateful end. Thus the Berkshire legend participates in a certain modernization of the fable's plot; like the version recounted in the blackletter *Newes from Perin* pamphlet and Lillo's staged version, it lodges the popular account (whether a case of true crime reportage or simply a local yarn) in the real world of colonial expansion and English economic interests.

In particular, *Newes from Perin* is a suggestive artifact of domesticity's fitful rationalization into a series of discreet categories—home, nation, public, private—much of which continually runs up against the imperialisms of early modern Europe. The pamphlet's

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[10] McBurney compiles a brief list of the play's sources in his edition, and reprints this pamphlet in "Appendix B" of *Fatal Curiosity*, 56. While Lillo likely drew upon this account as a model for *Fatal Curiosity*, the play has an extensive pre-history as a folk tale; similar fables have been traced to a variety of other sources and regions, ranging from present-day France and Germany, to Poland and Bulgaria.

[11] C. F. Burgess, "*Fatal Curiosity* in Berkshire," *Notes and Queries* (March 1970): 92-93. The original source for this is an unpublished diary by John Barnell, 2nd Baronet Parnell and Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer, held at the Folger Library.

illustrations visually inch its reader closer as the tragedy proceeds, through concentric spheres of delimited space into the family bedroom, and thereby implicates them in the circulatory movement of the burgeoning economy. We see a British merchant ship in transit, somewhere between Cornwall and the "Indies" (West or East is left unclear, but the play's contextualizing reference to Sir Walter Raleigh suggests the former), the disguised return home presaging the crime, as well as the crime itself in the private space of a personal bedchamber (figure 2.1). Eventually, the narrative closes by terminating the lives of its various actors in a reversal worthy of neoclassical theatre, problematically linking the bounty of what Lillo will later call the "prolific ocean" with *terra firma*'s urge to filicide. Even though such filicide is, in this case, a result of mistaken identity, the implication is that whereas maritime commerce is a fecund mother, the kingdom-nation destroys those who return home, or perhaps cannot recognize the alien modes they come to inhabit. In this way, the pamphlets and the anthologies from which Lillo drew in *Fatal Curiosity*, as well as the allusive local knowledge that appropriated the Virginia Waters, served to smuggle in the complexities of adjusting to the demands of empire by rehearsing them as something like the high tragic.

Lillo's text accomplishes a similar series of coded moves, even though its ambivalence is more carefully cultivated than the Cornwall pamphlet. In contrast to the Crusoevian adventurousness of prior versions, for example, the drama transforms the imperial urge—elective in those older versions outlined above—into a vexed necessity brought on by the Wilmot family's destitute circumstances. Placing the blame squarely on her husband, "whose wasteful riots ruined [their] estate / And drove [their] son… / To seek his bread 'mongst strangers, and to perish / In some remote, inhospitable



Figure 2.1. Woodcut image from *Newes from Perin in Cornwall,* 1618

land" (3.1.121-2;125-6), Agnes argues that the poverty that drove their family's participation in the far-off trade is a result of Old Wilmot's imprudent lifestyle. Even though the connections between domestic luxury and the imperial project in the play may be tenuous to our discerning eyes, mediated as they are by layers of agency and counter-agency, the implication resonates here and frames this as one of the central concerns of the text. However the causes are traced, the household fuels colonial expansion, occasionally defines itself in its opposition, and always remains entangled in its rhetoric.

Notice, for example, the rationalization at work in Randal's (the Wilmot family servant, reluctantly dismissed from duty in the first act) freighted soliloquizing earlier in the play, and the way in which global traffic serves as a productive foil to the household by exploiting a rhetoric curiosity. Contemplating his prospects, he waxes aloud:

Poor! Poor! and friendless! Whither shall I wander?
And to what point direct my views and hopes?
A menial servant? No! What, shall I live
Here in this land of freedom, live distinguished
And marked the willing slave of some proud subject
And swell his useless train for broken fragments,
The cold remains of his superfluous board?
I would aspire to something more and better.
Turn thy eyes then to the prolific ocean
Whose spacious bosom opens to thy view.
There deathless honor and unenvied wealth
Have often crowned the brave adventurer's toils.
This is the native uncontested right,
The fair inheritance of ev'ry Briton
That dares put in his claim. (2.2.1-15)

Randal's force of imagination and the strength of the pentameter lines, oscillating between iambics and rough emphatic spondees, lends strength to the oft-cited claim that Lillo had become a sort of second Shakespeare and that this play was his masterpiece.[12] Cut off from the domestic sphere, the servant lacks meaningful social connections, if not something approximating "identity," and, in a stunning reversal, claims precisely this newfound anonymity as an opportunity for self-definition, one that will found itself in the negation of the household economy. Indeed, while this economy has the powerful effect of anchoring

[12] As McBurney notes, the "masterpiece" claim is Fielding's (although of course, as the play's producer, his was a vested interested). See McBurney's introduction to the play, xiii.

the self in one's function—a variety of historians have pointed out the central place of servants in the Georgian family [13]—it does so by codifying a series of paradoxes so that to comply with it is to become at once a "willing slave," a "menial servant" in a vast "land of freedom." The household economy is represented as unproductive, one in which value is wasted in its concentration amongst the few rather than its circulation. "Useless" members of the household jockey for influence and scraps, any excess already "cold remains" by the time it reaches them. So while English liberty is celebrated as a feature endemic to its political landscape, it remains stifled and unrealized by the practices of the *ancien régime* distilled in the figurative "proud subject."

Contrasted against the "sinking fortunes" of a home in disarray and an order undergoing slow eclipse, Randal's vision of imperial bounty is an enticing fantasy. At once erotic and maternal, the Atlantic imaginatively "opens" itself to its own productive exploration and thereby becomes a willing accomplice to emerging forms of labor and capital markets. In this, it operates powerfully as a gendered category, conferring "honor" and "wealth" upon the presumably male ravishers it entertains—thus, "The fair inheritance of ev'ry Briton / That dares put in *his* claim"—a sort of mistress to the staid virtue of a domestic economy which offers little to those not already of considerable means. But chasing after this "native uncontested right" means, ironically, leaving one's native home for that which is foreign. Hence, one must become a "stranger" (a word used in the text for those returning from time at sea *as well as* those who people far away places) in order to realize the birthright proper to citizenship. Such are the costs for those who would, in

[13] See Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, 7, and Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. chaps. 1-2.

Randal's poignant formulation of bourgeois striving, “aspire for something more and better.”

I dwell on this complex passage because it suggests the sort of theorization at work in *Fatal Curiosity* and its tragic precursors, the manner in which migration is simultaneously a path for modest upward mobility, complicated by factors proper to domestic politics and cultural temperament, and also fraught with the Odyssean complexities attending a return home. For Lillo, the wistful desire to cast off to sea is the romance of empire speaking, an adventurous age already eclipsed by the rise of bureaucratic companies—albeit one he may have personally ascribed to, so repeatedly does he return to the thematics of the “prolific ocean.” This vision, however, is only possible by omitting the “fatal tempests,” “devouring waves,” and “tedious years” that characterized his younger master’s experience while away, factors that presumably temper the more whimsical aspects of the playwright’s Indo-Atlantic imagination and underscore the contingent fragility of such national projects. In a telling bit of staging, Randal’s seafaring fantasies are interrupted by the return of Young Wilmot in foreign habit, thereby subsuming them into the tragic series of events set into motion by that very exchange on the street. Says Randal: “My choice is made. / A long farewell to Cornwall, and to England! / If I return—but stay what stranger’s this[?]” (2.2.15-17) The possibility of disaster to the “brave adventurer” is broached and immediately cut short—or rather elided in the interruptive em dash—only to reemerge violently in a spectacle of domestic catastrophe. What is suspended is precisely the status of Randal’s optimistic “wandering,” its ethical and causal relation to the suffering on display in the home. Wandering, in other words, is not an uncomplicated venture and its rhetorical deployment is a way for Lillo to explore the moral costs of those colonial and imperial

projects that operate as subtext in the play. Here particularly, it emerges as a form of moralized curiosity, one aligned ambivalently with the sort of Pandoran transgressions that will ultimately ruin the family.

The impulse to wander, then, to see that which lies on the other side of the world, marks the projecting British explorer as in some sense a voyeur in Lillo's subtle rendition, privy to the sexualized metaphorics of the prolific ocean, a "spacious bosom" observed and thereby imaginatively owned. It also illustrates curiosity's vital relationship to empire and colonialism in their infancies, and the often ambivalent conditions of their negotiation. Nicholas Thomas, for instance, remarks that curiosity was a way for European voyagers to appropriate indigenous objects, to codify their desire for the material objects of another culture under the sign of intellectual inquiry and popular interest. The trouble with "curiosity" during the period, however, was that there existed from the first instance "a tension between a scientifically controlled interest in further knowledge and the unstable 'curiosity' which is not authorized by any methodological or theoretical discourse, and is grounded in passion rather than reason."[14] Similar points have been made by Barbara Benedict and Simon Schaffer, both of whom have sought to offer an historical account of curiosity sensitive to the power relations in which it was felt and practiced. Curiosity signals, according to them, an appetite for the unknown that both destabilizes and relies upon the boundaries it forcibly transgresses.[15] So while sanctioned curiosity explicitly underwrote imperial expansion—voyages were often ostensively concerned with charting new coastlines,

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[14] Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991),127.

[15] See Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), and Simon Schaffer, "Visions of Empire: Afterward," in *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature,* eds. David Philip Miller and Peter Hanns Reill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

cataloguing astronomical observations, or proving the existence of fabled passages and lands—illegitimate forms of the curious often belied the high-mindedness of these missions. The vigorous trade in curios, exploited speculation on global resources, and the almost boundless public appetite for tales of exploration illustrated why Edmund Burke was to dismiss curiosity as "the most superficial of all the affections."[16] Curiosity was troubling in that it tended to relegate the subject to a passive affective position, a captive of his own desires, in turn colonized by the object of exploration.

Lillo's text weaves this formulation of curiosity with Randal's expression of bourgeois striving so that they are practically indistinguishable, so that we cannot read its triumphalism devoid, finally, of a certain tragic irony redoubled upon the voyeur. The curious gaze is thereby reversed, a structure that will increasingly be at work in the spectator's own troubled observation of the Wilmots. My point here, however, is that the impulse to wander is part and parcel of this transgressive gaze, this violent appropriation of something new and better, figuratively played out in the imperial discourse that colors the play, and enacted in the secretive return of Young Wilmot masquerading as the exotic Other in his childhood home. This, the play's eponymous instance of fatal curiosity, whereby Young Wilmot seeks to increase the family's collective joy in the surprise revelation of his return, is understood to be a mental pleasure too "luxurious" and marks his "boundless curiosity a weakness" (2.2.76;8). Aspiration in this case renders him liable, too optimistically glossing over the suffering of his family—a tangible reality needing redress. Celebrated for its invigorating political potential, and feared for its transgressive refiguration of social and epistemic orders, wandering-curiosity thus becomes a sort of

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[16] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* ed. Adam Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 29.

troubling bourgeois virtue in the play. It is, on the one hand, an aspirational mode of relating to the world; on the other hand, its exploratory ambition becomes the fearful height from which a fall is properly tragic, marking those who wander too far from the straight-and-narrow of a given station.

Young Wilmot's optimistic return is undercut by the difficult realization that whereas hope is fleeting, pain is so visceral that its mere possibility tinctures life with an imagined bitterness:

> For one severe distress imposed by Fate,
> What numbers doth tormenting Fear create,
> Deceived by hope, Ixion-like, we prove
> Immortal joys and seem to rival Jove.
> The cloud dissolved, impatient we complain,
> And pay for fancied bliss with substantial pain. (1.3.131-6)

There is, in this passage, a hint of the theorization we saw at work in Inchbald and Harris. Fear is its own suffering, one that haunts those who dare act on their aspirations, as if, in an act of self-fulfilling prophecy, it renders the threat of loss concrete. And so curiosity proves "fatal" in this double sense: it is intimately tied to the unseen springs of providential fates, but in this, hurtling towards its bloody consummation. Its indulgence is a violation of some unseen order, one that entails a murderous debt to the gods because it severs the ties of kinship.

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So while the rhetoric of maritime bounty serves to distill English imperial desires and explore the relative class mobility that accompanied its need for skilled labor, here it

serves primarily as the condition for a certain type of domestic tragedy. What we find is that Lillo's text is more concerned with representing the tragic potential for those who return as "strangers," marked by their sojourn in the alien world and now navigating a domestic one that threatens to erupt into violence. Which is to say, the play explores the now alien strangeness proper to what might be considered "home." This section, consequently, turns to consider how Lillo's text undermines this notion by examining the Wilmot son's alienated negotiation of his erstwhile home.

Given the equivocal valences of terms like "home" and "curiosity," it is no accident that Young Wilmot himself becomes the "curio" circulating across domestic and non-domestic spheres, his appropriation of the Other in "foreign habit" (1.3.112) in turn enabling the voyeuristic observation of his parent's pitiable suffering. The tropics leave a lasting mark that will have fateful consequences; says Young Wilmot's companion, Eustace: "the burning zone / …[has] marred the native hue of your complexion. / Methinks you look more like a sun-burnt Indian / Than a Briton." Unrecognizable to those closest to him, he is a "stranger" standing in uncertain relation to the aspirational past to which he now returns. This moment is telling, and serves to remind us (as Dror Wahrman has so well chronicled) that early-modern identity found perhaps its most profound expression in costume.[17] A key difference between the play's staging and those visual representations that accompanied the original seventeenth-century pamphlets, its utilization by Lillo is one of the clearest

[17] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 176ff. At another point in his argument, he relates the well-known captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, who mistakes a band of Native Americans for Englishmen out riding on account of the clothes they wear. As she tells the story, it is only upon a closer inspection that the trappings of European exploration dissolve into a recognition that these men are Indian Others.

indications that the colonial world tragically implicates the home, even fatefully invades it.[18] So when Young Wilmot asserts, shortly following an encomium to Britain, that "most men / Who have it in their power, choose to expire / Where they first drew their breath," its tragic sense only finally becomes clear as his body lay on the very bed upon which he was likely born.

Caught between demonstrative ambiguity and adverbial gesture, Young Wilmot's triumphant affirmation upon arriving onshore—"*Here* we're safe." (1.3.1, emphasis mine)—subverts the space it presumes to define. What locality "here" invokes, precisely, escapes the specificity that he assumes for it; rather, the gesture signifies a loose range of categories constituting interior or "sheltered" space (with its connotations of both homely and protective). In the context of the drama's tragic irony, the moment alludes to the shores of England, the borders of Cornwall, the Wilmot lodgings, and the privacy of the bed upon which he retires. Nevertheless, and perhaps more importantly, the ambiguity of the uttered "here" implies that *we too*—the hidden spectator viewing this gesture of invocation—are on the inside, privy to sufferings proper to a home where Agnes' "poor husband [seemingly] mourns the while alone." Lillo's equivocal use of nation as an analogue to home has many precedents in neo-classical theatre, but here it finds expression in the performance of migrant labor's return in the assumed identity of a tawny-faced alien.

Of course, the portrayal of an exotic Other onstage would not have been altogether foreign to an audience during the period. A broad swath of African and oriental figures graced the stage in the years leading up to Lillo's appropriation of this spectacle, from John

[18] This is certainly one of Lillo's innovations to the story. None of the earlier versions of the legend have the young sojourner in East Indian or Native American garb, and the playwright's most likely source for the tale simply mentions his "humble" clothes and the difficulty with which the Charlot figure recognizes this man who "appears a poor stranger." See McBurney's notes in his edition, p. 57.

Dryden's Restoration-era heroic tragedy, *Aureng-Zebe* (1675 ; revived at Drury Lane several times during the first quarter of the eighteenth century), to Thomas Southerne's popular adaptation, *Oroonoko, A Tragedy* (1695; from Aphra Behn's 1688 novel), to Aaron Hill's *Zara, A Tragedy* (1736; translated from Voltaire's 1732 play, *Zaïre*).[19] Lillo's play, however, was different in that it staged its exoticism in a space confessed to be private, recognizably intimate, the alien transplanted into the English home.[20] In this, it surely sought to harness the visual language and complex political allusiveness of another exotic figure whose intrusion into domesticity proves fatal: Othello. As even a cursory survey of the vibrant, almost emblematic tradition that followed this play's final scene makes clear, it was this commingling of intimate space and shocking violence that marks *Othello* as a (perhaps unacknowledged) precursor to domestic tragedy in the popular imagination, and Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity* in particular, a drama almost obsessively concerned with the display and prohibition of the curious gaze into private space (figure 2.2). Samuel Johnson's exhausted commentary on the Shakespearian play's finale—"I am glad to have ended my revisal of this scene. It is not to be endured."[21]—evokes the sort of ambivalence that characterized the contemporary response to Lillo's work. As its similarity to those early reports of *Fatal*

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[19] Dryden, *Aureng-Zebe* (London: Henry Herringman, 1696); Southerne, *Oroonoko* (London: H. Playford, 1696); Hill, *The Tragedy of Zara* (London: J. Watts, 1736). As John O'Brien notes too, spectators of the Harlequinade were well aware of the blackface donned by its eponymous protagonist. See his "Entr'acte: 'Why is Harlequin's Face Black?'" in *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[20] While *Zara* is partially set in the home, this home is an exotic one—not the bourgeois Georgian home destabilized in Lillo's play. One caveat here with respect to Southerne's *Oroonoko,* which Felicity Nussbaum has shown to be similarly invested in the alienation of racial categories across gendered and nationalistic axes. In the recasting of Imoinda in the figure of white Briton the play articulates, she argues, a concern over miscegenation and black female subjectivity that explicitly played on the differences signified by complexion. See chapter six, "Black Women: Why Imoinda turns White," in *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[21] Johnson repeats this sentiment for Lear's closing scene as well, but it appears in relation to *Othello* in his notes on the play in "Johnson on Shakespeare," ed. Arthur Sherbo, vol. 8, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 1045.



Figure 2.2. [François Boitard?], Illustration depicting act 5, scene 2 of *Othello* in Jacob Tonson's *The Works of Wiliam Shakespeare* [sic], 1709, (By Permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library)

Curiosity indicates, *Othello* anticipated the domestic tragic's use of transgressive intimacy as a representational tactic, a sense that tragedy that takes place inside the home collapses the distance between spectator and sufferer onstage.[22]

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the one extant visual we have of *Fatal Curiosity* sustains a similar traumatic moment in the cultural imagination (figure 2.3). The climactic scene of mistaken filicide—that moment when Inchbald reports the audience gasps at the abject horror of the deed—is memorialized in Thomas Stothard's 1806 depiction by repurposing the *mise en scène* of eighteenth-century *Othello*s.[23] While by the time of its engraving for Inchbald's anthology this was something of a visual cliché[24], its inclusion in the collection testifies to the materiality of Lillo's text and the lasting influence of its staging. Years after the tragedy's premiere, Stothard seems to capture the conventions associated with the play's production, with its voyeuristic use of space to amplify tragic irony and discomfit the spectator.

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[22] This was perhaps most famously explored in the celebrated Tonson edition engravings. Indeed, we know that Lillo had access to at least one of these images in his personal library. Auction sales following the playwright's death indicate that he owned not only an unidentified folio of *Shakespear's Plays* (no date), but also the exact volume of Pope's *Works of Shakespear* [sic] that, in this second edition of 1728, contained the (already by then famous) depiction of the Othello bedroom scene. See McBurney, "What George Lillo Read: A Speculation," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 29 (May 1966): 275-86. Apropos of this tradition, Michael Neill observes that: "The illustrators' voyeuristic manipulation of the parted curtains and their invariable focus upon the unconscious invitation of Desdemona's gracefully exposed body serve to foreground not merely the perverse eroticism of the scene but its aspect of forbidden disclosure." Michael Neill, "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (Winter 1989): 383-412, 23.

[23] In *Thomas Stothard, R.A., An Illustrated Monograph* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1906), A. C. Coxhead records the plate's original under Stothard's miscellaneous works, noting that it was commissioned for Inchbald's collection, published in 1807 by Longman. Although he misinterprets the scene's staging, he correctly notes its similarity to other works anthologized in the Longman edition, including depictions of *The London Merchant*. See pp. 202; 209.

[24] Nussbaum notes, for instance, that Hogarth's *The Discovery* (1743) playfully inverts the racial politics of the *Othello* scene, thereby invoking the trope of the déshabillé woman ominously observed in the bedroom. Nussbaum, *Limits of the Human,* 164.



Figure 2.3. [Engleman?], Plate depicting act 3, scene 2 of *Fatal Curiosity* (after Thomas Stothard) in Inchbald's *The British Theatre,* 1807

And yet, this marks a series of telling departures from the *Othello* tradition. For whereas Shakespeare's play tends to play with voyeurism in order to explore the erotics of miscegenation, *Fatal Curiosity* underscores the homely-unhomeliness that comes to be expressed in the Georgian domestic tragic imagination, and only fully realized later in the Gothic. Unlike the threat of the alien's violence in *Othello,* directed upon an otherwise helpless woman, Lillo's play reverses the gendered trajectory of the domestic scene, so that it is the mother who coaxes the murder of the exotic visitor. What's at stake then is the illusory quality of hospitality, kinship, and domestic privacy. Stothard's composition, which carefully separates interiors from exteriors in the vertical enclosure that bisects the plate, visually signals both the enclosure of the jewels mistakenly stolen by Agnes, and the fateful bed occupied by the Wilmot's son. Vacillating between these two curious focal points, the conflicted position of the father is presented to the viewer as an ethical dilemma (whether to preserve the lodger's money or life), only to be resolved by his emasculated capitulation to Agnes' commanding gesture. Audiences would have known that the casket had, only a short while ago, been tucked away in the son's bosom, lending irony to the eagerness with which she volunteers to violate them both, commemorated here in the plate's partial motto: "You [Old Wilmot] are quite dismayed. I'll do / the deed myself" (3.1.168-9). To wit, this lockbox, which Amanda Vickery suggests was a boundary so absolute as to have been considered "sacrosanct,"[25] doubles here and in the play as a signifier of status and personal integrity, the private marker of an early bourgeois identity. Hence, Agnes' fatal curiosity—her "prying into th'affairs of others" (3.1.8)—reenacts the already-gendered Pandoran myth for the middling sort, transforming the classical transgression into one of privacy's violation. The

[25] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors,* 46.

tragedy here is that the bourgeois self, bound up as it is in its various possessions (whether costume, casket, or home), is torn asunder by its own aspirational desire, by some tragic twist on the sort of curiosity so fundamental to the bourgeois imagination. As if to one-up the *Othello* tradition in which it partakes, the plate doubles-down on Lillo's complex use of filicidal metaphor, transforming the domestic scene into one of uncanny symbolism. In the almost womblike enclosure of the bed, with its provocative glimpse of the son, carefully posed so as to suggest a fetus and ensconced in the vaguely labial curtains that signify private space, the image suggests that Lillo's ability to conjure morbid curiosity was an effect of the drama's literal "playing house."[26]

These elements—the four-post bed, suggestively drawn curtains, muddied distinction between public and private space—embellishing the anthologized text, carefully invoke the sort of interior that certainly would have been familiar to the middling sort, or at least those who aspired to its vaunted social stability. Lillo's play repeatedly calls attention to this staged simulation and rhetorically produces its various spaces, emphasizing the material comforts that characterized bourgeois life, and undermining them with tragic irony. Not only are we invited, then, to secretively witness the Wilmot family's pain, but also to consider the home itself as a potential signifier of domestic suffering. Struck with its

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[26] Perhaps Freud's clearest exposition of the uncanny explicitly identifies the home with the female sexual organs, binding domestic space with the interiority of the female body. As he summarizes: "It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness' and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body." Stothard's visual depiction of the play underscores this latent aspect of Lillo's text, which, while keen to explore domestic trauma, is conspicuously uninterested in the erotics of the bedroom. Indeed, Freud's theory is often ill-fit to the play, and its usage here is meant to emphasize a shift to domesticate trauma in something like an embodied affect. See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 244.

dilapidation, Young Wilmot's response upon seeing the family home becomes a pattern for our own interpretation of architectural space:

> What wild neglect, the token of despair,
>
> In each disordered or disfurnished room
>
> Of this once gorgeous house!
>
> What anguish and confusion fill the faces
>
> Of its dejected owners! (2.2.31-6)

This declaration, delivered in an aside (in the performance of interiority, we might also note), rhetorically deploys the home as an allusive marker of the Wilmot family's difficult state and shameful downward mobility. In the binding of bourgeois identity to their destitute living quarters, what is at once signaled is a dejected state of mind, a loss of status, and the cold emptiness of the encroaching grave. The disorder of the home, with its empty rooms and near-invisible inhabitants, is a troubling void. Like the "dead loins and…sterile womb" of their pitiful bodies, the elder Wilmots go on to confess that they mournfully await —or perhaps, rather tragically, mistakenly prepare—the decidedly macabre home that corresponds to this: "The loathsome grave…[their] refuge." (2.3.66; 70-1)[27] The Wilmot home, crumbling and barren, has become little more than an imagined threshold, little more than an illusion of its coherence. Surrounded by hollow remembrances of their former prosperity, the Wilmots have long lived in a mausoleum.

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[27] In his profoundly influential history of private life, Philippe Ariès observes that one key way in which domesticity was conceived in the early modern period was explicitly in terms of safe "refuge": [When] the family became the focus of private life…It became something it had never been: a refuge, to which people fled in order to escape the scrutiny of outsiders; an emotional center." See his introduction to vol. 3 of *A History of Private Life,* ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1990), 8. Similarly, Sir Edward Coke's aphorism, already clichéd by the eighteenth century, enshrined common law customs protecting the domestic threshold: "For a man's house is his castle, *et domus sua cuique tutissimum refugium*: for where shall a man be safe, if it be not in his house?" See Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (London: M. Flesher, 1644), 101.

The family is hence caught in the awkward social position that lies between desiring to flourish in bourgeois private life and the desire to be seen in their suffering. A corresponding language of visitation and genteel entertaining in the play augments this tension between voyeuristic transgression and public disclosure. Loaded with cultural meaning, visiting during the period was itself a sort of performance that entailed the carefully choreographed display of private space. Charlot's acknowledgment of Agnes at her door—"This visit's kind" (1.2.104)—vouches for their affection and longstanding rapport and provides one crucial example. If Christoph Heyl is to be believed, the tragedy's audience at the Little Haymarket (where manager Henry Fielding first brought the play to stage) would have detected a certain ironic doubling of theatricality: "While the servants scuttled about in their subterranean world, the rooms thrown open to visitors resembled a stage upon which the visit took place…[and] as befits a stage, what went on in these rooms were stage-managed and highly controlled events."[28] Conceived this way, visiting was a method for the cultural performance of bourgeois intimacy, a set of conventions that sought to formalize the social traversal of private and public spheres. As we soon discover, however, such moments serve as a foil for Agnes' shameful isolation in the community at large:

> Few else would think it so.
> Those who would once have thought themselves much honored
> By the least favor, though 'twere but a look
> I could have shown them, now refuse to see me. (1.2.105-8)

Cut off from the sociability of visitation, the Wilmots suffer in isolation, rendered invisible by "the cold neglect of friends" (3.1.19; cf. also Old Wilmot's admission, cited above, that

[28] Christian Heyl, "We are not at Home: Protecting Domestic Privacy in Post-Fire Middle-Class London," *London Journal* 27 (2002): 12-33, 23.

"none…regarded [their] distress"). Or yet worse, their suffering *is* witnessed—but only as the object of "galling scorn or more provoking pity" (3.1.20). Agnes, after all, is acutely ashamed of their misfortune, as if she knows the family is seen only so as to illustrate the moralizing platitudes of gossiping onlookers. Objects of gawking pity, they anxiously suspect what the audience already knows: they are living out a domestic tragedy.

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Lillo's subtle ability to implicate the spectator-reader in moments like these suggests a keen sensitivity to how tragedy—like the pleasures that make up gossip—was thought to rely on vicarious comparisons with those observed. So, one aspect of imagination celebrated by Addison's Mr. Spectator is that of regarding the pain of others from the relative safety of virtuality, mediated by either time or fiction:

> …when we read of torments, wounds, deaths, and the like dismal accidents, our pleasure does not flow so properly from the grief which such melancholy descriptions give us, as from the secret comparison which we make between ourselves and the person who suffers. Such representations teach us to set a just value upon our own condition, and make us prize our good fortune, which exempts us from the like calamities.[29]

The observation of suffering, in this view, is meant to valorize one's comparatively good fortune; it throws into relief the probabilistic safety of our own position. An effect of the rational powers of judgement, it is vital that the tragic exploit this gap between sufferer and spectator, exploit the mental space of comparison that both insulates and gratifies those who witness such misfortune. Years later, Burke's argument in *A Philosophical Enquiry*

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[29] *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 3:68.

(1757) would nuance this insight by reflecting: "I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others." Citing several classical heroic mainstays (Cato, a burning Troy), he adds: "There is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity."[30] For Burke, however, this pleasure arises in part as a function of sympathy. Gazing upon the pain of others—and here, as in Addison's theory, the key is in the othering of pain—activates the social bonds between people; we are drawn to gawk upon misfortune because pitying others *feels good.*[31] In both theories then, tragic affect is said to work by maintaining this safe distance and anxiously affirming its unlikelihood, that is, by underscoring the situational differences that obtain between subject and object.

But I'd like to suggest that bourgeois tragedy increasingly comes to be seen as a genre that troubles this viewpoint, and that its performance and later theorization served to illustrate a shift already at work in tragic theory by the time Burke turns to consider suffering's representation. Indeed, as I've tried to argue so far, one of the singular effects of Lillo's bourgeois tragedy has been the elision of this imaginative gap and the insistence on some imminent terror (so much so, that George Colman's 1783 revival of *Fatal Curiosity* confessed it necessary "to mitigate the horror of the catastrophe"[32]). In the paradoxical ordinariness of the extraordinary event, a simulation of the familiar (in the Inchbaldian coinage, "occurrences, as in real life") leads to an identification of tragic subject with onlooking spectator that ultimately brackets off its improbability. Addison's caveat, albeit in

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[30] Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry,* 43.

[31] Section XIV of Burke's *Enquiry,* on the "Effects of Sympathy on the Distresses of Others," considers this othering in some detail.

[32] See George Colman's postscript to his 1782 revival of the play (London: T. Cadell, 1783), 48.

regard to real-life pain, provides an instructive warning about the danger of staging a "True Tragedy" like *Fatal Curiosity*. "We are not capable of receiving [pleasure from suffering]," continues *The Spectator*:

> ...when we see a person actually lying under the tortures that we meet with in description; because in this case, the object presses too close upon our senses, and bears so hard upon us, that it does not give us time or leisure to reflect on ourselves. Our thoughts are so intent upon the miseries of the sufferer, that we cannot turn them upon our own happiness.[33]

Similarly, Burke's proviso that sympathetic pleasure thrives only when terror "does not press too closely"[34] echoes the Addisonian concern over the ability of suffering to override one's higher faculties, even while locating a common precursor in an Aristotelian rhetoric of fear's proximity. Discussing the rhetorical and aesthetic uses of fear, Aristotle defines it as the imagination of one's suffering when such conditions are "near at hand" or "about to happen" or likely "might happen."[35] This vacillation between physical proximity, looming imminence, and probability is a recurrent ambiguity in translation, but what emerges is an aesthetic theory of fear that relies on suffering's vivid representation, an evocation of danger that confounds one's assurance of its unlikelihood. "The nearer it approaches reality, and the further it removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect its power," adds Burke, silently marking a shift from the comparative faculties of Addisonian aesthetics to the affective rhetoric of the traumatic.[36]

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[33] *The Spectator,* 3:67.

[34] Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry,* 42.

[35] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George E. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 154; cf. 139.

[36] Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry,* 43.

In this, Burke's argument echoes another key Aristotelian insight: tragedy works best when its familiarity confirms a latent egocentricity or heightened sense of self-preservation; regarding "those like themselves" is an intensifier to fear, "for in all these cases something seems more to apply…to the self".[37] In the identification that obtains between bourgeois tragic subject and spectator, a short-circuiting of sorts occurs, so that the requisite imaginative distance is always foreclosed by the visceral qualities there observed. "People pity things happening to others in so far as they fear for themselves," concludes the philosopher.[38] Eustace's declaration, at the sight of Old Wilmot's bloodied hands, plays up just this sort of pity-fear dynamic at work in bourgeois tragedy and prefigures the sort of irrational egotism of the play's traumatized contemporary viewers: "Forbid it, Heaven, that I should know such guilt! / Yet his sad fate demands commiseration." That Eustace's first thought is a fear that this violence would be repeated in his life reveals its perceived intensity. In witnessing taboo's violation in such conditions, the play elicits, and then revels in, something closer to the sort of unbearable dread otherwise thought to be tragic affect run amok. Indulging in the sort of voyeurism that fuels gossip—the sort of curious pleasure that allows a neighbor's furtive comparisons of both petty misfortune and wallpapers—but then shows the viewer something traumatic, something which persists and thus occludes the comparative distance so important to period theorizations on tragedy.

The coincident senses implied when something "strikes close to home" or "strikes home to the feelings," with their sense of proximity to the gazing subject, thus provides an

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[37] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* 154.

[38] Ibid.

apt metaphor for the dynamic at work in period domestic tragedies.[39] As Harris's use of the phrase implies above, what's at work is a symbolic network wherein home signifies at once the private spaces lionized by eighteenth-century bourgeois ideology, the domestic political territory of one's nativity, and the interiorized, subjective identity that accompanied its emergence over the *longue durée*. In contrast to the Addisonian scheme, which locates the aesthetic consumption of suffering in the imagination's comparative faculties, bourgeois tragedy comes to be understood as a matter of the heart. One senses this shift towards affect not only in Harris and Inchbald, but also explicitly in the witty definition shared between two Bluestockings in 1782. Writing to Elizabeth Carter, whose report on a deserted gentry house had prompted somber reflection, Elizabeth Montagu uses the by-now familiar shorthand I've sketched above:

> I can sympathize with your feelings in seeing a good family seat deserted, it is is *tragedie bourgeoise*, it comes more home to us, is more distinctly felt than the great ruins of time—which lye in ye higher regions of pity & terror. The falling castle, ye mouldering Palace, excite very different ideas, & rather affect the imagination than touch the heart. Our minds are raised while we contemplate ye great works of time & fate; the petty larcenies they daily commit on such property as we possess wakens tears for ourselves, & our own possessions.[40]

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[39] The Oxford English Dictionary mistakenly claims that the first usage of this precise phrase dates a full century later than Harris' here, to 1889, while noting that the sentiment likely predated this in a similar construction, "nearer home." In this case, however, the literal sense is much more predominant and dates to the sixteenth century. The verb "strike," moreover, seems to be an eighteenth-century invention and suggests the sort of trauma to which I have tried to be attentive.

[40] Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter, September 2, 1782, MO 3534. I owe this reference to Elizabeth Eger, who discovered this passage as part of the ongoing Elizabeth Montagu Letters Project.

In linking the home with that which is "more distinctly felt"—and not, crucially, imagined—Montagu's casual definition demonstrates the way genre provided an affective language for bourgeois identity and the experience of suffering. It also brings to mind Young Wilmot's dismay at seeing the family home, with its destitute walls and unfurnished rooms, as a freighted sign of decay both physical and emotional. Bourgeois tragedy, in this view, relied on a fundamentally different bodily circuitry through which it was consumed, shifting empirical emphases away from the sensory work of mere observation to those of intimate personal concern.[41] Interiority is being negotiated here according to the sorts of private traumas and anxieties unearthed in tragedy's performance, explored spatially on stage, and conveyed in the voyeuristic flouting of recognized social custom.

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Marking this shift aids our understanding of why *Fatal Curiosity* is ultimately so theatrically and conceptually ambitious. In a move that plays with the transgressive potential of domestic tragedy I've sketched above, the genteel conventions governing privacy and intimacy are upended in the frantic catastrophe that unfolds in the play's third act. For while Young Wilmot imagines a grand gesture of display and a corresponding celebration of his return to the domestic, his parents soon plot to permanently hide away the body of the presumed Other in their midst. Blinded by "ecstatic" pleasure (2.2.93) at the

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[41] As Joseph Roach has chronicled in detail, the eighteenth century saw a series of shifts in the way performance theory was conceived and implemented (*The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* [Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993]). Crucial to this, he argues, was the interplay between the Enlightenment's boundary-pushing research into the body and the science of acting that ultimately led to a view that the body was, in effect, an instrument subject to physical law. Roach's book offers a rich account of the connection between drama and interiority, but I cite this here because its implications are somewhat reversed for the spectator, at least that of bourgeois tragedy; whereas acting comes to be understood as the mere performance of sentiments not actually felt by the actor, the consumption of performance more and more assumes the contrasting function: the didactic work of exemplary tragic figures gives way to the direct apprehension and disciplining of feeling. In the following chapters, we shall return to this in some detail.

thought of his "discovery" (2.2.72), he mistakenly stages the visit as if he were host, as if he were in control of the space he has so long deserted and could therefore dictate the terms of his homecoming:

Ev'ry friend

Who witnesses my happiness tonight

Will, by partaking, multiple joys!

Turning to Randal, he adds:

...imagine to thyself

The floods of transport, the sincere delight

That all my friends will feel when I disclose

To my astonished parents my return,

And then confess that I have well contrived,

By giving others joy, t'exalt my own. (2.2.73-5; 84-9)

His miscalculation, as we've seen, is that the Wilmots no longer have friends, and this anonymity—paralleled in the exotic anonymity inscribed on his body—provides both the motive and the means for his destruction. There only remain gossiping spectators, transforming the play's audience into the community that watches only to indulge in another's pain. And even though we know little about the Little Haymarket's layout in Lillo's time, we might reasonably conjecture that his fateful retreat into an "inner room" would have been an instance of freighted symbolism if not the overt simulation of a social custom played out many times before; the "extremely modest" theatre was known for its intimate informality, and its audience's physical proximity to the action may have heightened the

tension of the moment.[42] Furthermore, if Stothard's print is any indication, its later run at Drury Lane would have staged the space so as to register the familiarity and intimacy of its setting, further literalizing the strike that hits close to home. This is what makes Wilmot's murder so provocative—even hidden offstage and affected in the "deep groan [emanating] from the inner room," it reads as an exposure of private space, an agonizing violation played out for all to see. Hence, Agnes' fear—that she will become a pitiable spectacle, somehow seen but unrecognized in her pain (cf.1.2.117-19)—comes to fruition in the intimacy of her own home.

The taut deliberation scene, in which Agnes' entreaties to kill their son finally prevail upon Old Wilmot, is a veritable debate over the dignity of those for whom bourgeois aspiration has proven elusive, and the consequent inability of the home to ideologically cohere in such conditions. Echoing *The London Merchant*'s Millwood, although perhaps more self-consciously nuanced, Agnes maintains that she's merely what her situation has made her. Repudiating her husband's horror at the plan, she reminds him—in what will later read as irony—that it was his insolvency that originally cost them a son:

> Where was thy pity, where they patience then
> Thou cruel husband! Thou unnat'ral father!
> Thou most remorseless, most ungrateful man!
> To waste my fortune, rob me of my son,
> To drive me to despair, and then reproach me
> For being what thou'st made me! (3.1.129-34)

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[42] William J. Burling, *Summer Theatre in London, 1661-1820, and the Rise of the Haymarket Theatre* (Cranbury, NJ: Associate University Presses, 2000), 77ff. On the Little Haymarket's development in the context of trends in theatre architecture, see Donald C. Mullin, *The Development of the Playhouse: A Survey of Theatre Architecture from the Renaissance to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970).

Agnes' argument works by avowing a sense of fluid identity, one in which self is at least partially constructed by those social connections she longs to reestablish, as also those possessions which define her. Hence, the oftentimes morbid providentialism of Lillo's work, here collapsed into a rhetoric of personal circumstance: "'Tis not choice / But dire necessity, suggests the thought [of killing their guest]!" (3.1.37-8) But the argument also serves as a powerful check against her husband's at-times equally compelling attempt to secure ethics in a fixed identity:

> There is a kind of pride, a decent dignity,
> Due to ourselves, which, spite of our misfortunes,
> May be maintained and cherished to the last. (3.1.53-5)

Old Wilmot's response essentializes their worth, lodges agency in the middling-class self as an act of quasi-Stoic detachment. This contention, finally overturned by Agnes' sharp rebuking charge of "unnat'ralness", is amongst the play's most impassioned articulations of just what interiority and selfhood might entail, how it overlaps with but escapes the domestic, even as domestic considerations inevitably prove self-immolating. This desire, this aspiration—so intertwined with the very forms of curiosity central to bourgeois identity so that, immediately after opening her son's casket, Agnes soliloquizes: "Possessed of these [treasures]…lofty pride [would] bare its aspiring head" (3.1.21-2)—tragically ordains its own unrecognized sacrifice. To save the Wilmot family now, its patriarchs must destroy its future; hospitality comes at the price of "Th'inhospitable murder of [a] guest!" (3.1.82)

Old Wilmot's defeated concession to Agnes—"I am betrayed within" (3.1.101)—is a key moment, consequently, an anxious admission of identity's fragmentation that colors not only the patriarch's Calvinist-inflected weakness of will, but also the overlapping cultural

assumptions that make up domesticity and bourgeois identity. Here again, the staged home becomes a spatial focal point through which this is mediated. In the harried rifling-through of the home—uninvited, decorum and privacy suspended—frantically in search of the favorite son whose groans they recognize but cannot locate, Eustace, Randal, and Charlot upend the inviolability of the household so tenaciously asserted by the father. An inversion of those customs governing genteel visitation, so longed-for by Agnes, the family is laid bare to public scrutiny, exposing the naked self-interest that has overcome them. The semantic network that undergirds domestic ideology, of privacy and hospitality, of even the providential, reaches its own limits; both the "unbarred doors" and "hands…stained with blood" vividly signify that the house, its integrity, and the Wilmot family inexorably hemorrhage from the body of their unfortunate son.

As Agnes herself says, this is "a prodigy of horror" that shocks even as it demands our attention. And the play's overtly gothic touches underscore the way in which Lillo's use of uncanny horror anticipated much of the psychological turmoil that was to be the stock-in-trade of that genre. Still, the ineffable violence depicted—Eustace: "How shall I vent my grief?" (3.1.269)—suggests a trauma proper to the domestic, one that inheres in domestic ideology and in fact constitutively shapes it, and finally here, dictates the form of its theatrical representation. The Wilmots enact the response so often documented by Inchbald and the like: at realizing the filicide they have mistakenly committed, Agnes and Wilmot, become "dumb phantoms of despair and horror," as if, in retrospectively tracing the terrible implications of the plot, they are forced to witness the murder of their son, forced to undergo their sufferings anew through the refracted position of a third party's judgment—

perhaps the curious spectator, but certainly the chorus-like God hovering over Lillo's plays in silent judgment.

If this is a providential turn then, their election is a dark one, one that engenders a series of questions regarding the meaning of fate and suffering for those whose pain stems from the seemingly ordinary? How, for instance, do we understand the providentialism that tempers the play, and in particular, Charlot's entreaties to patient submission in the face of suffering? Wouldn't it seem that the drama understands this suffering—figured in the dead bodies that end up littering the stage—quite literally senseless, accidental, a series of terrible, meaningless mistakes? Or perhaps worse, like the filicide that features in the play's catastrophe, it figures a betrayal by one lying close to home—in this case, God himself? In fact, I'd like to suggest that this final twist on the unhomely theme provides an interpretive key through which the play's cultural and theological assumptions become clear. For what's at stake, finally, is just this imposition of interpretive order upon an otherwise tragic opacity; to hail this as an example of providential direction, even as betrayal, summons the ability to mourn and reinstates, perhaps paradoxically, an agency for those snake-bitten by misfortune.

If the Wilmots, and Agnes in particular, exemplify the tensions inherent in the middling sort's pride, Charlot is the play's moral exemplar and model of Christian patience. She is, we learn, not only selflessly charitable and devoted in her betrothal to Young Wilmot, but also one whose careful maintenance of desire is filtered through a rhetoric of godly purification. As Maria, her servant recognizes, she has "the heavenly art still to improve / [Her] mind by all events" (1.2.95-6). In this way, her trials become a method for the repudiation of her misfortune:

Taught by afflictions, I have learned to bear
Much greater ills than poverty with patience.
When luxury and ostentation's banished,
The calls of nature are but few; and those,
These hands, not used to labor, may supply. (1.2.81-5)

What is interesting however, is that this gesture of rendering tragedy null is unavailable when faced with another's suffering. Unlike Burke, who took the tragic spectator's pleasure as an indicator of sympathy's powerful bodily influence, Charlot's spectatorial anxieties threaten to overturn her convictions:

But when I think on what my friends must suffer,
My spirits fail, and I'm o'erwhelmed with grief. (1.2.86-7)

This line practically distills the drama's tragic irony, as it also belies Agnes' later Stoic resignation: "Death is the worst / That fate can bring" (1.2.134-5). Charlot's admission, on the contrary, foreshadows the reversal in store for the household; in the comparative logic of the play, Agnes' own death will be turned into a relatively easy lot, even a deliverance from the intractable pain of witnessing her son's death. Whereas one can turn their own pain into divine trial, that of another's observed tends to resist this.

Thus, while the possible meanings of suffering appear to be anxiously deferred until (and perhaps through) the tragedy's third act, most of Charlot's dialogue attempts to impose a sense of properly cosmic order upon the family's misfortune, to weave a sense of its value and virtues in the rehearsal of plot. Lillo, for example, allows her to recount the rudiments of the drama in the form of an "obscure" and "terrible" dream shared with Agnes. This has the paradoxical effect of heightening the tragedy's tension by rendering "the frightful

image / Of such a tragic scene" inevitable. But in the moment, it is a portentous warning for the company to keep the faith—literally—when misfortune is visited upon them:

> We must not choose, but strive to bear our lot
> Without reproach or guilt.
> …
> The hand of Heaven
> Spreads clouds on clouds o'er our benighted heads
> And wrapped in darkness, doubles our distress. (1.2.136-7)

They instead must see the plot through, as an extension of their devotion:

> And not attempt to extricate ourselves
> And seek deliverance by forbidden ways. (1.2.163-4

Charlot's words echo the complex rhetoric of concealment and revelation utilized by Young Wilmot and Eustace with respect to bourgeois speculation (cf. 1.3.105-9), and therefore place their sentiments on a common continuum by which they are opposed. Like wandering-curiosity, patience is fueled by hope, but one that expresses itself in the embrace of "transitory pain" and "frail imperfect virtue." Like the work ethic of the wandering company man, Charlot's patience is a labor she reckons to God.

Charlot thus subsumes her providentialism under a similar structure of expectation and reward. This is what finally proves doubly tragic for her; her anguished cry upon discovering Wilmot's body, like the Psalmist's *De profundis,* simultaneously registers confusion, betrayal, skepticism, and pious resignation. In short, it manifests those forms of suffering explored in the play, and until that moment, held at bay by the assurance that they would ultimately produce some good:

Welcome Despair! I'll never hope again.

Why have you forced me from my Wilmot's side?

Let me return! Unhand me! Let me die!

Patience, that till this moment ne'er forsook me,

Has took her flight, and my abandoned mind,

Rebellious to a lot so void of mercy

And so unexpected, rages to madness.

O Thou, Who know'st our frame, Who know'st these woes

Are more than human fortitude can bear,

Oh, take me, take me hence, ere I relapse

And in distraction, with unhallowed tongue,

Again arraign Your mercy! (3.1.255-65)

Even in this roundabout invocation, one can sense the tremendous symbolic weight of Lillo's God, its almost overloaded ability to operate as master-signifier in a dense network of attitudes and discourses. Up until this point, her God has been an idol, a household god whose domestication was hidden in the performance of saintly patience. The temptation to blaspheme, itself an impious admission, allows Charlot to voice both an implied imprecation and the faint disclosure of skepticism. If nothing else, this God is not the benevolent one she had assumed him to be, prone instead to elect misfortune upon the wicked and the pious alike.

I want to be careful here, however. For in developing this line of argumentation, I do not wish to suggest that Lillo's play is ultimately skeptical of the order it claims for its world. Nor that what the play depicts is the triumph of a merely cynical fatalism, or worse, an

anachronistic nihilism. Rather, I wish to suggest that this sense of the grimly providential is the bourgeois tragic poet having it both ways: it preserves tragic intensity, with its fearful affect and pitiable subjects, without having to abrogate the religious and cultural commitments in which the poet is enmeshed. Which is to say, it allows one the comfort of an ordered world, without refusing the brute fact of human suffering, even that which *seems* random. Because of this, Charlot's exhausted submission to a God she cannot love, and Old Wilmot's final protestation that "While Heaven was laboring to make [them] happy / [They] brought this dreadful ruin on [themselves]" (3.1.299-300) paradoxically serve the purpose of calling providence forth into existence, of making it real by witnessing to its presence. In their performance, they rehearse God's agency so that the domestic, as indeed, those modes of interiority at work in the play, become imbued with the holy. In invocations and assurances, dreams and plaintive gestures, the play's providentialism disciplines the household and audience alike.

The strangeness of *Fatal Curiosity*'s God is such that while present, he remains elusive, even—we might add—too close to home, "a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" in Cathy Caruth's formulation of the traumatic wound.[43] Lillo's play dwells in this near-paradoxical stance, where God is both transcendentalized as a horrible law foisted upon the family, and the one who was silently working the levers of the plot all along. No wonder then, that when Old Wilmot stabs his son, the words emanating from the inner room are deeply equivocal: "Oh, Father! Father!" (3.1.195). This line of dialogue, preserved in the oldest authorized copies of the play, would later be replaced by the sanitized "Oh Heav'ns! Oh mercy, mercy!," "Heaven" a common method for censoring mention of the

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[43] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

Christian God.[44] In actuality, we might note, the metamorphosed "Father-Heaven" remains a record of the theological agency that is of central importance in the play. It is, in this sense, another species of the tragedy's transgressive intimacy, the traumatic refusal at work in the Wilmot home. While I will consider at length the sublime implications of this darkly providential law when I turn to discuss *Clarissa*, suffice it to say, bourgeois suffering attains a certain clarity through its horrible exercise; in the tracing of providence's various deliverances and summoned afflictions, desire and its regulation become legible under the sign of domesticity. For Lillo, the "Father" carries with it the force of a vast symbolic network in which the family lives, and moves, and has its being.

[44] McBurney notes this as a major variant in his edition, tracing the substitution of "Heaven" for "Father" to copies of the play dated 1768. See notes to p.48.

THE ECONOMICS OF PROVIDENCE:

POETIC JUSTICE AND THE TRAUMATIC SUBLIME IN *CLARISSA*

> G-d d—n him, if [Clarissa should die]…[I] should no longer believe Providence, or eternal Wisdom, or Goodness governed the World, if [such] Merit, Innocence, and Beauty were to be so destroyed.
>
> -Colley Cibber, upon hearing of Clarissa's rumored death

> Is it contrary to the common method of Providence, to permit the best to suffer most? No. When the best do *so* suffer, does it not most deeply affect the human heart? Yes. And is it not your business to affect the human heart as deeply as you can? Yes.
>
> -Edward Young to Samuel Richardson, 1744

Not many people loved the tragic ending to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748). So in the months leading up to 1751, Richardson reissued *Clarissa* in an expanded third edition that considerably reworked the 1748 and 1749 versions of the text and sought to answer those outraged by the cruelty of the novel's final act.[1] Although he would go on to tinker further with his novel, no later edition would approach the astounding two hundred additional pages of clarifying "restorations" that appeared by volume eight's completion in early 1751.[2]

Among the alterations Richardson included in this edition was an expanded postscript, in which he abandoned the fiction of restoration and tackled the controversy head-on. In it, he offered newly calculated answers to objections to the novel's tragic ending

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[1] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, 3rd ed. [1751], 8 vols. (New York: AMS, 1990), 277. All parenthetical references to the novel and postscript will refer to this edition.

[2] For a succinct discussion of the novel's publication history, see Angus Ross's introduction in the Penguin edition of the novel (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 15-18. For a more detailed discussion of *Clarissa*'s reception and development after its initial publication see T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 285-321. Although Richardson was careful to maintain that the changes to the text were previously excised material, Eaves and Kimpel remain skeptical. See *Samuel Richardson,* 310-11.

that had arisen during the years separating the first awful rumors of Clarissa's impending death and his revised text. These complaints are well-documented, and often echoed the sentiments of Lady Bradshaigh, who—like many of Richardson's readers—insisted as early as October of 1748 that Clarissa's story end in poetic justice for its principal characters. Anything less, she insisted, "would give joy only to the ill-natured reader, and heave the compassionate breast with tears of irremediable woes."[3] Despite her investment in its characters, her ambivalence towards the novel's tragic ending eventually led her to ask its author to refrain from sending her its final volumes, no longer able to bear the pain in reading them.

Critics and historians have long noted the manner in which the novel seemed to touch a raw nerve for its contemporary audience, and Richardson struggled for years in order to justify his artistic choices to a public that preferred (to take only the most notorious example) Nahum Tate's sentimentally tragicomic version of *King Lear* (1681), a play he specifically singles out for censure in his postscript.[4] Readers used to poetic justice valued its comfort and closure, valued that is, its homely assurance that households would be restored and virtue rewarded in kind by curtain fall. In contrast to *Pamela*, whose "afterlife" in print provided a way to keep a beloved character alive, and whose further adventures as shared textual property fostered a sense of virtual community, what was was unsettling

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[3] *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson,* ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1804), 4:178.

[4] See chapters 9-12 in Eaves and Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson*, for a biographical account of Richardson's writing process and critical reception during the period in which *Clarissa* was being written. Several sources document the reception of the novel and offer invaluable critical analysis of Richardson's responses to his various readers, be they his interlocutors or his admirers. See, for instance, Tom Keymer, *Richardson's* Clarissa *and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chapter four of Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), and most recently, Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland, eds., *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for the* Clarissa *Project*, (New York: AMS Press, 1999).

about *Clarissa* was that its protagonist's afterlife was to be of a decidedly more literal sort, cut-off from her adoring readers.[5] Her death took away a character that much of public had grown to love, leaving an absence where other texts left imaginative possibility, causing grief and confusion rather than the satisfaction of a moral triumph observed (to say nothing of catharsis). "Seven vol.^{ms} more," read Lady Bradshaigh's annotations to the novel's 1751 postscript, its melancholy plea evidence of the ultimate emptiness of her threat to forego its finale.[6]

Like many of the bourgeois tragedies I have so far examined, *Clarissa* could evoke a palpable anxiety and displeasure for those readers invested in the reality of her afflictions, eliciting at once a reluctance to look on as she suffered, while at the same time an urgent need to bear witness to its injustice. "We accompany her in Horrow [sic]," wrote Sarah Fielding of the discomfort with which the reader experienced Anna Howe gazing upon Clarissa's lifeless body, replaying the uneasy erotics of morbid curiosity. Promising what the postscript identified, following Joseph Addison, as the novel's "pleasing anguish" (8:281), *Clarissa* was an ordeal; disturbed by its dark turn, "we sigh, we rave, and we weep with her," in effect becoming one of those grieving over her coffin.[7] "I have too much *Feeling,*" wrote a gentleman about *Clarissa*, adding a general complaint against tragedies: "There is enough in the world to make our hearts sad, without carrying grief into our diversions, and making the distresses of others our own" (8:278). Richardson made no secret of the pain he sought

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[5] The notion is David Brewer's. See his chap. on Richardson's "coterie public" in *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 121-53. A minor point for book history that often remains unnoticed, one of the interesting side-effects of *Clarissa*'s tragic ending was of asserting a crude copyright over the character.

[6] Janine Barchas and Gordon D. Fulton, eds., *The Annotations in Lady Bradshaigh's Copy of* Clarissa, English Literary Studies (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria , 1998), 140.

[7] Sarah Fielding, *Remarks on Clarissa,* ed. Peter Sabor, Augustan Reprint Society Nos. 231-2 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1985), 45.

to elicit in readers, appropriating the Spectator's argument that a good tragedy would "fix the Audience in such a serious composure of thought as is much more lasting and delightful, than any little transient starts of joy and satisfaction" (8:281). Because the novel was "a real Picture of human Life," readers identified with its world and developed the kind of attachments whose loss could feel unsettlingly real, painful, a cruel violation ordained by its otherwise trusted author (or Author, as Richardson implied by arguing that his novel was "a story designed to represent real life," with its inscrutably silent Providence).[8] *Clarissa*'s admixture of tragedy and realism was thus designed to cultivate an affective disposition of "serious composure" to human misery that would become central to later practices of high realist fiction and bourgeois drama alike. Shading almost imperceptibly between tragedy as a genre and the tragic as a mood or philosophical temperament, the postscript imagines a melancholy attitude to the world ("lasting and delightful") as the final aim of the novel's upheavals, a strategy echoed in Diderot's coinage of the bourgeois *genre-sérieux*.[9] As many critics of the novel have noted, affinities between *Clarissa* and contemporary tragedies on the stage are plentiful, from the immediacy of Richardson's epistolary "writing to the moment" to the ornateness of its set pieces and imagined spaces, to the thematics of domesticity, violence, and Romantic intrigue.[10]

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[8] The claims to realism here are found in Fielding's *Remarks on Clarissa* (45) and Richardson's postscript to *Clarissa* (8:297), respectively.

[9] For Diderot, the middling genre moves carefully between tragic and comic extremes, eschewing the most shocking effects of its British predecessor while cultivating all its gravity. I return to this in some depth in the next chapter. For Diderot's discussion of the genre, see his *Entretien sur le Fils naturel* (1757) in Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, eds. J. Assézat and M. Tourneux, 18 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 7:85-168.

[10] See for example, Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), esp. chaps. 10-11; Ira Konigsberg, *Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968); and John Richetti, "Richardson's Dramatic Art in *Clarissa*" in *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800,* ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1983).

Here I want to continue thinking about the anxieties unearthed and placed on display in and through the era's central example of a bourgeois tragic novel, *Clarissa*. In the previous chapter, I began laying the groundwork for thinking historically about modes of aesthetic reception that seemed to refigure the beholder's mediation of painful scenes in bourgeois tragedy as a matter of affect rather than, as in the associationist or Addisonian model of tragic pleasure, imaginative or intellectual comparison. What I suggested was that Lillo's domestic tragedies provided a way to talk about mourning realistic or ordinary suffering onstage in terms of the familiar anxieties it unearthed, as if the porous interiors and exteriors of *Fatal Curiosity*'s scenery figured that of the spectator's own self laid bare, one's fears and concerns dangerously exposed by the enacted voyeurism. One's experience of the uncannily familiar scene "striking too close to home" gave empirical shape to a shift that was well underway in the modern cultural imaginary, moving the locus of that experience from the airy regions of the imagination to something more primitive, more troublingly sensuous. Viewers of these tragedies spoke of them affecting the heart, dredging up unpleasant or too-intimate feelings. By the end of the chapter, I tried to convey the radical depth of this uncanniness as it plays out for the Wilmot family tormented onstage through the dense opacity of the pain they experience at the hands of Lillo's darkly providential God. Woven into the fabric of bourgeois life, this God is both comforter and destroyer, the big Other whose status as master-signifier binds the coherence of their suffering for good and ill.[11] In this chapter, I extend this line of inquiry by considering what Clarissa's trauma meant—or just as tellingly, what it failed to mean—for those who grieved

[11] On the connection between God as master-signifier and Lacanian big Other, see Slavoj Žižek's discussion of the Symbolic Order in *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (New York: Verso, 1991), chap. 1.

her, thereby tracing the persistent equivocation between suffering's sense and senselessness that plagues the century's bourgeois tragic archive.

Take, for example, the semantic stakes of poetic justice according to the poet laureate, Colley Cibber. For while Lady Bradshaigh's response to the novel is perhaps its most well known, the laureate's fevered imprecation (cited in the epigram above) is certainly the most remarkable instance of one's discomfort with the tragic that I propose to examine here.[12] Cibber, the story goes, had heard that the "piteous, d——d, disgraceful pickle" Richardson had placed Clarissa in would end in her death, news that sent him into a near-apoplectic fit.[13] "G-d d—n [Richardson]," he erupted, voicing his betrayal by the bleakness of the novel's plot. Relaying the exchange to *Clarissa's* author, Laetitia Pilkington went on to observe: "I am not quite sure, whether Mr. Cibber is not so strongly enamoured of [Clarissa's] perfections, and touched by her distresses that, were they exhibited on the stage, he would not, like Don Quixote, rise up in wrath and rescue the lady."[14] Betraying Richardson's hasty conclusion that "the gentler sex" was to blame for the popularity of poetic justice (8:277), Pilkington invites Richardson to imagine the uproar his novel would cause were it performed onstage. As the tears welled up in Cibber's eyes, she carefully recorded, he cursed Richardson and Lovelace alike for their "final destruction" of the novel's

[12] *Correspondence of Richardson,* 4:198.

[13] Ibid., 2:172.

[14] Ibid., 4:198.

heroine—Sadists *avant la lettre*—wishing that he could enact just recompense by somehow forcing the narrative reconciliation of act and consequence.[15]

It's a strange moment, one that might be simply laughable were it not also for the desperate vehemence with which a public figure like Cibber tantrums over what amounts to a novel's ending. And yet, linger over the anecdote's details a bit longer and his aggrieved position, half-bargaining, half-threatening, becomes more of a curiosity. What lies behind this reaction? What for that matter accounts for the pronounced disconnection between Richardson's tragic novel and popular expectations for its ending? What sorts of concerns did Clarissa's death unearth in the experience of readers whose appetite for tragic suffering in the period was otherwise demonstrably healthy? What was it about her embrace of death that seemed so raw?

In what follows, I read *Clarissa* as a founding moment for modern trauma. Moving between the generalized anxieties voiced by Richardson's readers and those ostensively private affects explored in his complex narrative apparatus, I argue that the debate around Clarissa's suffering staged a contest over the possibility of its semantic fullness. It staged, in other words, a contest over her affliction's meaning, its causality and relation to agency, the contours of its pain, as well as the bearability of that experience. What was at stake in Clarissa's suffering—for herself, for her readers—was the seeming incomprehensibility of certain types of affliction, the way that, as Cathy Caruth notes, "knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma." In her pioneering work on the subject, Caruth

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[15] In fact, a recent biographer of Sade notes that he had the book brought to him during his 1779 imprisonment in Paris, adding that it was the key model for his subversions in *Justine* and *Juliette*. See Neil Schaeffer, *The Marqus de Sade: A Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 271. More telling perhaps is the Marquis' praise of Richardson's Lovelace, a master-course (he argued) in the various permutations of vice and amoral passion. See his "Idée sur les romans," in *Les Crimes de l'amour* [Brussels: 1881], 115).

positions psychic harm of this sort on a spectrum of epistemological problems haunting modernity, as a question of adequately representing a pain fundamentally unknowable to oneself.[16] Trauma is not (or not only) the event of wounding, but crucially she notes, its untimely incomprehensibility, the difficulty of "resituating [that wound] in our understanding" in its aftermath.[17] Not unlike a tragedy's awful reinstatement of order in a plot's denouement, trauma always yields its true import belatedly, in fragments of bitter recollection and retrojected purpose. To confront trauma is to attempt to make sense of a life's upheaval, to take that wounding and refashion its pain into a knowledge somehow constitutive of one's identity, somehow productive in its mourning.

Writing just before the emergence of trauma studies, Terry Castle explained Clarissa's epistolary silence following Lovelace's rape in somewhat similar terms: as a struggle for meaning by the traumatized heroine.[18] Indeed, Castle was willing to go further than that, arguing that what is disrupted in the novel is language's ability to cohere at all for Clarissa, who labors to make use of its "floating" signification throughout much of the text. One part deconstructive, another psychoanalytic, Castle's approach merges Clarissa, novel, and trauma, as "the voice which repeatedly fails to make itself heard" (a phrase echoed in

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[16] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 4. Derived from the ancient Greek for "wound," the word connotes a surgeon's incision, a fact that would be uninteresting perhaps, were it not also one of Lovelace's devilish metaphors for the rape (5:65). If one looks "trauma" up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, moreover, one finds that it's being used in physician's handbooks by the late seventeenth century in this rather narrow sense of "a wound from an external cause."

[17] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* 11.

[18] Terry Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's* Clarissa (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). Castle, like others, uses "trauma" to describe the rape and its aftereffects. See pp. 72 and 109, for example. On *Clarissa* and trauma in the context of the novel form, see also Helen Moglen's discussion of Richardson in *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), chap. two.

Caruth's notion of an unconscious wound's irrepressible complaint).[19] In this sense, the heroine's silence prefigures a later understanding of trauma as discursive impotency, as a key instance of the way that pain strips the actor of agency by "disassociat[ing] language and reference."[20] Trauma disturbs the normal referential function of one's discourse, which is to say its ability to tag and sort the world's various symbolic networks and thereby make meaningful statements about that world's features—most importantly perhaps, one's own place in it. Trauma excludes and nullifies, it silences and disempowers. "I am but a *cypher,*" Clarissa laments, "to give *him* [Lovelace, but Castle also implies the novel's reader] significance and myself *pain*" (4:39). Hence, in Jonathan Lamb's learned account of the novel's "rhetoric of suffering," Clarissa's recourse to the Job narrative replays a discursive tension between the impersonal brutality of law and the unique demands of the aggrieved, harmonizing the particulars of her experience by absorbing them into the language of biblical type.[21] The heroine's resort to Christian allegory and allusion is a way to foreground the arbitrariness of a world where her words carry little if any power.

Yet while I remain indebted to the connections forged between trauma studies and Castle's feminist deconstruction, as also the system-theoretical analysis of Lamb's work on Job, my account diverges from theirs in several respects. First, by emphasizing a range of performative modes and affective entanglements extending beyond the merely explanatory or referential functions of one's discourse, I stress the non-epistemic—though no less

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[19] Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers,* 22; cf. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* 4.

[20] Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers,* 134.

[21] Jonathan Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), chap. 11.

symbolic—states bound up in those attempts at giving one's suffering meaning.[22] As Robert C. Solomon notes: "Every emotion is a strategy," constitutive of our meanings, "a purposive attempt to structure our world in such a way as to maximize our sense of personal dignity."[23] Because of this, I want to push back against any shortsighted notion of trauma as a phenomenon primarily mediated at the level of the conceptual or intellective, as a skeptical problem of discourse and referentiality that divests the afflicted of power. In my view, to define trauma solely along this axis, though insightful in many respects, misses something quite fundamental and historically interesting about what its experience seemed to entail at midcentury, particularly for the devout like Clarissa for whom the constructive aftermath of the trauma process involved an elaborate performance of passions not necessarily unlinked to notions of agency. Far from meekly submissive, Clarissa's complicated relationship to her suffering—her "Why died I not from the womb?" evoking what Denise Riley calls the affect-soaked *why me?* of modern trauma rhetoric[24]—explores the way that pain and mental anguish can sustain actors even as it remains intellectually impenetrable. Rebuffing the easy etymological slippage between passion and passivity,

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[22] Thus, in "Religion As a Cultural System" (in *The Interpretation of Cultures* [New York: Basic Books, 1973]), Clifford Geertz regards the problem of suffering (which he sees as central to a religion's role in a culture) as having both intellective and affective aspects, both fundamentally concerned with anchoring "not just interpretations, but *interpretability*" (100) He puts the distinction this way: "Where the more intellective aspects of what Weber called the Problem of Meaning are a matter of affirming the ultimate explicability of experience, the affective aspects are a matter of affirming its ultimate sufferableness. As religion on one side anchors the power of our symbolic resources for formulating analytic ideas in an authoritative conception of the overall shape of reality, so on another side it anchors the power of our, also symbolic, resources for expressing emotions—moods, sentiments, passions, affections, feelings—in a similar conception of its pervasive tenor, its inherent tone and temper" (104).

[23] Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, Company, 1993), xviii.

[24] Denise Riley develops this line of argument in her chapter, "Some WHYs and *why mes*," in *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 59-70.

whereby suffering amounts to a state of disempowerment one simply endures,[25] Clarissa's suffering is also "a *kind* of action" she sees herself as undertaking, the practice of which engages that pain, if not finally deriving from it a precarious and highly personal, meaning.[26] In this way, the apparent passivity of the heroine's post-traumatic anguish (her "shining time," as Anna Howe will put it [4:221]) is recast as tragic agency.

Secondly, I seek to emphasize the public's role in mourning Richardson's heroine. For if trauma is understood as a species of agonized *poesis* concerned with probing its significance, it also glosses anew Tom Keymer's claim that the struggle over *Clarissa*'s interpretation foreshadowed the practices of twentieth-century reader-response. In taking partial ownership over the meaning of Clarissa's suffering, in refuting its necessity and sharing in its pain and voicing their shock at its occurrence, figures like Lady Bradshaigh and Cibber were fulfilling the participatory role Richardson envisioned for his readers, who were to be "if not Authors, Carvers" of its text (a phrase he used in defending the ambiguity

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[25] Thus, Cynthia Halpern: "Suffering is what cannot be acted on….It is patience as opposed to agency" (*Suffering, Politics, Power: A Genealogy in Modern Political Theory* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002], 10). Sara Ahmed notes that etymology has been used to reify a hierarchy of reason over emotion: "It is significant that the word 'passion' and the word 'passive' share the same root in the Latin word for 'suffering' (*passio*). To be passive is to be enacted upon, as a negation that is already felt as suffering. The fear of passion is tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others," (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* [New York: Routledge, 2004], 2). Likewise, Lauren Berlant makes suffering's "etymological articulation of pain and patience"—that is, suffering's atmospheric quality, its looming and constancy over the subject—central to the affective turn in her essay, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics," in *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law,* eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 78-9. The historian of emotion, Thomas Dixon, contends that this linkage is often at odds with the moral entelechies that passion was taken to embody well into the nineteenth century. He notes, for example, that the distinction between reason and emotion is by and large anachronistic, a product of the secularizing discourses of Enlightenment psychology whereby emotions became states of mind one simply "has." In his view, the historical record tends to support the notion that passions are central to agency and action, not (as we often take them) their negation. See his study, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71.

[26] This is Tala Asad's formulation. As he argues: "What a subject experiences as painful, and how, are not simply mediated culturally and physically, *they are themselves modes of living a relationship*. The ability to live such relationships over time transforms pain from a passive experience into an active one, and thus defines ways of living sanely in the world." See his "Thinking about Agency and Pain," in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 84.

of the novel's ending as late as 1754).[27] Readers of Richardson's novel mourned its protagonist by engaging in a collective hermeneutics of suffering in this way, asking along with Clarissa why and how her affliction was to be borne, often confessing its necessity with incredulousness and ambivalence.

I remain just as interested, therefore, in the broader concerns voiced by readers who remained unsatisfied by this turn, and I take the very fact of this debate's eruption in the public sphere as evidence of a new urgency demanded by the suffering body. Or rather, we can take it as evidence of the era's eroding confidence in certain answers to loss and existential misfortune signified by those afflictions. These are mostly religious answers of course, although I want to be careful to qualify that this should not be taken to imply—despite Richardson's alarm at his "worse than Sceptical age" (8:291)—that secularism was left in its wake; what is the tidy economics of poetic justice if not a systematic theology in miniature, after all? In fact, the analogy between the poetic and theological in this respect had a history going back to confessedly orthodox critics like John Dennis who assured readers that poetic justice was a mode of representing the deep moral order enveloping the world. As will become clear, Richardson challenged this line on both aesthetic and theological grounds in the 1751 postscript, maintaining instead that Providence was finally incomprehensible, its impenetrability an instance of the sublime at once potentially tragic and scandalously true-to-life.[28] The truth of middling life, of bourgeois tragedy, was that its

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[27] See Keymer's discussion of the phrase in *Richardson's* Clarissa *and the Eighteenth-Century Reader,* 74ff. He lifts the quotation from a letter to Lady Bradshaigh dated February 25, 1754.

[28] Chad Loewen-Schmidt's recent article in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* "Pity, or the Providence of the Body in Richardson's *Clarissa*," (22, no. 1 [Fall 2009]: 1-28) argues that sentimental pity emerges in the period as part of a rhetoric of design and providential care.

ordinary suffering could be soberingly unjust, its sense deferred and displaced, a wound that never fully heals (at least not, as he qualified, on this side of the grave).

I will consider the context of these debates in more detail shortly, but my point here is that the social energy expended in debating *Clarissa*'s tragic ending is symptomatic of important changes to the social imaginary that I have been outlining in relation to bourgeois tragedy (such as a positive revaluation of ordinary life and the slow emergence of a sense of the dignity of middling people that thereby rendered suffering acutely problematic). Indeed, central to understanding the novel's reception—and a key to locating its importance to the tragic archive this study assembles—is that such overdetermined cultural debates over the tragic suggest that a new, modern attachment to life was in the process of solidifying as both a bourgeois value to be pursued and an affective relation to the world. According to several recent critical accounts, the backdrop to this is an emerging concern of the era: the possibility of "secular happiness," the pursuit of which comes to assume the basic goodness of this-worldly pleasures as well as the affective comforts that make up its ephemeral experience.[29] Personal happiness was becoming an immanent value, influenced not only by strains of skeptical and Enlightened thought but also—crucially and almost paradoxically—the lived habits of early capitalism that were often joined to various forms of British Protestantism. One need not, for this reason, interpret this movement in terms of the old "subtraction" of model of secularism, whereby religion's ideological features are peeled away to reveal a disenchanted, rational world. They tend to be mutually constitutive, rather, the same rehearsals of piety evidence of their need to be spoken aloud for example.

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[29] See, for example, Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Brian Michael Norton, *Fiction and the Philosophy of Happiness: Ethical Inquiries in the Age of Enlightenment* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012).

More telling for the current discussion, however, is that changes in the era's notions of this-worldly happiness also had troubling (perhaps unintended) consequences for the way suffering was mediated and imagined. If, after all, happiness was to be found in this life rather than the next—a promise held out implicitly by partisans of poetic justice—what was to be made of its negative implication? What was to be made of a life emaciated by the agonies of trauma? Poetic justice was one way to get around this, its practice offering readers and theatre-goers a way of redressing the injustice of this world by enacting a deep moral order in the world it represented. A mode of generic wish-fulfillment, poetic justice signals a culture's ambivalent attachment to this life. Rather than simply or merely an exercise of mawkish sentimentality then, the poetically just ending is a symptom of a culture whose beliefs and modes of being are felt (although perhaps not always acknowledged to be) in crisis.

Moreover, one effect of these cultural changes is the very possibility of trauma in its modern sense, of trauma as an existential wounding that questions interpretability itself and whose appeal to the providential elicits just as many questions as it answers. Hence, my claim that this moment not only seeks to secure the positive content of meaning for Clarissa's suffering, but also raise the question of its very possibility or necessity. The very question that suffering like Clarissa's might need or demand the sort of calculative accounting that would make sense of its occurrence in the here-and-now—rather than being simply her lot or an instance of fate's capriciousness, unworthy of special comment or hand-wringing—is itself historically interesting, suggesting that (precisely) *traumatic* suffering is a unique effect of contingent cultural forms coming into their own as part of modernity's tectonics. The urgency with which one's suffering demands a higher meaning is in this

sense, a byproduct of a culture's rising standards of living, social habits, and contemporary ideologies. The question then is: how we might conceive of trauma historically for the mid-eighteenth century—well before its advent as a pathology or as a key term for a skeptical problem haunting psychoanalytic and deconstructive discourses? What sorts of rhetorics, cultural forms, and performative acts, we might ask, were available for thinking about or working through instances of acute existential misfortune? The era's coincident interest in bourgeois tragedy as a genre provides perhaps the clearest present example of this aspect of modernization. *Clarissa*'s death, at once the plenitude of sense and the disclosure of pain's senselessness, marks twilight between ancient and modern.

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Before proceeding, I want to return to the contexts of Richardson's 1751 postscript in order to clarify how anxieties about the possibility of happiness and the meanings of suffering played out in debates over the novel's tragic finale. The postscript is a useful point of reference here, as it documents the counterarguments Richardson advanced against with those who "*insisted that Poetical Justice* required that [Clarissa be made happy]" (8:277) in the years leading up to the novel's conclusion. As noted above, many wanted the author to reprise the dramatic closing of his debut novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740); they argued that the reformation of the novel's principal antagonist, Lovelace, and his marriage to Clarissa would affirm the providential narrative of virtue's triumph over vice, in effect righting the wrongs done to her. And in fact, readers didn't just clamor for retribution to be visited on the novel's offenders; in response to her afflictions, they claimed, positive reward was due the novel's heroine. If Pamela's marriage was a way to ascend rank (thus, one

unauthorized sequel promised *Pamela's Conduct in High Life*[30]), surely Clarissa's suffering ought to be the source of this-worldly gain for the aspiring bourgeois. Her moral resolution seemed to many to have the power to beget its own reward, to prevail over the evils that threatened it by sheer force of goodness.

A holdover from disputes over the morality of the stage, the doctrine of poetic justice elevated the reformed rake to a well-known dramatic trope, often with little consideration of its moral hazards. After all, to grant happiness to Clarissa in a marriage to her captor, meant foregoing the punishment that the latter clearly deserved. Indeed, much good work—by Frances Ferguson and Sandra Macpherson, to name only the two best examples—has shown just how alarming the implications of this view are, the way that calls for a "fortunate ending" remain complicit in patriarchal laws that protected men (like Lovelace), who were willing to nullify charges of rape by marrying their victim after the fact.[31] Hence, the novel's rakish antagonist: "MARRIAGE, *with these women, thou seest, Jack, is an atonement for all we can do to them. A true dramatic recompense!"* (6:227) Amending her initial request that the two principal characters marry, Lady Bradshaigh's alternate ending to the novel thus tried to sidestep the marriage plot's most troubling implications by reframing the possible outcomes for the novel's final act. The margins of her copy thus have its heroine

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[30] John Kelly's *Pamela's Conduct in High Life* (London: Chandler, 1741) was only one of many hackneyed continuations of Richardson's first novel, but what makes it unique for my purposes is its adaptation by Thomas Hull for the stage in 1782 as a domestic tragedy. Having exposed herself to the viccissitudes of high life, Pamela's fate becomes tragic in a way it never was as member of Crusoe's "upper part of low life." Baker et al. remark: "Acted at Drury Lane, 1782. Never printed. This was a prose tragedy, in imitation of Lillo and Moore. It met with a very cold reception, and was performed only three nights" (See David Erskine Baker, Isaac Reed, and Stephen Jones, *Biographia Dramatica,* 3 vols. [London: Longman, 1812], 2:229). The manuscript remains part of the Henry E. Huntington Library's Larpent Collection. On what William B. Warner terms the "Pamela Media Event," and Kelly's sequel in particular, see his *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 227-30.

[31] Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," *Representations* 20 (Fall 1987): 88-112; and Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

restored to her estate and living in comfortable financial independence, there to "have recover'd her health, & liv'd to her hearts Content" in the company of friends.[32] Still, many of the novel's readers maintained that through such a turn—as if forcibly, the locution stripping her of agency in one final irony—Clarissa would be "made Happy" (8:277).

The marriage plot in particular therefore, belied a shortsighted version of poetic justice, one that muddied the potential of carrot and stick, motivating factors that Richardson himself acknowledged to be in some sense at work in *Clarissa*. In a concession to his readers tacked onto the final pages of the postscript, he granted that the novel did end with a restrained version of poetic justice insofar as Lovelace, his accomplices Tomlinson and Mrs. Sinclair, and even the Harlowes were "exemplarily punished" for their part in the tragedy. Richardson's punitive language underscores (or perhaps overstates) the natural consequences he takes the novel to depict, its moral order an instance of "organic-" or "natural providence" (in Jonathan Dollimore's terminology) whereby "the cumbersome apparatus of dogma and metaphysics" is silently integrated into the tragedy's realistic teleology.[33] The converse of this outcome was also possible though, as Richardson claimed by citing Anna and a reformed Belford as examples of poetic justice's rewards. Thus, their kindness to the novel's heroine, posthumously confirmed, leaves them "*signally happy,*" in effect naturalizing consequences in a psychology of affect (8:289).

These easy concessions, however, skirted the real issue. It was Clarissa's suffering that readers wanted rewarded; it was her loss that provoked a need for answers. Cibber's

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[32] Barchas, *Annotations*, 140.

[33] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 90-1. For an insightful discussion of the development of "natural consequences" in eighteenth-century moral discourse, see Susan Neiman's *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 47-8.

curse in fact conflates these two demands, equating the secular benefits of poetic justice with the very meaning of one's suffering. Merit accrues as a sort of moral capital, according to his view, so that the failure of poetic justice to valorize this pain, to bring about the tangible pleasures of happiness in the present, is practically tantamount to that pain's ultimate senselessness. Poetic justice in this way offered a vision of the world's moral order, underwriting cause and effect in a discourse at once economic, theological, and aesthetic. If the rehearsal of fortunate endings in the period's narrative and drama served to reinscribe the etiological linkage between virtue and reward in the period—which is to say an economics of Providence where just deserts are meted out in this life—then Clarissa's death implied for Cibber that Providence is fundamentally unintelligible or capricious. The threat that he would no longer believe in Providence or an abiding eternal Wisdom were Richardson's novel to end in tragedy, discloses an underlying anxiety about suffering's potential senselessness, an encroaching fear that a world unlinked to the mechanisms of justice has no higher order or moral law by which it coheres. Noting that the years leading up to *Clarissa*'s publication formed "a critical period in which the orthodox spirituality of an equitable afterlife was being replaced by the aesthetic spirituality of an equitable denouement," Michael McKeon concludes that the emergence of poetic justice can be read as evidence of the contradictions inherent to secularization. Poetic justice, in other words, imagined a Providence that many felt to be under threat or pressure, marking a longing for its assurances as much as a fear of its absence.[34]

Ironically then, poetic justice granted the regularity of law to providential discourse, arising in part as a response to the rationalizing energies unleashed by the Reformation in

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[34] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 124-5.

Protestant England. Of course, in some corners this rationalizing tendency was slow in coming or in fact, never arrived at all; for many believers, poetic justice would always be a trite fiction, domesticating a God whose will was absolute and uncompromising. Predestinarian branches of the Reformation, mostly Calvinist in orientation, were especially quick to emphasize the mysterious sovereignty of God's election, especially in light of the depraved indifference of an unjust, fallen world. Thus, George Lillo's tragedies seem to reflect the harshness of his Dutch Reformed upbringing, the dramas depicting the inscrutability of the divine's intervening judgments. But as the sheer amount of extant volumes of providentialist literature—both popular and technical—confirm, the belief that human fortune and misfortune appeared random was by no means limited to the Calvinist branches alone. Hence, Samuel Butler's verdict that "The world is so vile a thing that Providence commonly makes Fooles, and Knaves happy, and good men miserable in it, to let us know, there is no great Difference between Happiness and misery here."[35] And as Richardson himself would aver in *Clarissa*'s postscript: "God by Revelation teaches us he has…[placed mankind] here only in a state of *probation,* [where] he hath so intermingled good and evil as to necessitate them to look forward to a more equal distribution of both" (8:280). For many, providence could be rather fickle in its favors even as churchmen assured them to the contrary.

In his recent account of the dialectics of realism, Fredric Jameson argues that providence was vital to early realist novels because it named the causally obscure so as to make sense of action. Not unlike the earlier epic, providence gave form to what Lukács had called the epic's extensive totality, bathing its represented world with the "immanent, in the

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[35] Butler, *Characters and Passages from Note-Books*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 346.

sense that meaning is inherent in all its objects and details, all its facts, all its events."[36] The recurrence of the providential in the era's texts works out, as a function of plot: "the euphoria of a secular salvation otherwise inexpressible in material or social terms."[37] So if one way to read the early novel is as an attempt to understand the interrelations between commerce and agency during a period in which both the novel's generic conventions and capitalist social conventions are under cultural negotiation, "providence" and "fate" become ways for causality to be understood as new and unrecognizable market practices emerge, practices as yet uncodified by the repetition of collective social routine. Thrust into new forms of collectivity, moral agents revert to archaic concepts (like chance, fortune, and fate) in order to make sense of causality when antecedent causes prove obscure; perhaps paradoxically therefore, Christian Thorne suggests, the invocation of providence often tends "to signal its absence" in such narratives.[38] Fortune comes to name an epistemic threshold for the early novel, the point at which causality becomes seemingly irrational if not wholly inscrutable, when causality must warrant reason from on high.[39] Providence moves its characters along, granting their world meaning; fortune closes the novelistic circle.

At the same time, as Keith Thomas has influentially chronicled, theories of providence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attempted to fold older notions of "fortune" and chance" into an overarching, more mechanistic view of moral causality that

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[36] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 210-11.

[37] Fredric Jameson, "Ideology of the Text," in *Situations of Theory*, vol. 1 of *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971-1986* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 52.

[38] Christian Thorne, "Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident If You Please," *Modern Language Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2003): 323-347, 335.

[39] Ibid., 325-6.

went hand-in-hand with certain forms of disenchantment.[40] "The doctrine of providences," he explains, "was a conscientious attempt to impose order on the apparent randomness of the human fortunes by proving that, in the long run, virtue was rewarded and vice did not go unpunished. In place of unacceptable moral chaos was erected the edifice of God's omnipotent sovereignty."[41] Even though this conclusion remain hotly contested, arguments in support of the order and intelligibility of providence continued to develop in and throughout the moral philosophy of the turn of the eighteenth century, much of which tried to reconcile theological ethics with shifting models of commerce. What emerged over that period was an increasingly detailed understanding of the role of the human to better account for early psychologies of self-interest and economic law.[42] Many echoed the line advanced by Bishop Richard Cumberland, who argued that one's self-interest worked as one part of a rational whole, materializing providence in a complex series of reciprocal mechanisms. A contemporary of the Cambridge Platonists, Cumberland's *De Legibus Naturae* (1672; translated into English under the title *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature*, 1727) saw the natural order as both mechanistic and harmonious, so that causality was suffused with the intelligence of a benevolent Creator.[43] In contrast to older models of

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[40] *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 110. Charles Taylor accounts for this shift in similar terms.. See his, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 157-269.

[41] Thomas, *Decline of Magic,* 107.

[42] On this point in particular see Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 176-185; and Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1972), 55.

[43] Milton Myers, *The Soul of Modern Economic Man: Ideas of Self-Interest, Thomas Hobbes to Adam Smith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 41. Myers notes that Cumberland imagined the mechanized physical world as a series of finely tuned vortices in mutual tension: "The outstanding feature of the operation of Cumberland's 'whole material system' might be described as one of reciprocation and accommodation. Parts move towards and then away from each other in a pattern of mutual adaptation and adjustment." For a discussion of theological and philosophical arguments from design that resonates with my account here, see Colin Jager's recent *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

divine intervention, providence came to treated as part of a Newtonian world, directing finite causes according to universal laws. Such laws were knowable in principle too, organizing disparate interests into a beneficial whole.

Lovelace's cynical appropriation of Bernard Mandeville's satirical *Fable of the Bees* (1714) is likely meant to undermine this optimism. In a letter to his fellow rake Belford, he justifies his treatment of Clarissa by claiming: "At worst, I am entirely within my worthy friend Mandeville's assertion, that *private vices are public benefits*" (5:222). Moments like these remind us that Lovelace's actions are often (in the words of Christopher Hill) "sordidly financial" in the novel, his "providences" (a word Richardson substitutes for the much less provocative "precautionaries" following the third edition) simply the veiled machinations that aim at ownership of her "by deed of purchase and settlement."[44] But this episode also reminds us that arguments from design also served an important political purpose, for they were often taken to reconcile or refute Epicurean and Hobbesian notions of self-interest that seemed to undermine law and social order. Figures like the Third Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson argued that natural bonds of sentiment suffused the moral order, in this way balancing the mechanistic aspects of providential design alongside Stoic notions of an innately sympathetic impulse or "moral sense" in humankind.[45] Thus, for Shaftesbury, tacit calculations assumed a central role in the morality of everyday life: "[It is] philosophy to inquire where, and in what respect one may be most a loser, which are the greatest gains, the most profitable exchanges, since everything in this world goes by exchange."[46]

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[44] Christopher Hill, "Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times," *Essays in Criticism* 4, no. 4 (1955): 315-340, 323. For Lovelace's devilish use of providence, see *Clarissa* [1751], 5:160.

[45] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 246.

[46] Quoted in Viner, *The Role of Providence*, 69-70.

Indeed, it's very possible that Richardson's earlier work in *Pamela* reflects this strain of thought, perhaps received through friends like the Reverend Patrick Delany, for whom Richardson had printed sermons that claimed: "Rewards and Punishments are the great springs and wheels that set the whole world in motion."[47] Likewise, church moralists such as Bishop Joseph Butler attempted to reclaim psychologies of self-interest as part of a properly Anglican theology incorporating elements of natural philosophy. Butler's theory, for instance, was overtly apologetic in character, seeking to rationalize the design of this moral economy as a proof of God's omnibenevolence.[48] While he made allowances for social evil, he also argued that one's benevolence and enlightened self-interest were ultimately identical, thereby producing simultaneous civic and personal goods. In this way, some church figures underwrote a moral economy in which virtuous action entailed a certain recompense for the actor. As a 1710 sermon titled, *Providence Vindicated as Permitting Wickedness* argued:

> *The nature of things has link'd duty and happiness, disobedience and misery together*. From whence 'twas obvious to observe farther, that it is *a policy* of *heaven* transcendent and truly Godlike, thus to govern Man by the *Springs* and *Instincts* of his own nature; *rewarding* him for loving and taking care of himself, and *punishing* him, on the other side, for being his own *enemy*, and making himself miserable.[49]

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[47] James Louis Fortuna, *"The Unsearchable Wisdom of God": A Study of Providence in Richardson's* Pamela, University of Florida Humanities Monographs 49 (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1980), 47. For the Delany reference, see his "The Duty of Masters to Their Servants," in *Twenty Sermons Upon Social Duties and Their Opposite Vices* (London: J. and J. Rivington, 1750), 228.

[48] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 225; Myers, *The Soul of Modern Economic Man*, 59-60.

[49] Robert D'Oyly, *Providence Vindicated, as Permitting Wickedness and Mischief, in a Sermon Preach'd at Bath* (London: H. Clements, 1710), 3. The emphases are original.

Recast as "Nature" by many, providence was figured as a series of hidden causes and exchanges embedded in the world, decisively linking merit to reward, vice to punishment. Unsurprisingly, Thomas adds, "the belief that men usually got their just deserts" tended to flourish most among the swelling numbers of the British middling rank, for whom commercial aspiration and upward mobility confirmed what Max Weber long ago canonized as the Protestant work ethic.[50] A model for an emerging capitalist order, it's easy to believe in the "nature of things" when this simply confirms what a social rank was already coming to believe about itself.

So whether as the equivocal constellation of fate and accident (where providence names the obscure causes of an event) or as the springs of Pamela's "virtue rewarded" (where it appears as a principle of the world's design), providence offered tremendous explanatory power for Britons at precisely the moment of bourgeois tragedy's heyday. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the doctrine of poetic justice, flourishing as it did in close proximity to these providentialist debates, although rarely was it invoked with such urgency as that of *Clarissa's* readers. Yet as their response to the tragedy suggests, and as McKeon argues, the rhetoric of poetic justice had replaced (whether consciously or not) more traditional notions of providence in the very process of distilling its insights. Poetic justice thereby offered assurances of the moral order's regularity and order, compensating textually for the otherwise obscure vicissitudes of the providential.[51] Note, for

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[50] Thomas, *Decline of Magic,* 112. Thus, for Weber, Protestantism's distinct emphasis on the 'vocational calling' engendered a this-worldly asceticism, a rationalization of one's time and labor, the material benefits of which not only confirmed the agent's salvation, but ironically, eroded their ideological basis in religion over time. See *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism *with Other Writings on the Rise of the West,* trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[51] McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel,* 125.

instance, Thomas Rymer's insistence in 1678 that a play confirms its spectator's position by displaying moral consequences in stark and unmistakable terms. According to him, the play is granted sense (what Jameson called the immanence of realism, but Rymer terms the "constant order…harmony and beauty of Providence") by the "necessary relation and chain, whereby the causes and effects, the vertues and rewards, the vices and punishments are proportion'd and link'd together."[52]

John Dennis, who did more than anyone else to systematize poetic justice for the eighteenth-century tragic stage, made a similar claim, noting that the regularity of a divine and moral order ought to find its expression in the poet's work lest it blaspheme the Creator.[53] Thus, in his 1701 tome, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* he argued that: "every Tragedy ought to be a solemn Lecture, inculcating a particular Providence, and showing it plainly protecting the good and chastizing the bad, or at least violent; and that if it is otherwise, it is either an empty amusement, or a scandalous and pernicious Libel upon the government of the world."[54] Policing good and evil in this way, poetic justice had a didactic purpose, yes, but one grounded in the confident assertion of the world's deep moral order, something tragedy reflects as "an Image of the Divinity."[55]

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[52] *The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practices of the Ancients and by the Common Sense of All Ages* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1692), 140-1.

[53] Richard H. Tyre, "Versions of Poetic Justice in the Early Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Philology* 54 (January 1957): 29-44, 34-5. For a general literary historical view of the doctrine, see also Michael A. Quinlan, *Poetic Justice in the Drama: The History of an Ethical Principle in Literary Criticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1912).

[54] John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (London: Richard Parker, 1701). The quotation occurs on the unnumbered ninth page of the volume's Epistle Dedicatory to John Sheffield, Lord Mulgrave. Martin C. Battestin's classic study, *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) sees in much of the era's literature a similar concern with depicting the well-ordered design of the natural world. For him, poetic justice "is a reflection of the faith of [this] age in Order" (213). Where he sees confidence in its aesthetic reiterations, I see a deep and abiding unease.

[55] John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (London: George Strahan, 1704), 17.

Anticipating much of the language central to the providentialist literature, poetry is understood to be "an exact imitation of Nature…[which] is nothing but that Rule and Order and Harmony which we find in the visible Creation," its task like that of religion: "to move the affections."[56] Hence, Dennis takes tragedy as that art form that depicts the "many effects of a Dreadful Providence"[57] with the marked "Regularity" of a system, policing affect via plot: "The great Disorders of the world are caus'd by great Passions, and they are punish'd by Tragedy."[58] In cases like this, the rhetoric of poetic justice is functionally indistinguishable from that of the providentialist tracts above. Moreover, it's worth citing Richardson's own defense of *Pamela* to this effect, which maintained the converse corollary that "Providence never fails to reward….God will in his own good Time, extricate [the virtuous reduced to a low estate], by means unforeseen, out of their present Difficulties, and reward them with Benefits unhop'd for."[59] Less than a decade before *Clarissa*, Richardson seemed to go along with Rymer's secularizing mandate to avoid a "hell behind the scenes."[60]

It would seem then that the crisis of faith evoked by *Clarissa*'s tragic ending simply confirmed the anxieties that occasioned poetic justice and much of the providentialist literature to begin with. This should not be taken to imply that these debates were in any way settled by the middle decades of the eighteenth century, but rather that these concerns —whether acknowledged openly in skepticism, or turned over privately in one's mind, or actively negated in apologetic argument and assurances to the contrary—persisted and

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[56] Dennis, *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* 53.

[57] Dennis, epistle dedicatory to *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* xi.

[58] Dennis, *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry,* 55.

[59] Quoted in Fortuna, *Unsearchable Wisdom,"*22.

[60] Rymer, *Tragedies of the Last Age,* 26.

informed depictions of suffering on page and stage well throughout the century. Indeed, if Peter Brooks is to be believed, the melodramatic stage more than a hundred years later preserved the essence of poetic justice in what he termed the "moral occult," defined as "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality…the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth" that undergird the world with a hidden moral legibility.[61] Owing much to the domestic tragedies that I have been assembling here, I would add, the moral occult gives meaning to the misfortunes that plague an increasingly private and domestic domain of values. If this is an instance of secularization then, it's a secularization that—not unlike Jameson's own appropriation of the providential answer-position—evacuates certain areas of content, but largely retains its archaic forms. At its heart, as Lauren Berlant notes in a related context, the sentimentality that animates poetically just or melodramatic endings constitutes: "a command and a demand for the real to show up and be adequate to fantasy."[62] Motivated by wish, poetic justice arises in times of collective anxiety or uncertainty, enacting a world one hopes for as a way of redressing the world one suspects to actually exist. Like some idealized bourgeois home, it comforts and eases after enduring a harsh, prosaic world. If anything therefore, the endurance and compelling force of poetic justice borders on re-enchantment, haunted by what it might mean if it all means nothing.

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[61] *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 5. For the concept of legibility and moral law, see his discussion of Claudel and Balzac on p.141ff. Carolyn Williams' recent discussion of the moral occult as wish-fulfillment in Victorian melodrama is especially good, locating a common ancestor in the bourgeois tragedies of the eighteenth century. See her, "Melodrama" in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature,* ed. Kate Flint (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. 206.

[62] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 17.

Poetic justice thus arises out of an ambivalence, its enduring popularity indicative of a public by and large disappointed or anxious about its disenchantment, eager to restore a sanctity to the ordinary. The moral occult, Brooks goes on to clarify, is in reality a profound cultural longing for meaning in an era of early industrialization, and in its own way, a Romantic rejection of realist modes. In a later chapter, I will make a similar argument by which to understand the emergence of the sentimental novel as a reaction to the harsh realities unearthed in bourgeois tragedy, but the point is anticipated in the way that poetic justice held out the possibility for meaning in the face of one's personal traumas. For eighteenth-century Britons, the insistence that poetic justice depicted the world truthfully—a key to Dennis' argument, recall—in many ways signaled the aesthetic doctrine's motivation in fear, its deep (if unspoken) disappointment about this life while at the same time*,* an intense attachment to living it. Whether the erosion of traditional Christian belief made secular happiness a newly pressing concern or vice versa (as Weber ultimately suggested[63]), what's crucial here is the intense investment in ordinary, secular life encoded in every instance of poetic justice. In light of this, it's unsurprising that the "trial narratives" which Vivasvan Soni locates in the period would come to dominate much of the century's fiction, for in that form narrative could offer assurances of the tangible possibility of personal happiness in the present. Trials maintain the occult optimism that pain is a temporary state on the way to a compensating reward, after all.[64]

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[63] Weber, *Protestant Work Ethic,* 153.

[64] On the trial narrative as a mistrial of the tragic, see my introduction above, pp. 21-3. In his discussion of theodicy and modernization as mutually constitutive discourses, Odo Marquard suggests that the systemic forms of philosophical optimism are outlived by the "theodicy motive of compensation," defined as "the idea that the evils that are present are at any rate adequately balanced by goods" ("Unburdenings: Theodicy Motives in Modern Philosophy," in *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies,* trans. Robert M. Wallace [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 21).

What's puzzling then, is not that readers clamored for a poetically just ending to *Clarissa,* but rather that bourgeois tragedy should have arisen at all during the same period, its Dionysian energies repeatedly opening old wounds, affirming the value of this life precisely—and paradoxically—by destroying it. The archive, in other words, enacted for its readers and spectators the negating effects of trauma, enacted loss and upheaval, repeatedly asking *why* they suffered and how, in the absence of a clear explanation, one might grieve its occurrence. Which again is not to say that the archive serves as a mere prolepsis of the secular, despite its more radical implications (many of which, as we will see, find voice in the literal and figural prosaisms of later bourgeois tragedies). As Richardson made clear in his tragedy's postscript, the novel followed a "religious plan" that depicted "the great lessons of Christianity,"[65] a sentiment that one finds echoed in many of the archive's extant texts. He worried, for example, that "religion was never so low as at present," that the pleasures of this life were corrupting so that: "self-denial and mortification [was] blotted out of the catalogue of christian [sic] virtues: And a taste even to wantonness for out-door pleasure and luxury, to the general exclusion of domestic as well as public virtue, [is] industriously promoted among all ranks and degrees of people" (8:279). If anything, he argued, his tragedy would aid his readers in contemplating the impermanence and frailty of this admittedly good life. He warned Lady Bradshaigh, as the novel's final chapters neared publication in 1748, that: "If [death] is become so terrible to human Nature it is Time to familiarize it to us."[66] Such foreboding would seem to disclose an anarchic pessimism to Richardson, a dark promise of the tragedy's manic power to destroy, were it not typically

[65] This phrasing is in the first edition used by the Angus Ross' Penguin edition. See p.1495. Richardson modifies the latter phrase in 1751 to read "doctrines" rather than "lessons" (8:279).

[66] *Correspondence of Richardson*, 4:132.

qualified by its author's pieties: "A Writer who follows Nature and pretends to keep the Christian system in his eye, cannot make a Heaven of this World."[67] If there was to be any true and lasting justice for Clarissa, it would only come through the passage of death, a passage she undergoes at once alone alone and under the careful, woeful scrutiny of countless others.

For Richardson the depiction of bourgeois life he undertook in *Clarissa*—one that claimed to "follow Nature" in its unflinching realism—represented a world in which "good and evil happen alike to ALL MEN on this side of the grave" (8:281), one where the consolations of faith offered only cold comfort to too many of his readers. Here and throughout the postscript, he relied on Addison's theologized critique of poetic justice (or rather, as the the *Spectator* 40 recast it, "anti-providential" justice), charging many of the era's melodramatic tragedies with an unwillingness to leave their audiences uncomfortable, preferring instead to satisfy them with a dim imitation of pity and terror. If all will end well, he notes, tragic passions are only ever superficially excited, the play's tepid "tenderness" as Richard Steele put it in the *Tatler* in 1709, all but ensuring the tragedy's mediocrity.[68] But this of course is exactly the problem we've been tracing, for despite promises of an eventual heavenly reward, the novel asked its readers to stare, with Clarissa, into a representational void, to make peace with pain and death and those affects one would much rather avoid. It didn't matter for Cibber and others that her death would end in paradise: "My mind is so hurt with the thought of her being violated, that were I to see her in Heaven, sitting on the knees of the blessed Virgin and crowned with glory, her suffering would still make me feel

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[67] *Correspondence of Richardson*, 4:225.

[68] ***The Tatler*, ed. George A. Aitken, 4 vols. (London: Duckworth and Co., 1898), 2:233. Change to Bond edition**

horror, horror distilled."[69] The memory of trauma haunts its reader, turning this private violation into a collective lament for the profanation of cultural values. Which is not to say that *Clarissa*'s publication itself was an instance of collective trauma, only that the moment signals a traumatic process being undergone in the social imaginary, material evidence—in the particulars of a reception history—of the difficulty with which suffering was mediated as part of modernization. Across performance and narrative then, the genre stands as a record of the ways in which a social rank was forced to come to terms with affliction; *Clarissa,* I'll argue now, is its great exemplar.

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I want to turn here to consider Richardson's text in more detail, for if debates over the novel's ending reveal a culture's ambivalent attachment to the present, Clarissa's response to her trauma provides another angle by which to view these investments. By this, I mean only to shift the focus of my analysis to the first person of the narrative, remaining aware of the continuities between the "interior" and "exterior" sites of semantic production. In fact, as I have already been suggesting in my reading of the novel's reception, these two orders of cultural making were practically inseparable, easy evidence that *il n'y pas de hors-texte* when it comes to the public sphere in which the early novel emerged, so that upon final analysis the novel's life among the reading public is constitutive of the narrative itself, as much a part of the story of how Clarissa is mourned. Richardson's self-consciousness about his work and correspondence with readers at every point of his fiction's development has been amply documented by critics and biographers alike to this end. Likewise, his propensity to dramatize his works by enacting its letters found an audience in the frequent

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[69] *Correspondence of Richardson*, 4:198.

makeshift salons where he read aloud to friends and acquaintances, offering on-the-spot clarification and an almost endless capacity for *midrash* on the true import of its numerous episodes, moving by turns in and out of the novel's printed words. And yet the preceding discussion has only hinted obliquely at some of the novel's more performative elements, the way in which Richardson's texts asked readers to consider *how* one suffers, not just *why*. As one of Richardson's readers was to put it, the author's aim in his tragic novel was to "new-Model [the] Affections"—a sentiment echoed in Hugh Blair's 1783 judgment that domestic tragedy "inculcates on men the proper government of their passions"—so that the intimacy it evoked by "writing to the moment" offered its readers at once a how-to manual for the art of suffering and an exercise in those affects.[70] Thus Sarah Fielding captured the doubleness of the reader's position, Richardson's ability to evoke in careful tableaux both a tragedy's horrified identification with and pitying dissociation from a suffering felt by many to be traumatic: "We feel all the Distresses he paints; we not only weep for, but with *Clarissa*."[71]

As Mark Seltzer explains, this elision of interior and exterior, presentation with representation, in many ways characterizes the essence of trauma, an experience which "devolve[s] on a basic uncertainty as to the subject's and the body's distance, or failure of distance with respect to representation."[72] And it's exactly this aesthetic and affective problem, as I have been arguing, that Lillo's best work exploits and explores in the 1730s, a problem which will be cultivated later in prose tragedy's adoption of "writing to the

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[70] Quoted in *Samuel Richardson, Clarissa: Preface, Hints of Prefaces, and Postscripts,* ed. R. F. Brissenden, Augustan Reprint Society No. 103 (Los Angeles: William Andrew Clark Memorial Library, 1964), 8. Cf. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,* 3 vols. (Dublin: Whiteston et al., 1783), 3:335.

[71] Fielding, *Remarks,* 49. The italics here are original, but the context indicates that the heroine of the novel—and not the novel itself—is meant.

[72] Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (1997): 3-26, 11.

moment" in the 1750s as an aesthetic of immediacy and thus emotional urgency. The key link in this genealogy, I think, is Richardson's work during the years that intervened, which already by the mid-1740s was quite clearly reaching after a language and fictive method by which to mediate the violence and strange opacity of the traumatic experiences and looming despair enacted in middling tragedies (and middling people) like *Clarissa*. In this sense, Clarissa is Richardson's first incredulous reader, his first interlocutor struggling to represent a pain whose truth seems somehow not fully available and yet no less real.

Readers of the novel will likely recall the letters that immediately follow Clarissa's assault. They are notable mostly for the relative silence of the novel's principal character, who struggles to regain her voice following the rape. Lovelace writes to Belford: "Just now Dorcas [Lovelace's servant] tells me that what she writes she tears, and throws the paper in fragments under the table, either as not knowing what she does. or disliking it: then gets up, wrings her hands, weeps, and shifts her seat all round the room: then returns to her table, sits down, and writes again" (5:302). The act of epistolary writing, always fraught with unreliability and contested meanings (as Clarissa learned in the frantic exchanges of letters with those in her household), completely breaks down for her in this moment, foreshadowing the heroine's gradual disappearance from the text and withdrawal from the world. Indeed, the trauma's resistance to representation is famously visualized in that initial collection of scraps dated around June 16, an effect reproduced in the original volumes and made possible by Richardson's expertise as a printer. She writes her confidant Anna, in another letter, found in two pieces: "My dearest Miss Howe! OH! What dreadful, dreadful thing have I to tell you! But yet I cannot tell you….Plague on it!" (5:303) These letters mark a "traumatic loss of faith in articulation, and the power of the letter to render meaning,"

argues Castle, and it's nearly a month, in fact, before Clarissa can stand to explain just what has happened.[73] Even then, it's only with difficulty that she can express her pain and recollection; the story stops and starts before culminating in a hazy retelling of that night, grimly piecing its details together. "Permit me to break off. The task grows too heavy, at present, for the heart…" she says at one point (6:154). At another, she apostrophizes: "Recollection! Heart-affecting recollection! How it pains me!" (6:163) If the concept of trauma is predicated on memory's eruptive potential, if trauma is understood as an effect of the past's irrepressible capacity to possess its recollecting subject, we seem to have located an outlay in the concept's genealogy. No mere storehouse of ideas—as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined memory as late as the 1770s, appropriating one of Locke's most famous metaphors for the mind[74]—Clarissa's recollections haunt her with nightmarish beasts she fears she has taught to devour her.

It is possible to read in this an indication that the trauma Clarissa comes to understand lies much deeper than the assault, that the agency dissolved by memory here serves to place partial blame on her own actions in leaving the home, in giving herself partially to Lovelace's charms even if only under the condition of an eventual honorable marriage. "She fed [this beast] with her own hand: she nursed up the wicked cub with great tenderness; and would play with it," read one of Dorcas' collected scraps (5:56). Her flight with (and what's just as important, *to*) Lovelace, therefore, is as primal a trauma as the

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[73] Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers,* 121.

[74] Citing the persistence of this static Lockean understanding of memory, Fritz Breithaupt argues in "The Invention of Trauma in German Romanticism" (*Critical Inquiry* 32 [2005]: 77-101) that trauma's history depends on the emergence, in the psychological discourse of the 1770s and beyond, of a notion of the self's coherence. Crucial to this, he notes, was a shift in the way memory was conceived: as a media of self-fashioning that overturns antecedent pains by making their integration into the self a triumph of character.

rake's own transgressions, a forced detachment from the domestic the scars of which have never fully heal. "Who was most to blame, I pray?," she accuses herself in a manic, dissociative third-person: "The lady, surely!" The implication is startling and offensive to our contemporary sensibility: Lovelace was empowered by her own boldness. In fact, as Macpherson and Jonathan Kramnick have argued (in only the most recent entries in a long history of critical work concerned with questions of responsibility in the novel), agency is rarely neat in *Clarissa*.[75] Despite Richardson's attempts to obviate charges of his heroine's culpability, the subtlety of her visionary self-accusation, searching inside and outside her self for a way to understand her appointment with violence and violation, opens the door to Samuel Johnson's tantalizingly cryptic evaluation: "You may observe that there is always something which she prefers to truth."[76] At any rate, she maintains throughout that her fate is incommensurate with her part in leaving the home.

Still, the question of blame here is less interesting to me than how that blame is mediated by the actor's experience, how blame is assumed and explored as one's own in the psyche, even briefly and ambivalently. Whether or not Clarissa is actually culpable (ontologically or legally), therefore, is largely immaterial to how it's meditated in recollection, how she comes to understand her relation to trauma. These instances illustrate the sometimes contradictory libidinal investment in these traumas, the fact that Clarissa must return to them, parsing its elements and causal links, desperately searching, Puritan-like, for their significance and godly confirmation. Already by this point it seems, one's post-

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[75] Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), chapter 6. See also Elizabeth R. Napier's recent discussion of the novel in the context of embodiment and agency in *Falling into Matter: Problems of Embodiment and Agency in English Fiction from Defoe to Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

[76] Hester Thrale Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* [1786], in *Johnsonian Miscellanies,* ed. G. B. Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 1:297.

traumatic suffering is conceived as a compulsive return to an instance of shocking upheaval, an attempt to play out in the psyche what has violently overthrown the everyday patterns of one's life. Trauma, Caruth argues after all, is the final incomprehensibility of one's relation to past violence, the fact that it displaces our experience of the world and only gradually "imposes itself again…in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor."[77] Its emotional truth is felt out of time, that is, mediated through the hazy representation of memory and fantasy by which it is retroactively experienced *as* traumatic, marking it as constitutive to one's own self. Perhaps even more so when those memories, like the scenes of transgression and abject suffering enacted in Lillo's dramas, explode a domestic or private sphere otherwise held up as safe, refuge from the sordid world Clarissa mistakenly takes to be confined to the other side of Ms. Sinclair's bawdy house. The false safety of the Harlowe home is reactivated in this parodic double: Lovelace's brothel hideaway is a masquerading inversion of the marital home that conspires to realize the innuendo implied by her family name—evidence, if any was needed, that Clarissa was always to be prostituted in service of the ambitions of those men in her life. Taken together, the spaces she inhabits in the novel figure the dissolved thresholds that distinguish between self and other, home and stranger, trauma and its repetition. "*Self,* this vile, this hated *Self!,"* she complains, unable to run from that which lies deep within (6:107). For Clarissa, memory is ultimately a site of suffering, a space of traumatic reconstruction where questions of agency are not so much solved as they are displaced and endlessly refashioned in a series of terrible fantasies.

Certainly in these, its most Gothic moments, Richardson's novel seems to confirm our post-psychoanalytic sense of the traumatic. But just as striking, however, are the

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[77] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* 4.

historical discontinuities between Clarissa's response to trauma and our own, which together position the novel's complex textual apparatus in some proximity to a literary milieu that included theodicies, religious devotional tracts, and manuals on the good death, as well as bourgeois tragedies and criticism of the period. It is worth noting, in order to emphasize this point, that perhaps Clarissa's most important personal artifact to arise from the trauma itself is precisely a collection of religious devotions that form her private meditations on the process of grieving and intense personal suffering. *Meditations Collected from the Sacred Texts,* despite its publication months after the novel's second edition in 1749 and postdated 1750 title page, is first mentioned in a letter from Belford to Lovelace around the time of Clarissa's imprisonment (6:60).[78] In that letter, Belford cites the entry from July 15th, composed little over a month after the rape—repurposing the biblical Job: "Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balance together!" Shortly after this, now two months after Clarissa's assault, Belford reports: "Mrs Lovick obliged me with the copy of a meditation collected by the lady from the Scriptures…We may see by this, the method she takes to fortify her mind, and to which she owes in a great measure the magnanimity with which she bears her underserved persecutions" (7:93) This belatedness in the novel's temporality (complicated by the practices of actual readers, for whom 120-plus pages intervene [cross reference this]) has tended to obscure an important fact about the *Meditations*: that they arise as perhaps the first coherent form of self-expression following the rape, barely two days after the paper-scrap incident of June 16th.

Readings of the *Meditations* thus tend to emphasize the "rhetoric of suffering" that takes hold some time after the shock of the novel's tragic *peripeteia* has worn off, seeing in

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[78] Samuel Richardson, *Meditations collected from the sacred books: and adapted to the different stages of a deep distress…,* (London: J. Osborn, 1750), viii. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *Meditations.*

its language of pious resignation and regulated passion at once the activation of Job as biblical type and the slow process of detachment from the debased objects of this world. Clarissa's recurring identification with the biblical patriarch has the effect of illustrating the heroine's simultaneous exemplarity and exceptionality, an acceptance of her emblematic status as one who, like Job, suffers alone as she inches towards the good death.[79] Lamb sees this expressed in what becomes Clarissa's life-slogan during the period of her most intense affliction, a verse later quoted by Lovelace, who takes its claim to exceptionality to sanction —under cover of religious precedent—navel-gazing complaint: "Miss Harlowe, indeed, is the only woman in the world, I believe, that can say, in the words of her favorite Job (for I can quote a text as well as she), *But it is not so with me*" (7:145-6; Job 9:35). By contrast, Lovelace is refigured by this as a latter-day Miltonic Satan, the text's dramatic structure revealing, gradually, the illusory qualities of its antagonist's charms. "Oh Lovelace, you are Satan himself; or he helps you out in everything; and that's just as bad!," she cries in response to his hounding depredations, making explicit a series of allegorical correspondences that link the novel at once to *Paradise Lost* (1667) and its theodicean predecessor in the Book of Job.[80] And much like these texts, the knotted triangulation between sufferer, accuser, and sublime Creator gives way over time to the infinite demands placed on the human by a God above reproach.

On account of this, one can easily read Clarissa's suffering as ultimately a journey of religious enlightenment and Christian sublation where, "tried as gold in the fire of affliction" (*Meditations* 30), the work of mourning serves also as a ritual of purification.

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[79] Lamb, *Rhetoric of Suffering,* 229.

[80] This was noticed as early as Bishop Warburton's unpublished preface to the novel. See Eaves and Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson,* 193-6; Cf. Lamb, *Rhetoric of Suffering,* 232-8.

Both the *Meditations* and Richardson's correspondence in fact repeatedly stress the "usefullness" of the volume for guiding (and not merely consoling) the aggrieved in venting their passions by the careful application of scriptural lyrics and psalmody. Indeed, the *Meditations'* Advertisement page cites as its *raison d'etre,* a desire that the collection "might be serviceable to all such as labour under great afflictions and disappointments." Modeling this, the volume makes an appearance as one of Clarissa's few earthly possessions bequeathed to Mrs. Norris, her childhood wet-nurse, alluding to a life's closure in dust's return to dust. Back in the *hors-texte* of Richardson's contemporary London, the octavo volume was reserved as a gift to the author's friends, many of whom received them while in active mourning (Edward Young, for example, was given a copy upon his stepdaughter's sudden death in November of 1749).[81] In this way, the play between narrative and *Meditations,* between real and literary lives, hints at the intimacy between author, reader, and representation cultivated by the tragic novel even as the generalizing tendency of the biblical citations seems to impose a certain distance between Clarissa and her reader. Indeed, if one goes looking for the heroine's distinctive voice and the novel's textured psychological realism in the *Meditations,* they are almost sure to be disappointed, most of the reflections consisting of scriptural collages, barely "adapted" to her situation. As one recent commentator characterized Richardson's baffling claim to illustrate Clarissa "inwardest mind": "Paradoxically, the nearer readers get to Clarissa's private devotions, the

[81] On this, see Tom Keymer, "Richardson's *Meditations*: Clarissa's *Clarissa*," in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays,* eds. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 102.

further they seem to be from any semblance of interiority."[82] Further evidence of Clarissa's inability to speak in the wake of trauma, her retreat from the novel's sensational immediacy into the mechanics of transcription is taken as a sign of pain's power to nullify agency.

But to see in these texts only instances of resignation fails to register their complexity, for they also disclose the contradictions that often attend the experience of trauma even for the believer, the way its punctual fated unfatedness (more on this shortly) seems to occasion for Clarissa a sense of doubt and disappointment in its occurrence. To read the *Meditations* alongside the novel—Clarissa's *Clarissa* as Keymer presciently renamed the collection—is to see her raise many of the same complaints Richardson's readers logged following the tragedy's end. Read them closely, in other words, and the very same biblical citations register an indignant demand for answers to her suffering while the wound remains fresh. Take, for instance, the first meditation written only days after the rape. Dated June 18th, its text "transcribes and adapts" Job's third chapter, out of "the anguish in her soul":

> Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which I was conceived.
>
> Let that day be darkness: Let no God regard it from above. Neither let the light shine upon it.
>
> …
>
> Why died I not from the womb?
>
> Why did the knees prevent me? Or,

[82] Joshua Swidzinski, "'Great labour both of mind and tongue': Articulacy and Interiority in Young's *Night Thoughts* and Richardson's *Clarissa*," in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Rise of the Novel Reconsidered*, eds. Kate Parker and Courtney Weiss Smith (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 178.

> Why the breasts that I should suck?
>
> For now should I have been still and quiet. I should have slept.
>
> Then had I been at rest.
>
> …
>
> —Or, as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants, which never saw the light. (*Meditations* 2-3)

It's the rhetoric that's striking here, the raw power of its agony coupled with an honest, if not meekly submissive suggestion that she knows better than her God. "Why died I not from the womb" is suspiciously close to modern trauma rhetoric's *why me?*, the latter a hackneyed lamentation that (strangely) expects no real answer. Arguing that it's precisely this cliched quality that paradoxically gives a sort of collective force to the individual speaker's emotion, Denise Riley observes that: "Closest among the fertile tangles of rhetorical classification to *epiplexis* (the posing of questions in order to reproach, grieve, or inveigh) the summation of 'Why me?" is Job's lament."[83] "Why died I not from the womb?" Hidden in this query lie a series of difficult questions, presupposed but finally left unsaid. If, for example, such questions are simply demonstrative exercises in the interrogative, what sort of auditor do they presume to reproach? And what sort of answer do they expect? Wouldn't the answer, were it to materialize all of a sudden, be just as terrible—either a confession of its malevolence or else, its powerlessness to remedy the afflicted's situation? And isn't that sense of powerlessness the problem in the first place?

Thus, Slavoj Žižek argues that the scandal of Job is not simple that he suffers, but that the possibility of that suffering's meaninglessness exposes a truth far more traumatic:

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[83] Riley, *Impersonal Passion,* 60.

"What Job [comes to understand is] that it *was not him, but God Himself, who was actually on trial in Job's calamities,* and he failed miserably."[84] Clarissa's adaptation of the Book of Job here directs the force of doubt in their theodicies to the divine itself; it makes of the human rhetor both accuser and defender of its God, by turns apologetic and skeptic. *Why me? Why tragedy? Why does this woman suffer?* The questions in Richardson's text are entangled, distinct upon close examination certainly, but their answers nevertheless blur into the selfsame insistence on the tautologies of Providence. Questions of justice—the kind that animate, famously, Milton's epic—are turned in this way into rote assertions of the divine's sovereign power to destroy, into performative rituals whereby trauma's impenetrability becomes an instance of the sublime. "To you, great gods! I make my last appeal," Clarissa transcribes to Anna, taking now the words of Dryden and Lee's King Oedipus:

> Or clear my virtues, or my crimes reveal.
> If wand'ring in the maze of life I run,
> And backward tread the steps I sought to shun,
> Impute my errors to your own decree;
> My FEET are guilty; but my HEART is free.[85]

Clarissa is approaching blasphemy with this passage. She knows it too: "It were an impiety to adopt [those] lines, because it would be throwing upon the decrees of Providence a fault

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[84] Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 127. More recently, Antonio Negri has argued that Job may be read as a parable in which systems of measure and equivalence are shown to be fictions of sovereign power, a claim that resonates here (*The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as Parable of Human Labor,* trans. Matteo Mandarini [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009]).

[85] *Clarissa*, 4:41. The passage adapts the close of Act 3 of John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee's, *Oedipus: A Tragedy* (London: R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1679), 47.

too much my own." And yet the possibility of this bleak theology haunts her: "But often do I revolve them…" (4:40)[86] As Walter Benjamin recognized long ago, herein rests the element of sublimity in his mythical *Tragödie*: "In tragedy pagan man realizes that he is better than the gods, but his realization strikes him dumb, and it remains unarticulated."[87] Confident that they remain innocent of their suffering, the tragic figure takes comfort in its necessary decree. Because what, after all, is more disconcerting: the prospect that God ordains one's pain for some higher good—or that God is impotent, uninterested, or simply absent? This is the true significance of Richardson's claim that Clarissa absolves the deity of all wrongdoing: "It may not be amiss to remind the reader, that…the dispensations of Providence in her distress are justified by herself."[88] The meek avowal of her culpability above—that her fate was due to "a fault too much [her] own"—may ultimately serve to protect the God she elliptically accuses, to nurture an object of attachment that for her makes this life bearable. On the contrary, the claim to justify God by her actions also recalls poet's task in Milton's *Paradise Lost,* demonstrating the power of God in the midst of human weakness and moral corruption. At any rate, "Providence" here and throughout is a figure for the absence of clarity in this world's agency, a way to displace onto the radically Other a power we aren't sure we have or want. Tragedy for Richardson confronts its reader with the sublime, the experience of which calls up, like it will for Kant, a "momentary suspension of meaning that elevates the subject" through terror, beyond terror. Providence

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[86] E. Derek Taylor, *Reason and Religion in* Clarissa*: Samuel Richardson and 'The Famous Mr. Norris of Bemerton* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 118.

[87] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998), 109-111.

[88] This qualification is added in footnote "a" of the fourth edition postscript.

becomes Lacan's *das Ding*—the terrible, "impenetrable Thing."[89] In Clarissa's lamentations, we approach the sublimity of Job's insight in the whirlwind.

The sublime imagery of the Hebrew wisdom literature overwhelms, it takes one out of time, far away from the ordinariness of their prosaic life; it "ravishes and transports," as the critic John Husbands wrote in 1731 of Job's violent effect on the reader, a paraphrase of Longinus' theory.[90] Ravishing and transporting, violent and ecstatic, the sublime is a ready analogue to trauma, in no small part because the sublime according to this view has the potential to traumatize. John Dennis underscored the point in 1704 when he claimed that the sublime: "commits a pleasing Rape upon the very Soul of the Reader…wherever it breaks out where it ought to…like the Artillery of Jove, it Thunders blazes and strikes at once."[91] At stake in this upheaval is one's sense of self and place, which is to say a sense of their standing as actors, however small, in the midst of a whirlwind. "These *why mes,"* Riley observes along these lines, "are demonstrations of my unease that a critical stage of explanation, the stage which would have shown me my fate, has been missed out, with the result that my presence seems…violently exposed as naked." "Why died I not from the womb?," "Why me?"—the questions raise for their speakers an urgent desire for an agency that would mask their contingency, that would conceal or at least obscure the haplessness of

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[89] Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 124. On the meaning of *Das Ding* in psychoanalytic thought, see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar Of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics Of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, translated by Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 43-84. For Lacan, *Das Ding* is "characterized by its absence, its strangeness. Everything about it that is articulated as good or bad divides the subject in connection with it.…There is not a good and a bad object; there is good and bad, and then there is the Thing…which is there in a beyond." (63) *Das Ding* is thus beyond the sphere of representation (*Vorstellung*).

[90] John Husbands, *A Miscellany of Poems by Several Hands* (Oxford: Leon Litchfield, 1731), d4^{r-v}. Jonathan Sheehan argues that the Book of Job was crucial to the Bible's reimagination in the Enlightenment as a poetic text, and was often cited as a key instance of scripture's ability to evoke the sublime. See his *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 160-81.

[91] Dennis, *Grounds of Criticism,* 79.

their terrible situation. Acknowledgements of one's frailty and transience, they manifest a desire to regain a footing in the face of the sublime's most terrible effects, to be present in and to a situation that seems indifferent to their pain. Recalling—or rather, as I am arguing, *prefiguring*—the ambivalence of Richardson's chastened public, acting as poetic judges, Clarissa's appropriation of the biblical text mourns the harshness of the real world, while wanting to locate herself solidly, unambiguously, in its events.

The weight of the tragedy, I believe, rests in these careful equivocations. Searching herself, Clarissa's passion in the novel's latter volumes represents a tragic middling figure compelled to answer, in any way she can, what Arthur Miller called "that underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world."[92] What can seem to us as an instance of Clarissa's "surface reading" in the *Meditations* and throughout the novel's late epistles from the heroine calls its reader instead to a searching close reading of text and self. Here at least, trauma leads its subject to play on textual (read scriptural) surfaces, to imaginatively "vault the distance between ancient and modern" by inhabiting—in the eighteenth-century lyric's "emotional consensus"—at once the universalizing and profoundly personal sentiments of the suffering poet.[93] The recitation of the biblical literature in the context of this tragedy in particular enacted a delicate series of devotional maneuvers by which the afflicted navigated between impious complaints and the testimonies that make up the raw material of one's faith. Indeed, the act of speaking one's creed—"He woundeth, and his hands make whole" she declares, or rather implores (Meditations 44)—gives that creed life in performance. To

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[92] Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," *The New York Times,* February 27, 1949, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html.

[93] G. Gabrielle Starr, *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth-Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 19.

proclaim it is to render it true in the life of a believer, even for just a moment. And that utterance itself, just like poetic justice, admits of a deep ambivalence, its rehearsal proof positive of the need to remind oneself of its veracity. In this way, what seems from one angle to be the passivity of a broken woman becomes a typological activation of suffering as passion, suffering as something desired and acted and narrated through body and text. Which is to say that Clarissa ultimately finds in this the sublimity of the divine, a paradoxically "pleasing anguish" found in mourning the loss of earthly attachments. Another reader furthered the traumatic metaphor when he admitted that the pain he felt while reading the novel were like "the incisions made by a kind Surgeon…who gives them out of Humanity, and to save his Patients."[94]

Caught between the homogenous "empty time" of our quotidian histories and the intense, punctual time of mythology, bourgeois tragedy represents the liminal, the middling, the world of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* straining upwards so as to make of its suffering a *Tragödie*. The genre strains to sanctify its suffering, to set it apart as un-ordinary by plucking it from the prose of the world. And in this, bourgeois tragedy preserves a crucial insight of baroque drama, replaying if not reinvesting its middlingness as a: "tension between surface and depth, nostalgia and anticipation [that] leaves the audience neither here nor there but in the transitional space betwixt and between."[95] To be middling, in this sense, is to inhabit the liminality of Richardson's "state of probation," that secular time during which and *because of which* readers were called to "look forward," to begin mourning the life they otherwise clung to with desperation. Clarissa's tragic end reminds its

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[94] Quoted in *Hints of Prefaces,* 10.

[95] Blair Hoxby, "The Function of Allegory in Baroque Tragic Drama: What Benjamin Got Wrong," in *Thinking Allegory Otherwise,* ed. Branda Machosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 92.

reader throughout that we are all in various states of dying; we are all learning to mourn the world's loss. Between two worlds, at once holy and profane, ancient and modern, Richardson's novel conveys the genre's historical importance to the way suffering came to be conceived. As a bourgeois tragedy, *Clarissa* it would seem, is an exercise in Christian meditation, one whose ritual pieties offer assurances that our sufferings are not finally in vain because this life isn't all there is. And yet, for many of his readers—even for a brief moment, Clarissa herself—the tragedy served as a reminder that despite the sincerity and urgency of these pieties, despite even her final claim to deliverance, the reader is met only with silence.

PROSAIC SUFFERING:

TRAGEDY AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE ORDINARY

> So, too, in Tragedy Telephus and Peleus often grieve in the language of prose, when in poverty and exile, either hero throws aside his bombast and words a foot and a half long, should he want his lament to touch the spectator's heart.
>
> -*Ars Poetica*, 89-92

How does one *read* gravitas? For much of the long eighteenth century, the answer to this question was remarkably simple: you look for versification. Dramatic verse was, from at least the Elizabethan period, often synonymous with the expression of seriousness, the very medium through which the drama made its highest ambitions and most intense sentiments manifest. Of course, there were Jacobean domestic tragedies, but even there, prose was used inconsistently, and every domestic tragedy from that period lapses back into verse for the climactic final scenes, thereby signaling that we are about to get very, very serious. Hence Dryden's larger argument in *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, which explicitly parsed the stylistic differences between comedy and tragedy, refined more than a century of common practice and poetic authority by the time it appeared in 1668, claiming that whereas comedy could linguistically entertain the low and common in prose, tragedy's ideal purposes meant it required the rarified cadence of rhythmic utterance. "Tragedy," he argues, "is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray these exactly, Heroic Rhyme is nearest Nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse."[1] The chain of signifiers here invites us to follow a series of circular correspondences linking dignity at

[1] John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay* (London: Henry Herringman, 1668), 66. A full treatment of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century theatre would offer qualifications about blank verse's prosaic effects, which I shall briefly consider later. Dryden's argument in the *Essay,* represents something of a high-water mark for poetic artifice, we should keep in mind, and my discussion situates the emergence of prosaic suffering in the context of its influence in period aesthetics.

once to tragic poetry, nobility and heroic verse, sorting them according to their resemblance as things atop a hierarchy.

More than a century later, we still find much of the same attitude towards the poetics of tragedy. Indeed, when the easy equivalence of tragedy and verse is not already assumed, the idea of prose tragedy is either refused as an aesthetic impossibility or labelled a literary curiosity. Take, for instance, the case of Gorges Edmond Howard [sic], whose little-known bourgeois tragedy, *The Female Gamester* (1778), is perhaps most notable as a fragment of Johnsoniana. Howard, an Irishman with a dilettantish interest in writing for the stage, had solicited the eminent critic's opinion on the subject of his tragedy's prose style. Having originally written the play in both prose and verse, the would-be poet had been advised by "several of [his] literary acquaintance" that his "not much exalted" prose was much more suitable to the "scene…laid in private life, and chiefly among those of middling rank." But Johnson will have none of this:

> …[having communicated this to Dr. Samuel Johnson, his words (as well as I remember) were, "That he could hardly consider a prose Tragedy as dramatic…that let it be either in the middling or in low life, it may, though in metre and spirited, be properly familiar and colloquial; that, many in the middling rank are not without erudition; that they have the feelings and sensations of nature, and every emotion in consequence thereof, as well as the

great, and that even the lowest, when impassioned, raise their language; that the writing of prose is generally the plea and excuse of poverty of Genius."[2] Both echoing and clarifying notions of neoclassical decorum, Johnson enumerates a series of familiar reasons for the use of verse in tragedy. Despite some key differences, the argumentative substance underlying Johnson and Dryden is largely the same: meter elevates sentiment and refines the grief observed, literally inscribing a tonal difference otherwise lost in the flatness of prose. While here, tragic verse can at least accommodate a range of natural emotion, both feeling and meter coalesce in the same sorts of elevated affective configurations central to tragic representation. Verse signals seriousness and careful artistry and in this way, underwrites the mood so important to tragedy. In a crucial sense, therefore, prose impedes real suffering so the poet ought to avoid it if serious drama is his or her aim.

Prose then, suggests a blockage or misfiring of the tragic impulse—or at any rate, its reconfiguration—and it will be this chapter's central work to tease this out. How, for instance, do we account for the period's longstanding resistance to prose, this willful assertion that prose somehow cannot render suffering with poetic seriousness? What, for that matter, does this form deny the tragic? And how might a careful exploration of this complicate the critical argument that "realism" is, by and large, an invention of the

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[2] Gorges Edmond Howard, preface to *The Female Gamester* (Dublin: Byrn and Son, 1778), v. With respect to Johnson's sense of social hierarchy, Nicholas Hudson argues that the former's (implied) social theory typifies a transitional state between "rank" and what will become known as "class." Noting that the critic recognized wealth's destabilizing effect on the old order, Hudson adds: "[Johnson] promoted an ideal of learning and virtue that, while derived from the older model of the 'gentleman,' came to characterize the new understanding of middle-class respectability." (13) He thereby recognized a certain fluidity to one's social standing *within* the middling sort, while also remaining a staunch advocate for the otherwise given hierarchy of ranks that necessitated subordination. See Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. chapter one. For Johnson on rank and subordination, see Boswell's anecdote on what Johnson took to be "the absurdity of the levelling doctrine" in *Boswell's Life of Johnson,* eds. George Birkbeck Hill and L. F. Powell. rev. ed., 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-64), 1:447-8.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in particular, an outgrowth of novelistic fiction? Here I take up these concerns, and look to bourgeois tragedy's aesthetics of the ordinary as one long-forgotten aspect in the development of what we now call formal realism. In fact, I would like to suggest that here we need to be especially careful, for what's in question is, on the one hand, precisely what constitutes the experience of real suffering in the first place, the experience purportedly imitated stylistically on stage; while on the other hand, our answer ought also to account for what this real suffering might mean to those undergoing its experience vicariously. In reading back the critical locution, "realism," in other words, we miss the much more interesting prior question: how are debates over the performance of prosaic suffering shaping its character, its felt qualities, and the system of affects associated with its mediation? To return to the example with which I began: how might our accounts of tragedy, prose, realism, and tone, for instance, differ if we took Johnson seriously? What would it mean, likewise, for us to grant Dryden's claim that heroic rhyme portrays the minds of distressed nobles "exactly"? The puzzling insistence with which the period's critics demarcate what is fit to mourn as tragic, I'd argue, indicates the way that pain and suffering are at least in part constituted by the aesthetic categories through which they are consumed. In naming a certain range of gestures and utterances "tragic," prose tragedians were reordering their world, making not only descriptive claims about suffering's performance, but in point of fact, normative ones. The distinction between artifice and nature here is paper-thin, Johnson's counterargument implies, the sensations of a body in pain naturally finding voice in the lyrical.

Thus, it is not that bourgeois tragedy in the latter half of the century merely depicts suffering in ways true-to-life, as if our account of realism on the stage is a narrative of

literature's progressive bending towards a pristine empiricism, as if "the real" was (merely) a sort of latent data waiting to be unearthed and imaginatively described. On the contrary, these tragedies are the stuff of suffering itself—its pattern and rule—and the processes, arguments, and modes of expression that attend their production profoundly shape assumptions about what is "natural" to begin with. So while pain is elemental—David Morris reminds us[3]—it is experienced in a dense matrix of affective attitudes and social meanings that condition its qualitative substance. This is what I take to be under negotiation in arguments about tragedy's realism, if in fact that category remains helpful. Indeed, as I've already indicated, a discomfort with prose locates, on the level of form, a shift in the way suffering is understood and expressed, not only as an experience shared across social ranks but also one which might be problematically personal, commonplace, and perhaps banal. If, as one critic has claimed, versification serves to beautify the experience of suffering, prose insists on its crude intolerability, its reality and resistance to poetic gilding.[4] To this day, there are some that would, as a result of this aesthetic refusal, deny the moral seriousness of prose tragedy.

Because of this, one of my central claims here will be that there is a tension between the realism of such prose tragedies and the tonal qualities that would substantiate their generic and cultural authority, between the gravity that underwrites tragedy's affective power and the ordinariness of its sentimental presentation. The problem with middling life

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[3] David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1. Morris' book is essential reading for those looking to historicize pain, and he distinguishes between pain and suffering in that "suffering is a kind of damage that extends beyond the body to afflict the mind or soul or spirit too," 246. For a different take on pain as impetus for poetic making, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[4] Raymond McDonald Alden, "The Development of the Use of Prose in the English Drama: 1660-1800," *Modern Philology* 7, no.1 (July 1909): 1-22, 14.

is that it seems, by and large, inimical to what tragedy ought to do, stripped of the intensity of fatal vicissitudes, evacuated of its ideal, sometimes even quasi-sacred meanings. This tension has been a recurrent subtext of many of the works analyzed thus far, and I have tried to trace the way in which experimentation with tragedy marks the advent of something new in suffering's textual representation and consumption. As we have seen with respect to *Fatal Curiosity* and *Clarissa* especially, bourgeois tragic literature struggles to articulate at once the quotidian demands of realism and the exemplary quality of its depicted misfortunes. After all, if it is one thing that tragedy is historically not supposed to be, it is, well, *prosaic*. This chapter explores this productive aesthetic tension further.

Sandwiched between the costumed pageantry of the Restoration and a series of tragic Gothic spectacles at the turn of the nineteenth century, we are unaccustomed to think of the mid-eighteenth century stage as a locus of formal realism. And I should stress here that I certainly do not wish to equate the limited scope of a drama presented in a few short hours with the expansive scale and polyphony of the realist novel (despite a good drama's robust afterlife in repeat performances). As will become clear, bourgeois tragedy was a realist endeavor in different ways than the novel, although, in point of fact, they also informed each other's practice. Still, prosaic suffering is a recurrent literary phenomenon in the period, a set of patchy outlying data that together indicate an alternative trajectory for realism's development. Already by 1731, prose had become a medium for tragedies depicting the misfortunes of the middling: George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (which I have considered already in some detail) debuted in April of that year and was followed in December of 1732 by Charles Johnson's ambitious, although ultimately unsuccessful, domestic tragedy in prose, *Caelia; or The Perjur'd Lover*. Conversely, Richard

Cumberland's tragedy, *The Mysterious Husband* (1783) would portray the domestic suffering of its nonetheless noble *dramatis personae* in long passages of meandering, unmetered discourse, seemingly lifted from that waxing form exerting a profound influence upon all artistic forms: the novel. To this, we might add a handful of closet dramas and unabashed stage experiments, for the most part lost to history, such as Robert Porrett's adaptation of Richardson's seminal work, *Clarissa: or, The Fatal Seduction* (1788).[5] There were earlier experiments in tragic prose, of course,[6] but in the latter cases above, the formal qualities of the dialogue are considered part and parcel of the naturalism claimed by their authors, as are the focused, domestic setting and restrained scope of their claims to probability. Yet none of these texts, however, approach the profound, largely unrecognized influence of Edward Moore's 1753 bourgeois tragedy, *The Gamester,* the publication and theatrical afterlife of which represents, I believe, a pivotal moment in the alternative history of realism, modern drama, and ordinary suffering suggested by my broader argument.[7]

Moore's play follows the story of the Beverley household's downfall, and depicts the various sufferings of its namesake and his wife as the former gambles away their fortune

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[5] Charles Johnson, *Caelia: or, The Perjur'd Lover* (London: J. Watts, 1733); Richard Cumberland, *The Mysterious Husband* (London: C. Dilly, 1783); and Robert Porrett, *Clarissa; or, The Fatal Seduction* (London: W. Lowndes, 1788).

[6] Stuart women playwrights are central to this genealogy, setting important precedents for the other works considered here. Margaret Cavendish, for instance, employed prose for what could be called experiments in domestic tragedy (albeit featuring chiefly aristocrats). Most notable among these are, *Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* and *The Unnatural Tragedies*, published in her collection, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: A. Warren, 1662). Although Aphra Behn's 1689 play, *The Widdow Ranter, or the History of Bacon in Virginia* (London: James Knapton, 1690) would be classified by some as a tragicomedy, it was nevertheless a notable instance of dramatic prose used to represent the suffering of a bourgeois woman. Additionally, Thomas Durfey's tragedy, *The Famous History of the Rise and Fall of Massaniello* (London: Printed for John Nutt, 1700), used prose for the historic fisherman-turned-revolutionary at the center of its plot.

[7] Edward Moore, *The Foundling: A Comedy; and, The Gamester: A Tragedy,* ed. Anthony Amberg (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996). Amberg's edition is now the standard for work on *The Gamester* and collates nearly all of the available scholarship and ephemera associated with the tragedy. I will refer to it throughout this chapter, citing its pagination and page-specific line numbers.

and the family becomes increasingly destitute. Having been encouraged in his gaming by his erstwhile friend, sometime financial backer, and eventual betrayer, Stukely, Beverley leverages what remains of his wealth in a desperate attempt to keep creditors at bay. Stukeley's plan, Beverley learns only too late, involves a confederacy of sharpers and thugs intent on his ruin, so that Stukely can despoil what's left of his friend's estate, and in particular, his charming wife. Actresses who played Mrs. Beverley were given plenty to chew on in the role; she pleaded, assured, and affectionately forgave her husband for his many lapses of judgment, begging him to forsake the risks inherent in the gaming world and return to the pious stability of bourgeois life. Ultimately—and pathetically—her entreaties prove to no avail. Despair takes over the destitute gambler as the debts brought on by a precarious life are internalized in this shell of a man, and Stukeley works to frame him for the supposed murder of his sister's suitor, Lewson. In the play's closing scenes, Beverley poisons himself while awaiting his fate in prison, against the council of his wife, his sister, Charlotte, and a former servant, Jarvis, moments before the play's plot is unraveled and set aright by an astute Lewson, who condemns Stukeley to a life of "unpity'd Misery." (269.7)

Moore's play is significant for several reasons. First, Moore himself made claims to offering a "natural Picture" of the tragic, merging form and content into what Diderot would later call the *tableau,* or the staged picture of suffering essential to serious drama.[8] Accordingly, Moore not only employed an expressive prose style by which to represent its true-to-life distresses, but also, in its much more subtle sense of the sociological causes of the tragic, as well as their true-to-life expression, suggestively equivocated between

[8] Peter Szondi has argued convincingly that Diderot sought to shift the emphasis of tragedy from the staging of twists of fate to the detailed picture of private distress we know as his mature concept of the theatrical tableau. We will return to this shortly, making reference to Diderot's primary work, but Szondi's argument appears in his, "*Tableau* and *Coup de Théâtre*: On the Social Psychology of Diderot's Bourgeois Tragedy," trans. Harvey Mendelsohn, *New Literary History* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 323-43.

accidental and providential. Much of the dialogue becomes, by play's end, a contest between a skeptical, almost tepid fatalism and the providence to which it ultimately argues one ought to be devoted. *The Gamester* thereby literalizes the trouble with, and promise of, the middle state as a subject of realistic tragedy: in its depiction of complex psychological motivation, the play shifts the emphasis of tragedy from the plotted misfortunes of a nobility in crisis to the contours of belief itself, as a sort of Pascalian wager enacted on stage. Like *Clarissa*—perhaps *because* of *Clarissa*[9]—the drama is an exploration of the elusiveness of a personal (rather than political) happiness that seems so close at hand, almost novelistic (one hesitates to say) in its study of emotion and loss.

Moreover, Diderot was profoundly influenced by *The Gamester,* and his mature theories of tragedy and performance emphasize the type of richly sentimental realism that he would have gleaned from translating the play in 1760 (to my knowledge, the first French translation of what would be a very successful play on the Continent).[10] Perhaps this is why, following the play's triumphant return to the British stage in 1771, no other Restoration or eighteenth-century tragedy saw more performances over the next century.[11] From its debut as a vehicle for David Garrick's performance of intense affect in the title role, to later claims that Sarah Siddons' turn as Mrs. Beverley was remarkably "near…to the chastity of

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[9] As we shall see, Richardson's first two novels, *Pamela* and *Clarissa,* cast a long shadow over bourgeois tragedy, and especially Moore's dramatic work. Amberg helpfully collates much of the correspondence between the two authors, spanning October 1748-January 1749 (see "Appendix 6,"), and documents Moore's failed proposal to dramatize *Clarissa*.

[10] Donald Schier, "Diderot's Translation of *The Gamester,*" *Diderot Studies* 16 (1973): 229-40.

[11] This claim is Amberg's. See the Preface to his edition of *The Gamester*, 12. For a more detailed accounting, see his "*The Gamester*: A Century of Performances," *Theatre Research International* 15, no. 2 (June 1990): 105-25. So popular was Moore's work that in *Mansfield Park* (1814), Jane Austen has the Bertram family consider *The Gamester*—along with *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, perhaps shockingly to us now—for their impromptu play in one of the novel's most memorable episodes, before settling on Elizabeth Inchbald's indecorous comedy, *Lovers' Vows* (1798) See the Norton edition of *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 93.

nature"[12], the history of Moore's play can be read as an artifact of realism's dialectical emergence as indeed, its theatrical representation. My discussion of this aesthetic of the ordinary will build on the prosaics outlined in Moore's prefatory remarks to the play, therefore, and my later reading of the text will attempt to add complexity to the links between genre and form.

Given its enormous popularity during the period, as well as its sentimental portrayal of feeling and self-conscious ambition, *The Gamester* lends itself to the charge that it is hopelessly middlebrow. Its astounding lack of critical attention seems to further this impression, especially considering its central place in the history of theatre during the Enlightenment. And while the epithet, "middlebrow," dates to the first quarter of the twentieth century, I believe its anachronistic use here may be instructive, as it hints at the way in which forms and consumptive patterns become categorized by the authenticity or inauthenticity of their cathartic effects, a problem in which debates over prose and verse were fundamentally engaged. Johnson likely had Moore's play in mind when he railed against the prosaic suffering of Howard's play (like *The London Merchant,* its 1771 revival on stage was establishing it as a stock piece), and one senses that the former's uneasiness stems from the way a tragedy like *The Gamester* privileged direct apprehension of recognizable feelings, feelings thoroughly disenchanted, over the didactic exemplarity of a great, universal figure. Anticipating Adorno's definition of kitsch as "the parody of

[12] *Remarks on Mrs. Siddons, in Some of Her Principal Characters* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1784), 6. Austen, in fact, might have seen Siddons in the role during one of her visits to London in the 1790s. See Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6-7.

catharsis,"[13] prosaic suffering for Johnson reeks of bathos, alternately risible and crudely emotive—in truth, mere evidence of the dramatist's "poverty of Genius." This may be so, but regardless, my argument imagines a moment when the quotidian work of the middlebrow was an innovative aesthetic. As Paul Fleming has argued with respect to German drama, bourgeois tragedy was (paradoxically) one of the central discourses refashioning what art's relationship to genius was, away from the imitative exemplarity of Horatian tradition towards what Edward Young would call "original composition."[14] Resisting the sort of rhetorical "elevation" that would render theatrical mourning an act of transcendence, Moore's aesthetics of the ordinary nevertheless claimed the sort of affective responses that define the tragic while also turning them to the interests of a class in social ascent. Their ability or failure to elicit catharsis is itself an artifact open to analysis, and discloses the negotiations at work on stage and in literary circles with respect to prosaic suffering.

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I begin with a digression on tragic poetry: in order to make productive use of the shifts at work at midcentury, we need to understand the way tragic verse was theorized for the neoclassical tradition that dominated the stage. I want to return briefly to Dryden, therefore, since his views on rhyme and modern poetry in *Of Dramatick Poesie* did perhaps more than anyone else's to set the poetic agenda for a generation of tragedians. In the

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[13] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 340. Drawing on Adorno, Matei Calinescu suggests that kitsch may represent an attempt to escape the "drabness of modern quotidian life" (228-9), and later, "the other side of terrible and incomprehensible boredom" (248) manifesting itself in an overwrought style (*Five Faces of Modernity,* rev. ed. [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987]). Interestingly, the charge that domestic tragedies lay the groundwork for melodramatic drama later, tends to ignore the century-long negotiation over natural, prosaic style that deemphasized baroque excesses *even as* it dwelled in quotidian forms of middling anxiety.

[14] Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity:The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). The reference to Young is from his seminal critical treatise, "Conjectures on Original Composition," in *The Works in Prose of the Reverend Edward Young* (London: P. Brown, H. Hill, and S. Payne, 1765).

essay's dialogue, it is Crites who first frames the terms of the company's debate over versification, arguing that rhyme breaks the drama's mimetic spell, neither graceful enough to express comic sentiment, nor with the majesty befitting persons of rank. It is too plainly an artifice, and thus, following Aristotelian precepts, the stage calls upon the naturalness of blank verse as nearest to English speech. Neander's response—and that closest to Dryden's own—quickly maneuvers to qualify the argument, countering that if rhyme is unfit to depict tragic sentiment because it is unnatural, then such reasoning effectively prohibits verse as such. Having exposed Crites' vacillation on this point, Neander is free, with the laureate's playful ironic detachment, to press his case for a modern, as against ancient (or even Renaissance) poetic praxis. He thus takes heroic rhyme to be a sign of progress in the poetic arts, the refinement of taste amongst "the mix'd audience of the populace" frequenting the theatre.[15] Rhyme marks the modern as an age of superior sensibility and cultural elegance.

Still, the far stronger charge of verse's artifice remains to be accounted for, and in pivoting to consider this, Dryden's Neander distills something like what comes to be the Restoration's accepted view of tragedy's relation to form. Noting that even great men, while prone to noble sentiment, seldom speak them in polished meter, he reasons:

> It has been formerly urged by you [Crites], and confessed by me, that since no man spoke any kind of verse *extempore*, that which was nearest Nature was to be preferred. I answer you therefore, by distinguishing betwixt what is nearest to the nature of Comedy, which is the imitation of common persons and ordinary speaking, and what is nearest the nature of a serious Play: this last is indeed the representation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to an higher

[15] Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie,* 65.

> pitch. The Plot, the Characters, the Wit, the Passions, the Descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the Poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. Tragedy we know is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to portray these exactly, Heroic Rhyme is nearest Nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.[16]

Dryden's rhetoric in this passage, baroque in its contortions, is worth pausing over. For what Neander achieves in this discourse is both the admission that poetic meter is an artifice of the theatre while at the same time, a fundamentally natural mode of representation. The analogical argument I traced earlier should, I think, be a bit clearer now, its sense of elevation binding class, tone, and metrical form as constituent parts of tragedy. Verse approaches Nature in analogical resemblance—thus it is "nearest the nature of a serious Play"—and while never fully assuming it, rather transcends its verbal strictures, the better to capture its dignified intensity. For Dryden and his contemporaries (even Crites, despite his distaste for rhyme) poetry paints the tragic scene with colors more vividly true to life.

We might usefully contrast this to what we've already seen in Johnson's predilection for tragedy in verse. For while the two critics conclude with a similarly prescriptive aesthetic principle (as noted above), the details of Johnson's argument throw light on a vastly different set of assumptions at work by his time. As opposed to Dryden, for one, verse has less explicitly to do with the nobility of those represented than the intensity of the depicted suffering ("elevation" is a feature of distress—not of class). Tragedy needs verse, then, not

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[16] Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie,* 66.

because its elevation corresponds most closely to the stratified distance between nobility and commoner, but because it corresponds to the magnitude of the drama's subject matter. We might even say that whereas Dryden's reasoning is largely "top-down" in character (tragedies only depict nobility and thus need a corresponding form in which to image them), Johnson's retort to Howard proceeds from a realization that intense emotion and misfortune is just as much a feature of lower and middling life. Johnson, after all, at least entertains the possibility of bourgeois tragedy on the grounds that the middling sort feels with the intensity of which versified expression is simply a requisite. What remains then, calcified in tradition, is an entrenched formalism: one may experiment with the tragedy's particulars all one wants—what the critic cannot countenance is suffering in prose. To do so, in truth, would be to strip out the tonal *sine qua non* that defines tragedy as such.

For Raymond Williams, this poetic absolutism is the mark of a "conservative society" under increased social pressure. In his wonderful close reading of modern prosaics, "Notes on English Prose: 1780-1950," he argues that this period—roughly, the 1770s to the close of the century—undergoes a dramatic shift in the way prose styling is conceived, away from a rigid view of decorum, in which style is fundamentally a question of manner and taste reflected verbally, to a "Romantic," esemplastic view in which the mode of expression is itself its qualitative content.[17] In the older view, language is thought to "fit" as the clothing of one's thought, mimetically reproducing the mind. Style is a question of verbal aptness in

[17] Williams, "Notes on English Prose," in *Writing in Society,* 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1985), 73-74. The contrast between esemplastic and mimetic was famously explored in M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

which polished expression evinces a refined sensibility and low expression a vulgar one.[18] To take one influential maxim of the era, therefore, Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1709) concludes: "Expression is the *Dress* of *Thought,* and still / Appears more *decent* as more *suitable*." The governing metaphor here—language as clothing for the mind—owes much to classical rhetoric and powerfully regulates the limits of prosaism well into the latter half of the century. Thus, Lord Kames, in *Elements of Criticism* (1762) inflects the metaphor with a much more explicit rank-consciousness: "Language may be considered as the dress of thought; and where one is not suited to the other, we are sensible of incongruity, in the same manner as where a judge is dressed like a fop, or a peasant like a man of quality."[19] And Hugh Blair, in 1783: "[High ornament has] a similar effect on Language, with what is produced by the rich and splendid dress of a person of rank."[20]

Although this sense of language as decorous clothing for thought is decisively overturned with Coleridge, Williams argues that the older view of prosaics is already vulnerable to serious criticism by the 1770s: "Style is known [from then on], not as an abstract quality [i.e. mere decorum], but as inseparable from the substance of ideas and feelings expressed."[21] Coleridge's esemplastic view takes itself to be linguistically creating

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[18] On the concept of decorum as an aspect of "Tory" style, as well as its broader political usage, see Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). For another view, see Carey McIntosh, *The Evolution of English Prose, 1700-1800: Style, Politeness, and Print Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 5. McIntosh challenges Smith's claim by citing the radical Joseph Priestley's counsel to avoid "term[s]...that hath ever had the least connexion with *mean subjects*." Regulations on appropriateness of vocabulary and decorous self-expression, McIntosh claims on the contrary, tended to cut across political lines.

[19] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism,* ed. Peter Jones, 2 vols., 6th ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 2:24.

[20] As McIntosh points regarding Blair, uncommon words (as in refined diction) and elevated style "bestow dignity" (106). For the quotation above, see Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,* 3 vols. (Dublin: Whiteston et al., 1783), 1:339.

[21] Williams, "English Prose," 74.; on Coleridge and the esemplastic view, see Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp,* chap. 5.

the world its discourse inhabits, imaginatively creative rather than simply reflectively mimetic. With the social unrest of the last quarter of the century especially, that is, prose becomes a sparring ground over which a "crisis of language" takes place, as both the form of democratic and anti-democratic argument as well as its content as such. Thus, according to Williams, prose is not simply a question of decorous styling in such debates, but also the inscribing of an imagined relation between writer and reader; the manner in which prose expresses thought formalizes a set of reconfigured social relations and political attitudes—Williams: "substantial ideas and feelings"—bringing them into being in the arguments that engage their reader.

While I want to be careful to note that Williams is treating essayistic prose as his test case, his line of argument is, I believe, easily portable to other genres of literary expression in the period, and particularly the tragic with its ossified traditions and arguably conservative impulses. One might argue that the whole enterprise of bourgeois tragedy is troubling for precisely this sort of reason: what was formerly an impossible correspondence between the common person and heroic suffering is increasingly made not only possible *but natural* in the verbal lacuna opened by prose, as writers in the period explore the limits of tragic representation, thereby suffusing the ordinary with the specter of trauma. To recognize prose as the medium for these shifts, consequently, entails a sensitivity to the way these dramatists exploited its performative possibilities in the sense made famous by J. L. Austin.[22] Certainly, as I've already suggested, tragic prose is one arena in which such proxy debates are occurring, where such social pressures elicit absolutist statements over the standards of art and discourse—even well before the chronology in which Williams locates

[22] J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

these controversies. But we can go yet further than this, for isn't this sort of textual augury precisely what Williams identifies as a "structure of feeling?" Contrasting the as-yet unrecognizable shape of an emergent social system against sanctioned and institutionalized forms of being, he observes that before an emergent mode solidifies, it exists as "a kind of feeling and thinking, which is indeed social and material, but…embryonic."[23] They are, Williams elsewhere concludes, "social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available."[24] We sense the tide of an emergent way of thinking and feeling and being in these debates, lapping over the residue of an older order insistent on its archaic forms of expression.

With this in mind, we might productively compare Moore's own preface to *The Gamester,* written as part of his authorized collection of works in 1756, which in many ways proleptically figures William's "crisis of language." Moore initially claims that his bourgeois tragedy utilizes its prose style as a point of deferential decorum and adaptation, as a way to both capture and play to a broad audience. Thus, he states: "The Play…was intended to be a natural Picture of that Kind of Life, of which Men are Judges; and as it struck at a Vice so universally prevailing, it was thought proper to adapt its Language to the Capacities and Feelings of every Part of the Audience…" (204) This is theatre as documentary artifact, or rather Dutch portraiture, a "natural Picture" reproduced so as to capture the relative abilities of the common person to express him- or herself. And, in fact, Moore is concerned with lapsing into a ridiculous artificiality; can you imagine, the preface intones, how

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[23] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 131.

[24] Ibid., 133-4.

unnatural it would be for gamblers and sharpers to suddenly lapse into blank verse or heroic rhyme? Moore's concession to the prosaic, in similar fashion, admits the commonness of his subject and audience, and relies on the class-inflected rhetorical tradition outlined above and repeated throughout the period.[25] The play's "naturalism," according to this, simply means it renders the ordinary in a speech appropriate to rank. To write *The Gamester* in verse would be to dress a peasant in the noble's buskin. In this way, a deference to prevailing ideas governing decorum opens an aesthetic space for Moore to explore tragedy's relation to the ordinary.

And yet, the poetic absolutism we saw in Johnson is motivated by somewhat different concerns than that diagnosed by Williams and anticipated by Moore, although its contradictions nevertheless imply a politics under immense pressure. We have, in the case of Johnson's distaste for prosaic suffering, an instance of what Terry Eagleton has called his protean ability to be at once "grandly generalizing sage and 'proletarianized' hack," both experimental and stubbornly traditional in his views.[26] If we look a bit closer, in fact, it turns out the eminent critic is making a far more interesting claim, since it is not simply that by his time bourgeois tragedy is a generic possibility that nevertheless calls on the poet's metrical craft, but that such craft is merely the last refinement of what intense feeling already accomplishes. Suffering, for Johnson "raises [one's] language," lapsing out of the grittiness of prose into the elegant song of versification, and this is a natural response of humankind when in distress. As if the axes of "the Natural" have shifted, what is taken to be

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[25] McIntosh suggests that this tradition stresses the correspondence between words and thought and is thus largely a matter of genteel *vocabulary*, whereas here it seems as much about the very form of its expression. He cites, for instance, Hester Thrale Piozzi's 1794 tome, *British Synonymy; or, An Attempt at Regulating the Choice of Words in Familiar Conversation* (Dublin: William Porter).

[26] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (New York: Verso, 1984), 32.

the raw data of human pain is now naturally—and not simply analogically, as it was for Dryden—closer to verse.

How else should we read the following, in which Johnson implies that verse is somehow natural?: "[the middle rank] have the feelings and sensations of nature, and every emotion in consequence thereof, as well as the great, and that even the lowest, when impassioned, raise their language." Dryden's argument had proceeded from the admission that verse is not a feature of *extempore* speech, and heroic rhyme is simply a close analogue to the sentiment of the play, its final imagistic refinement. Here, by contrast, language is "raised" in proportion to the direness of one's situation regardless of class, in effect ornamenting itself in that same *extempore* moment Dryden concedes is always literally prosaic. Meter asserts itself in moments of personal crisis, Johnson claims, when great thoughts and ardent feelings need expression, and the poet merely *reflects* this. Suffering is poetry in the raw. Hence, his mimetic theory—oddly, stubbornly, disingenuous from our perspective—claims that affect already finds expression in the "raised language" that makes up tragic verse. Prose cannot do the work of the tragic because it is, in this sense, unnatural, inauthentic, and consequently ill-fit to the seriousness of such moments.

Johnson, I believe, is quite serious when he makes these claims, and it's not too hard to find a corroborating sentiment for his argument, even within the small body of prose tragic works he would otherwise delegitimize. Moore certainly concedes as much, when he goes on to qualify his argument in *The Gamester*'s preface. Immediately after trumpeting the play's "natural" use of prose, he confesses: "The judicious Reader will observe, that it is a Species of Prose which differs very little from Verse: In many of the most animated Scenes, I can truly say, that I often found it a much greater difficulty to avoid, than to write

Measure." (emphasis in original) Like Johnson then, Moore's argument is highly equivocal; for both, there is a poetry to pain that prosaic style somehow denies or obscures. And like Johnson too, it is crisis—fever-pitch emotion or intense affect in "the most animated scenes"—where this blockage would be most present. This sort of hedging, I would argue, is partly due to the overdetermination of terms like "Nature" and "natural" during the period, which for poets like Pope conveyed a sense of (and were occasionally identified with) "the universal." The particularities of an un-exemplary life complicate this, mar the ideality of tragic poetry with its humble, prosaic form. But the sense deployed in Moore's use of "natural" belies Pope and Johnson's concerns about the aesthetic here, shading rather into that first definition given in the latter's famed *Dictionary of the English Language*: "Produced or effected by nature; not artificial." Or similarly, "Unaffected; according to truth and reality." The drama's prosaism is claimed, rather surprisingly therefore, as the aesthetic feat on display in Moore's text, a willful playing-down of tragic elevation, as also a token of the drama's paradoxically quotidian artifice.[27]

Read with this in mind, *The Gamester*'s preface functions as a preemptive declaration of its tonal dissonance, an admission that prose naturalizes—or rather neutralizes—that which is meant to be, or in fact was *felt as* ideal, exemplary, even perhaps universal. It diffuses, in other words, the readerly expectation as to what tragic elevation will entail. So when Moore goes on to say that the play's "natural picture" serves to underwrite

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[27] One anonymous critic of the play understood this tension between tragic seriousness and the middling, noting: "If the Critic would consider, how difficult it is, to form a piece of this Nature, upon the Occurrences of Domestick Life, and the ordinary Senes [sic] which every Days Experience [sic] brings before the Eye, it is apprehended, they would attribute more Merit to this Play....the Dramatis Personae deliver themselves in the Dialogue of Conversation, destitute of delusive Ornaments of blank Verse, in which Poets have often found Means to dress up their no meaning with immoderate Applause." Amberg cites this notice, now located in the archives of the Enthoven Theatre Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in his edition of the play (100).

interestingness, something very different from heroic tragic theory is being articulated. As Paul Fleming has argued recently, Lessing will explicitly systematize what Moore only gestures towards here: a shift from tragic admiration to that of identification.[28] For Lessing, Fleming explains, bourgeois tragedy is a genre that expressly educates its audience in compassionate fellow-feeling, defined most fundamentally by its possessing "the ability to be moved by what resembles itself."[29] What is interesting to both playwrights is not so much the pageantry and pomp of great men (and occasionally women) the audience admires as exceptional sufferers, but rather its recognizable depiction of common persons and common concerns. In contrast to the "cold affect" Lessing was to argue resulted from admiration's distancing effect, Moore implies that it is precisely this trick of verbal verisimilitude that "[works] up [the catastrophe] to an uncommon Degree of Horror." (204) Prose drama purports to move its spectator and discipline the passions he or she recognizes as their own redoubled and performed onstage. (Thus, the play's language is adapted "to the Capacities and Feelings of every Part of the audience.") Unlike admiration, directed upwards toward the noble mind practically sanctified in a revelatory verse, the bourgeois affects explored in Moore, Richardson, Lillo et al., are nodes of mutual cathexis mediated through plain style. The politics of tragedy, which in its heroic configuration reifies a hierarchy of social differences, is thereby stylistically flattened and dispersed amongst a broader social milieu—even perhaps, made profane in its true etymological sense by which something previously

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[28] Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity,* 58-62.

[29] Ibid., 70.

consecrated is "returned to the common use of men."[30] Put simply, prose becomes a way to figure ordinary feeling according to a shared semiotics—even at the cost of tragedy's presumed grandeur. This is why, furthermore, prosaic suffering is so problematic for Johnson: its representation on stage is a vulgarity, a literal profanation of that which ought to be an aesthetic, quasi-sacred purification. The irony is that the particularities of adaptation make suffering troublingly universal.

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What is at stake, therefore, is never simply the referential truth of prosaic utterance, but also always its ability to intone the moral and affective qualities that make up an authentic picture of suffering. Indeed, if prose renders a tragedy "natural" in this sense, as Moore claims, it does so not merely by its ability to *simulate* a painful tableau, but also by its ability, through this simulation, to enact those values, concerns, and interpretive frames which make that suffering intelligible.[31] This is not precisely the sort of formal realism we see in the novel, which typically emphasizes the particularity of characters, places, times—in other words, the fine texture of descriptive prose that Cynthia Wall has recently analyzed in

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[30] Giorgio Agamben has recently attempted to revitalize this etymological sense of the profane, arguing that this long-forgotten meaning might be appropriated as a model for political resistance. See his *Profanations,* trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), especially chap. 9. The language cited above is from p. 73. We might consider this passage from Agamben's discussion of the profane to represent, in miniature, much of my argument on tragedy's prosaic representation of affliction in the period: "Profanation…neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized" (77).

[31] In chapter one, I dealt with Judith Butler's concept of the "frame" and the "field of intelligibility" in order to historicize bourgeois tragedy's use of pity. Her argument is laid out in the introduction ("Precarious Life, Grievable Life") to her, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009).

some detail as a feature of the novel's mental (and literal!) furniture.[32] For all the "naturalness" of the drama, something very different is meant by this than the sort of detailed enumeration of Crusoe's personal belongings we see in perhaps the most famous early example of this. Far from being simply "realistic" therefore, prosaic suffering's naturalness is conceived as a means to dramatic authenticity, a field of intelligibility composed of mutual epistemic, moral, and affective registers that moves the spectator-reader. Just as importantly, the prose takes on an almost confessional quality, whereby authors purport to present particular emotions *as if* unmediated.

If we look at contemporary examples we see this theorized in relation to prose, suggesting that this sense of dramatic authenticity is quite explicitly under negotiation in a new aesthetics of the ordinary. And much like period acting, what is initially a rather occult language for this mediation becomes, by the second half of the century, progressively more technical and methodized. For example, in Charles Johnson's *Caelia,* mentioned briefly above, the author's prologue makes a heavy-handed version of the argument I have so far traced, suggesting that prose's middling qualities lay bare the author's concerns to the spectator. Audiences at one of the few performances of the tragedy would have begun the play with Theophilus Cibber thundering:

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[32] Wall argues in *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) that the rise of prose is related to four main currents in the period: technologies that enabled new ways of seeing, the cult of domesticity, a new empiricist emphasis on the particular over the universal, and the expansion of consumer culture that brought about a flourishing market of things. While I agree with the thrust of this provocative argument—provided that one emphasizes, as she does, the *descriptive* function of prose—my argument locates a blind spot in her analysis. In my view, prose also shapes patterns of thought, affect, and performance that escape the descriptive sorts of functions we (and she) take to be central to its use in the novel. So while Wall considers the way that *Clarissa* employs its prose to create suffocating, implicit spaces, she says almost nothing about the drama in the period, which drew heavily on the sorts of discursive power-plays at work between Lovelace and the novel's heroine. As will become clear, this sense of restriction, confinement, and tension is precisely the sort of affective property that prosaic suffering theorizes as emergent. At any rate, the emphasis on prose as a descriptive medium has little to say, I would argue, as to why modern drama increasingly relies on prose.

He [the playwright] wou'd his humble Sentiments impart,

In Words that flow directly from the Heart;

To lofty Numbers he has no Pretence,

Who makes his Characters talk common Sense:

And yet, as no big Fustian rends the Air,

He creeps not on the Ground with servile Care.

He would not flat and spiritless be found,

Nor with false Met'phor swell th'unmeaning Sound. (5)

Prose privileges the recognizably common here, by which the author claims to more personally move the spectator. A rhetoric of prose's quotidian artifice is part and parcel of this; dramatist Johnson becomes a painter with a varied range of verbal tools.

In fact, the painterly metaphor (Johnson's later identification of prose dramatist with "painter" is echoed in Moore's "natural Picture" and takes advantage of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition) is central to such theories and will definitively take hold with Diderot's *Discours sur la poesie dramatique* (1758), suggesting not only representational detail and virtuosity, but also an ability to vivify those affects on display in the dramatic tableau.[33] Similarly, Lord

[33] Diderot's *Discours sur la poesie dramatique* made explicit much of what the *philosophe* had begun to articulate through his own bourgeois tragedy, *Le Fils naturel* (1757) and the critical edifice that quickly responded to it. That play, for instance, came on the heels of the 1756 edition of Moore's play, and was followed in quick succession by *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* (1757), and the notable bourgeois drama, *La père de famille* (1758) to which the *Discours* was appended. For an English translation of this latter work, see "On Dramatic Poetry," in *Dramatic Essays of the Neoclassic Age,* eds. Henry H. Adams and Baxter Hathaway (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950). Romira Worvill claims that Diderot's work in articulating the tableau model "shifts attention away from strictly literary preoccupations and directs it towards all that is visual in stage representation." See her essay "From Prose *peinture* to Dramatic *tableau:* Diderot, Fénelon, and the Emergence of the Pictorial Aesthetic in France," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 39 (2010): 151-70. The standard critical work on the intersection between fine art and dramatic aesthetics in the French context remains Michael Fried's art history classic, *Theatricality and Absorption: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). As we shall see, Diderot's views reflected years of thought on British bourgeois tragedy and London stagecraft, and the chronology above is highly provocative, suggesting that his sense of serious drama and the theatrical picture of suffering was born at precisely this moment of aesthetic and affective potentiality.

Kames will later argue that drama thrives on an ability to "affect to speak plain."[34] He goes on to catalogue, in some detail, the poet's arsenal for capturing emotion, emphasizing that most passions manifest in ways that are subtle and non-verbal, so that painting the touching picture (so to speak) requires a measure of moderation and formal restraint as also, by implication, the performing body as instrument. The ideal poet, accordingly, "maintains a moderate degree of dignity without reaching the sublime, paints delicately the tender affections, but is a stranger to the genuine language of enthusiastic or fervid passion."[35] Skillful drama, in other words, affects the middling.[36] Kames authorizes this representational tactic, however, in the most surprising way, citing Horace in the *Ars Poetica* (which I have taken as the epigram for this chapter and reproduced above). The classical world is thus taken to prefigure prosaic suffering if not explicitly underwrite the particular frame of intelligibility so central to bourgeois tragedy in prose, which is to say, the imagined relation that obtains when a speaker wishes "his lament to touch the spectator's heart." The Horatian phrase"*dolet sermone pedestri*,"—grieving in the language of prose—so nicely captures this simultaneous sense of the middling and the prosaic, the painfully unadorned and artless, and therefore somehow the *more true*.

This rhetoric of authenticity, we ought to keep in mind, always also reveals the representational strategy it obscures; prosaic suffering is still nevertheless artifice, still simply an effect conjured in these texts. And hence, Moore, Johnson, and Kames' arguments imagine in various ways a prosaic form that works as a vanishing medium for the

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[34] Kames, *Elements,* 1:350.

[35] Ibid., 1:358-9.

[36] Kames also cites Shakespearean soliloquies as "accurate and bold copies of nature," that are such because they refrain from histrionic description. See Ibid., pp. 360ff.; cf. Kames' section on "Versification" in vol. 2 (p. 98ff.) for an even more subtle, if not overlong discussion of metrical effects.

playwright; prose, that is, refuses the conventions associated with stylistic elevation and thereby *seems* transparent.[37] Its artifice lies precisely in its ability to mimic the absence of artifice. And while Horace provided the necessary theoretical precedent for its practice, this sense of prose as the form of authenticity perhaps owes more to Montaigne, who famously begins his *Essays* with the declaration that their prosaism is a gesture of transparency between author and reader. The affected modesty of the *Essays'* prefatory address signals that you—the reader—join Montaigne on the common ground of the vernacular and thereby directly perceive the inner life of its speaker. Indeed, prose becomes the body laid bare, sentiment purportedly unmediated:

> Were [these essays] to have been to seek the favor of the world, I would have made myself up better, and presented myself with a studied gait. I want to be seen in my simple, natural and ordinary fashion, with neither struggle nor artifice: for it is I that I paint….Had I been among those nations said to live in the sweet freedom of the first laws of nature, I assure you that I would have quite willingly depicted myself completely, and completely naked. Thus reader, I am myself the matter of my book…[38]

In the *Essays,* prose is the nakedness of form. Still, and crucially, this nakedness is a oeucx gesture of invitation, the enacting of an implied relationship always entangled in the medium through which it is conducted and the moods it evokes. *Sermone pedestri* is the

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[37] Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay explore the common assumption that prose depicts reality without mediation, arguing that prose is a signifying practice with a particular history and not simply unornamented discourse. See especially their discussion of prose history in *The Emergence of Prose: An Essay in Prosaics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), chap. 7.

[38] Michel Montaigne, "To the Reader," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne,* trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 1.

tragic version of this affected aesthetic honesty, always performing its seeming unperformed*ness,* always performing its ordinariness.[39]

We will look to specific examples of this shortly, but here I want to underscore this point by comparing the prose tragic aesthetic to its contemporary analogue in performance theory. Joseph Roach has demonstrated, for instance, that the period between Diderot's *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* in 1757 and his *Le paradoxe sur le comédian,* sixteen years later, saw a paradigmatic shift in the way performance theory was conceived for the *philosophe* and his circle, decisively shaping our subsequent ideas about theatrical naturalism by merging diverse currents of Enlightened physiology, aesthetic theory, and vitalism. The reigning paradigm, prior to this synthesis, was one that saw the actor's body as inspired and sensibly inflamed by the emotions called up in the drama. In Roach's succinct phrasing: "The [older] rhetoric of the passions literally incorporated the audience into the performance event. The fiery spirits, emanating from the eyes of the spectator, flowed across the intervening space and penetrated the eyes of the spectator, linking their emotions physically."[40] Thus, when an Othello suffered onstage, the actor was to call up the sentiments and feel them himself, a process which would materialize these same emotions

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[39] As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson explain, much of Mikhail Bakhtin's oeuvre represents a trenchant challenge to the assumption that prose was fundamentally non-literary, unmediated discourse put to page. For instance, in equating prose with speech, Bakhtin argues, the Russian Formalists assumed that prose was artistic only insofar as it mimicked the poetic, only insofar as it took upon itself a recognizable artifice. They argue that "prosaics" represents a philosophy of the ordinary that theorizes prose as quotidian artifice. See their, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). While Bahktin has inspired many of the critical procedures I take myself to utilize in this chapter, and especially its focus on the ordinary, it bears worth stressing that his work—despite its importance to our understanding the novel's prosaic form—almost completely ignores the theatre. Of particular note are Bahktin's notions of heteroglossia and polyphony, which he treats in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982]), and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984]), respectively.

[40] Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 155.

in the spectator. Roach shows how this process—which owed much to Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian—left intact much of the occult connection the ancient world theorized as central to rhetorical performance, even as it accommodated, by midcentury, sensible models of the nervous system. In this way, performance theory appropriated the Latin dictum that: "A strong imagination begets the event itself."[41]

The new naturalist aesthetic, on the contrary, saw the actor's body as a technical instrument, subject to physical law, in which a complex "semiotics of affect" was open to analysis and consistently reproducible onstage. Performance, as indeed the passions depicted, were a matter of craft. This mechanical regularity, according to Diderot, depended on the actor's ability "to overcome the influence of sensibility…[and] to discipline his gestures and expression to the threshold at which their sensible content ceases to register on his consciousness."[42] Rather like prose then, the actor becomes a sort of vanishing medium, recalling at once, Montaigne's text-as-body trope and Lord Kames' counsel that the expert depiction of pathos is one often defined by its restraint or expressive withholding. Indeed, one way we might conceive of this shift in performance theory, is as a prose*ification* of the body, a disenchantment and naturalization of dramatic craft. Diderot and his contemporaries argued that what distinguished the genius' performance from that of mediocre acting was an explicit de-emphasis of theatrical ornamentation and elevation, bringing the intensity of the moment under the control of embodied habitual techniques

[41] Quoted in Roach, *Player's Passion,* 25. See chap. 1 of *Player's Passion* for the classical rhetorical tradition's influence on acting theory and the transmission of affect.

[42] Ibid., 134.

bound by a sort of affective memory.[43] In the clearest break from the neoclassical rhetorical paradigm yet, the *Salons of 1767* imagined what we now know as acting's fourth wall: "In his most celebrated theatrical innovation, [Diderot] advised the dramatist to write the play as if the curtain had not risen, as if the spectator did not exist."[44]

If this seems at odds with what Charles Johnson takes himself to being doing in *Caelia*—"words flow directly from the heart," almost conjuring feeling—or even the ruse of emotional immediacy that Montaigne's introductory essay encourages, that's because ultimately it is. But it is not too far off from the theatrical atmosphere evoked by Moore's technically adept "natural Picture" in prose—and this connection, I want to stress, is almost certainly *not* coincidental. For when we consider that perhaps the decisive moment in the development of Diderot's theory occurred when the *philosophe* witnessed David Garrick demonstrate his ability to oscillate between a spectrum of different affective postures in the Parisian *salons philosophiques,* displaying rather definitively that the actor's body need not sensibly materialize the actual emotions called for by a given text, the connections between Moore and Diderot surface somewhat more clearly. Garrick's visit to Paris, immortalized in its profound effect on the *Salons of 1767,* conferred upon the actor the status of virtuoso amongst elite aesthetes of the period and came several years after the London debut of *The Gamester* in which Garrick played the embattled protagonist, Beverley.[45] *The Gamester*'s most recent editor notes, interestingly, that the actor negotiated the intensity of the play's

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[43] Like Kames, for instance, Diderot argued passionately that the actor's body was caught between rendering emotion legible for a reader-spectator, and fidelity to the natural presentation of those same affects. Cf. Kames, *Elements,* 494-9, and Roach's discussion of Diderot's mature understanding of this dynamic in *Player's Passion,* 134ff. As Roach correctly sees it, this is a problem of the theatre's scale (i.e. the actor's body against the size of a stage or amphitheater).

[44] Roach, *Player's Passion,* 154. For theatre's indebtedness to art history for this concept, see Michael Fried's influential *Absorption and Theatricality,* cited in note 33 above.

[45] Roach, *Player's Passion,* 122-8.

sentiments with Moore, suggesting that, if anything, the playwright's prose had a decidedly muted effect in its earlier drafts that needed to be "thicken'd" to the "Taste of ye Audience…at present" (Garrick's words).[46] Garrick's performance, despite some initial misgivings about the play—which was now peppered with several brief sentimental phrases culled from other tragedies—was a *tour de force* that left the author "ill through too much Fatigue." Thus, he confessed privately that "he was so much affected" that he worried he would be unable to keep up with the drama's nightly demands. This was because, perhaps unsurprisingly, the play was recognized as a vehicle for highly naturalistic portrayals of seemingly real people, a depiction that required the full exertion of the actor's craft. It took a certain type of genius to affect the middling, in other words, and much of the challenge was in balancing the plainness of the text against the subtlety of performance. Not only Garrick in the title role, but also Hannah Pritchard (the original Mrs. Beverley) and Sarah Siddons (likely the play's greatest) were singled out for praise in their "natural" turns as bourgeois women, which is to say, *versions of themselves*. Like the poetics of prose, their performances succeeded because they dissolved the hierarchical distinctions between them and their audience, reconfiguring the politics of tragic feeling by refusing verbal ornament and ostentatious affectation. In effect, and anticipating Lessing's later theory, the actors performing Moore's play became one of those assembled to view it. Recalling the disbelief of those whose first experience of the celebrated Siddons was in this middling role, one critic remarked that those who came expecting the "pompous, buskined deportment usually assumed by tragic actors…saw no cause to be smitten with her performance of this character in private life, because Mrs. Beverley, in her hands, was just what Mrs. Beverley should be,

[46] Quoted in Amberg's edition, 90-2. Amberg's introductory materials detail many of the key aspects of Garrick's working relationship with Moore.

and in nothing either short of it, or beyond it."[47] Such an appeal to tautology is not accidental, I think, and its usage here reproduces simultaneously the logics of Moore's prosaics and Diderot's theorized appropriation of English stagecraft.

In fact, Roach places considerable weight on the encounter between Garrick and Diderot for his reconstruction of the period's shift in performance theory, noting that the actor becomes a recurring character in the encyclopedist's dialogues concerning the mechanics of the actor's craft. The *philosophe* had by then cast his lot with bourgeois drama as an art form, patiently translating Moore's play sometime in 1760 as *Le Joueur* (the only English play he translated, and that, not a terribly successful one), and hailing English bourgeois tragedy as an art form comparable to the greatest of Greek tragedies.[48] Moore's play, moreover, had found a following on the Parisian stage in the translations of Abbé Bruté de Loirelle (1762), and Saurin (1768) as well as private admiration in polite French circles; even D'Alembert translated Beverley's dying soliloquy as if it was a Socratic meditation on the precariousness of modern life, and likely shared it with his fellow encyclopedist.[49] For Diderot, however, the experience of witnessing Garrick's bodily control and his ability to seemingly disappear in a series of subtle affectations was nothing short of a revelation; much of his subsequent work on aesthetics and theatre can be read as a protracted explication of naturalist representation under this rubric, a slow demystification

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[47] *Remarks on Mrs. Siddons*, 6.

[48] See, for example, Diderot's introduction to his adaption of Moore's play, *Le Joueur,* in *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, eds. J. Assézat and M. Tourneux, 18 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 7:413-15. For a synthetic account of this, see Robert Loyalty Cru, *Diderot as a Disciple of English Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913), 309. Cru treats Diderot's relationship to British drama in some detail, and British bourgeois drama especially, in chap. 6. See also Schier, "Diderot's Translation."

[49] Diderot, *Oeuvres completes*, 7:415**.** On the French mania for *The Gamester,* see Élisabeth Belmas, *Jouer autrefois. essai sur le jeu dans la France moderne (XVI^e^-XVIII^e^ siècle)* (Seyssel: Champs Vallon, 2006), 73-74.

of the archaic paradigms that had dominated so much of performance theory. If nothing else, Diderot's theoretical breakthrough occurred in an atmosphere highly invested in the aesthetic possibilities of the quotidian, one particularly concerned with what that might mean for the portrayal of suffering.

What interests me still more is the way that prose itself becomes a formal adjunct to the new model of theatrical absorption, which is to say that Moore's "natural Picture" implies that the prosaicness of its suffering exists in precisely that paradoxical gap between the average spectator's gaze and the actor's ability to deny its presence. As if the audience did not exist, prose tragic dialogue refuses the public function so central to the period's understanding of the noble genre. This affliction is not meant to be the rarified expression of those in high life, nor is it made more palatable in the polish of verse; its enactment does not elicit admiration so much as a voyeuristic identification. And similar to the way Diderot's theatrics of absorption feign a performance unadorned and raw, conferred by the fourth wall's speculative imposition of solitude, the prose tragedy imagines suffering in its extemporaneity. Prosaic suffering is, in this sense, an incarnation of that "writing to the moment" Moore had so admired in his friend Richardson's novels, and a savvy, against-the-grain reading of Dryden's neoclassical aesthetics (its extemporaneousness seems to grant, for instance, Dryden's assumptions in its staging of solitary distress). Prosaic suffering's affective contours are thus paradoxically constituted by the highly public illusion of private woe, expertly if not methodically reproduced. It also implies, however, a decidedly modern sense of affliction as something highly personal, ugly and non-admirable, even banal in its ordinariness. Gone are the soaring metaphysical disquisitions and over expressive meditations on the highest meanings of suffering, replaced instead by the authenticity of a

stammering, solitary Beverley who cannot bring himself to pray.

Thus, Moore's "natural Picture" becomes, in Diderot's mimeographic phrasing, "*tableaux réels*"—real pictures—and the rhetoric of prosaic authenticity is transmuted into a dramaturgy premised on the twin conditions "*si naturelle et si vraie*," that is, the natural and true.[50] The French pictorial aesthetic, of course, does not owe its existence to a pregnant phrase in Moore's prefatory comments; that would be an overstatement of my central claims. Rather, I simply wish to suggest that its emergence roughly, although decisively, coincides with a contemporaneous debate over prose's place in British tragedy, a debate in which Moore's preface and text formed something of a manifesto. The British literary scene, in which tragic prose was litigated and resisted over a century, was likewise negotiating—or perhaps stronger, *forging*—a naturalist aesthetic that would fundamentally alter the way suffering was mediated onstage, an aesthetic that would be definitively theorized in that French context so captivated by British bourgeois tragedy. Modern serious drama, its sense of the authentic and raw, the true and painful to witness, collates the insights of London's mid-eighteenth century theatrical scene (itself in dialogue with the novel), adapting, appropriating, and embodying the bourgeois tragic affects first explored there. Any serious account of its emergence—or alternatively, of suffering's affective shape—I am suggesting, must take this moment and its highly self-conscious use of prose into account.

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I want to turn now to offer a reading of *The Gamester* that begins to draw some of the implications of what I have so far laid out. And I will start with the play's final scenes in order to underscore my argument on Moore's aesthetic of the ordinary and its strange tonal

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[50] Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres*, ed. Laurent Versini, 5 vols. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1996), 4:1137 and 4:1136, respectively.

qualities. If we compare, for instance, Moore's treatment of the gamester's suicide with an analogous scene in Aaron Hill's 1721 domestic tragedy, *The Fatal Extravagance*, we immediately perceive the fundamentally different affective configurations at work there, as well as the way form opens up different ways to perceive affliction.[51] This pairing is deliberate, since Hill's text likely formed one of the crucial models for *The Gamester* and was similarly groundbreaking in its depiction of domestic tragedy. I employ *The Fatal Extravagance*, therefore, as a sort of poetic control. For example, here is Hill's Bellmour (the prototype for the later Beverley) ruminating on the temptation to suicide in cascading blank verse, purposely reproduced as close as possible to the original:

Enter Bellmour, *alone, Pensive.*

Bell. Why shou'd I pause! Nothing can be a Crime
Which puts a stop to Evil. A thousand Men
May have been poor as I,—and yet liv'd happy!
Miseries, we make *our selves,* are born with Ease;
But He, who beggars his Posterity,
Begets a Race, to curse him—Profuse in Ills,
He, propagating Ruin, with his Name,
Entails Descent of Anguish!—Every Scorn,
Which wrings the Soul of any future *Bellmour,*
Whom want shall pinch the Bones of, Ages hence,
Will *mark,* with Shame, my unforgotten Grave,

[51] Joseph Mitchell [Aaron Hill], *The Fatal Extravagance* (London: T. Jauncy, [1721]). Citations to this text follow the numbering of this original edition. I follow Paul S. Dunkin and others in attributing the play to Hill. See "The Authorship of *The Fatal Extravagance,*" *Modern Language Notes* 60, no. 5 (1945): 328-30.

And reach my guilty Soul, where e'er it wanders.

—— If to give Misery to those, to whom

We once gave Life, is an inhuman Crime

How can it be a Sin, to take Life back,

And put an End to Misery? To live,

Is to be rack'd, if Life must still be poor:

For Poverty gives up the Wise Man's Worth,

To the Contempt of tasteless Ignorance.

Oh! —— Could I feel no Misery, but my own*!*

How easy were it for this Sword to free me,

From all that Anguish, which embitters Life*?*

But, when the Grave has given *my* Sorrows Rest,

Where shall my miserable *Wife* find Comfort?

Unfriended, and alone, in Want's bleak Storm,

Not all the Angelic Virtues of her Mind,

Will shield her, from the unpitying World's Derision.

Can it be kind to leave her so expos'd,

And, while I sleep in Death, not dream of *Her?*

Better a thousand Times, to lead her *with* me,

Thro' the dark Doubtfulness of deep *Futurity!*

Whate'er uncertain Fate attends, hereafter,

It can but be the worst of what is bad,

And that's our State, already. —— It shall be done*!*

But how? That asks some Thought —— (33-4)

Here, Bellmour pauses to consider how to bring about the death of his family painlessly, concerned that what seems an act of compassion to him will seem cruelty to others. After six lines, he reasons:

Hark! The Time presses me.

(*Loud Knockings without.*)

What if I use th'unwounding Aid of Poison?

I have at Hand that Sovereign Remedy.

For all Diseases, Want and Woe can plague with,

Mix'd with some unfear'd Draught 'twill gently Murder:

Bear off Death's painful Edge, and, in sweet Slumber,

Swim soft, and shadowy, o'er the misty Eye ball. (34-5)

This undoubtedly ornate series of apostrophes and soliloquized thought is not without a certain charm recalling the Shakespearean, transposing the language of the heroic onto the domestic as if it was simply verbal costuming.[52] If we look at *The Gamester*'s corresponding scene, on the other hand, we find something altogether different (again reproduced in full):

BEVERLEY *is discover'd sitting. After a short*

Pause he starts up, and comes forward.

Bev. Why, there's an End then. I have judg'd deliberately, and the Result is Death. How the Self-Murderer's Account may stand, I know not. But this I know—the Load of hateful Life oppressed me too much—The Horrors of my

[52] The play's preface claims to be inspired by the Elizabethan domestic play, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (mistakenly believed in the period to have been by Shakespeare; now generally attributed to Thomas Middleton), a genealogy that has since been extended to Moore's later drama. See Amberg's edition, 380-2.

> Soul are more than I can bear—(*Offers to kneel.*)—Father of Mercy!—I cannot pray—Despair has laid his iron Hand upon me, and seal'd me for Perdition—Conscience! Conscience! thy Clamours are too loud—Here's that shall silence them. (*Takes a Vial out of his Pocket, and looks at it.*) Thou art most friendly to the Miserable. Come then, thou Cordial for sick Minds—Come to my Heart (*Drinks.*) O, that the Grave wou'd bury Memory as well as Body! For if the Soul sees and feels the Sufferings of those dear Ones it leaves behind, the EVERLASTING has no Vengeance to torment it deeper—I'll think no more on't—Reflection comes too late—Once there was a Time for't—but now 'tis past—Who's there? (263.20-39)

At the level of their most basic semantic contents the two scenes are remarkably similar, and as vehicles for the plot, they accomplish almost the exact same ends: the protagonists offer a justification of suicide, before expressing second thoughts on account of the effect their death will have on their families, lamenting their inability to spare them, before resolving to die, convinced that death is deliverance from pain (note that whereas Beverley swigs the poison before lingering to play's end, Hill's text increases the tension by having Bellmour think he has poisoned his young children before stabbing himself). In moments like this, it seems plain to see, Moore has Hill's pioneering domestic drama in mind.

Yet syntactically, the development in the direction of modern drama is clearly legible, and this has implications for the modernization of affliction as well as the overall affective configuration of this moment in the play. There is a total shift in the way apparently similar sentiments find expression, one that suggests that the cultural assumptions at work are profoundly different by midcentury. Whereas Bellmour's verse monologue—as mellifluous

and soaring as it is—essentially *tells* the spectator-reader, Moore's prose *shows*. The figure I omitted from Hill's text in ellipses above may serve as proof of this:

> Death, in itself,
> Comes soft, and sweetly, as an Infant's Sleep,
> When Nature, unalarm'd, expects it not.
> From those dear, destin'd Breasts, the pointed Steel,
> Must draw no Blood, to stain my blushing Hand;
> Lest my Soul start, and that seem Cruelty,
> Which I wou'd fain [sic] think Pity. —— (34)

Bellmour's dialogue, if anything, is rather reasonable in the tradition of the Shakespearean soliloquy, defined by its careful discursive rationalization of a difficult ethical choice. It is also figurative, moving from simile to synecdoche to trace the argumentative links that might frame this death as a good one, as a "gentle Murder" more compassionate than heartless and thus, Bellmour implies, the less of precarious evils. Beverley's sentiments in *The Gamester*, by contrast, are fleeting, never fully formed before they are dropped and another oppressive thought predominates in a flash of new concern. Even when a figure presents itself in the monologue, as in the "iron Hand" of "Despair," its staccato utterance colors intense, momentary pulses of affective meaning, never fully following their implications.

Moore's prose then is characterized in large part by what it withholds, often refusing even verbal signification, withholding uttered information, trailing off in its reasoning, or otherwise relying on the subtlety of an actor's bodily gestures. Thus: "The Horrors of [Beverley's] Soul" compel him to pray, before (as he kneels no less!) his prayer admits that

affliction has damned him to despair, stopping before it fully begins. Fitful and inconstant, Beverley's lines read as the ravings of a man in so deep a distress he has ceased to think clearly. This is telling, in fact, as the syllogistic links between the monologue's impressionistic sentiments ask much more of their reader than Hill's patient, figurative delineation of cause and effect, motivation and compulsion. The observer of Beverley's sufferings must employ a more holistic semiotics of affect for interpretation, therefore, one that requires them to read more into those moments where feeling elides its expression in words.[53] In this way, a certain clarity is denied us in the 1753 text, as it embodies Kames' counsel about grieving in the language prose quite literally: breaking its rhythm, blocking the metrical cadences that would beautify the moment even as its aesthetic sensibility is never fully absent (the apostrophe to poison—"Come then, thou Cordial for sick Minds—Come to my Heart" stands out, for example). This is apparent even in the stage directions I have been careful to quote above in their original; Hill cannot resist noting what we would soon learn anyways (that Bellmour is "*Pensive"* in this scene), while Moore's tight blocking and descriptive staging softly evoke an atmospherics in which absorption takes root. Concealing that which it would divulge, Beverley himself ironically hints at the changing

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[53] We might compare here Richardson's own use of visuality (for him, a visuality imagined) to characterize the processes behind suffering's consumption, with what is asked of the spectator in Moore's play. As I argued in the previous chapter, Richardson tends to think with the dramatist's eye, and thus key moments of *Clarissa* play out like they occur onstage. Richardson, for example, made much of the dramatic death scenes in the novel—especially Lovelace's. In a letter (dated between December 23, 1748 and January 23, 1749) the author repeatedly urges Moore along in his interpretation of the scene: "See him [Lovelace] supposed speechless….behold Lovelace the object of his own servant's pity!…See…his wounds bleeding afresh….See him…living over the night, but suffering much….See him in Convulsions, and fainting away…" The use of the imperative here and throughout their correspondence suggests one way in which drama and novel mutually informed consumptive patterns crucial to tragic affect. At times, Richardson's urging dissolves into an impressionistic list of visual details and affective poses that recall the tableau vivant, textual gestures that will be advanced by the bourgeois tragic tradition traced so far. As in Moore above, albeit necessarily lapsing into the description so necessary to novelistic prose, the sensibility binding the two writers works by showing rather than merely telling. Where they depart, however, is that Richardson's impatience with those who interpreted the text differently, leads him to supply his own ekphrastic framework for interpretation—in essence, guiding the mind's eye in supplying what was descriptively withheld in the novel. See Amberg, *The Gamester,* 401 for Richardson's letter in full.

performative paradigm in his halting utterance: "I'll think no more on't—Reflection comes too late." Too late indeed, or instead never quite present to the spectator and the play's protagonist alike. All of this is not to say that Bellmour's monologue in *The Fatal Extravagance* is not technically adept; I take it as a productive study in contrast precisely because it *is* adept, not merely a collection of doggerel but the work of a competent poet working comfortably according to the medium and social conventions of his time. The cumulative effect is one of profound difference, therefore, a sharp contrast between Hill's poetry and Moore's portrait of affliction, between the lyrical on the one hand, and the raw difficulty of the prosaic on the other.

I want to suggest then, that the real, formal differences we have observed so far index the shifting affective—as well as conceptual—terrains in which suffering resides. What's at stake, circulating in and through prose tragic aesthetics, lies beyond a merely notional or intellectual sense of affliction's modernization in the period, in other words, encompassing rather a network of possibilities, contradictions, and deep-seated anxieties, precisely the sorts of feelings Williams describes as palpable even as they remain well-nigh inarticulable (at least in that present in which they are first experienced). Prose tragedy, then, not only portrays common (as opposed to aristocratic) feeling, but also performs it in the *emotional register* of the prosaic before prosaic suffering is thoroughly normalized as "realistic." From our vantage point at least, it is difficult to read Beverley's soliloquy closely without apprehending precisely this sort of difference in the way tragedy works there. Consider the line immediately following his draught of the lethal vial: "O, that the Grave wou'd bury Memory as well as Body! For if the Soul sees and feels the Sufferings of those dear Ones it leaves behind the EVERLASTING has no Vengeance to torment it deeper" (263.33-7) This

line seems at first innocuous, but in the context of that moment in the play its digression into the subjunctive is much more telling; complementing the disjointedness of the gamester's elusive reasoning and the obscurity of its connections, the modal auxiliary "wou'd" caps the sense of uncertain longing that frames much of the play. Like its prosaic form, therefore, the subtle indeterminacy of grammatical mood also becomes a way to divest suffering of its elevated meanings by inhabiting the conventions of what will later be read as theatrical absorption.

One might dispute this, pointing to the subjunctive tense in *The Fatal Extravagance* —in a similar moment, Bellmour exclaims: "Oh!—— Cou'd I feel no Misery but my own!"— but here the subjunctive expresses a wish that is then quickly resolved in an elaborate, discursive rationalization spoken aloud. The resolution to kill his family is a way to limit their suffering, the audience is *told*, so that by this murder they might be delivered. Even the phrase, several lines later, "dark Doubtfulness of deep *Futurity"* is counterbalanced against a metaphysics with clear consequences for those who transgress its limits. For Hill then, the subjunctive works to proffer rhetorical questions which are answered in soliloquy, a sort of Socratic philosophical method in verse that thereby systematizes the natural law in which its loopholes exist. By contrast, *The Gamester*'s use of the subjunctive leaves such questions fundamentally unanswered, and Beverley's yearning only elicits other conditional concerns, compounding incredulous expressions of longing, regret, and loss. In short, it expresses rather radical doubts, entertaining a skepticism it goes on to rebuff by the play's end, to be sure—but not before it dwells in its anxious uncertainty. If anything, Beverley's monologue ultimately voices the tenuous hope that his demise would mean total annihilation, that painful memory would not persist in the soul's total death.

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I have zeroed in on this moment in the text because it illustrates the way its prosaic suffering underlies the theatrics of absorption and mimics the authenticity of the moment, but the subjunctivity of its grammar also offers a key for reading the play's organizing tropes. *The Gamester*, I will now clarify, is about the sort of uncertainties presented to the middling sort, or conversely about the series of wagers and ineffectual optimism that increasingly threaten the stability of an emergent bourgeoisie. Indeed, on several levels, Beverley is caught in a series of games: most literally, the gambling he engages in with Stukeley is repeatedly contrasted against the loving domesticity of Mrs. Beverley, and metaphorically doubled in the the language of financial speculation throughout the play, as well as Stukeley's own dangerous attempts at cuckolding his friend. Billed by its contemporaries as a morality play against the horrors of gambling,[54] the home is portrayed as constant, its affections much more unyielding than its present fortunes might entail. Hence, Mrs. Beverley's assurance that: "now [that their fortune is] gone, give me but a bare Subsistance [sic] and my Husband's Smiles, and I'll be the happiest of the Poor." (207.17-18) Later, in another bout of soliloquizing, Beverley looks on a gaming table, box and dice ready to play, and laments that had he labored as a slave for a "daily Pittance" (219.7), he would be much more reluctant to risk its loss. Ironically then, it is precisely a measure of affluence attained by the middling sort, that brings about its instability and degeneracy: "Had Fortune given me but little, that little had been still my own. But Plenty leads to Waste" (219.10-11) Labor and the home are the counterpoints to "the Disease of Play…encreas[ing] his Shame

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[54] Amberg, *The Gamester,* 90-115 passim. Among the responses to *The Gamester*'s success was an anonymous pamphlet offering a tongue-in-cheek defense of the pastime, *A Modest Defence of Gaming* [sic] (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1754).

and his Affliction" (209.5-7), in a moment that recalls Max Weber's landmark theses on the Protestant work ethic.[55] Whereas Lillo's London apprentice, Barnwell, looked forward to a day when he would attain the object of "late erected hopes," Beverley's misfortune is ironically underwritten by that sort of success being attained, its potential loss hovering over the family like a sinister cloud.

For Moore, the ludic is a gendered category that does provocative work in exploring public and private, risk and safety, skepticism and belief. Play of this sort is a mark of masculine, genteel leisure that projects a certain careless quasi-Epicureanism, an almost aristocratic *jouissance* in the chaotic whims of chance.[56] Stukeley, for instance, rallies his mark by goading Beverley's sense of manly quality. "Prithee be a Man," he urges, "Fortune may be ours again." When Beverley counters that Fortune has only teased them, implicitly gendering risk as a female lover, Stukeley goes on to emphasize the point by adjusting its figurative shape: "We are Fortune's Children—True, she's a fickle Mother; but shall We droop because She's peevish?—No; she has Smiles in Store." Like a parodic mother, capricious in her affections and uncomfortably eroticized here and throughout, she functions as mistress to domesticity's marital predictability. Of course, historians have long claimed women were frequent visitors to the gaming houses. Whist books were marketed for ladies and their circles in polite society, and socialites like the Duchess of Devonshire

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[55] The reference, of course, is to Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. See chap. 3, n. 50 above..

[56] With respect to the French context, Thomas Kavanaugh has noted that gaming culture is intensely negotiated in the years between the death of Louis XIV and the Revolution. He cites Moore's text as a key to understanding the moral backlash to gambling during the end of this period, tracing a widespread shift from aristocratic to bourgeois attitudes on games of chance. See "The Libertine's Bluff: Cards and Culture in Eighteenth-Century France, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 4 (2000): 505-21.

were known as much for their addiction to gambling as for their fashionable tastes.[57] But in Moore's play, gaming serves to separate the social sphere along axiomatic distinctions. Men risk; men play; men are the tempters and tamers of Fortune. Gambling here and throughout the bourgeois tragic archive denotes the Epicurean and libertine ethos of upwardly-mobile middle rank men. For Beverley, manliness is tied to the ability to risk it all, so that his debts not only endanger his family's livelihood but also signal a crisis in masculinity.[58]

Still, if Beverley's suicidal ramblings momentarily condense its anxieties, then, the play as a whole labors under a fog of the subjunctive, at times metaphorically glossing its uncertainties, at other times literalizing the wagers that characterize bourgeois striving. For example, when Beverley affirms that he has "judg'd deliberately" immediately before resolving to kill himself, the language has a modern resonance, evoking at once the calculative speculation of games of chance and the rational self-interest that underlies game theories in our own day. This resolution is preceded immediately by Stukeley's aggressive coaxing of his conspirators to: "Consider the Reward! Riches and Security!" (263.15) Such juxtapositions effectively underscore the risky behavior in which everyman Beverley involves himself; spanning across scenes in this way, the drama poses these wagers time and

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[57] Recent work on gambling and gender includes Jessica Richard, *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Cf. this to Kavanaugh, cited above, and Gillian Russell, "'Faro's Daughters': Female Gamesters, Politics, and the Discourse of Finance in 1790s Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no.4 (2000): 481-504.

[58] J. G. A. Pocock notes that this old idea gained traction in the Atlantic via an appropriation of Machiavelli, who concludes chapter 25 of *The Prince:* "Fortune [*la fortuna*] is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly." While Pocock traces this to James Harrington's Republicanism during the Interregnum, perhaps a more notable instance for my purpose here is Daniel Defoe's merging of fortune with the impetuous Lady Credit. For Defoe and many contemporaries, Pocock remarks, manly virtue was increasingly imagined as a matter of managing this sort of risk. See *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition,* Rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 13, esp. pp. 452-5, and *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chap. 5.

again, in an almost heteroglossaic use of language, so that the card-sharping underworld seems to speak against and with the properly middle rank speculation and class aspiration. Certainly, its imagery is redolent of the types of risks that both inhere in and proscribe middling behavior; thus, in a figure just as easily employed with respect to Crusoe or Young Wilmot, Beverley likens his and Stukeley's fortunes to those who have been shipwrecked, to those who hazarded all in a "rash Voyage" met by an unforeseen "Storm" (222.31-32). To gamble in this way, the text says, is to tempt the gods, to dwell in the counterfactual world of what *could* be, rather than in the quotidian details of the bourgeois way of life, which Lukács defines—in that way only he can—as a "life-denying" essence, "a kind of forced labor" thoroughly disenchanted.[59]

Which is not to say that *The Gamester* is simplistic in its separation of public and private spheres, that the opposition is ever simply settled between these two zones (the manly world of the tragic fates as against the feminine world of domestic comic bliss). In fact, part of the problem is that the household is itself rather precarious; Beverley is in so deep that to return home is simply to replace one set of endemic risks with another. This is something that Mrs. Beverley, in her impassioned pleas for her husband to return to her, cannot see; his ambitions have thoroughly saturated their world with the conditions of the tragic, even (perhaps especially) in the domestic sphere. There is, it seems, no way forward for Moore's protagonist that does not involve a substantial set of risks for his circle in the short run.

In such dire conditions then, the options are clear only from the perspective of the long run of Christian patience and pious submission. The probabilistic calculation of risk

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[59] Georg Lukács, "The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art's Sake," in *Soul and Form,* trans. Anna Bostock, eds. John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis (New York: Columbia University Pres, 2010), 74.

and rewards the play trades in, we should remember, already had a long history in early modern natural philosophy, and the overlapping frames of uncertainty and conjecture recall Pascal's foundational contribution to decision theory. But Pascal's wager is, at bottom, about the links between probability and happiness, about the personal decisions that entail, on the one hand, lasting and infinite happiness, while on the other, profound and equally infinite suffering. Moore's play makes this prosaic in a sense by enacting it onstage, placing its cosmic scope amongst the theatrical backdrop of a ruined home, its figurehead incredulously longing, hoping, wishing for deliverance, balancing "complicated Misery" against the grammar of "unusual Hopes" (222.1-2; 223:2). Ultimately, of course, this will be deeply ironic, as Lewson delivers news of the family's windfall immediately following Beverley's despairing suicide; ironically, and glossing Pascal's wager afresh, Christian patience turns out to have both spiritual and material benefits. Moore's appropriation of this speculative logic thus becomes a way to think religious faith and personal happiness when certainty is elusive, and its climactic representation in the play's final scenes can be read as a valence of the drama's modernity, its unflinching focus on the psychology of precariousness and the affective conditions that characterize belief, or lack thereof. In other words, the play's action—bracketed off in this way by the intractable situation of its central characters—transpires at the prosaic level of personal attitudes and beliefs. What animates its central moments and concerns is the exploration of despair and resigned acceptance on the part of Beverley and his wife, the willingness to accept disappointment in the hopes of something better, or conversely, the pain of losing someone close to you, and the dull tormenting depression out of which one cannot seem to crawl.

The women in the play are worth comment here, for while they are never devoid of this melancholic mood, their discourse represents an alternative for the reading of affliction. Mrs. Beverley and Beverley's sister, Charlotte, for whom prudence is at once a mark of domestic economy and Protestant sobriety, offer a gendered study in many of the contrasts the play imagines. Like those female sufferers that furnish a pattern for providential readings of misfortune and personal unhappiness in the texts we have explored (Lillo's Maria and Charlot, Richardson's Clarissa come to mind, but there are others too), their frequent exchanges serve as counterpoints to the skepticism of the play's background of chattering gamblers. Interestingly, this appears not only throughout their prosaic dialogue—thus, Mrs. Berverley sees less of fortune in the plot's twists: "Heaven turns Evil into Good; and by permitting Sin, warns Men to Virtue" (269.3-4)—but also harnesses some of the few versified lines in the play. Consider this brief exchange between the wife and her servant, Lucy, which closes act three by suggestively modulating its prose into one of the "tags" supposedly offered by Garrick himself. Immediately following the tense scene in which Stukeley makes an advance at Mrs. Beverley, she confesses that in this compromised position she "feel[s] a Woman's Fears" and desperately beckons the servant-girl:

> Come to my Chamber, *Lucy;* I have a Tale to tell thee, shall make thee weep for thy poor Mistress.
>
> *Yet Heav'n the guiltless Sufferer regards,*
>
> *And whom it most afflicts it most rewards.* (246.20-3)

What makes this example so telling is its careful navigation of form and genre, calling the servant to witness a tragedy in the offing, while then aphoristically moralizing the affliction it intimates. Thus, the Christian interpretive framework that Mrs. Beverley foists upon her

misfortune seems to naturally elevate its emotive pitch into the conventions of tragic verse. Densely encoded in this fleeting moment, the rhetorical gesture yokes the sort of beautified suffering of heroic tragedy with the sacred itself, in effect, *re*consecrating what the play problematically profanes as ordinary. Up until the play's shocking finale, when Charlotte reports that her "wretched Sister's…Grief is speechless," Mrs. Beverley's providential reflections try vainly to wrest her family's *raison d'être,* its meaning and misfortune, from the prosaic world.

The play thus repeatedly returns to the problem of a suffering severed from a theological economy, deftly moving between the prose of the world and a stylized imposition of the heroic aesthetic upon it. Notice the way that Moore's script finesses this in the penultimate scene of the play, the way the soaring rhetoric of the death tableau fails to apotheosize, collapsing instead into the same sorts of halting, unnumbered prose we saw earlier. Beverley:

> And now I go to my Account. This Rest from Pain brings Death; yet 'tis Heaven's Kindness to me. I wish'd for Ease, a Moment's Ease, that cool Repentance and Contrition might soften Vengeance—Bend me, and let me kneel. (*They lift him from his Chair and support him to his Knees*) I'll pray for You too. Thou Power that mads't me, hear me! If for a Life of Frailty, and this too hasty Deed of Death, thy Justice dooms me, here I acquit the Sentence. But if, enthron'd in Mercy where thou sit'st, thy Pity has beheld me, send me a Gleam of Hope; that in these last and bitter Moments my Soul may taste of Comfort! And for these Mourners here, O! let their Lives be peaceful, and their Deaths happy!—Now raise me.

(*They lift him to the Chair*.)

Mrs. *Bev*. Restore him, Heaven! Stretch forth thy Arm omnipotent, and snatch him from the Grave!—O save him! save him! (270.23-38)

Just try to read this excerpt in a way that doesn't lapse into the cadences and rhythmic stresses that make up the poetics of tragedy and it will be readily apparent that Moore's bourgeois drama is ahead of its time, supremely self-aware of the possibilities for an aesthetic of the ordinary. As if recalling the self-imprecating mixture of guilt and redemptive longing that characterized Marlowe's verse in *Dr. Faustus,* Beverley's prayer abides in the epistemic purgatory between belief and unbelief, verse and non-verse. Indeed, with minimal editing, one could easily mistake it for a series of so-called "mighty lines," in Moore's words, "a Species of Prose which differs very little from Verse." But this elegant address is soon followed by a swoon into a vacillating skepticism, an affective state for which a fragmented prose serves as cue:

Bev. Alas! that Prayer is fruitless. Already Death has seiz'd me—Yet Heaven is gracious—I ask'd for Hope, as the bright Presage of Forgiveness, and like a Light, blazing thro' Darkness, it came and chear'd me—'Twas all I liv'd for, and now I die.

Mrs. *Bev*. Not yet!—Not yet!—Stay but a little and I'll die too.

…

Bev. Lend me your Hand, Love—so—raise me—No—'twill not be—My Life is finish'd—O! for a few short Moments! to tell you how my Heart bleeds for you —That even now, thus dying as I am, dubious and fearful of Hereafter, my

bosom Pang is for Your Miseries. Support her Heaven!—And now I go—O, Mercy! Mercy!

(*Dies*) [270.39-271.14]

There is much going on here—at least much more than simply a typographic coding of how this death is to be played. Rather, prosaic form serves to disfigure the tidiness of a good death, to deny it the metrical song that might artistically stand in for transcendence in the moment. Like the play's manifesto-like prefatory comments, moreover, Moore's dialogue engages in a complex apology for its strange affective work. When Beverley asks for his wife's forgiveness, she assures him she will oblige, if only he would tell her what motivates the apology. "For meanly dying," answers the gamester, in a moment so self-aware as to encompass social, economic, and rhetorical senses. Suggesting the kind of dialogic properties that Bahktin claimed as a hallmark of novelistic prose, "meanly dying" is the shame of their downward mobility, it is the loss of dignity, but it's also how grieving in the language of prose takes place—especially for those who inhabit the "mean" of the middling rank (figure 4.1). So it should be clear that prosaic suffering is never *only* a question of form; instead, its form is a tactic for signaling the various affective registers the play negotiates as a politics of bourgeois feeling. Indeed, at its most ambitious, it imagines the emergence of a secularized suffering, one "dubious and fearful of Hereafter," that refigures gravitas as a troublingly disenchanted rhetorical category.

How does one read gravitas, *now*? This lingering question, with which I began the chapter, returns as, at once the affective and aesthetic problem explored in Moore's text. Now that suffering is unchained from the heroic, severed from the beauty and elevation of the poetic, anchored instead to the workaday prose of the world with its petty humiliations



Figure 4.1. J. Alais [printmaker], Engraving depicting the death tableau from *The Gamester* printed for J. Roach, [early-nineteenth century?] (By Permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library)

and disappointments and yes, accidentally tragic randomness, how does one still have dignity and meaning for one's afflictions? How does one meanly die, in other words? I'm not quite sure Moore and his contemporaries have a good answer for this—at least not in the play, which relapses into both the uncertainty of Beverley's wavering belief and inevitably its much more comfortable didacticism in Hannah Pritchard's epilogue. In this, it looks with anticipation to Ibsen's interrogative sense of the theatrical, the idea that drama is rather like a question posed without answer. And maybe this is the point, since the weight of its prosaism—fragmented, occasionally difficult to read, artfully inarticulate in its sputtering conclusions—is as close as the play gets, finally, to making its feeling tangible.

After all, this model of tragic gravitas imagines the body as a sensorium pulled down to earth, one in which our affective perception is monopolized by the weight of some impinging object. I cannot help but think of Beverley's lament in the deliberation scene I have made much of here: "But this I know—the Load of hateful Life oppresses me too much" (263.25-6). A load that oppresses could just as easily describe the experience of watching such a spectacle, the not-quite-satisfying sense of tragic accident in a middlebrow life, rendered thoroughly ordinary in its representation.[60] The question is one of endurance then, of what makes the pain of a trauma bearable for those enacting and regarding it. Strip the world of its poetry, and one might as well strip it of its aesthetic pleasures. In fact, Wordsworth made precisely this claim in the preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*:

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[60] Michael Rosen observes that gravitas is related historically to another term considered in this dissertation: dignity. It is from his recent work that I take the etymological point about gravitas being related to gravity and weightiness. Rosen states: "The term *dignitas* functioned in Latin as part of a critical vocabulary in relation to art and, particularly, rhetoric. *Dignitas* and its relative *gravitas*, were used (notably, by Cicero himself in his *De Oratore*) to characterize speech that was weighty and majestic, in contrast to discourse that was light and charming (which was referred to by the words *gratias* and *venustus*). And (as in our own modern usage) the term was applied not just to the manner of a speech but to the speaker him—it always was 'him'—self. We have here the roots of the association of the idea of dignity with what is 'dignified' in manner." See his, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 13.

> If the words, however, by which this excitement is produced be in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds….and hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre [sic] to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose.[61]

Then, underscoring his point, he adds:

> This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the reperusal of the distressful parts of *Clarissa Harlowe*, or *The Gamester*; while Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure—an effect which, in a much greater degree than might at first be imagined, is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement. (xxxi)

It is not that the prose of the world is so informal as to be trite or banal or bathetic—as critics from Dryden to Johnson had believed—but it is fundamentally the opposite case, that prose is troublingly raw, seemingly unmediated and because of this, just too heavy. Whereas in the neoclassical viewpoint, tragedy enlivens and elevates to catharsis, the prosaic

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[61] William Wordsworth, preface to the *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems,* 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), 1:xxx.

suffering of bourgeois tragedy burdens its spectator with a truth it refuses to gild. It makes the reader suffer too, in other words, because it seems real, all too real.

SYMPATHY PAINS:

MELANCHOLY, MIDDLING TRAGEDY, AND THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL

> Fellow-men, come here to learn how to bear the ills of life; come, let us weep together over the lot of the sufferers in these works of fiction, and let us say to ourselves, "When adverse fate overwhelms us, we in our turn shall at least have the sympathy of good people."
>
> -Diderot, *Éloge de Richardson*

Eulogizing Richardson in 1762, Diderot evokes a scene from a sentimental novel. He writes of receiving a letter which contains the (until-then censored) French translation of Clarissa's funeral and will from the closing volume of that eponymous novel.[1] The pages are quickly snapped up by a friend who happens to be visiting the *philosophe*. Huddled in the corner, this friend—"one of the most sensitive men I know," Diderot points out—reads and weeps, pauses, considers, and weeps again. The friend then begins pacing feverishly as if completely lost in the emotion of it all, before loudly mourning the girl's loss and reproaching, bitterly, her family's calloused disregard for her happiness. Always a keen observer of social mores, Diderot assumes at once the position of likeminded friend and narrative voice, in effect replicating what he sees as Richardson's method of keen perception, and thereby turning description into psychological commentary. "I watched him, and presently I see…," he recounts (286). A subtle sleight of hand, mourning Richardson happens in the *Eulogy* by mourning his fictional creations.

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[1] Denis Diderot, "An Eulogy of Richardson," in *Diderot's Thoughts on Art and Style, with Some of His Shorter Essays,* ed. and trans. Beatrix L. Tollemache (London: J. Macqueen, 1896), 266-91. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically and refer to this edition. Perhaps the most definitive comparative study of the "Eulogy" can be found in Ruth Goldberg's *Sex and Enlightenment: Women in Richardson and Diderot* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ch. 4.

Although this moment is exemplary for Diderot, within his circle of friends and fellow-travelers it is not without some controversy. In fact, the scene balances a series of relayed correspondences in which two ladies, mutual friends to the adjudicating Diderot, debate Clarissa's merits, the sincerity of her middle-class piety, and argue over the extent to which she is worthy of mourning at all. One passage in particular is notable for its biblical excesses. "*She is surprised that I am moved to tears by this book,"* one of his correspondents sneers of her erstwhile friend. To which, the philosopher: "And *I* am only astonished when I read of the last hours of this innocent creature, that the very stones, and walls, and the cold and senseless flags on which I walk are not stirred to cry out and join their sorrow with mine. Then all grows dark around me; my soul is filled with gloom, and it seems to me as if nature veiled her face with crape" (285). The world is a world of tears—*sunt lacrimae rerum*—and the tears of things double our readerly melancholy, turning the acuteness of sympathy pains into a realization of the abiding fragility of all good things.[2]

Eulogy shades here into elegy…but only for a moment. Diderot the critic reappears with this verdict: "You may see from this that there is in matters of taste as well as in religion an intolerance which I blame, but which it requires an effort of mind on my part not to share" (286). Sympathy here as throughout the *Eulogy to Richardson* binds as well as it divides because it functions at once as an aesthetic and ethical category, a matter of both fashionable literary taste and sensitivity to the pain of others. Julie Ellison characterizes the cultural Zeitgeist succinctly: "The eighteenth century witnessed the decisive popular fusion

[2] In a discussion of the era's fondness for the prospect poem, Helen Deutsch notes that this line was nearly used as the epigram for Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," but had already been claimed for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. Virgil's line, as I noted in chapter one, gradually came to be read as a prolepsis of suffering's pervasive ordinariness, cited in relation to not only this tradition but also bourgeois tragedy in James Harris' suggestive appropriation. See her "Elegies in Country Churchyards: The Prospect Poem in and around the Eighteenth Century," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy,* ed. Karen Weisman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of sensibility and taste, so that emotional susceptibility was allied to aesthetic expression."[3] Tragedies (especially those that depict the misfortunes of a growing bourgeoisie) have the power to create the social ties they imagine, to bring about the community of mourning they depict and to which they aspire. One's response to tragedy is a powerful bellwether for real-life behavior, this argument claimed, and so sentiment cleaves in that old double sense of the word. It doesn't matter that such suffering is fictional: what difference is there between the calloused heart of a Harlowe and that of one who scoffs at the pain of a literary character realistically drawn? In this case at least, not much. Hence, Sebastien Mercier's defense of *drame bourgeois* renders this as an imperative: "We must judge the soul of every man by the degree of emotion he displays in the theatre."[4]

The fate of sentiment, it seems, is intertwined with that of bourgeois tragedy. Indeed, we might say that both sentimental fiction and bourgeois tragedy manifest a response to an emerging cultural consciousness about modern suffering, its pervasiveness and because of this, its sheer ordinariness. In the literature of sentiment, as in that of bourgeois tragedy, the world is a world of tears; like theatre-goers at a domestic drama, sentimental protagonists become spectators of a catalogue of commonplace troubles, modeling for their readers the very affects they presume to evoke, in the process converting the harsh terrors of tragedy into the elegiac pleasures of the tragic mode. This chapter seeks to narrate one way in which this movement in the cultural imaginary—from tragedy as an Aristotelian poetics to the tragic as a bittersweet mood or philosophical disposition, as Peter Szondi's put it[5]—

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[3] Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 6. Janet Todd makes this claim the heart of her argument in her *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986).

[4] Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Du théâtre, ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* (Amsterdam: E. van Harrevelt, 1773), 12 (my translation).

[5] See his *An Essay on the Tragic,* trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

occurred in and through the period's depictions of ordinary suffering. What I will suggest here is that the history of the sentimental novel *is* one of aesthetic consumption writ large, fantasies of ideal reception and abandoned engagement with a world in pain whereby the experience of ordinary suffering is rendered common currency for the modern subject. Recalling Sarah Fielding's reader of domestic misfortune in *Clarissa*—weeping for *and* with —one's response to the suffering bourgeois evokes both identification and disassociation, negotiating a circulation of affects alternately felt as threatening, comforting, violent, and pleasurable. The sentimental novel is thus a way for the historical present to "find its genre," as it were, to articulate and thus make bearable in particular forms and material practices, the difficult aesthetic experience of regarding the all-too-ordinary pain of all-too-ordinary people, an experience which could often short-circuit the pleasures of bourgeois tragedy. In this way, the bourgeois tragic archive came to condition and make possible the sentimental novel's self-consciously melancholic sensibility.

I trace this shift from tragedy to the tragic in three closely related ways here: first, this chapter offers a factual account of sentimental fiction's emergence in the context of bourgeois tragedy, looking to Sarah Fielding's pioneering work on the novel of feeling in her 1744 tome, *The Adventures of David Simple*. Scholars have generally failed to notice the parallel development of these genres, a fact that is all the more puzzling when one considers that Fielding's novel—likely the first of its kind—features a Ludgate mercer's son whose circle of close relationships all arise from a context of middling misfortune and ordinary suffering. *David Simple* is thus quite literally about the prospects of mercantile prosperity looking upon its downwardly mobile other, a search for intimacy that unfolds as so many scenes of bourgeois tragedy. Fielding would have known these cruel realities well, not only

from her own financial difficulties but also from her brother Henry's involvement in producing George Lillo's bourgeois tragic drama years before. So as we'll see, a repeated theme of the novel is the dignity and grievability of middling figures, a notion which finds its precedent in the passions evoked by Lillo's Barnwell even within episodes of Fielding's 1744 text. Despite the novel's satire on London mores and overwrought sensibility, its rhetoric of suffering and spectatorship tends to be filtered through the bourgeois tragic archive I have been assembling in this project. Indeed, ultimately and ironically, David's world is dismantled in a series of tragedies that destroy his circle in Fielding's 1753 sequel, *Volume the Last,* a reversion of form that underscores the melancholic insight of much good elegy: that our attachment to happiness in the present is always an advance on future grief. The world is always already a world of tears, tragic if not tragedy in the offing.

The literary revisionism I undertake here muddies but ultimately confirms this slippage between the poetics of tragedy and an encroaching sense of the tragic. As part of this, and secondly, I will have occasion to narrate changes occurring across depictions of ordinary suffering that register the intensity of tragedy and those that mediate this through a sentimental aesthetic. The stakes of mediation will become clearer in the following section, after which I turn to examine its central features and strategies in a series of sentimental vignettes that intersect with middling affliction in the period.

The sum of these readings forms this chapter's third major insight: that the emergence of the sentimental novel enacts a process whereby the suffering object of bourgeois tragedy, the pitied figure struggling to navigate the middle rank, becomes the feeling subject defined in part by their ability to bestow pity upon an array of objects and others. I read this generic turn as in some sense an historical allegory for bourgeois

progress, at once a precursor to middling class consciousness and evidence of the shift from tragedy to the tragic that accompanied its ideological consolidation and revaluation in eighteenth-century culture. Placing bourgeois tragedy on a shared genealogy with sentiment, my argument locates the former historically, as an important dialectical precursor to middling sentimentalism. Because of this, my account is perhaps more sympathetic to the predicament of remaining present to another's suffering, a morbid curiosity we have seen time and again in the experience of bourgeois (or more to the point, perhaps, realistic) tragedy. The career of sentimentalism is one of overcoming this predicament through fiction, of finding the ordinary grievable, locating sites of trauma and repair and belonging—like Diderot, imagining oneself as part of a community that weeps together over the "ills of life."

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Let us return, in a sense, to the beginning. The *Eulogy*'s discussion of *Clarissa* finds a powerful precursor—until now, almost totally unnoticed—in another novel crucial to the history of sentimental fiction: Fielding's *David Simple*. In its first volume, we read of the novel's protagonist in the polite company of some ladies of quality who find themselves discussing the relative grievability of various literary characters: Othello, Lear, Dryden's Don Sebastian. Already by this point, David has become disillusioned in his quixotic search for a true friend—"one who could not see another's Suffering's without Pain nor his Pleasures without sharing them"[6]—and so the cunning Mr. Spatter begins introducing him to figures in "high-life." As it will for Diderot's epistolary circle, taste connotes moral fiber in

[6] Sarah Fielding, The Adventures of David Simple *and* Volume the Last, ed. Peter Sabor (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 59. All further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

this novel; find a sensitive reader, and there you will find a friend. Yet whereas for the *philosophe*, the tragedy under discussion is a novel—realistic, lushly imagined, inimitable *Clarissa*—the company's argument instead settles on George Lillo's *The London Merchant* and *Fatal Curiosity*. When one of the ladies compares the Stoic suffering of Joseph Addison's Cato to the "Wretch" Barnwell, the room erupts: "Oh intolerable! cry for an *odious Apprentice-Boy,* who murdered his Uncle, at the Instigation too of a common Woman, and yet be unmoved, *when even* Cato *bled for his Country*" (66).

Like Diderot, quietly "watching and seeing," though of course lacking his critical acumen, David's assumptions about the company are undercut in observing their hardened response to ordinary suffering. His interest in their reading of the play is deeply personal, after all; he himself comes from a line of merchants and country laborers, who by an "honest and industrious life" have provided David with a somewhat genteel upbringing (9). Fielding is careful to clarify her protagonist's middling origins, his status as a second-generation bourgeois financed in part by his father's trade in textiles, details that discussions of the tragic stakes for the middling ironic. Indeed, all he (and we) really need to know about the true character of the ladies' social circle is on display in this damning theatrical review, with its classist disapproval and cackling revulsion. For David, the distinctions between art and life mean very little here, so that discussions of tragedy in the novel encode the reader's or spectator's orientation to the social conditions of suffering objects, marking or foreclosing the possibility that the low Barnwell or Millwood can be objects of sympathy. Emotional detachment masquerades here as critical sophistication. Bourgeois tragedy is a low genre, in their view, an act of condescension for the persons of quality that make up the ladies' salon.

The impediments to sentiment here are many. For one thing, the ladies' critique of Lillo rejects the social realism of his character's motivations, barely concealing an anxiety about the meanness of the drama's affects. Despite the temporal displacement of the dramas' Elizabethan settings, Lillo's imagined world resembles that in which they themselves exist, one in which people "are to be tempted for Money to some monstrous Action," and hence, ought to be judged. Of course, this is also the world David is trying to navigate. Recall, for instance, the novel's first volumes, where his naiveté to the realities of the world nearly results in the forfeiture of his inheritance to an acquisitive brother, a detail that inflects such declarations with Fielding's satirical voice and unwittingly foreshadows its much more sober tragic ending. Ironically then, Lillo's sensitivity to real-life motivation is read by the ladies as its opposite: a vulgar coarseness of feeling ultimately antithetical to the genre's nobility. The comparison between Barnwell and Cato is telling in this respect, for the vision of suffering in the latter is, in point of fact, a quite limited one, a kind of luxury of the ruling class. Let the mob chase after money; to sympathize with Cato is to share in the rareness of an affective commodity, the sort of self-sacrifice that only means something for those living a life of privilege. How does one register loss, this view implies, when there's nothing really to lose? Thus, the economic motive in Lillo's work is objectionable for its banality, even paradoxically its necessity, so much so that they infer Lillo himself "must be something very *low,* for his Distresses always arise from *Poverty*" (66). Form also comes in for censure, however, as they single out his prose—"the *worst Language* in the World" in their hyperbolic summation—denigrating it as part and parcel of the meanness of his dramatic art (or, perhaps, its lack thereof). This is a mundane world concerned with getting

and spending, things which seem oddly particular for tragedy because, of course, they historically were.

But it's also a world that in a very real sense for them *cannot* be tragic. In fact, tragedy is something of a misnomer for what the bourgeois drama depicts, since the fate of Lillo's characters is simply their just deserts, low figures getting what they had coming to them: "every body of either *Sense* or *Goodness,* would wish to crush [Barnwell], and make [him] ten times more miserable than he is." Another lady responds by registering disbelief at the impudence of the tragedian's expected response: "he brings his wicked Wretches…which he would have his Audience pity" (66). How can this be tragic if, in their hardened view, the drama merely plays out the normal functions of justice, keeping the "vulgar Wretches" (65) in their place, violently reinstating the *status quo*? Why pity those low enough to be tempted by money?

If anything, this reaction to *The London Merchant*—satirized by Fielding's talent for impersonation—initially hovers close to what John Portmann qualifies as "juridical" *Schadenfreude,* a pleasure in the punishment of criminal transgression that social actors receive in the exercise of law.[7] Unlike other forms of *Schadenfreude* (Jonathan Swift's *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,* decidedly personal in its grudges, is an apt comparisonn), he notes that punishment of this sort can serve a powerful public function, reinstating power relations and creating the semblance of social cohesion. In this way, the law smuggles in the petty pleasures of a class hierarchy playing out its authority on the gallows. There is a pleasure in Barnwell's punishment because it keeps the low low, expressing outrage at the consequences of one's unruly attempt to transcend rank. As I argued in chapter one, there

[7] John Portmann, *When Bad Things Happen to Other People* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 130.

was a robust tradition behind this against-the-grain reading of tragedies depicting middling tradesmen and common folk, one that sought to pour scorn on them for the audacity of their aspirations.[8] For many, bourgeois tragedy replayed a spectacle of everyday misery reaffirming the dominant ideology, so that Barnwell's misery is ultimately laughable. Hence, the politics of pity in bourgeois tragedy seemed to have social and political consequences for even its earliest spectators. Artifacts of sentiment's actual practice across the long eighteenth century, tragedy delimits sympathy's reach so that the distinction between Cato and Barnwell in episodes like this measures the development of aesthetic feelings these texts sought to evoke.

The ladies' salon in *David Simple* thus presents a miniature of the cultural shift I have been tracing in my discussion of bourgeois tragedy, a call to question the distinction between the suffering of high tragic figures and their ordinary counterparts confirming much of our most subtle accounts of sentimental literature's long incubation period. Julie Ellison, for instance, traces sentimentalism back to the conspiratorial Roman plays that encoded Whig politics following the Restoration, plays which imagined suffering as a spectacle of masculine self-sacrifice. Describing the so-called Age of Sensibility as the misrecognized "second act" of the cultural movement, she argues that sensibility first emerges as a homosocial discourse, a gendered language for imagining male political behavior as a tension between Stoicism and masculine tenderheartedness. With time, the political rhetoric of male sacrifice in works as varied as Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius*

[8] This viewpoint finds a strange ally in the critique of poststructuralists like Roland Barthes in our own day, who inveigh against tragedy's ability to make human misfortune seem metaphysically necessary. Thus, Roland Barthes trenchant observation: "Tragedy is only a way assembling human misfortune, of subsuming it, and thus of justifying it by putting it into the form of a necessity, of a kind of wisdom, or of a purification." Quoted in Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Nature, Humanism, and Tragedy," *New Left Review* 31 (May-June 1965), 65.

Brutus (1680), John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), and Addison's *Cato* (1712), would give way to a generalized theory of sentiment, crossing genres and genders in its practice, ultimately denoting the sorts of "intersubjective" emotional relations explored in the novels of its late eighteenth-century heyday. In the process, the value of feeling in the public sphere emerges as a signal mark of modern experience.

Her most profound observation, however, is that the tangle of affects associated with sensibility gradually come to take different objects as the period wanes, as the dominant model of sympathy shifts from "transactions between socially equal persons…towards scenarios of inequality." Whereas we see homosocial bonds between peers explored at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by its latter half sentimental literature is more and more concerned with one's sensitivity to "needy others"—the poor, slaves, colonized populations abroad, for example.[9] In other words, sentiment increasingly denotes an asymmetrical relation of power, the pitying agent in contrast to the helpless object of their sympathy. Placing this development in the context of British and French imperial expansion, Lynn Festa offers something similar. She notes that sentimentality—which she distinguishes from "sympathy" (correspondence of feeling between individuals) and "sensibility" (susceptibility to feeling)—is a "rhetorical practice" that codifies power by "locat[ing]… emotion [and thus] designating who possesses affect and who elicits it." In her view, sentimental discourse served to define who was and what it means to be human, "policing" emotion's movement between the collective and the individual pitying an object deemed worthy but powerless. Hence, sympathy maintains differences across cultures and

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[9] Ellison, *Cato's Tears,* 19. Lynn Festa expands this argument to encompass French sources in her *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

particular bodies precisely by underwriting a vicarious identification with less fortunate others. "Colonial expansion means that readers must find ways of recognizing human likeness while maintaining other forms of difference," Festa parses, adding: "The sentimental community upholds a common identity, not by forging bonds directly between seemingly like individuals, but by creating a shared relationship to a common but excluded object about which the community has feelings."[10] Sentimentalism expands in collaboration with imperial borders as a way to schematize object relations, therefore, a process through which the subjectivity of compassionate feeling—its location and origin in a specific, privileged person—is cautiously, sometimes only barely, upheld.[11]

Changes of this sort are clearly becoming apparent in the salon imagined by Fielding when she writes *David Simple* in the mid-1740s, but it is happening there in a very different manner, remediated through the staging of middling figures that dramatically call into question the requisite distance upon which much of sentimentalism is predicated. Before the global scope of sentimental objects comes to predominate, therefore, the sentimental novel imagines the break from Ellison's Whiggish models of gentlemanly feeling in comparative readings of bourgeois tragedy whereby gender is no longer a barrier to sentiment but social rank nevertheless remains so. That is, a circle of witty *ladies* indulge in the discourse of civic virtue and sentimental affect, even though they cannot as of yet imagine such feeling crossing social rank, cannot imagine, in other words, middling and lower social orders as proper objects of tragic mourning. Of course the very fact that this is felt—in the context of the novel's satire—as a failure of moral imagination suggests

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[10] Festa, *Sentimental Figures,* 4.

[11] Ibid., 54.

something powerful is at work. To the extent that Fielding's novel responds to the domestic dramas of the prior decade, therefore, we can trace a slightly different genealogical trajectory for sentiment, one that does not disprove Ellison's and Festa's accounts, but rather, by addressing an important omission—the way middling and lower classes had to be first assimilated into sentimental affect—underscores its core implications for the history of sociability and emotion. The fact that it remains little-noticed to this day may indeed be evidence of Philip Fisher's claim that sentimentalism tends to obscure the contentiousness of its history in a rhetoric of common sense humanitarianism: "Where culture installs new habits of moral perception, such as the recognition that a child is a person, a black is a person, it accomplishes as a last step, the forgetting of its own strenuous work so that what are newly learned habits are only remembered as facts."[12] All the more so, I contend, for the middling folk who first embodied ordinary suffering. Unlike the slave, or child, or native, their assimilation as objects of feeling coincided with a cultural hegemony in which the middling sort came to see themselves as *essentially* subjects and not objects of pity. So total was this assimilation that, in fact, that as Colin Campbell puts it, sentimentalism came to understand itself as a "middle class aesthetic."[13]

In a moment, I'll clarify how the aesthetic experience of middling tragedy finds its way into the form of the sentimental novel in ways that complicate Ellison's account. But for now, I simply want to address the historical connections between the bourgeois tragic archive and the sentimental literature of the period by underscoring the fatefulness of their intersection in Fielding's pioneering work. Indeed, more than thirty years ago, Gerard A.

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[12] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9.

[13] See Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987), chap. 7.

Barker argued persuasively that Fielding's *David Simple* was in fact the original novel of feeling, a foundational sentimental text that would profoundly impact the way the discourse was imagined in fiction until at least Henry Mackenzie's slightly different iteration of the "Man of Feeling" in the 1771 novel of that same name.[14] Barker went so far as to suggest that Fielding's use of the then-rare term "sensibility" in the novel (in a moment of first-person reflection between Fielding's narrator and her reader) was "prophetic," its use commonplace less than a decade later.[15] Exalting Fielding's novel to the status of founding document, however, has done little to illuminate the connections between the early sentimental novel and the archive I have been tracing in this project. While Fielding's capacious reading has been the subject of some scholarly interest, and her close (albeit vexed) collaboration with brother Henry is well-documented[16], her admiration for Lillo (whose work she was clearly familiar with[17]) has been little-remarked upon. In their collection of Fielding correspondence, for example, Martin Battestin and Clive Probyn note that Lillo is among the most frequently cited literary figures in Sarah's work, although this elicits little comment, and the connections between the playwright's and her body of work remain largely ignored.[18]

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[14] Gerard A. Barker, "*David Simple:* The Novel of Sensibility in Embryo," *Modern Language Studies* 12.2 (1982): 69-80.

[15] Barker, "Novel of Sensibility in Embryo," 73.

[16] In his excellent introduction the novel, Peter Sabor notes that Henry Fielding exhibited a troubling editorial authority over the text. It is only recently that we are recovering a sense of the changes between Sarah's original and Henry's revised versions of the text.

[17] Fielding, as I noted in earlier chapters, was instrumental in staging *The Fatal Curiosity* at his Little Haymarket Theatre.

[18] See *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding,* ed. Martin C. Battestin and Clive T. Probyn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xli.

Moreover, if we take *Clarissa* to afford an entry in the genealogy of bourgeois tragic fiction, as I have urged us to do, the omission becomes even more puzzling. *David Simple*'s conclusion in Fielding's sequel, *Volume the Last* (1753)—separated by nine hard years and a fateful correspondence with Richardson—was clearly indebted to the cultural ferment that surrounded *Clarissa*'s ending, so much so that a handful of critics have labeled it in passing, a domestic tragedy.[19] The February of that year, 1753 (as close as British bourgeois tragedy gets to an *annus mirabilis*[20]), saw not only the publication of Fielding's tragic sequel, but also the debut of Edward Moore's domestic tragedy in prose, *The Gamester,* with David Garrick in the title role. Written while maintaining a close correspondence with Richardson, as I have argued, Moore's text featured a middling family increasingly shamed by their poverty and thwarted aspirations, until the climactic finale in which the protagonist kills himself in despair. Capping a period of intense cultural debate following the 1751 postscript to *Clarissa,* both texts—influential in their own ways—were written in an atmosphere of tragic possibility for the middling, as if the stylistic dam of poetic justice had been breached with enough force to diffuse its melancholy energies. In the previous chapter, I discussed this atmosphere in more detail with respect to Moore's prosaic artifice, its provocative disenchantment of suffering, and its anticipation of modern serious drama. Here I simply wish to call attention to the unnoticed influence of tragedies depicting the middling sort, the way that Fielding's work collects the concerns of Lillo and Richardson,

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[19] See Allen Michie's discussion of the sequel, "Far From Simple: Sarah Fielding's *Familiar* and the Limits of the Eighteenth-Century Sequel," in *On Second Thought: Updating the Eighteenth-Century Text,* eds. Debra Taylor Bourdeau and Elizabeth Kraft (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2007), esp. 108.

[20] The decade spanning 1751-61 was almost certainly the decade of bourgeois tragedy's most intense formulation and saw the debuts of Lessing's *Sarah Sampson* in 1755 and culminating in Diderot's decisive *Le Fils naturel* and its London-inflected theoretical apparatus.

and makes of bourgeois tragedy a *point de capiton* for the novel of sentiment. In this sense, the ordinariness of tragedy is a condition of possibility for sentimentalism, the hardened kernel of the real it ideologically, affectively massages, until inevitably perhaps, it either succumbs to the tragic impulse itself or transforms it into a source of pleasure.

So the verdict that Fielding's novel is also a domestic tragedy squares with the narrative I have been tracing, and a careful reading of *David Simple's* conclusion in *Volume the Last* yields a palpable shift in tone, moving from the gentle satire of the opening volumes with its comic half-ending and the chorus-like laughter of an implied reader, to the grimly sober realization at its belated close that tragedy is a condition of modernity—all the more so, perhaps, for those who strive for the comforts of middling life. Fantasies of the good life metastasize in that final act, working their way through the fragile community and economic stability David, Camilla, Cynthia and Valentine had arduously but briefly achieved. In this way, sentimental novel slinks into bourgeois tragedy, calling the reader's relation to the text and its suffering objects into question, and retrospectively stitching the sentimental novel back into the genealogy of ordinary suffering I locate through bourgeois tragedy. More importantly, the lasting influence of such appropriated anxieties and thematic material is easily apparent in even a cursory survey of the literature of sentiment, much of which critics and theorists tend to reduce (wrongly, in my view, although this chapter certainly won't help) only to those pitiable tableau that often make up its stock-in-trade. Even in those novels that end comically—for example, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and Sterne's delightfully mournful *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768)—the world of sentimental fiction is an elegiac one, one in which the

reality of bourgeois tragedy has become something of a given and the objects of its imagined mourning have multiplied accordingly.

David Simple thus works to democratize affliction, taking as ideal the compassionate spectator's response to the social realism of bourgeois tragedy. This much is clear in the foil against which Fielding satirizes the genteel salon above. Citing one Lady *Know-all* (whom Peter Sabor suggests was inspired by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a figure I had occasion to consider in relation to bourgeois tragedy in chapter one), the ladies of *David Simple's* first volume mock her sympathetic appraisal of the genre precisely because it turns suffering into a universal condition. "I once heard my Lady *Know-all,*" one of the company chimes in, "positively affirm *George Barnwell* to be one of the best Things that ever was wrote; for that Nature is Nature in whatever Station it is placed. And that she could be as much affected with the Distress of a Man in *low Life,* as if he was a *Lord* or a *Duke*" (66) Decoupling pain and personal misfortune from class, this statement is close to emblematic for the novel as well. While in search of a friend, David finds that tragic circumstances appear in all walks of life, from his close friend (and likely stand-in for Fielding herself), the sharply witty Cynthia, to the French aristocrat, Isabelle, to the rural poor he encounters in its final pages. Because "Nature is Nature," the social context of suffering is irrelevant to its claim on the person of sensibility, who imagines him- or herself as part of a community bound not primarily by the contingencies of the political but rather an essentialized capacity to imagine and feel. If suffering is imagined as democratic, universal, pervasive, so too is bourgeois sensibility, the aesthetic sensorium that transforms the world into a vast field of pitiful objects, largely retaining the relations of power upon which such spectatorship depends.

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I have been arguing so far that the history of the early sentimental novel is closely tied to that of bourgeois tragedy. Indeed, both turn on the insight that the revaluation of the middling and lower orders of social life entails its future mourning, registers that is, the potential for that value's loss and the gravity of such ordinary suffering. Of course, this isn't to say—as I have tried to qualify at several points—that by the 1740s, the dignity of the ordinary was *fait accompli* in the cultural imaginary. Far from it. Rather, I am claiming that the emergence of these genres in the years surrounding the mid-eighteenth century worked hard to come to terms with the afflictions and values of the middling and lower sorts, and was thus a process marked by contradiction and possibility. I want to turn now to develop the links between these two genres in more detail by suggesting that the novel of feeling in fact represents a response to the anxieties unearthed by the realism (and realities) of bourgeois tragedy. The sentimental novel's narrated mediation distances its reader, I claim, converting the punctual horrors of the tragic, with its abject bodies and uncanny betrayals, into an elegiac meditation on another's compassion for a world in pain. The sentimental novel thus represents, through the stylized mediation of the beholder, an early formal rapprochement with the social and formal realisms for which the bourgeois tragic archive came to be known.

Unlike theatrical depictions of middle rank suffering or the "found objects" of Richardson's epistolary novels, novels like Fielding's and Mackenzie's serve rather to emphasize the processes through which the pain of others is regarded, consumed, and sympathetically embraced or kept at bay. If bourgeois tragedy stages verisimilitude or "writes to the moment" or imagines realistic forms of everyday suffering—all of which foster an illusion of immediate presence for their spectator-reader, *mimesis* in its classical sense of

real-time enactment—the sentimental novel specializes in portrayals of emotional deliberation standing between us and the primary object of affliction. When David first meets Valentine and Camilla, poor and hovering close to death, we not only watch the siblings but also, and primarily, David's scanning of the *mise en scène* of affliction. Taking as its model the theatrical tableau—"[David] went upstairs…where he saw a most moving scene" (104)—the readerly experience is conditioned by that of another's, a textual layering whereby the reader watches the fictional spectator taking it all in. Even in moments where a character's exposition seems to suspend briefly the fiction of mediation (Camilla and Cynthia, for example, recount their misfortunes in the first person, expositing in lengthy monologues), the narrator's editorial voice repeatedly interjects to offer clarifying remarks on "our Hero's Sensibility" (100) calling attention to the performative practices that signal sympathy and the emotions that make up its felt texture. As Walter Scott would later remark about *The Man of Feeling,* such texts can be considered: "rather as the history of effects produced on the human mind by a series of events, than the narrative of those events themselves." [21] Sensibility signifies here above all an orientation, an embodied attitude, or mediating subject-position towards one's experience of the world and the objects of one's attachment. [22] Sentimentalism, by contrast, is its "rhetorical practice" or "crafted literary form"—in Festa's careful terminology—that defines the boundaries of a hero's sensibility

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[21] See **Walter Scott's brief biography of the fellow Scot, Mackenzie in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Walter Scott*, vol. 3 (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1829**), 218.

[22] Sensibility denotes a way of seeing the world, a frame of interpretation or "hermeneutic apparatus" (in Vivasvan Soni's vaguely bio-political turn) that allows one—in this case at least—to perceive suffering as tragic suffering, as a misery that was unwarranted or unjust, independent of its object's social identity. See Soni's discussion of sensibility in his *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), chap. 8. Ann Jessie Van Sant has offered perhaps the definitive account of the physiological stakes of sensibility in the period. See her *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

discursively, codifying the sympathetic relationship and its felt qualities, distinguishing between subject and object and nervously asserting their difference in a series of structured tableaux. What is at stake then is not so much the world of tears that subtends the text at a level of remove, humming along diegetically in the background, but rather that which makes up the substance of beholding itself. In such episodes, David serves as a metonym for an idealized theatrical audience making sense of its world, so that our experience is always already filtered through a bourgeois sensorium.

I am not the first to draw this analogy between the theatre and the sentimental novel; David Marshall, Vivasvan Soni, and Margaret Cohen among others, have made similar observations to this end, albeit with different points of emphasis.[23] Indeed, it is hard to overemphasize the profound effect of the theatre on the rhetoric of sentimentalism. But no one has yet noticed that in its infancy, much of this experience is in effect, that of watching *bourgeois* tragedy, which is to say, beholding the suffering of middling people in desperate and often impoverished conditions, tumbling down the social ladder, a context for which there was already a popular mimetic art form whose theoretical language privileged identification and closeness rather than admiration and wonder. Here is the sentiment-as-theatre trope, arguably at its inception in Fielding's novel, and the scene observed is modeled in large part on *The London Merchant*'s apprentices and *Fatal Curiosity's* hapless Wilmot household, scenes we might well call (as I have repeatedly) early experiments in

[23] David Marshall explores this in some detail in his, *The Figure of the Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), while Margaret Cohen places this in the context of French realist literature of the nineteenth century in *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

realism and emotional abbreviation.[24] Sentimental fiction thus reinforces the harsh cruelties and difficult realities of bourgeois tragedy by serving as ambivalent witnesses to their occurrence, urging us to the possibility of a higher order in which they make sense—be that Richardson's sublime Providence, Sterne's "Eternal fountain of Happiness," or the "moral occult" of turn-of-the-century melodrama.[25] A complex appeal to scale and metaphysical consolation, the sentimental novel neutralizes the intensity of those tragedies that strike too close to home.

Which is not to say that the sentimental novel makes no claim to move its reader—just that the affects evoked pass through the fictive mediation of the narrated spectator, and that in this process, what is raised to the level of prominence is this mediating aesthetic. Fielding's text trades on what will become clichés of sensible feeling by which particular subjects like David—who is, at one point, "unable to stifle his Sighs and Tears…for he did not think it beneath a Man to cry from Tenderness" (48)—come to stand in for normative modes of social engagement, investing domains with the localized energies of private and particular sympathies. Even the offhand use of the first person plural—"*our* Hero's sensibility" (my italics), powerfully anticipates Diderot's apology for *Clarissa's* reality: "the world we live in is his scene of action…the passions he portrays are those I feel within me" (241) —evokes the shared values of a kindred reader, calling attention to our status as witnesses to the act of witnessing, and because of this, co-conspirators in its gestures of

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[24] Cohen comes closest to this, in my view, arguing for the parallel between tragedy and sentimental fiction, although her tragic paradigm is *Antigone* via Hegel's *Aesthetics*. With respect to the French context of the nineteenth century, Cohen argues that realism is a "displacement" of sentimental codes, whereas I have been arguing (at least for the British context in which bourgeois tragedy initially flourishes) that sentimental codes arise as a *response* to an emerging realist mode.

[25] On the moral occult, see the Introduction to Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) and my discussion of its anticipation in chapter 3 above.

complaint and regret, fantasy and complacency. Self-aware moments like these implicate the reader as one of many, enumerating their inclusion as part of a set or genre in which David is exemplary if not unique. In this way, his capacity to imagine and feel becomes a pattern against which a cruel world is interrogated and found wanting, "holding the real accountable to what affective justice fantasy has construed" in Lauren Berlant's striking expression—even though these same capacities leave him susceptible to those who would exploit it.[26] Indeed, the contrast between the narrator's loving satire on David, and the cold indifference of a world he cannot navigate is one of the principal effects achieved by Fielding's deft hand, which, as it slouches towards its tragic last act, more and more relinquishes its ironies, as if it can't bear to ridicule the figure for whom poetic justice will eventually fail.[27]

When a Diderot or a David Simple, a Yorick or Harley, ruminate on the grievability of various figures, groping after the words that might capture their sensationalized feelings, what they offer us is a kind of secret history to bourgeois tragedy, a record of the various ways of abiding with and mourning ordinary suffering together. The gauzy light in which the harsh world appears, the moral reflections it occasions, the countless heart swells and blushes and things left unsaid, are the very substance of these novels because these novels are concerned with how actors in a modern world make sense of its experience. In David's displays of emotion, meticulously recorded and cited as "Proofs" (121, 145) according to the

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[26] See Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 21. Elsewhere, she puts the relation between realism and fantasy this way: "In the sentimental mise-en-scène all texts are docudramas, their realism intensified into a kind of soft surrealism that constitutes a command and a demand for the real to show up and be adequate to fantasy." (17)

[27] Felicity Nussbaum argues that the novel marks Fielding as one of the era's most subtle satirists. See her discussion of Fielding in *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chap. 2.

behaviorist language of the novel, the theatrical call-and-response of the bourgeois tragedian (recall Lillo's corporeal: "Tears, tears for blood!") is played out time and again, tableau after tableau, alluding to similar gestures of identification and disassociation in which the fact that one gives tears for blood assures the viewer that they need not themselves bleed. Indeed, one might argue that sentimentalism imports what Paul Fleming calls bourgeois tragedy's "aesthetic of affective identification," the drama's refiguration of the class clause of tragedy so as to render tragic suffering a more or less universal feature of modern life.[28] Early sentimental figures thereby leverage the experience of bourgeois tragedy so as to make of it a pattern for a universal suffering and sympathy, even when such vulnerability entails contact with the common or the "odious" (a word deeply suggestive of class loathing), or when such vulnerability means dwelling in the presence of another's pain, a situation always bounded by a certain epistemic obscurity.[29]

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By emphasizing the aesthetic beholder central to the sentimental novel's form, I have tried to suggest that these texts imagined a genre of tragic spectatorship whose history is implicated in its emergence with and against the bourgeois tragic archive. There are of course, other factors that play into sentimentalism's rise as a dominant eighteenth-century art form and social discourse (Whig politics, materialist theories of the nervous system, Anglo-French colonialism and imperial ideology), none of which, I think, substantially trouble the genealogical links I have been narrating with reference to the rhetoric of a middling sort experiencing increased influence over a culture's forms. In this section,

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[28] Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity: The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 46.

[29] For Elaine Scarry, this epistemic problem is foundation to our experience of pain. See *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

however, I want to press my case a bit further, offering a series of readings that focus on scenes of ordinary suffering particularly concerned with the interests and anxieties of the middle rank. More than depicting the functions of a refined sensibility, the sentimental novel turns the mediating beholder into a figure essentially middling, one whose ability to pity marks them as distinct from the class of objects to whom that pity is directed. The ability to *have* pity rather than elicit it, in other words, inscribes the "rise of the middle class" into the very form of the sentimental novel.

The interpolated tale recounting the story of Camilla and Valentine, for example, offers one prolepsis of the socio-economic shift E. P. Thompson claims for the final decades of the century.[30] Initially, the episode serves to emphasize the undue pressure placed upon women when faced with the prospect of downward mobility. When Camilla refuses to sink into prostitution to support them following expulsion from their family home, she resorts to disguising herself in haggard appearance so as to obviate such advances while begging. Alienated from herself in this way, so that she "was almost frighten'd at [her] own Figure," this brief glimpse of the disgusting in Fielding's novel figures the near-intractable dilemma of the abject body. In this form, the sight of her is too repulsive for sexual pleasure, and only worth tepid acknowledgment (hence, women "*seem'd* to take Compassion," my emphasis), but mostly her presence is a blight, an unsightly inconvenience to those going about their day. Thus, people "shook their Heads, and cried, it was a shame so many Beggars were suffered to be in the Streets, that People could not go about their Business, without being molested by them…" (130-31) This snap assessment of the London underworld is not wholly wrong, however, as Camilla is violently threatened by rival beggars whose territory she has

[30] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

been encroaching upon. No one is spared in this economy of tragic ills, whereby one is only seen to the extent that they are contemptible, which like all forms of disgust, is a sort of refusal.

Just as interesting, Camilla's recollections compound gendered concerns with those of class, describing the isolation and disgraces that come from sinking out of this seemingly natural station. She describes the *Schadenfreude* of those who assume she has deserved her misfortunes, the loss of reputation that bars her from intimacies, and the envy and malice she experiences by entering the competition of a trade, even if that "trade" is begging. Hence, she laments to David: "Alas, Sir…there is no Situation so deplorable, no Condition so much to be pitied, as that of a Gentle-woman in real Poverty. I mean by real Poverty, not having sufficient to procure us Necessaries" (132). There is a touch of biography here—although Fielding's living conditions were never quite so destitute—and later Cynthia will emphasize the extremity of this suffering by ironically comparing it against the "Tragedy" of a woman who cannot keep up with the latest fashions (150). In our view, at least, there is much to dislike about this declaration, which categorically elevates bourgeois suffering to the apex of what Ann Cvetkovich labels our "hierarchies of suffering."[31]

But there is more to her complaint here, I think—and not just in the admission that its affective figurations mark something of an achievement in the period. For as Camilla goes on to explain, what marks this condition as most pitiable is in fact its foreclosure of pity, its resistance to grieving and recognition and because of this, an inability to gain a hearing in the public spheres where suffering is sorted and lamented. In addition to the various bodily afflictions one learned to cope with in order to survive, the degraded

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[31] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 278-81.

bourgeois was also saddled with the shame of being *déclassé,* the presumption that "we must certainly deserve our Distress" if one falls out of the middle rank (132). "In short, Persons who are so unfortunate as to be in this Situation, are in a World full of People, and yet are as solitary as if they were in the wildest Desart; no body will allow them to be of their Rank, nor admit them into their Community," she adds. (133) Alienation, isolation, and shame are the costs of downward mobility, so that ordinary suffering strangely resists its representation.[32]

Adam Smith will famously give an economic gloss to this void in the first part of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).[33] Like Hume, he grants that mean and negative affects represent a barrier to fellow-feeling, our attachments more readily siding with objects of pleasure than with pain. Our pursuit of sentiment hence results in a harried attempt to consolidate our rank and avoid poverty. We want to be seen, he maintains—"To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation" (63)—and so this vanity drives the engine of the economy, drives even the "meanest labourer" to "spend a great part of [his wages] upon conveniences, which may be regarded as superfluities" (62). Like a magnet to the affections, one's prosperity also enlarges a social circle because it draws to oneself a virtual theatre of spectators "to go along with him in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of his situations so readily inspire him" (63). "The man of rank and distinction," not unlike the dramatic hero,

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[32] Hume, I think, toys with this problem when he notes in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007]) that: "A certain degree of poverty produces contempt; but a degree beyond causes compassion and good-will" (249).

[33] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (New York: Penguin Books, 2010). Hereafter cited parenthetically with reference to this edition.

"is observed by all the world." The limits of sympathy show themselves here, in an anecdote that recalls Camilla's plight while erasing its gendered specifics:

> The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel. Those humble cares and painful attentions which occupy those in his situation, afford no amusement to the dissipated and the gay. They turn away their eyes from him, or if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is only to spurn so disagreeable an object from among them. The fortunate and the proud wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that is should dare present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery presume to disturb the serenity of their happiness. (64)

Caught between shame and invisibility, twin conditions that virtually ensure that they are resisted as objects of sympathy, the wretched remain cut off from the emotional fabric of a world that does not relish joining in their pain. The abject cannot flourish because they remain unseen, without standing in a community. This anonymity, outside the frame of recognition that would make collective mourning possible, identifies bourgeois tragedy as a problem of representation even within the nascent discourse of sentimentalism.[34]

Fielding's novel, however, performs the cultural work of its assimilation, not only taking the bourgeois sufferer as an object of tragic sympathies, but by this—and almost imperceptibly—dramatizing the process by which a class of objects comes to take the position of feeling subjects. Camilla and Valentine again offer examples, although Cynthia

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[34] Indeed, this insight occasions one of several overt references to tragedy in Smith's body of work, and he draws a predictably narrow inference from it: "It is the misfortunes of Kings only which afford the proper subjects for tragedy" (*Theory of Moral Sentiments,* 65).

and David (who briefly loses his fortune in the narrative's early chapters) both exemplify a similar dynamic in the upwardly mobile. Upon being delivered from their poverty, Camilla soon voices what sounds like survivor's guilt, moralizing her new position in a confession that negotiates her ambivalence:

> …she did not know whether she ought not to be ashamed to own her present Reflections…for she was thinking, in all that number of Houses that they passed, how many miserable Creatures there were tearing one another to-pieces, from Envy and Folly; how many *Mothers-in-Law,* working under-hand with their Husbands, to make them *turn their Children out of Doors* to *Beggary* and *Misery:* She could not but own the pleasing Sensations she felt, for being *delivered herself* from those Misfortunes, more than over-balanced her Sorrow for her Fellow-Creatures. (148)

The scene is that of a domestic tragedy, one she knows well, but this confession is more notable for its uneasy disassociation with the scene observed. What predominates here is the pleasure of safety, the exquisite enjoyment to be had in a comparison whereby her position as spectator inures her from immediate danger. Five minutes removed from their own misfortunes, and already they are eager to pity rather than be pitied, eager to *have* emotion rather than occasion it in others. Indeed, the remainder of the original novel largely plays out the triumph of sentimental spectatorship, even as David's naiveté remains the cause for occasional humor (cf. Cynthia's mocking use of "Tragedy" above). The company—now flush with Simple-family cash—become newly empathic, consuming a world in suffering, performing their inclusion in an emerging intimate public by weeping and grieving together. Hence, David's assurance to them all: "to comfort ourselves in any

Affliction, by the Consideration that it is only the common Fate of Men…is certainly very reasonable" (149).

Indeed, Fielding's narrator enacts this shift by repeatedly goading her reader into the position of sympathetic spectator, consuming affects by an imaginative displacement of their own selves into the situation of another. For instance, I count no less than eight explicit appeals to readerly sympathy across both *David Simple* and *Volume the Last*, and many more instances in the text in which "imagination" is used to denote a vital sympathetic faculty. Fielding regularly stops short of description in the narrative, instead signaling to the reader to fill in those emotive blanks: "I shall not attempt to describe [what Camilla and Valentine felt at their father's displeasure], as I am very certain no Words can express it so strongly as your own Imagination." (116) Or later, David's affection for Camilla gives "him a pleasure much easier felt than described; and which can only be imagined by those People, who know what it is to have a Passion, and yet cannot be easy unless the Object of it deserves their Esteem." (135) As G. A. Starr points out, her use of *aposiopesis*—the rhetorical withholding of an expression's completion—underscores the importance of intimacy, of a closeness that need not explain itself.[35] At other points, dashes signify the eruptive rapture of feeling, or call to mind the sort of collaborative interpretive practices she explored in her *Remarks on Clarissa,* whereby elisions in the text open themselves to discussion over what makes the good life good, a shared midrash over the body of a ordinary sufferer. The narrator's near refrain in these moments is a gesture of omission and imputation whereby readers are implicated in the community David longs to foster: "I shall

[35] G. A. Starr, "From Socrates to Sarah Fielding: Benevolence, Irony, and Conversation," in *Passionate Encounters in a Time of Sensibility,* eds. Maximillian E. Novak and Anne Mellor (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 112.

leave that to my Reader's own imagination" (used variously, and almost verbatim on pp. 102, 136, 236, 247).

The corollary to this line of reasoning is that imaginative lack takes on the character of moral deficiency, even a lack of proper subjectivity. In discussing her experiences with the same "*fine Ladies*" whose salon David observes, Cynthia underscores the interplay between affect and image that defines the sentimental subject: "as they have no *Minds of their own, they have no Idea of others Sensations*" (90). And later, referring to the joy the friends experience, the narrator frames the tragic turn of the novel by claiming that she "*cannot* write" to those whose imagination prevents them from taking the fellow-feeling of the society at anything but face value. (247) In cases devoid of such sympathy, scoffing, like that of the Orgueil's—whose family name suggests the parodic extremes of a subject grounded by self-regard[36]—will later multiply the effects of tragedy by ensuring that the "little Society" suffers alone, unseen and unpitied. The novel's calculated strategy continually short-circuits the discursive register of such pathetic moments, relying instead on the spectator-reader's ability to perceive and feel and derive pleasure in an other whose suffering they make in some sense their own.

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From one important angle then, Fielding's novel depicts a certain commodification of suffering, and imagines the middling sort's emergence as subjects of feeling.[37] Yet while Philip Fisher argues that sentimentality is "a romance of the object rather than a romance of the subject"—less about the possibility of novel feelings than about the new kinds of objects

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[36] Daniel Gross, whose reading of Hume and Fielding in *The Secret History of Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) centers around contemporary notions of pride and selfhood, explores this point in some detail. See pp.144-56.

[37] Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity,* 46.

to which they attach, an insight that remains astute for the form as a whole[38]—I wonder if sentimentalism's response to middling forms of suffering is not finally a special case of this. What does it say that an emergent class once thought ill-fit for tragedy, most clearly asserts its cultural dominance not in an abundance of tragedies depicting the middling, but in a narrative form whereby their suffering is largely vicarious and othered, directed instead at unfortunates downward as a sort of luxury newly aquired? The middling sort is one moment outside the tragic, at another above it, watching over it and pitying those who fall short of its aspirational embrace—not so as to admire or even identify with their suffering, but almost as if to displace the possibility of their own, to place a rude past under erasure, or to work through a complicit maintenance of social forms in which these habits of moral consumption thrive. The complex passage from the objective politics of tragedy (whereby tragic suffering is the domain of a few aristocratic figures) to the subjective affects of tragedy (whereby compassionate identification binds a middling audience) is crystallized in the sentimental novel's mediated tableaux of ordinary suffering. In the case of bourgeois suffering at least, the object of affliction lodges itself in the fantasy life of a feeling subject with a unique tenacity, the raw material of an imaginative play whereby one's proximity to the abject is alternately countenanced and refused, brought close, but always finally *made other*. As if affirming the conventional wisdom of Robinson Crusoe's father—for whom "catastrophe" was something that happened to stations other than the middling—sentimental fiction identifies the quintessence of bourgeois feeling in its extension of compassion from the relative safety of class stability. If this is an assimilation of new objects of feeling then, it is also strangely a conversion, a change in positions from the consumed to

[38] Fisher, *Hard Facts,* 98-99.

the consumer, so that the romance of the object coincides almost completely with its forgetting in an essentialization as bourgeois subject.[39]

No one understood this better than Laurence Sterne. If we look forward to his *Sentimental Journey,* written a quarter century after Fielding's original volumes, this complex gesture of projection and disavowal becomes the source of one of Yorick's most subtle meditations on the structures of bourgeois tragic spectatorship and spectacle. I refer, of course, to the *pauvre honteux* of Montriul, a scene in which the traveller's "first publick act of…charity in France" doubles as an instance of rapturous self-examination teetering somewhere between guilt and moral congratulation. Yorick's retelling narrates his mental states as he considers whether or not to extend a sous to the fallen bourgeois who has been forced to join the ranks of the distressed:

> …I had overlook'd a *pauvre honteux,* who had no one to ask a sous for him, and who, I believe would have perish'd, ere he could have ask'd one for himself: he stood by the chaise a little without the circle, and wiped a tear from a face which I thought had seen better days—Good God! said I—and I have not one single sous left to give him—But you have a thousand!—cried all the powers of nature, stirring within me—so I gave him—no matter what—I am ashamed to say *how much,* now—and was ashamed to think, how little, then…"[40]

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[39] To see this at work in our critical narratives, for instance, recall Ellison's otherwise sharp account of sympathy's subtleties, which elides bourgeois tragedy and its afflictions wholesale. The suffering of middling people in their own popular tragedies is a curious blind spot as she narrates the history of sentiment as a shift from relations obtaining between elevated social peers in a correspondingly elevated heroic tragic form, to one of asymmetrical power relations directed to a host of characters that conspicuously omit the middling: "the deep-feeling Moor, the dying Indian, the impoverished veteran, the slave, the vagrant" (*Cato's Tears,* 18).

[40] Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy,* ed. Paul Goring (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 36. Subsequent citations to the text will be to this edition and appear parenthetically.

Left unsaid are the particulars of the *pauvre honteux*: the reasons for his misfortune, the conditions of his existence, the particulars of his name. They do not, in terms of the narrative, matter all that much. Instead, as Robert Markley explains in a classic essay on the novel: "Our attention in this passage, as throughout the scene, is focused on the mind and 'nature' of the sentimental hero." "*Honteux,"* for instance, is an imputation of shame upon the poor man, a disgrace cast upon to him by Yorick's use of the term as if to signal the former's prior state and the fragility of a station's benefits. It denotes, more than anything, the figure's awkward relation to the traveler. Somewhere between peer and inferior, Sterne's tableau countenances both identification and dis-identification, a splitting of the sentimental subject that betokens its ambivalence.

It also, however, casts a strange shadow on Yorick. As an "idealized object of pity" the beggar becomes symbolic moral currency in the mind of Yorick,"not simply an outsider but a projection of the narrator's unstated fears, a nightmare image of the sensitive, generous individual stripped of his means."[41] He is, in short, the forgotten, impossible figure of bourgeois tragedy, the middling person stripped of the luxury of feeling compassion rather than occasioning it in others. Yorick's layered ironies strangely distance us from the object, and call into question whether or not compassion is in fact actualized here or rather simply performed in his unspecified donation, a disavowal of that which lies too close and must therefore be projected onto the world as other. Lending himself to both ironic and sentimental readings, Sterne's narrator largely avoids suffering's actual representation, refiguring it instead in a first-person voice savoring the exquisite feeling of mourning a

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[41] Robert Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature,* eds. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), 224-225.

displacement of self, in the process disavowing its negative affects as if to wash them in the pleasure of naive benevolence.

Moments like this and Yorick's oft-quoted apostrophe to the "great SENSORIUM of the world"(111), exploit the effects of Sterne's distinctive voice, and ironically suggest the psychological isolation that characterizes much of the cult of sensibility's moral self-fashioning. Yorick is a narrative window here—but one that constantly calls us to dwell on the pane through which we see the world, to fix our depth of field on a troublesome layer of social and moral convictions, anxieties and yearnings, rather than the world itself.[42] In fact, we are left wondering whether or not the *pauvre honteux* was that at all, or merely a fantasy projected upon this poor figure since the episode ends almost as if to re-submerge an anxiety only briefly glimpsed: "The *pauvre honteux* could say nothing—he pulled out a little handkerchief, and wiped his face as he turned away—and I thought he thank'd me more than them all" (36-7). What never materializes is the bourgeois' suffering in its particularities, since such particularities are largely overshadowed by the anonymity of its experience, its representational obscurity except insofar as it materializes relations of power that differentiate between the otherwise equally ranked characters. On the contrary, what manifests itself most vividly is the position of benevolent spectator, the middle class onlooker whose compassionate gaze preserves structural inequalities and makes of the *honteux* an ideal type of unfortunate, one whose tragic course is figured as a move from the haves to the have-nots.[43]

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[42] Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 157.

[43] Ruth Perry utilizes this language in her discussion of sentimentality and class. See her essay, "Home Economics" in *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture,* eds. Paula R. Backsheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

At any rate, Sterne's irony invests the scene of suffering with a libidinal intensity that is hard to miss. As it is does for so many of the protagonists of sentimental fiction, Yorick's meditations disclose an erotic attachment to sources of trauma, a compulsive return to those scenes that assure us we are alive and well and keep alive a fantasy of vicarious suffering otherwise forgotten in the subject. "With what moral delight," he almost coos, "will it crown my journey, in sharing in the sickening incidents of a tale of misery told to me by such a sufferer? to see her weep!" The cumulative effect of these repetitions is the universalization of tragical misfortunes, a disenchantment of sorts in which suffering is no longer traumatic because it is commonplace. A melancholy admission of our frailties, such play in the vicinity of trauma make sentimental tragedies capable of aesthetic reframing as elegy. In sensibility's dilated perception, suffering is found in every nook and cranny—just as much a feature of the beholder as it is of her world. Thus, suffering becomes commonplace to not only the *pauvre honteux,* but the aristocratic Madame L*** (43-5), as also a captive bird (70) whose experience is likened, with shocking effect, to that of an African slave. If bourgeois tragedy depicts a world where a malevolent agency wounds particular families and ordinary people, sentimentalism worries instead about a world which is indifferent to us all, uncaring save by those who force themselves, like theatre-goers, to mediate its pain. And by this process, the scale of the suffering—what George Eliot will later call "that element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency"[44]—strips it of

[44] Tracing Dorothea's disillusionment with her marriage, George Eliot's narrator describes her melancholy not as a feature of narrative or formal principle, not as tragedy that is, but as a pervasive sense of an our disappointment with the real. The tragic is thus what haunts us in the loss of an ideal object, the crushing mediocrity of that which is left behind. Notice the subtle shift at work here in describing Dorothea's situation: "Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps out frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life…we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence." See *Middlemarch,* ed. Rosemary Ashton (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 194.

tragedy's intensity, making it no less *tragic* perhaps, but more so as a mood to be savored among likeminded readers.

Like Sterne's use of the imagination, Adam Smith's moralized version of this faculty allows him to maintain a certain relation to fantasy that confirms both a spectator's distance and an affective identification with the object observed. Smith will famously codify a version of this speculative gesture years later in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), arguing less for affect's contagiousness than for its ability to be self-actualized in the mind:

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can carry us beyond our own person, and it is by imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. (13)

Unlike the nerve-based sensibility of a generation earlier, for Smith, one's "fancy" enables the extension of sympathy beyond the bounds of one's narrow ambit as a decidedly volitional process, one that allows a subject to overcome exigencies of context and literal distances (14). We might describe this empathic gesture in one of many related ways: as a "sympathetic identification" with an other, as a "becoming the *other,*" or perhaps a selfless "switching of roles with the *other,"* even a "change [of] person and character" as Smith later clarifies (373).[45] Regardless, one does not mourn their own imagined misfortunes, but those imagined on behalf of the supposed subject; Smith's language on this point recalls that of

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[45] The first two of these citations refer to Martha Nussbaum's formulation in *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 73, 76. The third quotation is from Ralph Anspach, "The Implications of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* for Adam Smith's Economic Thought," *History of Political Economy* 4 (Spring 1972), 182.

period theorizations of domestic tragedy: "[sympathy] arises from bringing your case home to myself, from putting myself in your situation, and thence conceiving what I should feel in the like circumstances" (373). Reversing the trajectory of the domestic tragic imagination—tragedy doesn't strike home, for Smith, but rather the subject brings them home—suffering is nevertheless domesticated in this imaginative *as if*, so that agonies are "adopted and made…our own, [until they] begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what [a sufferer] feels." Like the violent figures of domestic tragedy, negative affects betray our hospitality.

Smith's account argues for the subject's ability to identify and disassociate with the scene of misfortune, to take in the other as something of their own—close but not *too* close—in a way that ultimately suggests "a splintering of the self into multiple personality positions."[46] This split, David Marshall observes, is crucial to Smith's famed "impartial spectator," a trope which distills, most clearly, the theatrical model behind moral sentiment in the period. Smith's "man within the breast," (159) further abstracts this moment of recognition and displacement, that is, by positing a third position by which sympathy's correspondence is judged, becoming in effect "a spectator to oneself as spectator to oneself," enacting as it were, sentimental fiction's doubling effect on the reader.[47] We compare our sympathies, that is, and calibrate them according to an imagined third-person who "represents the eyes of the world." This theatricalization of society, Marshall goes on to add, is thus "internalized and doubled within the self," so that ultimately what is alienated is that which is proper to one's identity, subsumed in what T.D. Campbell called, years ago, "the

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[46] Festa, *Sentimental Figures,* 28.

[47] Marshall, *Figure of the Theater,* 38; cf. 50.

average, or normal, or ordinary man" the impartial spectator represents.[48] Social relations condense in one's conscience, in this way, so that the middle rank's averageness or meanness supervenes and defines Smith's impartial spectator, making it a metonym for a bourgeoisie who looks over a world in pain; the ordinary object effectively *becomes* the modern subject of feeling in the impartial spectator.[49] Disclosing its close affinity to the scene of tragedy, the feeling subject comes to understand itself as essentially a middling observer, the average audience that is, at the same time, exemplary in its capacity to feel for all. Virtually synonymous with what will be Lessing's bourgeois tragic audience—for whom "The ideal audience for compassion is as average as can be"—the impartial spectator is a monument to a process of cultural forgetting, a remainder left over in the middle class's adoption as objects of feeling.

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I want to turn, in this concluding section, to consider two responses to the sentimental aesthetic I have been tracing here thus far. Indeed, these responses can be read as the return of something repressed in sentimentalism, the recurrence of tragedy in the lives of middling figures whose sense of self was defined largely by an ability to feel for their world. The sequel to *David Simple,* for example, systematically dismantles the fragile happiness that the company has attained, asserting their agency *as* sufferers and not merely objects of compassion in a series of meditations that recall Richardson's work in the years proceeding. Like Clarissa, the lasting solidity of a blissful "future State" is increasingly taken

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[48] T. D. Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1971), 134.

[49] See Brian Singer, "Montesquieu, Adam Smith, and the Discovery of the Social," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 4 (March 2004). 38-39; Stephen Darwell puts this effect slightly differently, but in a way that still suggests its universalizing scope: "We imaginatively project, not as ourselves, but impartially, as any one of us." See his, "Sympathetic Liberalism: Recent Work on Adam Smith," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 28 (Spring 1999), 142.

as a fixed point of aspiration, a release from the "struggles…[of] this World…[and] the Vanity of its utmost Enjoyments" (that paradoxically grounds the suffering subject by maintaining their relation to a desire for something better, to a desire to escape "the Possibility of falling into any future Afflictions" (341). This is repeatedly contrasted against figures like Mrs. Orgueil, whose easy life—"without any real Misfortunes to afflict her" (259)—is claimed as its own affliction, compounded by her overly-sentimental raptures, a sort of a languishing in the ordinary and longing for a plenitude that cannot last in this life. "Forgetting what Abundance she possessed, and straining after an imaginary Good, she could never possibly reach" (259), the pleasures of this life become a *mise en abyme* of middling ambitions, a ceaseless longing after what is new and better that gives narrative life to Johnson's imitation of Juvenal in "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (written, to great acclaim, in the years intervening between Fielding's original volumes and its conclusion). Whereas the middle class provided a safe space for the company to flourish in the original novel, inured by virtue of its quotidian easiness from the elder Crusoe's fabled "Calamities of Life," this is exposed as fundamentally illusory in *Volume the Last*. Or rather, this wish is displaced onto an afterlife the possibility of which preserves the object-cause of desire in the hope for a happy life, not unlike that which the bourgeoisie seemed to promise in the period. Fielding's turn to tragedy empties the world of its attachments—not to abolish the feeling subject's relation to them, but rather to relocate its scene of fulfillment.

Financial miscalculations and disastrous entanglements characterize *Volume the Last*, many of which only become clear retrospectively as "our Society" experiences increasingly dire circumstances and effectively slips out of the middle rank. The friends, for instance, lose ten thousand pounds when the inheritance left them by Valentine and

Cynthia's father is revealed to be tied up in a bad mortgage. David, in addition, is sued for a share of his Uncle's fortune and the lawsuit embroils him in an expensive, drawn-out process of litigation. Although he wishes to settle rather than maintain his claim to the fortune, the advice of both Mr. Orgueil and David's new friend *cum* benefactor, Mr. Ratcliff, convince him to pursue his claim as a matter of prudence. Mr. Orgueil's argument towards this exploits David's credulity, arguing in coded terms that suggest gendered stereotypes of masculine public virtue. "A Man of your peculiar way of thinking," Mr. Orgueil tells David, "ought always, in worldly Affairs, to be directed by Men of Prudence and Experience." Editorializing this, the narrator goes on to add that by telling him this, Mr. Orgueil was also: "hinting, at the same time, how liable he had been, in the former part of his Life, to be imposed on and deceived." (253) David eventually loses the lawsuit—and nearly all of his subsistence income—forcing the friends to retreat into ever humbler living conditions and underscoring an inability to navigate the protocols that secure one's position in the middle station.

Volume the Last's narrator is quick to tell us that the happiness of the circle greatly outweighs the trouble of "some pecuniary Losses," qualifying that "the Union of Hearts, which subsisted in that happy Family, was sufficient to compensate every common outward Evil." (245) This is a recurring set of rhetorical gestures on the part of the novel's narrator, for in juxtaposing the "public" pecuniary matters of the broader world with the "private" virtues of the domestic circle, she establishes an unstable equivalence; money doesn't buy happiness, the narrator assures her reader, even as she repeatedly links the two terms. Economic activity, in fact, is never totally expelled from the seemingly private boundaries that form David's circle, despite their retreat from London's commercial sphere (they sue

for inheritances, collect on what income they can, and ultimately invest in their future by administering a Jamaican plantation). In her discussion of Fielding's sentimental economics, Liz Bellamy argues, rightly in my opinion, that *David Simple* "locates its conclusion in the evocation of the simple-life mythology of the organic complex," a retreat from the world into the domestic that is only ever fantasy. At best, it is a mournful wish to transcend the political, to imagine a community composed of likeminded people whose feeling can be taken at face value, untouched by obligation and financial entanglement.

This has disastrous consequences for David and his circle, who by the end of *Volume the Last* have become thoroughly indebted to a commercial world they had hoped to transcend. The mercer's son, now with mouths to feed on empty pockets, no longer signifies what little rank to which he could lay claim. Fielding's description of David's state of poverty is a stark one: "By [his and Camilla's] Poverty I mean…when you pay *Cent. per Cent.* for every Necessary of Life." (276) Which is to say, David and Camilla (who has herself been reduced to that begging out of which she was once delivered) are, as Harriet Guest remarks, "excluded from the economy of credit."[50] They are, not unlike the *pauvre honteux,* socially faceless, without representation or voice in a cruel world.

If there is occasion for irony here, Fielding largely eschews it except insofar as its reversals are tragic. Indeed, the novel rewrites the sentimental archive as a tragic one in its final act, one that moves dialectically between the abjection of real, ordinary suffering and a fantasy that the act of witnessing another's grief can somehow make us all better. Fielding's sequel announces itself as such in its opening chapter, in a citation to Milton that just as much evokes Richardson:

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[50] Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, and Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 35.

"I now must change

These Notes to tragic;

yet no foul Distrust and Breach

Disloyal on the Part of Man" (261, emphasis in original)

A subtle rewriting of Milton's original, Fielding's insertion of the conjunction *"yet no"* places her protagonists on a domestic tragic genealogy that includes not only the patient Clarissa but also its historically deep source in Job, whose resignation to unhappiness is paraphrased in the former's own conjoined qualification: "But it is not so with me." An affirmation of trust in the unseen, tragedy for Fielding allows at once a radical admission of profound injustice and evil in the world, while also holding on to the idea that happiness is possible somehow: "like *Job, David Simple* patiently submitted to the temporary Sufferings allotted him." (261). Such textual mediations—a clear reference to Clarissa's epistolary tracings—represent a certain kind of agency in suffering, the rehearsing of order in narratives of affliction that congeal meaning around the *why?* of suffering, a question that cannot be answered but is nevertheless kept alive by being incessantly asked. In this way, as Elaine Scarry argues, narrative gives form to pain, re-making what seems unmade in our suffering and bringing representational form to bear on what seems unbearably obscure.

Claiming an agency in their affliction, refusing a mere objectification, the friend's stubborn insistence on relieving, as much as possible, the suffering of their "distressed Fellow creatures," (247) signals that they have some forms of social capital to spare. Most readings of *Volume the Last* have emphasized the economic losses incurred by David, Cynthia, Camilla, and Valentine in these final chapters, but Fielding is quite clear that their situation in fact enables their most profound ethical interventions. When the Simple family

is visited by a "wretched Beggar" near the close of *Volume the Last,* they respond by both feeding and housing the man, "as much actuated by Compassion as ever a Miser was by Avarice." (313) Fielding underscores the literal good faith of this profound gesture, for though David knows he ought "not so far trust a Stranger," (314) his kindness empowers their circle to give despite their distress, despite their own proximity to nothingness. In this way, he takes back the sentimental subjectivity he seemed to have lost along with his credit, not so as to signal his superiority (as it does for Sterne's satiric churchman), but rather to express a Christian solidarity with—or rather, as part of—a culture's oppressed minority who beseeches aid "for the Love of *Christ*" (312).

Fielding's elegiac sensibility in *Volume the Last* invites us to lament the tears of things, the impossibility that "any real or lasting Happiness can arise from an Attachment to Objects subject…to certain Death" (341). This is felt most clearly as the friends' social circle shrinks in a series of affecting deaths. After all, monetary value, however difficult, can be recovered when poorly invested, reputation can be reestablished—people, friends, children, are irreplaceable. This is often more painful than our own afflictions and so the irony of sentimentalism, which works so hard to forge intimacies and shared experience, is ultimately a source of profound hurt. In the novel's final chapter, therefore, Cynthia becomes the mournful witness to a series of domestic tragedies whereby the objects of her attachment, the community of friends and family that made affliction bearable by its sharing, are gradually taken from her. Fielding is certainly thinking of her own circle, many of whom, in the years since her initial success, had been lost to disease and age.[51] The hope

[51] Richard Terry makes a similar point in discussing *Volume the Last's* importance to reading Fielding's sentimentalism. See his, "*David Simple* and the Fallacy of Friendship," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44 (2004).

for a Christian afterlife is thus a powerful counter to a world perceived as tragic, a deferred hope that the things that make us happiest—the objects that tenaciously anchor us to this world—persist and await us in a safety that eludes us. Turning the world "poor and empty," in Freud's classic formulation of the mourning ego,[52] Fielding's narrative recathects its libidinal energies around a bliss it can only gesture towards, never fully imagine, and certainly never suitably describe. In this way, tragedy maintains sentimentalism in a dialectical back and forth, one moment embracing pain, another denying it, but always anxious circling around its truth.

[52] "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 246.

CONCLUSION:

THE PARADOX OF (BOURGEOIS) TRAGEDY

IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AESTHETICS

> The high heroic virtue we see exemplified in Tragedy warms the imagination and swells the mind; but being distant from the ordinary feelings and exertions of life, has, I suspect, but little influence upon the conduct….In stage-misfortunes, in fancied sufferings, the drapery of the figure hides its form; and real distress, coming in a homely and unornamented state, disgusts the eye which had poured its tears over the hero of tragic misery, or the martyr of romantic woe. Real calamity offends…
>
> -Henry Mackenzie, 1785

Looking back on the century's drama, the eminent theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll wrote of bourgeois tragedy's missed opportunity in Britain. "By neglecting to follow along the paths of Lillo and Moore," he lamented in his 1923 tome, *History of the English Drama, 1660-1900*, "English dramatists of the late eighteenth century lost one of their greatest opportunities." He then added, with a note of regret: "They might have led the van of continental playwrights in the common search for something vital and expressive of modern conditions. As it was, they and their followers allowed first France and then Germany and Scandinavia to assume the generalship of the more progressive forces."[1] In this tepid acknowledgment, Nicoll minimized British bourgeois tragedy's foundational importance to the history of modern drama, if not also modern tragic fiction and theory.[2]

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[1] Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of the English Drama*, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 91.

[2] Nicoll is not the only one. Even in the otherwise subtle account of bourgeois tragedy in Raymond Williams' *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), and Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker: A Study of Drama in Modern Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010 [1946]), bourgeois tragedy's rise is nearly synonymous with its fall, relied upon to propel the story of modernity forward and thus to get us to the *real* realist and naturalist modes of Ibsen and Strindberg.

My argument has been, to the contrary, that the bourgeois tragic archive in eighteenth-century Britain *does* represent the vanguard, and not only because such tragedies continued to find willing audiences in performance and print well into the next century. Rather, these texts did imagine modern forms of suffering whose depictions drew their vitality from the conditions of common people and their everyday experience of the world, and were thus profoundly influential in the global history of what Erich Auerbach would famously come to call, in the decade following Nicoll's history, "the representation of reality."[3] In fact, as I have argued throughout my account, this is so not only for the content of the archive—their true-to-life depictions of domestic scenes, their use of the middling and lower sorts as subject matter, the omnipresence of an economic element in their misfortunes, for example—but also in the distinctive literary forms these expressions took on page and stage. The unfolding development of realism in relation to tragic fiction during the period is a story about stylistic ordinariness too, that is, about the way suffering becomes both literally and figuratively prosaic in the period, with all that entails to a history of those affects it purported to enact and describe. The entangled narratives of modernity and affliction—the modernizing of affliction, affliction read as a coming-of-age in the modern—plays out in the various media that made up the art of bourgeois tragedy. Far from the narrative of tragedy's death in the period then, its modern form first emerges in the network of texts and discourses I have traced in this account, decisively shaping tragic fiction in the decades to come.

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[3] The reference, of course, is to Auerbach's landmark *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). I thank Jane O. Newman for suggestion this connection to me.

And yet there remains a kernel of truth to Nicoll's wistful declaration, at least when we consider that by the turn of the nineteenth century, and despite the continued popularity of the genre, bourgeois tragedy was undergoing a sort of erasure in the histories British poets and critics told. Although these texts remained in the popular imagination, in other words, their reputation among the British literary elite flagged so that Nicoll's opinion simply conveyed years of common knowledge. One need only recall Wordsworth's concern at the turn of the nineteenth century, that *Clarissa* and *The Gamester* were too painful to endure, and thus constituted something like "bad art," something that ought to be rejected in the search for a true language of common feeling. Wordsworth's intuition, as it turned out, would be spot-on for nearly two centuries, and it was only in the 1980s that *Clarissa* was critically revitalized by feminist, Marxist, and deconstructionist critics.

For quite different reasons, Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt would soon after object to the genre on account of its inability to ennoble the reader, especially in the case of Lillo's early dramas. Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, *The London Merchant* served as a punchline when read aloud pathetically (and with a ham-fisted didacticism) to Pip in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), more melodramatic than tragic in its effects.[4] Similarly, the gravity of much sentimental fiction has long been dismissed on account of the apparent excessiveness of its emotion. An appreciation of the way such performances of feeling may insist (although not always) on the political importance of marginalized peoples and communities, relocating certain feelings, trafficking in the rhetorical excesses of ordinary tragedies, is something that contemporary affect theorists have been keen to explore in recent years. Given this belatedness, therefore, it is not at all wrong to ask why

[4] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 93ff.

the archive seems to run aground in its native context at the same time that it fatefully takes hold on the European continent? Why and how does this once distinctively British tradition, a tradition so inventive and daring, become something of a submerged discourse?

I find Wordsworth's argument especially resonant in light of this line of inquiry, since it suggests that realism in bourgeois tragedy came to figure—to borrow David Marshall's concise formulation of the trouble with art's intrusion into the everyday—less a problem *in* aesthetics than a problem *about* aesthetics.[5] These texts muddy the boundary between art and life, more presentation than representation for their beholders. As Wordsworth suggests in the Preface, prosaic suffering, because it functions as a vanishing mediator, was difficult to abide on page and stage, short-circuiting the dynamics of tragic pleasure. And because of this, bourgeois tragedy can mark an extreme limit to the well-known paradox of tragedy, fatally destabilizing that paradox's counterpoise of pleasure and distress, spilling out into the lurid and the abject, poisoning its own experience and thus making itself an impossible object to behold. To be sure, the fine line poets walked in this respect was an old phenomenon: "Fictions meant to please should be close to the real," claimed Horace—but too close, it seems here, and the pleasure dissolves along with the fiction.[6] How then should art navigate that which is felt as offensive, even if offense locates the true and the real? To what extent is tragic art *art* if it cannot countenance aesthetic distance, if its experience disallows the requisite space for contemplation or edification or even remaining present to its experience to begin with? Despite the nation's clear investment in realist modes, therefore, its practice in bourgeois tragic fiction just as often

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[5] David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 8.

[6] The reference is to *Ars Poetica*, ll. 338-9 in Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica,* trans. H. Ruston Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

occasioned declarations of the genre's baseness, concerns about a decline in taste, complaints about its transgressive form and graphic subject matter, and inevitably and most telling, impassioned reiterations of the paradox's delicacy of form.

Something of this puzzle has been present in the dissenting voices that frame (some would say, intrude on) each chapter of this project, even though it is only much later in the century, as there emerges something like an accepted sense of the aesthetic *as such*—a self-conscious discourse on the disinterested appreciation of art—that the affective problems behind certain forms of ordinary suffering come into sharper focus. Instances of this include Lady Bradshaigh, who refuses to finish *Clarissa's* epistolary narrative; or that the final scene of *Fatal Curiosity* is too traumatic to bear, or alternatively, *The Gamester* too emotional to perform, its prose too burdensome; or that sentimental novels place suffering bodies at a level of narrative remove. From a certain angle, in fact, the history I have been telling unexpectedly recounts a story about precisely this process of disciplinary rationalization; the great utility of the genre for the history of aesthetics, and British literary criticism in particular, is that bourgeois tragedy repeatedly proves exceptionally difficult to fit neatly within a series of conventions and theoretical notions governing the period's tragic art. While bourgeois tragedy has always had its detractors, therefore, the character of their resistance to the genre changes over time, in the process illustrating a shift in attitudes towards our relation to an art-object.

That shift, I'd like to propose now, was largely one from the poetics of tragedy to its aesthetics, from a discourse concerned with an object's exemplification of a poetic tradition to that of one concerned with its aesthetic experience. A few words on these rival sensibilities will make this distinction clearer, and provide a fitting conclusion to the

argument I have been tracing in my account. The trouble with Lillo's realistic tragedy in the 1730s, according to its contemporary critics, was fundamentally its deviation from generic norms, its flouting of poetic decorum and the transgressive social energies implied by the mere depiction of a suffering apprentice, Barnwell, and his even lower ranked seducer, Millwood. It was a failure to follow accepted (often classically derived) poetic models. To the extent that *The London Merchant* was resisted at its debut or ironized in Sarah Fielding's sentimental novel, it was done so on the basis that its middling figures ruined the tragedy of it all, that what it accomplished was a troubling deviation from the prescriptive norms of the genre. What we take to be realism there—manifested in the social rank of its characters, an assumption of their basic dignity, the familiar motivations the drama's prose disclosed, all of which would not have been understood in terms of our retrospective notions of realism—was thought to be incompatible with the high-cultural ideology of the tragic itself, concerned as it was with the afflictions of social betters. Indeed, the mere placement of these figures on the tragic stage was to err against the realism proscribed by tragedy's social function.

Or consider, along these lines, Dryden's tight analogical association between tragedy, verse, and nobility in his essay, *Of Dramatick Poesy*. To write a tragedy, the poet laureate claimed, was to write something that was essentially unordinary in its rhetoric, so that prosaic suffering could be many things but never really tragedy. Here again, the trouble with realism—to the extent, again, that this is a problem with realism—is that its shopkeepers and housewives will fall short of the genre's lofty style and tone whenever they utter language proper to their station. Now this idea was an old one, found not only in Aristotle's argument that the genre was essentially about the great, but also in prescriptive traditions that followed Horace and Longinus. Indeed, the latter figure provides an instructive

benchmark if we consider the development of sublimity over the century: in his *Peri Hypsous,* quite tellingly, the term "sublime" describes a feature of the text and its language —not the feeling itself—a critical usage that will be overturned as the century progresses. Sublimity, for Longinus, is "a certain distinction or excellence of discourse," a modifier to certain expressions in a work of art meant to capture its modulated rhetorical pitch.[7] As Timothy M. Costelloe observes, the older sense of the sublime (as well as a variety of period aesthetic categories here, such as the beautiful and the picturesque) often privileges the "qualities of objects" as simply "a trigger or occasion for a feeling so-called."[8] What the century accomplishes, in other words, is a "shift from associating the sublime exclusively with style to isolating it as an aesthetic response."[9] Hence, the problem with bourgeois tragedy in the earlier half of the century tends to be registered as a failure to conform to genre, as a thematic deviation from the tradition's body of formal exemplars. Because of this, those whose skepticism emphasized the poetics of the genre asked: doesn't ordinary suffering fail at exemplifying Tragedy *per se*?

While this viewpoint has its defenders well into our own time (although I think it is becoming rarer), by the turn of the nineteenth century the terms of the argument have undergone a telling change. In a departure from this, Wordsworth seems to grant that

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[7] Longinus, "On the Sublime," in *Classical Literary Criticism,* trans. Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 114.

[8] Timothy M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition: From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 181.

[9] Ibid. 42; Costelloe cites Samuel Monk's characterization of this change: "To write on the sublime style is to write on rhetoric…to write on sublimity is to write on [the] aesthetic." (Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England,* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960], 12) Monk's phrase echoes my own distinction between the poetics and aesthetics of tragedy, but emphasizes instead the persuasive element of rhetorical thought in the period. I have used the term "rhetoric" throughout this project, however, to describe a broader linguistic phenomenon, more akin to our current sense of "discourse" as a culture's network of signification and shared meanings. Cf. M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 73ff.

realistic tragedies like *Clarissa* and *The Gamester* are nevertheless tragic (there is nothing inherently un-tragic about suffering in prose, as Samuel Johnson claimed). Indeed, if anything, the poet reverses the direction of this line of argument, drawing out the implications of a universalized suffering: "the feeling…developed [in *Lyrical Ballads*] gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling." (Preface, xvii) The intensity of feeling dictates form, Wordsworth contends, so that it is not at all impossible to imagine, in principle, a tragedy about ordinary people in commonplace conditions.[10] The concern, instead, is that these texts are more documentary than poetic, that their seeming lack of artifice overrides any pleasure we might derive from its consumption by collapsing the distance between a poetic object and feeling subject. Whereas an older generation insisted that realism's muted tone and rhetoric failed to capture the genre's intensity, for Romantic thinkers (and feelers!) like Wordsworth, these strategies succeed too well. Bourgeois tragedy domesticates the sublime, so to speak, striking way too close to home.

But this view, as I have argued at several points in my account, was clearly *not* a Romantic invention: Addisonian, Burkean, and even Johnsonian discussions of represented suffering, for instance, were keenly aware of literature's power to unearth deep-seated emotions and generalized anxieties. These figures often spoke in terms of one's imaginative proximity to represented pain, the traumatic excess of the sublime, or that which cannot be endured in a tragic scene as the utmost limit of what could be (or should be) represented, a threshold I suggested domestic drama repeatedly returned to in the middle decades of the

[10] Hence, Abrams' thesis in *The Mirror and the Lamp* argues that the Romantic attitude to poetry is marked by its expressive possibility, its ability to make the world it depicts, rather than simply reflect that which already exists.

century. Likewise, the seeds of this concern were present in those same classical sources that an earlier generation of critics purported to follow, many of which warned of the effects of graphic tableaux and descriptions in careful asides or equivocating passages.[11] Wordsworth himself probably drew on Richard Payne Knight and William Gilpin's explications of how the source of aesthetic pleasure lay in the subject's affective relation to ideas occasioned by the art-object, a notion which they traced to and adapted from critics like Burke.[12] For Knight, in particular, aesthetics was a matter for the "organs of sense," more a feature of "modes and habits of viewing and considering" than of the particular artifact under question.[13] The key here, as it would be for Wordsworth, was in maintaining the space between the beholder's reflection on a scene, and the particulars of the scene itself. Invoking the conditions of the paradox of tragedy before seeming to dispel them, this view suggests that: "something can thus be '*displeasing to sight*' and yet '*pleasing objects of sight.*'"[14] Aesthetic pleasure is a product of one's reflection—what theorists began to recognize as an attitude of critical "disinterestedness" made possible by this distinction between the scene of distress (the object) and the viewer's experience (the subject).[15]

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[11] Thus, Horace: "Yet you will not bring upon the stage what should be performed behind the scenes, and you will keep much from our eyes, which an actor's ready tongue will narrate anon in our presence; so that Medea is not to butcher her boys before the people…" (*Ars Poetica,* ll. 182-5).

[12] Costelloe, *British Aesthetic Tradition,* 179-84.

[13] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste,* 4th ed. (London: T. Payne and J. White, 1808 [1805]), 2.2.74.

[14] Costelloe, quoting Knight, 2.2.74.

[15] On the development of "disinterestedness" in notions of the aesthetic, see M. H. Abrams, "From Addison to Kant: Modern Aesthetics and the Exemplarity of Art," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics,* ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of Aesthetic Disinterestedness," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961): 131-43; and Dabney Townsend, "From Shaftesbury to Kant: The Development of the Concept of Disinterestedness," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 287-306.

To a growing body of bourgeois tragic works, the once subtle affective element of poetic theory gradually came to predominate in the critical language responding to the archive. Reflecting this modern sense of the aesthetic, the problem with the genre came to be less its failure to conform to classical notions of tragedy, than its propensity to distress its beholder, to evoke an unbearable range of what Hume called "disagreeable and uneasy" passions like sorrow, terror, and the vaguely modern-sounding, but nevertheless Humean, "anxiety."[16] Bourgeois tragedy *discomforted* its viewer, weighed them down with the kind of emotion that made tragic pleasure difficult to sustain. Indeed, the genre could often elicit a viewer or reader's disgust, a condition which Kant would famously identify in 1790's *Critique of Judgment* as the aesthetic's uncompromising "Other."[17] After all, disgust makes aesthetic disinterestedness impossible, compelling us to respond, to turn away in refusal or ameliorate its cause—to become interested, that is, with new urgency.[18]

While disgust is merely the most extreme example of the uneasy feelings a tragedy could unearth, it is nevertheless an especially telling emotion. In the context of tragedy, it denotes both our profound discomfort, and our resistance to art's ability to unsettle us emotionally or existentially. As Kant argues:

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[16] David Hume, "Of Tragedy," in *Four Dissertations* (London: A. Millar, 1757), 185.

[17] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). Kant's anti-aesthetic definition for disgust, (German: *Ekel*) was established long before the third Critique, but a similar etymological logic governed the word in English. Thus, drawing on the French *degout* and Latin *degusto*, both of which can be glossed literally as "anti-" or "no-taste," Johnson's Dictionary wavers between literal and metaphorical senses of distaste. Given the period's intense investment in theories of taste (across the arts and ethics), the disgusting is a particularly loaded term when applied to the art-object. Jacques Derrida, for example, argues that disgust is art's absolute "Other" along these lines. Cf. Derrida's "Economimesis," in *Diacritics* 11, no. 2 (1981): 3-25.

[18] Sianne Ngai argues that "disgust is never ambivalent about its object," but I've also tried to note the way that morbid curiosity seems to trouble this, sustaining a sort of ambivalent attachment to witnessing pain. See her *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Cf. William Ian Miller on disgust as provocation to action in *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

> There is only one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty: that ugliness which arouses *disgust*. For in that strange sensation, which rests nothing but imagination, the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting; and hence the artistic presentation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself, so that it cannot possibly be considered beautiful. (1.2.48; p. 180)

In this way, Kant came to theorize the sort of morbid curiosity I have been arguing was central to bourgeois tragedy in the period. For even in cases where the subject's morbid curiosity takes hold, the "unaccountable pleasure" of its erotics works only insofar as it is sustained by the threat of something repulsive, something with the potential to pollute or discomfit, and thus, definitively turn us back. As an aesthetic phenomenon, therefore, Sianne Ngai offers that disgust "both includes and attacks the very opposition between itself and desire," the object making an "outrageous claim for desirability."[19] Everyone loves a good train wreck, one essayist recently quipped, belying the simple "No" of disgust and its melancholic sister-affects.[20] Like many of the British thinkers who tackled the problem of depicting pain and suffering in the years leading up to Kant's breakthrough, such representations obscure the division between subject and object, violently holding our interest, "insisting" on its real presence (and not simply re-presentation).

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[19] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings,* 335.

[20] Eric G. Wilson, *Everyone Loves a Good Trainwreck: Why We Can't Look Away* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Geroux, 2012). The phrase, "'No of Disgust" belongs to Winfried Menninghaus who explicates this dynamic in his, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation,* trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

G. E. Lessing, the father of German bourgeois tragedy (and one of the British tradition's greatest admirers and students), made a similar claim in his *Laocoön* (1766).[21] Discussing the fine line between beautified pain and the truth of its expression in tragedy, epic, and the plastic arts, he asks his reader to reflect on the exquisite feeling negotiated in his central example, *The Laocoön Group* (c. 25 BCE):

> The demands of beauty could not be reconciled with the pain in all its disfiguring violence, so it had to be reduced. The scream had to be softened to a sigh…because it [screaming] distorts the features in a disgusting manner. Simply imagine Laocoön's mouth forced wide open, and then judge! Imagine him screaming, and then look! From a form which inspired pity because it possessed beauty and pain at the same time, it has now become an ugly repulsive figure from which we gladly turn away. For the sight of pain provokes distress… (17)

In order for the tragic to work, which for Lessing means training its average audience to pity, the affective intensity of the scene must restrain something of its truth. Otherwise, the strength of the emotion communicates itself with chilling effect, drawing the audience into those loathsome passions acted out onstage while at the same time and because of this inciting its refusal ("gladly") of the scene (let along negating the tender work of pity). Remarking on the libidinal dynamics of such abject scenes, Julia Kristeva observes that such objects seem to confound inside and outside; the source of horror, of trauma, "lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated." In terms that one suspects Richardson would have approved, she goes on to note that the abject's gravity "draws [one] toward the place where

[21] G. E. Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

meaning collapses."[22] Likewise, the train of imperatives in Lessing's discussion—"Imagine! Judge! Look!"—acknowledges the deeply disturbing pull of the morbid, and leads its reader, finally, to "the wide-open mouth," "in painting a mere spot and in sculpture a cavity, with most repulsive effect" (17).[23] Our interest is drawn, finally, into the *mise en abyme* of our own desire doubled in the repulsive vacancy of the art object. Disgust can mark the horizon of sense, in this way, so saturated with negative feeling that it dissolves our objectivity.

Yet I also want us to notice that a key premise of both Lessing's and Kant's reasoning here specifically links *realism* to affects of resistance and repulsion; for example, in Kant's understanding, disgust is a byproduct of certain kinds of "ugliness…presented in conformity with nature" (180). Despite the period's emerging consensus on realism's potential, therefore, the philosopher quite clearly sees its formal practice as an enduring aesthetic problem. In contrast to this limitation, he clarifies, "The Furies, diseases, devastations of war," all remain capable of aesthetic beautification, in part because they can be allegorized or softened by emphasizing their "likable attributes" (one can imagine that a rush of patriotism or a depiction of courage ennobles the depravity of war, for instance). "Indirection" and artistic license are crucial to depictions of the ugly, it quickly becomes clear (180). Indeed, Kant's canon seems largely drawn from classical epic and heroic tragedy, the literature of gods and kings who live far above the base considerations of merchants and bureaucracies and women flailing against their disinheritance. His argument, for this reason, seems obliquely directed against, among other things, prosaic

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[22] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

[23] For an insightful discussion of horror's power to unsettle in Lessing's work, see Dorothea von Mücke, "The Powers of Horror and the Magic of Euphemism in Lessing's 'Laokoon' and 'How the Ancients Represented Death,'" in *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century,* eds. Veronica Kelly and Dorothea von Mücke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

suffering and realistic tragedy. The suffering represented in a bourgeois tragedy—realistic, ordinary—is by definition disaffecting in this view, luridly sensational and exposed, emotionally overburdened if not outright offensive to modern sensibilities in ways that make for bad art. Were one to present ugliness in its "conformity with nature," the viewer would rebel against that which cannot be aesthetically pleasing (a problem Lessing sought to obviate in his own dramaturgy). Or, in Wordsworth's formulation, expressions of emotion must "fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life." "Compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering," the poet's language constrains its feeling, "removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion."[24] So although modern aesthetics arrives in this new disinterested relation to the art-object, it nevertheless maintains a determined resistance to genres like bourgeois tragedy whose realism has the capacity to shock.

The tension between realism and the aesthetic, however, was characterized as potentially fatal to the genre as early as 1785 when Henry Mackenzie surveyed the state of tragedy for his Edinburgh periodical, *The Lounger*.[25] In what must have been a critical moment for bourgeois tragedy—in the thick of a revival onstage, with sentimental texts flooding the market, and a wave of French and German appropriations of the archive landing back on British shores[26]—the author of *The Man of Feeling* reflected on its

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[24] This phrase is from Wordsworth's preface to the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems,* 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees), 1:xxx..

[25] Mackenzie examined tragedy in *The Lounger* nos. 27-8, originally published in Aug. 6-13, 1785 (*The Lounger,* ed. Henry Mackenzie [Edinburgh: Creech, [1795-7]]).

[26] Mackenzie's adaptation of Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity,* renamed *The Shipwreck* was performed in London the year before his argument in *The Lounger*. Shortly thereafter he would offer readings of Lessing and Goethe for the inaugural meeting of the Royal Society of Edinburgh under the title, *Account of the German Theatre* (1788), noting that several new collections of their texts were only recently available to readers of French and English. While Mackenzie's readings are charitable and note their affinity to the domestic tragedies I have traced, Wordsworth likely has these texts in mind when he laments the "stupid and sickly German tragedies" read by fashionable Britons. Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, xix.

prospects with a wariness that seems now to anticipate Wordsworth and Kant's critique several years later. Citing Lillo's work, along with *The Gamester* and later, *Clarissa* (in an aside that categorizes serious domestic novels like Richardson's as "a kind of tragedy"[27]), the essay argues for the urgency and vitality of the genre, noting that this tradition lays bare the "vulgar distresses of [one's] fellow-creatures, or the ordinary relations of life" (109) and hence, "moulds" (105) passions that seemingly affect us all. These tragedies show us decidedly modern forms of tragic suffering, the sort of everyday trauma and ordinary affliction to which we are oftentimes inured, but which "constitute that part and character of life which almost every one is called to perform" (105). The bourgeois tragic archive thereby trains us to respond with renewed sensitivity when distresses burden our neighbors, or with dignity, if and when these burdens become our own.

Or at least that's the hope. Mackenzie tempers his optimism with the kind of sobering admission whose slide into the past tense suggests the genre's moment had already passed: "A modern audience did not relish a distress so real" (109). Of course, implicit in this is a rhetorical question about what the average consumer in the period wants from their fiction: if one tries to minimize their exposure to real suffering and its corresponding negative affects in their day-to-day life, why would one seek it out on stage or in narrative literature, which more and more, John O'Brien contends, held out the possibility of a mass cultural escapism?[28] After all, without its ennobling artifice, without its promise of cathartic pleasure, isn't tragedy just an exercise in discomforting oneself? Life—even middling life—

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[27] This phrase occurs on p. 111 of *Lounger* 28, but Mackenzie had noted that such novels draw their power by representing "domestic scenes and situations in private life," in the months prior. His *Lounger* 20 offered a critique of sentimental novels that echoes the concerns of this project, and suggests that his own foray into the genre was marked by ambivalence and irony.

[28] John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

was hard enough, even before one filled their leisure time with the sufferings of those like themselves. Certainly then, the type of changes in the nation's demography and consumption practices that O'Brien traces do some work in explaining bourgeois tragedy's mixed legacy. And while the market for print culture and drama could be highly diverse (especially in urban centers like London), one can easily see how for a growing middle class, the serious afflictions of lowly apprentices and domestic women, subtle and unadorned, might fail to capture their interest when placed against comic, Romantic, or Gothic foils.

Still, it's not enough simply to claim that bourgeois tragedies failed to entertain as they instructed; in fact, this just seems to restate the question of why these tragedies make a viewer or reader uncomfortable without really getting to its underlying source. Moreover, this rationale says little about the broader aesthetic complaint directed against formal realism by philosophers like Kant and Romantics like Wordsworth, a complaint which had less to do with notions of entertainment than what form was appropriate for expressing pain, suffering, and all manner of disagreeable feelings in the fine arts. (In fact, elites tended to align bourgeois tragedy with the vulgar and the young—precisely the sorts of people whose shifting interests drove concerns over literature's value as entertainment.) As it would be for aesthetic thinkers at the turn of the century, the problem is much more primal, inherent in the very nexus of sense and affect galvanized by realistic tragedy. Because it's one thing to *prefer*, say, a Gothic spectacle over a realistic tragedy for an evening's entertainment; it is quite another thing to claim, as Mackenzie does in the epigram above, that the latter form "disgusts" its beholder. Much more active in orientation, realism "offends" its reader or spectator in a way that finally overrides even the ambivalences of morbid curiosity.

The intensity of such a response suggests that the ugliness of ordinary suffering unsettles us and threatens to bring us low, disordering both our sense of self and metaphysical order. Realistic tragedy reminds us of our frailty and transience, of the injustice of a prosaic world where poetic justice is an all-too-rare phenomenon. And feelings of unease can locate truths we rather not affirm, so that realism thrusts us towards the Real, prompting us to "gaze into the true essence of things" our sense of terror seems to disclose.[29] One recent treatment of the emotion thus sees it as "a hallmark of metaphysical insight," evidence that one has had "access to a powerful insight."[30] On the other hand, realistic suffering's offensiveness also seems to indicate a fear of contagion, overpowering one's senses with the abject and seizing one's imagination with terrible thoughts. Apropos of this, William Ian Miller notes that such revulsion can have a complex social dimension: "Disgust evaluates (negatively) what it touches, proclaims the meanness and inferiority of its object….It is thus an assertion of a claim to superiority that at the same time recognizes the vulnerability of that superiority to the defiling powers of the low."[31] Contrasting the middle station portrayed in bourgeois tragedy against the elevated positions of "tragic heroes" and "martyrs of Romantic woe," Mackenzie's claim that it is the "coarseness" of a "real calamity" that disgusts (109) seems to order the world along the sort of social hierarchy that I argued (with reference to Hume and Smith) sentimentalism paradoxically preserved and lamented. The exemplars of "heroick suffering" (Sir Joshua Reynolds' indelible phrase for the only *true* subject of tragedy is apt here) stand shining above us,

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[29] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in The Birth of Tragedy *and Other Writings,* eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 38.

[30] Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History,* 9.

[31] Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust,* 9.

refining their readers, while ordinary suffering seemingly pollutes from below. In this way, the rhetoric of disgust imagines a porous emotional world nevertheless reified in that same emotion's experience. Encapsulating the turn from the poetics to the aesthetics of tragedy that I have been tracing, this shift implied a novel relation between reader or viewer and the art object before them that made the bourgeois tragic archive newly troubling: if, for the poetic view, prosaic suffering debased the genre, by the end of the century, it was thought to debase its beholder.

Disgust with the real voices a frail admission that we prefer our literature to confirm us in the safety and social position of our buffered selves. When eighteenth-century Britons complained of the overbalance of uneasiness in this tragedy, what they indicated was a preference for comfort. (Is it any surprise that domestic tragedy befouls this homely feeling?) Indeed, in Mackenzie's view, and later Wordsworth's, the archive's offensiveness materializes a sort of paradox for the genre, figuring not only Kant's argument a decade later but what one recent critic calls the "negative eschaton of the modern art system's accelerated *drain on stimuli*": insofar as these works achieve verisimilitude, they prompt the reader's resistance or refusal, negating their vitality.[32] The more realistically bourgeois tragedy portrays its suffering, the more it "disgusts the eye," barring its being consumed as an aesthetic object. Prosaic suffering convinces us that a range of profoundly negative feelings (pain, humiliation, anger, fear) are being endured in real time, our gaze making us vulnerable to its powers of mimesis. Speaking of drama, Lessing sums: "The closer the actor approaches nature, or reality, the more our eyes and ears must be offended" (24). One need

[32] Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History,* 8. He notes, however, an apt comparison between the shock-aesthetic of much of today's performance art and Friedrich Schlegel's own writing on art and disgust as early as the publication of his "Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie" in 1798.

not take the visual-aural scheme literally, either, for the well-crafted novel (decades of careful work in novel studies makes clear) often produced similarly chilling effects in the "mind's eye." It is not for no reason that Wordsworth pairs Richardson and Moore, I would emphasize. We treat disgusting art (be that a novel, drama, painting, or even now, film or installation) as a discomforting threat to ourselves in some sense, and because of this, refuse it or deny its validity *as art*. Ensnared in this paradox, the genre thus fulfills Horace's proleptic insight into the aesthetics of the shocking: "Whatever you thus show me, I discredit and abhor."[33] Bourgeois tragedy is an impossible work of art. This is the cost of realism, circa 1785.

And so the tragedian is compelled to mitigate his drama's effects, concealing the truth of its horrors in the softness of verse, or a swelling metaphor, or even—as I argued in my excursus on sentimentalism—the overwrought mediation in one's own sensibility that together creates a necessary space for aesthetic pleasure and moral contemplation. Or poets displace the tragedy's fictionalized sufferings through a classed or spatial distancing, so that what is portrayed is regal- or Oriental- or at any rate "fancied suffering," "fantastic griefs" (109) and "imaginary distresses" (110) alien to the average theatre-goer. Imagining pain and affliction in this manner denies its historical and bodily specificity, which is to say its lingering presence in the actual prose of the world. In a phrase so wonderfully evocative that it deserves more attention than I can spare it here, Mackenzie calls this the "drapery of the figure" (109) enabling the unaccountable pleasures of catharsis. Calling to mind a sense of embellishment and preening adornment, the image suggests an ersatz making that binds the naked ugliness of human pain, concealing "real distresses." In the drapery of the figure—

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[33] Horace, *Ars Poetica,* l.188.

whether that figure refers to a venerated hero's or heroine's body or poetic form itself is left open in the locution—afflictions become more than simply bearable, they become beautiful. In ascending to art, the tragic loses something of its raw power.

On the British stage, the drapery of the figure took several forms, keeping alive facets of bourgeois drama while modulating its most terrible effects. Melodramas, which made spectacles of suffering women and adapted the tableau's static scenery, explored the performance of excessive affect, as well as virtue's occult power to validate affliction in the happy ending. Expressions of longing and anxiety in a disenchanted, rapidly industrializing world, they silently revised she-tragedy and Richardson's dark providence by demanding justice in this life. Another appropriation of the archive can be found in the Gothic, which could often be melodramatic. Onstage, the Gothic's debt to domestic tragedy was present in its evocation of morbid curiosity, utilizing dread and fantastic horror for titillating effect. But its influence was present in Gothic novels too. As Terry Castle has shown with reference to *Clarissa*, the Gothic illustrates the uncanny's emergence as if it were historical allegory, becoming a story about Enlightenment's relation to those dark, psychic recesses that collectively lie close to home. Others have observed the way that horror and fantasy enabled writers of Gothic fiction to represent domestic violence, an insight we can trace to *Fatal Curiosity's* theorization of the domestic tragic imagination. Like horror in our own day, domestic and bourgeois tragedies exploited a culture's fear of being exposed to danger by those closest to them. The genealogies of realism and the Gothic intersect in the bourgeois

tragic archive, their family resemblance legible in the common ancestors further up the line of descent.[34]

The resemblance is much stronger if we look to the serious novels of the nineteenth century and naturalist dramas of its final years and beyond. To read Eliot or Hardy, Ibsen or Strindberg, Chekov or Miller is to be struck with the dignity of common people, the tragic conditions thrust upon them by a modern world, and above all, a careful attention to the emotional texture of ordinary life. It is to be struck, in other words, with the deep resonance of bourgeois tragedy and ordinary suffering across time. The world imagined in this archive is a modern one, our world, a world that perhaps no longer disgusts us with the same intensity—proof that affects, like a culture's aesthetic tastes, unfold in history.

[34] Coleridge argues in his *Biographia Literaria,* 2 vols. (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), that German drama and the *Sturm and Drang* owed a profound debt to a popular trio of English works: Richardson's *Clarissa,* Young's *Night Thoughts,* and Hervey's *Meditations* (see 2:183).

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