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“The Language of Trade”: Rhetoric, Power, and the Commercial Identity
in Eighteenth-Century British Fiction

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Danielle Rose Domzalski

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Ann Van Sant, Chair
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2016

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Language of Trade”: Rhetoric, Power, and Commercial Authorship in Eighteenth-Century British Fiction

By

Danielle Rose Domzalski

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Ann Van Sant, Chair

In *Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon distinguishes between assimilationist and supersessionist iterations of the progressive narrative form; while most texts remain fundamentally elitist, he writes, supersessionist texts “seek the legitimation of a humble social group in its own terms.” The disparity signals the presence of distinct, competing social fractions within the eighteenth-century middling sort: a polite, assimilationist fraction, and a more supersessionist trade and manufacturing community, which I term the commercial fraction. I argue that commercial authors have been consistently overlooked or misread by contemporaries and modern critics; the genteel authors and audiences who dominated contemporary literary discourse read commercial texts through the distortions of a polite lens, while modern literary scholars have based their analyses upon—and thereby perpetuated—these flawed ‘translations.’ Although scholars have studied commercial authors such as Samuel Richardson as agents of an undifferentiated ‘middling’ culture, there has been no recognition of a tradition of distinct commercial rhetoric, no sustained analysis of the commercial fraction’s engagement with polite discourse.

My introduction unpicks the intertwined strands of middling culture to discuss the commercial sort “in its own terms,” analyzing the social and rhetorical patterns in autobiographies and conduct treatises written by members of Britain’s commercial population. In the following chapters, I analyze commercial fiction as counterdiscourse, focusing primarily on three authors: Robert Dodsley, Samuel Richardson, and Robert Bage. These authors interrogate the polite dominance of public discourse—and empower themselves—by appropriating and rewriting its linguistic signs. They redefine virtue to privilege practical, self-interested conduct, including ambition, manual labor, and time management, and their texts reinterpret power by figuring the social contract as a decentralized and situational network of bonds rather than a unified, natural hierarchy.

My dissertation ultimately encourages further scholarly engagement with the concept of commercial authorship. I argue, for instance, that commercial rhetoric created greater space for portrayals of empowered women, and it may have shaped the late-century radical interest in subaltern independence and agency. Studying patterns of commercial rhetoric allows us to interrogate conventional misreadings and opens up new ways to assess the intersections among eighteenth-century texts.

INTRODUCTION

As the first king of Bohemia kept his country shoes by him, to remind him of whence he was taken, I have put a motto on the doors of my carriage, constantly to remind me to what I am indebted for my prosperity, viz. "SMALL PROFITS DO GREAT THINGS." And I assure you sir, that reflecting on the means by which this carriage was procured adds not a little to the pleasure of riding in it.

---James Lackington, *Memoirs of James Lackington*

In his 1791 *Memoirs*, James Lackington reports that his rapid rise in status from impoverished shoemaker to wealthy bookseller has occasioned a degree of public opprobrium—especially his acquisition of a carriage and liveried servants, status symbols normally reserved for the social elite.¹ Lackington, however, ostentatiously embraces and usurps these genteel forms; he has inscribed his carriage with his trade motto, thereby using his ‘polite’ equipage to advertise his common origins, his ambitions, and his business to the public gaze. The elegant carriage becomes, in his hands, a vehicle of trade culture—and his emphasis on the “pleasure” he derives from his commercialized carriage suggests that he recognizes the transgression. Lackington’s rhetorical move reflects a technique practiced by commercial writers from Daniel Defoe to Robert Bage, who appropriated the fundamental signs of genteel culture and reinterpreted them to privilege their own values. In this dissertation, I argue that these authors constitute a largely unrecognized subset of the middling sort, a fraction consistently overlooked or misread by their contemporaries and modern critics. Like Lackington, they create a form of supersessionist discourse by writing commercial rhetoric into polite structures.

¹ James Lackington, *Memoirs of the first forty-five years of the life of James Lackington*, (London: J. Lackington, 1791), 234.

The Supersessionist Narrative

Barriers to recognizing commercial rhetoric are partly rooted in vexed, inconsistent literary discussions of the middling sort itself. I base my references to “the middling sort” in the consensus definition used by current historians, who broadly agree that urban-based independent work is central to that rank; the middling sort thereby encompasses merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers, manufacturers, and professionals—but not minor gentry, servants, or journeymen.² However, literary scholars tend to engage the middling sort in more tentative and problematic ways; many critical texts reference the concept of a “middling sort” or “middling ranks” without any definition at all,³ and in others the terminology is susceptible to slippage.⁴ The issue is further vexed because late Stuart and Georgian Britons described their own society in widely

² In the past two decades, Keith Wrightson and Shani D’Cruze have suggested that middling Britons were those who needed an occupation—because they could not earn a living from rents or investments—yet did not have to labor directly for an employer. See Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 290; Shani D’Cruze, “The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker,” *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 184. See also Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Los Angeles: UC Press, 1996), 15. Hunt offers a somewhat broader standard, agreeing that most “worked for a living,” but middling individuals could also live on rental or investment incomes, so long as they were not members of gentry.

³ *The Rise of the Novel*, for instance, so closely linked to the growing influence of the middle classes, never offers a clear definition of this key term. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, 2nd American Edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2001). The ambiguity creates interpretive problems, as readers may construe the term in widely varying ways.

⁴ See Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness* (Lewisburg, PA: Buckness UP, 2003). In the Introduction, Jordan repeatedly references “the middling sort,” and “the middle classes,” but later often fuses the commercial and professional populations with the decidedly non-middling gentry as “the comfortable classes.” The latter phrase implies a binary social structure, one that by definition cannot accommodate a ‘middle’ layer, thus confusing any distinction between the upper and middling ranks. See also Michael Mascuch, “Social Mobility and Middling Self-Identity: The Ethos of British Autobiographers, 1600-1750,” *Social History*, 38, no. 1 (January, 1995): 45-61. Mascuch analyzes 135 seventeenth- and eighteenth-century autobiographies in his article on “Social Mobility and Middling Self-Identity,” but includes the writings of men who indicate no profession and style themselves “gentlemen” on the title page; he excludes only nobility and a single domestic servant as outside the bounds of the study. One-third of the texts in his sample were thus written by ‘gentlemen’ who would be unlikely to identify with the ‘middling’ populace. Such ambiguity arguably hampers the reach and utility of literary analysis.

divergent ways. Multiple interpretive models were not only available, but the same person might suggest different status structures in different situations.⁵

Nevertheless, H.R. French sees opportunity in the rhetorical confusion, suggesting that the existence of multiple systems “reinforces the need for detailed studies of ‘middling’ status and identity.”⁶ Recognizing and studying commercial authorship can help scholars more effectively read eighteenth-century middling culture and rhetoric. In an analysis of eighteenth-century middling taste, for instance, Robert Mayer writes that “the kind of material treated in these [middling] texts...made it clear that a new class of readers was sought. Deloney writes of clothiers and yeomen; Behn of an African slave, albeit a princely one; Defoe of merchants, thieves, and whores; Richardson of a serving girl.”⁷ Mayer implies that these authors have made equivalent rhetorical decisions, eliding the distance between the tradesmen—Deloney, Defoe, and Richardson—who challenge elite conventions by introducing ‘vulgar’ protagonists, and Behn, who does not. Oroonoko is more than “princely”—he is a prince, and throughout the text Behn connects his noble conduct to his high birth.⁸ While the commercial authors reject polite assumptions about worth, Behn’s text offers a fundamentally conservative social vision. When we distinguish between commercial and polite authorship, we are better equipped to manage the expectations that shape (or distort) the way we interpret texts.

I take Michael McKeon’s *Origins of the English Novel* as the foundation for my analysis of commercial rhetoric, for his tracing of various narrative types—aristocratic, conservative, and

⁵ David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 20. Cannadine suggests that at least three different models were available: hierarchical, in which society was seen as a continuous web of relationships from king to laborer; tripartite, which stipulated upper, middle, and lower sections; and dichotomous, with two (variable) categories, such as rich/poor, better sort/inferior sort, etc.

⁶ H.R. French, “Social Status, Localism and the ‘Middle Sort of People’ in England 1620-1750,” *Past & Present*, No. 166 (Feb., 2000): 70.

⁷ Robert Mayer, “Did You Say Middle Class?: the Question of Taste and the Rise of the Novel,” *Eighteenth-century Fiction*, 12 (2000): 288.

⁸ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994). See, for example, Behn’s descriptions of Oroonoko’s lineage, “brave and gallant” manners, and “mighty actions” (10-12).

progressive—acknowledges an ongoing textual struggle for cultural authority. Fiction, McKeon writes, “gives form to the fluidity of crisis by organizing it into a conflict of competing interpretations.”⁹ Although McKeon resists using class terminology as anachronistic, he offers a framework for analyzing texts that interrogate the legitimacy of dominant discourse.¹⁰

However, commercial authorship cannot be simplistically tied to the progressive narrative form. McKeon’s text indicates shifting, blurred lines among the aristocratic, conservative and progressive texts, tracing commonalities as well as conflicts.¹¹ He argues that conservative ideology privileges a (demystified) vision of aristocratic worth, shortly before tracing progressive texts’ emphasis on the industry of “successful younger sons of the nobility.”¹² Demanding space for younger sons is progressive only in the most attenuated sense, because these sons are still members of elite families. In both conservative and progressive narratives, the genteel are implicitly and consistently assumed to have greater merit or potential than those who lack gentility. Most of these progressive texts are, therefore, simultaneously conservative, for they fight a rearguard action against status inconsistency; they depict a more pragmatic vision of nobility, yet they remain fundamentally elitist.¹³ McKeon acknowledges the connection, writing that “one potent justification for this progressive plot was the essentially

⁹ Michael McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002), 174.

¹⁰ Michael McKeon, “Parsing Habermas’s ‘Bourgeois Public Sphere,’” *Criticism*. 46, no. 2 (2004): 273.

¹¹ McKeon argues that it is impossible to frame unified, authoritative textual categories: “Speaking in the broadest terms available, dialectics is therefore a way of understanding things under conditions in which there is no single privileged view, and it presumes, if not an infinite, then at least an indefinite, array of parts and wholes” (*Origins*, xiv-xv).

¹² *Ibid*, 219.

¹³ *Ibid*, 220. See also Nicholas Hudson: “I have these contentions in mind: (1) the novel belonged to a program of stabilizing, not transforming, English society during a time of disruptive and disorienting change; and (2) the novel did not aim to promote values of individualism, progress, freedom, equality, and so forth in opposition to an entrenched aristocratic and conformist ideology, but highly valued the ideals (if not always the current reality) of the old order, which it emulated and later sought in quite conscious ways to make part of a new consolidated ruling class.” Nicholas Hudson, “Social Rank, ‘The Rise of the Novel,’ and Whig Histories of Eighteenth-Century Fiction,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 17, no. 4, (July 2005): 574.

assimilationist desire to renovate old families fallen into corruption”—and adding that the protagonists in these narratives “retain a gentility of behavior.”¹⁴

Importantly, however, McKeon points to a subset of more radical or “supersessionist” narratives, which seek the “legitimation of a humble social group in its own terms.”¹⁵ Though he does not discuss which social group might have possessed “its own terms,” his examples are suggestive; he always turns Deloney, Defoe, or Richardsons to illustrate supersessionist rhetoric—the same authors on which Mayer rests his claims about shifting middling tastes.¹⁶ Literary scholars routinely source key arguments about the growing influence of *middling* culture in the work of *commercial* authors, without allowing for the presence of two distinct groups. I will argue that the supersessionist narratives McKeon describes were the products not of a broad, indistinct middling populace, but a particular subset of that group: members of the trade and manufacturing community.

McKeon focuses on the broader conservative/progressive dialectic, precluding any systematic analysis of supersessionist texts, yet these unequivocal acts of legitimation warrant further inquiry. While polite middling fictions represent varying iterations of gentility, commercial fiction asserts a different set of values altogether. In this introduction, I will unpick the intertwined strands of middling culture in order to discuss a “humble social group”—the commercial sort—“in its own terms,” studying the social and rhetorical patterns in autobiographies and conduct treatises written by members of Britain’s commercial population. In the following chapters, I will identify and analyze their fictions as counterdiscourse. Commercial

¹⁴ McKeon, *Origins*, 220.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 225. See also McKeon’s remark that “from [a] progressive perspective of extreme demystification, the preferred method for overcoming status inconsistency is not assimilation but supersession—the replacement of all the outworn fictions of status orientation by the emergent criteria of class” (222-23).

¹⁶ See, for example, his claim that “Defoe is our most convenient guide to the variations that occur within this basic movement” (McKeon, *Origins*, 221).

authors granted narrative authority to voices located outside of dominant genteel circles, and drew upon distinct communal mores to assert a rhetoric which appropriates and rewrites the linguistic signs—and thereby the conceptual foundations—of polite culture. They invert the definition of independence, tying this traditional virtue to work *rather than freedom from work*, and their texts refigure the social contract as a decentralized and situational network of bonds rather than a unified, natural hierarchy. They also challenge elite representations of virtue to elevate more practical, self-interested conduct, including manual labor (for both men and women), ambition, time management, and economy.

Locating the Commercial Sort

Pierre Bourdieu's work on class, taste, and distinction confirms that the writings of the trade and manufacturing community can—and should—be analyzed independently of other middling texts. The disparity between assimilationist and supersessionist rhetoric signals the presence of competing social codes within the eighteenth-century middling sort; Bourdieu's account of class fractions enables us to recognize distinct groups within an individual rank, each with its own habitus—and each struggling for the power to shape discourse, to determine “the definition of the accomplished man.”¹⁷ Mayer draws upon Bourdieu to point out that eighteenth-century texts consciously stake positions within the socio-cultural field, but Mayer concludes that “middle-class taste is not identified with a set of views or values or choices of its own but is instead defined by being caught in between the ‘legitimate’ [i.e., elite] and the ‘popular.’”¹⁸ In fact, Mayer notes that Bourdieu himself recognized “only two aesthetics: legitimate taste and the

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Trans. Richard Nice (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2010), 85.

¹⁸ Mayer, “Did You Say Middle Class?,” 283.

popular aesthetic.”¹⁹ These claims are true to a certain extent. However, an analysis of commercial texts will demonstrate that the fraction comprising the commercial community possessed a cohesive identity and aesthetic rather than an assortment of high and low tastes—and that commercial authors sought to privilege a distinctive vision of “the accomplished man.”

We can locate the commercial fraction by turning to Bourdieu’s account of cultural capital.²⁰ Although most researchers acknowledge that politeness was a component of perceived status during the eighteenth century, recent studies continue to overemphasize economic factors.²¹ The division between the two major fractions of the British middling sort becomes visible through variations in social capital—in other words, the presence or absence of genteel status. Professionals, for instance, were working members of the middling populace, but most of them were also part of the broader polite community. Barristers generally considered themselves gentleman, either because their fathers were members of the gentry, or because they had spent several years at Oxford alongside gentlemen. Minor gentry, vicars’ daughters, and schoolmasters might possess vastly different incomes, ranging roughly from a comfortable £500 to a mere £30 per year,²² and thereby live in widely varying degrees of comfort, with widely varying marital prospects. Yet most of these people would possess a genteel mindset and “taste,” acquired in childhood and/or during higher education. Although professionals sometimes expressed solidarity with commercial interests, they frequently conveyed unease with commercial habits

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

²⁰ Bourdieu outlines a comprehensive view of capital, devoting marked attention to forms of status and power aside from income or occupation. See especially Chapter 1 of *Distinction*.

²¹ See Paul Langford, “The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 12, (2002): 311-331. See also Lawrence E. Klein, “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (Dec., 2002): 869-898.

²² I have arrived at this rough estimate after consulting several studies of the middling ranks.

and beliefs.²³ This preference is repeatedly displayed in eighteenth-century novels, in which the hero or heroine is often more deeply affected by the pathos of impoverished fellow gentlefolk than by bankrupted tradesmen or hungry peasants.²⁴ For these reasons, doctors, lawyers, and divines are not members of the commercial fraction.

Artists and authors often had similarly genteel inclinations. Professionals in the arts, such as writers, painters, and musicians, could be caught between the lifestyle of independent City tradesmen and the cultural sophistication of West End gentlefolk. Artists worked for pay, often crafting saleable goods with their hands—a primary indicator of non-genteel status. However, for successful artists, that labor also involved a significant degree of cultural refinement. Many professional artists were “drawn from the educated but impoverished upper classes”²⁵ and had significant cultural capital, even if they struggled to make ends meet. Henry Fielding inherited very little money, and was forced to write for pay in order to make a living; he also later served as a London magistrate. In this sense, he can be seen as the quintessential middling voice. Nevertheless, Fielding was a gentleman’s son with genteel relatives, and he received a classical education at exclusive Eton College.²⁶ For the rest of his life he carried with him the cultural capital (and attitudes) of his privileged social background.²⁷

Furthermore, patronage still exerted a powerful cultural influence on artists. Many relied upon aristocratic favor for their livelihoods, and often lived for extended periods with their fashionable benefactors. Therefore, most British artists and writers—unless they had backgrounds in trade or manufactures—would have identified more strongly with the attitudes

²³ Christopher Brooks, “Professions, Ideology and the Middling Sort in the Late Sixteenth Centuries,” in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 140.

²⁴ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 77-8.

²⁵ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 75.

²⁶ Martin Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 7-9, 38-44.

²⁷ Mayer, “Did You Say Middle Class?”, 299.

and beliefs of their polite customers than with the commercial rank and file. Charles Burney was both a professional musician and a music historian; he was not independently wealthy, and he worked hard at a series of jobs for a salary. Nevertheless, he was born to genteel parents, went to good schools, and received many years of specialized training. More importantly, he was patronized by such aristocrats as Fulke Greville, and he moved in almost entirely polite circles.²⁸ Catherine Gallagher suggests that the Burney family was dedicated to the acquisition and display of elite cultural capital; Burney's children, including the future author Frances, were raised in a cultivated environment, and identified more strongly with genteel than with commercial manners.²⁹

Paying increased attention to social capital also helps us assess the connections between politeness and commerce, for trade did not always preclude gentility. Early in the century, in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* famously mentions "this amphibious Creature, this *Land-water-thing*, call'd, a *Gentleman-Tradesman*."³⁰ In later decades, writers continued to note the existence of "genteel Trades"³¹ or "genteel tradesmen."³² The younger sons of aristocrats and gentry who were set to trades carried their elite capital with them to their new, less-exalted situations.³³ Merchants—tradesmen who dealt with international imports and exports—were especially likely to have genteel backgrounds, at least in part because the occupation itself seemed to confer greater prestige. Merchants dealt with larger amounts of capital, and conducted business with

²⁸ Roger Lonsdale, *Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 50.

²⁹ Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Gallagher refers specifically to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, writing that the "accumulation of such assets in the Burney family was intense... Their accretion of cultural capital and the development of relationships that would make it grow was bound up with their most intimate sentiments and deepest sense of identity." (216-17).

³⁰ Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. Paul Scanlon (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview, 2005), 90.

³¹ James Nelson, *An Essay on the Government of Children, under Three General Heads: viz. Health, Manners and Education*, (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1753), 306.

³² Lackington, *Memoirs*, 249.

³³ McKeon, *Origins*, 220.

foreign markets; they were usually multilingual and possessed a broad knowledge of foreign geography and cultures. Such large-scale, cosmopolitan work seemed both more valuable to the nation and more gentlemanly, and thus garnered more respect from the landed interests.³⁴ In 1747, Robert Campbell wrote that small-scale tradesman “live upon one another, and never add one Sixpence to the aggregate Wealth of the Kingdom; but the Merchant draws his honest Gain from the distant Poles, and every Shilling he returns more than he carried out, adds so much to the National Riches and Capital Stock of the Kingdom.”³⁵ Campbell’s perspective was commonplace; even Defoe, in *The Complete Tradesman*, conceded that only overseas traders were properly called merchants, “by way of honourable distinction.”³⁶

Scholars have often argued that the growing acceptance of merchants by polite society—evidenced, for instance, by the increasing number of baronetcies and knighthoods granted to prominent merchants—indicated the growing strength of the middling sort.³⁷ Yet the claim should be qualified: merchants were nearly always *already* polite. In Richard Steele’s 1722 play *The Conscious Lovers*, the protagonist Mr. Sealand proudly declares that “we merchants are a species of gentry,”³⁸ but the statement seems less revolutionary if we consider that most merchants were born to genteel families.³⁹ Lawrence and Jeanne Stone have observed that individuals in several other commercial occupations, such as wholesalers and bankers, also enjoyed relatively high status, and tended to attract genteel apprentices. As with large merchant companies, these trades commanded correspondingly high apprenticeship fees that helped to

³⁴ Natasha Glaisyer, *The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660-1720* (Woodbridge, UK: Royal Historical Society/The Boydell Press, 2006), 17-19.

³⁵ Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman* (London: T. Gardner, 1747), 284.

³⁶ Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (Lexington: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), Introduction, n.p.

³⁷ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 219.

³⁸ Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, IV.ii (364-5), in *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy*, ed. Scott McMillan, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997).

³⁹ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 290.

maintain their social exclusivity.⁴⁰ The result was a tight web of connections among merchants, professionals, and landed wealth—both in London and in other regions.⁴¹ These groups had disparate livelihoods and incomes, but they were rooted in a common (dominant) culture.

Manufacturing jobs were considered far less desirable. Virtually all manufacturers—with the singular and surprising exception of brewers—were excluded from polite society until the close of the eighteenth century.⁴² Elite Britons equated these businesses with other less prestigious trades, such as retail and victualing, which charged comparatively modest apprenticeship premiums. For these reasons, as Richard Grassby points out, “a strenuous effort was made both in contemporary literature and in real life to distinguish between foreign and domestic trades and between wholesaling and retailing.”⁴³ These were not merely occupational distinctions; they possessed substantial cultural implications. Although merchants maintained a positive literary and cultural image throughout the century, the figure of the lesser tradesman or manufacturer “was disdained as an upstart, a social parvenu, a mere mushroom who threatened the social order.”⁴⁴ The dominant social order was polite, and it vigorously rejected citizens

⁴⁰ Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite?: England 1550-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 234-35. Apprenticeship fees for this trade were correspondingly exorbitant, which reinforced the genteel domination of overseas trade; even at the start of the eighteenth century, apprenticeship fees to the elite merchant companies averaged £1000, with another £1000 required to set up in business afterwards.

⁴⁰ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 219.

⁴¹ See Jonathan Barry, “Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort,” in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 93; Philip Jenkins, *Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry, 1640-1790* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1983), 36; Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 280.

⁴² Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 280-9. It is interesting to note the unique social status of brewers. According to the Stones, they were virtually the sole ‘respectable’ manufacturing interest during the eighteenth century (206). Their acceptance by polite society helps to explain why the powerful Welsh landowner John Salusbury was willing to marry his daughter, Hester, to the rich brewer Henry Thrale in 1763. Hester Thrale, of course, later became an author and the close friend of Samuel Johnson.

⁴³ Richard Grassby, *The Business Community in Seventeenth-Century England: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English Speaking World, 1580-1740* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119.

⁴⁴ Neil McKendrick, “Gentlemen and Players’ Revisited, The Gentlemanly Ideal, the Business Ideal and the Professional Ideal in English Literary Culture,” in *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman*, eds. Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 111.

perceived to be unrefined, no matter how successful. The eighteenth-century populace was highly sensitive to the polite/vulgar divide.⁴⁵

I have been implicitly discussing men, yet women acquired status and cultural capital in similar ways. The kinds of occupational tasks that were suitable for a bookbinder's wife would likely be shunned by a merchant's wife, merely because of differences in the family's social identification.⁴⁶ Women raised in self-consciously polite families—whether those families were engaged in trade or not—were not expected to learn a trade, help out behind the counter, or enter service, and they were (to varying degrees) taught the fashionable ladylike accomplishments, such as French, music, dance, and drawing. The acquisition of this cultural capital enabled them to “describe themselves as ‘polite’, ‘civil’, ‘genteel’, ‘well-bred’ and ‘polished.’”⁴⁷ Women did not live outside questions of masculine status and cultural capital; instead, they were deeply embedded in the system. Simon Gunn has argued that women's bodies were key markers of a family's social position, writing that “women had a critical part in transmitting cultural competence by embodying it in their own person, their dress, deportment and behaviour.”⁴⁸ A poor clergyman's daughter was thus raised to signify the same ‘polite’ status as a squire's or Turkey merchant's daughter, even though the size of their dowries, and consequently their marriage prospects, might vary greatly.

⁴⁵ Elite tradesmen and financiers have also largely monopolized the attention of modern historians, to the cost of the smaller businessmen and manufacturers. See Peter Earle, “Age and Accumulation in the London Business Community, 1665-1720,” in *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman*, eds. Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 38. The situation, however, is probably due primarily to the comparative prevalence of records for high-profile businessmen.

⁴⁶ Richard Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 336.

⁴⁷ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian Britain* (New Haven & London: Yale UP), 1999.

⁴⁸ Simon Gunn, “Translating: Cultural Capital and the English Middle Class in Historical Perspective,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56, no. 1, Special Issue: The Concept of Cultural Capital and Social Inequality (Mar., 2005): 55.

Philip Jenkins has confirmed the general permeability between the gentry and certain occupations, especially the professions, which is largely indicated by intermarriage.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this permeability was limited to culturally suitable candidates. An *arriviste* tradesman would have difficulty finding acceptance in genteel households if he lacked the proper cultural credentials.⁵⁰ On the other hand, polite families “had relatively little objection to the son or grandson of such a man, provided that he had had a suitable education and consequently had the manners, graces, and values of a gentleman, and conducted himself accordingly.”⁵¹ When looked at from this perspective, the concept of ‘intermarriage’ loses a great deal of its significance. Richard Steele encapsulated contemporary attitudes neatly: “The appellation of a gentleman is never to be affixed to a man’s circumstances, but to his behaviour in them.”⁵² Polite manners—the outward manifestation of cultural capital—mattered more than birth, occupation, or wealth.

I should acknowledge that Britons often embraced a combination of both commercial and polite mores. Wealthy merchants, for instance, might occasionally buy a country house, at a time when estates were the cultural province of the landed classes; however, these men almost always chose to purchase property very close to London, so that they could remain involved with their businesses and commercial associations,⁵³ and they usually decorated their homes, whether town or country, in a more subdued, modest style than gentry families with similar incomes.⁵⁴ Such men were also usually unashamed about putting their own sons to a trade, even though they might provide these sons with some degree of genteel education prior to or concurrent with

⁴⁹ Jenkins, *Making of a Ruling Class*, 36

⁵⁰ Jonathan Barry. Introduction, *The Middling Sort of People*, 17. See also Grassby, *Business Community*, 118.

⁵¹ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 239.

⁵² Richard Steele, *The Tatler* #207, in *The Tatler*, 3 Vols, Vol. 3, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 99-100

⁵³ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 303.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

apprenticeship.⁵⁵ Conversely, professionals frequently shared some characteristics with the commercial population.⁵⁶ As many scholars have noted, even Alexander Pope, a significant defender of conservative values, broke new marketplace ground by using subscriptions to achieve his independence from elite patronage.

Nevertheless, the non-genteel commercial populace constituted an identifiable fraction within the larger middling community. In his *Essay on Man*, Pope aptly remarks on the intermixture of virtue and vice: “If white and black blend, soften, and unite / A thousand ways, is there no black and white?”⁵⁷ Similarly, the fact that middling citizens were able to embrace both commercial and genteel values does not negate the existence of independent sets of social codes.

The attempt to study the non-genteel middling community is complicated by terminological obstacles. At one point in “The Middling Sort in London,” Peter Earle remarks that “a well-dressed and reasonably well-educated book-keeper or exciseman, with a genteel person and behaviour, might well seem more *middling* to his contemporaries than a self-made builder or manufacturer, who, although worth ten or twenty times as much, might well be ‘an awkward clumsy fellow’ who could hardly write his own name.”⁵⁸ The statement is problematic. No independent manufacturer worth hundreds of pounds per year (no matter how awkward or clumsy) would be considered a member of the laboring class; he is therefore unquestionably a member of the middling sort, just like any educated exciseman. Earle’s remark points more to the manufacturer’s lack of polite credential—he is financially successful, but he is not genteel. *Yet there is currently no term available that can quickly and accurately describe this situation.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 304-5

⁵⁶ Brooks, “Professions, Ideology and the Middling Sort,” 140.

⁵⁷ Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), Epistle II, 213-24.

⁵⁸ Peter Earle, “The Middling Sort in London,” *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 150. [my emphasis]

As previously noted, there was an abundance of terms available to privileged eighteenth-century women (and men) to indicate their status: genteel, polite, well-bred, civil, and polished. However, we lack an appropriate, corresponding designation for those middling individuals—tradesmen, innkeepers, manufacturers, bakers’ daughters, and others—without genteel pretensions. ‘Middling sort’ itself is, as I have shown, too broad; it encompasses genteel professionals, artists, and merchants as well as these humbler types of people, and thus obscures the very distinction that this dissertation seeks to examine. Jonathan Barry uses ‘bourgeoisie’ in order to reference the urban middling sort,⁵⁹ but that word is unsatisfactory for the same reason as ‘middling’—it does not differentiate between those with and without polite credentials. Other labels, such as ‘vulgar,’ ‘impolite,’ ‘uncivil,’ ‘ill-bred,’ ‘unrefined,’ or ‘common,’ are inadequate for two reasons. First, these terms are overly broad, encompassing both middling tradesmen and members of the laboring classes. Moreover, these words are pejoratives created by the elite to distinguish themselves from their perceived inferiors. They overwrite non-polite culture.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the terms “commercial sort” and “commercial identity” to refer to this nameless segment of the British population. I realize that these terms are not perfect, since many commercial people, such as merchants, could also be genteel. At this time, however, these phrases appear to be the best available option, because they specify a business-oriented urban population and emphasize the non-genteel aspects of the identity, in value-neutral terms.

I use the term ‘identity’ primarily in the communal sense,⁶⁰ for the commercial identity was marked by traits described in Bourdieu’s work: shared forms of taste and discourse in

⁵⁹ Barry, “Bourgeois Collectivism?,” 85.

⁶⁰ See Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 179. Wahrman has argued that the modern interpretation of selfhood—as a personal, distinctive consciousness—did not yet exist during the later 17th and early 18th century. However, he does suggest

tension with other ranks or fractions.⁶¹ The longstanding assumption that the majority of the middling sort sought to imitate or join the ranks of the landed classes has been largely discredited in recent years.⁶² Wrightson suggests that instead of trying to match their social superiors, the middling looked to their peers, amid “the networks of association of the middle sort themselves.”⁶³ I will argue that these networks of association rarely bridged the commercial/polite divide, but the key point is that members of the commercial populace largely formed a cohesive community, independent of both laboring and polite circles.

Polite Misreadings

Many scholars have assessed the cultural ties between the middling sort and the dominant genteel sphere. Lawrence Klein, for example, has persuasively traced the profound flexibility and accessibility of politeness, comparing it to a dialect in a multilingual culture, and consequently a skill available to most Britons who might wish to learn it. Thus, he suggests, most members of the middling sort who dealt regularly with their social superiors would endeavor to “comport themselves in a genteel way.”⁶⁴ Klein sheds helpful light on the concept of politeness, but his approach tells only part of the story. Although a milliner would indeed probably work to demonstrate “a kind of commercial affability,”⁶⁵ those agreeable manners would not make her genteel—either in her own eyes or in the eyes of her customer.

the late Stuart and Georgian populations still acknowledged an earlier form of selfhood, one that was rooted in social relationships rather than personal identity.

⁶¹ Bourdieu writes that “Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make” (*Distinction*, xxix). See also his remark that “People who belong to the same social group and who thus occupy the same position in social space tend to share the same tastes across all forms of symbolic practice” (xiv).

⁶² Langford discusses the concept of emulation at length in Chapter 3 of *A Polite and Commercial People*. See Hunt for the more recent scholarly refutation of this concept (*The Middling Sort*, 2-3).

⁶³ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 300.

⁶⁴ Lawrence E. Klein, “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (Dec. 2002): 880.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 880.

Literary critics have offered sustained analyses of aspirational or polite middling behaviors, but not the core values of manufacture or trade. Daniel Defoe's complex, fraught links to the commercial world have been studied insightfully and thoroughly since the early twentieth century, and more recently by scholars such as John Richetti and Paula Backscheider.⁶⁶ These studies, however, tend to assess Defoe's novels either in isolation or as agents of an undifferentiated 'middling' culture. There has been no recognition of a tradition of commercial rhetoric, no studies purposefully connecting Defoe to other commercial authors, such as Robert Dodsley, Samuel Richardson, or Robert Bage.

The interpretive oversight is largely based in the nature of eighteenth-century print discourse, which generated three, closely-related hermeneutic obstacles. First, the literary sphere was dominated by authors who would fit comfortably into polite circles—such as Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Horace Walpole, Penelope Aubin, Henry and Sarah Fielding, Frances Burney, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Delarivier Manley, Charlotte Lennox, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. These writers possessed elite cultural capital, and they also possessed both the necessary time and skills to write fluently. Most of them descended from polite families, and all of them spent formative years in a genteel environment. They could address the “commercial” experience only indirectly, through the lens of polite rhetorics. Bourdieu writes that when an “intellectual...put[s] himself in the place of a worker without having the habitus of a worker, he apprehends the working-class tradition through schemes of perception and appreciation which are not those that the members of the working class themselves use to apprehend it.”⁶⁷ In other words, mediation results in distortion.

⁶⁶ See John Richetti, *The Life of Daniel Defoe* (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2005); Paula Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989).

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 373.

In addition, those texts which *were* produced by commercial authors were received by predominantly polite readers who brought their own cultural preconceptions to literature. Klein's figure of a multilingual culture falters here, for the genteel community was unable to read the commercial dialect. Bourdieu argues that "a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded."⁶⁸ Commercial texts have been largely misread because few readers possessed the 'code' necessary to interpret them appropriately. As I will show in the following chapters, eighteenth-century audiences experienced commercial authors' texts as translations, often overlooking or misinterpreting key expressions of the commercial ethos.

Finally, the dominance of polite literary production and reception has shaped and limited modern critical studies of eighteenth-century literature. I will argue that scholars primarily rest their analyses upon the contemporary fictions and reviews that originally misinterpreted commercial rhetoric, thus perpetuating its invisibility. The title of Paul Langford's *A Polite and Commercial People* neatly encapsulates two distinct, significant threads of British culture, but only one thread has been seriously considered by literary scholars. My dissertation seeks to address this gap, first by identifying and delineating the commercial fraction, and then offering a sustained literary analysis of its engagement with dominant polite discourse.

The Commercial Identity

Keith Wrightson argues that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, England had developed a "commercial society with a set of values which they could claim, with some justice,

⁶⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xxv.

as being peculiarly their own.”⁶⁹ In the remainder of this chapter, I will draw upon current histories of the middling sort and the business community, in addition to a variety of contemporary conduct books, to ascertain the values that most characterized the commercial fraction.⁷⁰ I support my analysis with passages from several late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century diaries and autobiographies; in an effort to isolate manners specific to commercial culture, I have focused on five individuals who were born and raised with no apparent access or pretensions to genteel culture: James Lackington, the London bookseller I mention at the start of this chapter; Thomas Turner, a Sussex shopkeeper; William Stout, a Lancaster grocer; Thomas Tryon, a London hatter; and Thomas Gent, a Yorkshire printer. These men lived in diverse locations and experienced varying degrees of financial success, but all worked their way up through lesser trades, and none received a polite education.⁷¹

The most salient trait of the commercial sort is their valorization of occupational independence. The connection between labor and independence formed the very basis of their identity as middling workers, distinguishing them from both landowners and wage laborers; Wrightson writes that “unlike the gentry, they had to work for a living, but unlike laboring people they did so independently.”⁷² Tradesmen also took immense satisfaction in their status as employers rather than employees dependent upon a fixed wage.⁷³ William Gent recalled proudly the moment that he was able to quit wage labor and direct his own household, marveling that

⁶⁹ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 303. Although Wrightson frequently uses the broader term “middling sort” in his text, the context, as in this sentence, indicates that his study focuses on families engaged in commercial activities. See also Richard Grassby’s argument, that “business did have some distinct values” (*Business Community*, 388-9).

⁷⁰ For conduct books, I have chosen to contrast Daniel Defoe’s *The Complete Tradesmen* with several conduct books intended for gentlemen. Although these texts contain some common ground, they also demonstrate marked cultural differences. See Grassby, *Business Community*, 391.

⁷¹ Although even the most personal diaries are still artificial to some extent, these texts still offer the most direct, accurate windows available into the commercial sort’s “own notions” of their lives. See Dan Doll and Jessica Munns. *Recording and Reordering: Essays on the Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Diary and Journal* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 12-13. Michael Mascuch has also argued that “no analysis of human action is complete unless it attends to people’s own notions of what they are doing” (“Social Mobility,” 47).

⁷² Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 290. See also Jonathan Barry, *Bourgeois Collectivism?*, 103.

⁷³ D’Cruze. *The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester*, 183.

“from the late condition of servant, was I raised to be a master!”⁷⁴ The commercial sort was therefore able to exercise a certain degree of self-determination, a kind of control unavailable to the laboring populace. Daniel Defoe painstakingly cautioned tradesmen to be diligent managers, for their role was necessarily supervisory: “Let your apprentice be in the business, but let the master be at the head of the business at all times.”⁷⁵ This deep sense of responsibility and authority, of possessing “directive control of an enterprise, however minute,”⁷⁶ also separates them from many professionals, such as doctors and writers, who did not need to employ other people.

Many landowners also prided themselves upon their independence, but, importantly, they tended to focus on the political rather than personal implications of their status. According to J.G.A. Pocock’s seminal text *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, Commonwealth or “Old Whig” gentry and aristocracy valued their lands and rents because the income insulated the owners from the need for other sources of money, such as political offices or sinecures, and, in consequence, they were free from the political influence or corruption that might attend that dependence. In this tradition, the rural gentry greatly prized their virtuous freedom, their ability to critique the allegedly corrupt Whig oligarchy without risking their own livelihoods.⁷⁷ The genteel definition of independence thus centered on *exemption* from work, and a corresponding distrust of

⁷⁴ Thomas Gent, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Gent, Printer, of York* (London: Thomas Thorpe, 1832), 151. Gent’s memoirs were written in 1746, though not published until the mid-nineteenth century.

⁷⁵ Defoe, *The Complete Tradesman*, 98.

⁷⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies*, 2nd edition (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 110.

⁷⁷ See J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986).

markets⁷⁸—whereas work for gain was essential to the commercial sort’s own pursuit of independence and self-determination.⁷⁹

Two other traits are particularly central to the commercial identity; the first is fear of failure. People in the professions, the military, the government, the gentry, and the aristocracy were somewhat insulated from the experience of complete financial ruin.⁸⁰ Mismanagement might harm a gentleman’s or barrister’s prospects, but generally did not land him in a debtor’s prison. We live in a modern society, with modern protections, and it is frequently difficult for us to understand the extent of the risks facing these “congenitally fragile” business communities.⁸¹ During the late Stuart and Georgian eras, credit was the foundation of British trade; cash flow was thus a constant and significant problem.⁸² Until James Lackington’s groundbreaking decision in 1780 to accept cash only,⁸³ virtually all tradesmen and manufacturers had to trust that customers would ultimately be able and willing to pay. Each day that a payment ran overdue, they risked running out of cash to pay their own creditors. As Hunt observes, “the problem of endemic overstretched credit was virtually omnipresent in trading communities across the length and breadth of England.”⁸⁴ Poor management skills, inclement weather, accident, illness, and early death could also lead to bankruptcy. Moreover, businessmen were expected to financially

⁷⁸ Dana Harrington, “Gender, Commerce, and the Transformation of Virtue in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Summer, 2001): 35.

⁷⁹ The contested public/private interpretations of independence correlate with McKeon’s argument that during this period, the elite “civic humanist model of public virtue began to be challenged by alternative models, more compatible with an emergent commercial culture, that could valorize more successfully the public efficacy of private interests” See Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 26.

⁸⁰ Professional writers could experience great financial instability, of course—but they constituted a very small fraction of the broader genteel populace. Fear of failure was not a commonplace trait of polite culture.

⁸¹ Richard Grassby, “English Merchant Capitalism in the Late Seventeenth Century: The Composition of Business Fortunes,” *Past and Present* 46 (1970): 102-104.

⁸² David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 247. See also Hoh-Cheung and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops & Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1989), 24-6.

⁸³ Lackington, *Memoirs*, 212.

⁸⁴ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 31.

assist improvident relatives, whether they were their own children or more distant kin.⁸⁵ The effective rate of bankruptcy over a tradesman's career was 10-15%, and simpler business failures—in which legal action was not necessary—were much more common.⁸⁶

Fear of failure haunts the writings of late Stuart and Georgian tradesmen—both fiction and non-fiction⁸⁷—and was probably a prime driver of the increasingly-popular self-help books that flooded the market. In his diary, Thomas Turner repeatedly expresses concern about his financial situation, sometimes agonizing at length about sluggish trade and the difficulty of obtaining cash:

Oh, how dull is trade, and how very scarce is money! Never did I know so bad a time before. To think how much I have due to me and cannot get in! What shall I do? Work I cannot, and honest I always will be if the Almighty will give me grace. I that used at this time of year to take £15 or £20 a week, and sometimes £25 or £30, now seldom take above £5 or £10. To what can I attribute this loss in trade? I sell my goods as cheap as ever I did and buy them as well, so far as I can judge; and my design is to use my customers with as good manners as ever I did. And I do my utmost endeavour, so far as I know to do it, but trade in all places, and more particularly in a country place, is very precarious.

Turner never actually breaks during the diary years of 1754-1755, and David Vaisey notes that the shop was ultimately successful.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Turner's anxiety is palpable, and he connects his concerns with the "prospect of poverty" on multiple occasions.⁸⁹ Thomas Gent, a printer,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁶ Grassby, *The Business Community*, 253.

⁸⁷ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 34. See also Wrightson, *Earthy Necessities*, 294.

⁸⁸ David Vaisey, Introduction to *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, ed. David Vaisey (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), xx.

⁸⁹ Turner, *The Diary*, 153, 169. See 35, 61, 74, 81 for examples of Turner's concerns about "dull" trade.

discusses the difficulty of succeeding in a “troublesome world,”⁹⁰ and William Stout, the Lancaster grocer, repeatedly—almost morbidly—lists and describes the business failures of relatives and associates.⁹¹

The other foundational trait is ambition. The volatility of business may have caused anxiety, but it also offered hope for financial advancement. In *The Complete Tradesman*, Defoe writes, “How ordinary is it to see a tradesman go off the stage, even but from mere shopkeeping, with from ten to forty thousand pounds’ estate, to divide among his family!”⁹² Defoe’s claim is hyperbolic, but it does speak to the sense of infinite possibility associated with commerce. Unlike the laboring poor, tradesmen and manufacturers could reasonably endeavor to rise in the world.

These ambitions, however, violated polite ideals. The dominant definition of virtue entailed selflessness (or disinterest), whether political or personal. In *The Secret History of Domesticity*, McKeon writes that polite society held that “the language of ‘interest’ itself was by definition inappropriate.”⁹³ Virtuous Britons were supposed to devote themselves to their friends and to the public good, not to their own social or financial advancement. The delegitimization of interest prompted persistent literary caricatures marking members of the commercial sort as avaricious or small-minded.⁹⁴

The dominant association of disinterest with virtue, however, has diverted critical attention from commercial justifications of ambition. In his *Memoirs*, Lackington rejects the polite stereotypes: “I do not recollect that I have ever felt one *anxious* painful wish to get money,

⁹⁰ Gent, *Life*, 73.

⁹¹ William Stout, *Autobiography of William Stout*, ed. J. Harland (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1851). See, for example, 63, 65, 66, 72, 73.

⁹² Defoe, *Complete Tradesman*, 199.

⁹³ McKeon, *Secret History of Domesticity*, 25.

⁹⁴ Grassby, *Business Community*, 199. See also Hudson, “Social Rank,” 585.

estates, or any way to better my condition: and yet I have never since that time let slip any fair opportunity of doing it. So that all I mean is that I have not been *over solicitous* to obtain any thing that I did not possess.”⁹⁵ Lackington endeavors to deflect contemporary portrayals of grasping tradesmen by drawing a line between moderate and immoderate ambition. He argues that he has not felt an “*anxious*” wish to succeed, which subtly implies that he did, indeed, work hard to secure that success—but the next sentence is unambiguous: he has “never” missed the chance to advance his business. Lackington thus builds ethos with his condemnation of extreme greed, but also stoutly defends his desire to rise in the world. Thomas Gent, the Yorkshire printer, expresses the same wish. He postpones marriage “till I knew the world better, and, consequently, [was] more able to provide such a handsome maintenance as, I confess, I had ambition enough to desire.”⁹⁶ These commercial citizens felt strongly enough about the matter to own their personal interests in print; in the following chapters I will demonstrate that commercial fictions frequently move beyond the diffident defense of private ambition; they overturn polite mores by suggesting that *interest facilitates virtue*.

The constant tension between these two powerful emotions—fear and hope—meant that a tradesman’s day-to-day activities could appear remarkably important, for they might decide the difference between financial success and utter ruin. The most vital practical skill was keeping good accounts.⁹⁷ Conduct books frequently advised gentlemen to manage their income effectively, but for them, keeping immaculate records was not vital to survival. The recommendations, therefore, are rather vague. In *A Gentleman Instructed*, William Darrell writes:

⁹⁵ Lackington, *Memoirs*, 98. Lackington’s reference to “that time” refers to his study of Stoic philosophy.

⁹⁶ Gent, *Life*, 155. Significantly, the commercial men seem exclusively focused upon financial advancement rather than social refinement. None mention actions taken (or even the desire) to cultivate polite manners or acquaintances; they appear to feel comfortable within their fraction.

⁹⁷ Grassby, *Business Community*, 184.

Some Gentlemen are so punctilious and nice, that they look on Business as a thing below their level: No, they'll not look on their Accounts, though their Estate lies in an Agony; as if there were no Difference between *Prudence* and *Trading*. But certainly Wisdom jars not with Quality; and I hope, one may be a good Husband without turning Clown. It's no branch of a Gentleman's Prerogative to be bubbled out of House and Home.⁹⁸

The thrust of the advice is that a gentleman should condescend “look on” his Accounts at unspecified periods. Darrell implies that gentlemen do not keep their own books; if they did so themselves, there would be no danger of being “bubbled,” or cheated, out of their estates. The advice is sketchy because the issue was not usually a critical one for landowners, who received a relatively fixed income; they did not need to constantly adjust expenditures to meet a fluctuating budget. Darrell also indicates that becoming too active might carry traces of vulgarity, and no gentleman would want to be seen as a plebeian “Clown.”

On the other hand, every commercial diary and autobiography in my sample emphasizes the significance of keeping personal, detailed accounts of revenue and expenditures—and some consistently report expenses directly in the pages of their journal or autobiography. Though these men were not entirely able to control the outcome of their efforts, at least bookkeeping “seemed to promise real control over an extremely anxiety-ridden area of daily life.”⁹⁹ Defoe's *Complete Tradesman* calls accounts a tradesman's “repeating clock, which upon all occasions are to tell him how he goes on, and how things stand with him in the world.”¹⁰⁰ Like a timepiece, good accounts could minimize chaos and help to establish regularity, order, and predictability. As

⁹⁸ William Darrell, *The Gentleman Instructed, in the Conduct of a Virtuous and Happy Life* (London: Sam. Fairbrother, 1704), 31.

⁹⁹ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 61.

¹⁰⁰ Defoe, *Complete Tradesman*, 5.

Defoe recommended, William Stout cast up his accounts every single year, regularly served as the executor of acquaintances' estates, and always notes whether or not the deceased had kept good records.¹⁰¹ Thomas Turner routinely managed accounts for his business, which he refers to in the body of his diary as "post[ing] my day book;"¹⁰² he also records detailed transactions in most entries of the diary itself.¹⁰³ James Lackington accounts (in both senses of the word) for his success by claiming, "I have for fourteen years past kept strict account of my profits."¹⁰⁴

The close conceptual link between accounts and clocks is also manifested in businessmen's efforts to organize their time as well as their finances. Proper time management represented stability and control; Stuart Sherman has suggested that "temporal order" was viewed as "an instrument of ownership."¹⁰⁵ The commercial populace was thus very particular about clock time, both to maximize the number of productive hours, and to use those hours as effectively as possible.¹⁰⁶ In general, they associated daylight hours with business, while they linked evening hours with pleasure, vice, and the expenditure of hard-won money on those pleasures and vices. Therefore, the commercial sort encouraged early rising and correspondingly discouraged late hours. Defoe suggested that a man "who will sleep when he should work, and perhaps drink when he should sleep, turns nature bottom upwards."¹⁰⁷ These concerns were at least partially influenced by the rhetoric of religious tracts, but the commercial sort then made this issue more completely their own. Keith Wrightson points out that "the godly" were always a small fraction of the commercial community, and work habits "were the broadly shared outcome of a larger process of cultural adaptation whereby elements of varied origin were appropriated,

¹⁰¹ Stout, *Autobiography*, 76, 140.

¹⁰² Turner, *The Diary*, 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Lackington, *Memoirs*, 265.

¹⁰⁵ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 231.

¹⁰⁶ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 53-6.

¹⁰⁷ Defoe, *Complete Tradesman*, 33.

modified, and fused under the pressure of the demands of a changing economic environment.”¹⁰⁸ Religious tracts may have played a role in commercial time discipline, but they were more likely a contributing rather than a controlling factor; the trade community almost certainly would not have embraced particular devotional habits if they had not fit into a pre-existing practical mindset. In many cases, a tradesman’s diary was not the product of a desire for religious self-scrutiny, but “a natural extension of the business journal,” focused more on financial transactions and the weather than on spiritual matters.¹⁰⁹

Whatever the precise origins of time consciousness, members of the eighteenth-century commercial sort were particularly focused on the clock. Tryon was a devout (if highly unorthodox) Christian, and his memoirs reflect his religious preoccupation. He discusses “the preciousness of time” at length, and includes a schedule for proper activities.¹¹⁰ Yet even less spiritual commercial writers, those who make only occasional *pro forma* references to God or Providence, are also explicitly concerned about their use of time. William Stout writes that his master “was very active in trade, and a very early riser in a morning; and we apprentices, lying in the shop, were early called up, which seemed at first to be a hardship to me, but afterwards turned to my very good liking and benefit.”¹¹¹ It is unsurprising that Stout would claim early rising is virtuous or helpful to his occupation, but he also claims that he enjoys it, transforming a duty into a congenial pleasure. He takes rhetorical ownership of this practice, as if it is a valuable part of his character rather than a necessity imposed upon him. Thomas Turner drew up twelve detailed “rules of regimen” for himself, beginning with the promise to “rise as early as I possibly

¹⁰⁸ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 302. Margaret Hunt also discusses time discipline at length, and works to distinguish tradesmen’s eighteenth-century preoccupation with time from earlier Calvinist and Puritan roots (*The Middling Sort*, 53-4).

¹⁰⁹ Grassby, *The Business Community*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Thomas Tryon* (London: T. Sowle, 1705), 44-47, 52. Schedule on 108-10.

¹¹¹ Stout, *Autobiography*, 9.

can,” and then “breakfast between the hours of 7 and 8.”¹¹² He believed that the maintenance of a regular family time-table was, in Naomi Tadmor’s words, “a mark of virtuous, wholesome, and industrious living.”¹¹³

Commercial family schedules generally restricted leisure activities to early morning or evening hours—when they would not interfere with business. Turner read voraciously: “Oh, what can be a greater pleasure than to be employed in an honest calling all day, and in the even to unbend and relax one’s thoughts by endeavouring to improve the mental and more noble part of man!”¹¹⁴ Tryon spent time learning to play “the Base-viol, tho’ during the time of my learning, I was as assiduous, and stuck as close to my working Trade, as ever before...taking my opportunities at Night, or in the Morning as I could.”¹¹⁵ Stout records that he enjoyed lengthy early morning walks, and “when out of necessary business, I passed my Time in reading or improving myself in arithmetic, surveying, and other mathematical sciences, which I was most naturally inclined to.”¹¹⁶ Notwithstanding the enjoyment each man claims to take in these leisure activities, all of them emphasize that such knowledge was attained outside of business hours—“in the even,” as Turner phrases it. Unlike people in polite society, the commercial sort drew a sharp line between business and pleasure, signifying that leisure was appropriate only at certain, limited times. They did not have the privilege to scorn profit.

¹¹² Turner, *Diary*, 26-27.

¹¹³ Naomi Tadmor, *Family & Friends in Eighteenth Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 66.

¹¹⁴ Turner, *Diary*, 145. Turner frequently mentions and meditates upon a wide range of books and periodicals, from history and science to novels (*Pamela* for example) and drama; Vaisey’s appendix lists almost 150 distinct texts named in the diary.

¹¹⁵ Tryon, *Some Memoirs*, 43-4.

¹¹⁶ Stout, *Autobiography*, 13. For more on walking and self-improvement, see also 27, 53, 113.

Genteel conduct books usually encouraged gentlemen not to waste their time, but did so in broader, more perfunctory terms, such as the exhortation not to lie too long abed in the morning.¹¹⁷ In one typical text, the author writes,

Gentlemen have so much time on their Hands that they know not to how to spend it; it's a Burthen and a Charge, and so like Prodigals they rather fling it away than take Pains to improve it. I counsel you therefore to set aside some Hours for reading; it's a handsome Diversion, and conveys Profit through Pleasure; the Intellect is a grateful Soil."¹¹⁸

Here, the concern about time seems academic rather than urgent. The author specifies no particular schedule or time-table, merely recommending one daily activity—and the advice cannot offer any clear practical consequences for wasted time. There was no significant impetus for the gentry to order their days or nights, which facilitated the idleness so often censured by moral critics.¹¹⁹

Understanding the sources of different attitudes towards time management allows us to more effectively interpret the ambivalence that so often marks eighteenth-century texts. Sarah Jordan has suggested that the middling sort was broadly susceptible to the allure of leisure, exploring James Thomson's view of idleness in his 1748 poem *The Castle of Indolence*. Jordan argues that Thomson's conflicted imagery is largely due to the collision of middling work habits with the desire for emulation:

¹¹⁷ Josiah Dare, *Counsellor Manners his Last Legacy to His Son* (London: J. & B. Sprint, 1710), 62-3.

¹¹⁸ Darrell, *A Gentleman Instructed*, 25.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, "An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit," in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times. In three volumes*, Vol. 2 (London: 1711). Shaftesbury condemns the "lazy Opulence" of the elite populace, contrasted unfavorably with "the industrious sort of common People" (133).

The middle classes, in aspiring to join the gentry, were using their industriousness to leave a class known for its industry and join a class which by definition was idle. Idleness, therefore, was somehow the desired reward for hard work, the ultimate attainment in social status, while it was also viewed as deeply threatening, to the self and to the nation.¹²⁰

Yet in the commercial texts I have studied, idleness is explicitly and unequivocally condemned—these writers exhibit none of Thomson’s attraction to indolence. Research indicates that few members of the business community—even wealthy merchants—truly sought to join the ranks of the leisured populace. Even when financially successful enough to retire, most tradesmen and manufacturers continued to work.¹²¹ However, James Thomson was not a tradesman or a manufacturer; he was a classically-trained teacher at the elite Watt’s Academy, born and bred to the genteel culture that prized leisure as a spur to cultivation. His apparent anxiety about idleness, therefore, is not a general ‘middling’ ambivalence; it was likely based in the rhetorical pressure that the commercial middling sort was placing upon genteel middling individuals, like Thompson, to use their time more effectively.

The commercial sort’s careful attention to time thus connects closely with the productive *use* of that time: industry.¹²² In the preface to his autobiography, James Lackington claims that “should my memoirs be attended with no other benefit to society, they will at least tend to shew what may be effected by a persevering habit of industry... whatever is thus acquired is more honourable to the parties than the possession of wealth obtained without intrinsic merit or

¹²⁰ Jordan, *Anxieties of Idleness*, 18. See also Judith Frank, *Common Ground: Eighteenth-Century English Satiric Fiction and the Poor* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997). Frank notices the same literary ambivalence labor and leisure: “By the end of the century the universalizing logic of the commodification of labor makes this tension acute and gives it a strong moral charge. Like Smollett’s novel, Burney’s *Cecilia* “represents labor as a terrible thing, as ‘the life of a savage.’ But when, overwhelmed with debt from dissipated living, the fashionable gentleman Harrel blows his brains out, he blames his ruin on his own idleness” (19).

¹²¹ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 303.

¹²² Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 48-56.

exertion.”¹²³ Personal diligence is also a major theme of Thomas Gent’s autobiography; he responds to envious associates by pointing to his own hard work,¹²⁴ and later proudly describes his “stock of goods growing larger by my careful industry.”¹²⁵ In the conduct book *Gentleman’s Library*, however, the anonymous “Gentleman” author laments that “we fear the imputations of *Labour* and *Assiduity*, *Diligence* and *Industry* have a *Mechanick Report*, and *Employment* and *Application* savour of *Drudgery*.”¹²⁶ Industry was not, and never had been, a constituent element of the genteel identity.

Notably, the commercial sort’s embrace of industry did not exclude manual work. In his diary, Thomas Turner regularly tackles routine, low-status tasks, from working with goods in his store to pest control: “In the morn after breakfast went down to Mr. French’s to get him to bring me from Lewes ½ oz. cauliflower seed, and when I came there, I found Mr. French, his servants, and Tho. Fuller a-catching of rats; so I stayed and assisted them about 3 hours, and we caught near 20.”¹²⁷ Turner’s help is voluntary, and none of the men involved appear to sense any impropriety in the activity. Most of the commercial men in my sample indicate respect or admiration for other men who work with their hands. Lackington, for instance, praises the “manual labor” of his friend, shoemaker Ralph Tinley, “one who had not dignity of birth or elevated rank in life to boast of, but who possessed what is far superior to either, a solid understanding, amiable manners, a due sense of religion, and an industrious disposition.”¹²⁸ Lackington does not claim politeness for himself or his peers, but he does indicate that the craftsman possesses a form of sociable propriety, citing Tinley’s “amiable manners.” The

¹²³ Lackington, *Memoirs*, xvii.

¹²⁴ Gent, *Life*, 33.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 128.

¹²⁶ *Gentleman’s Library, containing rules for conduct in all parts of life* (London: W. Mears. 1715), 173.

¹²⁷ Turner, *Diary*, 54.

¹²⁸ Lackington, *Memoirs*, 241.

significance of manual work to the commercial mind surfaces in Defoe's *The Compleat English Gentleman*; as Defoe discusses the gentry, he uses what Judith Frank has termed "a rhetoric of labor": "It is apparent that treasure of wit and parts is given from Heaven to be cultivated and improv'd; and as God set Adam to till the ground after the fall, and told him, if he did not do it, ay, and labour and sweat at it, too, he should have no bread . . . it is required that those jewels [of wit and parts] should be polished."¹²⁹ Although sons of the gentry would be unlikely to "labour and sweat" in real life, Defoe's choice of tropes imply the centrality of work to the commercial experience, as well as distaste for the ideal of the leisured gentleman.¹³⁰

Though literary scholars have argued that middling women were increasingly barred from labor during this period—especially outside of the household—commercial middling women found work as housekeepers, seamstresses, nursemaids, shop assistants, and other similar positions.¹³¹ Shani D'Cruze's research on middling families in Georgian Colchester reveals that numerous tradesmen's wives worked for pay, often independently.¹³² Each author in my sample matter-of-factly refers to women engaged in a variety of occupations, and commends or criticizes them only according to their (perceived) individual merits. Stout praises a number of hard-working single, married, and widowed women who run businesses; Mrs. Godsolve, for instance, managed to support her family despite her abusive husband's interference:

[She] never got any assistance from her husband, only had the premium money left for their relief; which, with her industry, she maintained her and her son upon for three or four years, till she was assisted by putting her in some more profitable

¹²⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Compleat English Gentleman*, ed. Karl D. Bülbring (London: David Nutt, 1840), 110-11.

¹³⁰ Frank, *Common Ground*, 17.

¹³¹ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 81. See also Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism*, 317-18.

¹³² Among other women, D'Cruze mentions Elizabeth Shillito, the daughter of cardmakers, who trained as a milliner and traded on her family's premises as a young woman; after her marriage she raised a family, but continued her millinery business as well as a perfumery. Ann Wilder, the unmarried daughter of a saddler, ran a clear-starcher's trade out of the family home ("Eighteenth-Century Colchester," 187-9).

employ, which she was capable to manage; having before her marriage kept a milliner's shop to her profit and reputation.¹³³

Many commercial women found independent ways to earn money without damaging their reputations—in fact, Stout implies that their occupational skill warrants respect. Unless a family already possessed “pretensions of gentility,” the commercial sort did not feel compelled to insulate wives and daughters from remunerative work.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, the labor of most commercial women took place within the household or family business; in addition to general housework and child-rearing, they “bought raw materials, supervised apprentices, hustled for customers, and sold finished goods.”¹³⁵ Defoe encourages all tradesmen to teach their wives how to manage the business, and criticizes those genteel women “who stoop to marry men of business, but scorn the trade” by leaving all work to “apprentices and journeymen.”¹³⁶ Defoe implies that genteel Britons should adapt to commercial culture, even if such participation is not a financial necessity. At the beginning of Stout's autobiography, he offers some family background: “My sister Elin, being then 20, was diligent in assisting my mother in her housewifery, whilst she was employed in looking after the servants in the fields and dressing her corn, and going to market with the same, as she usually did.”¹³⁷

Stout's mother dressed her own corn and personally sold it at the market—tasks that a polite middling woman would never perform. The family is clearly not poor; Stout was apprenticed to a reputable trade, and the family employs multiple servants. Still, he attaches no stigma to his mother's labor or her engagement with the marketplace.

¹³³ Stout, *Autobiography*, 77.

¹³⁴ John Rule, *Albion's People: English Society, 1714-1815* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 97.

¹³⁵ Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism*, 322.

¹³⁶ Defoe, *The Complete Tradesman*, 186.

¹³⁷ Stout, *Autobiography*, 9.

Tradesmen could focus on bookkeeping, time-work discipline, and industry as tangible (if uncertain) ways to manage and restrain the vagaries of commercial fortune. However, the commercial sort did not focus only on model professional conduct; they also subjected their personal behavior to scrutiny. Most eighteenth-century Britons had only a vague understanding of macroeconomic issues, which affected an entire industry, an entire nation, or international commerce.¹³⁸ As often as Thomas Turner worried about the “dullness”—or, less commonly, exulted in the briskness—of trade, he is unable to identify any causes. All he can do is scrutinize his own behavior, which he does. Repeatedly.¹³⁹ Jonathan Barry confirms this tendency to self-examination, noting that the middling sort believed personal behavior largely determined worldly fortune, and that “these moral evaluations thus came to play a major part in the self-classifications of the middling sort.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, commercial people saw critical introspection as a core quality of their own identity. These assessments were especially vital because the division between domestic and work activities was frequently very thin, making it difficult to separate personal from professional behaviors.¹⁴¹

In addition, given the density of trade networks, and the high degree to which any given businessman was dependent on the solvency of other businessmen, the commercial sort were also extremely invested in the personal integrity of their peers—possibly more concerned about these peers than about the behavior of social inferiors such as servants and the laboring poor.¹⁴² These perceptions help to explain why tradesmen were more inclined to scrutinize their own and others’ moral and domestic conduct than the gentry, who were relatively unaffected if nearby landowners exhibited poor management skills or irresponsible behavior. To the commercial

¹³⁸ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 37.

¹³⁹ For example, see Turner, *Diary*, 61, 74, 81-2, 143, 145-6, 241, 251, 252-3.

¹⁴⁰ Barry, Introduction to *The Middling Sort of People*, 15.

¹⁴¹ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 33. See also D’Cruze, “Eighteenth-Century Colchester,” 181.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 41.

population, maintaining an orderly, efficient household characterized by “right living” was both a moral *and* professional good,¹⁴³ in addition to a community obligation.

The commercial diaries and autobiographies confirm their authors’ focus on household and community order rather than on politics or national events. Gent claims, more than once, that “My notions were not so much fixed on great personages (though, in political thought, I did not want the least sense of the most humble and dutiful respect to our superiors in church and state,) as how to spend my time well, and procure an honest livelihood.”¹⁴⁴ He takes pains to separate the personal from the political, and places his emphasis on domestic virtue. The more devout Tryon opens his memoirs with a statement of three purposes; he wishes to acknowledge “Divine Goodness,” but he also hopes that his writings will serve as an example to others of how to live an orderly life, with “Humility, Industry, Temperance, Cleanness, and Mercy.”¹⁴⁵ The commercial emphasis on personal behavior explains why Stout nearly always ascribes the failure or success of his peers’ businesses to the personal conduct of the family involved—not to providence or market forces.¹⁴⁶

Good household order necessitated the maintenance of a proper social hierarchy within that household. Every author in the sample uses language which indicates clear power relationships, such as “master,” “servant,” “superior,” and “inferior.” Each businessman expects to direct his servants, apprentices, or other employees—and complains when they do not follow orders or meet expectations.¹⁴⁷ Unlike gentlemen and ladies, however, the commercial sort

¹⁴³ Wrightson. *Earthly Necessities*, 296.

¹⁴⁴ Gent, *Life*, 73. Similarly, Vaisey, notes that though Turner’s diary was primarily a business *aide-mémoire*, it was also “a record of his attitudes and intentions and, as often as not, of his contrition or forgiveness.” (Introduction to *Diary*, xxxix). Turner’s diary served both to monitor and justify his personal conduct.

¹⁴⁵ Tryon, *Some Memoirs*, 1-6.

¹⁴⁶ For example, see Stout, *Autobiography*, 29, 40, 46, 63, 84, 133.

¹⁴⁷ One of Gent’s complaints is representative: “The servants, who were most ungovernable before our marriage, proved but very little better after, though I used them with the greatest lenity; they loitered away the time, were quite

viewed these relationships as temporary or situational rather than natural and fixed; the social barrier between businessmen and their employees was more porous than the impenetrable gentleman/servant divide. They worked together, as when Turner reports that “my wife, self, Ann Slater, and maid very busy a-making of bolster and pillow-ticks and a bed bottom for Jos. Fuller.”¹⁴⁸ They also often dined together; like other commercial citizens, Turner routinely ate at a single table with his entire ‘family,’ including his apprentices and servants.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, after apprentices or servants left service, they could socialize with their former employers, often as equals. Turner’s former maidservant, Mary Martin, repeatedly stopped by to visit, and either dined or drank tea with the family.¹⁵⁰ While discussing Samuel Richardson’s *Vade Mecum*, Tadmor indirectly suggests that the commercial sort had a particularly democratic attitude: “Unlike the servant-maid in [Eliza] Haywood’s treatise, who is seen as socially inferior to her mistress both in the present and the future, [Richardson’s] apprentice and his master are perceived as possible future equals, even future competitors.”¹⁵¹ Tadmor might have added that Samuel Richardson—who elevates Pamela to gentility—was a member of the commercial sort; Eliza Haywood was not. Instead of a single, stable hierarchy centered on the king, commercial society comprised decentralized, fluid networks of authority centered on individual businesses. Although members of the commercial sort might wield well-defined power at a given time, they did not consider themselves inherently superior or inferior to their fellow Britons.

idle in my absence, and betrayed their malignity through bitter aspersions, so unworthy to many of our London youth, that I became sorry almost to death that I ever was placed over such incorrigible wretches” (*Life*, 156).

¹⁴⁸ Turner, *Diary*, 3. Ann Slater was Turner’s sister-in-law.

¹⁴⁹ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 25-26.

¹⁵⁰ Turner, *Diary*, 3. Turner also breakfasts, dines, and sightsees with his former apprentice, George Beard, to whom he applies the respectful title, “Mr.” (59). See also Gent’s discussion of a former apprentice who has become a friend; Henry Addison “proved very skilfull in the business, honestly served his time, and handsomely provides for his wife and three lovely young daughters, brought up by an affectionate mother” (*Life*, 181).

¹⁵¹ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 62.

Naturally, none of these attitudes were exclusive to Britons without a polite education. Genteel merchants could, and often did, embrace industry. Barristers could, and often did, promote good domestic order. However, these inclinations were not fundamentally rooted in a generic “middling sort,” but in a specific set of habits and attitudes cultivated within the commercial fraction. Perry Gauci has argued that social identity is not simply a product of political identity, that “it was possible for a lived experience to breed a culture from within.”¹⁵² The epicenter of commercial habits and attitudes remained specifically with the business community—in other words, with the people who “lived” them. Furthermore, many commercial authors ultimately sought to reshape polite culture in their own image. Much of the presumed middling pressure upon the elite was in fact commercial pressure on the genteel middling and elite; the storied bourgeois attitudes of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele were largely influenced by commercial rhetoric.

Commercial Authors

The commercial sort, of course, published literature far less often than did the polite. The people who were raised and educated to trade or keep shop on a daily basis usually lacked the free time, skills, and/or inclination to write texts intended for public consumption. Most tradesmen and manufacturers lived in relatively small, tightly-knit communities; their worlds were, in general, limited to family, nearby friends, and business associates.¹⁵³ Before the eighteenth century, the commercial fraction had been predominantly invisible because members of the community lacked both familiarity with polite culture and access to polite forms of communication; tradesmen and manufacturers possessed broadly-shared beliefs and attitudes, but

¹⁵² Perry Gauci, “Finding the Middle Ground: The Middling Sort in the Eighteenth Century,” *History Compass* 4, no. 2 (2006): 234.

¹⁵³ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 306.

had not yet developed the concrete consciousness that only crystallizes through contrast with another group.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the increasing proliferation of print reduced these barriers. Print granted commercial writers access to a national audience, but it also allowed commercial readers access to a much wider intellectual community, the chance to explore elite culture and contrast it with their own lived experience. Nancy Fraser has suggested that stratified societies generate counterpublics, less-privileged communities that “invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”¹⁵⁵ Counterpublics work to reduce their positional disadvantage by engaging, reinterpreting, and/or refusing dominant language and narratives.¹⁵⁶ Though commercial authors embraced (and attempted to emulate) some aspects of polite society, they also crafted supersessionist narratives that challenged polite discourse.

The lives of the businessman-authors in this study share a common arc.¹⁵⁷ First, I have chosen men who spent their formative years in non-genteel environments; otherwise, they would likely have internalized certain genteel attitudes and behaviors, thereby complicating any attempt to distinguish commercial from polite rhetoric. However, at some point each man developed personal ties to members of the polite community. Commercial authors were usually inspired to write by occupational or social contact with polite literature and authors, who—by virtue of their

¹⁵⁴ Giddens, *Class Structure*, 111.

¹⁵⁵ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990): 67.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 67-68.

¹⁵⁷ I have restricted my study to commercial authors, which for the most part does not include working class laborers, servants, or women. First, the voices of working class writers—such as Robert Tatersall, Stephen Duck, and Ann Yearsley—have been addressed in such texts as Donna Landry’s *The Muses of Resistance* and William Christmas’ *The Lab’ring Muses*. Also, writers from the lower ranks tended to publish poetry, and nearly always did so under the aegis of genteel patrons, which tends to affect the style and content of the texts. Finally, working class authors possess their own backgrounds and perspectives, and should not be conflated with independent businessmen. I have not included any commercial female authors, because I am not aware of any women in business who published literature with their names attached.

education and often-greater leisure time—possessed a near-monopoly on the production of literary texts. These men thus gained significant exposure to polite society, but from a place on the margins, as cultural outsiders.¹⁵⁸ The commercial authors' unusual status granted them a broader view of the socio-cultural field, enabling them first to articulate and then to write a groundbreaking form of counterdiscourse into their own texts.

Daniel Defoe was born to a wealthy tallow chandler “with a talent for accounting,” and trained as a London tradesman.¹⁵⁹ He spent his formative years in a commercial environment, but his years at the Newington Green Academy, along with later political and journalistic experiences, brought him into close and prolonged contact with polite culture.¹⁶⁰ In this sense, Defoe had the opportunity to survey—and to interact with—elite society, and he was able to compare and contrast these observations with his own ‘native’ heritage. Defoe became conversant with genteel society, but he did not simply emulate what he found; he reserved conceptual space for tradesmen independent of the lower and upper ranks. In *The Trueborn Englishman*, Defoe complained that the gentry “would divide the world into two parts only . . . This family jargon, for it is no more, they oppose to the trading part of the whole world, which they divest of all dignity as well as degree, and blend together under one general or rather common denominator of mechanics.”¹⁶¹

Defoe's other writings bear out this unwillingness to adopt or emulate the genteel vision. His *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* illustrates a set of priorities markedly different from those seen in earlier travel manuals. Defoe prizes modernity and the economy; rather than

¹⁵⁸ Character and culture forged in youth does not change easily. Brooks has traced the long-standing conflicts that arose when genteel apprentices chafed under the strictures of commercial culture (“Apprenticeship, Social Mobility,” 79-80). Conversely, as I mentioned previously, wealthy, self-made businessmen faced significant social barriers. In general, polite society accepted only the offspring of these men, once they acquired the proper education and manners—in other words, the social capital that their parents still lacked.

¹⁵⁹ Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Part I.

¹⁶¹ Defoe, *A Plan of the English Commerce* (London: Charles Rivington, 1728), 6.

dwelling on polite interests like historical monuments or “antiquity,” he endeavors to depict “the present state of the country described, the improvement, as well in culture, as in commerce, the increase of people, and employment for them.”¹⁶² In his fiction, Defoe frequently focuses on financial matters—James Thompson refers to “the omnipresence of ‘the economic’” in his writings¹⁶³—and he often uses middling and socially-marginal characters. Moll Flanders is one of the first ‘vulgar’ protagonists in British fiction; she tells her own narrative, and she is portrayed without scorn or condescension. Defoe also wrote handbooks titled *The Compleat Gentleman* and *The Complete Tradesman*, implying his awareness of—and a confidence in his facility with—two separate versions of “the accomplished man.”

Defoe is the only commercial author who has been studied deeply *as* a commercial author. I do not intend to replicate those arguments here, though my study may allow us to (re)contextualize Defoe’s work as it relates to other writers of his fraction. Instead, my dissertation primarily examines the work of three other businessman-authors in order to prompt scholarly engagement with the concept of commercial authorship and to produce a sustained, cohesive argument about their supersessionist rhetoric.

Robert Dodsley has received a modicum of critical attention, but that attention is largely due to his status as, arguably, the eighteenth century’s most innovative bookseller. Between 1735 and his death in 1764, Dodsley cultivated dozens of Britain’s most talented and prolific authors, and he also initiated numerous immensely successful publications of literary collections and periodicals. However, Dodsley’s own literary output, especially his drama, has been largely overlooked or dismissed—even though he wrote two of the century’s most popular plays.

¹⁶² Defoe, *Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. Pat Rogers (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 43.

¹⁶³ James Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996), 87.

In Chapter 1, I first analyze the literature Dodsley produced during his years as a footman, a body of work primarily comprising a number of assimilationist poems inspired by—and designed for—a genteel public. I show that these early texts operate almost entirely within the conventions of polite discourse, and argue that Dodsley's background and experiences had constrained his literary imagination to the tropes and rhetoric of elite culture. I then trace the seismic shifts in Dodsley's writing after he trained to become a bookseller and opened his own shop, Tully's Head. Dodsley's new occupation embedded him within the trading community, and I offer evidence that his work and his experiences shaped his identity, his habitus, and his discourse. Dodsley's mature work represents a distinctly commercial, supersessionist vision; his plays and prose reject the genteel association of independence and virtue with property, instead forging connections among independence, virtue, labor, and ambition. In essence, he rewrites virtue and independence to accord with commercial mores. Furthermore, Dodsley grants his tradesman-protagonists narrative—and often satiric—authority, thereby fostering rhetorical space for commercial mores. His tradesmen not only speak effectively for themselves, they directly challenge the genteel practices of gentlemen and aristocrats.

I argue, however, that both eighteenth-century audiences and modern critics have overlooked many of Dodsley's transgressive elements. His contemporary (and predominantly polite) audiences read a traditional gloss upon virtue and independence because they could not 'see' Dodsley's commercial rhetoric. Modern critics have, in turn, tended to base their analyses upon these original, flawed receptions—and have therefore largely reproduced their misinterpretations. Studying Dodsley as a commercial writer allows us to interrogate these readings, to peel back the layers of polite translation in order to engage the texts directly.

Chapter 2 centers on Samuel Richardson, the London printer who became a novelist in his fifties. Richardson, like Defoe, has been the subject of numerous critical studies; however, his affinity for polite literary circles and his depiction of genteel characters and settings has prompted scholars to read his texts as assimilationist rather than supersessionist discourse. I suggest that recognizing the commercial rhetoric inscribed into these otherwise genteel works enables us to more effectively identify and assess the transgressive aspects of his fiction.

In this chapter, I argue that Richardson appropriates the concept of ‘virtue’ outlined in polite fictions (by authors such as Penelope Aubin and Elizabeth Singer Rowe), erasing its association with rural or cloistered disinterest in order to align it with the more boisterous, *interested* world of exchange. Richardson foregrounds the economic relationships of his characters—whether master and servant or clergy and congregation—while implying that these ties are both natural and beneficial to the community. He thereby crafts outwardly genteel narratives with a commercial core; Mr. B and Pamela promulgate the habitus of City trade, and *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*, similarly promote the merits of “managing Ladies” and an industrious baronet who, “were he not born to a fortune... would make one.”¹⁶⁴

Richardson also more directly challenges elite cultural hegemony. I suggest that he refigures the sociopolitical contract as an occupational contract, thereby destabilizing the traditional, natural hierarchy; his narratives evoke not a single “Great Chain of Being” but myriad networks of localized power relations. As I have shown, the commercial sort possessed fluid notions of status; Richardson’s novels accordingly imply that servants are the situational rather than natural inferiors of their masters. Many scholars have suggested that Pamela loses her authoritative voice upon her wedding to Mr. B; however, I argue that Richardson depicts a

¹⁶⁴ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris (London: Oxford UP, 1971), II.111.

marriage that preserves Pamela's "own free Agency"¹⁶⁵ by—paradoxically—figuring her as Mr. B's servant, an act which preserves her subjecthood in a way that the traditional *femme covert* marital contract could not. Aside from Richardson's commercial reinterpretations of the contract, the novels introduce a number of other subversive elements; I discuss the ways in which his protagonists repeatedly interrogate or defy polite conventions, creating space for alternative mores. Richardson's commercial rhetoric ultimately had a profound and lasting influence on the concept of virtue and power; before he began writing, novels were expressions of elite culture; after Richardson, novels—and, I would argue, dominant eighteenth-century culture—shifted to accommodate a number of commercial values.

Robert Bage, a Staffordshire paper manufacturer, published six novels during the 1780s and 1790s; scholars usually connect his work to the radical Jacobin novels that proliferated in the wake of the French Revolution. Bage certainly had some revolutionary sympathies, but in Chapter 3, I argue that his writings reflect commercial rather than proletarian counterdiscourse. Whereas radical authors such as Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin championed national and political causes, Bage's texts privilege commercial forms of virtue and independence, and he endorses egalitarian principles based in the occupational contract and commercial practice rather than in the writings of Harrington or Paine. I argue that, like other commercial authors, Bage normalizes self-interest, tying virtue to exertion and occupational labor—and his positive portrayals of genteel working women overwrite polite gender norms, offering women a potent, if indirect, form of enfranchisement.

Moreover, I suggest that Bage's commercial emphasis on labor and the occupational contract facilitates the agency of his non-genteel characters. While Jacobin authors objectify members of the dominated fractions, figuring them as powerless victims, Bage grants these

¹⁶⁵ Richardson, *Pamela*, 446.

characters narrative authority and subjectivity. His tradesmen and servants repeatedly mock, educate, or otherwise evaluate the ladies and gentlemen around them, thereby prompting polite readers to (momentarily) consider their own fraction as the object of an empowered subaltern gaze. Indeed, though Bage never advocates revolution, his narratives collectively invite his audience to read British society through a commercial lens.

Conclusion

My dissertation ultimately explores the ways in which a dominated fraction published—and publicized—its identity. Susan Whyman recently suggested that private letters played an important role in the development of middling identity; as members of the middling sort exchanged private letters, they became increasingly sensitive to existing patterns of rhetoric and authority. In this way, she writes, “language may have contributed to the rise of class-consciousness. As letters were written, ties were constructed between people above, below, or equal to each other in rank. Thus as people corresponded, distinctions of social status were repeatedly made and renegotiated.”¹⁶⁶ Whyman’s analysis indicates that letters enabled writers to author themselves, at least within their own sphere.

Print, however, empowered writers to engage with a broader discursive public—a public that had historically been dominated by elite voices. I will show that commercial authors consistently challenge elite hegemony by rejecting elite versions of themselves. They insist upon their own terms. Fraser writes that a counterpublic seeks “to speak ‘in [its] own voice,’ thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing [its] cultural identity through idiom and style.”¹⁶⁷ Significantly, all three men were physically involved in the development of print culture—as

¹⁶⁶ Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 131.

¹⁶⁷ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 69.

bookseller, printer, paper-maker, and, including Defoe, journalist; they possessed access to polite authors and discourse, as well as an occupational proximity to one of the nation's most powerful mechanisms of legitimation. The production of others' print seems to have spurred them to inscribe their own values into polite forms, to appropriate and repackage key signifiers of elite culture to—literally—publish a commercial rhetoric or “voice.” Mascuch argues that James Lackington was “the first ‘ordinary person’ to demonstrate publicly his own authoritative ethos.”¹⁶⁸ I suggest that the fictions produced by commercial authors also constitute public demonstrations of authoritative ethos—but rather than writing an “individualist self,”¹⁶⁹ they sketch and legitimate various iterations of a collective identity. In the following chapters, I argue that recognizing commercial authorship equips us to study their texts as supersessionist narratives and to recover the meanings that are lost when we rely upon polite translations.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 24.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

CHAPTER 1

“The Morals of a Bookseller”: Robert Dodsley, Commercial Rhetoric, and the British Stage

*How happy a state does a miller possess
Who wou'd be no greater, nor fears to be less;
On his Mill and himself he depends for Support
Which is better than Servilely cringing at Court.*

--Robert Dodsley, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*

In Robert Dodsley's 1737 afterpiece, the eponymous miller of Mansfield requests a song that opens with praise of his rustic simplicity and freedom, favorably contrasting his “happy” distance from royal power with those who are “servilely cringing at Court.”¹ The miller's paean to independence echoed the contemporary sentiments of the Tory and country Whig political groups, which deplored the growing influence of the Walpole ministry after the Hanoverian accession.² These circles, comprising primarily aristocrats and gentry, valorized their status as landowners because their rents allowed them to maintain their political independence from the despised Court Whig ‘machine’. *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* was an immediate success and ultimately became the most popular play of 1737, largely due to Opposition delight with its political implications.³

However, Dodsley's rhetoric is more complex than this view initially suggests. Dodsley's Cockle is not a landowner, and the song highlights not just his independence, but the practical source of it; it attributes his livelihood to a symbol of his occupation or work (the Mill), rather than to the possession of land, and also explicitly states that the miller supports “himself,” that he

¹ Robert Dodsley, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, ed. David Stuart Rodes (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1983), 38-39.

² Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*. See also Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Boston: Harvard UP, 1959).

³ Harry Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating the New Age of Print* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996), 55.

provides rather than merely *uses* his own income. Dodsley thus draws attention to the miller's active involvement with production. In *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, and throughout the rest of his writings, Dodsley works to reveal and justify labor, and to elevate the ambition that makes that labor productive. He both renders manual work visible and unshackles it from attendant polite stigmas, tying independence directly to labor, and labor to virtue.

Dodsley's counterdiscursive rhetoric has been misread as traditional moral sentiment, both by predominantly-polite Georgian audiences and modern critics. In this chapter, I will argue that Dodsley crafted supersessionist narratives similar to those analyzed by McKeon, and I locate the source of his rhetoric in the commercial fraction.⁴ Dodsley's early works—written before he became a tradesman—embrace polite tropes and conventions; they are assimilationist texts that operate within existing elite structures. However, Dodsley's rhetoric shifted markedly once he opened his Tully's Head book shop. His later works transfer narrative authority to tradesman-protagonists, elevate occupational independence, and redefine virtue; they not only legitimize the commercial experience, but they constitute counterdiscourse that seeks to disrupt and supplant genteel mores. Bourdieu has argued that in most cultures a struggle exists “between the dominated fractions as a whole and the dominant fractions over the definition of the accomplished man and the education designed to produce him.”⁵ I will show that Dodsley's fiction challenges conventional assumptions about public and private virtue, and advances a distinctively commercial vision of the “accomplished” or ideal citizen. His drama has been misread for centuries; however, when he shifted his literary efforts to didactic prose, his blend of polite ideals with business practicality ultimately had a significant impact on developing bourgeois culture.

⁴ See Introduction, 5-7.

⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 85.

Commerce in Restoration & Eighteenth-Century Theater

Dodsley's commercial plays were outliers, contradicting or inverting the conventions of contemporary drama. Late Stuart and Georgian plays were largely conceived and written by genteel playwrights to please predominantly genteel audiences.⁶ A pervasively elite theater, therefore, observed and sketched the commercial populace from across the social gulf—as objects rather than subjects. Mark Dawson's recent *Gentility and the Comic Theatre of Late Stuart London* studies the ways in which comic playwrights and audiences negotiated the “genteel/non-genteel divide,” a process that he suggests allows us “to recover significant aspects of the complex socio-cultural process that was gentility.”⁷ Dawson helpfully discusses stock ‘cit’-versus-gentleman dramatic encounters as representative of the “tension between status *vis a vis* class power” rather than simple class conflict.⁸ In essence, he writes, the economic capital of wealthy citizens creates anxiety for gentlemen with lesser means; to these relatively-impooverished elite, the economic disparity seems to mark a failure of the rightful connection of social with economic clout. I would add that playwrights themselves usually came from genteel backgrounds—and because they nearly always picked up the pen for financial reasons, they would be especially prone to view (and depict) rich citizens with an unfavorable eye.⁹ Late Stuart theater thus offered polite Britons the discursive space to work out the implications of

⁶ It is commonplace—but accurate—to note that Restoration and early eighteenth-century theaters were the province of the elite. Although playgoers were not exclusively polite, audiences were drawn primarily from the top 5-7 percent of the British populace. See Catie Gill, Introduction to *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England, 1650-1737* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 6. Most members of the public could not afford the regular expense of a shilling for a cheap seat, and even wealthier tradesmen were discouraged from attending by the overlap of customary curtain times with working hours. See Frances Kavenik, *British Drama, 1660-1779: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 20.

⁷ Mark Dawson, *Gentility and the Comic Theatre of Late Stuart London* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹ See Introduction, 8-9.

“gentility,” to engage in dramatic play that would alternately establish, reinforce, and reinterpret elite identity.

However, the process Dawson describes was exclusionary, occurring without direct engagement with the commercial populace. As scholars have long noted, the few commercial characters that appear are portrayed with contempt or condescension, marked by varying degrees of foolishness, avarice, and sexual or social impotence.¹⁰ In these plays, ‘cits’ are unable to establish and maintain orderly houses, whether that pertains to their wives, offspring, or servants. They lack control. These characters are thus metaphorically castrated by the playwright, who reasserts and empowers polite mores by contrast.¹¹ Significantly, playwrights and audiences do not seem to have indiscriminately censured all members of the middling sort; Dawson notes that plays rarely ridiculed professionals,¹² strengthening the likelihood that the genteel populace objected to the commercial fraction—the commercial culture—rather than the middling sort in general.

Although many scholars have described a “bourgeois turn”¹³ in theater during the early Georgian period—featuring increasingly benign portrayals of commerce and commercial characters—plays remained almost exclusively focused on representatives of elite culture.

Frances Kavenik sums up the ‘bourgeois’ trend, writing that during the early eighteenth century

both tragic and comic dramatists wishing to draw the audience’s sympathy updated their protagonists and changed their venues: merchants and other middle-

¹⁰ See for example J.D. Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

¹¹ Bourdieu has observed that “social subjects...distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make” (*Distinction*, xxiv). By rejecting the commercial fraction, polite playwrights simultaneously validate their own ideals.

¹² Dawson, *Gentility and the Comic Theatre*, 29.

¹³ There was a broad-based effort to reform ‘sinful’ elite Restoration dramas. Many playwrights began to incorporate greater respect for stereotypically bourgeois virtues such as civic responsibility and sobriety rather than aristocratic values. See Gill, *Theatre and Culture*, 7; also Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form: 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981), 147.

class figures replaced princes and idle gentlemen, inhabiting the country and countinghouse as often as the drawing rooms and parks of London. Even plays whose tragic setting and character types were still centered on war and politics domesticated those concerns.¹⁴

The changes, however, were not quite as sweeping as Kavenik suggests. Scenes set in a “countinghouse” are actually extremely rare, and aside from merchants, almost all major characters in such dramas are members of the gentry—not representatives of the middling sort. Nicholas Rowe claimed that his domestic dramas introduce a “humbler theme” because they centered upon the private moral struggles of non-aristocratic men and women—but his protagonists are wealthy and genteel.¹⁵ Richard Bevis has cited Aaron Hill’s *The Fatal Extravagance* (1721) as one of the first plays to handle middling characters in a tragic manner.¹⁶ However, the play does not actually represent the middling sort, nor does the author claim to do so. The central conflict of *The Fatal Extravagance* concerns Bellmour’s dissipation of “a wealth so Vast”¹⁷ and “the wide Estate, which once enclos’d”¹⁸ his family; he is indisputably a member of the gentry. The innovation that Hill does claim for his play is simply that of domesticity, which, unlike martial or political tragedies, allows audience members to empathize with concerns similar to their own.¹⁹ Hill’s sentimental dramas, as well as the works of Nicholas Rowe, break new ground by depicting less exotic or elevated subjects, but these plays represent Kavenik’s description of “middle-class figures” only in the most attenuated sense. The audience

¹⁴ Kavenik, *British Drama*, 205.

¹⁵ Nicholas Rowe, Dedication to *The Fair Penitent* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1714).

¹⁶ Bevis, *English Drama*, 138.

¹⁷ Aaron Hill, *The Fatal Extravagance. A Tragedy*. (London: T. Jauncey, 1721), 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Prologue.

members most likely to view the events and emotions onstage as similar to “our own” were, like the characters themselves, implicitly polite and socially privileged.

Kavenik starts to address this divide when she notes that playwrights offered flattering portrayals “mostly to very wealthy men of business, veritable merchant princes, not to ordinary shopkeepers and traders.”²⁰ However, I would argue that the key attribute of these merchants is their cultural rather than their economic capital. In Richard Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers*, the virtuous merchant Mr. Sealand defends his occupation by telling Sir John Bevil, “Sir, as much of a cit as you take me for, I know the town and the world,” which he opposes to Bevil’s own limited “trading...extended no farther than a load of hay or a fat ox.”²¹ His defense rests not on his wealth, but the experiences that have enriched his temperament and intellect. His words and actions support his claim; he is civil, intelligent, and capable of eloquent sentiments when he discovers his long-lost daughter, Indiana.²² Indiana is herself depicted as polite, despite her lack of wealth or title. Before the recognition scene, Sealand tells Indiana that he would never insult “so accomplished a lady as your sense and mien bespeak.”²³ Polite Britons considered manners the essence of gentility, so well-bred merchants and their daughters (and, by implication, impoverished professionals) could rightfully be considered, in Sealand’s words, “a species of gentry.”²⁴ Steele seems to have designed his merchant primarily to illustrate his vision of behavioral gentility, not to represent the reality of trade culture. Neil McKendrick writes that “in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the businessman continued to be judged...not by his own

²⁰ Kavenik, *English Drama*, 138. See also J. Douglas Canfield, “Shifting Tropes of Ideology in English Serious Drama, Late Stuart to Early Georgian,” in J.D. Canfield and Deborah Payne Fisk, *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Canfield writes that despite the “democratic, meritocratic” rhetoric of the new generation of drama, such plays are actually “exclusionary: they portray the consolidation of power in the hands of a new (male) elite” (196).

²¹ Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, 2nd Edition, ed. Scott McMillan (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 365.

²² *Ibid.*, 378-79.

²³ *Ibid.*, 376.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 366.

merits but by those of the gentleman. If they wished to make him acceptable, [authors] must make him conform to the prevailing ideals.”²⁵ British dramatists extended their sympathies only to businessmen who could be rendered polite.

George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731)—the play most frequently cited as evidence of the domestic or bourgeois turn—demonstrates the ways in which polite discourse filtered representations of commercial culture. C.F. Burgess notes that Lillo was the first playwright to detail a merchant’s business practices and present him as a moral exemplar.²⁶ Thorowgood’s business practices are certainly in evidence; the audience is immersed in Thorowgood’s trade from the first lines of the play, as he discusses business matters with his apprentice Trueman. Thorowgood’s lines center on the public benefits of his occupation; he offers a patriotic defense of international trade, explaining in detail how “Honest Merchants, as such, may sometimes contribute to the Safety of their Country, as they do at all times to its Happiness.”²⁷ Thorowgood’s virtue is also the moral center of the play. His behavior serves as an example to his apprentices, the flawed George Barnwell and the ideal Trueman, both in Act I and in the final scenes, as he counsels Barnwell on the nature of forgiveness and repentance.²⁸ Jeremy Black has

²⁵ Neil McKendrick, “Gentlemen and Players Revisited: The Gentlemanly Ideal, the Business Ideal and the Professional Ideal in English Literary Culture.” *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman*, eds. Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 117.

²⁶ C.F. Burgess, “Lillo Sans Barnwell, or the Playwright Revisited,” in *Modern Philology* 66, no. 1 (1968): 7. Lillo was well-positioned to write ‘bourgeois’ drama, since he spent his formative years in trade. Born in 1691, he had trained and worked as a partner in his father’s jewelry business before he turned to the stage in 1730. It is interesting that Lillo culled the material for two of his plays from British popular sources instead of classical mythology or foreign drama; *The London Merchant* was based upon a seventeenth-century ballad about an apprentice who murders his uncle at the behest of his mistress, and *Fatal Curiosity* was inspired by a lurid seventeenth-century criminal history (Brown, *English Dramatic Form*, 163). Lillo lacked a polite background, so it is understandable that he was comfortable with resources important (and accessible) to the larger, non-genteel public.

²⁷ George Lillo, *The London Merchant: Or, the History of George Barnwell* (London: John Gray, 1731), 2. Later, Thorowgood tells Trueman that international trade “has promoted Humanity, as it has opened and yet keeps up intercourse between Nations, far remote from one another in Situation, Customs and Religion; promoting Arts, Industry, Peace and Plenty; by mutual Benefits diffusing mutual Love from Pole to Pole” (28).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

suggested that *The London Merchant* was revolutionary primarily because Lillo located virtue within members of the middling sort rather than the upper ranks.²⁹

Nevertheless, Lillo never places commercial and polite values in direct conflict. Though he makes a strong case for the value and integrity of elite Britons engaged in commerce, his play is fundamentally assimilationist, for the characters portrayed in such flattering terms are still unmistakably members of the elite. Thorowgood confines his praise of business to the public benefits of international commerce, which (unlike domestic trade) was acceptable to the polite community.³⁰ Moreover, he is “daily solicited by Men of the greatest Rank and Merit for leave to address” his daughter Maria,³¹ and his speech and manners demonstrate cultivation throughout the play. The families able to afford Thorowgood’s apprenticeship premiums would have been similarly polite, which is corroborated by the existence of Barnwell’s rich uncle, who has raised George nearly from birth.³² The main characters of the play work for a living, which is noteworthy, but they are still genteel. Canfield has written that “Barnwell and his master Thorowgood present class triumph not for the petty bourgeoisie but for the upper-middle merchant class.”³³ Thorowgood does not criticize polite culture, directly or indirectly, because he is part of it. Despite Lillo’s willingness to depict a merchant hero without condescension, he does not directly challenge dominant mores.

Though *The London Merchant* is essentially a polite version of commerce, the commercial fraction still seems to have appreciated its unusually positive portrayal of trade. The play premiered in early summer, after the close of the London season, when the polite populace

²⁹ Jeremy Black, *Culture in Eighteenth-Century England: A Subject for Taste* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 110.

³⁰ See Introduction, 9-11.

³¹ Lillo, *London Merchant*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 37.

³³ Canfield, “Shifting Tropes,” 212.

had largely migrated to country houses or fashionable watering holes. During this time, audience members would more likely be local businessmen or other middling workers, who needed to remain in London year-round.³⁴ The play was an instant smash with its target audience; in *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734), Samuel Richardson laments that

Most of our modern Plays, and especially those written in a late licentious Reign, which are reckon'd the best, and are often acted, are so far from being so much as *intended* for Instruction to a Man of Business, that such Persons are generally made the Dupes and Fools of the Hero of it. To make a Cuckold of a rich Citizen, is a masterly Part of the Plot; and such Persons are always introduced under the meanest and most contemptible Characters.³⁵

Richardson's words suggest that members of the commercial sort were aware of—and resented—the typical caricatures of contemporary drama. He names only one play as worth the attention of the business community: *The London Merchant*.³⁶

“Unfeather'd Yet”: Robert Dodsley's Early Life and Verse

Kavenik calls *The London Merchant* “an apparent anomaly” in British theater history because later playwrights moved away from Lillo's focus on business; instead, they transferred his moral exhortations to more gentrified characters and content.³⁷ Yet the Georgian commercial community produced at least one other playwright: Dodsley wrote two of the most popular plays of the era. Nevertheless, modern scholars have rarely analyzed his works; most studies of eighteenth-century drama do not mention him at all, and those that do offer only cursory

³⁴ Lincoln B. Faller, *The Popularity of Addison's Cato and Lillo's The London Merchant, 1700-1776* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 104.

³⁵ Samuel Richardson, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1975), 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ Kavenik, *British Drama*, 150.

remarks.³⁸ Robert Hume suggests that eighteenth-century plays have been relatively neglected by critics because they lack sufficient complexity to interest scholars.³⁹ Whether or not this is true, Dodsley's plays are valuable cultural artifacts that can shed light on the uncertain and contested boundary between genteel and commercial. Dawson's analysis of that boundary is useful, but it is limited to the polite perspectives of genteel playwrights; Dodsley's work represents the unmediated rhetoric of a tradesman. More importantly, Dodsley also advanced supersessionist discourse, implying that the moral code of a humble tradesman may be superior to that of an educated gentleman. Dodsley's plays thus play an important role in the theater's ongoing (re)definitions of virtue.

Although Dodsley became a businessman only in his mid-twenties, addressing his disadvantaged early life allows us to track shifts in his literary voice and his social identity—from a dependent footman seeking patronage, to an independent and influential tradesman. He was born near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire in 1703, and named after his father, a schoolteacher. Robert Sr.'s teaching position could suggest that Dodsley's family maintained some pretension to culture or breeding. However, the evidence indicates that Robert Sr. only possessed a marginal education; there is no record of his attendance at any university, and even the school's two masters were not university graduates. Robert Jr. never learned Latin or Greek, and his brothers all pursued non-genteel careers: a farmer and maltster, a servant, and a gardener.⁴⁰ Robert Jr., the oldest son, was bound at 14 to a stocking weaver—one of the least-expensive, least-attractive

³⁸ Kavenik, Gill, Gollapudi, Dawson, and Canfield do not give any attention to his dramatic works. Kinservik and Bevis offer only a few sentences about Dodsley's plays.

³⁹ Robert Hume, "Theatre History, 1660-1800: Aims, Materials, Methodology," in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660-1800*, eds. Michael Corder and Peter Holland (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 16.

⁴⁰ Harry Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating the New Age of Print* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 8-9. Robert's youngest brother, James, was apprenticed as a bookseller to Robert, but only much later, after Robert had already become successful.

apprenticeships in Britain.⁴¹ The entire family was clinging to the lower rungs of the middling sort, lacking in both economic and social capital.

Robert Jr. remained a weaver's apprentice for only a short time; he soon quit and entered service in a series of wealthy households.⁴² Early on, Dodsley was a servant under Sir Richard Howe and his wife, in Nottinghamshire. His passion for literary matters manifested itself during this period; Dodsley later wrote that a neighboring gentleman, Sir Griffith Boynton, had "first approv'd [my] song."⁴³ In 1729, Dodsley surfaced in London, where he had apparently been working for several years. He served as a footman for Charles Dartineuf, a gentleman with close ties to the Tory literary establishment, then later moved to a similar position in the house of Jane Lowther, who allowed Dodsley full access to her extensive library and encouraged him to publish his first poem, *Servitude*, a verse conduct book for footmen.⁴⁴ He was 25 years old.

Almost none of Dodsley's correspondence survives from these early years, so we can only examine Dodsley's published writings for insight into his earliest attitudes and motivations.⁴⁵ *Servitude* sets up an illustrative baseline against which to assess the writings he

⁴¹ Grassby, *Business Community*, 159. The future of a weaver's apprentice was generally limited. Orphans were especially likely to become stocking weavers, because the average apprentice premium was only around £7. See also Moshe Justman and Karine Van Der Beek. *Market Forces Shaping Human Capital in Eighteenth Century London* (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research: Melbourne, Victoria 2013), Table A1.

⁴² Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 11. Solomon argues that the split was managed amicably; no advertisements for a runaway apprentice were ever posted, and Dodsley was able to find employment in wealthy homes, which would have been extremely difficult to accomplish without good references. Nevertheless, there may have been a falling out between father and son; Robert was ultimately excluded from his father's will in favor of his younger brother John. See James Bracken, *The British Literary Book Trade, 1700-1820* (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1995), 106.

⁴³ Robert Dodsley, "To Sir Griffith Boynton, Bart.," in *A Muse in Livery: or, The Footman's Miscellany* (London: J. Nourse, 1732). The documentary record during these years is scant. Although we know several of his employers, all dates are uncertain until Dodsley's first publication in 1729, by which point he had probably been in service for almost 10 years.

⁴⁴ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 19. Dodsley may have begun working for Lowther in 1728; unfortunately, few details about Lowther's patronage of Dodsley have survived (Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence*, 4).

⁴⁵ We have only a few brief letters that can be dated prior to 1750, and relatively few even from 1753-59, long after he had become successful as a bookseller and author. No family letters survive, even though we know that he maintained cordial relations with several of his siblings. Tierney was troubled by the necessity to produce "an edition of correspondence where so much is known missing." The primary explanation seems to be that Dodsley's brother James burnt a significant part of Robert's correspondence shortly after Robert's death; Solomon suggests that James may have been ashamed of the family's low origins (51-52).

produced after he became a bookseller. Dodsley demonstrates some independent thought, as he argues that a master is placed over his servant due to “accidental Circumstances” rather than innate superiority,⁴⁶ but his text is more strongly marked by subservience and convention. He contrasts allegedly arrogant, unworthy footmen, who believe that any advantages are due to their “own Merit,” with ideal footmen, who “gratefully receive [benefits] as unmerited Bounties flowing purely from their Master’s generosity.”⁴⁷ *Servitude* is an apt title, for the poem is assimilationist, replete with the paternalistic tropes and structures of patronage. His endorsement of humble gratitude—and corresponding dismissal of individual merit—strongly resembles the stereotypical selfless servant, such as Humphrey in *The Conscious Lovers*, who thanks his master for “an easy forty years . . . without much sickness, care, or labor.”⁴⁸ Like Humphrey, Dodsley portrays himself as a dependent rather than an agent. Although Dodsley makes the argument that servants should be accorded greater trust and responsibility, he does so by appealing to the aristocratic vision of master-servant relations, emphasizing loyalty and humility—and he never fundamentally questions the existing social structure.

In *An Epistle from a Footman in London* (1731), Dodsley again displays the attitudes and figures of the polite world; he expresses solidarity with his fellow laborer-prodigy Stephen Duck, and implies a strong desire for patronage, writing of his hopes that both men, who are “unfeather’d yet,” will be “fledg’d and strengthen’d with a kindly Spring.” The imagery is strongly hierarchical, figuring these grown men as helpless baby birds in need of benevolence. In *The Lab’ring Muses*, William Christmas compares Dodsley’s early poetry to that of other contemporary plebeian poets such as Robert Tatersall and John Bancks, all of whom sought

⁴⁶ Robert Dodsley, *Servitude* (London: T. Worrall, 1729), 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸ Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, 326. See especially Humphrey’s remarks in I.i and I.ii. Canfield discusses Steele’s use of Humphrey to reinforce conservative ideals in “Shifting Tropes,” 221.

pensions similar to the stipend that Queen Caroline had granted Stephen Duck.⁴⁹ Christmas suggests that Dodsley's poetry is primarily intended to "prove himself worthy of polite patronage."⁵⁰ The footman's work is thus both imitative of and designed to appeal to a genteel audience, not to his fellow servants.

The deferential and conventional aspects of Dodsley's earliest works are further magnified in his most significant volume of poetry, *The Muse in Livery* (1732), which reprinted his earlier published poems and added about a dozen other short works that had probably been circulating in manuscript for a year or two.⁵¹ Several of the (new) poems touch upon the same themes as those in *Servitude* and *An Epistle from a Footman*. In "The Wish," Dodsley imagines possessing sufficient wealth to maintain "a small estate," with "a little garden too [to] join / My happy rural seat"—at which the speaker could "retire some part of ev'ry day / And read, and think my easy hours away."⁵² The poem depicts a Tory or Opposition Whig fantasy of a rural, landed independence separate from the implicitly commercial "noise and hurry" of London.⁵³ Dodsley also includes one verse fable, "The Enquiry," in which a lion declares that virtue should conquer lust, pleasure, food, ease, and power. He urges the other animals

To take delight in doing good,
In justice, truth, and gratitude;
In aiding those whom cares oppress,

⁴⁹ William Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 96.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹ Robert Dodsley, *Muse in Livery: or, the Footman's Miscellany* (London: J. Nourse, 1732). One of his poems is titled "To the Honourable Lady Howe, upon the Death of her Husband Sir Richard Howe Bart. who died July 2, 1730 after they had lived together upwards of Fifty Years." The other datable poem was composed for Robert Lowther's wedding to Katherine Pennington in June 1731.

⁵² Dodsley, *Muse in Livery*, 15.

⁵³ Maynard Mack, *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

Admin'string comfort to distress.⁵⁴

The form of virtue described here comprises justice and charity, the aristocratic vision of *noblesse oblige*. Dodsley does not praise labor, industry, ambition, economy, or anything that would suggest the particular priorities of businessmen such as James Lackington, Thomas Turner, or even George Lillo. In addition, Dodsley chooses a lion, a symbol of earthly power or royalty, to lecture to his other “various subjects.” This poem, like his entire youthful body of work, represents assimilationist discourse, characterized by elite attitudes and rhetoric. Dodsley primarily displays intellectual and creative dependence, a mindset typified by “gratitude” rather than agency. Jeremy Black aptly summarizes Dodsley’s earliest contributions to British literature in two brief sentences; he acknowledges Dodsley’s success as footman-poet and bookseller, and adds: “In the former role he had come to prominence with *Servitude* (1729) and *A Muse in Livery* (1732). These did not challenge social assumptions.”⁵⁵

Dodsley may have, to some degree, assumed or emphasized his subservience in order to succeed with his benefactors and his hundreds of wealthy subscribers. Nevertheless, until this point, Dodsley had little access to—or experience of—a way of life outside of his rural lower-middling upbringing and the elite world of his employers. As he entered his late twenties, his service experiences would have conditioned him to view the world as feudal or hierarchical, one in which he could only hope to rise through the favor of his social superiors.

At the least, Dodsley seems to have possessed a desire to cultivate an independent voice. One year before *A Muse in Livery*, Dodsley published an essay, *A Sketch of the Miseries of Poverty*, which offers a more immediate, detailed picture of Dodsley’s social and economic frustration—and he clearly chafes at his dependent situation. In his dedication to Sir Griffith

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 46.

⁵⁵ Black, *Subject for Taste*, 41.

Boynton, he offers the conventional, modest claim that if his pages are “so happy as to employ but one of your Leisure Hours in any measure agreeably, ‘tis all they pretend to, ‘tis more than they expect, or I doubt deserve.”⁵⁶ The seeming humility of this remark is soon undercut by Dodsley’s vexed assertion that anyone whose “Coat is not so clean, or his Wig so much powder’d as that of his Antagonist” is dismissed:

That this is really his Case I appeal to any Man who has been but the least conversant in the World: And it is from a Consciousness of this his Insignificancy, that though he has the clearest Truth, and the strongest Reason in the World on his Side, yet he cannot assert it with that Boldness and Assurance which is necessary; but suffers his Words to break from him with as much Diffidence, Perplexity, and Hesitation as if he was uttering an Untruth.⁵⁷

Dodsley implies that his inferior social position damps his ability to assert himself, casting doubt upon the sincerity of his opening suggestion that the text is a bagatelle fit only for one of Boynton’s “Leisure Hours.” His remarks suggest profound levels of pride and frustration. Dodsley also seems to have desired to separate himself from the lower ranks of society. In the essay, he refers to himself as

one who is desirous of Learning and Knowledge, who is capable of tasting Happiness, and enjoying the rational Pleasures of Life; to such a one, I say, a penurious Fortune is inexpressibly Calamitous. [A different man], as he has no Relish of any Enjoyments above those which his poor Condition and Circumstances afford him, so he may with more Ease be contented and Satisfied with them.

⁵⁶ Robert Dodsley, *A Sketch of the Miseries of Poverty* (London: A. Dodd, 1731), vi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

The speaker later writes that his meditations cause him to fall into a “Reverie,”⁵⁸ in which he has been shipwrecked in a “savage, rude, inhospitable Island.” Some men bemoan their fate, but “the Natives, tho’ to all outward Appearance as miserable, for the most Part seem’d easy, unconcern’d, and, as it were, insensible of their Condition.”⁵⁹ Dodsley seems to place himself in the category of men who are aware of, and therefore distressed by, their pitiable situation. He lives in proximity to both the lower and upper ranks, and his argument that awareness affects perspective supports my contention that those at the nexus of different cultures are best equipped to notice and critique other worldviews.⁶⁰ However, even though Dodsley separates himself from the mass of “Natives,” he does not seem to know where to place himself. His hopes, as he describes them consistently throughout his poetry, involve a monetary competence granted by benefactors, and a sort of rural idyll in which he can pursue his intellectual interests. As a poor footman, Robert Dodsley cannot (and may not wish to) identify as a gentleman, but his mental horizons are nevertheless limited to the rhetoric of gentility.

The Footman Becomes a Tradesman

Shortly after the publication of these poems, a major shift in Dodsley’s livelihood triggered correspondingly substantial changes in his identity and discourse. In *The Lab’ring Muses*, Christmas stops discussing Dodsley’s writing rather abruptly, with a description of Dodsley’s establishment of the Tully’s Head bookshop in 1735.⁶¹ Christmas’s decision implies, correctly, that with the launch of his career, Dodsley was no longer a plebeian laborer, and his

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁰ See Introduction, 39.

⁶¹ A number of scholars suggest that Dodsley served an informal apprenticeship with Lawton Gilliver, Alexander Pope’s primary bookseller. See Bracken and Silver, *Literary Book Trade*, 154. See also Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 32-3. Pope was (and remained) Dodsley’s primary patron, and Gilliver published more of Dodsley’s poetry in 1734 and 1735. Dodsley never joined the Stationer’s Company, but, as Wrightson notes, informal apprenticeships had become increasingly common during the early eighteenth century (*Earthly Necessities*, 290).

writings no longer reflected a plebeian mindset. The servant had learned the bookseller's trade and become an independent businessman, with profound ramifications for his writing.

In the first place, Dodsley became conversant with business skills that would have demanded initiative, active management, and the mastery of several distinct fields of work. During the eighteenth century, booksellers relied only tangentially upon retail book sales, functioning more as publishers and distributors. They purchased copyrights from authors, oversaw the editing process, arranged and delivered the text to a printer, and distributed copies from both his or her own shop and potentially others.⁶² The subjects of his extant letters are primarily literary topics, but he discusses them almost entirely in business terms: marketability, corrections, paper quality, etc. A letter to John Gilbert Cooper, which discusses the first and second editions of Cooper's *Life of Socrates*, demonstrates Dodsley's broad range of expertise:

I heartily beg your Pardon for not giving you an Account of y^e Expences & Profits of this First edition of y^e Life of Socrates I printed 500, but there are but small Profits arising from this Edition, occasion'd by y^e Expence of y^e Cutts & the high Price of y^e Paper. The Profits will be considerably higher in the second Edition as y^e Cutts are paid for, & as I was oblig'd to make use of a cheaper paper (tho' a very good one) none of the former sort being in the Market. It is not yet proper to advertise the 2^d Edition as the first, tho' all out of my hands, is not yet out of y^e hands of the Wholesale men, who woud complain if a 2^d Edition was advertis'd before they had sold the First. But I dare say they are very near gone, &

⁶² George Justice, *The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 117. The bookselling profession was very complex web of relations between authors, printers, and booksellers—books could be 'published' anonymously, jointly with other booksellers, or under the imprint of someone different from the actual copyright holder; for a variety of reasons, Dodsley often arranged for trade publisher Mary Cooper to issue one of his works under her imprint. See also John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2006).

y^e 2^d Ed will be ready this Week. However as the Town will be empty I should think it better to defer advertising till after y^e Holidays, but will be directed by You. The Words *Second Edition* are in y^e Title Page, & the Errata in the First are corrected in This. But two of y^e Errata you last sent were too late to be corrected, a new Errata will therefore be made for them. I have heard nothing of Mr. Warburton, nor any Criticism worth mentioning, except what I think I mention'd before viz that several people when they came to ask for it expected a larger Work. I send you enclos'd that part of the Monthly review that contains y^e Account of Socrates which I suppose is all you want.⁶³

Dodsley's evident mastery of occupational knowledge probably explains his willingness to correct and guide genteel clients such as Cooper, a well-travelled Cambridge graduate.⁶⁴ The formerly-deferential footman has become more confident and assertive. Aside from making the type of sales and format suggestions included in the above letter, Dodsley actively edited the content of the books he prepared for publication, and the (usually) polite authors with whom he worked were normally satisfied with his stylistic decisions.⁶⁵

Therefore, Dodsley did not merely change jobs; he experienced a revolution in lifestyle and mindset, and he began to demonstrate the traits and priorities common to the commercial fraction.⁶⁶ His letters show him to have been an active manager and editor, one who seemed to possess directive control of his business. He appears to have worked long hours, and he characterized his literary endeavors as a side concern, "either snatched from the hours of

⁶³ Dodsley to Cooper, December 19, 1749, in *Correspondence*, 132.

⁶⁴ Robin Dix, "Cooper, John Gilbert (1722–1769)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004). Online ed. Lawrence Goldman.

⁶⁵ Richard Wendorf, "Robert Dodsley as Editor," *Studies in Bibliography* 31 (1978): 245.

⁶⁶ See Introduction, 18-37.

business, or stolen from those of rest.”⁶⁷ He demonstrated risk-taking and ambition; unlike some established booksellers, like the Tonson family, he did not derive most of his profits from lucrative old copyrights of Shakespeare or Milton.⁶⁸ Instead, newcomer Dodsley had to embrace innovation—and he succeeded, discovering and promoting new talent, and collaborating far less often than other booksellers did. Tierney suggests that Dodsley’s reluctance to embark upon joint projects with his peers indicates “an extraordinary independence on Dodsley’s part.”⁶⁹ Finally, by all accounts, he was careful with his money, keeping detailed accounts and plowing his profits back into the Tully’s Head operations.⁷⁰

Dodsley became one of the most prominent booksellers in London,⁷¹ and he appears to have embraced his new identity. In 1748, after years of hard work, Dodsley wrote Joseph Spence:

[H]ere I am, ty’d down to the World, immerst in Business, with very little Prospect of ever being able to disengage my self. ‘Tis true, my Business is of such a Nature, and so agreeable to the Turn of my Mind, that I have often very great Pleasure in the Pursuit of it. I don’t know but I may sometimes be as much entertain’d in planning a Book, as you are in laying the Plan of a Garden.⁷²

Despite these words, Dodsley was not actually “ty’d down.” He had long been successful enough to retire, to hand the business to his younger brother James, withdraw from London with a sizable “competence,” and indulge his youthful fantasy of a rural retreat. Spence, an educated

⁶⁷ Robert Dodsley, *Public Virtue: A Poem in Three Books* (Dublin: 1754), v.

⁶⁸ Justice, *Manufacturers of Literature*, 116-17. See also Tierney on the jealous hoarding of “bread and butter” reprinting rights by established industry families (James Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence of Robert Dodsley* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 38.

⁶⁹ Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence*, 39.

⁷⁰ Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence*, 33-34. See also Ralph Straus, *Robert Dodsley: Poet, Publisher, and Playwright* (London: John Lane, 1910), 267.

⁷¹ Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 121.

⁷² Dodsley to Joseph Spence, October 22, 1748, in *Correspondence*, 125.

historian and scholar, was living this dream, and might have inspired the now-wealthy Dodsley to follow him into the countryside. Instead, Dodsley's sentiments correspond with those of his commercial peers, who rarely retired from business even when they had the means to do so.⁷³ In youth, he had characterized his labor as drudgery and an obstacle to happiness; now, he portrays it as "agreeable to the Turn of my Mind." It is unsurprising, perhaps, that he felt differently about his own work after embarking upon a more intellectually-stimulating career, but as I will show, his later writings indicate that his overall view of labor itself had become more favorable. In 1759, he finally passed control of Tully's Head to his brother, though he remained involved—and even then, he indicated that his retirement was somewhat reluctant, writing that the departure "makes me melancholy," and calling it "a sacrifice to brotherly love."⁷⁴

Apart from his trade, Dodsley was a successful author who regularly socialized with Britain's (genteel) literary elite, including Samuel Johnson, Edward Young, Oliver Goldsmith, and Edmund Burke, among many others.⁷⁵ Richard Graves wrote laudatory verses characterizing Dodsley as London's arbiter of polite literary taste: "In vain the Poets, from their Mine, / Extract the shining Mass, / Till Dodsley's Mint has stamp'd the Coin, / And bid the Sterling pass."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, these experiences and social connections did not prompt members of elite social circles to believe that he had joined their ranks; he still lacked the cultural capital that would have secured him full membership in polite society. On multiple occasions, polite acquaintances hinted at his lack of education and lowly upbringing.⁷⁷ Even Horace Walpole, one of Dodsley's

⁷³ See Introduction, 30.

⁷⁴ Dodsley to William Shenstone, March 27, 1759, *Correspondence*, 409.

⁷⁵ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 5.

⁷⁶ Richard Graves, "On Tully's Head in Pall Mall: To Mr. R. Dodsley, on his writing *Cleone*," in *The Festoon: a collection of epigrams, ancient and modern*, (London: Robinson & Roberts, 1765), 176.

⁷⁷ Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence*, 68. See also Thomas Gray's letter of July 1752, no. 169, in *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, eds. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 149. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and David Garrick also disparaged Dodsley's origins (Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 112, 210).

foremost supporters, took Dodsley's part in a quarrel by telling a friend that "you know how decent, humble, inoffensive a creature Dodsley is."⁷⁸ Despite Walpole's obvious affection, all of the words he chooses are patronizing, even faintly contemptuous. Dodsley remained an amiable "creature" rather than a peer of his associates.

Nor did Dodsley seek to present himself as genteel. Tierney has carefully recorded Dodsley's revisions of personal and business letters, which collectively indicate that he viewed himself as a member of the commercial fraction. In the midst of a multi-year quarrel with William Warburton over the rights to Alexander Pope's posthumous *Works*, Dodsley composed various drafts before sending a reply:

"<I am Sensible however that I am but a Bookseller, I will endeavour not to forget that Modesty and Respect with I owe to your superior Character as a Clergyman> not withstanding all you have said, I would willingly avoid; I know I am but a Bookseller, and You a Divine <but when> tho' pounc'd by an Eagle: but even a wren will complain. I <will> must therefore proceed....For by your uncharitable <slur> sneer on the morals of a Bookseller, and from the very hard conclusion of your last Letter, it <seems> appears <if> that You <could scarce> cannot allow me even the merit of common Honesty; <since you there> <and> but treat me as one with whom You would by no means chuse to have any dealings."⁷⁹

Dodsley's initial lines are somewhat conciliatory. He acknowledges the social divide between himself and Warburton and he abases his own status; he is "but a Bookseller" in contrast to Warburton's "superior Character as a Clergyman," and suggests that he therefore owes

⁷⁸ Horace Walpole to George Montagu, May 4, 1738, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford*, ed. Peter Cunningham (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1906), 3.135.

⁷⁹ Dodsley to Warburton, January 6, 1756, *Correspondence*, 216. The material within arrow brackets indicates language that was crossed out.

Warburton a modicum of “Modesty and Respect.” Yet some element of pride or dignity caused Dodsley to delete these lines. He again contrasts their social ranks, but this time his words suggest a degree of resentment, especially at Warburton’s refusal to concede Dodsley’s possession of “common Honesty.” Dodsley’s willingness to defend himself in such heated terms—and to intensify, rather than moderate, that defense after revision—indicates a measure of pride regarding his station. In addition, the fact that he refers to himself as a ‘Bookseller’ twice suggests that his current occupation plays an important role in his conception of himself, and in the way he believes others see him. Dodsley identifies as a commercial man, and his indignation and pride reinforce Hunt’s argument that emulation played only a limited role in the lives of the middling sort. The post-Tully’s Head Dodsley should be definitively viewed as a commercial author.

The Toy-Shop: Independence, Labor, and the Orderly House

In 1735, Dodsley produced *The Toy-shop*, a highly-successful, one-act afterpiece consisting primarily of a series of satirical exchanges between a toy shop’s Master and his genteel customers.⁸⁰ Unlike Dodsley’s earlier work, the *Toy-shop* depicts an honest tradesman protagonist who speaks the language of unapologetic commerce. The narrative is also more aggressively supersessionist than *The London Merchant* had been. Faller suggests that Lillo’s play sought “to readjust its audience’s sensibilities, to reform taste.”⁸¹ Yet rather than trying to reform (and thereby reaffirm) polite discourse, Dodsley advances a form of counterdiscourse; *The Toy-shop* places narrative authority in the hands of a common shopkeeper.

⁸⁰ At some early point, Dodsley had read Thomas Randolph’s *The Conceited Pedlar* (London: John Marriot, 1630); he later described Randolph’s play as “the first Hint” of *The Toy-shop*—an appropriate phrase, because Dodsley uses the general premise of the original play but changes most of the details. A draft of the play had been completed by 1733, though it was neither published nor staged until 1735 (Tierney, *Correspondence*, 65). At the time Dodsley wrote the play, toy shops sold jewelry and other small ornamental items.

⁸¹ Faller, “Lillo’s London Merchant,” 101.

In the first scene, an unnamed gentleman defends the Master against the charge that he is “impertinent,”⁸² and informs the audience that the Master is “a general Satyrst, yet not rude nor ill-natur’d.”⁸³ Dodsley thus quickly and explicitly rejects two charges typically levelled at citizens—that they are presumptuous (in other words, disrespectful of genteel privilege) and ill-mannered—and predisposes the audience to view the shopkeeper favorably. The gentleman’s description of the owner as a “Satyrst” also places the Master in an authoritative role, since satire conventionally positions the satiric voice as a clever truth-teller and a source of moral correction. The Master is soon introduced in his shop, going over his books. The passage is lengthy, but worth quoting in full:

Methinks I have had a tolerable good Day of it to-day. A Gold Watch, Five and Thirty Guineas----Let me see----What did that Watch stand me in?----Where is it? O here----Lent to Lady Basset Eighteen Guineas upon her Gold Watch. Ay, she died and never redeemed it.----A Set of old China, Five Pounds.----Bought of an old Cloaths Man for Five Shillings. Right.----A curious Shell for a Snuffbox, Two Guineas.----Bought of a poor Fisher-boy for a Half-penny. Now, if I had offer’d that Shell for Sixpence, no body would have bought it. Well, Thanks to the whimsical Extravagance and Folly of Mankind, I believe, from these childish Toys and gilded Baubles, I shall pick up a comfortable Maintenance....Nay, as if there were not real Trifles enow, they now make Trifles of the most serious and valuable Things. Their Time, their Health, their Money, their Reputation, are trifled away.⁸⁴

⁸² Robert Dodsley, *The Toy-shop*, ed. David Stuart Rodes (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1983), 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12. Like most elements, this scene is not present in Randolph’s original text—it is new to *The Toy-shop*.

Dodsley, unlike every other playwright of his period, depicts a man minutely cataloguing his earnings—at the *direct expense* of ladies and gentlemen—and still characterizes that man in a positive way. Because Dodsley portrays the Master’s actions after informing the audience that he is respectable, viewers are dissuaded from observing the shopkeeper’s careful calculations with disapproval. Furthermore, the earnings themselves are remarkable. The Master makes at least twice the purchase price (and usually much more) for every one of the listed items, which could suggest that he is cheating his customers. He even revels in his profit margins, noting that the mark up makes the trinkets even more attractive to “the whimsical Extravagance and Folly” of his clients, who seem obtusely unaware that they have overpaid. His ridicule is somewhat contemptuous, imputing a degree of social power to the Master rather than his customers: we are asked to laugh at the elite, not at the citizen. For the first time since the Restoration, satirical authority is granted to a commercial man who judges his social superiors. The Master’s ambitious salesmanship, his cleverness itself, also signifies a commercial mindset. In polite discourse, occupational shrewdness—*interest*—carried negative connotations.⁸⁵ Usurers and tradesmen in particular (although not exclusively) are charged with craft; their profits are characterized as “ill-gotten spoils,” and usually amassed at the expense of innocent or ingenuous protagonists.⁸⁶ However, the commercial sort viewed self-interest and ambition as respectable, even virtuous, and the possession of sharp business skills were considered an asset, as long as the transactions were not fraudulent.⁸⁷ Dodsley’s Master accordingly intends to earn a “comfortable Maintenance,” and he is unapologetic about his desire for profit. Lillo’s Thorowgood had been a model of polite sentiment; he was respectably altruistic, and rather than focusing on personal profit, he advertises the ways in which his trade benefited the entire nation. The Master, on the

⁸⁵ Introduction, 23.

⁸⁶ Dawson, *Gentility and the Comic Theater*, 29. See also Grassby, *Business Community*, 199.

⁸⁷ Introduction, 24.

other hand, speaks only his own interest, even as his wittiness—and Dodsley’s strategic use of satiric tradition—render that interest innocuous.

The Master’s behavior conveys practical as well as satiric authority. Though most citizen characters were socially inept and unable to control their disorderly houses, the Master is a capable manager who keeps careful accounts. He also repeatedly shows his willingness to impart sound moral advice, as when he exhorts his customers to keep a detailed memorandum book:

As for Instance: Always to make a Memorandum of the Benefits you receive from others. Always to set down the Faults or Failings, which from Time to Time you discover in yourself. And, if you remark any Thing that is ridiculous or faulty in others, let it not be with an ill-natur’d Design to hurt or expose them, at any Time, but with a *Nota bene*, that it is only for a Caution to your self, not to be guilty of the like. With a great many other Rules of such a Nature as makes one of these Pocket-books both a useful Monitor and a very entertaining Companion.

Like the businessmen in my study, Dodsley values a heavily didactic approach, a technique made more striking because members of the gentry (rather than apprentices) are depicted as a businessman’s acolytes, passive recipients of his wisdom.⁸⁸ Black argued that *The London Merchant* was revolutionary because Lillo assigned virtue to a merchant—but even Lillo did not imply that virtue is *more likely* to be found amongst the commercial sort. The Master’s promotion of memorandum books also displays a partiality to order and bookkeeping equal to the tradesmen discussed in the Introduction, which is especially remarkable because an emphasis

⁸⁸ In the closing couplets, Dodsley removes any doubt that the Master’s fictional genteel customers represent the polite community as a whole; the main Gentleman tells the privileged audience directly that “would you guide your Lives and Actions right, / Think on the Maxims you have heard tonight.” (46). Dodsley essentially advises ladies and gentlemen to conduct themselves according to a shopkeeper’s advice.

on the importance of organization does not make for compelling stagecraft.⁸⁹ The Master encourages genteel Britons to use a commercial tool, the memorandum book, to regulate their own ethical behavior—in essence, to keep their own moral accounts.

The Toy-shop therefore challenges the dominant discourse in two closely-related ways. First, the play enables the commercial fraction to write itself as conscientious, intelligent, capable, and worthy of respect. Second, and more importantly, Dodsley's commercial protagonist turns an empowered, satiric gaze toward his social superiors. The Master implies that the upper ranks would benefit from adopting certain commercial practices and beliefs, thereby critiquing polite society from a position of equal or superior authority. If Richardson had composed *Vade Mecum* one year later, he almost certainly would have mentioned *The Toy-shop* favorably by name; however, Dodsley also secured a sizeable genteel audience for his experiment. *The Toy-shop* was staged 34 times during the 1735 season—an impressive run—and merited six legitimate editions in a single year, not including pirated versions and translations.⁹⁰ For (perhaps) the first time, a dramatist had asked polite theater audiences to study themselves through a commercial lens.

The King and the Miller of Mansfield & Sir John Cockle: “The Labour of thine own Hands”

Two years after the Master first lectured his customers, Dodsley produced his second, most famous afterpiece: *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*. Once again, Dodsley chose to portray a confident, assertive businessman as a protagonist, and once again, Dodsley loosely based the plot on an old British source—this time, a politically-subversive popular ballad that

⁸⁹ Although *The Toy-shop* enjoyed a successful theater run, it was more popular in print, where the lack of action was less of a disadvantage (Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 43).

⁹⁰ Harry Solomon, Introduction to *The Toy-Shop and The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, ed. David Stuart Rodes (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1983), iv.

was originally printed in 1624.⁹¹ Fictional king-commoner encounters, like that between Henry II and the miller, were particularly popular during the Tudor and Jacobean era, surfacing in a variety of genres. The pastoral, an aristocratic narrative form, often depicts a king in rustic disguise, though in such texts the king's inherent nobility is apparent to all, and even peasants cannot be long deceived by the masquerade. In popular ballads, however, the commoner cannot recognize the king, even when the king is not disguised. The failure of recognition constitutes what Rochelle Smith has called "the most subversive aspect of the ballad motif," for it denies a natural distinction between aristocrat and peasant.⁹² Dodsley chooses to work within the ballad (rather than the pastoral) tradition, for at the beginning of the play, his king—lost in the woods—delivers a monologue that underlines the artificiality of nobility:

Of what Advantage is it now to be a King? Night shews me no Respect: I cannot see better, nor walk so well as another Man. What is a King? Is he not wiser than another Man? Not without his Counsellors I plainly find. Is he not more powerful? I oft have been told so, indeed, but what now can my Power command? Is he not greater and more magnificent? When seated on this Throne, and surrounded with Nobles and Flatterers, perhaps he may think so, but when lost in a wood, alas! What is he but a common Man?⁹³

⁹¹ Olav K. Lundeberg, "The True Sources of Robert Dodsley's *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*," *Modern Language Notes* 39, no. 7 (Nov. 1924): 395. Note also that Robert Dodsley was born and raised near Mansfield, and thus would have been particularly likely to be familiar with the tale. I find it interesting that Dodsley, having been denied a classical education, turned throughout his career to the recovery and preservation of native British texts: ballads, tales, and 'lost' Tudor or Jacobean plays.

⁹² Rochelle Smith, "King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad, Elizabethan Drama, and Shakespeare," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 301-02. For an in-depth analysis of the contemporary conflict between birth/worth, see Chapters 4 and 6 of McKeon's *Origins*.

⁹³ Dodsley, *The Toy-shop*, 11-12.

Dodsley retains the populist, satiric tone of the original ballad, in which the miller imagines that Henry II is “some Gentleman Thief.”⁹⁴ Dodsley’s King is virtuous, but he does not possess manifest nobility, nor do his manners distinguish him from others. Dodsley endorsed similarly democratic ideas later in his career; his *Chronicles of the Kings of England* (1740) discusses the reigns of various kings and queens with irreverent humor, and closes by tracing the lineage of every British monarch back to “*William the Conqueror, who was the son of a Whore.*”⁹⁵ Dodsley’s deliberately vulgar language undermines and demystifies the monarchy itself, a radical line of thought that not even the Opposition was willing to countenance.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, even popular ballads shied from seriously undermining existing power structures. The common protagonists in the original text are depicted as comical bumpkins, especially once King Henry brings the miller and the miller’s son, Dick, to court. The king chastises the miller for his theft of the king’s deer, and then turns to the son:

Quoth our king gently, 'How should I forget thee?
Thou wast my own Bed-fellow, well that I wot.
But I think of a Trick, tell me that, prithee Dick,
How thou with farting didst make the bed hot?'
'Thou whore-son happy knave,' then quoth the Knight,
'Speake cleanly to our king, or else go shite.'
The King and his Courtiers heartily laugh at this.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *A Collection of Old Ballads* (London: J. Roberts & D. Leach, 1723), 54. There were several near-identical versions of the ballad extant during the early eighteenth century. I have chosen to quote from the text in this popular ballad collection; the collection was reprinted multiple times during the 1720s, and therefore might easily have been consulted by Dodsley.

⁹⁵ Robert Dodsley, *The Second Book of the Chronicle of the Kings of England*. (London: T. Cooper, 1741), 51.

⁹⁶ The text was politically sensitive enough that Dodsley did not want it associated with himself or his business; he published *Chronicles* anonymously through a different bookseller (Solomon, 81).

⁹⁷ *A Collection of Old Ballads*, 61.

Henry II and his knight employ vulgar language, in keeping with the ballad tradition, but their status and power are never in question; the aristocrats laugh at Dick's supposed flatulence, and Dick is warned not to offer a similarly offensive response. The miller and his son are at times funny and irreverent, but they are fundamentally butts—crude, petty thieves who routinely poach the king's game.⁹⁸ The ballad implies that they should not be taken seriously, thereby reinforcing elite authority.

Dodsley charts a different path, for his plays are neither aristocratic nor popular; he seems more interested in legitimizing commercial culture than in promoting the rights of the common populace. Dodsley transforms the miller and Dick—traditional figures of low comedy—into the wise, earnest, respectable John Cockle and his equally earnest and respectable son. In effect, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, along with the sequel, *Sir John Cockle at Court*, are tributes to occupational independence. Harry Solomon views the play as a vehicle of typical Opposition rhetoric because Dodsley repeatedly praises the independent, rustic miller; the court and town were synonymous with political corruption, while “the corollary symbol for an uncorrupted England was the countryside.”⁹⁹ Yet as I discussed at the outset of this chapter, this assessment misses key aspects of the miller's language. In the first place, John Cockle is not portrayed as a romanticized peasant. Dodsley takes care to highlight his occupation as a miller, with the attendant pride and independence the position implies. His attitudes are thus much more closely aligned with those of urban tradesmen than with those of farm laborers. In addition, John Cockle does not truly align himself with Opposition landowners. Instead, he suggests that his independence is based in work itself, not in the passive reception of rents. To Cockle, then, the mill on which “he depends for Support” makes his identity possible—it separates him both from

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁹⁹ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 57.

the peasantry *and* the gentry who are engaged in “servilely cringing at Court.” It makes him a businessman.

Dodsley’s 1738 sequel, *Sir John Cockle at Court*, continues to connect independence with work. The king is dismayed by Cockle’s refusal to spend the king’s grant on the latest fashions, and tells him, “What I gave you was with a Design to set you above the mean Dependence of a Trade for Subsistence.”¹⁰⁰ The royal stipend represents the type of patronage that Dodsley had dreamed about as a footman: sufficient funds to obviate any necessity to labor for a living. Yet Cockle counters the king’s privileged view: “While my Trade will support me, I am independent, and I look upon that to be more honourable in an *Englishman* than any Dependence whatsoever.”¹⁰¹ Dodsley adopts the genteel emphasis on independence as a sign of virtue or moral worth, but he inverts its meaning. While the King understands independence in the traditional manner, as freedom from work or service, Dodsley’s Cockle counters that independence is rooted in an “honourable” occupation. His specification of “Trade” also supports an identification of Cockle with the commercial sort rather than common laborers. Furthermore, though Cockle lacks a polite education, he is far from the illiterate bumpkin typical of rural tradesmen in other late Stuart and Georgian plays. Instead, Dodsley suggests that Cockle can serve as an ethical role model for any “*Englishman*.” Nor are the miller’s sense and virtue intended to be anomalous; when the king tells Cockle that he does not speak or think like “a common Miller,” Cockle defends his fellow citizens: “Wisdom is not confined to palaces, nor always to be bought with Gold. I read often, and think sometimes; and he who does that, may gain some Knowledge even in a Cottage.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Robert Dodsley, *Sir John Cockle at Court* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1738), 10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 12.

As Dodsley elevates Cockle's occupational independence, he spends almost as much time highlighting the virtue of the physical work itself—echoing Defoe's "rhetoric of labor" in *The Compleat English Gentleman*.¹⁰³ In *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, when the miller's son, Dick, returns from London disappointed that he has not secured preferment, Cockle solemnly tells him, "No, no, Dick; instead of depending upon Lords promises, depend upon the Labour of thine own hands; expect nothing but what thou can'st earn, and then thou wilt not be disappointed."¹⁰⁴ Dodsley envisions no barrier between business and the manual work that makes business possible; the word "labor" might possibly be construed as intellectual or managerial, but he erases all ambiguity by specifying manual labor, or work performed with "thine own hands." The often-cited middling taboo on manual work did not, at this time, exist for the commercial fraction. Instead, Cockle draws attention to the physical means of production as if they enhance his respectability or virtue; Dodsley connects labor to virtue as closely as he ties labor to independence.

Later verses of Cockle's song add grittier texture to Dodsley's vision of work. As with his Master in *The Toy-Shop*, he grants satirical authority—and thus credibility—to a commercial voice, which now rejects the elite aversion to labor. Although the Miller "all dusty and whitend'd does go,"¹⁰⁵ and

Tho' his Hands are so dawb'd they're not fit to be seen,
The Hands of his Betters are not very clean;
A Palm more polite may as dirtily deal;

¹⁰³ See Introduction, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Dodsley, *The Miller of Mansfield*, 30. None of this language appears in the original ballad, so the emphasis is Dodsley's own.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 38.

Gold, in handling, will stick to the Fingers like Meal.¹⁰⁶

The rhetoric of court corruption and virtuous independence was part of a long and pervasive satiric tradition, but never had virtue been so fully tied to the laboring body. The elite—free from the need to focus on the material aspects of the human condition—had long distinguished themselves from the lower ranks by associating virtue and taste with intellectual or spiritual qualities. Roy Porter contends that polite culture “equated the flesh and the plebs, and hence made the bodily connote all that was vulgar, disorderly, contagious and threatening.”¹⁰⁷ Dodsley turns the elite commonplace on its head. His laboring body, signified here primarily by his “dusty” appearance and “dawb’d” hands, is not more vulgar than the clean, uncalloused hands of noblemen. Dodsley implies that Cockle’s soiled appearance is honorable—or, at the least, less shameful than the sycophantic “Hands of his Betters.” Dodsley thereby asserts an alternative form of respectability, one in which virtue is grounded in the physical labor of a trade rather than in intellectual cultivation or high-mindedness.

Dodsley’s later ballad-opera *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*¹⁰⁸ (1741) offers the same rhetorical moves as his two ‘Miller’ plays. In the original ballad, Bessy, the daughter of a maligned nobleman disguised as a beggar, marries a knight. Dodsley substitutes a young, penniless merchant named Welford as the romantic lead.¹⁰⁹ Welford repeatedly declares his poverty, but just as often declares his desire to work. As he tries to convince Bessy—the

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin Books, 2003). See also Chapter 2 of *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, by Peter Stallybrass & Allon White. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.

¹⁰⁸ *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, like Dodsley’s other dramatic works, is based on folk literature. In this case, the story originated as a traditional ballad, then was transformed into a play by John Daye around 1600. Although Solomon claims that Dodsley’s *Blind Beggar* is based on Daye’s version (see 92-93), I don’t think Daye was a primary source. Dodsley’s play more closely follows various eighteenth-century print versions of the traditional ballad. See for example *A Collection of Old Ballads*, Volume 2.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Dodsley, *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* (London: R. Dodsley, 1741). Welford’s history is never fully explained, but he does say that “all [my father] had, I think, was lost at sea” (23). The remark implies he is the son of a merchant.

beggar's daughter—to marry him, he says that “Whilst these hands can work [your father] can never know want.”¹¹⁰ Later, he tells her father: “The greatest pleasure I could have, would be to maintain you and your daughter by the honest Labour of my Hands.”¹¹¹ He even sings a song about “Labour,”¹¹² and after the beggar is revealed as an exiled (albeit wealthy) nobleman, Welford regrets his loss of “the Pleasure I had promised myself in laboring with my Hands to maintain the Father of my Love.”¹¹³ Dodsley continues to connect work with the body; even at the end of the play, when it would have been less awkward for Welford to envision simply “laboring to maintain” Bessy's father, he injects “with my hands.” The unnecessary repetition points to purposeful counterdiscourse—language designed to redeem and thereby legitimize labor.

The resolution is more plainly supersessionist. As the play opens, Bessy has received an appealing offer of marriage from the honorable Sir William Morely; he loves her, possesses a “good-natur'd and agreeable” temperament, and appears to be neither old nor unattractive.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, at the close of the play she successfully pleads to marry Welford instead. Dodsley's Bessy—perhaps without precedent in British literature—prefers a kind and virtuous (working) businessman to an equally kind and virtuous (leisured) gentleman. Since both men are apparently irreproachable, Bessy's choice seems to elevate the commercial interpretation of virtue over the elite form.

Dodsley's affirmation of labor applies to women as well. *Sir John Cockle* lacks a complex plot, but what little action there is involves Cockle's daughter, Kitty, who has been

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 24.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 44.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 25. Dodsley does not reference Sir William Morely's age or appearance. They do not seem to be factors in Bessy's choice of Welford.

puffed up by her father's royal honors. Her original, humble suitor Greenwood emphasizes to Kitty that they would "live in a Cottage on a little Farm," though the farm would be (of course) "independent."¹¹⁵ Kitty replies:

Adieu to your Cart and your Plough;
I scorn to milk your Cow.
Your Turkeys and Geese;
Your Butter and Cheese,
Are much below me now.
If ever I wed,
I'll hold up my Head,
And be a fine Lady, I vow.¹¹⁶

Although genteel middling criticisms of aristocratic excess had commonly cited their obsession with expensive fashions, gambling, and general dissipation, Dodsley's satire focuses entirely on Kitty's unwillingness to work. The chores she mentions are all the type of tasks that William Stout's mother performed, and which he felt comfortable publishing in his autobiography.¹¹⁷

Commercial middling women, unlike their polite counterparts, were not culturally restricted to the supervision of servants and needlework. Booksellers were no exception; John Feather notes that most of their "wives and children were actively engaged in the day-to-day work."¹¹⁸ Dodsley himself often worked closely with the independent trade publisher Mary Cooper, who had run her husband's business since his death in 1743; in fact, his dealings with the Coopers' business

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 20-21.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

¹¹⁷ See Introduction, 33-34.

¹¹⁸ Feather, *History of British Publishing*, 51-52.

increased after Mary assumed full control.¹¹⁹ Manual labor was, for Dodsley and other commercial families, perfectly respectable—even virtuous—and his censure of Kitty implies praise for those women who are willing to work. Both of Dodsley’s John Cockle plays superficially incorporate the kind of virtue-and-independence rhetoric that would have appealed to a broad swathe of the elite community, especially to the Opposition, but a closer study reveals a much more radical revision of virtue to accord with commercial values.

The King and the Miller of Mansfield was a substantial and reliable success throughout the eighteenth century; the most popular play of 1737, it was performed at least 37 times in its opening season.¹²⁰ David Erskine-Baker, a contemporary drama critic, highly approved of Dodsley’s work: “The sentimental Parts such as do Honour both to the Head and the Heart of its Author, and the Catastrophe tho’ simple yet affecting, and perfectly just.”¹²¹ When combined with the lasting success of *The Toy-shop*, these details might suggest that Dodsley was positioned to become one of the more influential playwrights of his age, and perhaps to have a profound effect on genteel discourse. Yet his plays almost disappeared from public notice by the end of the century, and remain obscure even to current scholars. Instead, Dodsley was to achieve his greatest and most lasting influence with didactic prose.

Lost in Translation

Despite their popularity and groundbreaking social implications, Dodsley’s plays do not seem to have re-centered public discourse. Part of the problem is that Dodsley dropped out of the theater business within a few years of his debut. After he trained as a bookseller, he produced four plays in six years: *The Toy-shop* (1735), *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737), *Sir*

¹¹⁹ Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence*, 40-43.

¹²⁰ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 55. The play also had staying power; by 1779, it had been performed at least 286 times (Kavenik, *British Drama*, 120, 165).

¹²¹ David Erskine-Baker, *Companion to the Play-House*, Vol. 1 (London: T. Becket & P.A. Dehondt, 1764), KI.

John Cockle (1738), and *The Blind Beggar of Bethnel Green* (1741). Then he abruptly turned from the stage, focusing almost entirely upon didactic fiction and editorial ventures for the remaining 23 years of his life.¹²² Doubtless, one reason for Dodsley's shift in focus is the same reason that other playwrights began to abandon the theatre around the same time: the Walpole-driven Licensing Act of 1737 rendered the profession disagreeable, for political and practical reasons.¹²³ The result was a sweeping creative exodus from drama to fiction, especially novels.¹²⁴ Dodsley never wrote any novels, but he was still affected by the changing political environment. His two 'Miller' plays were rife with anti-Walpole rhetoric, but at the debut of *Sir John Cockle* in 1738, the audience "found fault" with several lines—enough fault that Dodsley altered/deleted them and then announced the changes when the play was first published.¹²⁵ One year later, Dodsley was actually imprisoned for eight days after publishing Paul Whitehead's *Manners*, a scathing attack on the political establishment. Though Solomon argues, with good reason, that Dodsley was arrested primarily as a substitute for more powerful Opposition figures, Dodsley's activities were nevertheless under serious scrutiny throughout this period.¹²⁶ Dodsley's literary specialty had been his politically-allusive satire and wit, but subversive drama had now become

¹²² In 1753, Dodsley attempted georgic verse, publishing the first third of a projected three-part blank verse series on *Public Virtue*. See Juan Christian Pellicer, "The Georgic at Mid-Eighteenth Century and the Case of Dodsley's 'Agriculture.'" *The Review of English Studies, New Series* 54, no. 213 (Feb., 2003): 67-93. Pellicer writes that Dodsley's poem was "the first formal georgic to treat agricultural topics with unambiguous respect for the practical craftsmanship of farming and gardening, without distancing irony" (70). The foregrounding of physical labor, in what Pellicer calls "graphic detail" (82), may have been off-putting to genteel readers, but it illustrates Dodsley's lasting interest in destigmatizing manual work.

¹²³ Although the Act was intended primarily to stem the tide of thinly-veiled political abuse that had thrived throughout the 1720s and 30s, the effects reached far beyond a slight modification of content. Only two acting venues were granted patents; these privileged companies, freed from most of the competition, chose to rely more heavily upon repertory rather than invest in the time, money, and risk attendant upon staging new dramas. See Robert Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre: 1728-1737* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 249. Many erstwhile playwrights, such as Henry Fielding and Henry Brooke, found novel-writing a much more congenial genre.

¹²⁴ Bevis, *English Drama*, 194-95.

¹²⁵ Robert Dodsley, *Trifles* (London: R. Dodsley, 1745), 78. It is unclear what specific changes were made, but he does thank the opening night audience for "correcting" him.

¹²⁶ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 63.

dangerous to write or produce. He may have written *Blind Beggar* to test the waters with safer material, but the piece fizzled on opening night.¹²⁷

Commercial drama also became increasingly unfashionable. Drama had always been particularly subject to audience tastes,¹²⁸ but during the second half of the eighteenth century, the business was a buyer's market, "emphatically not a playwright's theatre."¹²⁹ Those authors who persevered were usually less interested in innovation than they were in the likelihood they could produce one of the few plays managers would deem 'safe' enough to warrant the financial risk. Given these circumstances, mid-to late-eighteenth century playwrights generally chose to recycle the same types of anodyne plots and characters that had stood the test of time. Most comedies of the 1740s and 1750s dropped the racier Tudor and Restoration material, but they adhered to most of the polite conventions and stock characters of earlier drama: protagonists are always genteel, and citizens are always villains or fools.¹³⁰ Polite discourse thus dominated the London boards, in both comedies and tragedies, through the end of the century.¹³¹ Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777), although a consummate sentimental comedy, is typical in this respect; it depicts long-established genteel attitudes while censuring commercial values. Charles Surface, like the other protagonists, is polite; he is also a deeply-indebted spendthrift, but is charitable and good-hearted. Joseph Surface—Charles' brother—is outwardly responsible, but is ultimately exposed as cunning and avaricious. The characterizations of these two brothers, which privilege openhandedness and scorn shrewdness, are reminiscent of Fielding's juxtapositioning

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 92-93. Although the play itself failed, the songs became quite popular; they were reprinted separately on several occasions.

¹²⁸ Kavenik, *British Drama*, 1.

¹²⁹ Matthew J. Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknes Press), 106.

¹³⁰ Bevis, *English Drama*, Chapter 13. See especially the works of Benjamin Hoadly and Arthur Murphy. Even for tragedies, "the bourgeois trend" of the 1720s and 30s ended abruptly (201).

¹³¹ Kavenik, *British Drama*, 150.

of Tom Jones and Blifil.¹³² In this environment, Dodsley, the author of idiosyncratic commercial (and often political) satire, may simply have decided that his creative efforts were best directed elsewhere.

Cultural barriers between Dodsley and his audience also limited the influence of his work. Audiences thoroughly enjoyed *The Toy-shop* and *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, but no surviving contemporary comments remark upon the supersessionist aspects of Dodsley's rhetoric. Instead, viewers praised the aspects of each play that were most amenable to an elite worldview: the general moral satire, the Opposition themes, and the sentiment. Throughout this period, playhouses continued to attract far more of the aristocracy, gentry, and professions than middling London tradesmen, and theatergoers viewed his work through a polite lens even if Dodsley's language frequently belies a polite interpretation. Georgian theater audiences were simply unable to decode his rhetoric.¹³³ Aaron Hill's theatrical magazine, *The Prompter*, remarked that *The Toy-shop*, although lacking "any THEATRICAL Merit whatsoever, received the loudest Applauses that I have heard this long while, only on Account of its General and well-Adapted Satire on the Follies of Mankind."¹³⁴ The anonymous author broadly commends the play for the wit and morality—he takes no notice of anything unconventional. Audiences also seem to have viewed *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* as straightforward Opposition rhetoric, pitting a virtuous countryside against the corrupt court; one typical review simply concludes that "there is a rural Simplicity in *The Miller of Mansfield* which is excessively

¹³² Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997). Fielding marked Blifil's villainy by citing his "avarice and ambition" (288).

¹³³ See Introduction, 18.

¹³⁴ *The Prompter* (London: J.Peele, February 18, 1735).

entertaining.”¹³⁵ The polite public does not appear to have noted the differences between genteel visions of country virtue and Dodsley’s more commercial iterations.

In 1762, the anonymous *Art of Poetry on a New Plan* directly conflated Dodsley’s commercial sentiments with polite rhetoric. In one section, the text celebrates “songs that are written in praise of a country life, or on contentment and happiness.” The author first offers a song written in 1736 by the Reverend Thomas Fitzgerald, an usher at Westminster School, and a friend of Alexander Pope¹³⁶:

No glory I covet, no riches I want,
Ambition is nothing to me;
The one thing I beg of kind heaven to grant,
Is a mind independent and free.
With passion unruffled, untainted with pride,
By reason my life let me square;
The wants of my nature are cheaply supply’d,
And the rest are but folly and care.
The blessings which providence freely has lent,
I’ll justly and gratefully prize
While sweet meditation and chearful content
Shall make me both healthy and wise.¹³⁷

Fitzgerald’s sentiments are the conventional praises of genteel rusticity. He disclaims any ambition, which appears possible because the necessary “blessings” of life have arrived without

¹³⁵ *A View of the Edinburgh Theater During the Summer Season, 1759* (London: A. Morley, 1760), 16.

¹³⁶ Valerie Rumbold and Thomas McGeary, “‘Folly’, Session Poems, and the Preparations for Pope’s ‘Dunciads,’” *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 56, no. 226 (Sept. 2005): 587-88.

¹³⁷ *The Art of Poetry on a New Plan*, Vol. 2 (London: J. Newbery, 1762), 51-52.

any effort on his part—“providence freely has lent” them, apparently without the obligation to work for them. The life is quiet and retired, one in which contemplation and “sweet meditation” are possible. The speaker is clearly a landowner, or at least in possession of a living that obviates the need to struggle. *Art of Poetry* then offers a second example—the song from *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*—writing that the “pleasant smartness of satire, the natural turns of the thought, and easiness of expression, cannot be too much admired.”¹³⁸ The Cockle song, of course, does praise rustic virtue and independence, but provides a stark contrast to Fitzgerald’s poem in numerous ways. Cockle does not sing of meditation, nor does he rely upon “kind heaven” or “providence” to provide for his needs; he labors for his living, and his “daub’d” hands testify to his efforts. He also embraces honest ambition, for he can “endeavour to heap an estate” and focus on “bring[ing] grist to his mill.”¹³⁹ The poems provide two distinct visions of independence and virtue—but the author of *Art of Poetry* cannot see these differences, grouping them together as “songs that are written in praise of a country life.” Dodsley’s expression of the commercial identity is invisible to this polite critic.

For all of these reasons—the diminishing space for partisan satire, the increasingly inhospitable environment for new plays, the mid-century dominance of genteel drama, and the interpretive gap between Dodsley’s rhetoric and his primary audience—Dodsley’s drama was ultimately unable to shift polite British discourse. Although some of his plays were very popular, they were remembered primarily for their conventional qualities; the truly groundbreaking aspects seem to have gone unnoticed, or at least unnoticed by the dominant populace. After Dodsley’s four plays, no one placed a commercial protagonist onstage for generations. Dodsley’s situation—his inability to leave a lasting literary impression—is similar to that of Thomas

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

¹³⁹ Dodsley, *The Miller of Mansfield*, 36.

Deloney, the former silk-weaver who wrote popular prose romances at the end of the sixteenth century. In proto-novels such as *The Gentle Craft* and *Jack of Newberry*, Deloney introduces commercial protagonists, such as clothiers, shoemakers, and weavers, and depicts them with depth and complexity. His work suggests that the trade populace is not only worthy of social respect, but can provide “models of virtue and industry.”¹⁴⁰ Deloney’s work was rendered obsolete during the Civil War, and remained anomalous until Daniel Defoe began writing one hundred years later. Nevertheless, he still merits and has received the attention of numerous modern critics, most recently Alex Davis in his study of Renaissance historical fiction.¹⁴¹ Robert Dodsley’s drama deserves a similar degree of attention.¹⁴²

Finally, eighteenth-century polite receptions of Dodsley’s plays have affected—even limited—the ways in which current scholarship interprets them. The few critics who have discussed Dodsley’s plays focus on the elements that seemed important to elite Georgian audiences: his general satire and the Opposition rhetoric. The results, I would suggest, are fundamental misreadings of Dodsley’s ethos and agenda. Richard Bevis writes briefly that *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* is “a patriotic story of the incognito King impartially dispensing justice to courtiers and rustics, [and it] skirts melodrama to reach comedy of a sober sort.”¹⁴³ In his edition of Dodsley’s correspondence, James Tierney remarks only that *The Toy-shop* contained “gentle satire of contemporary extravagances.”¹⁴⁴ Even Harry Solomon, Dodsley’s biographer, focuses on the more unoriginal aspects of Dodsley’s drama. He prefaces his discussion of *The Toy-shop* by claiming that Lillo’s *London Merchant* inspired Dodsley to

¹⁴⁰ Merritt E. Lawlis, *Apology for the Middle Class: The Dramatic Novels of Thomas Deloney* (Indiana UP, 1960), 44.

¹⁴¹ Alex Davis, *Renaissance Historical Fiction: Sidney, Deloney, Nashe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011).

¹⁴² Brean Hammond, who wrote *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670-1740: 'Hackney for Bread'*, is currently writing a book on Dodsley.

¹⁴³ Bevis, *English Drama*, 173.

¹⁴⁴ Tierney, Introduction to *Correspondence*, 5.

“please both aspiring merchants and their fashionable customers,”¹⁴⁵ but in the following pages Solomon does not explain what aspects of the play might have been particularly pleasing to merchants or tradesmen. Instead, he discusses the rural/court contrasts in *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* as Opposition rhetoric, and also suggests that the play is essentially conservative because it “assumes that in a just hierarchical system, rank will correlate with goodness.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, since the King ultimately chastises Lurewell and elevates John Cockle, traditional social order is upheld. Solomon does not seem to notice that Dodsley’s miller never assimilates. Cockle is vociferously unwilling to shed his own identity in order to adopt genteel values—and more daringly, he implies that his own commercial values are superior to those of the elite.

“The Labour of Virtue”: Dodsley’s Didactic Prose

Dodsley ultimately had a deeper and more lasting influence in print than he had on the stage. Amidst his many ordinary projects, Dodsley conceived, edited, and/or wrote numerous major publications containing the same markers of commercial discourse that were written into his drama: the inscription of labor, occupational independence, and ambition into the concept of virtue. Dodsley was most effective in didactic genres that privileged a pithy wit and moral clarity, which was seen early with the publication of his satirical *Chronicle of the Kings of England*.¹⁴⁷ Print was more suited to his rhetorical aims as well. First, it was more easily accessible to a middling populace—both genteel and commercial—that could not make frequent visits to the playhouse. In addition, didactic texts were especially valued and internalized by a

¹⁴⁵ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 42.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁷ Searches of *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* reveal that it sold very well (three editions in one year), which likely prompted him to produce a second volume about the monarchs from King James I through the current king, George II. The books ran through at least thirteen editions by the end of the century, and were included in Dodsley’s collected works (*Trifles*) at least four additional times.

middling sort eager to improve both their financial situations and social conduct; ‘self-help’ genres routinely outsold fiction throughout the eighteenth-century.¹⁴⁸ Dodsley’s prose and other editorial projects thus reached a wider audience than his plays ever had, so they had greater scope for a long-term impact upon public discourse.

The most influential of these works was *The Oeconomy of Human Life*, a 1750 conduct book ostensibly translated “from an Indian manuscript, written by an ancient Bramin.”¹⁴⁹ Like many of his other works, Dodsley published it without his name attached; the town was so impressed that rumors attributed *The Oeconomy* to Philip Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield.¹⁵⁰ A careful reading of the text, however, offers evidence that the writer was not a gentleman. Unlike religious and genteel conduct manuals, *The Oeconomy of Human Life* is largely a guidebook to practical virtue and material success rather than urbanity or social prestige—nor does piety appear to be a primary concern, as most of the text focuses upon the *usefulness* of its recommendations rather than their righteousness. The first part contains “The DUTIES that relate to MAN considered as an Individual.” These duties are essentially utilitarian: consideration (i.e., forethought), modesty, application, emulation (i.e., ambition), prudence, fortitude, contentment, temperance—all of which Dodsley suggests are important to prosperity. Application is industry, or the proper “way to employ the present time,”¹⁵¹ and Dodsley describes it in a particularly commercial manner:

¹⁴⁸ Hunter, *Before Novels*, Chapter 9. In Chapter 3, Hunter also argues that new readers were largely urban and ambitious. Although he does not offer deeper occupational analyses, these terms perfectly describe the commercial sort. On the popularity of didactic material, see Hunter, 235. Fiction itself was, of course, often highly didactic; I discuss Richardson’s didacticism at length in Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Dodsley, *The Oeconomy of Human Life. Translated from an Indian manuscript, written by an ancient Bramin* (London: M. Cooper, 1750). Dodsley does slyly acknowledge that the ‘Bramin’ authorship is a fiction: “If it was not for some turns of expression peculiar to the East and the impossibility of accounting for its being written in this very ancient language, many would suppose it to be the work of a European.” (xv)

¹⁵⁰ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 141. Chesterfield’s posthumous *Letters to His Son* became models of polite conduct.

¹⁵¹ Dodsley, *The Oeconomy of Human Life*, 4.

Whatsoever thou resolveth to do, do it quickly—defer not to the evening what the morning may accomplish. Idleness is the parent of want and of pain; but the labour of virtue bringeth forth pleasure. The hand of diligence defeateth want; prosperity and success are the industrious man’s attendants. Who is he that hath acquired wealth; that hath risen to power, that hath clothed himself with honour, that is spoken of in the city with praise, and that standeth before the king in his counsel? Even he that hath shut out idleness from his house; and hath said unto sloth, Thou art mine enemy. He riseth up early, and lieth down late; he exerciseth his mind with contemplation, and his body with action; and preserveth the health of both.¹⁵²

As discussed in the Introduction, genteel conduct books commonly censured idleness, but Dodsley’s language is much better suited to an ambitious businessman. For a start, diligence is said to defeat “want,” to prevent poverty—which was not normally a major polite concern. Readers are also encouraged to maximize their productive hours. More importantly, the writer encourages readers to seek “prosperity and success,” worldly concerns that represent quintessentially commercial aspirations. Those Britons who showed occupational ambition, who sought to achieve “success,” were frequently reproached or satirized by their social superiors.¹⁵³ Dodsley, however, exhorts his readers to set goals and pursue temporal rewards, whether these include the polite aim to stand “before the king in his counsel,” or the more commercial desire to “acquire wealth” and be “spoken of in the city with praise.” Ambition is virtuous, suggests Dodsley, and so is the proper use of time in order to achieve those ambitions.

He more fully and directly endorses ambition in his section on “Emulation”:

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁵³ See Introduction, 23.

Endeavour to be the first in thy calling, whatever it be; neither let any one go before thee in well doing: nevertheless, do not envy the merits of another, but improve thine own talents. Scorn also to depress thy competitor by dishonest or unworthy methods; strive to raise thyself above him only by excelling him: so shall thy contest for superiority be crowned with honour, if not with success.”¹⁵⁴

Throughout *Oeconomy of Human Life* Dodsley makes an effort to keep the language appropriate to a supposedly ancient Eastern text, yet the sentiments expressed here undeniably belong to Dodsley’s contemporary commercial community, which alone possessed favorable views of competition. Polite conduct books did not exhort readers to surpass fellow Britons “in thy calling.” Polite praise of merchants also tended to focus upon their value to the nation as a whole, not upon any one merchant’s hard-fought ability to outmaneuver other traders. He even uses the word “competitor,” implying a rather adversarial interpretation of the word “calling.” Interestingly, Dodsley appropriates a highly aristocratic trope, “crowned with honour,” in order to describe how a successful businessman—not a king’s counsellor or a beneficent lord—should be treated, thus indirectly equating patrician and commercial achievement. Dodsley has rewritten elite definitions of virtue to include ambition.

The Oeconomy of Human Life has some traditional elements; for instance, it situates the reader within a series of hierarchical, “ordered domestic relationships.”¹⁵⁵ The familial structure depicted is not democratic, but patriarchal and conservative, with specific duties allocated to each family member; the text also advocates a number of conventional conduct book values, including temperance and, later in a section on social duties, such genteel virtues as justice and benevolence. However, Dodsley shifts the implications of these ‘polite’ virtues to make them

¹⁵⁴ Dodsley, *Oeconomy of Human Life*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Karen Harvey, “Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Gender & History* 21, no. 3 (November 2009): 534.

relevant to working households. For instance, *The Gentleman's Library*, a popular eighteenth-century conduct book, connects benevolence to the gentleman's privileged status:

A Gentleman in a Country Life enjoys Paradise with a Temper fit for it; who understands the Station in which Heaven and Nature have plac'd him; he is more Superior to those of low Fortune by his Benevolence, than his Possessions; and justly divides his Time between Solitude and Company, so as to use the one for the other.¹⁵⁶

Here, the gentleman's benevolence is a mark of his rank, which has fitted him to have a more expansive, more generous temperament than those less fortunate. The author's other references to benevolence have to do with polite friendship, a disinterested but profound connection between two equals: "We must conceive that *Friendship* is not to be sought, from a view to *profit*, and *avaricious Inclination*; but as all its Fruits and Advantages consist in the Passion of *Love*, and *mutual Benevolence*."¹⁵⁷ The author explicitly opposes benevolence to profit—the essence of benevolence is its distance from self-interest. Dodsley's section on "Benevolence," however, yokes the polite virtue to personal profit:

Thy food, thy cloathing, thy convenience of habitation, thy protection from the injuries, thy enjoyment of the pleasures and comforts of life, thou owest to the assistance of others; and couldst not enjoy but in the bands of society. It is thy duty therefore to be friendly to mankind, as it is thy interest that men should be friendly to thee.¹⁵⁸

Dodsley recommends sociable behavior because it will further the readers' "interest," implying that a concern for one's personal benefit is an appropriate factor in social interactions. Polite

¹⁵⁶ *The Gentleman's Library*, 403-4.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 95.

¹⁵⁸ Dodsley, *Oeconomy of Human Life*, 66.

texts eschewed such presumably vulgar considerations—but for tradesmen, friendship and instrumentality were not mutually exclusive. Trade sociability was a web of professional interdependence, and friends could be expected to offer business support (e.g., custom, referrals, loans) as well as companionship.¹⁵⁹

Dodsley has thus appropriated the traditional signification of family—as a little kingdom in which each member has differing degrees of power and responsibility—and repackaged it to promote commercial values. Benevolence becomes business-friendly. The resulting proto-bourgeois amalgam resonated deeply with the British public. Between publication in 1751 and 1800, *The Oeconomy of Human Life* was issued in approximately two hundred editions, possibly more individual printings than *any other* eighteenth-century text. Dodsley's *Oeconomy* was, significantly, especially popular in commerce-friendly America. Even though the American publishing industry was in its infancy, one quarter of the total editions were issued there, both before and after the Revolutionary War—including two versions printed by Benjamin Franklin, the maestro of practical commercial wisdom.¹⁶⁰ Dodsley also issued the immensely successful *Select Fables of Esop and Other Fabulists*, many of which he himself reworked (or invented) to clarify each moral and express various commercial iterations of virtue.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, Dodsley commissioned a number of innovative non-fiction texts that also promoted commercial values to the general public. In 1748, Dodsley's affinity for memorandum

¹⁵⁹ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 294-95. See also Jon Stobart, "The Economic and Social Worlds of Rural Craftsmen-Retailers in Eighteenth-Century Cheshire," *The Agricultural History Review* 52, no. 2 (2004). Stobart writes that "shared economic concerns brought individuals closer in social and emotional terms, and an individual's business dealings often mapped closely onto their personal friendships" (156).

¹⁶⁰ Donald D. Eddy, "Dodsley's 'Oeconomy of Human Life,' 1750-1751," *Modern Philology* 85, no. 4 (May, 1988): 460-479

¹⁶¹ For example, in one of Dodsley's original fables, a fly dismisses ants as "low mechanic creatures who live by their industry." The ant replies that when it "retire[s] to the hoarded granaries, which my own honest industry has filled, enjoy every satisfaction, independent of the favour either of beauties or of kings." Robert Dodsley, *Select Fables of Esop and Other Fabulists* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761), 171. Dodsley's fables were reprinted at least 12 times in Britain through the end of the century, and were widely praised as the best fables in English (Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 363).

books—first seen in *The Toy-shop*—resurfaced when Tully’s Head issued the *New Memorandum Book*, subtitled “the gentleman and tradesman’s daily pocket journal.”¹⁶² Dodsley had sparked a new genre, combining the functionality of almanacs with space for daily personal note-taking. Unlike almanacs, which simply included a calendar, important tables, and other information, Dodsley’s memorandum books came equipped with a blank page for each day, to encourage the owners to take notes, keep track of their appointments, and otherwise manage their time more effectively. The resulting product formed “the prototype of the modern diary.”¹⁶³ Dodsley thus recommended a commercial mindset to the public at large, and his approach was massively influential. The books, which appeared annually in November, became so popular that myriad imitations arose, such as Richard Baldwin’s *Gentleman and Tradesmen’s Daily Journal*¹⁶⁴ and *The London Pocket Book*.¹⁶⁵ Dodsley had made it fashionable for men—including gentlemen—to carefully manage their time. Although it might have been easy for polite audiences to overlook or ignore Dodsley’s vision of labor in his plays, a gentleman’s purchase of a memorandum book was an acknowledgement that practical management is a valuable skill, even for those outside the counting house. Dodsley had, through his own works and their numerous imitators, helped to infuse the rhetoric of the commercial populace into broader public discourse.

Conclusions

Harry Solomon has insightfully analyzed Dodsley’s importance to the “New Age of Print,”¹⁶⁶ the transition between a traditional, aristocratic “patron” system and the burgeoning supremacy of publishers. Solomon surveys several aspects of Dodsley’s writings: his

¹⁶² *The New Memorandum Book Improv'd* (London: R. Dodsley, 1753).

¹⁶³ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 131.

¹⁶⁴ Cyprian Blagden, “Thomas Carnan and the Almanack Monopoly,” *Studies in Bibliography* 14 (1961): 26.

¹⁶⁵ Dodsley had to scramble to maintain his preeminence (Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, 131), revising the *New Memorandum Book*—according to the title page—to make it “more useful and convenient for all Sorts of Business, than any of those who have pretended to imitate it; and as it was the First, so now it is the Best Book of the Kind.”

¹⁶⁶ Solomon, *Rise of Robert Dodsley*, title page.

contributions to “proletarian poetry” with *A Muse in Livery*, his importance as a “sentimentalist” playwright, and his political criticism.¹⁶⁷ Dodsley’s actual significance, however, is much larger than Solomon and other scholars have realized. In the first place, his rhetoric is distinct from the genteel forms that dominated Georgian drama, foregrounding the chasm between discourse and counterdiscourse. Dodsley consistently connects virtue to manual work, ambition, and order, signifying a rhetoric that had, until then, rarely penetrated the world of polite letters. His plays can thus facilitate a deeper understanding of the perpetually overwritten commercial populace.

Dodsley is also noteworthy as an agent of cultural change. He designed and wrote texts that disseminated his community’s values; his drama may not have successfully influenced polite audiences, but ventures such as the *New Memorandum Book* and *The Preceptor* were admired and embraced by both polite and commercial Britons. Dodsley did not, of course, transform the entire middling populace into businessmen, but the lasting popularity of his didactic texts—and the extent to which they were often imitated—suggests that they helped to bring certain commercial behaviors and priorities, such as domestic management and competition, within the genteel pale. Robert Dodsley’s literary efforts granted a voice to the commercial fraction, even as his work helped to crystallize the nascent bourgeoisie.

¹⁶⁷ Solomon extensively discusses Dodsley’s broader accomplishments in the publishing industry, but only briefly discusses the literary works themselves, which he suggests is a more “narrowly conceived” (263) way to assess Dodsley’s importance.

CHAPTER 2

“Equally Useful”: Virtue and the Occupational Contract in Samuel Richardson’s Novels

My own industry, and God’s providence, have been my whole reliance. The great are not great to me, unless they are good. And it is a glorious privilege, that a middling man enjoys who has preserved his independency, and can occasionally (though not Stoically) tell the world, what he thinks of that world, in hopes to contribute, though but by his mite, to mend it.

—Letter from Richardson to Jean Baptiste de Freval, Jan. 21 1751

Samuel Richardson’s letter to de Freval embodies McKeon’s argument that narrative supersession rests upon “the legitimation of a humble social group in its own terms.”¹ Richardson justifies himself by pointing to commercial mores, writing that his “independency” is rooted in his work, his “own industry.”² In the process, he appropriates a phrase conventionally associated with elite social status, suggesting that his occupational independence constitutes a form of “glorious privilege.” Richardson stretches the language, engaging in a form of linguistic play—defining and redefining “great” to accord with competing forms of discourse. Though audiences and scholars have long understood that Richardson sought to express “his mite” to reform British society, I will argue that the signification of that mite has been rendered problematic by shifts in rhetoric and language. Most of Richardson’s polite readers understood that he wished to encourage virtue, for example, while misreading the way in which he used the word itself. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Richardson, like Dodsley, rewrote key elements of polite discourse to recommend specifically commercial iterations of virtue and power.

¹ McKeon, *Origins*, 225.

² Samuel Richardson to J. B. de Freval, January 21, 1751, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 175.

Our understanding of Richardson himself has remained unsettled, fluctuating uneasily between visions of Richardson as a bourgeois conservative and Richardson as a revolutionary.³ Jocelyn Harris succinctly encapsulates these perceived contradictions, writing that “Richardson’s image as a sober middle-class printer is deceptive, for the life he gives to radical ideas about hierarchy, power, education and reform demonstrates a considerable awareness of the intellectual and political ferment that had existed since the Civil War.”⁴ Studying Richardson as a commercial man, however, enables the reconciliation of these perspectives and facilitates a more consistent analysis of Richardson’s supersessionist discourse. His status as “a sober middle-class printer” did not conflict with his more radical ideas—it fostered them. Richardson, like Dodsley, was a businessman who translated aspects of the dominant culture to accord with (and legitimize) the commercial habitus.⁵ Robert Mayer writes that “in the eighteenth century, at least momentarily, what happens is that a form of fiction written by tradesmen, writing and preaching women, and printers, embodying a popular aesthetic—functionalist, moralizing—is endorsed by the aristocrats of culture.”⁶ Dodsley and Richardson both exhorted polite readers to adopt specifically commercial interpretations of virtue and social status; Dodsley had been largely

³ For studies discussing Richardson as a conservative/conformist, see T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 2-3. See also Emily Friedman’s recent article, “The End(s) of Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*,” *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 52, no. 3 (2012): 651-668. For studies discussing the more progressive elements in Richardson’s novels, see Tom Keymer and Peter Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace: Literary Controversy and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005). See also Stephanie Fysh, *The Work(s) of Samuel Richardson* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997).

⁴ Jocelyn Harris, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 1.

⁵ Though few letters between Richardson and Dodsley exist, we know that they were on familiar and friendly terms. Richardson was one of the printers Dodsley most often used, and his data indicates that Richardson printed texts for Dodsley on no fewer than 30 occasions. See Keith Maslen, *Samuel Richardson of London Printer: A Study of his Printing Based on Ornament Use and Business Accounts* (Otago: University of Otago, 2001). Richardson wrote to Lady Barbara Montagu that Dodsley was “an ingenious Man, a Writer himself, and no indifferent Judge of Writing” (Samuel Richardson to Lady Barbara Montagu, Feb. 17th, 1759, Harvard University, Houghton Library MS Hyde 77).

⁶ Mayer, “Did You Say Middle Class?”, 103. Mayer’s subsequent description of the ‘popular aesthetic’—“the idea that the new fiction must function, in a practical sense, as a guide to living, a fictional version of a conduct book, a manual for the would-be moralist?”—would most accurately apply to the commercial populace.

uninterested in prose fiction, but Richardson revolutionized the developing novel and managed to render a commercial literary voice broadly acceptable to “the aristocrats of culture.”⁷

“Their Worth and Quality”: Rowe, Aubin, and Polite Virtue

We can most fully distinguish Richardson’s commercial rhetoric if we contrast his material with the early (and nearly always genteel) fiction that immediately preceded his own career as an author.⁸ Scholars have previously established that he was greatly influenced by the didactic or ‘virtue’ fictions produced in the opening decades of the eighteenth-century, including works by Penelope Aubin and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, and routinely cite Richardson’s shared interest in using fiction to promote virtue.⁹ However, scholars mistakenly equate these forms of virtue; they do not seem to notice that these early didactic fictions consistently affirm an elite interpretation of virtue, valorizing fundamentally conservative qualities such as nobility and the renunciation of worldliness—thereby perpetuating definitions of virtue that Richardson’s novels challenge and overwrite.

Aubin’s narratives operate within the romance tradition; noble birth is manifested in physical appearance and manners, creating what McKeon has described as the aristocratic “unity of outward circumstance and inward essence.”¹⁰ In *The Life of Madame de Beaumont*, Aubin

⁷ In the Feb. 1759 letter to Lady Barbara, Richardson noted that his friend Dodsley thought “the day of Novels is over.” Although Dodsley was usually quite skilled at reading the London literary market, his opinion in this particular situation was rather seriously (though amusingly) mistaken.

⁸ Richardson was, of course, also influenced by Daniel Defoe, a fellow member of the commercial sort. (See Introduction, 39-41.) Defoe’s work is mostly outside the scope of this dissertation, but where relevant I will compare his work with Richardson’s.

⁹ Richardson probably wrote the flattering preface to a 1739 edition of Aubin’s collected works, just prior to his own composition of *Pamela*. See Wolfgang Zach, “Mrs. Aubin and Richardson’s Earliest Literary Manifesto (1739).” *English Studies: a Journal of English Language and Literature* 62, no. 3 (1981): 271-281. The seven-page preface indicates great affection for several of Aubin’s novels, quoting passages and discussing the types of incidents and themes common to her fiction. Richardson had certainly read Rowe’s work as well, since he printed several volumes of her epistolary fiction (Maslen, *Samuel Richardson of London*).

¹⁰ McKeon, *Origins*, Chapter 4.

refers to “two lovely young Men, whose Looks and Habit spoke their Worth and Quality,”¹¹ while the heroine’s mother describes a nunnery in which she was “kindly treated by the Abbess and Society, who were most of them Ladies born of good Families, and perfectly well bred.”¹² Throughout Aubin’s work, graceful manners and mien are trustworthy evidence of innate “Worth and Quality.” Consequently, the common folk in her novels are both the social and natural inferiors of those in the upper ranks. They are ascribed “mean Capacities and Education”—and even the best are described simply as loyal to their superiors, or “not altogether void of Good Nature and Humanity.”¹³ Aubin’s novels imply that gentility signals both moral and intellectual worth, and that polite behavior is inaccessible to those without privileged social status.

Aubin’s characterization of virtue—especially women’s virtue—is similarly based in essence rather than action, and often corresponds to the virtues of the cloister, especially chastity and piety. Aubin paints an inflexible vision of feminine sexuality, urging what Aparna Gollapudi calls a “surreally militant chastity.”¹⁴ Sexual continence is, if possible, more important to her (usually married) heroines than it is to Pamela and Clarissa; in *The Noble Slaves*, Maria explains that she successfully thwarted an attempted rape when she “tore [her] eyeballs out, and threw them at” her attacker.¹⁵ Aubin’s protagonists are also exceptionally devout; she openly sought to inspire greater piety in her readers, writing in the preface to *The Strange Adventures of Count de*

¹¹ Penelope Aubin, *The Life of Madame de Beaumont*, ed. Michael F. Shugrue. (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973), 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁴ Aparna Gollapudi, "Virtuous Voyages in Penelope Aubin's Fiction," *SEL: Studies in English Literature* 45, no. 3 (2005): 669.

¹⁵ Penelope Aubin, *The Noble Slaves: Or, the Lives and Adventures of Two Lords and Two Ladies, Who Were Shipwreck'd* (London: E. Bell et al., 1722), 33. The gesture is far more violent than polite, but it accords with the religious views of extreme piety that produced martyr narratives.

Vinevil that she has created a narrative in which “Divine Providence manifests itself in every transaction.”¹⁶

Conservative forms of virtue often entail a cloister-like separation from the world; it is located—as with Opposition rhetoric—in disinterest and rustic independence from supposed urban corruption, what John Richetti terms “the secure rural world of secluded virtue.”¹⁷ The monastic overtones are sometimes overt; in the opening pages of *The Life of Madame de Beaumont*, Aubin places her heroines in a cave on the Welsh coast, where they have been living in “sweet Retirement” for fourteen years.¹⁸ Aubin’s hero, Mr. Luelling, has also “wisely prefer’d a Country Retirement before noisy Courts, and Business.”¹⁹ Their preferences are not merely aesthetic. Unlike commercial authors, Aubin works to demonstrate that cities are the sources of human corruption: The villain Glandore

lived too long in that curs’d Town, where Vice takes place of Virtue, where Men rise by Villany and Fraud, where the lustful Appetite has all Opportunities of being gratify’d; where Oaths and Promises are only Jests, and all Religion but Pretence, and made a Skreen and Cloak for Knavery; a place where Truth and Virtue cannot live. Oh! curse on my Credulity, to trust so rich a Treasure to a Wolf, a lustful *Londoner*.²⁰

¹⁶ Penelope Aubin, *Adventures of Count de Vinevil*, ed. Michael F. Shugrue (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973), 6.

¹⁷ John Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 223. See also Robert Adams Day, *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 152-53.

¹⁸ Aubin, *Madame de Beaumont*, 13. In true genteel fashion, a rural retreat does not have to entail vulgar privation. The cave is fitted up with “Damask Beds” and consists of “five Rooms so contrived, and so richly furnished, that [Luelling] stood amazed” (16-17).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 102. Aubin offers a similar denunciation of London on 56.

Aubin's contemptuous italicization of that final word, "*Londoner*," speaks volumes. The bustling city—the home of ambition, trade, and upward mobility—is a moral cesspit, and true virtue flourishes when separate from the tainted world of exchange.²¹

Unlike Aubin, Rowe gestures to the experience of work, but the episodes are brief and romanticized. In separate narratives from *Letters Moral and Entertaining*, two highborn women—Rosalinda and Melinda—escape from vicious family situations by masquerading as servants. Yet though these ladies are ostensibly laboring for wages, Rowe is careful to distance them from manual work. Rosalinda assures the reader that the farmer's wife "happen'd to want a Servant, rather to share with her the Management of a large Family, than to be employed in any domestick Drudgery."²² Rosalinda's position gives her "a Pretence to keep my Distance, and to be as reserved as I think fit; so it frees me from any Drudgery, but what is my own Choice: the worst of which is rubbing a long Oaken Table, that graces the Hall."²³ Rowe avoids any imputation of vulgarity by emphasizing that Rosalinda maintains a healthy "Distance" from her coworkers and avoids nearly all manual labor; Margaret Doody refers to Rosalinda's position as "an absolute sinecure" which enables her to go "rambling about the lush countryside."²⁴ Even this limited form of service ends quickly when the mistress recognizes and responds to Rosalinda's manifest gentility, and Rosalinda soon marries a suitable member of the landed

²¹ Rowe also demonstrates an entrenched suspicion of urban life, and her protagonists consistently choose to retire from the corrupt city. See Elizabeth Rowe, *Letters Moral and Entertaining*, vol. 1. 2nd Edition (London: T. Worrall, 1733-34). Letter XI, in which a statesman celebrates his retirement into the country: "Indeed I was never more sensible of my own dignity; abstract from business or diversion, my mind retires within it self, where it finds treasures 'till now undiscover'd, capacities form'd for infinite objects, desires that stretch themselves beyond the limits of this wide creation, in search of the great original of life and pleasure" (58). It is the separation from—not engagement with—business that enables his moral development.

²² Rowe, *Letters Moral and Entertaining*, 3-4.

²³ *Ibid*, 6.

²⁴ Margaret Ann Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 42.

elite.²⁵ The second woman, Melinda, experiences a similarly fanciful form of service when she flees the debauchery of her brother's house and finds refuge as "Chamber-Maid" to a rich merchant's wife. Like Rosalinda, Melinda finds her situation to be rather undemanding: "I found myself perfectly at Ease, dressing my Mistress was all I had to do; which was a very agreeable Employment, and soon dispatch'd."²⁶ Melinda is also quickly rescued from her subservient position; the rich, well-bred merchant is so impressed by her virtue that he leaves her £10,000 before he departs on his next voyage, enabling her to reassume her prior genteel status.²⁷ Rowe seems to respect trade (or at least genteel trade), but her narratives represent the common experience as seen through a soft-focus lens, as if these two women have been involved in play-acting rather than genuine employment.

We should therefore recognize Aubin and Rowe's didactic fictions as models of polite discourse. At the moment *Pamela* was first published, these types of virtuous narratives were gaining in influence and popularity, even amongst the commercial populace. Yet because authorship remained in genteel hands, these texts were bound to the horizons of the polite imagination. Richardson was deeply attracted to their emphasis on virtue, yet he possessed a radically different frame of reference. Like Dodsley, he consciously reinterprets these dominant patterns of discourse, shaping his fiction to transmit his commercial vision to a wider public.

"Presumptuous!": Richardson's Counterdiscourse

Despite his literary fame, his sociability, and his patent gratification with the admiration of polite society, Richardson seems always to have identified as a tradesman. The first fifty years of his life are poorly documented when compared with the mountain of material that

²⁵ Rowe, *Letters Moral and Entertaining*, vol. 2, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 80.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 82.

accumulated following his literary debut, but enough information is available to outline his habits and principles.²⁸ Richardson's father was a master joiner, and after some time in rural Derbyshire, Richardson spent his adolescence on Tower Hill, surrounded by other tradesmen, warehouses, and a brewery.²⁹ The family did not have sufficient resources to offer Richardson an extensive education, and in 1706 he committed himself to a printer's apprenticeship under John Wilde. He later recalled that

I served a diligent Seven Years to it, to a Master who grudged every Hour to me, that tended not to his Profit...I stole from the Hours of Rest and Relaxation, my Reading Times for Improvement of my Mind...But this little Incident I may mention; I took Care, that even my Candle was of my own purchasing, that I might not in the most trifling Instance make my Master a Sufferer (and who used to call me The Pillar of his House) and not to disable myself by Watching, or Sitting-up to perform my Duty to him in the Day-time.³⁰

We have no independent corroboration of Richardson's model behavior, but the passage communicates what he believed to be the commercial ideal: the careful, industrious worker. Once set up as a printer, Richardson's business did not slacken until his death forty years later; Keith Maslen's research indicates that Richardson remained active in his business—and that business was booming—even through his authorship years. Maslen emphasizes that Richardson's writing did not encroach upon his trade: "Rather it was his managerial skills as printer, and his exceptional ability to focus his mental energies that enabled him both to print and

²⁸ Christine Gerrard, Introduction to *Correspondence with Aaron Hill* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), xiii.

²⁹ Eaves & Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson*, 6-7.

³⁰ Samuel Richardson, *The Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence and Stinstra's Prefaces to Clarissa*, ed. William C. Slattery (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1969), 25.

write so much.”³¹ Richardson continued to ply his trade even after he became a successful novelist; he does not seem to have aspired to join the gentry, and he never retired. In 1753, he told Stinstra that “my Business, Sir, has always been my chief concern.”³²

Notwithstanding his immersion in trade, Richardson acquired a deep familiarity with polite culture through his access to printed materials and his contact with genteel customers and acquaintances—nor was he averse to all genteel practices.³³ Consequently, scholars have focused on the connections between Richardson’s fiction and existing polite mores. Margaret Anne Doody and Sylvia Marks both read *Sir Charles Grandison* as a fundamentally polite, assimilationist text. Doody has suggested that Sir Charles is “the epitome of the virtues described in Richard Allestree’s *The Gentleman’s Calling*,” for Sir Charles represents a fusion of traditional genteel manners with Christian piety and virtue.³⁴ More recently, Marks published a comprehensive study of *Sir Charles Grandison* as “the most complete and compelling guide in its time to the duties, dilemmas, and moral choices faced by every member of a household under varying circumstances.”³⁵ She analyzes Richardson’s embedded advice regarding courtship, education, parental duty, and even narrower matters, such as fashion and dueling. All of these issues were relevant to Richardson and his contemporaries, but Doody and Marks overlook several ways in which Richardson subverts polite convention. Richardson promulgates an interpretation of virtue that differs substantially from the form assumed by Allestree; Richardson elevates labor, ambition, and two quintessential commercial values: time management and

³¹ Maslen, *Samuel Richardson Printer*, 8.

³² Richardson to Stinstra, June 2, 1753, *Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence*, 26.

³³ Eaves and Kimpel, 322-64. See also Maslen, *Samuel Richardson Printer*. Maslen offers a detailed account of the works printed by Richardson.

³⁴ Doody, *Natural Passion*, 16.

³⁵ Sylvia Marks, *Sir Charles Grandison: The Compleat Conduct Book* (London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1986), 14.

domestic economy. He also rewrites the implications of the social contract, thereby interrogating the legitimacy of polite society itself.

I do not dispute that Richardson's novels are largely tailored to the environments and concerns of polite readers; in fact, I will argue that they were his target audience. Still, the fact that he wrote for the gentry does not mean that he either identified with them or wished to integrate himself into their ranks. In a letter to Lady Echlin, Richardson predicts that

A Time will come, and perhaps it is not far off, when the Writer of certain moral Pieces will meet with better Quarter from his very Censurers. His Obscurity, a Man in Trade, in Business, pretending to draw Characters for Warning to one Set of People, for Instruction to another—Presumptuous!—³⁶

Richardson suggests that social mores are shifting, and men of trade will soon (and, he implies, rightfully) command “better Quarter,” at which point the elite will presumably respect and hearken to commercial voices. He acknowledges that his novels are an anticipation of this development. Like Dodsley, Richardson implies that the commercial fraction should possess a form of moral authority equal—if not superior—to genteel society.

The business community, of course, valorized moral “Instruction.”³⁷ As Robert Mayer has pointed out, Richardson's fusion of fiction with detailed moral instruction was immediately successful, though this style ultimately became a detriment to his posthumous reputation. Even at the height of his fame, many people found his earnest moralizing tiresome, and he fared much worse during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as audiences developed a greater aversion to the moral exemplum.³⁸ Even now, students and scholars alike are often put off by his persistent

³⁶ Richardson to Lady Echlin, October 10, 1754, *Selected Letters*, 316.

³⁷ See Introduction, 34.

³⁸ See Allen Michie, *Richardson and Fielding: The Dynamics of a Critical Rivalry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999), Chapters 3-4.

didacticism; in a recent article, Alexander Pettit refers to Richardson's "self-congratulatory Puritanism" and his "oozy intolerance."³⁹ Pettit's attitude is extreme, but even at more moderate levels, such lingering discomfort limits our understanding of Richardson's literary objectives and the rhetorical strategies he employed to realize them.

Richardson was a commercial man trying to attract a polite audience; he openly sought to cast a wide net, to reach all readers, regardless of social status. In the Preface to *Pamela*, he wrote that he wished to illustrate "the Social Duties, and that from low to high Life." He intended "to teach the Man of Fortune how to use it"⁴⁰ and to help "Ladies of Condition learn, that there are Family Employments in which they may, and ought to, make themselves useful."⁴¹ Though it had never been controversial for a businessman to direct the conduct of servants, apprentices, or other common workers, an attempt to instruct one's social superiors might be considered "Presumptuous!" On multiple occasions, Richardson referred to his audience and his willingness to modify texts to suit the predominant taste.⁴² At one point, when Aaron Hill lamented the unpopularity of his own works, Richardson suggested that Hill adjust his style: "I am of the opinion that it is necessary for a genius to accommodate itself to the mode and taste of the world it is cast into, since works published in this age must take root in it, to flourish in the next."⁴³ At least in part, then, Richardson endeavored to make his narratives palatable to "the Man of Fortune" and "Ladies of Condition" in order to secure a positive response. Whether or

³⁹ Alexander Pettit, "The Headwaters of Ooziness (Richardson the Polemicist)," *New Contexts for Eighteenth-Century British Fiction: "Hearts Resolved and Hands Prepared": Essays in Honor of Jerry C. Beasley*, ed. Christopher D. Johnson (Lanham: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 68, 74.

⁴⁰ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*, eds. Tom Keymer, and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁴² In letter to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson writes that he hopes that his novels will continue to be read decades later, "since they appear in the humble guise of a Novel only by way of an Accommodation to the Manners and Taste of an Age overwhelmed with a Torrent of Luxury, and abandoned to Sound and senselessness" (*Selected Letters*, Dec. 15, 1748, 117). See also Richardson to George Cheyne, August 31, 1741, *Correspondence with George Cheyne and Thomas Edwards*, eds. David Shuttleton, and John A. Dussinger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): "If I were to be too spiritual, I doubt I should catch none but Grandmothers" (47).

⁴³ Richardson to Hill, October 27, 1748, *Correspondence with Hill*, 264.

not he succeeded, Richardson's interest in "Accommodation" may be linked to the predominance of genteel characters and settings in his fiction. However, though both Marks and Doody locate Richardson's protagonists among the pages of polite conduct books, his narratives are not fundamentally assimilationist. Richardson uses the conventions of polite discourse to advocate commercial values; his efforts to reform are a type of *re-forming*, a counterdiscursive translation of the dominant culture.

"Wipe Away Those Little Aspersions": The Commercialization of Virtue

Richardson, like Dodsley, works to rehabilitate occupational ambition in his texts. In a letter to Stinstra, Richardson wrote that "I will be bold to say, that never Man of a small Fortune, and obscure Birth and Station, was more independent. God and my own Diligence were ever my chief Reliance. Pardon, Sir, the Boaster."⁴⁴ Richardson stakes his success on his occupational independence rather than his finances or his genteel connections—and, like the Miller of Mansfield, he bases that independence upon his "Diligence" in work. A low-born tradesman needed to rise in the world in order to secure that independence; consequently, Richardson, like Dodsley, suggests that ambition is a virtue rather than a vice. In *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum*, Richardson advises the ideal apprentice to "converse with his *Betters*, and particularly have an Eye to the Acquaintanceship of such Persons, as may *promote* him in his Business when he begins for himself."⁴⁵ Although members of polite society prized the ideal of disinterested friendship, the commercial fraction encouraged self-interested sociability.⁴⁶ Richardson tells apprentices: "You should principally pursue your own Interest, and prefer your self in all lawful

⁴⁴ Richardson, June 2, 1753, *Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence*, 29. In the same letter, Richardson told Stinstra that his hard work "made me more independent of Booksellers...than any other Printer" (25).

⁴⁵ Samuel Richardson, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1975), 44.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, 92-93.

Cases, to every one else; but that you should so pursue it, as should shew you were not sordidly attached to it.”⁴⁷ Just as bookseller James Lackington stressed that he had not been “*over solicitous* to obtain any thing that [he] did not possess,” Richardson suggests that ambition is only problematic when it is excessive, especially when characters are motivated to secure social advancement rather than financial gain.⁴⁸

A few lines later, Richardson more directly counters the negative connotations of ambition in polite discourse by reassigning them to the elite. In his *Vade Mecum*, he protests that tradesmen are unfairly made “the meanest and most contemptible Characters” in contemporary drama, and then argues that tradesmen can (and should)

gain the Name of a *generous* and *Gentleman-like* Man, Epithets in no sort incompatible with Trade and Business, and wipe away those little Aspersions which the low and sordid Selfishness of some narrow Minds have put into the Mouths of Gentlemen, and others, who are not Tradesmen, against Men of Business.⁴⁹

Richardson uncouples ambition from avarice by suggesting that tradesmen are more than capable of “*generous*” behavior; at the same time, he transfers the “low and sordid Selfishness” to the genteel fraction, specifically pointing to the playwrights whose characters speak “against Men of Business.”

Scholars have long suggested that Richardson’s grasping Harlowe family is a portrait of middle class ambition,⁵⁰ but the Harlowes possess “landed estates in several parts of the

⁴⁷ Richardson, *Vade Mecum*, 40

⁴⁸ See Introduction, 23-24. Interestingly, James Harlowe’s “ambition” is to acquire a peerage, not money itself.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 40. For further discussion of Richardson’s playhouse complaint, see Chapter 1, 55.

⁵⁰ Samuel L. Macey, *Money and the Novel Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors* (Victoria, B.C: Sono Nis Press, 1983), 108. See also Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 73; R.F. Brissenden,

country.”⁵¹ They are “middle class” only in the sense that they lack titles and they demonstrate the (supposed) bourgeois tendency to social climbing. Richardson censures the members of the family for their excessive ambition; however, his criticism does not hinge upon their desire to improve their situation, but upon the immoderation of that desire—just as Defoe implies that Crusoe’s ambitions are censurable not because he tries to rise in the world, but because he demonstrates “an incapacity to limit his desires.”⁵² Richardson never criticizes characters who have acquired fortunes, so long as those fortunes have been acquired according to normal commercial practice; in *Sir Charles Grandison*, Lord L. defends Mr. Jervis’s right “to do what he pleased with a fortune acquired by his own industry.”⁵³

Richardson’s rhetoric repeatedly implies that ambition, in this moderate manifestation, enables rather than hinders generosity, kindness, and delicacy. Pamela writes that parents should raise children with the desire for financial success, so that they will eventually possess “the glorious Power of conferring Obligations on the deserving; which is surely one of the highest Pleasures that a generous Mind can know.”⁵⁴ Richardson challenges polite discourse by implying that benevolence is, to some extent, dependent upon the interested pursuit of profit. In essence, a genteel virtue rests on a commercial foundation.

In commercial culture, ambition was closely tied to the willingness to work hard.⁵⁵ Despite the dearth of tradesmen in Richardson’s fiction, he does manage to suggest a correlation between work and independence in each text. Pamela’s views on childhood education require that “the noble doctrine of independence should be early instill’d into” children’s minds—to

Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974), 183.

⁵¹ Macey, *Money and the Novel*, 108.

⁵² McKeon, *Origins*, 322ff.

⁵³ Samuel Richardson, *A History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris (London: Oxford UP, 1972), II.21.

⁵⁴ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2012) 528.

⁵⁵ See Introduction, 30-31.

encourage a less-wealthy companion to “improve his Fortune by his honest Industry,” but also to encourage the privileged boy to “improve his own” fortune.⁵⁶ As with Dodsley, Richardson ties independence not to a (usually rural) distance from politics or urban corruption, but to industry and application. Clarissa spends nearly the entire novel imprisoned either by her family or Lovelace, but after her death Anna Howe offers a detailed description of Clarissa’s dairy house, where she worked prior to the events in the novel. Karen Lipsedge has suggested that Richardson uses these passages “to emphasize Clarissa’s independence, self-sufficiency, and command of space.”⁵⁷ Even though Clarissa’s situation renders her largely helpless and reliant upon others, Richardson makes a point to cite her prior independence and business experience. Sir Charles Grandison, of course, poses certain difficulties, since it would be problematic for Richardson to tout the occupational independence of a wealthy baronet; nevertheless, readers are assured that “were he not born to a fortune, he would make one.”⁵⁸ Richardson’s genteel characters may not need to work hard in order to secure their independence, but he suggests that they *would* if their circumstances were different. His attitude towards employment contrasts sharply with that of Henry Fielding: “Money in *Tom Jones* tends to be a largely providential commodity. It is inherited, lost, stolen, and bestowed, but rarely, if ever, earned.”⁵⁹

Richardson does not limit his praise of work to polite or managerial tasks. James Wood has studied the centrality of work to Richardson’s didactic project; although manual work is largely invisible in the novels, Richardson’s fiction attempts not to exclude labor, but to “establish continuities between the decorous work of high life and the hard work of the hand.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 528.

⁵⁷ Karen Lipsedge, “‘I was also Absent at My Dairy-House’: The Representation and Symbolic Function of the Dairy House in Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 1 (2009): 30.

⁵⁸ Richardson, *Grandison*, II.169.

⁵⁹ Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of a Tear* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 19.

⁶⁰ James Woods, “Richardson’s Hands,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 26, no. 3 (2014): 332.

Unlike Allestree in *The Gentleman's Calling*, who unfavorably compares “the Shop or the Plough” with “those more excellent productions which the happier *institution of Gentlemen* enables them for,”⁶¹ Richardson never suggests that manual labor is vulgar or otherwise inferior to genteel duties. Instead, he implies a moral equivalence between the two modes, as if polite work is merely “one type of work among others.”⁶² In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Sir Charles says that

Providence has given to men different genius's and capacities, for different ends; and that all might become useful links of the same great chain. Let us apply those talents to Labour, those to Learning, those to Trade, to Mechanics, in their different branches, which point out the different pursuits, and then no person will be unuseful; on the contrary, every one may be eminent in some way or another. Learning, of itself, never made any man happy.⁶³

Although the concept of a ‘Great Chain of Being’ had existed for centuries as an aristocratic justification of hierarchy, Richardson modifies the trope. In his list, “Learning” appears neither first nor last—and among the other types of work, there appear no linguistic or semantic markers of honor or status. The lines suggest a chain of equals more than a hierarchy. Sir Charles also declares that men of *any* occupation—“every one”—can achieve a form of greatness. In this way, Wood writes, Richardson “emphasizes the horizontal rather than the vertical relations” among the various categories of work.⁶⁴ Richardson’s rhetoric therefore implies that manual labor, accounting, and estate management are different, yet fundamentally equivalent forms.

⁶¹ Allestree, *Gentleman's Calling*, 13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 333.

⁶³ Richardson, *Grandison*, II.478.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 336. Similarly, Sir Charles condemns the way spinsters have been satirized: they may be “amiable and useful” (III.397). He thus challenges the ongoing alienation of respectable single women from work. See Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 145.

Commercial women worked in the home, and Richardson correspondingly introduces female protagonists who are receptive to manual labor. In his first novel, Pamela famously tests her ability to return to labor alongside her parents by scrubbing dishes in Mr. B's scullery.⁶⁵ Ann Van Sant has suggested that Richardson's mention of Pamela's resulting blisters indicates "that she is not accustomed to this type of work and that it is not appropriate for her."⁶⁶ The blisters certainly indicate that Pamela is no longer accustomed to scouring pots. However, it is less clear that Richardson desired to show that labor would have degraded Pamela. In Frances Burney's *Cecilia*, the heroine listens sympathetically when Belfield recalls his effort to work in the fields as "the life of a savage," as "an existence which thus levelled me with a brute."⁶⁷ Richardson never indicates that Pamela's parents see their lives or work as uncivilized, nor does Pamela seem to view labor this way. Instead, she seems pleased with her experiment in the scullery—and she returns to the subject even after she marries Mr. B. In *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition*, the now-elevated heroine cheerfully recalls her "pride and pleasure in the Thought of working for my Living with you, my dear Parents."⁶⁸ Furthermore, in the second edition of *Clarissa*, Richardson indicates that Clarissa's dairy house activities involved manual labor; Anna writes that Clarissa always "chose rather the *operative* than the *directive* part" of the dairy processing.⁶⁹ April London suggests that Clarissa's identity is partly based in "the pleasures of being

⁶⁵ Richardson, *Pamela*, 76-77.

⁶⁶ Ann Van Sant, "Crusoe's Hands," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32, no. 2 (2008): 131.

⁶⁷ Frances Burney, *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress*, eds. Peter Sabor and Margaret Ann Doody (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 739.

⁶⁸ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 19. At the very least, if Pamela's blisters mark her suitability for genteel status, then it is a form of gentility very different from the type depicted in Aubin and Rowe's fiction—for in their novels, Pamela's birth would have barred her from consideration.

⁶⁹ Richardson, *Clarissa; Or, the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1985), 529.

continuously and actively engaged in labour.”⁷⁰ Richardson thus urges readers to reject the polite tenet that physical labor is somehow dishonorable or inappropriate for the genteel fraction.

None of Richardson’s heroines, of course, ever undertake paid employment. Laura Rosenthal notes that while Richardson plays with the idea of Pamela’s “willingness” to return to work, she “escapes truly coming to terms with the possibility of having to make her living through manual labor.”⁷¹ In Richardson’s final novel, however, Sir Charles more directly challenges this polite taboo: “A woman is looked upon as demeaning herself, if she gains a maintenance by her needle, or by domestic attendance on a superior; and without them where has she a retreat?”⁷² Richardson’s proposed solution, his “retreat,” is the opportunity for a job in a sociable setting, which he terms “*Protestant Nunneries*.”⁷³ Richardson figures employment as empowerment for women, a place where they “might live with all manner of freedom,” entitled to their own profits: “I would have a number of hours in each day, for the encouragement of industry, that should be called their own; and what was produced in them, to be solely appropriated to their own use.”⁷⁴ In this sense, Richardson envisions work as a positive opportunity for such women rather than a unpleasant necessity. He connects their labor to increased independence—and a form of property based in the time that is “called their own” and in the money they earn “for their own use.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ April London, *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 19.

⁷¹ Laura Rosenthal, “Pamela’s Work,” *The Eighteenth Century* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 247.

⁷² Richardson, *Grandison*, II.355.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II.355. Unlike Aubin and Rowe, Richardson urges engagement with the world of exchange. He criticizes the cloistered life because it entails retreat and separation, the very qualities that Aubin and Rowe (though Protestant) elevate as a path to greater independence and spiritual purity. He views the commercial city not as a source of corruption, but of prosperity and “encouragement” to practical virtue—or, according to Dr. Bartlett, “a *national* good.” See also Sir Charles’s comments in III.374.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 3 for further discussion of women, property, and work in commercial narratives.

Richardson clearly shared the commercial appreciation for independence and work, but he rarely depicts trade or tradesmen in his novels; his primary rhetorical priorities lay elsewhere. Defoe produced more overtly commercial fiction; in *Money and the Novel*, Macey remarks that Defoe demonstrates a far greater interest than Richardson in exploring trade and the pursuit of wealth. Unlike the more dynamic and restless Defoe, Macey writes, Richardson did not show “the wide experience and even wider interest in the many specific projects through which wealth is accumulated.”⁷⁶ Defoe unquestionably accords more narrative space to commerce and capital, but I would argue that the difference is not as substantive as it seems. Richardson openly sought to attract and reform members of polite society, so he chose to feature genteel characters in genteel situations—which thereby precluded extended, explicit discussions of profit and the mechanics of commerce. Instead, he focused on the commercial *values* that could be made relevant to both his genteel protagonists and his genteel readers. Commerce suffuses Richardson’s novels, but instead of engaging trade directly, he justifies and promotes the commercial habitus that makes trade possible.

“A Regular Piece of Clockwork”: Richardson and the Rhetoric of Time

As noted in my Introduction, the commercial fraction was particularly attentive to the clock. Existing religious rhetoric encouraged the proper use of time, and many polite Britons censured idle behavior, but time management was never a priority for people whose livelihoods did not depend upon punctuality or productivity.⁷⁷ The ideal businessman, on the other hand, would “demonstrate diligence, discipline, regularity, weight—the whole cultural complex symbolized in the clocks that increasingly graced the halls and parlours of the middle sort”—and

⁷⁶ Macey, *Money and the Novel*, 87. See also Eaves and Kimpel’s remark that “Richardson was...interested in trade and in making money, but Defoe’s interest in these matters is more prominent than his” (*Samuel Richardson*, 75).

⁷⁷ See Introduction, 29.

the commercial populace viewed the ability to track one's time as both a practical skill and an important moral virtue.⁷⁸ Richardson devoted a great deal of space to the subject in his *Vade Mecum*; he tells apprentices that "keeping late Hours...is in itself one of the most unwarrantable Things,"⁷⁹ and that "the Hours of Business you ought to look upon as your Master's Due, and that so strictly, that it would be directly robbing him, to employ them otherwise than to his Benefit."⁸⁰

Richardson's ostensibly polite novels display their tradesman author's consistent preoccupation with time, urging readers to adopt these thoroughly commercial habits. Richardson especially promoted the practice of rising early, because it allowed individuals to get a head start on their business; he himself rose almost every morning by 5 am,⁸¹ and his friend Thomas Edwards wrote that "you live more hours in the four and twenty than most men."⁸² In his first two novels, Richardson approvingly informs readers that Pamela, Mr. B, Clarissa, and even Lovelace are all early risers.⁸³ In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson adds moral weight to the practice; Harriet writes her friend that

Lady L. is not an early riser. I am sure this brother of hers is: So is Miss Grandison. If I say I *am*, my Lucy, I will not allow you to call it boasting, because you will, by so calling it, acknowledge Early rising to be a virtue; and if you thought it such, I am sure you would distinguish it by your practice. Forgive me my dear: This is the only point in which you and I have differed—And why have I in the main so patiently suffered this difference, and not tried to tease you out of

⁷⁸ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 301. On time management as a moral virtue, see Natalie Roxburgh, "Rethinking Gender and Virtue through Richardson's Domestic Accounting," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24, no. 3 (2012): 403-429.

⁷⁹ Richardson, *Vade Mecum*, 19.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸¹ Richardson to Aaron Hill, May 10 1749, *Correspondence with Hill*, 308.

⁸² Edwards to Richardson, February 4 1754, *Correspondence with Cheyne & Edwards*, 361.

⁸³ Richardson, *Pamela*, 263-5; Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 32, 173; *Clarissa* Volume 3, Letter 34.

it? Because my Lucy always *so well* employs her time when she is *alive*. But would not one the more wish that well-employed life to be made as long as possible?⁸⁴

It might seem that Richardson was excessively concerned about a rather trivial issue, but to the commercial fraction these habits were markers of deeper moral worth. Harriet specifies that early rising is not simply a good habit—she rewrites (and thereby elevates) the practice to the status of “a virtue.” Moreover, Richardson boldly implies that this essentially commercial standard of behavior should apply even to high-ranking members of British society. Charlotte and Sir Charles are praised, and Lady L. and Lucy are correspondingly censured because their late sleeping cuts into their hours of “well-employed life.” Virtue does not merely entail passive piety and chastity, as it did for Aubin and Rowe—it must be an active force for public good.

In addition to maximizing daylight hours, the proper management of time also entailed the effective use of those hours.⁸⁵ In *Pamela*, Richardson emphasizes the importance of time management—but strikingly, the most particular recommendations come from landowner Mr. B rather than the hard-working Pamela. After the engagement, Mr. B complains that too many women “turn Day into Night, and Night into Day, and are seldom stirring till ‘tis time to sit down to Dinner; and so all the good old Family Rules are revers'd.”⁸⁶ Mr. B. depicts this upside-down schedule as more than simple irregularity; he suggests that sloth represents an overall pattern of dissipation. He equates punctuality with propriety, thus linking the family timetable to moral order:

⁸⁴ Richardson, *Grandison*, II.162.

⁸⁵ See Introduction, 26-29.

⁸⁶ Richardson, *Pamela*, 368. Richardson again demonstrates his suspicion of late dinner hours in *Sir Charles Grandison*. On two separate occasions, characters note that Sir Charles’s family dinner time is “much earlier than that of most other people of fashion.” See Richardson, *Grandison*, II.137, 246.

I shall, in the usual Course . . . like to go to-bed with my Dearest, by Eleven . . . I ordinarily now rise by Six, in Summer. I will allow you to lie half an Hour after me, or so. Then you'll have some time at your own Dispose, till you give me your Company to breakfast; which may be always so, as that we may have done at a little after Nine. Then will you have several Hours, again, at your Disposal, till Two o'clock, when I shall like to sit down at Table. You will then have several useful Hours more to employ yourself in, as you shall best like; and I would generally go to Supper by Eight.⁸⁷

Mr. B is exceedingly precise; he'll get up not "early," but by a particular hour. He won't let her sleep in for "a while," but for "half an Hour." Breakfast won't be done around nine, but "at a little after Nine." The repeated use of the word "by" implies deadlines, and makes the system appear more rigid and precise. Such particular times and set standards suggest that Mr. B. intends to let the clock dictate his household schedule—almost as if his home were a family shop. Yet Mr. B goes beyond the mere structure of her time. He also addresses the content, telling Pamela that her hours will be "useful." He does not cast them as free time for her to pass or while away; instead, she will "employ" herself. Although Pamela has previously indicated the tasks with which she intends to occupy her time, Mr. B. now seeks to co-opt the matter by creating and implementing a concrete, time-conscious schedule.⁸⁸ His system is strongly reminiscent of the time-tables discussed in advice books for tradesmen and other middling workers—or of Thomas Turner and his personal "rules of regimen."⁸⁹ Though Mr. B. ostensibly represents the gentry, his precise, clock-oriented language is more that of a busy tradesman than a gentleman.

⁸⁷ Richardson, *Pamela*, 368-9. On the family timetable and moral order, see Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 65.

⁸⁸ For the list of Pamela's intended activities, see Richardson, *Pamela*, 263-5.

⁸⁹ See Introduction, 28.

Mr. B's time-centric rhetoric recurs on multiple occasions, prompting Macey to label the character "a paragon of clockwork-like efficiency."⁹⁰ At one point, Mr. B. tells Pamela that he intends to be so devoted to order that his neighbors and friends will despair of corrupting him: "He is a regular Piece of Clockwork, will they joke." He then expresses his complete satisfaction with this portrayal, adding, "For Man is as frail a Piece of Machinery, as any Clockwork whatever; and, by Irregularity, is as subject to be disorder'd."⁹¹ Mr. B.'s drive for a near-mechanical efficiency, and his emphasis on morality through constant industry, are remarkable; he is a member of a rank that traditionally cultivated benevolence and manners, not the meticulous regulation of one's day. Readers might have expected that Mr. B. would approve of an industrious wife, especially because she is a former servant. However, he describes an unnecessarily particular, strict system—and apparently does not intend to exclude himself from the time-table that he has laid out for his wife.

Yet Richardson did not design the reformed Mr. B. to flatter English landowners; he is portrayed in a complimentary manner, but he is also portrayed as an *exception*. In fact, Mr. B. soon challenges the aristocratic habitus by raising serious concerns about the typical upbringing of privileged youth: "We People of Fortune, or such as are born to large Expectations, of both Sexes, are generally educated wrong."⁹² He then acknowledges that Pamela has already made this point, and that he agrees with her. Readers must consider the consensus of both a servant *and* of a gentleman—the latter of whom would be expected to be more defensive—that most gentlefolk are "so headstrong, so violent in [their] Wills, that [they] very little bear Controul."

⁹⁰ Samuel Macey, "Clocks and Chronology in the Novels from Defoe to Austen," *The Country Myth: Motifs in the British Novel from Defoe to Smollett*, ed. H. George Hahn (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 158.

⁹¹ Richardson, *Pamela*, 369.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 443.

Mr. B. concedes that his rank does not hold the moral high ground, given the “undutiful and perverse Behavior” of gentlemen and ladies.⁹³

Therefore, Mr. B—as he is represented in the second half of the novel—serves two purposes at once. First, he represents the ideal gentleman according to Richardson's tradesman vision, justifying Walpole's claim that Richardson portrayed “high life according to a bookseller.” Yet Richardson was clearly aware that his “high life” heroes were anomalous, and intended them to serve as instructive examples to the actual elite. Mr. B. is repeatedly portrayed as atypical; not only does he distance himself from other gentlemen by complaining about their usual behavior, but he suggests that he and Pamela can set an example to “our Neighborhood.”⁹⁴ Hunt observes that such a “virtuous aristocrat” is designed “to stand out from the dissolute throng, to embody all the moral qualities that commercial people, especially, most admired or sought in themselves, in their children, and in those with whom they transacted business.”⁹⁵ Richardson constructs a similarly time-conscious lady in *Clarissa*,⁹⁶ and Sir Charles serves essentially the same purpose in Richardson's third novel; he impresses other gentlemen by his strict attention to punctuality, consulting his pocket watch on numerous occasions in order to keep to a self-imposed schedule.⁹⁷

The result of these regimens is, generally, moral and financial success. Richardson never suggests that good time management can prevent or resolve all disasters; Pamela, Clarissa, and Harriet are all abducted despite their keeping of careful hours. Nevertheless, the attempted rapes

⁹³ *Ibid*, 443-4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 369.

⁹⁵ Hunt, *Middling Sort*, 204.

⁹⁶ We are told that (before the events of the novel) Clarissa used to say that “no one could spend their time properly, who did not live by some rule: who did not appropriate the hours, as near as might be, to particular purposes and employments.” Accordingly, Anna outlines Clarissa's comprehensive weekly regimen, which included the number of hours Clarissa slept each night (“SIX hours only”), the hours allotted to useful tasks such as “domestic management” and “visits to the neighboring poor,” and customary acts of polite sociability, such as “dinner-time conversation.” (Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1469-72.)

⁹⁷ Richardson, *Grandison*, I.252, 256, 263. The watch comes back out later (III.71).

are outside of ordinary experience—they are the material of romance. During the normal course of events, the habits of these commercial models are shown to secure an idyllic home; the endings of *Pamela*, *Pamela Exalted*, and *Sir Charles Grandison* all represent happy, explicitly methodical families that serve as inspirations to the neighboring communities. They are agents of discursive reform, members of the gentry reimagined to model commercial virtue to their peers. On at least one occasion, Richardson’s exhortations were effective; Richardson’s friend Lady Bradshaigh reported that after reading about Clarissa’s practices—both her early rising and her time management—she altered her own behavior: “You made her early hours appear so charming, that I determined to become in that her imitator, and find numberless conveniencies in it, unknown to me before . . . She has also taught me to keep an account of my time; but that, compared with her’s, only serves to put me out of conceit with myself.”

“Some Account of My Stewardship”: Richardson on Management and Economy

Richardson is almost equally interested in connecting virtue to good management skills—and in a tradesman’s house, good management started with good accounting practices.⁹⁸ Richardson’s account books have not survived, but Keith Maslen has unearthed evidence that Richardson kept meticulous ledgers and that he took “great Pains” transcribing them for his nephew William in 1755.⁹⁹ Although his novels are set in fashionable country seats and town houses rather than citizens’ shops, Richardson makes it clear that keeping good accounts is, even for the privileged, both practical and virtuous. Although events in the first half of *Pamela* largely prevent Pamela from using her bookkeeping skills, after her marriage to Mr. B she exults in her ability to “render some Account of my Stewardship, in relation to the large Sums you have put into my hands for Charitable Uses.” She keeps a “large Vellum Book” in which she carefully

⁹⁸ See Introduction, 24-26.

⁹⁹ Maslen, *Richardson of London Printer*, 52.

tracks of all her charitable expenditures.¹⁰⁰ In the trade community, accounting proficiency was frequently bound up with effective time management—both enabled the greater organization of available resources. In Richardson’s second novel, *Clarissa* uses accounting language to manage her complex schedule more effectively; she refers to certain hours as her “fund” and she uses the concept of debits and credits to mark whether or not she has ‘spent’ her time usefully.¹⁰¹ She defends her system against accusations that it is “perplexing and unnecessary,” saying that “those who will not keep a *strict* account, seldom long keep *any*.”¹⁰² Meticulous accounting is, therefore, not merely for harried or avaricious tradesmen; even the genteel must keep “a *strict* account.”

Richardson links these good accounting practices to moral virtue. After her marriage to Mr. B, Pamela rejoices in her newfound ability to dispense charity:

Then shall I not be useless in my Generation!—Then shall I not stand a single Mark of God’s Goodness to a poor worthless Creature, that in herself is of so poor Account in the Scale of Beings, a mere Cypher on the wrong Side of a Figure; but shall be placed on the right Side; and, tho’ nothing worth in myself, shall give Signification by my Place, and multiply the Blessings I owe to God’s Goodness, who has distinguish’d me by so fair a Lot!”¹⁰³

In one sense, Pamela’s sentiments are typical of polite liberality, an expression of gratitude that her elevated social “Place” will facilitate her generosity; however, she expresses herself in a highly unusual manner. She begins by invoking the notion of her own utility, and moves into an extended, concrete, and elaborate accounting metaphor. Instead of figuring benevolence as

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 373-74.

¹⁰¹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1470-1.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 1472.

¹⁰³ Richardson, *Pamela*, 363.

condescension or an obligation of rank, Pamela conceives of charity as a sort of well-funded business that requires her to track the “Blessings” she bestows. In fact, her language implies that she *is* the “Account,” and her alms allow her to “give Signification” like the numbers in a ledger. Richardson rhetorically translates generosity from a function of aristocracy to business, implying that Pamela’s careful accounting enables her to practice greater (or, at least, more effective) virtue.

Natalie Roxburgh has tied these heroines’ numeracy to a growing social pressure to educate women “in arithmetic and accounting methods.”¹⁰⁴ However, it is important to note that the books she lists—*The Accomplish’d Housewife* (1745), *The Young Ladies Accountant* (1771), and annual editions *The Ladies’ Compleat Pocket-Book*, and *The Ladies’ Own Memorandum Book*—were all published after Richardson began urging genteel women (not just tradesmen’s wives) to learn and practice accounting. Even the memorandum book genre was initiated in 1748 by another commercial author: Robert Dodsley.¹⁰⁵ Richardson was not so much following an existing trend as he was part of the community *driving* that trend.

Keeping accounts was only part of good business or domestic management. In 1756, Richardson eulogized his friend Mary Watts, writing that she had been “a most excellent lady, and I think one of the most perfect women, as a Christian, an economist, a wife, mother, mistress, friend, and neighbour, that I know and have heard of.”¹⁰⁶ Of all the domestic roles played by Mrs. Watts, Richardson places her managerial skills near the top of the list, right after her “Christian” virtue. Richardson prized domestic order, and his female protagonists are, without exception, “managing ladies.”¹⁰⁷ At one point in *Pamela Exalted*, Miss Darnford gushes

¹⁰⁴ Roxburgh, “Rethinking Gender and Virtue,” 411.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 1, 94-95.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Richardson to Hester Mulso. August 30, 1756, Barbauld, III, 232.

¹⁰⁷ Richardson, *Grandison*, III.326.

that “it would take up five or six long letters to do justice to the oeconomy observed in this family.”¹⁰⁸ Miss Darnford may not produce that many letters on her own, but Richardson’s praise of good management takes up a significant number of pages in every one of his novels, and each time he suggests that an organized household enables the same virtues as proper scheduling and accounting. After mentioning Clarissa’s polite ‘accomplishments,’ Richardson advertises her more practical skills in all capital letters: “Notwithstanding all her acquirements, she was an excellent ECONOMIST and HOUSEWIFE.”¹⁰⁹ In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Charlotte Grandison (herself an “excellent manager”¹¹⁰) marvels at Harriet’s superior domestic efficiency: “Such a *succession of orderliness*, if I may so call it! One right thing is an introduction to another; and all is in such a method, that it seems impossible for the meanest servants to mistake their duty. Such harmony, such observance, yet such pleasure in every countenance.”¹¹¹ In Richardson’s fiction, well-ordered homes are run like well-ordered businesses—they are like the clocks Keith Wrightson refers to as “the commercial ideal,” machines in which all the parts move quickly and efficiently, without hurry or wasted motion. Mr. B proudly refers to himself as a clock, and in *Pamela Exalted* Miss Darnford calls upon the same trope: The B. family home “is an Heaven of a House: And being wound up thus constantly once a Week [via religious services on Sunday], like a good Eight-Day Clock, no piece of Machinery, that ever was made, is so regular and uniform, as this Family is.”¹¹²

Although the polite world often viewed household administration as the purview of women, the commercial sort did not feminize these skills. Bonnie Latimer has expressed her

¹⁰⁸ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 335. The term “oeconomy” (or “economy”) derives from the Greek term for household management.

¹⁰⁹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1468.

¹¹⁰ Richardson, *Grandison*, I.180.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, II.544.

¹¹² Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 338.

dissatisfaction with critics who highlight the domestic efficiency of Richardson's heroines, writing that "'domesticity' is easily connected in critical accounts to 'weakness and passivity' as distinguishing aspects of femaleness, as opposed to the agency I see in Richardson's women."¹¹³

Latimer should view these traits as evidence of managerial ability, not merely domesticity.

Management is *active*, and it was a fundamental skill for countless men in the business community. In that sense, management could be masculine—and it could enable rather than hinder the agency of Richardson's women.

Richardson's good men are, accordingly, active and conscientious administrators, contrary to the role models in polite conduct books, who exhibit a well-bred ambivalence towards their estate business.¹¹⁴ Richardson had designed Sir Charles to be more virile than the tame Hickman, so the fact that the new hero serves as "his own Steward,"¹¹⁵ and demonstrates an abiding interest in "oeconomy" underscores the commercial fraction's separation of domestic skills from weakness or femininity.¹¹⁶ Richardson repeatedly details Sir Charles' "great dexterity in business" as manager of multiple estates.¹¹⁷ He is directly involved in the running of his properties, and there is no suggestion that he views such activities as Allestree does—as "a Divertisement" to help him kill time. The reformed Mr. B frequently speaks and acts like a tradesman; Sir Charles, Richardson's "good man," is also more akin to a businessman than a

¹¹³ Bonnie Latimer, *Making Gender, Culture, and the Self in the Fiction of Samuel Richardson: the Novel Individual* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 26.

¹¹⁴ See Introduction, 24-25. Also, in *Gentleman's Calling*, Allestree cautions gentlemen to display only a "prudent oversight of their Estates...for if it be moderate, and such only as I recommend, it is supposed to exclude all painful and disquieting Solicitudes; and then it becomes only of the nature of a Divertisement, helps them off with some of those spare hours, whose Emptiness becomes their Load" (83). The mention of "oversight," of course, assumes a steward to handle the actual day-to-day work.

¹¹⁵ Richardson, *Grandison*, I.279. At various moments, Richardson's heroines also refer to themselves as stewards: Pamela (*Pamela Exalted*, 227); Clarissa (104).

¹¹⁶ On Sir Charles's reputation for "oeconomy," see Richardson, *Grandison*, II.39 and 645. When Richardson began to create his "Good Man," he hinted at his intention to emphasize Sir Charles's masculinity: "He must be wonderfully polite; but no Hickman! How can we hope the ladies will not think a good man a tame man?" (Richardson to Susanna Highmore, June 4, 1750, *Selected Letters*, 161).

¹¹⁷ Richardson, *Grandison*, I.361. Harriet later offers a detailed description of Sir Charles's various business responsibilities (II.260-1).

baronet. Even in his personal interactions, Sir Charles negotiates agreements (often by financial means) in order to promote orderly exchange.¹¹⁸

“The Stated Hire for this Labour”: Social Status and the Occupational Contract

Richardson wrote commercial interpretations of virtue into each of his novels, and he was assertive enough to praise, encourage, chide, or censure the behavior of those who were not traditionally subject to the judgment of a printer. Yet Richardson’s commercial discourse possessed deeper, more radical implications than the promotion of practical business habits; his novels also remap the existing social order, from an aristocratic system of fixed social status to decentralized networks of contractual relations. I should make it clear that Richardson accepted differences in social status. His writings—both fiction and non-fiction—are replete with references to “superiors” and “inferiors,” and he always emphasizes that individuals in subordinate positions owe deference and obedience to those who rank higher. Richardson understands such authority, however, as situational rather than natural. Husbands wield a certain degree of power over their wives, just as landowners and shop owners outrank their laborers, servants, or apprentices. However, that power is contingent, and can alter when the circumstances change. Richardson’s “slippery mixture of radicalism and conservatism” was a reflection of trade culture—egalitarian yet protective of social deference—and it challenged many assumptions of polite privilege.¹¹⁹

The praxis of commercial life fostered an interpretation of power based in the occupational contract. In *Vade Mecum*, Richardson recommends that an apprentice live according to the rules of his master’s house and hold himself “accountable to his Master for

¹¹⁸ Lois Chaber, “*Sir Charles Grandison* and the Human Prospect,” *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 200.

¹¹⁹ Latimer, *Novel Individual*, 6.

every Hour.”¹²⁰ Nevertheless, Richardson indicates that this subordination is a temporary situation—it is based not in natural superiority but in external and changing qualities such as experience and age. He recommends that an apprentice should vary his treatment of his fellows (with “Complaisance” or “Condescension”) according to seniority, and that fair treatment “will lay a just Foundation for you to expect, in your Turn, the same Regard from those who shall be your Juniors.”¹²¹ Richardson implies that these social rankings are valid, but accidental rather than inherent; any lowly youth might become master “in [his] Turn” if he works hard enough, and fulfills the terms of the indentures Richardson so carefully explicates in the opening pages. In Richardson’s business, at least, upward mobility was a real possibility. He took his first three apprentices in 1722, and two eventually became master printers.”¹²² Richardson knew, from personal experience, that inferiors could quickly become equals.

Naomi Tadmor analyzed the contractuality of household relationships in her study of the eighteenth-century family and kinship:

The apprentice’s indenture was. . . formal, but its duration was limited and it could be dissolved. The contractual household-family relationships were not always so explicit, and they tended to be less explicit in the case of related persons. Some agreements could also be short term, or intentionally flexible and open to change. The important point, however, is that the household-family relationship was formed by agreement: an offer had been made and accepted.¹²³

¹²⁰ Richardson, *Vade Mecum*, 7. Richardson must have managed to impress his master; though Richardson remained a journeyman printer for years after he completed his apprenticeship, Wilde permitted Richardson to marry his daughter.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 28.

¹²² He appears to have treated his apprentices well, and—more importantly—he “was always willing to accept apprentices without any premium, and drew his apprentices from a wide range of society” (Fysh, *Work(s) of Samuel Richardson*, 37).

¹²³ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 27-28.

Tadmor does not specifically tie these attitudes to the commercial identity, but she uses shopkeeper Thomas Turner's diary to support and illustrate her point. Moreover, following her discussion of Turner, Tadmor raises the issue of contractuality only one more time—when she studies Samuel Richardson's *Vade Mecum*. The concept of contractual relations seems to have been most central to those families whose daily life revolved around shifting employment relationships. The commercial sort's understanding of power as contractual—as provisional rather than natural—is reflected in Tadmor's comparison of conduct books by Richardson and Eliza Haywood. As I discussed in the Introduction, Tadmor writes that “the servant-maid in Haywood's treatise... is seen as socially inferior to her mistress both in the present and the future, [whereas Richardson's] apprentice and his master are perceived as possible future equals, even future competitors.”¹²⁴ The genteel understanding of employment assumes innate inequality in status or worth; there may be a contract, but that contract is embedded in—subsumed by—the structures of social privilege.

Richardson's portrayal of domestic service in *Pamela* illustrates a commercial interpretation of the contract. In Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, the old servant Humphrey lacks agency; he is personally devoted to and dependent upon his master, who has protected Humphrey from the cares of the larger world for forty years.¹²⁵ The infantilized Humphrey embodies the polite vision of service, for his role reflects not an occupational contract but natural subservience. Richardson's servants are far more assertive; Pamela rejects Locke's suggestion that parents avoid rewarding children for good behavior, and stresses that proper motivation is essential to work:

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 62. See also Introduction, 36-37.

¹²⁵ See Chapter 1, 58.

I doubt, Sir, this is a little too strict, and not to be expected from Children. A Servant, full-grown, would not be able to shew, that, on condition he comply'd with such and such Terms, (which, it is to be suppos'd by the *Offer*, he would not have comply'd with but for that Inducement) he should have such and such a reward; I say, he would hardly be able to shew, that he preferr'd the Pleasure of performing the requisite Conditions to the stipulated Reward. Nor is it necessary he should; for he is not the less a good Servant, or a virtuous Man, if he own the Conditions painful, and the reward necessary to his low State in the World, and that otherwise he would not undergo any Service at all.—Why then should this be exacted from a child?"¹²⁶

Richardson's newly-elevated heroine characterizes her former peers as "full-grown," competent agents; a servant assumes work on a contractual basis, rendering service not because he admires his master, desires security, or views the work as an honor or "Pleasure," but because he needs the financial "reward necessary to his low State in the World." Richardson favorably depicts the desire for monetary compensation—a servant focused on pay can still be a "virtuous Man." Moreover, the agreement is explicitly voluntary; it is a contract entered into by both parties for their mutual advantage, what Tadmor terms "an exchange of material benefits."¹²⁷ Richardson thus implies that service is not a natural state, but a temporary situation. Servants promise loyalty and obedience, but these manners are conditional upon compensation and the servant's continuing judgment—and the servant *is* expected to exercise independent judgment. Pamela is praised for resisting Mr. B, and in *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson criticizes servants who

¹²⁶ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 506.

¹²⁷ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 28.

think only of “obeying [their master’s] principles, right or wrong.”¹²⁸ In this way, he destabilizes elite definitions of authority, transforming servants from dependents to independent agents.¹²⁹

Strikingly, Richardson uses the same rhetoric to figure churchmen (favorably) as employees. Pamela vehemently criticizes the common Anglican practice of conferring plural benefices, in which a minister collects the income for more than one parish without performing the duties for more than one:

But if here be a Rectory or Vicarage, of 200 L. a Year for Example...is not that 200 L. a Year the Reward for doing such and such Labour? And if this be the stated Hire for this Labour, to speak the Scripture Phrase, *is not the Labourer worthy of his hire?* Or is he that does *not* labour to go away with the greatest Part of it?”¹³⁰

Polite discourse had long idealized withdrawal from ‘mercenary’ society, so the respectable churchmen in contemporary literature tended to be good-hearted and unworldly, like Parson Adams or Charles Primrose. Richardson embeds pastors in the work force, the world of commercial exchange. His texts represent a living not as the provision of a pious refuge, but “the stated Hire for [religious] Labour”—and the minister is the “*Labourer*.” Richardson repeatedly foregrounds these economic connections without implying that they taint human relationships. In fact, he suggests that the exchange of obligation benefits everyone in the community.¹³¹

Commercial discourse binds utility to virtue; contractual labor is socially useful, so it is virtuous—and thus perfectly consistent with religious work. Richardson disapproves of pluralism

¹²⁸ Richardson, *Grandison*, I.160.

¹²⁹ See Chapter 3 for further discussion of servants and independence.

¹³⁰ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 194.

¹³¹ On a related point, Doody writes that Richardson works to “dispose of the claims of the secluded life as a higher form of virtue” (269).

not because the churchman is interested in money, but because these arrangements are a breach of contract that cheats the curate and the populace.

Richardson's commercial vision also influences his characterization of the marriage contract, which features prominently in his novels, from Mr. B's first itemized (and rejected) overture to Pamela, to Sir Charles's careful signing of the marriage articles with the bashful Harriet.¹³² The marriage contract had long been the subject of political and social discourse; John Locke had framed it as a mutual agreement that could, in theory, be dissolved upon mutual agreement. However, in reality, British husbands wielded absolute power after marriage.¹³³ Mary Astell urged any woman who desired to marry "ought to lay it down for an indisputable Maxim, that her Husband must govern absolutely and intirely, and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey." Women unwilling to submit to these conditions, Astell wrote, should remain single.¹³⁴ During the eighteenth century, women were really only at liberty to grant or withhold their initial consent. Afterward, they were *femmes coverts*.

Richardson's novels present a more liberal vision of marriage, by—paradoxically—suggesting that women are engaged in service to their husbands; he paints marital negotiations in language that parallels the occupational contract. Robert Folkenflik writes that while "Richardson portrays the growth to selfhood sympathetically and celebrates the individuality of Pamela, he nevertheless suggests powerfully that the good wife is in many ways the good servant."¹³⁵ Indeed, in many ways Pamela's individuality stems from her characterization as servant-wife rather than as *femme covert*; despite her subordination, she—like other servants in

¹³² See also Clementina's contract (Richardson, *Grandison*, III.380-94).

¹³³ Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 52-53. See also Eve Taylor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000), 28.

¹³⁴ Mary Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, 3rd edition (London: R Wilkin, 1706), 56.

¹³⁵ Robert Folkenflik, "Pamela: Domestic Servitude, Marriage, and the Novel," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5, no. 3 (April 1993): 268.

the novels—retains independent judgment and the power to dissent even after the contract has been signed. Though Mr. B unequivocally asserts his precedence, he assures Pamela that his wife’s “Compliance with me [shall be] reasonable, and such as should not destroy her own free Agency.”¹³⁶

Pamela’s “free Agency” becomes visible soon after her marriage, when Mr. B introduces an unusually detailed list of her marital obligations. The focus is not jointure or other financial settlements, but behavior within the relationship: it is a wife’s *Vade Mecum*. Pamela makes several remarks—some approving, some rather sardonic—but finally concludes that the rules are “all very tolerable; and a generous Man, and a Man of Sense, cannot be too much obliged.”¹³⁷ Pamela annotates fully half of the forty-eight injunctions, indicating a careful assessment of the document. When she decides that they are “tolerable,” then, she gives a voluntary, informed assent to what seems, in essence, an employment contract. Mr. B also praises her in language appropriate to a work review: “Let me assure you, I am thoroughly satisfied with your conduct hitherto.” He then assures her that he will fulfill his own behavioral responsibilities, as a good master would promise a servant:

You shall have not occasion to repent [your conduct]: And you shall find, though greatly imperfect, and passionate, on particular provocations, (which I will yet try to overcome,) that you have not a brutal or ungenerous husband, who is capable of offering insult for condescension, or returning evil for good.¹³⁸

Mr. B’s promise soon becomes relevant, as the continuation of *Pamela* indicates that the agreement is dissoluble should one party renege on the terms of the agreement. Scholars have long commented upon Pamela’s supposed “total submission” to masculine authority at the end of

¹³⁶ Richardson, *Pamela*, 446.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 451.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 448.

the novel.¹³⁹ Upon marriage, Pamela and Harriet (and eventually Charlotte) yield to their husbands' authority, and to some extent their independence is curbed—yet Richardson implies that a wife may abrogate her husband's authority when he does not fulfil his own responsibilities. Latimer suggests that Pamela's resistance to Mr. B's injunction against breast-feeding encourages readers to view wives as independent agents: "Pamela hints at the fictionality of submissive femininity, denaturalizing it: it is dependent upon the *consent* of the submissive, and is not natural or inevitable."¹⁴⁰ Pamela eventually submits, which allows Richardson to avoid transgressing existing sexual norms, but the suggestion that she *chooses* to submit underscores her latent agency.

Richardson more fully delineates Pamela's domestic authority when she suspects Mr. B of infidelity. She arranges a private but elaborate "trial"—she even lines up three chairs to serve as "the Bar"—and though Pamela claims that she is defendant and stands at the Bar, *she* conducts the interrogation, in a surprisingly aggressive manner. At one point, Mr. B. tries to recover the initiative, warning her, "I have caution'd you, *Pamela---*" but Pamela cuts him off: "I know you have, Sir, interrupted I; but be pleased to answer me, Has not the Countess taken a House or Lodgings at *Tunbridge?*"¹⁴¹ When he tries to question her methods, she interrupts him

¹³⁹ Jerry C. Beasley, "Richardson's Girls: The Daughters of Patriarchy in *Pamela*, *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*," in *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Beasley argues that although *Clarissa* never marries, she submits to the patriarchy via Christ. See also Jocelyn Harris: "The second part of [*Pamela*] makes painful reading, for as soon as Pamela gives up her sole weapon, her chastity, she surrenders rights to her only property, her person. . . . Bound by her vow of obedience, Pamela may no longer resist. Whatever she thinks, she may no longer say it" (33). See also Scarlet Bowen, *The Politics of Custom in Eighteenth-Century British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 73.

¹⁴⁰ Latimer, *Novel Individual*, 83. See also Elizabeth Kraft, "Pamela: Chastity, Charity, and Moral Reform," *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, eds. Lisa Zunshine and Jocelyn Harris (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2006). Kraft argues that "ethics, not privilege, possession, and dominance, guide Mr. B.'s and Pamela's choices. Gender difference remains not as a marker of masculine control and female subservience but as a source of wonder and awe, prompting mutual respect and responsibility as well as creating the conditions for both ethical obligation and erotic fulfillment" 110.

¹⁴¹ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 424-33.

again: “Nay, Sir...only Yes or No, if you please.”¹⁴² Pamela retains control of the confrontation, issuing unilateral directions to her husband. The thrust of her challenge is even more startling: If Mr. B decides to take the Countess as his mistress, to live in “open Sin with another,” she will leave him.¹⁴³ Florian Stuber notes the significance of this moment, in which “Pamela asserts her self—her rights, her being, her love and her integrity.”¹⁴⁴ The episode implies that a married woman should retain her independent judgment, just as Richardson encouraged servants to do, and *assert* that judgment when she deems it necessary—even when, as Doody points out, her actions “contraven[e] the laws of conduct books.”¹⁴⁵ More significantly, Pamela twice demands custody of their infant son, which most contemporary readers would have considered an audacious claim.¹⁴⁶ The general implication is that Mr. B has forfeited his marital authority through a breach of contract, thereby freeing Pamela to leave with the son she boldly terms “*my Child*” and “*my Billy*.”¹⁴⁷

Richardson, therefore, does not silence Pamela after her marriage; her subordination is voluntary, informed, and limited to the implicit terms of an occupational version of the marriage contract. Eve Taylor Bannet has argued that Enlightenment feminists such as Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft broke new rhetorical ground in their texts “by making women’s obedience to men conditional on men’s obedience to the sacred truths they themselves taught.”¹⁴⁸ Yet in these pages, decades earlier, Richardson moots a similar view. Mr. B’s reaction to the ‘trial’ confirms Pamela’s authority within the relationship: “You are Virtue itself, my dearest Life; and

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 426.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 430.

¹⁴⁴ Florian Stuber, “*Pamela II*: ‘Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes,’” *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 63.

¹⁴⁵ Doody, *Natural Passion*, 95. Doody also suggests that, in *Clarissa*, Mrs. Harlowe’s subservience towards her husband is designed to reinforce Richardson’s point that “negative obedience...is not the answer to moral and spiritual challenge” (103).

¹⁴⁶ Stuber, “*Pamela II*”, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 432. [emphasis added]

¹⁴⁸ Bannet, *Domestic Revolution*, 48. Bannet does not mention Richardson in her book.

from this Moment I will revere you as my tutelary Angel. I shall behold you with Awe, and implicitly give up myself to all your Dictates; for what you *say*, and what you *do*, must be ever right.”¹⁴⁹ In this scene, Pamela rises above the supposed limitations of her sex or marital status. Her virtue seems to empower her, whereas Mr. B’s vice emasculates him; the printer-author thereby locates authority in merit rather than gender or social status.

“Had I Been to Have Made the Custom”: Richardson’s Meritocratic Vision

Richardson’s commercial, contractual view of authority fostered social attitudes that were far more progressive than critics usually recognize. To a shopkeeper, servants were not fundamentally different from him or his family. Apprentices might later become business associates, and wives might do laundry alongside their servants; tradesmen often ate at table with their servants and apprentices.¹⁵⁰ There was, simply, less vertical distance between master and servant in commercial households, resulting in what Scarlet Bowen has called “the fluid boundaries between plebeian and middling orders.”¹⁵¹ Such quotidian intimacy naturally encouraged a more democratic (or at least meritocratic) world view. Though much of Richardson’s rhetoric was designed to promote a commercial interpretation of virtue, he occasionally offers more a direct challenge to elite privilege.

Pamela vigorously disputes Locke’s claim that parents should discourage familiarity between servants and children; she argues that such distance only fosters arrogance and contempt

¹⁴⁹ Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 433.

¹⁵⁰ See Introduction, 36.

¹⁵¹ Bowen, *Politics of Custom*, 17. Bowen, of course, does not differentiate between the commercial sort and the genteel middling, but her text nevertheless implies that there *was* a difference in the way the commercial sort and the genteel middling viewed members of the lower ranks. The authors whom she cites to demonstrate social fluidity are all representatives of non-genteel culture: anonymous balladeers, Daniel Defoe, Stephen Duck, Robert Dodsley, and Richardson. See especially Chapters 1 & 2.

“that is not warranted by any rank of condition, to their Inferiors of the same Species.”¹⁵² As a former servant, Pamela might be expected to hold more progressive views—but Richardson’s gentlemen echo her sentiments. After Mr. B insists that his bride Pamela may join the family for dinner, his sister pettishly insists that her own lady’s maid should be able sit as well. Lady Davers (and, perhaps, most polite readers) expect her complaint to be met with outrage, as genteel convention forbade master and servant to dine together.¹⁵³ Instead, Mr. B. replies, “With all my Heart...I have so much Honour for all the Sex, that I would not have the meanest Person of it stand, while I sit, had I been to have made the Custom. Mrs. *Worden*, pray sit down.”¹⁵⁴ Sir Charles similarly calls his servants his “honest Friends,” and mixes informally with them: “After dinner, at Mr. Selby’s reminding motion, Sir Charles and the men went to the tenants. They all wished him joy; and, as they would not sit down, while he stood, Sir Charles took a seat among them, and all the rest followed his example.”¹⁵⁵ These exchanges hint at the depth of Richardson’s supersessionist views, and the extent of the changes he may have initiated were he “to have made the Custom.” Richardson rejects the rituals of natural superiority, and the text prompts readers to follow these examples just as Sir Charles’ gentlemen friends followed his.

Richardson also created a number of strong, independent female protagonists. A few researchers have suggested that Richardson was drawn to women—both as characters and as correspondents—because he commiserated with their relative disenfranchisement. Carol Stewart remarks that perhaps Richardson “found the female voice more congenial to him insofar as it

¹⁵² Richardson, *Pamela*, 313. Locke urges parents to limit children’s contact with servants on multiple occasions. See John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1705), 71, 114, 137.

¹⁵³ See James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008). Boswell writes that Samuel Johnson used the prospect of a similar situation to confound Catherine Macaulay (whom Boswell terms ‘a great republican’). Johnson proved “the duty of maintaining subordination of rank” by inviting Macaulay to dine with her footman. She refused, and Johnson concluded, “I thus, Sir, shewed her the absurdity of the levelling doctrine” (316-17).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁵⁵ Richardson, *Grandison*, III.233.

spoke from a position of subordination.”¹⁵⁶ However, the commercial sort also worked alongside women more often, either with their own wives and daughters in the family business, or by contracting with independent businesswomen.¹⁵⁷ They were thus more likely to understand and respect women’s capabilities. Richardson himself had persistently worked to grant a voice to at least one female character who would have ordinarily been voiceless; for twenty years, he suggested Pamela’s story to a variety of authors, but they all declined because they “thought the Subject too humble for them.”¹⁵⁸

Richardson’s novels frequently seem to step back from the most radical implications; many scholars have pointed out that Richardson tried to limit the radical implications of Pamela’s marriage to a gentleman by stipulating that Pamela is exceptional.¹⁵⁹ Richardson also explicitly bars men from a comparable elevation; Mr. B stoutly defends his marriage to Pamela, but he is unwilling to countenance a genteel lady’s marriage to a male servant: “The Difference is, a Man ennobles the Woman he takes, be she *who* she will; and adopts her into his own Rank, be it *what* it will: But a Woman, tho’ ever so nobly born, debases herself by a mean Marriage, and descends from her own Rank, to his she stoops to.”¹⁶⁰ These words present a seemingly well-defined limit to Richardson’s meritocratic ideals. However, I would counter that Richardson had, in his own words, endeavored to “accommodate” his style to public taste, so these passages do not necessarily indicate his personal beliefs. To begin with, he refused to elevate Pamela’s status even though he received a great deal of social pressure to gentrify her parents in later editions and in the sequel, and even though several spurious continuations ‘discovered’ genteel blood in

¹⁵⁶ Carol Stewart, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel and the Secularization of Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 36. See also Jocelyn Harris’ remark that “Richardson saw women as uneducated outsiders like himself, and therefore potentially progressive” (*Samuel Richardson*, 4).

¹⁵⁷ Introduction, 32-33. See also Chapter 1, 80-81.

¹⁵⁸ Richardson to Hill, January 26, 1747, *Correspondence with Hill*, 243.

¹⁵⁹ See Harris, *Samuel Richardson*, 5-6; Eaves & Kimpel, 545.

¹⁶⁰ Richardson, *Pamela*, 422.

Pamela's family.¹⁶¹ Pamela is not even the only Richardsonian maid to marry above her station. In *Pamela Exalted*, Richardson weds Pamela's maid, Polly Barlow, to the family's chaplain, Mr. Adams—even though the text suggests that Polly cannot match Pamela's exceptionalism.¹⁶² In fact, Richardson indicates that Polly is both less accomplished and more foolish than her mistress had been; when Mr. Adams asks for Polly's hand, Pamela only worries about Polly's giddy character—not her status as a servant.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, the two marry, and both Pamela and her friend Miss Darnford are hopeful that the match will be successful.¹⁶⁴

Moreover, there are indications he would have written more openly meritocratic texts if he had thought they would be well received by his target audience. In 1753, Richardson recalled that as a youth he had created “a History, on the Model of Tommy Potts. . . a Servant-Man preferred by a fine young Lady (for his Goodness) to a Lord, who was a Libertine.” Richardson adds: “All my stories carried with them I am bold to say an useful Moral.”¹⁶⁵ Richardson never published this story, but decades later he suggests that this type of marriage represents a “useful Moral.” Despite his claim in *Pamela* that women should not marry beneath them, he seems to have privately felt that marriage to a worthy man—no matter how humble his birth—would not necessarily degrade a “fine young Lady.” It was already controversial to elevate *any* servant girl to the gentry; therefore, his careful remarks about Pamela's exceptionalism were likely intended to conciliate his polite audience.

¹⁶¹ Eaves & Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson*, 151. See also Keymer & Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 77.

¹⁶² Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 490.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 472-74.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 478, 490.

¹⁶⁵ Richardson to Stinstra, June 2, 1753, *Stinstra-Richardson Correspondence*, 27. “Tommy Potts” was a popular ballad in which a wealthy young lady successfully pleads to marry a virtuous servant rather than a libertine aristocrat. Bowen argues that ballads have been overlooked as possible influences on *Pamela* (*Politics of Custom*, 59). Richardson's letter strengthens this possibility, and also parallels Dodsley's own use of ballads as literary inspiration.

Richardson briefly introduces transgressive material into the text when Pamela violates genteel decorum, challenging the polite monopoly on behavioral norms. As scholars have long noted, Pamela's oft-mentioned "sawciness" and impertinence were scandalous to many genteel readers. Her defiance is remarkable not merely because she criticizes her social superiors (complaints from the disadvantaged were commonplace), but because she ridicules them. A complaint is a supplication, and positions the speaker as a powerless victim—but Richardson grants Pamela satirical authority, as Dodsley does his Toy-shop Master.¹⁶⁶ After the fine ladies tease Pamela, she writes that "I know what I could have said, if I durst. But they are Ladies—and Ladies may say any thing."¹⁶⁷ Pamela's scorn is palpable; her remark that "Ladies" are permitted to be rude is clearly ironic. By mocking her superiors, she effectively asserts her agency and independent judgment, further reinforcing a commercial interpretation of power relations. A few paragraphs later, Pamela speculates on the content of the ladies' conversation after she leaves, supposing that "so, belike, their Clacks run on for half an Hour." The phrase lacks respect, and, more importantly, fear. It is also couched in "vulgar" language, which contemporary polite culture considered distasteful.¹⁶⁸ Pamela empowers herself on the page, using the voice of her own community—she possesses what Gillian Beer calls "the most authoritative voice" in the novel, "collapsing the claims of the aristocracy to govern language."¹⁶⁹ The transgressive nature of her attitude and expressions is evident in the fact that while many complaints about genteel behavior survived in every edition through 1801, these mocking remarks (and others) were deleted.¹⁷⁰ The assertive rhetoric of Pamela and the Toy-shop Master indicate that legitimate

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter 1, 69-70.

¹⁶⁷ Richardson, *Pamela*, 53.

¹⁶⁸ I will discuss the commercial fraction's treatment of non-standard language in Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁹ Gillian Beer, "Rethinking Arcadia," *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, eds. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 39.

¹⁷⁰ Many late changes weren't even introduced by Richardson; his daughters likely had a significant hand in revisions for the 1801 edition (Keymer, Introduction to *Pamela*, xxxiii).

authority exists outside of the genteel power structure, and can turn a critical gaze upon it.

McKeon writes that Pamela is, technically, absorbed into the gentry by marrying Mr. B. and assuming the trappings of privilege: “But we and B. know that it is her terms that have prevailed, that her apparent linguistic assimilation masks a supersession of aristocratic honor.”¹⁷¹

Unsurprisingly, then, Richardson’s protagonists repeatedly warn elite characters that they are not automatically owed respect; they must earn it in accordance with commercial standards. Pamela argues that her young son will need to ground his “Superiority” in the “Perfections of the Mind, rather than on the *accidental* Advantages of *Fortune* and *Condition*.”¹⁷² Even Sir Charles—a baronet and wealthy landowner—declares that social distinction is conditional. He criticizes the snobbery of his cousin’s new wife, exclaiming: “But what, in a nation, the glory and strength of which are trade and commerce, is gentility! What even nobility, where descendants depart from the virtue of the first ennobling ancestor!”¹⁷³ The implication, of course, is that gentility and nobility are worthless if the possessor does not demonstrate his or her value to the community; Richardson also implies that success in “trade and commerce” may be a better measure of social worth than polite status. His rhetoric, his repeated suggestions that genteel authority is problematic, lays the groundwork for other legitimate—perhaps even *more* legitimate—forms of authority. Richardson creates genteel characters and communities, but repurposes them to embody commercial values.

Therefore, claims that Richardson policed his writings to eliminate vulgarity, or that he “allowed outside pressure to influence his work”¹⁷⁴ are true only in a limited way. Richardson certainly desired to appeal to his audience, to adapt his work to “the mode and taste” of his

¹⁷¹ McKeon, *Origins*, 380.

¹⁷² Richardson, *Pamela Exalted*, 524.

¹⁷³ Richardson, *Grandison*, 348.

¹⁷⁴ Harris, Introduction to *Grandison*, xxviii.

readers, but he is less assimilationist than often thought. Although he constantly sought corrective feedback from his acquaintances, he usually implemented only the minor, stylistic suggestions; many of his concessions to etiquette appear to have been strategic.¹⁷⁵ Collectively, his novels work to secure cultural legitimacy for the commercial fraction—not through emulation of their erstwhile superiors, or by criticizing the elite’s failure to uphold their moral standards, but by rewriting the standards to reflect commercial priorities. Towards the end of *Sir Charles Grandison*, Sir Charles tells his friends that “men, in their different attainments, may be equally useful.”¹⁷⁶ Commercial men might never be able to compete with the education or elegance of gentlemen—but all Britons could be useful. In fact, if “the glory and strength” of Britain lay in trade rather than in martial power or property, then the commercial fraction might prove superior.

“Into the Domain of Common Sense”: Richardson’s Legacy

Richardson’s novels had an outsized impact on British letters; R.F. Brissenden writes that although “it is debatable whether he can be called the greatest novelist of his age there can be no doubt that he was the most influential.”¹⁷⁷ Unlike Dodsley’s drama, Richardson’s fiction directly or indirectly affected almost every eighteenth-century author, as well as a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists such as George Eliot and Henry James.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the nature

¹⁷⁵ Eaves and Kimpel, 91, 207, 213. I should make it clear that I do not reject scholarship demonstrating that Richardson revised his language to make it more polite; he also constantly sought feedback. Nevertheless, he ignored most of the more substantive suggestions.

¹⁷⁶ Richardson, *Grandison*, III.245.

¹⁷⁷ Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*, 159.

¹⁷⁸ *Pamela* was a major media event, and all of his novels were internationally successful. Although *Sir Charles Grandison* is seldom read today, its early reception was profound enough to warrant Gerard A. Barker’s *Grandison’s Heirs*, a book-length study of Sir Charles’s literary influence on authors such as Frances Sheridan, Frances Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald, Thomas Holcroft, William Godwin, and Jane Austen. Austen was a particularly avid fan; after her death, her nephew J.E. Austen-Leigh wrote that her “knowledge of Richardson’s works was such as no one is likely again to acquire.” See *A Memoir of Jane Austen: And Other Family Recollections* (Oxford:

of Richardson's influence is still being debated. Scholars have variously remarked upon the influences of his epistolary form, his circumstantiality, his psychological realism, and his feminist undertones, among other qualities. His contemporaries and later generations more often considered Richardson's stated primary goal: his desire to encourage virtue. In fact, Elizabeth Bergen notes, eighteenth-century praise focused more on the moral didacticism of his novels than on any other quality.¹⁷⁹ In 1804, Anna Laetitia Barbauld began her *Life of Richardson* with the observation that his fictions "have been molded upon the manners of the age, and, in return, have influenced not a little the manners of the next generation, by the principles they have insinuated, and the sensibilities they have exercised."¹⁸⁰

Nonetheless, nearly all of these responses interpret the concept of "virtue" as it is defined by polite authors like Rowe and Aubin: chastity, piety, benevolence, and familial duty. Dodsley's contemporaries were largely blind to the ways in which he advocated particularly commercial values; Richardson's novels have been subject to the same skewed reception. When Richardson's social status was mentioned during the eighteenth century, it was usually either to impugn or defend his supposed 'lowness' or simplicity—not to comment upon the ways in which he undercut polite authority.

Modern criticism—which so frequently relies upon initial responses—has also been affected by the inability of polite readers to read Richardson's commercial material as commercial. The disconnect helps to explain how Sylvia Marks' in-depth study of *Sir Charles Grandison* as a conduct manual does not engage Richardson's deep interest in management,

Clarendon Press, 1926), 89. For Richardson's influence on George Eliot, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006), 282. For his influence on Henry James, see Eagleton, *Rape of Clarissa*, 80.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Bergen, *Samuel Richardson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 110.

¹⁸⁰ Barbauld, "Life of Richardson," *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Barbauld (London: R. Phillips, 1804), vii-viii.

economy, time, or the other practical virtues so important to early commercial conduct manuals like Defoe's *Complete Tradesman*. Eaves and Kimpel also conclude that Richardson's moralizing "was conventional even in his day, and his personal contribution in this respect is limited to putting so much of it in a work of prose fiction—in our opinion a minor claim to fame."¹⁸¹ As I have shown, Richardson's moralizing was not entirely conventional; it is a mark of his success that it can be retroactively characterized in that manner.

Although the literary public largely missed the full implications of Richardson's work, polite discourse seems to have absorbed some elements of commercial rhetoric. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Mayer's argument that, for a time, the eighteenth-century polite community embraced aspects of trade culture. Although the conduct and courtesy book tradition existed long before Richardson began writing, the public interest in practical virtue seems to have spiked in the wake of Richardson's novels. Conduct literature boomed after the 1740s.¹⁸² Similarly, Nancy Armstrong writes that "the period following 1750 saw a new effort to regulate the free time of children and, by extension, the free time of their parents."¹⁸³ The timing of these developments is suggestive. At the moment when the most influential advocates of practical virtue were commercial men, practical virtue suddenly became a higher priority for wide swathes of the public. Through the end of the eighteenth century, respectable members of the upper ranks preferred Richardson to Fielding; Fielding, whose works embodied a much more conservative sensibility, had to wait decades until elite culture reasserted its preeminence in taste.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Eaves and Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson*, 601.

¹⁸² Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 15.

¹⁸³ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 17.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 303.

Nevertheless, in many ways Fielding's polite sensibilities remained dominant throughout the Georgian period. During the decades following the publication of Richardson's novels, protagonists remained genteel, and no other author demonstrated such a profound interest in the minutiae of practical life. To a certain extent, his rhetoric may have become a victim of its own success. According to Terry Eagleton, once Richardson's values became universally accepted, "the novel was able to stop being explicitly moralistic, and could crystallize into its modern non-didactic form."¹⁸⁵ Although I think this explanation may oversimplify changes in literary taste, it certainly helps to explain why later novels could use a form of shorthand description to establish the virtues of various characters. Jane Austen did not need to offer elaborate praise of her heroines' practicality and willingness to engage in domestic work, nor did she need to spend multiple pages censuring idle characters. Instead, when she describes the Dashwood family's arrival at Barton Park, she simply writes that "Sir John Middleton, who called on them every day for the first fortnight, and who was not in the habit of seeing much occupation at home, could not conceal his amazement on finding them always employed."¹⁸⁶ Her criticism of the Middleton family's indolence is implicit—it does not need to be explained. Austen can also censure characters that lack "method, moderation, and economy" in a correspondingly succinct manner because certain standards of behavior no longer needed to be justified.¹⁸⁷ Armstrong writes, "Richardson's tediously protracted description of the household in *Pamela* can be supplanted by Austen's minimalist representation precisely because the rules governing sexual relations laid out in the conduct books could be taken for granted."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Eagleton, *English Novel*, 75.

¹⁸⁶ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 31.

¹⁸⁷ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Linda Bree (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1998), 51.

¹⁸⁸ Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 63. See also Doody, *Natural Passion*, 275. Richardson produced such "tediously protracted descriptions of the household," of course, because commercial virtue was largely based in the household.

Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* focuses primarily on shifting gender relations, but the argument holds true in a wider sense. Richardson redefined a number of fundamental cultural principles, not just gender roles—and his rhetoric may have had a gradual, cumulative effect. Austen's work does not just reflect an increasing acceptance of practical virtue; it also reflects increasing space for the commercial fraction. Her novels are largely set in rural village environments, but tradesmen are frequently visible and respected. Mrs. Bennet's brother, Mr. Gardiner, "lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses" in a commercial district of London.¹⁸⁹ Austen describes Mr. Gardiner as a "sensible, gentlemanlike man;" he never embarrasses Elizabeth Bennett the way that her immediate (ostensibly polite) family frequently does. He is also enterprising. Unlike Lydia's passive father, he manages to salvage his niece's reputation by negotiating for the financial settlement Wickham requires. In *Emma*, the Westons and the Coles—families who have recently retired from trade—are described in similarly favorable ways. Austen does not suggest that these 'new' families are grasping upstarts. Instead, the snobbish Emma Woodhouse is forced to acknowledge that in a party invitation they "expressed themselves so properly—there was so much real attention in the manner of it—so much consideration for her [ailing] father."¹⁹⁰ Macey has noted Austen's favorable portraits of trading families, and writes that Austen accepts "the need of the '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village' to make accommodations with worthy members of the trading classes."¹⁹¹ I should emphasize that Austen was not progressive; I do not question her reputation as a polite author. Nevertheless, the barrier between commercial and polite culture was gradually diminishing.

Richardson's commercial vision was most fully realized across the Atlantic, in a community where productivity more commonly outranked privilege. Richardson was,

¹⁸⁹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 1993), 104.

¹⁹⁰ Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Random House, 1992), 15.

¹⁹¹ Macey, *Money and the Novel*, 158.

unsurprisingly, nearly as popular in America as Dodsley.¹⁹² Although colonists generally favored nonfiction, they made an exception for Richardson. Benjamin Franklin admired his fellow printer, and serialized *Pamela* in 1742-4, making it “the first and only novel printed unabridged in American until the eve of the Revolution.”¹⁹³ Van Wyck Brooks observed that Richardson’s novels were commonly read during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; *Clarissa* was popular, and “Richardson’s Grandison was their beau ideal. Many a girl said she would never marry until she found his like.”¹⁹⁴

Though Samuel Richardson was not a political radical, his commercial ideas carried radical implications for the elite ranks, which had always asserted the exclusive right to define and legitimize cultural values. Sabor and Doody write:

He believed—as writers and printers both must do—that words have the power to make change. History is always being rewritten, as Enlightenment scholars knew—rewritten, amplified, reconsidered, interpreted, and annotated.

Richardson’s characters are all authors, all engaged in the never-ending business of publishing the word. Richardson’s life as a printer was not a sideline of his existence, but something important at the core of his life.”¹⁹⁵

Sabor and Doody draw attention to the ways in which public discourse constitutes a palimpsest, a site of continual tension and (re)negotiation. Richardson’s occupation embedded him in textual production, and studying his commercial rhetoric helps us trace how his novels instantiate the larger process of cultural appropriation and reinscription.

¹⁹² See Chapter 1, 93.

¹⁹³ Keymer and Sabor, *Samuel Richardson*, 39.

¹⁹⁴ Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England* (New York: Dutton, 1952), 57.

¹⁹⁵ Doody and Sabor, Introduction to *Samuel Richardson*, 3.

CHAPTER 3

“Too Free to Bear Servitude”: Robert Bage, Commercial Culture, and the Radical Novel

I propose...that every man amongst us, should be a man of business, of science, and of pleasure. We must have manufactures, that other folks may be as happy as ourselves, and that Julia's children may be brought up in the way they should go. We must have commerce, or the manufactures will be useless.

--Henry Foston, in Robert Bage's *Mount Henneth* (1782)

Historians of the late-eighteenth-century novel nearly always discuss Staffordshire papermaker Robert Bage in the context of radical politics, comparing him with Jacobin novelists such as William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Elizabeth Inchbald.¹ Gary Kelly has written that the close of Bage's first novel, *Mount Henneth*, displays the Jacobin fondness for leaving protagonists in “a kind of utopian or pantisocratic isolated community, isolated, that is, from a society that is past gradualist moral reform.”² However, Bage's *Mount Henneth* community is not isolated—it is a “thriving colony” deeply embedded in the surrounding economy.³ Mr. Foston envisions a sociable, methodical network that benefits “other folks,” and the group collaborates to outline a general timetable, goals, and responsibilities for each member of the community. It is, in essence, a business plan that prioritizes hard work, trade, manufactures, and the employment of others. Mr. Foston carves out space for leisure time—“science” and “pleasure”—but he makes clear that business comes first; members of the

¹ Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Nancy E. Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property, and the Law: Critiquing the Contract* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Miriam L. Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects in the English “Jacobin” Novel, 1790-1805* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2009). For a rare exception to this pattern, see Hannah Doherty, “Robert Bage's Novel Merchandise: Commercialism, Gender, and Form in Late Eighteenth-Century Fiction,” *Eighteenth-Century Novel* 9 (2012): 171-192.

² Gary Kelly, “Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790s,” *Fetter'd or Free?: British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, eds. Mary A. Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), 293. See also Pam Perkins' remark that “Bage undoubtedly shares the rather Utopian political ideals of his Jacobin contemporaries.” In “Playfulness of the Pen: Bage and the Politics of Comedy,” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 26, no. 1 (Winter, 1996): 31.

³ Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth* (New York: Garland Pub., 1979), II.306.

group “breakfast early,” and then “devote the hours till three, the hour of dinner,” to work.⁴ At the end of Holcroft’s radical novel *Anna St. Ives*, the eponymous heroine and Frank Henley commence a lofty, altruistic project; they will devote their lives to “acting in behalf of society...guiding, enlightening, and leading the human race onward to felicity!”⁵ Bage’s rendering of social virtue is far more pragmatic, based in the quotidian world of exchange. Mr. Foston’s Mount Henneth community represents not a Jacobin paradise, but the dream of a Midlands manufacturer—and it connects him not with authors inspired by the French Revolution, but with earlier commercial writers: Robert Dodsley and Samuel Richardson.

Despite the prevalence of studies identifying Bage as a radical author, scholars have acknowledged that the label is problematic. He was part of an older generation that reached adulthood during the 1740s and 1750s, long before the turbulent era of the American and French Revolutions, and he published most of his novels before 1789.⁶ More importantly, even during the early 1790s—the heyday of radical activity—Bage did not mix with radical political or literary groups. Several scholars have pointed out that while Holcroft, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft moved in the same London political and literary circles, Bage “stood somewhat apart, as a North Country businessman.”⁷ Bage does not seem to have corresponded with these groups, nor did he travel to London to see them; he only met Godwin in 1797 (after he had published his final novel) because Godwin sought him out. A.A. Markley writes that “while it is clear that Godwin and Holcroft together planned similar projects in adapting the novel to

⁴ *Ibid*, II.308. In Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*, Charlotte Grandison “earns her pleasures” by rising early and working before she engages in leisure activities (Richardson, *Grandison*, I.180).

⁵ Thomas Holcroft, *Anna St. Ives*, ed. Peter Faulkner (London: Oxford UP, 1970), 481.

⁶ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 35. See also Pamela Perkins, Introduction to *Hermesprong, Or, Man As He Is Not* (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2002), 21. Bage was born in 1730, about 20-30 years before other radical authors—15 years older than Holcroft, 23 years older than Inchbald, 26 years older than Godwin, and 29 years older than Wollstonecraft.

⁷ Harrison Steeves, *Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 273. See also Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 13; Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 20.

political purposes, the political motivations of Derby papermaker Bage are much harder to ascertain.”⁸ Yet though these scholars concede Bage’s uneasy status as a radical, they seem unsure about how to situate his writings more effectively.

Forty years ago, Marilyn Butler briefly accounted for Bage’s outlier position by noting that Bage’s Derby Philosophical Society friends were not Jacobin intellectuals:

Bage’s circle of businessmen and entrepreneurs, inventors and scientists, canal-builders, mechanics, chemists, educators, is key to an understanding of his intellectual position. It was a world whose textbook was not Godwin’s *Political Justice*, still less Paine’s *Rights of Man*, but Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*.⁹

Butler locates Bage within the business community—the same fraction as Dodsley and Richardson—and insightfully points to the distance between commercial and radical traditions. However, she does not fully explore these differences, primarily concluding that Bage would have been inspired more by the ideals of the American than the French Revolution.¹⁰ In nearly all literary studies, including Butler’s, the critical focus has remained narrowly political.

Bage’s novels warrant a fresh look, one that distinguishes him from the young London radicals whom he hardly knew, and seeks the existing rhetorical traditions within which he worked. In this chapter, I will argue that Bage crafted progressive, supersessionist narratives based in a fundamental part of the commercial habitus; his remapping of virtue to elevate manual labor and working women, his suggestion that power is based in the occupational contract, and his ascription of agency to subaltern characters are rooted not in his politics but in his culture.

⁸ A.A. Markley, *Conversion and Reform in the British Novel in the 1790s: A Revolution of Opinions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

⁹ Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

Resituating Bage can shed greater light on the development of the commercial literary tradition, even as it helps us understand his influence upon radical discourse.

Recent scholarship has begun to interrogate the Jacobin label, thereby providing some of the conceptual work necessary to study Bage as a commercial rhetor. M.O. Grenby notes that radical authors never referred to themselves as Jacobins—the term was created by their political opponents as a slur, an infinitely flexible catch-all used “to beat any and all movements for reform, of whatever complexion.”¹¹ More recently, A.A. Markley has suggested new terminology:

While the categories of Jacobin and anti-Jacobin have been useful as a starting point, these labels are not adequate to describe the diverse group of political novels published in the 1790s and the early years of the 1800s . . . Throughout the book I will generally use the term ‘reformist’ instead of ‘Jacobin’ because I believe it to be a broader and more accurate way to refer to novels that, in some way or another, seek to foster some aspect of social or political change.¹²

Markley’s flexible, more exploratory approach allows us both to separate Bage from the Jacobin label and to consider the elements that distinguish him from other reformist writers. However, the article perpetuates a different interpretive obstacle; like most scholars of radical novels, Markley focuses on fiction published during the 1790s, and therefore overlooks the majority of Bage’s work. At one point, Kelly writes: “Even though four of his six novels were published before 1789, Bage shared most of the assumptions and values of other English Jacobin novelists, whose important novels were almost entirely a response to the crisis of the 1790s.”¹³ Kelly points

¹¹ M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 65.

¹² Markley, *Conversion and Reform*, 2.

¹³ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 28.

to a vital question, but does not provide the answer: Bage asserted many of these values before the radicals raised them because Bage was not a radical author. He was a commercial author.

“Simple in His Manners”: Bage’s Commercial Identity

Bage’s life follows the familiar trajectory of the commercial sort. He was born on February 28th, 1730 to George Bage, a paper-maker near Derby.¹⁴ Although Robert showed extraordinary academic promise—William Hutton, a life-long friend, later recalled that Bage was proficient in Latin by age seven—he attended a common day school and was soon apprenticed to his father’s trade.¹⁵ When Bage was 21, his marriage to Elizabeth Woolley enabled him to start his own business,¹⁶ and in 1756, he formed an exclusive partnership with his friend Hutton, who distributed all of the paper manufactured by Bage. They maintained a strong business relationship for forty-five years, until Bage’s death in 1801.¹⁷

Bage’s commercial background shaped his view of literature, for he consistently figures his novels as merchandise. In the Preface to his first novel, *Mount Henneth*, he writes that “my three daughters assure me, that I write in a very tasty manner; and that it is two years, bating two months, since I made each of them a present of a new silk gown.”¹⁸ Bage advertises his financial motivation, and his use of the colloquial “tasty” associates his books with light amusement; he essentially characterizes them as potboilers. In a later novel, he considers his customer base, writing (only half in jest) that “my first ambition...is to make a selection agreeable to my fair

¹⁴ There is some uncertainty about both the day and year of Bage’s birth. In a recent article, John Goss makes a strong case for this particular date—and also for the possibility that Robert was conceived and/or born out of wedlock. See John Goss, “Robert Bage: Birth and Parentage,” *Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language* 1, no 1 (2008).

¹⁵ Peter Faulkner, *Robert Bage* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 11.

¹⁶ Walter Scott, *The Novels of Swift, Bage, and Cumberland: with prefatory notices &c.* (London, Ballantyne Novelist’s Library, 1824), xiv.

¹⁷ William Hutton, *The Life of William Hutton*, 2nd ed. (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817), 167. Bage eventually owned and operated two mills, producing flour as well as paper (Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 12).

¹⁸ Bage, *Mount Henneth*, I.ii.

readers, of whom I promise myself just twenty thousand.”¹⁹ Hannah Doherty has argued that Bage’s remarks here—and elsewhere in his novels—demonstrate his unusual “willingness to self-identify as a profit seeking author.”²⁰ She points to the differences between Bage’s remark and the claims made by many other (primarily female) authors who justified their decision to publish by pleading desperate financial circumstances; his ostensible hardships seem deliberately trivial when compared to the “widowhoods and starving children” cited by others, thus underscoring the unabashedly commercial nature of his venture.²¹ Bage also identifies himself as a manufacturer, and directly ties his books to his (unnamed) product by writing that critics will “kindly inform the world, that in their opinion, I might have been better, and quite as profitably employed in getting up a few more of my mechanical matters. But, with submission to their better judgments, a man cannot always be making -----.”²² Bage refers to his novels as a second branch of his business, a marketable product designed for the consumer rather than art.²³

Bage’s intellectual cultivation and membership in the Derby Philosophical Society do not, in themselves, indicate a polite mindset, for commercial culture had never precluded an interest in the broader world.²⁴ The majority of Bage’s time—like that of other businessmen—was spent attending to his trade. Bage told Godwin that “he devoted his three hours an afternoon (the portion of time he allotted for reading) to [mathematics] for twelve years.”²⁵ Bage

¹⁹ Bage, *Man As He Is*, I.76.

²⁰ Doherty, “Novel Merchandise,” 176.

²¹ *Ibid*, 176.

²² Bage, *Man As He Is*, iii-iv. Bage also wrote that “I live a great way from London, and have a pretty mechanical way of doing certain things, which has procured me some reputation” (Preface to *Mount Henneth*, ii).

²³ He treated his novels as commodities as well, choosing the less-reputable, commercial Minerva Press to publish his later novels because Minerva was willing to pay higher prices. See Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 172.

²⁴ Bage’s friends and early biographers all note the depth and breadth of Bage’s knowledge, comprising Latin, French, Italian, and mathematics—mostly acquired without the benefit of formal education. However, all of the tradesmen in my sample wrote about their efforts to educate themselves, particularly through reading and the study of music. (See Introduction, 28-29.)

²⁵ William Godwin to Mary Wollstonecraft, June 15-16, 1797, *Letters of William Godwin*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 222.

methodically taught himself a variety of subjects, but he did so only during strictly “allotted” hours. Just like other commercial men, and just like Mr. Foston in *Mount Henneth*, Bage allowed himself leisure activities but limited them so that they would not encroach upon his business.

Despite his financial security and broad intellectual interests, Bage seems to have been uninterested in acquiring genteel habits. When Godwin arrived at Bage’s house, he remarked upon the owner’s complete lack of pretension: “I found him uncommonly chearful and placid, simple in his manners, & youthful in all his carriage. His house at the mill was floored, every room below-stairs, with brick, & like that of a common farmer in every respect.”²⁶ Bage is described as “simple,” rather than polite, and he has not worked to gentrify his home. Bage never fully retired from his mill; even at 67, he walked four miles to his paper mill three times a week in order to keep an eye on production.²⁷ Finally, he never sent his sons to university. Two of them survived long enough to establish a career; Charles ran a cotton factory, and Edward was apprenticed to a surgeon/apothecary.²⁸ By all accounts, Bage seems to have been content to live as an ordinary businessman, and made arrangements for his sons to continue walking the same path.

“The Pride and Boast of Man”: Independence & Ambition

Bage, like Dodsley and Richardson, ties independence to occupation and the world of exchange rather than status or rural sequestration.²⁹ In *Herm sprong*, for example, the hero

²⁶ *Ibid*, 222.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 222.

²⁸ Scott, *Novels*, xxiv.

²⁹ General praise of independence is frequent in Bage’s work. In *Herm sprong*, for example, the hero claims, “I must be independent as far as social man can be independent” (Bage, *Herm sprong*, 166). *Herm sprong*’s qualification, that he will be independent “as far as social man can be,” further demonstrates the commercial tenet that the virtuous life must be lived in a community, in the world of exchange—not in isolation. ‘Man’ must be social.

claims, “I must be independent as far as social man can be independent.”³⁰ Hermsprong’s qualification, that he will be independent “as far as social man can be,” suggests that the virtuous life is lived in a community like that at Mouth Henneth—in the commercial sphere, not in isolation. ‘Man’ should be independent *and* social.

Critical analyses have frequently discussed Bage’s abiding interest in independence, yet they consider only the political implications. In an article exploring British literary reactions to the American Revolution, James Watt writes that *Mount Henneth* and *The Fair Syrian* draw upon impressions of the colonists’ war to “suggestively engage with themes of oppression and independence at the level of familial and personal relations.”³¹ Bage certainly criticizes political oppression, but his reflexive embrace of independence is not merely a function of the revolutionary moment, and it does not only entail the absence of external tyranny. In *Mount Henneth*, for example, Tom Sutton secures a position as steward of the wealthy Mr. Foston’s estate. Although Tom has received a polite education, he is overjoyed by the opportunity to exercise his capability for “determined industry,”³² writing his sister that

the noble generosity of the elder Mr. Cheslyn has restored to thy brother the peace my uncle’s tyranny has long deprived me of; and with it, the active energy and independent spirit of a man. How long have I suffered my youth to lie in the lap of idleness, to bask in the moonshine of expectation, to crouch to despotism for its daily bread, and to give up all that is valuable to man, the exertion of the powers of the mind, and the native freedom of the human will.³³

³⁰ Bage, *Hermsprong*, 166.

³¹ James Watt, “‘The Blessings of Freedom’: Britain, America, and ‘The East’ in The Fiction of Robert Bage,” *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 22, no. 1 (2009): 49. See also Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 84; Johnson, *English Jacobin Novel*, 17, 93.

³² Bage, *Mount Henneth*, I.29.

³³ *Ibid.*, I.48.

Tom embodies a specifically commercial ideal; he seeks—and secures—his independence not through inheritance or marriage, but through work, which he directly contrasts with “the lap of idleness.” Tom’s comments reflect the principle that independence is primarily a personal rather than a political virtue, revealed through a person’s industry and “active energy.”

The emphasis on occupational independence ties directly to Bage’s positive assessment of occupational ambition. Like other businessmen, Bage suggests that competition is a healthy, valuable social force: “When a man values himself for having more skill in his profession, more general science, more liberal opinions, it is highly probable he will obtain more professional skill more general knowledge, and a greater liberality of opinion.”³⁴ Ambition enables self-improvement, and the resulting competition does not preclude sociability. In *Barham Downs*, attorney William Wyman criticizes his friend Henry Osmond for retreating into genteel isolation: “Thou, useless to every purpose for which a wise father would have begot thee, are basking in the sun-shine of the shade. Ye gods! what havoc does the want of ambition make amongst your works!”³⁵ Even though Osmond is financially independent, and he causes no harm, Wyman roundly censures his isolation and aimlessness as “useless.” Gillian Skinner points to the narrative contrast Bage creates; while Osmond’s “involvement in commerce and his sensibility are represented as benignly feminizing qualities, his retreat from public life is seen by his friends as unmanly—effeminate rather than feminized.”³⁶ A virtuous life necessitates action and a vigorous engagement with the world of exchange—which in turn, Wyman reminds us, requires a modicum of ambition. Skinner suggests that novelists of the 1780s were newly willing to “attach

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I.87.

³⁵ Robert Bage, *Barham Downs* (New York: Garland Pub., 1979), I.14.

³⁶ Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics*, 127. Skinner notes that Bage’s commercial populace also demonstrates active compassion. Henry Osmond’s financial woes are alleviated by his fellow merchants rather than gentlemen. Skinner writes that “this feminized reaction from men of business stands in obvious contrast to the rapacity of representatives of commercial values such as the ‘London-attorney’ who turns old Edwards out of his home in *The Man of Feeling*” (123). Tradesmen provide the compassion (and benevolence) that most polite texts suggested were the province of the cultural elites.

sensibility to commercial values,”³⁷ but Richardson had made the connection decades before. As a commercial author, Bage rewrites ambition as a virtue rather than a vice.

Kelly suggests that Bage discourages ambition in the lower ranks, thereby reinforcing conservative views about social order. He cites an episode from *Mount Henneth* in which a humble shoemaker, Hugh Griffiths, is financially ruined trying to keep up with his new wife’s pretensions to gentility; she disdains the whitewashed walls, brick floors, and the oak furniture, and demands (among other luxuries) wainscoting, mahogany, and “a fine pier glass.”³⁸ The hero, James Foston, allows Griffiths only enough money to restore him to his original humble home, furnishings and the tools of his trade. Kelly writes that Foston’s charity, because it corrects the Griffiths’ supposed overreaching and preserves the hierarchy, is therefore a conventionally-genteel “*prudent* kindness.”³⁹ We should, however, make a careful distinction between occupational or financial ambition and profligacy. At the beginning of this tale, Griffiths describes his happy situation prior to his marriage: “In a few years I had six hands besides myself, and made shoes for exportation.”⁴⁰ Bage seems to support the shoemaker’s ambition to expand his business and increase his profits, for at a later point in the novel, Tom Sutton laments that so many common families have been ruined, “who might have possessed fortunes, had the father possessed prudence.”⁴¹ Tom Sutton’s sister, Nancy, draws a clear line between prosperity and affectation: “If I had fine cloaths, I should wear them; if I had a coach and six I should ride in it. I have no violent objection to the being very rich, or very handsome; but I have an aversion to ceremony and parade.”⁴² Bage never implies that working folk should shun ambition; in fact,

³⁷ *Ibid*, 122. For Richardson’s view of ambition and benevolence, see my discussion in Chapter 2, 110-11.

³⁸ Bage, *Mount Henneth*, II.66-71

³⁹ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 36.

⁴⁰ Bage, *Mount Henneth*, II.64

⁴¹ *Ibid*, II.80.

⁴² *Ibid*, I.10.

his novels validate their desire to improve their fortunes. The criticism of Mrs. Griffiths seems to be based in the conviction that her expenditures are a waste of resources on pretension rather than substance.⁴³

“Laudable Exertions”: Industry, Manual Work, and Gender

Bage challenges the genteel distaste for employment and manual work more frequently and with greater complexity than either Dodsley or Richardson. As I discussed at the start of this chapter, the conclusion of *Mount Henneth* brings together a number of like-minded people in a rural idyll, but Bage makes clear that they have not retired from society or disengaged from business. Mr. Foston’s business plan includes shipbuilding and the construction of a glass factory to produce bottles and spectacles—and all of the men will share the work.⁴⁴ Bage suggests that withdrawal is not a blessing or an aspiration; instead, the virtuous existence is the world of interested exchange, which combines a like-minded sociability and profitable activity.

Bage always privileges virtuous activity over virtuous passivity, even interrogating conventional depictions of human suffering. Toward the end of *Hermesprong*, Lord Grondale unjustly turns the Wigley family from their home; Bage paints the stereotypical, dramatic portrait of a family ruined by their wicked lord, with a distraught mother, one daughter at her knee and a “younger daughter in hysterics, held by the two maid servants of the family, profuse in tears and loud in lamentation.” Mr. Wigley himself “survey[s] the scene around him with an aspect half expressing grief; and half astonishment, bordering on stupidity.”⁴⁵ As in so many sentimental and reformist novels, the hero happens upon the scene and sees the grieving Mr. and Mrs. Wigley standing helpless outside the cottage—but his instinctive reaction is emphatically

⁴³ The passage appears to validate Bage’s personal, commercial lifestyle; his description of Hugh Griffith’s original cottage resembles Godwin’s description of Bage’s own simple, brick-floored house.

⁴⁴ Bage, *Mount Henneth*, II.309.

⁴⁵ Bage, *Hermesprong*, 183.

unconventional: “The first reflection which occurred to Hermsprong was, you might almost call it an exclamation, was, ‘What total imbecility is here!’ Yet, all weakness as he thought it, compassion sprung into his eye.”⁴⁶ The Wigleys are paralyzed by their situation; they are objects of pity for both Hermsprong and Bage’s readers, and Hermsprong’s fleeting (but powerful) contempt implies that such victims are to some extent accountable for their inaction. Bage consistently praises compassion, and Hermsprong helps the family, but the scene renders passive suffering ethically ambiguous.⁴⁷

Bage thus elevates activity, and, like his fellow commercial authors, extends this respect to various forms of work and manual labor. After finding a position as footman with the Lamoude family, James Wallace tells his friend that “so far from having cause to complain, I have abundant cause to rejoice and be happy.”⁴⁸ He remains cheerful, much later telling the Lamoude that “I feel the value of my present situation sensibly: I have in it a satisfaction and content which I never remember to have had before.”⁴⁹ James Wallace’s stint as footman was almost certainly inspired by a similar episode in Smollett’s *Roderick Random*; Pamela Perkins points out that even contemporary readers noticed the parallels.⁵⁰ Yet Bage repurposes the episode to reflect commercial principles. In the first place, Smollett’s eponymous protagonist had been extremely reluctant to take the job: “I was fain to embrace this humble proposal, because my affairs were desperate.”⁵¹ Furthermore, Random—like the genteel heroines forced to become maids in Rowe’s novels—never expresses satisfaction with his work, nor ever suggests that his time as a footman is anything other than a misfortune. While Wallace is unashamed of his status

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 183.

⁴⁷ I will further discuss passivity and agency below.

⁴⁸ Robert Bage, *James Wallace* (New York: Garland Pub., 1979), I.194-95.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, II.18.

⁵⁰ Perkins, Introduction to *Hermsprong*, 22-23.

⁵¹ Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random*, ed. David Blewett (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 218.

and content to serve as footman to his own love interest, Miss Lamoude, Random bitterly laments his “servile,” “inglorious,” and “sordid” position, and wishes to be free to address the lovely Narcissa.⁵² Bage undoubtedly copies the situation, but he uses it to celebrate rather than lament employment.

More significantly, Bage rhetorically enfranchises women by legitimizing their labor. His decision is highly unusual, even among reformist authors. In *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money and Society from Defoe to Austen*, Mona Scheuermann writes that, excepting Defoe’s fiction, novels rarely depicted gently-bred women engaged in work: “When authors show women working, they deal with lower-class women. This is true even among the male radical writers, Godwin, Bage, and Holcroft, no matter how capable a woman is seen to be, she generally is not pictured as working.”⁵³ Her argument accords with Bourdieu’s observation that dominant fractions (in this case, the genteel) claim “a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies...remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies.”⁵⁴ In essence, the polite prided themselves upon their freedom from mundane concerns. Therefore, eighteenth-century fiction portrays women’s work as a tragic necessity, one that inherently forces the woman to narrow her mental horizons, thereby inhibiting her sensibility and/or sociability. In Burney’s *The Wanderer*, when Gabriella and Juliet try to earn their living by sewing

it was with difficulty that they learnt to enjoy each other’s society, upon such terms as their altered condition now exacted; where the eye must never be spared from laborious business, to search, or to reciprocate a sentiment....The lively

⁵² *Ibid*, 221, 225, 231.

⁵³ Mona Scheuermann, *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money and Society from Defoe to Austen* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1993), 9.

⁵⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 48.

intelligence, the rapid conception, the arch remark, the cordial smile; which gave grace to kindness, playfulness to counsel, gentleness to raillery, and softness even to reproach; these, the expressive sources of delight, and of comprehension, in social commerce, they were fain wholly to relinquish; from the hurry of unremitting diligence, and undivided attention to manual toil.

Burney suggests that work for pay thwarts the potential for civility and social virtue; the women are victimized by their “undivided attention to manual toil,” which destroys the emotional and intellectual rapport that was possible before the activity became a necessity. Burney’s distressed heroines recall Smollett’s Random, who laments his “sordid” time as a footman.

Commercial authors, however, were more likely to imply that women are empowered rather than burdened by work. Scheuermann singles out Defoe, who implies that “a woman’s talent for productive work is limited only by society’s definition of what avenues for earning money are available to her.”⁵⁵ I would add that Richardson also endorses women’s participation in the workforce; as discussed in Chapter 2, Sir Charles Grandison urges impoverished genteel women to work full time at manual arts, including “a number of hours in each day, for the encouragement of industry, that should be called their own; and what was produced in them, to be solely appropriated to their own use.”⁵⁶ Richardson characterizes such work as the path to self-determination rather than the bondage envisioned by Burney. Still, working women in Richardson’s novels are rare.

It is truly puzzling, however, that Scheuermann dismisses Bage. The Midlands manufacturer is as comfortable with middling and genteel working women as Defoe, and features several prominently in his novels. In *The Fair Syrian*, the orphaned, polite Miss Warren

⁵⁵ Scheuermann, *Her Bread to Earn*, 2.

⁵⁶ Richardson, *Grandison*, II.356. See also Chapter 2, 114-15.

happily seeks employment, shunning the conventional options of charity or life as a dependent companion: “If...I can find a situation in any country where I can live unnoticed, and unmolested, and can gain the little I need by this small approach to the art of painting, and by fine-needlework, I shall have all I now ask in life.”⁵⁷ She takes steps to realize her goal, and takes pleasure in the thought of “getting my own bread”⁵⁸—a phrase that echoes Scheuermann’s book title. Miss Warren eventually agrees to marry the reformed hero, John Amington, but Bage has already conveyed that she was happy to work, and that independent employment is preferable to “the evils I fear...servility and dependence.”⁵⁹ Miss Warren, like James Wallace, separates labor from the concept of drudgery and associates it with occupational independence. Bage thus also implies that employment—and independence, which is usually figured as masculine—can be desirable objectives for women. Bage devotes extensive narrative space to Miss Warren’s occupational ambition, as she discusses her plans at length and on multiple occasions; he seems to be normalizing women’s work.⁶⁰

In *Man As He Is*, Bage pushes the boundaries of convention further; his polite heroine chooses work and financial independence over marriage to the man who loves her. After Cornelia Colerain’s father dies and her fortune is wiped out, she rejects the good-hearted Sir George Paradyne, electing instead to take a job painting ceramics for a midlands pottery, “exchang[ing] the products of some of the elegant arts...for the common and convenient necessities of life.”⁶¹ The element of choice is key, for it makes the employment appear to be an appealing option—almost a vocation—rather than a dire necessity. Indeed, months after starting

⁵⁷ Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian* (New York: Garland Pub., 1979), I.237.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, II.239.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, I.163,

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, I.247; II.15; and II.239

⁶¹ Bage, *Man As He Is*, I.192. Sir George even sees and admires some of her “products” for sale in a factory exhibition room (II.216-17).

work, Miss Colerain tells her disappointed suitor: “Industry is amusement. It is even consolation.”⁶² Bage indicates that the work neither degrades Miss Colerain’s sensibility nor causes her to feel despair. Instead, it enables her to be self-sufficient, respectable, and, apparently, fulfilled.

Bage thus privileges activity and employment, and pointedly includes working women; his novels collectively constitute commercial counterdiscourse, rewriting occupational independence and work as a laudable, desirable goal for both men and women.⁶³ Furthermore, though neither Dodsley nor Richardson offers such a sweeping challenge to polite mores, they do suggest that virtuous women are unafraid to work. These similarities form a pattern in the writings of commercial men; along with Defoe, they represent a culture that encourages women to help run a business (sometimes independently), contribute to the family income, and work with their hands. Their fiction encourages a shift in polite assumptions, asking readers to consider women’s ability to make substantial, practical contributions to British society.

“I Will Be a Slave to None”: Agency and the Occupational Contract

Bage’s enduring reputation as a radical novelist has prompted myriad political critiques of his work, variously proposing his endorsement of either “liberal Whig” or more radical views of the social contract.⁶⁴ While Liberal Whig (or “contractarian”) theorists had moved away from the conservative political fiction of an original, binding contract, radicals questioned whether the Liberal Whigs went far enough; according to Nancy Johnson, radical texts convey “a wariness of

⁶² *Ibid.*, II.240.

⁶³ There are other working women in Bage’s novels; *Mount Henneth*, for example, features Miss Tyrell, a witty and resourceful milliner who is willing to sell her wares in bawdy houses; see especially I.119-I.155. Mr. Foston invites her to join the ‘ideal’ community at the end of the novel.

⁶⁴ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 48. Kelly ties the “liberal Whig” view of the contract to the 18th-century Commonwealthmen. See also Wallace’s Introduction to her *Revolutionary Subjects* and Nancy Johnson’s *English Jacobin Novel*, Introduction and Chapter 1.

the continued dependence of agency on property,” a term that may entail either the possession of land or “financial independence.”⁶⁵ Although Bage rarely engages in an explicit political discussion of the social contract or citizenship, he indirectly addresses these themes at the local or domestic level. Johnson suggests that Bage uses Gregory Glen, the bastard narrator of *Hermesprong*, in order to “show the impact of a model of enfranchisement on a man who has been denied agency.”⁶⁶ Bage does, indeed, imply Glen’s agency—but Glen is also well-bred and receives a modest income (enough to secure his genteel independence) from his landowning father. It is not too much of a stretch to view him as possessing a form of cultural and financial ‘property.’ Nevertheless, Bage metaphorically enfranchises a stunning variety of less privileged characters, from humble tradesmen to servants. His fiction draws only tangentially upon existing political discourse; instead, it presents groundbreaking interpretations of the contract and property that are based in a distinctive, commercial vision of power relations.

Although seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writings on the social contract explore political relationships—and their associations with patriarchy—commercial views of the contract center on the business relationship. In Chapter 2, I made the case that Samuel Richardson’s novels suggest a contractual understanding of the social hierarchy; Richardson approves of differences in social status but understands these differences as situational rather than natural or innate.⁶⁷ Bage observes society through the same cultural lens, using similar tropes and language to imply the dignity and agency of subordinates. In *Man As He Is*, the servant Mr. Macreith, seeking a position as valet, expresses a very negative opinion about a former employer. The

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. Johnson draws upon P.S. Atiyah’s *The Rise and Fall of Freedom of Contract* to discuss the social contract, which she defines as “the ‘mutual rights and duties’ required of citizens.” Johnson adds, “Not everyone was considered a free, rational agent qualified to participate in a social contract. As the idea of the citizen was reinterpreted and the borders of the individual reconsidered, the economically dependent were denied a full array of rights and excluded from the enjoyment of political agency in civil society” (3-4).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2, 126-35.

genteel Mr. Sampson is surprised, and worries that Macreith may make a poor valet, since his “notions may be too free to bear servitude in any degree.” Macreith responds:

I cannot answer that question, till I get a definition o’ servitude. As soon as I left school, I became footman in Lord Glencairn’s family; I rose to be his gentleman, or valet de chambre. I ay considered this to be a contract betwixt my lord and mysell; on his part, to find me subsistence, and a sma’ spell o’ money over; on mine, to perform the offices that are implied in the names of footman and valet de chambre.⁶⁸

Here and elsewhere, Bage makes a consistent distinction between *service* and the concept of *servitude*.⁶⁹ He works to separate these terms, to detach service from any implication of degradation. As Mr. Macreith claims, service involves a contract between two adults; servants obey their employers, but only so long as the terms of the contract are fulfilled. At no time do they surrender their own agency—it is conditional, not natural subordination. When James Wallace works as a valet (before he becomes a footman), he leaves his master because “it was the servant’s privilege in all countries where slavery was abolished, to quit his service when it became too heavy to be borne.”⁷⁰ Bage’s distinction between service and servitude explains how he can repeatedly censure “servility and dependence” while still suggesting that Wallace can find “abundant cause to rejoice and be happy” as a footman. Wallace’s friend Paracelsus Holman later emphasizes the point when he tells Wallace, “I can be a journeyman anywhere; I will be a

⁶⁸ Bage, *Man As He Is*, II.148-49. Bage does not undermine Macreith’s position; the polite Samson immediately concedes that Macreith has “the true idea.”

⁶⁹ Most eighteenth-century references to domestic employees refer to the work as “service,” but many novelists also referred to service as “servitude”—as, for example, Tobias Smollett in *Roderick Random* (231); Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 186; and Mr. Sampson here. See also “Servitude,” *OED*.

⁷⁰ Bage, *James Wallace*, I.183.

slave to none.”⁷¹ Wallace and Holman’s comments contrast sharply with Random’s complaint about the perceived “servility” of his status as footman. According to Bage, employment, whether as journeyman, footman, or—in Tom Sutton’s case, steward—is honorable work that is compatible with personal independence. The occupational contract and independence offer members of the lower ranks a form of agency without property.

Bage’s discourse remains consistent when applied to familial relations—and, as in Richardson’s novels, the contract rhetoric carries occupational overtones. Scheuermann has suggested that “Bage presents an entirely new perspective for the relationship: to make parent and child equal is, after all, to deny much of a parent’s accustomed power.”⁷² Yet Bage is not that radical—he never implies that parents and children are equal, just as he never implies that an employer and employee are equal. Instead, Bage suggests that children are ordinarily expected to obey their parents, but only so long as their parents do not abuse their authority.⁷³ The plot of *Hermesprong* parallels the premise of *Clarissa*; a family (in *Hermesprong*’s case, the father only) tries to force a young woman to marry a repellent but wealthy suitor. The conflict, however, is figured as a contractual dispute. When Hermesprong tells his love interest, Caroline Campinet, that she should leave her tyrannical father, Miss Campinet counters that filial duty requires her to stay. Hermesprong asks, “Are there obligations binding on one party only? obligations which are not reciprocal?” Miss Campinet replies, “It is a question of too great range, Mr. Hermesprong; but suppose it so...does a breach on one side dissolve the obligation on the other?” Hermesprong’s

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I.49. Contemporary debates on slavery appear to have affected Bage’s language; however, in all of his novels, his characterizations of independence and the contract fundamentally track those of earlier commercial novelists. As with his references to radical texts in his final novels, Bage incorporates topical political tropes/rhetoric—but the sentiment is rooted in commercial culture.

⁷² Mona Scheuermann, *Social Protest in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1985), 224.

⁷³ Bage, *Hermesprong*, 305. See also *Man As He Is*—the dutiful Sir George walks out on his mother, but only when one of her harangues becomes “violent and rather abusive” (I.37).

answer: “I think so.”⁷⁴ He later clarifies his reasoning by explaining that parents are not owed respect and obedience unless they earn it: “Merely for existence...I owe nothing. It is for rendering that existence a blessing, my filial gratitude is due. If I am made miserable, ought I to pay for happiness?”⁷⁵ Markley claims that these passages reflect “the revolutionary spirit of the times,”⁷⁶ but Bage’s language suggests otherwise. Hermsprong’s rhetoric, his suggestion that filial duty is a form of payment for services rendered, echoes Macreith’s description of the employment agreement, and Miss Whitaker’s description of marriage as “undertak[ing] a profession.”⁷⁷ It evokes an understanding of power that reflects commercial culture more closely than Commonwealth political rights. Bage may have read John Locke and sympathized with the aims of the Continental Army, but I would add that he was already predisposed by his habitus to have ‘liberal’ social views. Cultural practice can precede (and sometimes magnify) politics. Bage’s textual vision of human power relationships parallels Richardson’s.

Bage’s conception of power and agency separates him from the radical novelists, who figure the lower classes as the oppressed victims of a tyrannical system. In Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, Orlando Falkland decries “the yoke of these unfortunate people,” and refers to them as “Poor wretches!”⁷⁸ Holcroft’s Anna St. Ives demonstrates such solidarity with the working class that she “never gave [her] servants much employment, and always doubted whether the keeping them were not an immoral act.”⁷⁹ In most reformist novels, injustice seems baked into the

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 256

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 305. Bage’s association of relationships with the rhetoric of ‘payment’ surfaces frequently. When Dr. Blick demands that Hermsprong respect Lord Grondale, Hermsprong replies, “I only pay it, Sir, where I owe it” (106). Later, Gregory Glen uses nearly the same words: “I pay exactly what I owe” (145).

⁷⁶ Markley, *Conversion and Reform*, 81.

⁷⁷ Bage, *Barham Downs*, II.324.

⁷⁸ William Godwin, *The Adventures of Caleb Williams: Or, Things as They Are* (London: W. Pickering, 1992), 105.

⁷⁹ Holcroft, *Anna St. Ives*, 419.

structure; whether or not the powerful possess good intentions, they cannot secure systematic justice or happiness for their social inferiors.⁸⁰

Bage's novels do not follow this pattern; Marilyn Butler observes that he "appears innocent of the otherwise universal jacobin obsession with social determinism."⁸¹ Bage accepts hierarchy, and his novels, like Richardson's, reflect the more conservative belief that customary labor relationships justify subordination.⁸² His mindset helps to explain an episode in *Hermesprong* that scholars often struggle to explain.⁸³ Towards the end of the novel, Hermesprong attempts to disperse striking miners:

My friends, perhaps it may be true that your wages are not adequate to the furnishing you with all the superfluities of life which you may desire; but these are unhappy times, and require of you a greater degree of frugality and forbearance. My friends, we cannot all be rich; there is no possible *equality* of *property* which can last a *day*. If you were capable of desiring it, which I hope you are not, you must wade through such scenes of guilt and horror to obtain it, as you would tremble to think of. You must finish the horrid conflict by destroying each other.⁸⁴

An author possessed of truly radical beliefs might be expected to side with the desperate workers. Hermesprong is sympathetic, but he also expressly (and emphatically) dispels the notion of property equality. Instead, he urges them to manage their money more carefully and accept their current situation; in essence, he wants them to stop viewing themselves as victims, for the

⁸⁰ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 227-29. See also Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 43.

⁸¹ Butler, *War of Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 77. Gary Kelly notes the same contrast, calling it a "paradox" that Bage lacked interest in "the causal circumstances between circumstances and character" (*English Jacobin Novel*, 62). See also Scheuermann, *Social Protest*, 201.

⁸² London, *Women and Property*, 117-18.

⁸³ Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 135-37. See also Johnson, *English Jacobin Novel*, 98.

⁸⁴ Bage, *Hermesprong*, 314.

same reason he earlier showed impatience with the passive Wigley family. The passage may be inexplicable to readers expecting Jacobin ideology—especially in Bage’s final and ostensibly most radical novel—but it makes sense if you view Hermsprong as the voice of commercial culture. The business community was comfortable with social rank, financial inequality, and even deference, so long as those differences were understood to be contingent, or based in merit or work rather than birth or nature. Bage implies that the men are employees, independent agents—not slaves or serfs. They are therefore responsible for their own happiness. If the country’s economic troubles have made their position difficult, Hermsprong suggests, they should either change their behavior and attitude (through “frugality and forbearance”) or leave, as James Wallace quit his position as valet. Other reformist authors may have disputed Bage’s position, but he was not a radical. He was a businessman who had to deal with his own strikes.⁸⁵

Perkins writes that individual characters in Bage may be corrupt or dangerous, but “unlike Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and other such novelists, Bage avoids extending his satire to the impersonal structures of social institutions.”⁸⁶ Neither Perkins nor Butler, however, has advanced a reason for Bage’s less deterministic views. Bage does not portray British society as inherently unjust, because he views power relationships as fundamentally contractual rather than exploitative. Nor does he pity everyone in the lower ranks, because he sees them as agents rather than powerless victims. Although he can (and does) spotlight abuses of power, he suggests that the problem lies in human weakness, not the socio-political system itself.

⁸⁵ Johnston, *Unusual Suspects*, 166.

⁸⁶ Perkins, Introduction to *Hermsprong*, 45.

“To Distinguish Men by Virtue”: Subaltern Subjectivity in Bage’s Novels

Bage’s view that most Britons are independent agents or subjects—with or without traditional forms of property—corresponds with his view that that most Britons are worthy of attention and respect. Late-eighteenth-century novels often recognized the voices of non-elite men (and women) because “subjectivity was emerging as a crucial claim for all forms of [political] agency.”⁸⁷ Wallace argues that the radical engagement with subjectivity involved the ongoing (re)definition of *political* subjectivity via representations of *literary* subjectivity, so that almost any Briton might be considered “a social agent able to act upon the world and in the world, engaging in meaning-making and containing an interior psychological self.”⁸⁸

Bage certainly seems interested in legitimizing Britain’s non-elite populace—yet his earlier novels demonstrate that this interest preceded the ‘radical’ era and paralleled the work of earlier commercial authors. Most scholars have already pointed out the “moral and egalitarian” nature of Bage’s fiction, which collectively “rejects all inequality based on anything except merit.”⁸⁹ Many of these claims are general statements of principle, as when Hermsprong proclaims, “I have been taught only to distinguish men by virtue.”⁹⁰ As I have shown, Bage never implies that he disapproves of status inequality, but he seeks to shift the standards by which power and status are acquired. Mr. Warren, a wealthy merchant in *The Fair Syrian*, carefully explains the commercial populace’s views:

⁸⁷ Johnson, *English Jacobin Novel*, 17. I follow Johnson’s definition of “subjectivity” as the “discrete, independent self [which] was a pre-requisite to citizenship, to proprietorship in the social contract, to the avoidance of subjecthood that was a carryover from formal patriarchy” (17). Wallace provides a similar argument, adding that Jacobin fictions sought “to include and make coherent subjects previously excluded from full subjectivity: property-less men, criminals, women without men, and non-Europeans” (*Revolutionary Subjects*, 14).

⁸⁸ Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 20-21.

⁸⁹ Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 240. See also Anahid Nersessian, “Romantic Liberalism and the Juridical Comedy: Robert Bage’s *Hermsprong*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 651; Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 33; Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 117; and Scheuermann, *Social Protest*, 205.

⁹⁰ Bage, *Hermsprong*, 82. See also: *Mount Henneth*, I.221, II.120; *Barham Downs*, I.331, II.75-81; *The Fair Syrian* I.273, II.29, II.361; *James Wallace*, I.33-35, I.100-2, II.233; *Man As He Is*, I.52, II.23, III.259; *Hermsprong*, 92, 204.

For those of the plebeian race, of which I am unfortunately one, can hear of no physical difference in their bloated blood, which can entitle men of rank to superiority. It is not that we are angry at a truly great man's getting a title; because we see that he possesses qualities which we have not. If a man has been eminently serviceable to his country, and appears at court with a star on his breast and a garter round his knee, we acknowledge that he deserves the distinction; but we cannot think that the son of this man, happening to have been begot by him rather than by another, on this account is entitled to get above us. Still less is it agreeable to men of trade, that a narrow-minded wretch should value himself because a few generations back an ancestor possessed a good estate, to which he has succeeded in spite of his insignificance—or which has perhaps been almost wasted in the support of imaginary dignity before it reaches him.⁹¹

Mr. Warren takes pains to emphasize that he does not begrudge men of rank or nobility their customary trappings, so long as such status is earned and is not automatically passed to the next generation. According to this view, any Briton might have worth, and none are objectified or excluded from public discourse simply because of their blood or lack of good breeding. Instead, the test of merit is commercial, hinging upon the degree to which a man is useful (“serviceable”) to his country. Bage’s counterdiscourse engages and remaps traditional social institutions from the perspective of his own community: “men of trade.”

Much of Mr. Warren’s speech would fit comfortably in any number of novels throughout the century, many of which promulgated the progressive narrative of merit. However, most of these narratives are also fundamentally polite and assimilationist, because they use such rhetoric

⁹¹ Bage, *The Fair Syrian*, II.361.

only to create space for disadvantaged genteel characters.⁹² Bage, however, creates a much more radical, supersessionist narrative of merit by introducing a number of non-polite characters who command attention and respect commensurate with their polite counterparts.⁹³ When James Wallace sets up a legal office in a “bye street” and fails, he invites his friend Holman to laugh:

My landlord, an honest weaver, laughs also. Master Wallace, says he, after I had been a fortnight in his house without a client, a friend, or an acquaintance, male or female, I have a good trade, and a bit of money at use, and how do you think I got it? Why I got it by going to look for business, not by letting business come to look for me. How should any body employ you, when nobody knows you?

Bage’s weaver engages in what Miriam Wallace calls “meaning-making,” and his interpretation of James Wallace’s failure turns traditional patronage on its head. In conventional narratives, the gentleman would lend a humble craftsman the money necessary to recover from an illness or financial hardship. Instead, the humble craftsman cheerfully assists the gentleman, demonstrating superior practical wisdom and advising Wallace to embrace a traditional commercial quality: enterprise. Richardson had usually created space for the commercial identity by grafting it on to ideal gentlemen like Mr. B and Charles Grandison. Bage, however, is far more direct. Readers are invited to see the commercial figure as the “accomplished man,”⁹⁴ and to legitimize his point of view by laughing good-naturedly at the inexperienced Wallace, who does not seem

⁹² See Introduction, 4.

⁹³ Bage approvingly refers to “saucy” or pert English servants and peasants (*Fair Syrian*, II.51), which recalls Richardson’s similarly sympathetic portrayal of Pamela, who was frequently called “sawcy” by Mr. B. In *The Fair Syrian*, a humble French peasant confronts the lord who has seduced his wife: “His honour was insulted; for I had unhappily forgot his greatness, and my own littleness, and talked to him as a man would talk to a man. This is an insult, the French *Noblesse* cannot pardon.” (II.211) When Lady Mary Paradyne falls ill in *Man As He Is*, her nurse scoffs that “if rank would save people from the gout, it would be worth something. For my part I see no difference between a duchess and a washerwoman.” (III.259)

⁹⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 85. See also Introduction, 6-7.

offended.⁹⁵ Although the weaver is a secondary character, he is an empowered *subject* looking and judging, rather than an object receiving the sympathetic gaze of the elite. Bage writes a commercial sphere that differs from the polite without appearing subordinate.

The nuanced representation of the commercial fraction continues over the next several pages, as the weaver takes his tenant to a social gathering in order to help Wallace drum up business:

It was a club of honest tradesmen, whose principal subjects were politics and jokes. I was not extremely well qualified in either; but I desired to please, and, after a fortnight's exertion, succeeded tolerably. A young soldier, fresh from America, had favoured the members sometimes, and was at first well received; but as he chose to talk for every body, every body grew weary of being auditors only, and heartily wished to be rid of him, though no one chose to signify so unpolite a request.⁹⁶

Once again, readers are invited to view the gently-bred protagonist as an awkward cultural 'apprentice' rather than an influential, sophisticated patron of the common folk. Wallace's immersion in the club breaks existing polite discursive practices, in which "a plebeian event [is] transformed into a literary text for the educated elite" through "the social and physical separation of the observer."⁹⁷ Wallace does not separate himself. Instead, he "desire[s] to please" men who would ordinarily be considered his social inferiors, and he learns to converse on their terms, in a distinct mode of sociability that rests on "politics and jokes" rather than literature, philosophy, or *bon ton* gossip. Bage thereby signals the cultural differences between Wallace and the tradesmen

⁹⁵ Bourdieu writes that "the surest sign of [cultural] legitimacy is self-assurance" (250). Bage's commercial (and, more broadly, his subaltern) characters are routinely portrayed as confident and capable.

⁹⁶ Bage, *James Wallace*, I.130.

⁹⁷ Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 119.

without rhetorically favoring Wallace; the men are friendly and hospitable, and no one chooses to be “unpolite.”

A tradesman from Glasgow eventually resolves the awkward situation by wielding the tools of commercial sociability: jokes and laughter. After one of the lieutenant’s long, boastful stories, the tradesman ironically suggests that the officer is an ideal “jontleman that wants na but common sense to mak him compleat.”⁹⁸ The lieutenant is (naturally) offended, and several exchanges follow in which the tradesman makes his opponent appear even more foolish. The lieutenant then requests a duel: “No man shall affront me with impunity; and, by G—d, Sir, I insist upon satisfaction.” The tradesman, however, cheerfully and deliberately misinterprets the conventional meaning of “satisfaction”: “My trad, Sir, is selling thread and lace: If you want any thing in that way, I shall be proud to oblige you.” The response is rhetorically brilliant, because he neatly rejects polite culture (dueling) in the same moment that he affirms the practices of his own commercial status.

The exasperated officer then lashes out at the entire company: “Gentlemen...do you countenance such usage? If you do, let me tell you, you don’t know how a gentleman ought to be treated.” The response, given by an anonymous “one of the members,” is expressive:

‘Not we, indeed...we are a club of humble tradesmen, and know our distance. We don’t aspire to the honour of keeping gentlemen company. I believe, Sir, that you came amongst us at all, is more owing to your generous condescension than to our ambition.’ A general smile succeeded. The officer threw down his shilling, damned the company for low-lived scoundrels, threatened the Scotchman, and departed. We have seen him no more.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Bage, *James Wallace*, I.136.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, I.138-9.

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, mockery is far more transgressive than complaint or outrage. Bage's narrative grants the commercial voice satiric authority; while ostensibly confessing their inferiority, the tradesmen undermine the elitist attitudes that the officer represents. Though the point of view is technically Wallace's, he describes the tradesmen in a positive manner and works to integrate with them, all while distancing himself from the only other gentleman present: the peevish lieutenant. It is very difficult to read the scene without identifying with the tradesmen—or at least viewing them as (temporary) protagonists—due to their poise, wit, and easy sociability. Bage's novels contain numerous similar episodes, which cumulatively reject polite narratives featuring non-elite characters as spectacle, as objects of pity or grasping, unsophisticated social-climbers.¹⁰⁰ The club men are neither powerless nor interested in assimilation; it is the gentleman, James Wallace, who learns from and attempts to emulate them.

The fact that the Glaswegian tradesman outwits and outclasses the lieutenant despite his heavy Scotch accent is itself revolutionary. Eighteenth-century authors had generally used dialect or other forms of non-standard English to signal the social and intellectual limitations of an ill-educated, foreign, or provincial speaker.¹⁰¹ Bage, too, uses language as a marker of social difference, but in his novels subaltern forms do not delegitimize the speaker. The Gamidge family in *James Wallace* is part of the stereotypical *nouveau-riche*; Mr. Gamidge, “a very industrious and fortunate oil-man,” has recently retired to the countryside and become a justice of the peace. Although the family is tempted by the prospect of gentility, Mrs. Gamidge colorfully expresses her distaste for pretension:

¹⁰⁰ On the aestheticization of plebeian subjects, see Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, 119-124.

¹⁰¹ Jane Hodson. *Dialect in Film and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 109. See also N.F. Blake, *Non-standard Language in English Literature* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1984), 108.

Sensible people...are astonished to see how people with a title forgets themselves, as if the man that got the money, that bought the title, was not a better man than they that have it for nothing; but every thing here in this world ungenerates. Prudent people gets fortunes, and children buy titles, and forgets their Fathers and Mothers.¹⁰²

Nothing in the text undermines Mrs. Gamidge's claims, and it is especially suggestive that Bage declines to refine Mrs. Gamidge's language. Like the rest of her family, she speaks in the uneducated dialect of her commercial past, but the substance of her remarks is no less sensible for her non-standard grammar. Bage manages to distinguish her linguistically from the genteel populace without suggesting that she is in any way inferior to more 'cultured' individuals. In the first edition of *Pamela*, Richardson crafted a similarly authentic voice for Pamela, although he later polished many of her expressions in order to appease his polite readers.¹⁰³ These voices, in essence, demand respect for other fractions—and in the process, they suggest the artificiality of social barriers between polite and vulgar.

Perhaps the most remarkable dialect voice belongs to Scipio, James Lamounde's black valet in *James Wallace*. Bage did not consider service to be servile or degrading, so his vision of a strong, confident non-elite populace extends to domestic servants. Lamounde is a young, well-educated gentleman on his Grand Tour, and he runs into financial trouble. He tells Scipio, "I will ready my accounts for your inspection," so that he "might have the benefit of [Scipio's] remarks."¹⁰⁴ Lamounde then asks Scipio how to disentangle himself from a gambling companion. Scipio does not disappoint: "Ask him pay you, Sir; if he do—good—well; if he do not, he no come near you. Me tink de debt bad; me don't know if de oder, Mr. Moreton, very

¹⁰² Bage, *James Wallace*, I.53-4.

¹⁰³ See Chapter 2, 139-40.

¹⁰⁴ Bage, *James Wallace*, II.50.

good.”¹⁰⁵ Servants in eighteenth-century drama and novels frequently offer guidance to their masters and mistresses, but the advice is nearly always limited to affairs of the heart or situations requiring low cunning—an area of supposedly ‘vulgar’ expertise. Bage’s rendering of Scipio’s voice also, on the surface, implies intellectual and cultural handicaps; his pronunciation and grammar verge upon pidgin English.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the content of Scipio’s advice belies his lack of outward polish. He is clearly financially literate, and Lamoude’s willingness to submit his accounts to Scipio’s “inspection,” as if Scipio were the master and Lamoude the apprentice, ascribes a marked degree of authority and professional expertise to a valet. Scipio helps Lamoude get his books in order, assesses the likelihood that different debts will be repaid, and offers an astute, non-confrontational way for his master to extricate himself from an unhealthy friendship. Lamoude takes the advice. Kelly has claimed that Bage was uninterested in the poor, “except as objects of charity for his heroes and heroines.”¹⁰⁷ Scipio suggests otherwise; he is, in the words of Miss Lamoude, “a person of some consequence among us.”¹⁰⁸ He is only one of a number of strong voices among Bage’s lower-rank characters, and many command respect despite their lack of polite style.¹⁰⁹

Bage further illustrates the artificiality of the genteel-vulgar divide by incorporating successful ‘intermarriage’ relationships. In *Barham Downs*, Bage marries an honorable attorney—one of the main characters—to the seduced, uneducated daughter of a poor surgeon.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, II.51.

¹⁰⁶ Scipio’s language mirrors that of “Mr. Fidel Benjamin,” Cornelia Colerain’s black servant in *Man As He Is*. (e.g., “I no ought to speak to you in dis way” IV.202.) In a lengthy, two-part interpolated narrative, readers are told that Fidel was born in Benin, then sold by his father into slavery and taken to Jamaica. He received several years of education, handles accounts, and once oversaw a plantation (IV.201-220). Bage thus implies that the non-standard language is a form of dialect, not a reflection of limited intellect. Bage does not describe Scipio’s background, but he probably intended that Scipio’s language be read in the same way.

¹⁰⁷ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Bage, *James Wallace*, II.154

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Mrs. Tyrrel in *Mount Henneth*; Fidel in *Man As He Is*; the French peasant in *The Fair Syrian*; and Sally in *Hermesprong*.

Richardson knew that Pamela's marriage to Mr. B would trouble polite readers, so he had been careful to emphasize Pamela's "Qualifications above [her] Degree,"¹¹⁰ including singing, playing the spinet, dancing, producing decorative needlework, and performing "the Honours" of the table, and he spends the second half of the book establishing the neighboring gentry's admiration of this "most accomplished Lady."¹¹¹ Bage makes a much more forceful case for non-elite legitimacy, for Kitty Ross appears to lack all of the graceful accomplishments that were considered appropriate to the status of a gentleman's wife.¹¹² Nevertheless, William Wyman loves her for "the beauties...of her mind," and begs her to marry him until "she condescended to apply the last remedy, [which] succeeded with me so well and so happily."¹¹³ Bage's readers are repeatedly confronted with the suggestion that good breeding (or the lack thereof) should not play a significant role in social or marital connections.¹¹⁴

The ultimate effect of Kitty Ross's portrayal—as well as Bage's portrayal of myriad other subaltern characters like Scipio, Hugh Griffiths, and the Glaswegian tradesman—is to nudge the audience towards a view that polite breeding does not confer moral, cultural, or intellectual superiority.¹¹⁵ He grants unprecedented access to their (often authoritative) points of view, prompting readers to identify with and respect them—and their often supersessionist rebukes of elite culture. In the process, Bage gives these characters the subjectivity and agency that Johnson suggests was vital to political enfranchisement.

¹¹⁰ Richardson, *Pamela*, 11.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 474.

¹¹² At least, Bage does not seem to think that these accomplishments (or lack thereof) are important enough to discuss.

¹¹³ Bage, *Barham Downs*, II.83

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Tom Gamidge's marriage to a housemaid in *James Wallace*. When Tom expresses his desire to marry a housemaid, his mother objects, arguing that the family's now-genteel status prohibits the match. "Rachel's of low degree to be sure," Tom replies, "What then? she'll spend less" (I.100). No arguments are made that Rachel is qualified to become a 'lady', nor does Tom suggest that she possesses exceptional domestic or sexual virtues. Nevertheless, Tom's father and sister side with him, and he happily marries the housemaid.

¹¹⁵ I should add that Bage depicts numerous dishonest or vicious 'vulgar' characters—but they are not dishonest or vicious more often than genteel characters. He portrays women the same way; as Mona Scheuermann points out, Bage creates silly women as often as capable ones (*Her Bread to Earn*, 167).

“The Language of Nature”: Outsiders in Bage’s Fiction

Bage does not always lodge his critiques of gentility in tradesmen or servants; he sometimes steps outside of the traditional British hierarchy in order to accomplish the same goal more effectively. Wallace writes that radical novelists often feature a “critique by an outsider who brings a new eye to what is commonly accepted as ‘normative’ in a British context, and [invite] the reader to consider the perspectives of others and their different virtues.”¹¹⁶ In his final novel, Bage introduces Hermsprong, a young man raised in the wilderness among Native Americans. Hermsprong voices some very radical sentiments: he affirms that he values men only according to virtue; he encourages Miss Campinet to abandon her father’s house; he makes unfavorable comparisons between the British elite and Native Americans; and he tells a clergyman, “I owe you no obedience; and despise you for your tyrannical and contentious spirit!”¹¹⁷ Hermsprong is a provocative figure, but Bage mitigates Hermsprong’s forceful and blunt criticism by consistently reminding readers that he has been raised with an unorthodox system of beliefs. Hermsprong brandishes his outsider status repeatedly, telling other characters, “I was born a savage” or “I am an ignorant young man,” and he refers to “my savage education.”¹¹⁸ These remarks lessen the sting of his more controversial statements because they allow readers to see him as an exception or outlier rather than a harbinger of domestic, working class unrest. Outliers, after all, are anomalous by definition, and therefore unlikely to spark a cultural revolution. The technique allows Bage’s audience to encounter and consider “the perspectives of others” in a fictional environment that feels relatively safe.

¹¹⁶ Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 103.

¹¹⁷ Bage, *Hermsprong*, 139, 249-252, 256.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 82, 92, 140.

Wallace discusses Hermsprong's role in the context of other reformist novels, but does not mention that Bage had used the same technique in his pre-revolutionary fiction, years before the radicals did—except that the earlier novels feature Quakers rather than a young 'savage.' Bage was not a practicing Quaker, nor do scholars currently believe that he was raised in a Quaker family.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, in three of his novels—*Barham Downs*, *The Fair Syrian*, and *Man As He Is*—Quaker characters play important secondary roles. Quakers cultivated a reputation for singularity and a "distinctive way of life,"¹²⁰ enabling Bage to introduce an alternative form of sociability. In *The Fair Syrian*, for example, the French Marquis de St. Clair is struck by the pleasure he receives from a Quaker farmer in America. He writes home that the farmer's

conversation was so entertaining, his hospitality so warm, and his wife so pretty, that I stayed three days with him in the country, without becoming *ennuyé*, except once, when the dissertation upon plants had stretched out too long. 'I tire thee,' says he. I was assuring him to the contrary. 'We study here the language of nature more than that of politeness,' says he; 'come let us take a walk.'¹²¹

Bage encourages his readers to experience the same surprise and delight as the nobleman—which, in turn, invites them to recognize and reject genteel hegemony. The Quaker's opposition of "politeness" with "nature" challenges the assumption that politeness best facilitates social harmony, because in this passage the blunt "language of nature" allows the Quaker to better accommodate the needs of his guest.

Since Quakers voluntarily rejected the dominant culture for spiritual (in other words, non-political) reasons, they could more easily voice attitudes that the elite might otherwise have

¹¹⁹ J. Sutherland, "Bage's Supposed Quaker Upbringing," *Notes and Queries* 198 (1953): 32-33.

¹²⁰ James Walvin, *The Quakers: Money and Morals* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1997), 41-42.

¹²¹ Bage, *Man As He Is*, 1.33.

considered impertinent or disquieting. In *Man As He Is*, the Quaker Miss Carlill comfortably “supports her mother and herself, by peculiar needle-work, much seen and admired.”¹²² When Sir George Paradyne, the protagonist, buys one of her works, she neither praises nor thanks him for his financial support: “A desultory conversation ensued, in which Miss Carlill supported her opinions, and she had opinions, with the same spirit as if Sir George had not been a baronet, and her recent benefactor, and in two hours the party seemed to have known each other half an age.”¹²³ She does not regard the purchase as an act of patronage for which she should express gratitude; she treats it as a business transaction, which no more indicates social superiority than does a farmer’s sale of a barrel of turnips to a grocer. Bage emphasizes the point by repeating that Miss Carlill “had opinions”—she is willing to express her own mind forcefully, although the object of a gentleman’s benevolence usually would not. Miss Carlill refuses to be an object, and asserts herself as Sir George’s equal. Yet the fact that Quakers traditionally reject social distinctions helps to soften Miss Carlill’s refusal to treat Sir George with deference—and, perhaps, makes readers more receptive to her social transgression.

Bage therefore often uses Quakers to voice his most controversial, supersessionist claims. In *Barham Downs*, apothecary Isaac Arnold defies a dissolute Irish aristocrat: “Give me leave to inform thee in my turn, that I am Isaac Arnold, by birth a man, by religion a Quaker, taught to despise all titles that are not the marks of virtue; and of consequence—thine. I rank above thee.”¹²⁴ Arnold issues a flat rejection of traditional norms. At the same time, his avowal of his Quaker identity tempers and (somewhat) de-politicizes his provocative assertion that he ranks “above” an aristocrat. The American Quaker in *The Fair Syrian* inoculates himself with the same rhetoric; when St. Claur asks him his opinion of nobility, the Quaker demurs: “Though our

¹²² *Ibid*, I.111.

¹²³ *Ibid*, I.145.

¹²⁴ Bage, *Barham Downs*, I.331.

religion forbids us to sacrifice truth to politeness, it does not forbid us to be silent, rather than give offense.”¹²⁵ When St. Clair then successfully persuades him to voice his criticism of aristocracy, readers have already been disarmed by his modesty and the reminder of his outsider status. Bage had outsourced some of his most controversial material long before Charles Hermsprong—and before other Jacobin novelists followed suit.

Re-Situating Bage

Since the resurgence of interest in Bage, efforts to connect his work to other writers have tended to fall into two categories. Those interested in Bage’s ideological influences have studied the late-eighteenth political tracts and novels of the revolutionary era. Johnston, for example, suggests that “to a considerable degree, *Man As He Is* constitutes a response to Burke’s *Reflections*.”¹²⁶ The (many) studies that focus on *Hermsprong* generally look to radical texts published shortly before this final novel, such as *Anna St. Ives*, *Caleb Williams*, and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.¹²⁷ When scholars explore Bage’s literary roots, however, they have discussed his affinity for satire, as when Gary Kelly connects Bage’s talent for “blend[ing] instruction and entertainment” with Fielding and Smollett.¹²⁸

These studies are all valuable, but they have obscured Bage’s status as a commercial author, and the parallels among his texts and those of other businessmen, especially Richardson.¹²⁹ Despite the differences in tone—Bage’s light, comic touch differs greatly from Richardson’s characteristic gravity—and the forty-year gap between their authorial debuts, their

¹²⁵ Bage, *The Fair Syrian*, I.34-35.

¹²⁶ Johnston, *Unusual Suspects*, 169.

¹²⁷ Scheuermann, *Social Protest*, 203-29. See also Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, Chapter 3; Markley, *Conversion and Reform*, Chapter 1.

¹²⁸ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 25. See also J.R. Foster’s discussion of the plot parallels between *James Wallace* and Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* in *History of the Pre-Romantic Novel* (New York: MLA, 1949).

¹²⁹ Some scholars have cited ties between Richardson and Bage—e.g., Bage’s use of the forced-marriage plot, or the abduction of a virtuous woman by a rake—but these ties tend to be incidental plot devices rather than deeper similarities of ideology or purpose. See Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 106-7; Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 59.

novels nevertheless possess startling similarities in rhetoric and characterization. As I have shown, Bage and Richardson share a common discursive project: they inscribe commercial values into polite forms and urge genteel readers to adopt these modified perspectives and practices. Both Richardson and Bage celebrate occupational independence and a contractual view of human relations. Kelly has written that Bage's meritocratic stance "is certainly radical; and Bage held it consistently before 1789."¹³⁰ Kelly is right, of course, to point out that Bage was an early advocate of individual dignity—but so were Richardson, Dodsley, and Defoe. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the embrace of meritocracy is only as radical as commercial culture itself can be considered radical. Looking beyond the 'Jacobin' authors reveals the depth of Bage's ideological roots; it also permits greater recognition of Richardson's own supersessionist material.

Furthermore, recognizing these shared cultural and literary principles can open up many fruitful avenues for analysis. Both men, for example, have been cited for their proto-feminist tendencies.¹³¹ Richardson features bold, independent, and "sawcy" women in each of his novels—Pamela, Anna Howe, and Charlotte Grandison—and Peter Faulkner notes that Bage copies Richardson's tendency to pair a spirited, witty woman with a best friend who is more conventional.¹³² Anna Howe, of course, never cheekily pulls a pistol on Mr. Soames in order to defend her friend, as Maria Fluart does to Lord Grondale, but Richardson's pairings still convey

¹³⁰ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 33.

¹³¹ Scholars have also pointed to a wealth of proto-feminist material in Defoe's novels. Regarding Richardson's feminist overtones, see Jocelyn Harris, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 2; Derek Taylor, "Clarissa Harlowe, Mary Astell, and Elizabeth Carter: John Norris of Bemerton's Female 'Descendants,'" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 1 (1999): 24. On Bage's feminism, see Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993): "Bage could be called one of the major feminists of the period" (138). See also Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 133-42.

¹³² Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 50. The pairs are Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe/Anna Howe in *Clarissa*, and Harriet Byron/Charlotte Grandison in *Sir Charles Grandison*; and Bage's Julia Foston/Laura Stanley in *Mount Henneth*, Annabella Whitaker/Peggy Whitaker in *Barham Downs*, Caroline Campinet/Maria Fluart in *Hermesprong*. Richardson's pairings may have been inspired by similar friendships in Restoration plays.

the intelligence and capability of women. Both Bage and Richardson ascribe unconventional thoughts and behavior to a ‘friend’ character, while the nominal heroine remains passive or obedient. The arrangement allows the authors to air more progressive sentiments without alienating genteel readers.¹³³ Both authors envision women engaged in various types of independent work; both authors suggest that women are the intellectual equals of men; and both authors suggest that women are capable of making significant practical (rather than decorative, moral, or spiritual) contributions to the larger community. I would argue that Bage’s and Richardson’s view of women is founded in their background; the commercial population possessed more porous gender roles, which left space for independent, assertive, working women who could participate in the family economy.¹³⁴

Where Bage and Richardson differ, they tend to differ in tone—or, more importantly, degree. Bage almost always endorses deeper and more sweeping changes in British culture. Many of these differences, however, are based in the more reform-friendly environment in which Bage lived and wrote most of his novels.¹³⁵ Richardson had long treasured his idea for the story of a virtuous, wealthy lady who marries a virtuous footman, though he never published it.¹³⁶ He also fantasized about a future date when “the Writer of certain moral Pieces will meet with better Quarter from his very Censurers” who mock “His Obscurity, a Man in Trade, in Business, pretending to draw Characters for Warning to one Set of People, for Instruction to another—

¹³³ Perkins writes that the ‘unconventional friend’ literary role is, itself, conventional, which helps to make the controversial material more acceptable: “Bage manages to violate readers’ expectations without alienating his audience, because he makes sure that the violation occurs on only one level of the narrative and is counteracted on another (“Playfulness of the Pen,” 40). Although Perkins is only discussing Bage’s novels at this point, her argument applies to Richardson as well.

¹³⁴ See Introduction, 32-34.

¹³⁵ Langland, *Polite and Commercial People*, 481-87.

¹³⁶ See Chapter 2, 139.

Presumptuous!”¹³⁷ If he had lived and written during Bage’s era, perhaps he might have felt comfortable committing these more openly supersessionist ideas to print.

“Often Just, Sometimes Striking”: Bage’s Uneasy Influence

Re-situating Bage also invites us to reassess the ways in which he influenced late-eighteenth-century authors. Bage may have been sympathetic to radical politics, but his novels were literary precursors produced by a writer drawing upon the traditions of a different culture and era; he affected their writings much more than they affected his. Nor were Bage’s core values, as evidenced in his writings, substantially altered or intensified by revolutionary politics or fiction. A few academics have suggested that the French Revolution was a watershed moment for Bage, and that his first four novels represent a far more conventional vision of British society—a “relative compliance with eighteenth-century forms and modes of thinking.”¹³⁸ In this view, a liberal Whig Bage imbibed radical ideals in the wake of the French Revolution and the outpouring of progressive tracts. Yet closer readings demonstrate that Bage urges a consistent system of belief, from *Mount Henneth* in 1782 to his post-Revolutionary *Hermesprong*.¹³⁹ The events of 1789 fostered public conversations and (for a brief time) widespread support of a French republic and corresponding British reform. Bage embraced many of these developments, and he began to make more specific references to radical texts and ideas, but the fundamental ideals that he endorses are the same ones he had supported from the beginning—and they are rooted in the commercial fraction.

British radicals testified to the consistency and visibility of Bage’s progressive views; they knew and approved of Bage—or at least, since the novels were published anonymously—

¹³⁷ Richardson to Lady Echlin, October 10, 1754, *Selected Letters*, 316. See also Chapter 2, 106.

¹³⁸ Paul O’Flinn, “‘Man As He Is’ and Romanticism as it ought to be” *Critical Survey* 4, no. 1 (1992): 31. See also Johnston, *Unusual Suspects*, 168.

¹³⁹ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 55.

knew and approved of his work.¹⁴⁰ Three major London literary periodicals were published by the radical bookseller Phillips, and at least one of these periodicals published reviews of every Bage novel except *Barham Downs*.¹⁴¹ Although contemporaries of Dodsley and Richardson often overlooked the authors' progressive tendencies, these reviewers enthusiastically praised the ideological basis of Bage's work, from an anonymous writer's praise for *Mount Henneth's* "judicious reflections"¹⁴² to Mary Wollstonecraft's positive assessments of *Man As He Is* and *Hermesprong*.¹⁴³ In 1787, a writer for the *Monthly Review* praised the egalitarian leanings of *The Fair Syrian*, and chose to reprint the lengthy dialogue between St. Clair and the Quaker because

the just and pertinent observations contained in the following extract will shew that our Author is something more than a novel-writer: he appears, indeed, in the honourable and amiable character of a philosopher, and friend of man,—for though in the dialogue which we have here selected, a *quaker* and a *petit-maitre* compose the scene, it is very easy to discover that the quaker, the favourite character, speaks the sentiments of the Author's heart.

The reviewer concludes that he "cannot too much commend" *The Fair Syrian*. We do not have any evidence recording the response of ordinary readers, but at the very least, sophisticated contemporaries recognized that the novels were not intended only for entertainment. Thomas Holcroft published a glowing review of *Man As He Is*, writing that it "has the power of playing on the fancy, interesting the affections, and teaching moral and political truth." *Man As He Is*

¹⁴⁰ The title page of each novel after *Mount Henneth* indicated the other titles, e.g., "By the author of *Mount Henneth* and *Barham Downs*." The novels were therefore advertised as a single author's body of work.

¹⁴¹ Phillips owned *The Monthly Review*, *The Critical Review*, and *The Analytical Review*. The conservative *Anti-Jacobin*, which launched in 1797, routinely savaged the opinions expressed in Phillips' publications (Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*), 15.

¹⁴² *Monthly Review* 66 (Feb. 1782), 130.

¹⁴³ For the reviews of *Man As He Is* and *Hermesprong*, see *The Analytical Review* 24 (Jul.-Dec. 1796): 398-99 and 608-09. Reviewers had some criticism for the loose plot structure in *James Wallace* and *Man As He Is*, but they always praised Bage's characters and handling of social issues.

“gave us great pleasure, and is such as we can recommend to readers of taste, science, and sentiment.”¹⁴⁴ Holcroft was so pleased with Bage’s fifth novel that he gave it immediately to Godwin; it was the first book Godwin read after he started work on *Caleb Williams*.¹⁴⁵ It would be worthwhile to conduct a systematic study of Jacobin novels to see what influence Bage’s work (or the work of other commercial authors) might have had upon them.

Bage’s novels also seem to have been well-received by the general public. Three secured second editions, and three were pirated.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, even the more conservative periodicals praised Bage’s work—at least until the mid-1790s. Perkins speculates that Bage worked to temper his reformist material with adherence to literary conventions, and did so effectively enough to dampen disapproval.¹⁴⁷ Kelly, on the other hand, suggests that Bage’s pervasive gentle humor disarmed readers who were quick to criticize the more sober works of Godwin and Holcroft.¹⁴⁸ I have also already discussed two additional factors. First, Bage was not as radical as Godwin and Holcroft; he criticizes certain attitudes and beliefs, and promotes others, but he targets individuals—he never advocates a fundamental transformation of social institutions.¹⁴⁹ Second, his strategy of placing his most radical statements in the mouths of cultural outsiders probably made his novels more palatable to the polite world.

At any rate, Bage’s immediate influence seems to have been weakened during the late 1790s by the mounting conservative backlash. The early, moderate stages of the French Revolution had ended, giving way first to the violence and chaos of the Reign of Terror, and then the growing militaristic threat of Napoleon. The political and cultural environment in Britain

¹⁴⁴ *The Monthly Review* 10 (March 1793), 302.

¹⁴⁵ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 146, 191.

¹⁴⁶ Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, 144.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins, “Playfulness of the Pen,” 40.

¹⁴⁸ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Markley, *Conversion and Reform*, 74.

shifted almost as quickly—and though Bage did not change, public perceptions of his work did.

Perkins writes, “There is no doubt that the social and political changes between the 1780s and 1820s were so great as to make it not altogether surprising that a writer who, in 1782, could be admired for his solid morality might be seen as a dangerously radical figure by the 1820s.”¹⁵⁰

Many Britons, alarmed by events across the Channel, saw it as their duty to scrub any potentially subversive ideas from public discourse. Grenby traces the swift—and primarily informal—silencing of reformist voices during the 1790s and the early years of the nineteenth century. The progressives were a minority from the start, and despite a brief period of relative popularity, they were outnumbered and outlasted by legions of anti-Jacobin fictions and reviewers.¹⁵¹ Although earlier periodicals had endeavored to offer impartial assessments of novels’ literary value, by 1798 the *British Critic* had revised its standards, which it proclaimed openly. Novels would be valued according to the following guidelines:

1st, those which are innocent, instructive, and well written; 2ndly, those which possess only two of these three properties, being deficient in the last mentioned; 3rdly, those which are pernicious in their tendency, whether they are well or ill written. Upon these, we shall set, as deeply as we are able, our mark of reprehension.¹⁵²

The war footing brought an end to all tolerance for counterdiscourse. Bage may have been spared longer than other radical novelists, but by the end of the century, he too was considered a “pernicious” influence.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Perkins, Introduction to *Hermesprong*, 18.

¹⁵¹ See Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, 1-12. Between 1791 and 1805, almost 50 anti-Jacobin novels were published; there were no more than 20 Jacobin novels (even using the most inclusive definitions) published during the same period.

¹⁵² *British Critic* 11 (March 1798), 316.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 193.

Despite overwhelming cultural pressure to reject reformist novels, Bage appears to have influenced at least four major writers during and immediately after the Napoleonic era. Butler argues that Bage had a significant impact on Maria Edgeworth, because Edgeworth felt comfortable discussing “controversial issues” and because “she agrees with him in valuing independence above other personal attributes.” Edgeworth also chooses to assert that a wife should “share her husband’s authority by sharing his work.”¹⁵⁴ The commercial emphasis on independence and strong, working women seems to have survived, at least into the early decades of the nineteenth century. Although an analysis of Edgeworth’s connections to Bage (or other tradesmen-authors) is outside the scope of this dissertation, it would be useful to study the ways in which her writings might have been affected by commercial rhetoric, and in turn, how these influences may have contributed to the development of bourgeois culture.

Butler also mentions Walter Scott, whose *Ballantyne Novelist’s Library* (1821-4) reprinted three of Bage’s novels: *Mount Henneth*, *Barham Downs*, and *James Wallace*. Despite Scott’s solid reputation as a conservative, his decision to include three of Bage’s novels indicates marked respect for Bage’s work.¹⁵⁵ Paul O’Flinn writes that Scott was deeply conflicted by his desire to include Bage; he cites Scott’s claim that he strongly disapproves of Bage’s “political and theological tenets,” and suggests that Scott deliberately reduced Bage’s profile by refusing to reprint the more “radical” novels: *Man As He Is* and *Hermesprong*.¹⁵⁶ Yet Scott may have overstated his aversion in order to satisfy a conformist readership, for he goes out of his way to recommend *Hermesprong*: “It is, perhaps, without a parallel in the annals of literature, that, of six different works, comprising a period of fifteen years, the last should be, as it unquestionably is,

¹⁵⁴ Butler, *War of Ideas*, 86.

¹⁵⁵ Kelly, *English Jacobin Novels*, 174-5.

¹⁵⁶ O’Flinn, “*Man As He Is* and Romanticism,” 29.

the best.”¹⁵⁷ His unnecessarily high praise—of a novel not even present in the collection—likely encouraged a number of open-minded readers to seek out a copy of *Hermesprong*; at the least, he does nothing to dissuade them from reading it. Scott may have asserted his distaste with certain aspects of Bage’s work, but the overall effect of his preface is to encourage readers to view the novels as “works of talent and genius.”¹⁵⁸ Scott did not reprint *Hermesprong*, but he defied the reactionary environment in order to promote Bage—even Bage’s more controversial work.

Butler does not mention Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s interest in Bage, probably because Barbauld was primarily a poet and essayist rather than a novelist, and therefore might not be considered a “successor.”¹⁵⁹ Barbauld’s *British Novelists* series, published between 1810 and 1820, represents what Claudia Johnson calls “a diverse, politically self-conscious, and progressive canon always laying bare the work of social dissent and the political associations and interests of authors.”¹⁶⁰ Her decisions regarding Bage support this interpretation. Although Barbauld had, according to Johnston, retreated from her “earlier liberal hopes,” she chose to reprint one of Bage’s more explicitly radical texts, *Man As He Is*—and when Barbauld regrets that Bage’s writing “shows more of thought than refinement,” she indirectly praises his “thought.”¹⁶¹ She acknowledges the conservative turn in British culture, stating flatly that “*Hermesprong* is democratical in its tendency. It was published at a time when sentiment of that nature were prevalent with a large class of people, and it was much read.”¹⁶² Barbauld never

¹⁵⁷ Scott, *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library: With Prefatory Memoirs by Sir Walter Scott*. London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1821-24, Vol. 9, xviii.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, xxvii

¹⁵⁹ Butler, *War of Ideas*, 86.

¹⁶⁰ Claudia Johnson, “Let me make the novels of a country?: Barbauld's *The British Novelists* (1810/1820).” *Novel* 34, no. 2 (2001): 170.

¹⁶¹ Johnston, *Unusual Suspects*, 178. Barbauld’s words are found in *The British Novelists: With an Essay, And Prefaces, Biographical and Critical*, New ed. (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1820), Vol. 48, ii.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, ii.

offers a wholesale endorsement of Bage's reformist material, but she does write that her favorite character is the outspoken Quaker woman, Miss Carlill, and she claims that

the whole [of *Man As He Is*] is the work of a man who knows the world, and has reflected upon what he has seen; of a man whose mind has more strength than elegance; and whose opinions, often just, sometimes striking, are marked with traits of singularity, and not unfrequently run counter to received notions and established usages.¹⁶³

Barbauld's treatment of Bage indicates her desire to rehabilitate his reputation, defend many of his more transgressive elements, and secure him a position in the developing British canon.¹⁶⁴

Although the effort does not appear coordinated, Barbauld, Scott, and Edgeworth collectively ensured that Bage's commercial discourse had at least an indirect effect on the next generation of British literature.

Between Polite and Commercial: Austen, Bage, and the Commercial Legacy

Although Butler demonstrates the distance between the Anti-Jacobin Austen and the Jacobin novels of her youth, she acknowledges that Bage anticipated Austen's fiction in a number of ways.¹⁶⁵ Austen is rightly considered a conservative author; nevertheless, I have already pointed out a number of ways in which Austen was influenced by commercial rhetoric, particularly via Richardson's novels.¹⁶⁶ Austen was familiar with Bage as well. Johnston calls

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, ii-iii.

¹⁶⁴ Barbauld also made a strong case for Richardson, whose work had fallen from favor toward the end of the eighteenth century. She reprinted both *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*, even though she felt obliged to justify including his work: "It is a truth which cannot be denied, that the works of Richardson are not found so attractive to the present generation as they were to the past," because of what Barbauld terms his "defects of his style," but "his intrinsic merit is too great not to place him among the varying taste of the day."

¹⁶⁵ Butler, *War of Ideas*, 85.

¹⁶⁶ Hudson echoes most scholars with his claim that that she was "concerned with instilling a stabilizing reverence for the best features of the old order, and the need to consult, above all, the social good and traditional ideals of manners, religion, and morality" ("Social Rank," 567). For Richardson's influence on Austen, see Chapter 2, XX.

her “the contemporary novelist who has most to say about Robert Bage [although she] said barely a word about him, paying him the greater compliment of imitation.”¹⁶⁷ Johnston may have overstated the case, yet Austen does seem to have drawn upon a number of Bage’s ideas and plot devices. At the least, we know that Austen owned a copy of *Hermesprong*, likely acquired around the same time she began writing the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, and she probably drew upon aspects of *Hermesprong*’s plot and characterization in her own work.¹⁶⁸

Indirect evidence suggests that she was familiar with at least two other Bage novels. Stephen Derry has noticed a number of suggestive parallels between *Barham Downs* and *Sense and Sensibility*.¹⁶⁹ Austen also seems to have been influenced by Bage’s portrayal of strong, albeit portionless, women. In *Man As He Is*, the wealthy Sir George Paradyne falls in love with Cornelia Colerain, and he proposes to her in a scene paralleling Elizabeth Bennet’s rejection of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Sir George rejoices on his way to propose to Miss Colerain, for “having obtained a solid victory over his pride...it never occurred to him that any other difficulties remained.” Mr. Darcy, similarly, “spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security.” When Miss Colerain initially rejects Sir George, he cries, “What a lot is mine! When I had determined to disregard the remonstrances of your relations, the

¹⁶⁷ Johnston, *Unusual Suspects*, 180.

¹⁶⁸ D.J. Gilson, “Jane Austen’s Books,” *The Book Collector* (Spring 1974): 31. Butler makes the connection between the publication of *Hermesprong* and *Pride and Prejudice* (*War of Ideas*, 85). On the literary influence of *Hermesprong* on Austen, see Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects*, 114. See also Butler, *War of Ideas*, 81-3.

¹⁶⁹ Stephen Derry, “Robert Bage’s *Barham Downs* and *Sense and Sensibility*,” *Notes & Queries* 41, no. 3 (1994): 325. In Bage’s novel, the young Henry Osmond falls in love with Lucy Strode, and they become engaged. Lucy, however, rejects him once she manages to engage the affections of Henry’s older and wealthier brother. The mercenary Lucy Strode seems to have inspired Austen’s equally avaricious (and almost identically-named) Lucy Steele, who jilts Edward Ferrars in order to marry his more ambitious brother. Derry notes that Lucy Steele’s sister, Nancy, fancies that she has an admirer named Dr. Davis—which may deliberately allude to Henry Osmond’s pseudonym, Mr. Davis.

advice of friends, and to brave the contempt of my equals, I am informed, it is too late.”¹⁷⁰ Miss Colerain answers Sir George’s astonished complaint with a measure of resentment:

You have felt your superiority. You have struggled against it, and believe you have conquered. You have taken the generous resolution in my favour, to disregard relations, friends, and the contempt of the world. I ought, according to the opinions current in society, to be excessively obliged; and to repay this condescension with an uncommon portion of gratitude. But I want humility. I am too proud to be excessively obliged.¹⁷¹

Similarly, Miss Bennet bridles at Mr. Darcy’s openly-stated misgivings: “I might as well enquire...why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?” Mr. Darcy response echoes Sir George’s initial astonishment: “Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?”¹⁷² In both novels, the wealthy and respected man ultimately recognizes that the ‘lesser’ woman’s pride is legitimate, and is forced to reconsider his sense of superiority.

Bage undoubtedly offers a more radical take. The conservative Austen’s Miss Bennet asserts her status as a gentlewoman, while Bage’s Miss Colerain seems unconcerned about her social position. In addition, unlike Mr. Darcy, Sir George is eventually humbled enough to tell his mother that he is “not worthy” of Miss Colerain.¹⁷³ However, Bage’s underlying message—that a virtuous and practical woman can deserve the love *and* respect of her social and financial

¹⁷⁰ Bage, *Man As He Is*, II.228

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 233-4.

¹⁷² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 142.

¹⁷³ Bage, *Man As He Is*, IV.188.

superior—is carried through Austen’s fiction, not just in *Pride and Prejudice*, but in several of her novels, including *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. Butler remarks that both Bage and Austen challenge “the automatic reverence for rank which was an unwritten assumption behind so many stock eighteenth-century fictional situations.”¹⁷⁴ More importantly, they challenge the reverence *directly*. Many novels had depicted lower-born women rejecting arrogant and dissipated aristocrats, but these women did not defend their own dignity as stoutly and effectively—except, of course, for the heroines crafted by earlier commercial authors.

In Chapter 2, I noted that Richardson seems to have influenced Austen, who incorporates a number of respectable trade families into her otherwise polite gentry environments. I would add here that, in a few places, she grants these families a limited form of the consideration and respect that Bage offers his common characters. Scheuermann has pointed out that the final paragraph in *Pride and Prejudice* foregrounds the Gardiners and their role in the novel’s dénouement:

With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them.¹⁷⁵

The Gardiners are lively, witty, and sensible. They do not leap from the page in as forceful a manner as Scipio or the Glaswegian tradesman, but closing a novel with a wealthy gentleman’s gratitude to (and intimacy with) a tradesman would have been unthinkable before commercial culture gained a public voice.

¹⁷⁴ Butler, *War of Ideas*, 85.

¹⁷⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 282. See also Scheuermann, *Her Bread to Earn*, 220.

Austen does not represent or support the commercial fraction as Bage and Richardson had, but her novels suggest that by the close of the century their values have begun to penetrate the polite ranks. The cultural and political aftermath of the French Revolution scrubbed many commercial values from British discourse, but others persisted, absorbed into the developing middle class. Writers like Bage, Richardson, and Dodsley contributed to a growing, *widespread* conviction that individual virtue and merit are more important than social status. As discussed in previous chapters, polite Britons also became more willing to valorize traditionally commercial, practical virtues such as time management, work, and economy. It would be worthwhile to further explore these connections, perhaps to investigate the influence that commercial attitudes towards the virtue of lengthy and vigorous walks—best exemplified by Hermsprong, who travels everywhere on foot—may have had upon the rising ideal of the genteel walker, like Mr. Knightley in *Emma*, or Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.¹⁷⁶ We might also assess whether the strong, independent women in the novels of businessman-authors gave polite women the rhetorical tools needed to mitigate (or resist) the increasing pressures of domestication. In a recent article, Gary Kelly suggests that writers like Austen and Edgeworth “attempted to formulate a compromise between gentry and middle-class ideologies, a compromise that would in fact become the dominant ideology of the nineteenth century.”¹⁷⁷ This is essentially true, though I would use terms that more accurately reflect the divisions present at that time. Writers like Austen attempted to formulate a compromise between *polite* and *commercial* ideologies—and this compromise became “the dominant ideology of the nineteenth century.”

At the end of *Mount Henneth*, Mr. Foston tells the other members of the community that “We are associated together for no other purpose on earth...but to sow the seed of happiness on

¹⁷⁶ Bage, *Hermsprong*, 83-84. See Olivia Murphy, “Jane Austen’s ‘Excellent Walker’: Pride, Prejudice, and Pedestrianism,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 26, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 121-142.

¹⁷⁷ Kelly, “Jane Austen and the English Novel,” 301.

our own ground, and diffuse the plant around us, as far as we are able.” Mr. Foston’s idealism aligns neatly with any number of radical novels, but his next words might be considered to encapsulate commercial authorship: “Now the point is, to go about it like workmen.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Bage, *Mount Henneth*, II.304.

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