

Risky Business: The Economy of Self-Management in Eighteenth-Century British Fiction

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study argues that in the eighteenth century a discourse of risk management emerged that fundamentally reshaped the relation of man to the world by imagining that the individual was capable of controlling aspects of life that had hitherto been left to God or fate. This shift, moreover, established one of the defining characteristics of modernity, linking individual autonomy to the process of managing risk in a manner that not only remains with us today, but has been so thoroughly naturalized that we are no longer aware of how it shapes everyday life. When eighteenth-century fiction and philosophy first began to link selfhood to the ability to manage risk, the dangers an individual faced were all potentially lethal threats to the body: shipwreck, cannibalism, plague, kidnapping, rape. As the notion of individuality as a reflexive defense against the dangers of the world came to be better established, the nature of these threats changed. Rather than dangers to the body, social risks became the focus of authors I call risk theorists. Individual autonomy now meant policing the boundaries of a particular representation of oneself in society. This new formation of selfhood at first depended on a powerful anxiety about avoiding the emotional influence of others, but as this risk too came to seem manageable external threats melted away. What was left were the psychological operations of an individual forced to read social cues, knowing that failure to do so meant inviting the condemnation of others. The greatest risk to an

individual now came from their own mind when they failed to discover and perform the right social procedures.

The study begins by focusing on the intermixed physical and economic risks that shape the works of Daniel Defoe, who established the need for a modern individual to circulate in a dangerous world in order to secure for himself better standing in society. In *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) Defoe explicitly rejects the notion that one should take the safest path in life, forcing his protagonists to move through a world they know to be dangerous even when that choice seems superficially unreasonable. Samuel Richardson then translated these intermingled risks into sexual terms in *Clarissa* (1748), telling the story of a woman who knows that defending herself against a rapist means risking financial destitution. Rather than choose her virtue or her livelihood she charts a third course, valuing her sense of self over the safety of her body and dying in order to ensure that she controls how her story is told.

In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, periodical writers Joseph Addison and Richard Steele began the process of rendering risk in social terms by establishing a discourse of taste which Adam Smith takes up in both his moral philosophy and economic writings. Smith sees the logic of good taste through to its natural conclusion in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) when he defines the modern individual through his ability to seal himself off from the poor judgment and excessive emotions of others. Smith then brings the moderation and reserve of the individual to an

economic and thus global scale in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Finally, Jane Austen completes the internalization of risk management in *Emma* (1815), where the ability to confront the dangers of the world is rendered in fully psychological terms. Emma's evolution as a risk manager depends not on her capacity to seal herself from the outside world, but on her ability to correctly read the intentions and desires of others and judge whether and how they can be compatible with her own.

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Introduction: Risk in the Modern World

Literature, Risk, and the Modern Individual

In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1803), Catherine Morland harbors a dark suspicion: General Tilney killed his wife. Catherine, inexperienced and impressionable but exceedingly clever, believes that her attention to small details has allowed her to ferret out this secret. Wanting to confirm her misgivings, she sneaks into the room of the General's late wife, only to find it is nothing like what she imagined. Nevertheless, she cannot shake her feelings as she slips back out of the room—and runs into Henry Tilney, the General's son. They are surprised to see each other, and Henry politely asks Catherine what has drawn her to this part of the abbey, suggesting several innocuous possibilities. Catherine, though frightened, is unwilling to accept the exit strategies Henry offers. Instead, she intimates to him her suspicions, which he very quickly detects:

If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to—Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could

they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?
(136)

In a single passage, Henry establishes the links between reading, risk management, and the dangers of the modern world that motivate this dissertation. The questions he poses to Catherine demonstrate that it is not her tendency to speculate that has led her astray, but her choice of evidence. She has reasoned from the wrong context, and the results are disastrous.

Both Henry and the reader know that the answer to his first question to Catherine—“What have you been judging from?”—is simple enough: Gothic novels. Rather than chastise Catherine for believing General Tilney capable of killing his wife, Henry berates her for having chosen as her point of reference such a poor model of the real world. He offers a litany of more reliable guides than the novels that she reads: nationality, religion, the advancements of the modern age, the state of education. Included in this catalog are Catherine’s “own understanding,” her “sense of the probable,” and her “observation of what is passing around” her. Despite the length and weightiness of his list of Catherine’s omissions, Henry is remarkably gentle in his criticism. Having just heard his father accused of killing his mother, Henry positions

Catherine as an observer who should be capable of better, had she only based her speculations on sound information.

Equally important, Henry includes in his counterevidence to Catherine's fanciful notions the claim that "the social and literary intercourse" of the country would not allow such a crime to pass unnoticed. Knowing that Catherine is obsessed with Gothic novels—Henry has often teased her about her desire to see the world in Gothic terms—he nevertheless defends literature as a guide to good behavior. In an earlier exchange, Catherine is indeed surprised to learn that Henry loves many of the same novels; the issue, as she will come to see, is that she does not know how to read those novels properly. Indulging in Gothic horror almost exclusively, Catherine lacks familiarity with those works that would show her, as Austen's novels do, how to read the character of others realistically. So long as she merely jumps at shadows in the abbey, Henry confines his criticism to playful mockery. But when this habit skews Catherine's judgment about his father, Henry feels obligated to reprimand her more strongly. In doing so, however, he does not include a wholesale condemnation of reading, or even of horror novels. The fault lies not with the novels themselves, but with the lack of judgment that has led her to misread both the novels and the world.

Henry points to a different order of danger in the modern world: a "neighbourhood of voluntary spies" ready to report every behavior and able to spread such information at a time when "roads and newspapers lay everything open." The risk

Catherine faces, in other words, is to her reputation, coincidentally the same risk to which she would have exposed General Tilney. Henry points to a still greater risk, however, when he asks, “[m]y dear Miss Moreland, what ideas have you been admitting?” What Catherine admits into her head shapes what she admits as true about the world, and Henry plays off this double meaning: Catherine’s lack of discernment has put her own mind at risk, the greatest danger of all. If she does not correct this defect, she will carry it forward with her, and not everyone will understand her as thoroughly, or treat her as kindly, as Henry. To her credit, Catherine internalizes Henry’s lesson almost instantly. She is overwhelmed with shame, running off in tears, and right away she reflects on what she has done. More importantly, she reflects on what she has, and has not, learned:

She did not learn either to forget or defend the past; but she learned to hope that it would never transpire farther, and that it might not cost her Henry’s entire regard. Her thoughts being still chiefly fixed on what she had with such causeless terror felt and done, nothing could shortly be clearer than that it had been all a voluntary, self-created delusion, each trifling circumstance receiving importance from an imagination resolved on alarm, and everything forced to bend to one purpose by a mind which, before she entered the abbey, had been craving to be frightened. (137)

Having been a poor risk manager to this point, Catherine begins to correct herself immediately. She knows that she cannot dismiss what has happened as unimportant—that would be to dismiss crucial evidence. She hopes, rather, to use the experience going forward so that such a thing will never happen again. Refining one's sensibilities over time is the hallmark of risk management, which acknowledges that our understanding and actions will never be perfect, but that they can be iteratively improved. Catherine sees that her greatest error was in making the world around her conform to her expectations, rather than the other way around.

This single-mindedness forecloses the problem solving process required to navigate through a world of ever-changing risks. From the beginning, as I will show, novels were obsessed with risk, but the nature of that risk and the means of dealing with it changed dramatically over the course of a century, moving from a deserted island to the parlor of a country manor house. Austen brings that process of risk management to its apogee and conclusion, creating a world in which the greatest risks to an individual came not from others, but from within the self. To counteract this new source of danger, the conviction that the individual mind was capable of self-correction was born. For the writers before Austen, the process of self-improvement necessarily involved repeated interaction with or comparison to others. It was only by registering the contrast between him or herself and others that the individual developed and maintained a sense of self. By the time of Austen the notion of individual autonomy had been secured, freeing her

to combine the procedures of risk management with the complex individual psychology that makes her novels seem both an exercise in reading the complexities of character and a model of how to do so.

Even as she shifted the theater of operation for risk management, Austen reaffirmed the belief of earlier risk theorists: our “social and literary intercourse” makes us what we are. *Northanger Abbey* contains a famous, prolonged defense of novel reading, chastising novelists who apologize for their work, lambasting critics, and arguing that it is a genre “in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language” (22). For a reader seeking self-improvement, what could make a better choice than a text that models “the greatest powers of the mind,” that divulges “the most thorough knowledge of human nature,” and that entertains to boot? Reading lets us know ourselves and our world better, in other words, which is why texts about risk management can instill their procedures into their readers, bridging the gap between fiction and reality.¹

¹ In Part Two of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the Victorian era formalized a new discourse of sex that was both “highly prolix” and committed to “discretion and modesty” (22). It is not, as many assume, that sexuality came to be a forbidden or ignored topic, but rather that it was circumscribed so it could only be spoken of in a technical way, Foucault contends. He ties this shift to the development of population modeling in the eighteenth century, which placed sex “[a]t the heart of [the] economic and political problem of population” (25). For the first time, “the sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and a target of intervention” (26). By placing sex at the intersection of domesticity and population-level thinking, Foucault highlights the dual legacy of the eighteenth century’s

My project explains how eighteenth-century English literature engaged a discourse of risk management that emerged during a period of economic reorganization to alter the relationship of individual readers to the prevailing socio-economic order. It is a commonplace of eighteenth-century cultural history to identify both the rise of the novel and the advent of probability and statistical methods with the onset of modernity.² I propose to link the two phenomena directly. In order to test and develop theories of risk management, I argue, the prose fiction credited with launching the tradition of the English novel exposed what was then a middle-class individual to a series of physical, social, and economic risks so that he or she could learn to survive them through proper self-management.³ By putting nothing less than individuality itself at stake in these encounters, fiction paradoxically produced the autonomous individual in whom readers still recognize the first traces of themselves.⁴ Only by repeatedly threatening to

obsession with risk management, which lives on in both the self-surveillance of proper Victorian gentleman and domestic women and through the quantitative and technical advancements in calculating economic risk.

² James Thompson's *Models of Value*, Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic*, Mary Poovey's *Genres of the Credit Economy*, and Valerie Hamilton and Martin Parker's *Daniel Defoe and the Bank of England* all link the emergence of the English novel with the rise of modern economic practices and institutions, interrogating the connection between the fictionality of the genre and the fictions at the heart of finance capitalism. Other scholars approach the question from a more strictly literary perspective, like Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*, Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel*, and Catherine Gallagher in "The Rise of Fictionality." Despite different approaches and arguments, it is universally held that something distinctly modern begins to appear in the eighteenth century. I am suggesting that the overlapping interests of these scholars can be named more precisely as "risk management."

³ This middle-class position is famously claimed by Robinson Crusoe's father, who recommends to his son "the middle Station of Life" as the best way to move "silently and smoothly thro' the World" (5-6).

⁴ In *How Novels Think* Nancy Armstrong argues that the history of the novel is also the history of the modern individual, as it is through the novel that readers came to understand themselves as autonomous subjects. I

annihilate it could novels insist on the autonomy of this individual, or what John Locke called “property in oneself.”⁵ In other words, if risk constituted the “self” of individualism, then risk management was the means of both creating that self and maintaining its salient characteristics over time. Insofar as it mitigated threats to the autonomy of an embodied mind, risk management as enacted in and reproduced by the early novel also instilled in selfhood a foundational fear of losing that autonomy. It subsequently charged the struggle to maintain it with eroticism, moralized that struggle, and finally naturalized the operations of risk management so that they folded into individual psychology and became a quality of character that materialized in the social choices one made, which is to say in one’s taste.

My first chapter looks at Daniel Defoe as an early theorist of risk, a mode of thinking initially apparent in his writings on speculation and the new credit economy. This thinking was more effectively dramatized through the fictional protagonists of *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*, whose journals reject any final resolution, even in Providential terms, and thus offer no sanctuary from the world of

am proposing that the discourse of risk management provides the mechanism for this translation from fiction to real life. Homer O. Brown makes a similar argument in “The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe,” noting that *Crusoe* in particular is about the fear that accompanies the protagonist’s confusion of selfhood and otherness, and that it is only by constantly reinscribing this fear that Crusoe learns to maintain his sense of individuality. In this regard, Brown suggests, Crusoe is a mirror for Defoe’s own impulses, and those of a “society of isolated and mutually suspicious individuals” (590).

⁵ Etienne Balibar credits Locke with inventing the concept of “the self” by linking “the continuity of consciousness” with “personal identity.” This continuity is what allows Locke to imagine a subject that has ‘property in oneself.’ See *Identity And Difference: John Locke And The Invention Of Consciousness*, p. 56.

risk. Indeed, Defoe compels his protagonists to seek out danger repeatedly as the only means of testing and developing strategies for managing risk to person and property. Where Crusoe finds this self-generating danger at the margins of a socio-economic world that invariably draws him back into circulation, H. F., the protagonist of *A Journal of the Plague Year*, experiences those dangers at home in the metropolitan center of an emergent commercial culture. Ironically, it is Crusoe who finds some success in maintaining his individuality for twenty-eight years on the island by essentially quarantining himself, while for H.F. the quarantine procedures of London during a time of plague fail immediately. H.F. knows that quarantine would ultimately destroy not only his business but also his ability to collect the information recorded in his journal, thus preventing him from securing both his property and an afterlife through his words. For Crusoe it is the other way around: though at first his impulse to barricade himself from the world helps him transform his labor into property and keep his journal, these signs of individuality prove inadequately secure when cannibals visit his shores. He, too, is forced back into circulation, where he must struggle for what is his. In short, though these stories depart from diametrically opposed contexts, I contend, both insist on the impossibility of avoiding risk in the modern world. Indeed, they exploit the inherent risks of the modern world to produce a “self” that materializes only as they defend it.

Defoe's protagonists are anomalous, one could argue, in that they both exist within states of exception where the operations of everyday life do not apply. How can their mode of problem solving provide a model for readers who live under the social conditions that, by the end of the century, Henry Tilney would describe to Catherine Moreland as those of England itself? Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* translates the epistolary form into just such an account of risk management, transforming the perils of a modernizing society into a sustained sexual assault that a well-bred heroine defends herself against by harnessing the power of moral rhetoric. Deprived of the right to control the disposition of her body, Clarissa uses the power of language to choreograph a response to her rape that will ensure her writing, and by extension her selfhood, remains forever intact. Clarissa's letters render her death the ultimate expression of a self so well-managed that sexual violation only reinforces her integrity as an individual. If for Defoe death marks the failure of the protagonist to manage risk properly, then *Clarissa* infuses moral rhetoric with the power to maintain selfhood despite the death of the body. The explosive popularity of the novel, and the debate it prompted over whether Clarissa should compromise her principles and live, or stay true to them and die, prove that her letters secured an afterlife not only for her sense of self, but for her brand of moral rhetoric as well.

Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations* formulate a concept of taste that will provide the means of managing the emotions of both social

and economic relationships in an emergent public sphere. To formulate his concept of “sympathy,” Smith created a theory of social relationships that operated on an individual-to-individual basis, which is to say on the presumption that each individual is a self-enclosed body of feeling. By the second half of the century, the danger of being consumed by cannibals or succumbing to the plague had subsided, giving way to the risk presented by the nature of emotional responses. A new theory of self-control was needed to confront the infectious nature of mass emotion, and to this end Smith developed the normative figure of “the impartial spectator” as a means of regulating the feelings of each individual. Having fashioned this consummate figure of risk management in *Moral Sentiments*, Smith then transposes the qualities of temperance and social responsibility onto a global scale in *Wealth of Nations*.

Finally, an afterword on Jane Austen’s *Emma* shows her translating the terms of Smithian self-awareness into a world in which the gravest danger to an individual comes from her own mind. Austen no longer requires her heroine to be constantly assailed by external risks, whether physical or emotional, in order to teach her the principles of good self-management. The operations of Emma’s individual psyche are adequate both to expose her to serious risks, and to learn how to manage those risks. It is only when she has successfully learned the lessons of risk management that she is able to find the right husband. By synthesizing previous strains of thinking on risk management, fully incorporating them into the psychological depths of the individual,

and using them to defend the integrity of the English household, Austen refigures the concept of self-management for a growing and diversifying English population. In so doing, she participates in the transition to a disciplinary society that Michel Foucault argues takes place largely in the eighteenth century, when previously self-enclosed disciplinary models transformed into “general formulas of domination” that ensured individuals felt they must behave themselves as though they were always being watched by others (*Discipline and Punish*, 137).⁶

My argument, then, is that the narrative form that would come to be called the novel was developed as a means of protecting the individual against risks to person and property.⁷ The early novelists on whom I focus—namely, Defoe and Richardson—were both what Antonio Gramsci called organic intellectuals, or men who spoke for the interests of an emergent social class.⁸ As such, they relished the new economic world amenable to an entrepreneurial spirit that fostered the concept of a self-authored and authoring individual. Such an individual required a destabilized social environment

⁶ Foucault’s argument is that specialized mechanisms for circumscribing the actions of individuals had long existed, like “monasteries, armies, [and] workshops,” but that these particular “disciplines” gave way to a more diffuse application of what he calls disciplinary power, or the “constant coercion” of individual actions (137). He characterizes this shift as a movement from “social ‘quarantine’ ... to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism” of surveillance, and within this new model “the family [becomes] the privileged locus” of disciplinary questions (216). By tying the earliest appearance of discipline to quarantine procedures and its mature iteration to self-regulation and family structure, Foucault sketches both the trajectory and the stakes of the evolution of risk management this project traces.

⁷ In *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke’s definition of “property” encompasses a man’s “Life, Liberty and Estate,” tying together the issues of selfhood and ownership in a way that Defoe takes up as he builds the foundations of the discourse of risk management (323).

⁸ See Gramsci’s “Prison Notebooks,” p. 113, selected in *An Anthology of Western Marxism*.

with permeable class boundaries that posed a constant and imminent danger to his or her autonomy. By repeatedly confronting protagonists with imperfect information and demanding that, even so, they figure out the best pathway to a positive outcome, the novel refined and ingrained a faculty of risk management within the self, indeed made his or her story an account of risk management. To be sure, the forms of risk in the major documents of eighteenth-century British culture I have named above pose different threats, of different magnitudes, to the lives and limbs of protagonists drawn from different periods and positions within the social order. There are so many differences, in fact, that it may seem of dubious benefit to discuss them as part of a single cultural process. I hope to quiet this doubt by clarifying the terms of my argument.

Defining Risk and Risk Management

On the theoretical level, this dissertation has two overarching goals. The first is to reinsert a non-technical understanding of “risk” into a history of the concept that has largely forgotten how risk was understood before it became a quantifiable, technocratic object of study. The second is to demonstrate that how we collectively choose to define risk is one of the organizing tenets and perhaps the major social characteristic of modern society. These two goals are mutually supportive. Understanding the non-technical origins of risk allows me to show why the term and concept are ubiquitous in the modern world even as a satisfactory definition of “risk” proves stubbornly elusive. The term is invoked to mean many different things, changing dramatically with context and

resisting the efforts of everyone from philosophers to economists to pin it down. This difficulty makes perfect sense if we think of the problem of risk as the impetus behind a massive sociocultural project. While we now have an entire class of technocrats who aim at managing risk for profit, it can be argued that there are lay risk managers as well. Indeed, by the time Austen's novels appeared in print, managing risk was not only the responsibility of the landowner but of all the heads of household and women who maintained the social order. At this point, risk management was essential to the "judgment" that signaled one had arrived at a state of maturity. That every day most of us make decisions on the basis of incomplete information in an effort to bring about or preclude future outcomes, and do so knowing that our best efforts are no guarantee of success, is no doubt part of the reason these novels continue to be read despite dramatic changes in the forms and means of managing risk. This, in a nutshell, is my definition of risk management.

I realize that it may seem counterintuitive to look at the novel for a modern cultural history of risk management. But while the social scientists and critical theorists who developed the concept of risk with which I am working tend to look to philosophical and economic discourse for evidence, I want to identify the larger cultural milieu in which managing risk on a daily basis and in every domain of life became second nature. Inasmuch as the novel emerged from this milieu and characterized its nature, it follows that the genre can both serve as a record of this shift and help specify

the mechanism by which it occurred. As for the question of how risk became one of the organizing tenets and perhaps the major social characteristic of modern society, the considerable body of social scientific work—by philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists—offers a rich variety of explanations as to why a quantitative or systematic understanding of risk necessarily fails to capture the way the concept organizes everyday life. This work allowed me to develop a concept of risk management sufficiently qualitative—that is to say, individuated and situational—to cover the range of risk that in being managed bear and bestow the stamp of individual character.

Given its sensitivity to context, the difficulty of pinning down the concept of risk is well-established. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* begins its entry on risk by noting that “[i]n non-technical contexts, the word “risk” refers, often vaguely, to situations in which it is possible but not certain that some undesirable event will occur” (Hansson). The essay goes on to lay out with considerable clarity the basic obstacles to any clear and unified definition of the term. There are multiple technical definitions of risk, so that even if one were to restrict the scope of inquiry to specified usages, these would not resolve in a single meaning. However carefully one refines these technical definitions, moreover, none of them would adequately account, in theory or practice, for the common uses of the term. As a result, philosophers concluded there is something

about these common usages that must be preserved in our definition of risk.⁹ It is not the case that we are prone to use imprecise language for risk when a better alternative is available. The fact is that the most informed and persuasive efforts to systematize risk have failed to explain how risk operates in the decision-making processes of everyday life.

Though many technical definitions of the term do depend on the ability to calculate risk, not all technical definitions are quantitative. What ultimately classifies a definition as “technical” is whether or not the concept operates within a well-defined body of knowledge. In medicine for instance, certain behaviors are identified as health risks even if there is no numerical value attached, as in, “[l]ung cancer is one the major risks that affect smokers” (Hansson). Even though risk here operates as a qualitative term, it still finds its meaning within a particular body of knowledge. Although the *Encyclopedia* neglects to provide a single non-technical example of risk, we are already familiar with any number of examples we might in everyday terms call “bad judgment.” To a friend’s declaration, “my license expired, but I’ll drive anyway. I’m not going to be pulled over or get into an accident,” we might well reply, “that seems awfully risky.” Although “risky” does not refer here to a particular theory or discipline, its meaning is

⁹ See K. S. Shrader-Frechette’s *Risk and Rationality: Philosophical Foundations for Populist Reforms*, Lara Buchak’s *Risk and Rationality*, and Duncan Pritchard’s “Risk” for philosophical accounts of how technical definitions of risk cannot describe all applications of the term and concept. Max Boholm, Niklas Möller, and Sven Ove Hansson have gone a step further in demonstrating through linguistic evidence that these technical definitions do not alter the way the word “risk” is commonly used; see “The Concepts of Risk, Safety, and Security: Applications in Everyday Language.”

plain: driving without a license increases the odds of something bad happening to you. Each of us must intuitively determine when that risk exceeds an unacceptable threshold. The intuition of risk—or what Crusoe described as “fear of danger”—is a consistent habit of mind from the beginnings of the novel to the present moment (135). Well before there was a technical field of risk management, the novel indicates that a concept of risk was already in circulation.

Etymological evidence supports this assertion. In *Risk: A Sociological Theory*, Niklas Luhmann finds that the term first became prevalent in Italian “from about 1500 on, probably with the expansion of printing” (10). This sudden dissemination of the term predates the first book that can properly be called a work on probability, written by Italian mathematician Gerolamo Cardano around 1564.¹⁰ In French the noun and verb forms of “risk” appeared within a year of one another, in 1577 and 1578 respectively, while the concept of expected value, now the pillar of quantitative approaches to risk, was developed by Blaise Pascal in 1654.¹¹ It took longer for “risk” to make its way to English, where the first usage dates to the early seventeenth century—the noun form appeared in 1621, and the verb in 1660, both of which predate the first major contribution in English to a technical understanding of risk, Abraham de Moivre’s 1718

¹⁰ See pages 39 and 51 of Ian Hacking’s *The Emergence of Probability* for this history.

¹¹ An expected value is calculated by multiplying each quantifiable outcome by its likelihood, then summing all the values produced. For example, when rolling a die the expected value is 3.5, obtained by summing 1 times $1/6^{\text{th}}$, 2 times $1/6^{\text{th}}$, and so on. See Oystein Ore’s “Pascal and the Invention of Probability Theory” for an account of how and why Pascal first approached this problem.

textbook *The Doctrine of Chances*. In each case, the appearance of “risk” anticipates a major mathematical breakthrough by about a half century; the emergence of the everyday concept of risk in the vernacular precedes the development of mathematical tools of risk management.

Nor is this strictly an etymological argument—Pascal developed the concept of “expected value” in response to the frustration of amateur French mathematician Chevalier de Méré, who could not reconcile his theoretical calculations about probability with actual data drawn from gambling.¹² As Ian Hacking puts it, “the probability emerging in the time of Pascal is essentially dual. It has to do both with stable frequencies and with degrees of belief. It is ... both aleatory and epistemological” (*Emergence of Probability*, 10). When we understand the history of risk management in epistemological terms, that history increases in length of time and has more to do with intuition than with calculation. Describing the epistemological issues that philosophers of risk must confront, the *Encyclopedia* explains that “in practical applications it is important to distinguish between those probabilities that can be treated as known and those that are uncertain and therefore much more in need of continuous updating” (Hansson). Although the *Encyclopedia* does not discuss the epistemological problem in Bayesian terms, I would argue that this is nonetheless a Bayesian explanation of decision

¹² See Ore, p. 413. Méré and Pascal ultimately arrived at the right solution independently at around the same time.

making.¹³ Humans do not carry a set of probabilities in their mind to which they can refer when facing a difficult decision. To the contrary, they hold subjectively derived beliefs more or less strongly and update those beliefs to accommodate whatever new information they encounter.

The intuitive approach offers very different procedures for “calculating risk” than quantitative approaches, and I reject the idea that intuitive assessments of risk should not be called calculation at all. They are still the most prevalent form of risk management and likely to remain so, because they are at once versatile and habitual. Once again, etymological evidence can help us reframe the question. Dating to 1393, “calculation” is a much older word in English than “risk.” The O.E.D first spots the former in a Middle English confessional poem that links astronomy with a kind of magic—the ability to calculate from the positions of the stars how events will unfold below. This usage is defined as “the action or process of reckoning; computation.”

¹³ Thomas Bayes was an English mathematician and minister whose work was published posthumously. It is interesting that the *Encyclopedia* does not explicitly discuss a Bayesian interpretation of probability, because it does link attempts to define “objective risk” with traditional, frequentist interpretations. A frequentist defines the probability of an event as the value which is approached after repeatedly sampling the population being studied. To estimate the prevalence of a characteristic in the entire population, in other words, one takes many randomly selected samples, notes the prevalence within those samples, and sees the value to which the samples tend. With adequately large samples and an adequate number of trials, the frequency within the entire population can be estimated to within a specified degree of precision. A Bayesian, on the other hand, understands probability as a measure of the degree to which a belief is held. As new information is gathered, the belief is continually updated, so that posterior beliefs become new prior beliefs to be tested in the world. Bayesians still distinguish between objective and subjective beliefs within their theory of interpretation; objectivists maintain that prior beliefs must be strictly held to what a reasonable person would assume given available data, while subjectivists allow for priors to be linked to personal belief, not just data. In the description of the *Encyclopedia*, humans operate as intuitive, subjectivist Bayesians.

Though today one would assume that a “computation” involves, for instance, a literal summation, there was a time when calculation referred more loosely to a kind of mental summing up. In this context, one could calculate the mysterious forces the heavens exerted on the world.

While intuitive risk management and calculation took an early hold on reasoning and never let go, technical advancements in probability have at times gone long unheeded. Cardano’s *Liber de ludo aleae*, or *Book on the Game of Chance*, was not published for 100 years after it was written. When Pascal and Méré simultaneously developed the concept of expected value, they seem to have kept it to themselves, with little evidence that it was discussed outside the correspondence of a cohort of mathematicians.¹⁴ Likewise, Bayes’ theorem was published in 1763, independently discovered and greatly expanded by Pierre-Simon Laplace in 1774, then quickly fell into disuse when Laplace himself switched to a frequentist interpretation of probability. By the nineteenth century, the theory had fallen into disrepute, and it was only in the twentieth century that the power of Bayesian statistics to perform calculations beyond the capacity of any individual or group was rediscovered, thanks to Alan Turing’s use of repeated conditional probabilities in cracking the code of the German Enigma machine during World War II. To be sure, this history is partly a function of the time it takes to understand the power of quantitative advancements. But it also points to the difficulty

¹⁴ Ore, 417.

of integrating such discoveries into processes of reasoning, even in a technical sense. It is no surprise, then, that these developments seem to do little to change our everyday understanding of the world.

In discussing the difference between “objective risk” and “subjective risk,” the *Encyclopedia* notes that “subjective risk” tends to be associated with an individual’s “risk perception,” but that “strictly speaking the term is misleading. This is not a matter of perception, but a matter of attitudes and expectations” (Hansson). It proposes, therefore, that psychological research is the true counterpart of a “frequentist,” or “objective” notion of risk. If risk is a matter of “attitudes and expectations,” it follows that such risks need to be examined not only in individual psychological terms, but in terms of individuals on a sociological scale. This leads to thorny question of where our intuitions about risk come from—instinct or ideology. But I am less interested in recreating for “intuitive risk” the difficulties of developing an all-encompassing definition than I am in explaining how novels established the form of “the novel” as they undertook the project of naturalizing a certain notion of risk. While the continuing expansion and diversification of the market in novels that deal with risk provides my only “objective” evidence of this claim, it nevertheless seems to me that a century or more of novels

ensured that their readers could use the term freely and without confusion, despite the incredible adaptability of what it meant to calculate risk.¹⁵

Risk and Society

To begin explaining how this might have happened, I have relied on an anthropological argument to the effect that risk is essential to the very concept of social order. In *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers*, Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky make the universal claim that “the perception of risk is a social process. All society depends on combinations of confidence and fear” (6). Although they focus on the environmental movement during the twentieth century and consider the role of technology central to the organization of modern life, Douglas and Wildavsky insist that it is not anachronistic to apply their method across the board: “If risk and culture are related in the way we claim, then these relationships should stand out among the most diverse people way back when and not only among us moderns here and now” (15). According to Douglas and Wildavsky, in other words, we have always been risk managers.

Also important to my own argument is their observation that risk becomes legible as such only at the moment when a culture decides that the risk is something that

¹⁵ Here my argument takes a cue from Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. He notes that “neither economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create *in themselves* the kind, or shape, of imagined community” that he ties to the emergence of nationalism, which he calls “the framework of a new consciousness” (65). Instead, he attributes this rise to print capitalism. In the same way, I am arguing that it was the novel that disseminated the procedures of risk management that were most readily incorporated into the everyday lives of readers, in so doing producing a new kind of individual consciousness.

can be avoided or controlled. For a number of distinctly modern risks, the eighteenth century was apparently when that decision was made. Many processes long considered to be governed by fate, luck, or Providence were put within the grasp of human reason.¹⁶ Among the innovations that increased the purview of the intelligible were modern financial instruments like insurance companies, national banks, and stock markets.¹⁷ These new realms of human control were also realms of danger. The concept of an economic “bubble” was first defined after the 1720 collapse of the South Sea Company, prompting Newton’s claim, “I can calculate the movement of the stars, but not the madness of men.” After John Harrison and John Arnold spent decades creating the first clocks, watches, and chronometers able to keep time at sea, dramatically reducing navigational errors that led to shipwrecks, international commerce took a huge leap forward. Emergent statistical and probabilistic frameworks found new applications in calculations about population management, migration, and the spread of infectious disease, biopolitical problems that persisted over the long eighteenth century.¹⁸ The texts

¹⁶ Or at least, it was for the first time an open question whether they could be controlled. In “Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident if You Please,” Christian Thorne distinguishes between different terms of chance like fortune, accident, and Providence, arguing that their meanings are shifting in the eighteenth century as characters push back against the uncontrollable tides of the world. As he puts it, “[w]hen eighteenth-century characters cannot name causes, or when they mean to emphasize the implacable complexity of those causes, they invoke fortune” (326).

¹⁷ Thorne concludes his essay with the claim that “new forms of novelistic narrative themselves made the new institutions of finance possible,” echoing the claims of Thompson, Poovey, Baucom, and Hamilton and Parker that I cite above (347).

¹⁸ Foucault traces these developments in *Security, Territory, Population*, where he argues that “[e]tymologically, statistics is the knowledge of the state. ... [K]nowledge of the population, the measure of its quantity, mortality, natality ... [and] circulation. ... [A]ll this data, and more besides, constitutes the

this dissertation considers were active participants in this largescale social project, carving out new forms of control for their protagonists and central figures.

Given that risk becomes legible at the moment a particular culture defines it, the question of how to address it is necessarily a value-laden choice. As Douglas and Wildavsky argue, there will never be a “single correct conception of risk” that everyone finds convincing (4). Instead, the risks that we consider important to our survival, whether we choose to take or avoid them, will reveal something basic about our desires as a society. This linking of risk and desire goes a long way in explaining why the eighteenth-century discourse of risk management I am tracing consistently sees circulation in the world as at once necessary and threatening to individual prosperity. If, as I assert, the major desire of this discourse is to fashion a durable selfhood, the presence of others must register as a constant threat to individual autonomy. Thus circulation in the world produces the threat to autonomy that must be overcome by the individual as the means of demonstrating his or her resilience. The insistence on the need to circulate in the world is, as Douglas and Wildavsky put it, a question of both “confidence and fear.”

Where *Risk in Culture* is primarily interested in the ways in which society dictates individual attitudes to risk top down, I am more interested in approaching the question

essential content of the sovereign’s knowledge” (274). In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he goes on to argue, broadly speaking, that eighteenth-century political economy marked the onset of neo-liberalism and its belief that economic order can be imposed atop social order—an inversion of prior history.

the other way around. One of the consistent lessons of the eighteenth-century texts I examine is that without individuals who agree to take risks, there would be no society. If the need to circulate is a manifestation of what eighteenth-century English culture desires, it is also the foundation on which that society is built—which is why novels are tasked with both encouraging readers to take risks, and teaching them how to properly manage risk. This difference in perspective helps pinpoint where my argument diverges from that of Douglas and Wildavsky. They build upon Douglas' work in *Purity and Danger* and *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, and are therefore committed to extending her claim that there is nothing different about modern societies as compared to what we might dismissively call "primitive" ones, at least in structural terms. The only sources of difference *Risk and Culture* admits of, in other words, are the choices of risk selection made by different cultures. By contrast, I am arguing that there is something distinctly modern about the need to circulate in the world that becomes pervasive in the eighteenth century.

What Douglas and Wildavsky do not account for, in my view, is the difference between a mass mediated culture and one based on myth, cosmology, and the like. The history of the novel suggests how a break might have occurred that made culture capable of traveling far and wide. This is part of Benedict Anderson's argument in *Imagined Communities*, as I suggested above: the appearance of print capitalism marks the onset of, indeed helps bring about, a new form of self-awareness. In "Novels before

Nations: How Early US Novels Imagined Community,” Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse advance a modified version of Anderson’s claim. While granting his “hypothesis that the novel and the nation emerge together,” they also insist that the relation between the two is messier than he acknowledges (353). Taking “issue with Anderson’s argument that novels imagine populations as nations unified to the degree he suggests,” Armstrong and Tennenhouse focus instead on the “dynamic and potentially boundless networks of ... relations at work in novels” (354, 355). These relations exceed the boundaries of nations, and point to the inherently dynamic, which is to say unfinished, nature of both culture and novels. Risk management, in a point that I shall make time and again, operates in much the same way—always focused on the process of becoming, rather than on static outcomes. In short, though I am persuaded that the risks emphasized at a particular historical moment reveal what that culture values, I am not convinced that it follows that culture has a static form, as *Risk in Culture* suggests.

Niklas Luhmann has also argued that risk is a critical term for sociology, placing it at the heart of what he sees as society’s most fundamental antagonism: normal versus abnormal. As he puts it, efforts to control the abnormal reveal “what is being done to protect an always precarious normality. ... [E]xplaining [the abnormal] cannot be left to chance; it must be shown to have an order of its own, a secondary normality as it were” (vii). Luhmann’s argument that misfortune is “the other side of the normal form,” and

that “it is only by referring to the other side of the normal form that it can be recognized as form,” supports my own argument concerning the novel as constitutive of selfhood (viii). I contend that it is only against the threat of annihilation that selfhood first comes to be intelligible, and that therefore in its earliest forms selfhood had to constantly re-confront risk to be maintained. Luhmann makes an analogous claim when he argues that society as a whole is defined against risk: “The question is ... what we can learn about the normal processes in our society from the fact that it seeks to comprehend misfortune in the form of risk” (viii).

To open his inquiry into the difference between pre-modern and modern, technologically mediated cultures, Luhmann asks what it means that misfortune is “no longer [understood], for example, in the form of magic and witchcraft; and hardly any longer in the form of religion, having accepted a purely benevolent God and a devil who has forfeited his cosmological function if not his very existence” (viii). This shift, he argues, indicates a world order “that perceives the normal in the functioning of technology, in the conditions permitting rationality, and above all in the dependence of the future on the making of decisions” (viii). Luhmann’s vision of modernity, then, is tied to the internalization of shared methods of risk management. No longer do strategies of risk management appeal to forces outside of human control; even at the social level, they proceed from the capacities and efforts of modern man. In this regard, Luhmann’s argument performs the same conceptual move from individual, internalized

risk management to social risk management that Smith makes between *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. Though Luhmann does not name risk management as such, it is evident in his claim that in the normal form of modern society, the future depends on decision-making. Risk is the negative term against which society is defined, and the future depends first of all on the decisions made to control that risk.

Luhmann is skeptical of efforts to base decision-making on models of rational calculation, arguing that they “not only remain unsuccessful, but in the last instance also undermine the claim of method and procedure to rationality” (x). Instead, he favors a model of risk that integrates it within the concept of communication, broadly speaking. (Communication includes social and political pressures, for instance.) As he puts it, “[r]isk communication itself has become reflexive and thus universal. Refusing to assume risks or demanding their rejection have become dangerous behavior” (x). As Defoe made clear several centuries ago—“the Fear of Danger is ten thousand times worse than Danger itself”—risk avoidance can easily become more dangerous than facing risk directly (*Robinson Crusoe*, 135). Even Crusoe, one of the earliest and most anti-social expressions of individualism, had to risk befriending Friday in order to mitigate the risk of the danger presented by other men. In the same way, one cannot function in society while insisting on isolation from risk. Even as it remains unnamed, risk management so thoroughly permeates Luhmann’s theory as to replace “Nature” as the concept that “intrinsically limit[s] what can happen” (xii). The result is a sense of “the

dependence of society's future on decision making," and a consequent "fear that things could go wrong" — that in turn lead to an ever-expanding conceptual role for risk (xii).

Luhmann contends that the realization "that certain advantages are to be gained only if something is at stake," and the fear that is consequently attached to the future, together transform risk from the marker of misfortune into the norm of modern life (11). In his view, when risk shifts position from the aberrant to the norm it requires some kind of "guarantee that even if things do go wrong, one can have acted correctly," a need he ties to the development of probability theory (13). In this respect, Luhmann's argument lends support to the notion that a form of social organization based on risk took hold during the eighteenth century and provided a self-correcting model for incorporating mistakes in risk management. It is inevitable that one will be wrong at times, but so long as there is reason to believe that the error is not systemic, there is need not to blame oneself. Because Catherine Morland's error was systemic, as Henry Tilney points out, she deserved his recriminations. Where risk used to be the explanation for misfortune, it had become, as Henry implies and Luhmann states, "a normal aspect of life. ... [O]nly in the case of risk does decision making (that is to say contingency) play a role. One is exposed to dangers" (23). One manages risk.

Recovering the Lost History of Risk

These, then, are the qualities of risk that I imagine in bringing the concept to bear on select works of eighteenth-century literature. First, it is unavoidable. It

demands that individuals constantly re-evaluate the world, including what may seem stable beliefs about its operations. Risk resists being reduced to computation and relies instead on a more capacious notion of calculation that predates technical understandings of risk. It is a marker of the modern world that emerges at a time when human control of the material environment seemed to be expanding and bringing with it new dangers. As a result, risk saturated modern culture so thoroughly that I find it impossible to imagine life without multiple forms of risk management. While many of these qualities have been written out of the technical history of the term, the novel maintains and activates them each time we read it.

In looking to recover some of this history, I want to recover an earlier version of my argument to the effect that eighteenth-century novels observed the same cultural logic as smallpox inoculation.¹⁹ As a point of comparison with *Northanger Abbey*, let us consider the preface to Frances Burney's 1778 *Evelina*:

Perhaps, were it possible to effect the total extirpation of novels, our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit from their annihilation: but since the distemper they have spread seems

¹⁹ For an account of the ravages of smallpox before inoculation and especially vaccination, see Donald A. Henderson and Bernard Moss's "Smallpox and Vaccinia." They note that in eighteenth-century Europe smallpox killed 400,000 people a year, caused a third of all blindness, and killed 5 reigning monarchs. It is an ancient disease, dating as early as 10,000 B.C., and at one point was endemic on three continents. It wasn't until 1000 A.D. that inoculation was discovered, and then it took another 700 years before Lady Mary Wortley Montagu brought the technique to Britain. It was a major source of both risk and social uncertainty until Edward Jenner developed vaccination in 1796.

incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of Time, and bitter diet of Experience, surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than contemned.

Let me, therefore, prepare for disappointment those who, in the perusal of these sheets, entertain the gentle expectation of being transported to the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination, where Reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the Marvellous, rejects all aid from sober Probability. The heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is

No faultless Monster that the world ne'er saw,

but the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire. (95)

Burney makes an apology for novels of exactly the kind Austen mocks, but it seems forgivable given the preface's characterization of the genre. Novels, if we are to believe the work that launched Burney's literary career, are infectious. Burney is applying that description metaphorically, and from our modern perspective "distemper," "contagion," and the other medical and epidemiological terms she uses can only be figurative, but she does so in full awareness that these terms were once considered quite true of novels. The

imagination was once thought to have power that could body, and women in particular were cautioned by the moral spokesmen of their society to be as careful about what they read as the people with whom they socialized. Given that superstition competed on an even footing with medical science to explain the mechanics of infection at the beginning of the eighteenth century, books were sometimes considered the gravest threat to a person's health.²⁰ Even though she is not directly addressing this discourse, Burney invokes it a mere twenty-five years before Austen wrote her first novel.

As ridiculous as it may seem to us now to ascribe such powers to a work of fiction, this belief is not actually that far from Austen's own characterization of novels and their instructive influence. Like *Evelina*, *Northanger Abbey* implies that reading admits a dangerous threat to an individual's judgment and reputation. When stimulated by fiction, in Burney as in Austen, imagination grants that world priority over rational control, suggesting that in their ability to displace the real, novels *are* infectious. When her Preface claims that only "what is prescribed by the slow regimen of Time, and bitter diet of Experience" can protect one from the dangerous effects of reading, Burney testifies to her power as a novelist to inoculate the reader against the imagination run wild. Indeed, like Austen, she declares judgment itself the result of mastering the excesses of individualism—vanity and imagination.

²⁰ See Katherine Kicel's *Novel Notions: Medical Discourse and the Mapping of the Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* for an account of how, in the eighteenth-century, the purported discovery of the area of the brain that controlled imagination influenced both medical theory and novel theory, and how they thus influenced each other.

The second paragraph of Burney's Preface establishes an interesting tension within her novel, and among novels generally, when it promises not to indulge "Romance," "Fiction," and the "the Marvellous" at the expense of "Reason" and "Probability." The argument I once pursued was that novels sought to protect readers by exposing them to small doses of the very same dangers the genre warned against, thus "morally inoculating" readers. In the context of *Evelina*, a small dose of fiction is enough to make readers risk-averse to the dangers of Romance. It is no coincidence that *Evelina* suffers from a long bout of illness after receiving an offensive letter she believes to be from her former suitor and eventual husband Lord Orville: written words have the power to infect. Novels that give readers a little taste of danger in fictional form, so that they might learn to recognize the risks of real life, are working within an inoculative paradigm. Thought of in these terms, *Evelina* and *Northanger Abbey* are not dissimilar at all.

While I am still convinced that the model of infectious disease and inoculation captures the circular process by means of which the novel lures the readers with the promise of romance or adventure, only to punish him or her via the protagonist's remorse and humiliation for taking the bait, that circle fails to capture the larger implications of the concept of risk and its operations as a plot device that either

enhances or depresses the value of character.²¹ This project required a way of opening that circular logic to suggest how the novel came to present readers with an individual they could imagine themselves to be, then adjusted and reshaped that individual to accommodate everything from colonial expeditions to the parlor, from the city to the manor house. The concept of everyday risk management that I develop in this dissertation not only allows the principle of inoculation to move into the various domains of respectable modern life, it also provides the subject—or protagonist, if you will—of a novel form that adjusts to changing socio-economic conditions. This sequence of formal adjustments provides the spine of my argument, as sketched out near the beginning of this introduction.

In closing, I want to make the point that what is forgotten or left out of a particular history leaves its traces here and there throughout a culture, until that culture is disposed to make these qualities visible again. When the history of an organizing principle of everyday life is displaced by an innovation in the abstract language of mathematics and eventually the technology of probability theory, as was the fate of risk

²¹ In *The Economy of Character*, Deidre Shauna Lynch argues that the eighteenth-century saw an evolution in the way literary characters were understood caused by the emergence of a newly commercial social order. At the beginning of the century characters were not thought to possess an inner life that the reader had to uncover, but the new nature of social relations taught readers to look for value in unusual places. Readers came to understand that exploring the depths of a character allowed them to explore their own depths, and thus secure their own sense of selfhood. While Lynch is arguing against an account of the rise of the individual, approaching this question instead through shifting reading practices, she nevertheless helps justify my claim that readers could both learn about the world and secure their sense of individual autonomy through lessons drawn from fiction—specifically fiction that grappled with the modes of circulation imposed by a new economic reality.

during the nineteenth-century, we might say that the concept of risk belongs to the experts.²² The prior history of risk is rendered doubly invisible, once in historical terms and again because we forget it continues to operate at the level of individual decision making. Thus from a contemporary perspective we can say that quarantine procedures did not work: they failed first to keep out the outside world, and second to promote the circulation essential to the commercial life of England, the early stirrings of empire, and the making of a cohesive modern nation. Before the English could freely circulate, however, they required a mechanism that would allow them to do so without corrupting a personal and national identity they had just begun forming. The fantasy of quarantine that seals off the mind in the body, and the body in a household, serves that purpose in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Clarissa*, even if it is ultimately displaced within the novels.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault says that every plague provided a dystopic basis on which to imagine a perfect government: “The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies—this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city” (198). This is the government that comes into being for a time in *Crusoe*. Yet quarantine, as Defoe makes clear in *A*

²² Of the theorists I have cited on the intersection of modern commercial society and the novel, Mary Poovey and James Thompson in particular make this point with their respective discussions of the rearrangement and ultimate divergence of the disciplines in the eighteenth century.

Journal of the Plague Year and *Due Preparations*, is not a solution to the problem of plague and never could be in a society that depends on the circulation of goods, labor, and information. In a time when quarantine was the culturally and politically intelligible response to the dangers of plague, a time before the biomechanics of infection were understood, there was nevertheless a procedure, not for controlling its spread, but for calculating the spread, person by person, household by household, district by district. The issue was not whether this procedure actually stopped the infection, but whether it brought the destruction under cognitive control. The procedures for the cognitive mapping of London during the plague year bear a family resemblance to the procedures that Crusoe used to organize his island once a population accumulates, procedures that anticipate those of the first English census in 1801.

With the shift to biopolitics, smallpox became the paradigmatic disease, and inoculation the mechanism of control.²³ Quarantine represented an individual response to an individual problem, while inoculation and later vaccination obeyed a different the principles of population management.²⁴ But this did not erase the history of the plague, which had already taught government to think in terms of demographic slices (age,

²³ Foucault makes this point on p. 10 of *Security, Territory, Population*.

²⁴ It is worth noting that in his self-published pamphlet on smallpox and vaccination, Jenner describes a remarkably modern approach, speaking in terms of his experiments on viruses, highlighting test cases of his theory, and ultimately concluding that once his evidence reached a critical mass, he no longer felt it "necessary ... to inoculate the whole of those who had been the subjects" of his "late trials." Though he knew he had exposed them to smallpox, he was also confident that their previous exposure to cow pox kept them safe—a conclusion he extrapolated from a sample of people to apply to an entire population.

gender, status, profession).²⁵ Nor is quarantine the only forgotten component of individual risk management that I want to stress. While *The Wealth of Nations* lives on, the impartial spectator of both Addison and Steele and Smith has been forgotten, no longer needed in a world where individuals do not perceive the same dangers from the mere presence of others. Still, we shall see that the impartial spectator marked a crucial step in finally closing off the individual from the outside world, securing selfhood once and for all paving the way for the psychologically sophisticated characters of Jane Austen—and for our modern selves.

²⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, like *Journal of the Plague Year*, sends those of title and position off to the country until the danger passes. Inoculation and vaccination are, at least in theory, much more democratic.

Chapter 1: Daniel Defoe and the Risks of Circulation

Introduction

In 1697 Daniel Defoe's first publication, *An Essay Upon Projects*, described an era defined by inventiveness and risk-taking:

Necessity, which is allow'd to be the Mother of Invention, has so violently agitated the Wits of men at this time, that it seems not at all improper, by way of distinction, to call it, *The Projecting Age*. For tho' in times of War and Publick Confusions, the like Humour of Invention has seem'd to stir; yet, without being partial to the present, it is, I think, no injury to say, the past Ages have never come up to the degree of Projecting and Inventing, as it refers to Matters of Negoce, and Methods of Civil Polity, which we see this Age arriv'd to. (7)

Though he finds its earliest traces in 1680, Defoe attributes this period of remarkable ingenuity to the Nine Years' War of 1688 to 1697—a time when the French largely abandoned direct naval conflict and instead hired privateers to ravage England's commercial shipping, extracting sums so prodigious they “would fright a weak Accomptant out of his belief” (8). Under the pressures of this destruction risk was incentivized; merchants would hazard “any thing to retrieve the desperate Credit of their Fortunes” (8). From this sense of desperation, Defoe extracts a theory of risk that transforms it from the mere chance for sudden, unlikely restitution to a socially productive force. Rephrased in modern terms, high-variance strategies are not only

acceptable, but advisable, when one is hoping for an unlikely outcome. Indeed, Defoe defines his “projects” largely by their improbability: “The Building of *Babel* was a Right Project; for indeed the true definition of a Project, according to Modern Acceptation, is, as is said before, a vast Undertaking, too big to be manag’d, and therefore likely enough to come to nothing” (13). *An Essay* lays out in a handful of pages a nexus of topics to which Defoe frequently returns: the necessity of taking on risk, the extent to which risk can be managed, and the formative role of risk management in forming a sustainable society.

In this, his first attempt to transform risk into a positive social principle, Defoe must demonstrate that the dangers of speculation can be harnessed and made productive. He begins by arguing that when an unlikely project does succeed, its benefits are sufficient to underwrite a new generation of similarly risky ventures, some small portion of which will likewise prove fruitful. In this iterative way, both individuals and larger communities make social and economic progress. Defoe knows he is walking a narrow path in making this argument. By his own admission, the risks of speculation are so great that “projecting” — a term with decidedly negative connotations at the time of *An Essay* — is “in general of publick Advantage” only under certain conditions (9). First, he excludes projects built on deceit, when a “projector” secures investors with the sole intention of making off with the capital. More substantively, he

distinguishes projects designed solely to enrich the project manager from those that, if successful, stand to benefit the public by creating employment or encouraging trade.

As an example of the former he cites the “mere Project” of Sir William Phips, which he describes as “a Lottery of a Hundred thousand to One odds. ... [A] Voyage that wou’d have been as much ridicul’d as *Don Quixot’s Adventure upon the Windmill*: Bless us! That Folks should go Three thousand Miles to Angle in the Open Sea for Pieces of Eight!” (11). Phips, a shepherd- turned-ship captain backed by private investors, was responsible for planning a venture to retrieve sunken Spanish treasure 40 years lost. A previous search, under another captain and over a year long, had found nothing, and Defoe could not have been alone in considering the plan foolish. Even if successful only a select few stood to benefit, and thus the project was, in Defoe’s estimation, “a Lottery” —not a socially responsible undertaking that could be well-managed so much as a scheme built on blind hope in beating the odds.¹ But Defoe uses the conditional phrase “wou’d have been as much ridicul’d as *Don Quixot’s Adventure upon the Windmill*” for a reason: Phips’ expedition retrieved more than £200,000, making him suddenly a very rich man.²

¹ There is some evidence that Defoe is being ungenerous in his account, as Phips did study the earlier expedition. He appears to have gleaned valuable information and carefully planned his voyage, and it must be said that he found the treasure remarkably quickly. Nevertheless, Phips himself had led an earlier treasure hunting voyage that cost more than the modest sum it retrieved.

² His share was £11,000.

In the end, moral reservations about such projects must be put aside, as “‘twou’d be a kind of Blasphemy against Fortune to disallow ‘em” (11). As “Blasphemy” implies, there remains for Defoe a sense that the fate of projects is beyond human control. At the same time, he insists that all projects not built on deceit or foolishness represent objectives man can achieve without depending on Providence, no matter how unlikely that may seem. Though Defoe calls the tower of Babel a project “too big to be manag’d,” he likewise insists it could have been completed had the architects not forgotten “to Measure the Height.” Thus, he concludes, “as in other Projects, it only Miscarri’d, or else ‘twou’d have Succeeded” (13). What are we to make of the tautology that projects don’t succeed simply because they go wrong?³ What of Defoe’s still more puzzling claim that Babel is paradigmatic, “a Right Project,” precisely because the risk of building it could not be entirely managed? Doesn’t this imply that any project, even one aimed at the public good, is ultimately a gamble of the type he rebukes?

Rather than faulty logic, these difficulties reveal Defoe’s efforts to define the role of risk management. He opposes only those projects that cannot be managed in principle, not those whose complexities outstrip man’s managerial abilities. Despite

³ One part of the answer to this question lies, I think, in Genesis 11:6, where God witnesses the construction of the tower: “And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.” Defoe’s logic mirrors that of the Biblical narrative, where nothing is strictly beyond human reach, though God can and does intervene when he desires. Perhaps Defoe’s tautology, then, reflects the contradictions inherent in a world in which God ultimately decides (for example, to reward Phips), though man still has an obligation to be a responsible projector (unlike a treasure hunter).

Phips' success, it is reasonable to assume that in 1697 no amount of planning could significantly improve the odds of fishing long-lost treasure out of the sea. But Defoe refuses to set a limit on ambition and instead relies on those possessed "of strange and Universal Intelligence" to generate projects. Some men, he explains, "are so exquisite, so swift, and so exact, that a Merchant sitting at home in his Counting-house, at once converses with all Parts of the known World. This, and Travel, makes a True-bred Merchant the most Intelligent Man in the World, and consequently the most capable, when urg'd by Necessity, to Contrive New Ways to live" (9). As he goes on to make clear, success comes when such a man encounters a set of circumstances well suited to the inclinations of his individual genius. Beyond this, Defoe has little to say about the confluence of events that creates a successful project, and indeed it is impossible to account for all the slippage between chance, management, Providence, impossibility, and implausibility in *An Essay*. As the editors of the modern edition remind us, many of these moments of logical indecision seem to reflect Defoe's own contradictory desires. Foremost among these contradictions are his efforts to distance himself from past speculation, which led to bankruptcy and debtors' prison, in the very process of plotting new projects he hoped might bring him fortune and fame (xv). Even the volume's title points in two directions. As an "essay" it ostensibly promises to dispassionately formulate a theory of speculation. It is at the same time an "essai," the French for "attempt," by Defoe to devise and legitimate projects of his own, and therefore hardly a

disinterested text. Thus the essay proceeds as a relation between two narrative personae: “Defoe the essayist holds Defoe the speculator in check,” the editors note, in an attempt to “temper the agitation associated with the wild projecting age” (xxiii).

Risk Management and the Novel Form

When it comes to his prose fiction, Defoe does his best to shrug off the obligations of the essayist and let the speculator run free. It is in this fiction, and not in his many pamphlets, periodicals, or other works of non-fiction prose, that his interest in risk management achieves its fullest formulation. I contend, in fact, that *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year* offer narratives built on the very questions addressed by *An Essay*. Both protagonists must manage the risks that swirl around them, seeking to turn danger into opportunity and knowledge not only for themselves, but for readers to whom they might pass on dearly earned wisdom. The drama of these stories derives from the fact that their narrators work with imperfect information and make life-or-death decisions on the basis of hypothetical understanding. Successful risk management is the condition of possibility for their authorship, as without risk they would have no story to tell—and without overcoming that risk, would not be alive to tell it. Simply put, Defoe turns risk management into a formal feature of his narratives.

It is for this reason that the introduction of *An Essay* notes that it is impossible to read the text without thinking of “the most famous merchant adventurer of all, an Englishman named Crusoe, exiled, but not stymied, on an island in the mouth of the

Orinoco" (xxiv). Crusoe is undoubtedly "urg'd by Necessity, to Contrive New Ways to live" after being stranded on an island, though he mostly rediscovers known agricultural and industrial techniques. His characteristically meticulous record keeping, planning, and experimentation mirror the "almost obsessive protective ethos" of *An Essay* and so betray some of the same anxieties that temper Defoe (xx). Nevertheless, in *Robinson Crusoe* these anxieties are finally left behind. What remains is a form of redemptive escapism for the author, a world where adventure can yield an enormous fortune without bringing the risk of financial ruin and debtors' prison. Indeed, this narrative is governed by the conceit that every risk Crusoe takes turns to profit, no matter how unlikely that may seem along the way. The story turns instead to a different kind of danger which the protagonist must face.

The price Crusoe pays for freedom from financial ruin is the risk of losing life itself. In his story danger becomes inextricable from fortune, and together they help constitute modern life. Indeed, *Crusoe* presents life as a sequence of encounters in which the protagonist (and by extension reader) learns to manage risk, to survey at a given moment the opportunity for profit and the danger it entails, then choose a course of action likely to succeed. It is more than a little ironic, then, that the story begins with a cautionary note to the title character to stay home and avoid the dangers of the wider world, a warning that necessarily falls on deaf ears. But it is not the least bit ironic that Defoe fails to find a final destination for Crusoe and an end point for his narrative,

inasmuch as that narrative models an ongoing process of decision-making rather than a single transformative achievement. When one danger ends for Crusoe another begins, his time as a castaway on the island bookended by other misadventures that differ in duration but not in kind. This iterative structure extends even across volumes; witness how the ending of *Crusoe* immediately spills over into the promise of another tale, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, leaving the reader without any sense of resolution. Despite repeated lamentations that the risks he took were unnecessary, Crusoe willfully courts danger even after he has amassed a great fortune. He must repeatedly run risks and survive them, otherwise neither he nor Defoe will have a story to tell.

A Journal of the Plague Year likewise creates and reflects a world in which risk proves inescapable. In an inversion of the conceit of *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrator H.F. must choose whether to protect his business interests but risk his life by staying in London, where he is a saddler, or flee the oncoming plague. H.F.'s decision to stay, much like Crusoe's decision to go, is frequently a source of regret, and again the needs of the story demand that the former risk his life for economic gain. Aside from these parallels there is in another sense in which risk becomes a ubiquitous presence in *A Journal*. The moment H.F. decides to remain in London, he is assailed by uncertainty to an extent even Crusoe would struggle to fathom. Facing an epidemic without an understood cause, the world becomes a collection of theories, practices, and strangers that might protect H.F.'s life or endanger it. He is forced to parse and choose, trusting

that his instincts and calm state of mind will guide him well. H.F. deliberately implicates the reader in this interpretive task:

I have set this particular down so fully, because I know not but it may be of moment to those who come after me, if they come to be brought to the same distress, and to the same manner of making their choice; and therefore I desire this account may pass with them rather for a direction to themselves to act by than a history of my actings, seeing it may not be of one farthing value to them to note what became of me. (9)

Defoe thus positions the text as a fictional guidebook, a work that blurs the lines between fact and fiction. Only in a fictional world could H.F. experience in quick succession everything he recounts in *A Journal*, and those fictional experiences are valuable, the implication is, precisely because they may have bearing on how readers move through the real world.

H.F.'s cautious hope that his story "may be of moment" to others reflects his struggles with incomplete knowledge, rumor, superstition, and perhaps the progress of the disease. In a fundamentally uncertain world, what is important for H.F. and Crusoe is that they accumulate the information necessary for "making their choice." Defoe's theories of risk management thus spill over the boundaries separating fiction from fact and the individual's experience from the world itself, leading *An Essay*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal* to pose the same question: how does an ordinary individual manage the

risks inherent in a seemingly unmanageable world? This question presupposes that individuals must run the risk of circulating in the world—risk avoidance is not an option. This fact of modern life becomes a new literary imperative as prose fiction begins fashioning compelling narrative and aesthetic pleasure from risky encounters analogous to those readers encounter in the real world.

The more basic question is not how to manage risk, then, but why Defoe found it necessary to provide readers with lessons in doing so. Did he imagine that by reading fictional accounts of risk management, readers would learn to live by that principle? Consider this extract from Defoe's preface to *An Essay*, which takes the form of a letter to his patron Dalby Thomas, the accomplished British merchant and financier: "Books are useful only to such whose Genius are suitable to the Subject of them: And to Dedicate a Book of Projects to a Person who had never concern'd himself to Think that way, would be like Musick to one that has no Ear" (1). But where *An Essay* is meant for those men of "Universal Intelligence" who design only the most promising projects, among whom Defoe would place himself, I would argue that *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal* offer something else entirely. These works of fiction are not concerned with soliciting the financing for expeditions at sea, or any of Defoe's own projects. Instead, *Crusoe* and *A Journal* engage the common reader in figuring out how to pursue both financial interests and good health in an increasingly complex and dangerous world. Defoe has translated the risks of speculation into the risks of an emerging middle class.

In *Daniel Defoe and the Bank of England*, Valerie Hamilton and Martin Parker frame the contradictory impulses found in both *An Essay* and *Moll Flanders* as responses to a cultural shift in the definition of “evidence.” As they put it, “It seems to us that the time of the beginnings of corporations, adventures, and monopolies is related to the beginnings of the idea of the novel, of new ways of thinking about how fictions might become facts” (8). Credit, the phenomenon that sent Defoe to prison and propelled certain nations into prosperity in the eighteenth century, arguably amounts to a fiction that becomes a fact, as Hamilton and Parker (following Marx) point out. So too with the corporation, which claims a type of cohesion though it is held together by nothing so much as the idea of the corporation itself. Thus it should not surprise us, they suggest, that the rise of the novel parallels that of new financial institutions, both of which work to turn fiction into fact.⁴

In comparing the two institutions,⁵ they make a claim that resembles my own: “our account of Defoe, Moll, and [founder of the Bank of England William] Paterson allows us to tell a different story, one that begins not with rationalization but with

⁴ In this light, they see more than coincidence when Defoe compares Sir William Phips’ quest for lost Spanish treasure to tilting at windmills in *Don Quixote*, and they pause over one of Defoe’s letters which notes, “Writing is become a very considerable Branch of the English Commerce” (4,5).

⁵ In calling the novel an institution, I am echoing Homer Obed Brown’s *Institutions of the English Novel*, particularly his argument that the genre is both produced by institutionalization and an institutionalizing force itself. In much the same way, I see Defoe’s prose fiction as a product of and vector for the emergence of an autonomous individual brought into being by experiencing and managing risk. But where Brown’s account of the novel rejects an emergence of the genre before the nineteenth century, Hamilton and Parker give us reason to believe that the institutionalization of the novel begins in the eighteenth. Even if the term “novel” does not come to have a generally accepted and codified meaning until the 1800s, it nevertheless arguably germinates alongside other kinds of institutions that date to the prior century.

projectors, and all the moral and financial risks associated with imagination" (20). Both the novel and the Bank manage risk on behalf of readers and investors, though in different ways. In the novel, risk is "experienced at one remove" from the reader, whose "fears are projected, carried away from the self to 'another'" (55, 57).⁶ While it is certainly true that reading is a way of "experiencing sin" without needing to live it, my own view of Defoe's relation to fiction requires me to invert Hamilton and Parker's schema (55). The value of fiction for the writer who was arguably England's first novelist was not to externalize danger and risk, placing it at a distance from the reader, but rather to provide the means by which that reader would internalize risk, so that it inflected his way of seeing and making sense of the world.⁷ In this respect, there was no modern individual before a literate population considered risk management essential to everyday life. Prose fiction reflected and participated in modern efforts to assess and quantify risk, and readers acquired an imaginary autonomy as they learned to manage risks that threatened their control over body, mind, and property. If risk is indeed constitutive of the self we now take for granted when we speak of individual

⁶ The Bank of England also sought to distance the individual investor from risk, for example by initially having a strict limited liability structure in which it never issued more in bills than its capital investment (only later was the practice of a bank lending more than it had on hand invented). But the initial outlay of funds ensured a different level of personal risk for investors compared to novel readers, especially because the Bank was raising funds to fight a war with France, an inherently risky endeavor, and because the Treasury had failed to pay back loans before.

⁷ For the sake of simplicity, but more importantly because of the argument I am making, from this point on I shall call Defoe's early prose fiction "novels." It is my contention that Defoe wrote into existence some important features of the novel tradition, and thus I feel justified in using the term despite the anachronism this entails.

subjectivity, I am arguing, then risk management is the means of developing a self capable of sustaining its individual identity over time. The notion of life as defined by one's place in society is transformed through risk into the life of an autonomous individual. This claim shapes my account of the rise of the English novel.

Sandra Macpherson has argued that risk plays a formative role in the history of the English novel, though for her it is the impossibility of managing risk that shapes the genre. Working against the longstanding opposition of the novel to classical tragedy, Macpherson traces the intertwined development of the emergent narrative form and the legal concept of strict liability. She finds "a preoccupation with tragic, involuntary action is the defining feature of Defoe's fictions of harm and of the novel form those fictions bring into being" (30). For Macpherson, then, it is precisely "the impossibility of anticipating, and managing, harm" that Defoe imprints on the novel tradition (27). What is more, strict liability holds characters morally accountable for accidents and even the actions of their subordinates. As a result the protagonist of the novel is "different from the [individual] we are used to thinking emerges in the period. For on this view, the person is individuated solely *by* responsibility, and responsibility conceived against the criteria by which we tend to define individuals—against interiority, against intentionality, even, paradoxically, against agency itself" (30).

Macpherson is right to posit a tragic reading of Defoe and the novel form against the long tradition of comic readings—comic, she notes, in the sense that chaos and

danger are temporary forces inevitably overwhelmed by a natural order which transforms disorder into design. Pursuing instead a reading where “disorder persists *as* disorder,” Macpherson correctly situates Defoe’s fiction in a world where the resolution of one encounter with risk never signals the happy ending of the story (28). More danger is just around the corner, and past actions continue to bear in unexpected ways on future decisions. It is nevertheless possible to acknowledge the tragic consequences of involuntary and past actions, from which there is no escape, while also sidestepping the comic-tragic binary. Defoe’s prose fiction reflects a world which is by turns comic and tragic, where moments of order and affirmation are interspersed within stretches of uncertainty and regret. Rather than focusing on outcomes in order to arrive at some judgment, whether rational or moral, such narratives focus squarely on the *process* of management. While there is, as Macpherson suggests, no comic resolution to the story, it is equally true that it steadfastly refuses to resign itself to a tragic world. In short, nothing persists as it was—there is always the next episode to be managed. Which is why the question of Defoe’s relationship to Providence has been such a sticky one for his readers: even man’s relationship to God is subject to management. If at times Defoe’s invocation of Providence seems forced in both *Crusoe* and *A Journal*, I would argue that this is an acknowledgment that even faith cannot obviate or escape so basic a requirement of modern life.

It is on this basis that we can reconcile the “pose of perpetual vigilance” — which Christian Thorne suggests and Macpherson rejects as the lesson of eighteenth-century fiction — with the world of tragedy (26). An ever-skeptical disposition is justified as a tool of good management, even though it does not and cannot guarantee success. Failure is built into Defoe’s model as just another fact of life. That Macpherson confines her discussion of Defoe to *A Journal*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana* while excluding *Robinson Crusoe* suggests that *Crusoe* is singularly resistant to a tragic reading based on involuntary action — that Defoe indeed portrays *Crusoe* alone as bearing the burden of his own mistakes and shortcomings.

Crusoe is, for this very reason, exactly where one must begin an account of the novel as guidebook for risk management. It simulates an individual’s encounter with a world that demands planning to minimize danger and maximize opportunity, a paradigm that arguably offers a first-cut description of all of Defoe’s novels. Such a narrative affords its reader the opportunity to scrutinize and reshape the world to meet his or her needs. If Defoe has earned the title of the first British novelist, then he did so, in my view, by providing a model of everyday life as a sequence of risky encounters that an ordinary individual had to negotiate in order to earn his or her place in the world. He did so, moreover, by extravagantly testing contemporary theories of how to survive and even thrive on risk. These tests wagered nothing less than the protagonist’s individual autonomy — his body, mind, and property — so as to bring into being the very individual

that Defoe's narratives placed in jeopardy. The figure of an autonomous individual at risk persists from Defoe's early prose fiction to form the framework of the mid-century debates over the risks of novel reading itself, a paradox that I develop in the next chapter. The link between self-management and economic and class status thus established, the narrative of risk management took over the marriage plot to revise established courtship rituals in the work of Jane Austen. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, risk remained the formative narrative principle of novels we still esteem, while novels remained the means of placing readers in a world in need of management and teaching them to negotiate it.

Man on the Edge

Just before he relates his discovery of the lone footprint in the sand that upends his world, Crusoe finds himself writing about the small pleasures he has cultivated on his island. Grapes in particular he loves, and also the short voyages he takes in his boat. This is the second canoe he has painstakingly built, not so large as the first that he is never able to drag to sea. It is at one and the same time a small piece of freedom and a source of danger. As he explains, "sometimes I went out in her to divert my self, but no more hazardous Voyages would I go, nor scarce ever above a Stone's Cast or two from the Shore, I was so apprehensive of being hurry'd out of my Knowledge again by the Currents, or Winds, or any other Accident" (130). This apprehension stems from an earlier excursion, when a strong current nearly pulled the canoe out to sea. Crusoe's

recollection serves as a reminder that he is stuck at the edge of the navigable world, unable to attempt a return to civilization except by hazarding his life. What is more, the narrative presents this physical limitation as its own epistemological horizon. By describing Crusoe's experience of being swept out to sea as "being hurry'd out of my Knowledge," the narrative equates the limits of his understanding with those of his very existence, putting him at the edge of subsistence, navigability, and intelligibility all at once.

Tying Crusoe's liminality to questions of individual autonomy and self-sovereignty, Homer O. Brown writes, "Robinson's island isolation is after all only a metaphor for the solitary selfishness of all men. This seemingly impenetrable selfishness, however, is a Hobbesian 'state of nature,' transposed into a social world, atomistic, volatile, where the mere existence of another person, for Robinson even the *possibility* of the existence of another person, is a threat to the self" ("Displaced Self" 566). On the other hand, Maximillian E. Novak claims that for Defoe and other writers of the eighteenth century "man was a social animal, that the bestial life of the solitary savage was insecure, and that so far from being happy, the isolated man lived in a constant fear of death" (*Defoe and Man* 23). He likewise notes that "in one of his last works, [Defoe] attacked Hobbes's concept of the solitary natural man and the state of nature," finding a site of disagreement between the two authors precisely where Brown sees a literary reflection (*Defoe and Man* 16). But whether man is a social animal enervated by forced

isolation or the opposite, Brown and Novak agree that at stake in Crusoe's narrative is nothing less than the very existence of the modern self.

Everett Zimmerman frames this question explicitly as one about the nature of boundaries. As he puts it, "the Crusoe story is an intricate exploration of social and legal rationales for violence. Look at from this perspective, Defoe's *Adventures* and *Farther Adventures* explore the extremities of the political philosophy of Hobbes and Locke, focusing on the borders where philosophical certainties become attenuated" ("Crusoe and No Man's Land" 526). In this respect, Zimmerman thinks of Defoe as an experimental author and social theorist who uses the novel to remove the individual from the established means of social reproduction in order to imagine a self-constituted individual. For Zimmerman too this process is motivated by danger: "Although Crusoe puts his trust in the modern commercial world, commerce fails to eliminate endemic violence" ("Crusoe and No Man's Land" 525). Reading the novel as inherently open-ended, he calls attention to the process of management Crusoe confronts rather than to the inconclusiveness of the plot or the partial articulation of a theory of individual formation. Like Crusoe himself, readers learn that the self must be continually reconstituted by confronting and surviving various forms of risk.

In this light, Crusoe's recollection of the dangers called to mind by his canoe foreshadow the overwhelming fear and confusion that come when, almost exactly halfway through his story, he discovers the lone footprint in the sand. This is the center

of the narrative in several senses, the moment that sets into motion the events that throw Crusoe's liminal status into sharp relief and reveal the true stakes of his story. Perhaps no other episode in the novel better models the consistency with which the narrative forces Crusoe to manage risk, recalibrating his understanding of the world around him to accommodate new information as well as the whims of his own mind. His first reaction is to stand "Thunder-struck, or is if I had seen an Apparition. . . . I could see no other Impression but that one, I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe if it might not be my Fancy. . . . But after innumerable fluttering Thoughts, like a Man perfectly confus'd and out of my self, I came Home to my Fortification, not feeling, as we say, the Ground I went on" (130). This discovery demands an immediate reorientation of Crusoe's understanding of the world, so that he now conceives of his home as "my Castle, for I think I call'd it ever after this" (131). Faced with the possible presence of a stranger on an island where he thought he had sole dominion, Crusoe reconceives his position as that of a sovereign threatened by an imagined intrusion.

This initial shock gives way to a series of contradictory impulses, as Crusoe is by turns hysterical, rationally objective, and even some combination of the two. Unable "in the least [to] imagine" how a single foot print came to be on this stretch of beach, he finds himself "fancying every Stump at a Distance to be a Man; nor is it possible to describe how many various Shapes affrighted Imagination represented Things to me in" (130). Here we see Defoe playing with two meanings of "imagine," the first a failure of

Crusoe's empirical understanding to explain why there is only one footprint when there should be two, or even an entire trail, the second a suggestion that his overstimulated faculties have invented a threat where there is none. Fancy and reason collaborate as he examines and discards the possibility that the Devil left the print in order to torment him, which he dismisses with the probabilistic observation that "'twas Ten Thousand to one whether I should ever see" the footprint, odds far too low to be worth the Devil's while (131). Briefly thankful he was not discovered by the intruder, he is soon overcome by despair at having been abandoned by God and berates himself for having failed to accumulate great stores of goods on which to subsist while in hiding.

What follows this initial flurry of responses are philosophical reflections on the inconstancy of the world and human perception. Crusoe has hoped for human companionship for so long that even he finds it ironic that evidence of another man should send him into a frenzy. This spate of self-criticism restores enough mental equilibrium to turn his thoughts once again to God and the Bible. In this newly calm state he realizes he has failed to do something essential—namely, to verify whether or not the footprint is his. He proceeds to test the entirely plausible theory that he and the intruder are actually one, only to see that the foot is far too big to be his own. Again thrown into a panic, he vows to destroy all he has built in order to efface his very existence. With the benefit of hindsight he is able to extract from this extended episode a lesson, presented as much for the reader as for himself: "Oh, what ridiculous resolutions

men take when possessed with fear! It deprives them of the use of those means which reason offers for their relief. ... Fear of danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than danger itself, when apparent to the eyes; and we find the burden of anxiety greater, by much, than the evil which we are anxious about" (135). I can think of no lines from the novel that better recapitulate the process of managing risk, which requires men to use "those means which reason offers for their relief." While panic temporarily leads him to avoid risk, risk management demands that Crusoe confront danger head-on. Crusoe does just that, fortifying his castle and building his stores to such an extent that he is not afraid, just a few pages later, when he discovers the cannibals that frequent the island. Rather than fear for his life, he ponders the question of whether he is morally justified in taking theirs.

John Richetti notes that the tendency of self-reflection in Defoe's protagonists is coupled with a desire to reshape the world around them, and he attributes the "realism" of Defoe's fiction to these paired characteristics:

Defoe's 'realism' as a novelist comes in his vivid evocation of individuals as they examine the conditions of their existence and explore what it means to be a person in particularized social and historical circumstances. Looking back on their lives, his characters discover the nature of *their* particular reality. They reveal how they adapted to their circumstances, how they modified actuality as

they encountered it and constructed personal versions of “reality,” all the while
let it be said avoiding solipsism. (“Defoe as Narrative Innovator” 121)

In naming what is realistic about Defoe’s prose fiction, Richetti presupposes the very categories that Defoe is to some degree writing into existence. Nevertheless, his argument supports my claim that eighteenth-century readers were interested in a fictional guidebook for managing risk. Noting the use of “socially marginal or even criminal” characters to represent “ordinary people,” Richetti argues that “Defoe’s clear-eyed fictions are novelistic precisely because their narrators evoke a shifting social and historical field of opportunity (and danger) rather than a hierarchical and settled order” (“Defoe as Narrative Innovator” 121, 123). Defoe uses cannibalism—which literally destroys the humanity of those consumed as it cancels out the humanity of the consumers—to represent in hyperbolic terms the threat that constitutes Crusoe’s sense of self, but the difference, as Richetti suggests, is not one of kind but of degree. If as Zimmerman says institutions break down at the margins, then inversely that is where opportunity and danger are amplified. Defoe taps into these intertwined forces, offering through Crusoe a series of adventures in which the principles of risk management not only sustain life, but identify it as that of an individual.

Man in Circulation

My argument thus far has depended on the notion that adventure and risk are compulsory for Crusoe, but the source of this compulsion has not yet been explained. What sparks Crusoe's desire to remake himself as a self-sovereign individual responsible for increasing his domain? Why can he not heed his father's advice and take a place among the middling ranks in York instead of seeking out the dangers of a life at sea? This is, in fact, the exact line of questioning that his father pursues and that Crusoe twice fails to answer, once immediately upon being asked and the second time in his narrative retelling of the episode. I know of no prior literature that advocates pursuing self-sovereignty even and inevitably at the hazard of one's life, yet Crusoe comes no closer to an explanation than when he tells his mother his thoughts are "so entirely bent upon seeing the World" that he will go with or without his parents' blessing (8).

While *Crusoe* remains largely silent on the subject, Defoe's economic writing on "circulation" does shed some light here. In the March 27th, 1705 issue of his periodical *The Review*, he attacked the Act for the Relief, Employment, and Settlement of the Poor recently passed by the House of Commons.⁸ This piece of legislation would, if successful, establish each parish as a largely independent economy, with the goods necessary for sustaining parishioners manufactured on-site to maximize employment. Defoe's response characterizes the Act in a sequence of hyperbolic and acerbic

⁸ David Trotter has noted the formative effect of circulation on Defoe's thinking and writing in his book *Defoe, Dickens, and the Economies of the Novel*. He discusses many of the same themes and both excerpts I will examine from Defoe's *Review*, though in a different context—see particularly pp. 2-6. His work focuses on 'circulation' as a bodily metaphor, a topic to which I will turn later.

descriptors that invert the very project they describe, undercutting the idea of a local economy:

Be it that it was Contriv'd by the most Consummate Knowledge, agreed to by an Assembly of Inlightn'd Spirits, I affirm, That Bill is an Indigested Chaos, a Mass of Inconsistency and Incongruous Nonsense in Trade, big with Monsters of Amphibious Generation, Brooding Needless and Fatal Errors, and Numerous Irretrievable Mischiefs, absolutely Destructive of our Trade, Ruinous to the Poor, tending to the Confusion of our Home Trade, stopping the Circulation of our Manufactures, and Encreasing both the Number and Misery of our Poor.

(Volume II 38)

“Circulation” is at risk here, by which Defoe means the movement of goods that produces more wealth than their actual production. Should parishes indeed supply their own needs, rather than relying on London to redistribute goods from other centers of production, countless middle-men would lose employment and be thrown into poverty. Defoe concludes that to interrupt “the Circulation and Oeconomy of our Home Trade” would be folly, stressing that “there are greater Numbers of Families Maintain'd, thus by our Manufactures after they are made, than there are by the making them” (Volume II 38).

Defoe returned to this subject in the July 9, 1709 issue of *The Review* to address a related question: would the rapid growth of the English population depress wages? It is

quickly apparent how little is left of Defoe's former fear that widespread unemployment will leave citizens to starve. Four years later Defoe frames the idea that the poor will suffer not as an inevitability but as a hypothetical that is easily dismissed:

I readily grant, if you were to bring over a hundred Thousand Butchers or Shoemakers— They would be ready to butcher one another for Work, and the Shoemakers would ruin those we already have ... And by Consequence would want to do some Work, that some other Body did before; and this is what we call by that ill-natur'd Phrase, of *Eating the Bread out of the Mouths of our Poor*.

(Volume VI 165)

This is not, as Defoe makes clear, the way a modern economy works. Operating in much the same mode as Crusoe's journal, the later issues transforms the fear of butchers butchering one another for work and of imported labor taking bread from the mouths of the poor into a reasoning process that aims at managing the risk of that threat before it materializes. "When we talk of people," Defoe says, "and planting them in a Nation, we are to consider this nation as concern'd in Trade; Trade, which is now the Consequence of peopling a Country; and this Trade is to be consider'd in its full Circulation, by which it employs perhaps ten times the Hands, which the same Things produc'd in another manner would employ, and which Circulation is the Life of general Commerce"

(Volume VI 165). Not the making of products but the trading of them is the

"Consequence" of peopling a country. Gone is the former fragility of circulation and the

violence that accompanies a drop in the number of jobs relative to the mouths that must be fed. Instead Defoe repeats his main point—that the number of people employed by trade increases more rapidly than employment tied to production—but this time as a reassurance, not a warning. “Circulation” now guarantees increased employment, and thus is the key to “the Life of general Commerce” and the future prosperity of Englishmen.

Recast in light of an ever-expanding economy, the advice that Crusoe’s father offers him is as outdated as it is well-intentioned. The father’s failure to understand the new commercial economy is revealed when the son recounts how he was asked “what Reasons more than a meer wandring Inclination I had for leaving my Father’s House and my native Country” (5). All the more when the elder Crusoe argues,

That the middle Station of Life was calculated for all kind of Vertues and all kind of Enjoyments; that Peace and Plenty were the Hand-maids of a middle Fortune; that Temperance, Moderation, Quietness, Health, Society, all agreeable Diversions, and all desirable Pleasures, were the Blessings attending the middle Station of Life; that this Way Men went silently and smoothly thro’ the World (5-6).

Defoe himself objects to this line of reasoning on several grounds. First, circulation in the world is necessary to construct and then claim the possessive individualism that Crusoe the younger realized. By the same token, danger is no longer something to be

assiduously avoided. Indeed, risk cannot be avoided under an economy increasingly dependent on the profits of trade and speculation. As a result, finally, the “middle Station of Life” had fundamentally changed. No longer tied to a family business handed down from father to son, the new middle class depends upon and demands the movement of people and goods. As Ian Watt puts it in *The Rise of the Novel*, Crusoe embodies “the dynamic tendency of capitalism itself, whose aim is never merely to maintain *status quo*, but to transform it incessantly. Leaving home, improving on the lot one was born to, is a vital feature of the individualist pattern of life” (65).

It is thus no surprise that *Robinson Crusoe* is a novel obsessed with movement. By the end of the story, Crusoe’s efforts have put an enormous number of people and things into circulation. When Crusoe returns with the now educated Friday to England, they leave behind mutineers they have captured and conscripted as island administrators. Crusoe decides to send women to the island so that the administrators can establish a colony, and later takes great pleasure in returning to his island to find it prospering. Finally there is the incredible wealth that he accumulates, both as a castaway and through the trust that has managed his plantation in Brazil, which must be transported to him in England. The novel, in short, brings even the remotest island and long-lost specie back into circulation.

Defoe’s focus on circulation is part of a pervasive concern during the long eighteenth century with controlling and optimizing the movement of people and goods.

In 1651, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* compared the movement of specie in a country to the circulation of blood in the body,⁹ one of the earliest uses in English of a metaphor that would soon become commonplace.¹⁰ Charles Gildon, a frequent critic of Defoe, worked to literalize that metaphor, publishing what is generally considered the first "novel of circulation," or "it-narrative," in 1709. *The Golden Spy*, appearing in the same year as the second issue of *The Review* seen above, narrates its story through the eyes of coins that circulate throughout the "Courts of Europe," and consequently serve as witnesses to all manner of depravity.¹¹ On the side of population management, an Act of Parliament in 1700 had the unintended effect of financially incentivizing parishes to declare the poor "vagrants," one in a series of poor laws dating back to the fourteenth century. Subsequent acts in 1714 and 1744 expanded the list of people who could be rounded up, corporally punished, and then forcibly moved for the loosely defined crime of vagrancy,

⁹ "For Gold and Silver, being (as it happens) almost in all Countries of the world highly valued, is a commodious measure for the value of all things. ... [It] goes round about, Nourishing (as it passeth) every part thereof; In so much as this Concoction, is as it were the Sanguification of the Common-wealth: For natural Bloud is in like manner made of the fruits of the Earth; and circulating, nourisheth by the way, every Member of the Body of Man" (174).

¹⁰ Joe Cribb, a numismatist at the British Museum, traces a version of this metaphor back to the 14th century, with money compared to the four humors of the body. The particular association of money with blood comes in the early seventeenth century in several European languages other than English, and rises to dominance in the mid-century, with Hobbes "one of the earliest to make this connection in spite of his distaste for metaphors." By 1660 the usage had "entered into popular speech" (471).

¹¹ *The Golden Spy* tells an episodic, fragmented story that associates avaricious desire for money with other immoral behaviors, chiefly excessive sexual appetites. It helped inaugurate the tradition of the satiric novel of circulation, a genre which persisted through the nineteenth century. Circulation thus becomes the lens through which one examines the ills of society, in stark contrast to Defoe's use of the concept. Gildon is most famous for his literary rivalries, managing to be simultaneously an enemy of Defoe and of Pope and Swift—no small feat, considering the antagonistic relationship between Defoe and the Tory writers.

which was frequently associated with promiscuity.¹² While these particular phenomena were playing out, mercantilist and nascent capitalist economic theories greatly increased the scope of concerns about the distribution of people and the resources required for sustaining them, determining trade, monetary, and even immigration and emigration policies in much of Europe.¹³ When *Crusoe's* father cautions that easy movement through the world is the marker of individual security and the pleasures it brings, he could just as well be describing the philosophical underpinnings of socio-political systems in 1719, the year *Crusoe* was published. Or even in 1651, which is not only the year of *Leviathan* but also the first year of *Crusoe's* story.

Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, published in English as *Security, Territory, Population*, draw attention to the role circulation plays in organizing eighteenth century thought. He suggests that "broadly speaking, what was at issue in the eighteenth century was the question of the spatial, juridical, administrative, and economic opening up of the town: resituating the town in a space of circulation" (13).

¹² For an examination of how common forcible removal had become by the end of the century, see "Loose, idle and disorderly: vagrant removal in late eighteenth-century Middlesex" by Tim Hitchcock, Adam Crymble and Louise Falcini; on the persistent association of sexual indecency with vagrancy see Linda Woodbridge's *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature*.

¹³ There is an extensive body of scholarship tying poor and vagrancy laws in England to mercantilism, agrarian capitalism, and modern forms of capitalism. These various accounts often disagree over how to characterize the economic theories of the long eighteenth century, but they all cite an eighteenth-century belief that unemployment and the general distribution of British subjects needed to be managed to ensure prosperity. See for example Bernard Bailyn's *Voyagers to the West*, particularly pp. 29-36, on the role mercantilism played in colonialism. David Omrod's *The Rise of Commercial Empires*, meanwhile, argues that "mercantile cities" (p. 9) were as important as nation-states in determining economic policy and even law, while Larry Patriquin's *Agrarian Capitalism and Poor relief in England, 1500-1860*, offers a historical account that replaces mercantilism with a uniquely British agrarian capitalism.

Foucault goes on to link the far-reaching influence of the concept of circulation with an emphasis on management and optimization. As he puts it, at stake in the eighteenth century was the “matter of organizing circulation, eliminating its dangerous elements, making a division between good and bad circulation, and maximizing the good circulation by diminishing the bad” (18). Though Foucault does not explicitly name this process as risk management, his lectures frequently refer to that way of thinking. He comes closest to naming risk management as such when he cites the emergent understanding in the eighteenth century of “differential risk,” the realization that the danger of contracting epidemic disease varied across demographic groups and individuals and thus should be quantified (61). On the basis of that insight theories of how best to control smallpox began to employ modern notions, like baseline infection and mortality rates.

Foucault is ultimately interested in the role circulation plays in shaping governmental policy. As he notes near the end of the lecture series, “by ‘circulation’ we should understand not just the material network” that allows the circulation of labor and goods, but also “the set of regulations, constraints, and limits, or the facilities and encouragements that will allow the circulation of men and things in the kingdom and possibly beyond its borders” (325). He examines strategic policies that work from the top down: how should cities and towns be organized spatially? How can crime and epidemic disease can be contained, if not prevented? How should policies and laws be

enforced? The ability to safely navigate roads, the movement of grain, and the spread of contagion—these are the paradigmatic examples of circulation from which Foucault derives his definition. In such an account, there is no meaningful role for prose fiction to play. My interest in circulation instead works upward from the level of the individual, which is to say it begins at the level of self-government rather than government. Where Foucault's interest in circulation is logistical, Defoe's interest as a fiction writer is epistemological in nature. *Robinson Crusoe* only scratches the surface of the importance Defoe invests in circulation. *A Journal*, on the other hand, is a text obsessed with fundamental epistemological questions about the foundation of belief and the status of knowledge in a chaotic world. It considers the governmental, logistical questions Foucault investigates while at the same time embodying, indeed greatly surpassing, the self-reflexive qualities of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Man Dis(connected)

In the world of Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Londoners face the life-and-death questions of whether and how to quarantine themselves from the infection. Given that in the eighteenth century it was impossible to distinguish the healthy from the asymptomatic, quarantine was simultaneously a method of survival and a death sentence. With adequate provisions, early quarantine ensured survival for those lacking the means to leave the city. But if mistimed, or when imposed by the local government on anyone deemed ill, sequestration almost certainly meant a slow death in a "shut up"

house, no one allowed to enter or leave. Along with vast reserves of emotional investment, *A Journal* expends countless pages in weighing the logistical and ethical risks of observing quarantine procedures against those incurred by violating them. Written in 1722, in the shadow of a plague outbreak in Marseilles two years prior that had killed 100,000 and renewed fears in England, *A Journal* seizes on the history of the London plague of 1665 to demonstrate how H.F. weighs the double risk of surviving a lethal threat when the government procedures for doing so are themselves risky.

The risk of navigating these procedures is but one side of the problem. In a world defined by commerce, circulation, and an emphasis on familial attachments, true isolation is not a viable option practically or theoretically. An individual defined by various forms and degrees of connection with the world cannot sever those ties without risking his livelihood and shirking his moral responsibilities. These concerns come to a head in an oft-quoted section of *A Journal*, where the perambulatory H.F. encounters a lone waterman also walking the banks of the River Thames. After conspicuously avoiding contact with each other, the two “at last [fall] into some talk, at a Distance,” whereupon H.F. asks the waterman for an account of the progress of the disease in his part of the city (92). He learns that almost all the surrounding houses have been infected, that even the waterman’s family has fallen ill, although the waterman himself is still sound. H.F. expresses his skepticism. Knowing that the Robert has lost a child to the plague and has an infected wife, H.F. inquires “how do you mean then ... that you are

not visited [by the plague]”? On the surface, H.F. asks a practical question about how Robert avoided being infected by a family member. Ever the moralist, H.F. wants to be sure that the waterman has not abandoned his “own Flesh, and Blood.” “Lord forbid” Robert responds, explaining that his work forces him to leave his family but keeps them free “from Want” (92). Living on his boat and using a jerry-rigged delivery system to move goods, the waterman can perform his familial duty while avoiding the infection. For a time H.F. remains focused on logistics, learning that Robert participates in a new boutique economy to make money while trade is suspended: the waterman distributes goods to passengers quarantined on anchored ships, allowing him to send his wife Rachel supplies and weekly pay.

Given that she is confined to their home and may very well die, how can giving Rachel money serve any practical purpose? Only Robert can buy the goods that will sustain his quarantined family. After putting the money in infected hands, moreover, Robert must endanger himself in order to reclaim it. Why does Defoe have Robert and Rachel make this exchange, if not to have the coins serve as tangible proof that Robert is no less emotionally bound to his family for being physical separated from them? To prove his devotion, Robert takes the risk of contaminating desperately needed specie. That both husband and wife receive great comfort from this exchange emphasizes that the family is ultimately a single unit that must survive or perish together, despite the care with which its members avoid danger at every other time. What is more, this

transaction serves as a reminder of the peculiar status of money in both *Crusoe* and *A Journal*. In settings in which the normal rules of circulation have collapsed, money is rendered essentially useless. Crusoe's riches have no value on the island, while the buying power of potentially infected specie is dwarfed, if not entirely negated, by the suspicion with which it is viewed as a potential vector of disease. Yet in both narratives its allure remains, precisely because money represents the hope of one day returning to the normal avenues of commerce. Crusoe knows his money is useless but nevertheless hoards it; Rachel and Robert both need to touch it and share it between them, whatever risks that may bring.

Thus this moment reveals another layer of the exchange between the narrator and the waterman, one that uncovers the real reason the episode is worthy of several pages. Reading H.F.'s original question—"how do you mean ... that you are not visited [by the plague]?"—as theoretical as well as practical, we must ask what it means for Robert to claim that he is not infected when his family, whom he cannot abandon and to whom he is inextricably linked, has fallen ill. It is Robert's response to H.F.'s accusation that convinces the narrator to believe the waterman's testimony. Struck by "a Countenance that presently told me, I had happened on a Man that was no Hypocrite, but a serious religious good Man, and his Ejaculation was an Expression of Thankfulness ... his Family did not want," H.F. knows before Robert has even explained himself that the story he tells will be true (92). Robert is here embodying the paradox of

the autonomous individual, who seeks constantly to police the boundaries of a selfhood that is defined against danger, obligation, and connection. He must take care of his family and he must share all he has, including the four shillings that are his weekly pay. Connections persist, and in both a practical and a theoretical sense, Robert's familial obligations make quarantine impossible.

Macpherson reads this moment in terms of "the legal category of 'deodand,'" an object or possession that is forfeit under the law because it has caused a person's death (42). She argues that Defoe, who wrote a treatise on deodands, reduces the agency of human actors to that of things by relying on the logic of involuntary action and tragedy to shape his narrative. As she puts it, in *A Journal* "persons and objects are alike 'cursed things'" that harm others regardless of intent (42). In her view, this explains why Defoe features a protracted encounter between H.F. and the waterman. Watermen were subject to the strict liability laws whose history Macpherson traces, and they did their work knowing they could be held legally responsible for accidentally infecting others. Robert's decision to allow H.F. aboard his boat thus "registers as uncharacteristically risky—negligent, even" (41). H.F.'s desire to travel with Robert is justified, as are many of his journeys, by his insatiable "Curiosity." But what compels Robert to agree, knowing full well the risks to life, livelihood, and family?

Macpherson's argument that the agency of people is reduced to that of things rests on the assumption that in the plague infected city, humans have no more

knowledge of their status as carriers of disease than do objects. But an object cannot choose how it will circulate in the world, nor can it engage in any manner of probabilistic thinking. Human actors can and must do both. This is the reason why Robert relents and decides to trust H.F.'s repeated assurances of good health, providing us with a paradigmatic moment of risk management—though one, to be sure, where each accepts more risk than he would wish. Macpherson is right that risk is unavoidable and that connections persist in *A Journal*, even when unwanted or unknown, but these are not the results of a tragic world so much as a modernizing one. The result is a palpable tension in H.F.'s narrative, as his dual roles of incorrigible observer and careful survivor pull him in opposite directions. No fact of the story better captures this tension than the introduction of a peculiar note, near the end, which points out the author's final resting place: "N.B.—The author of this journal lies buried in that very ground, being at his own desire, his sister having been buried there a few years before" (199).

Because Defoe does not resort to the eighteenth-century convention of introducing a fictitious editor, readers might well be disoriented by the note. Has H.F. written the note himself from beyond the grave, or has he arranged to have someone write it for him? Perhaps some exceptionally unobtrusive editor has decided that this detail, and this detail alone, warrants his intervention. (There is an earlier *nota bene*, but it is integrated seamlessly in the text and is clearly in H.F.'s voice rather than an editorial insertion, whereas the note testifying to H.F.'s grave is offset from what surrounds it

stylistically, contextually, and in some texts even visually.) Any of these explanations obviously generates more questions than answers, but the fact remains that Defoe conspicuously alerts readers that his narrator is buried in one of the “new burying-grounds” created to accommodate those who died of the plague. Though the continuous narrative suggests that H.F. has survived the epidemic despite his repeated potential exposures, the note at least raises the possibility that he ultimately succumbs to the disease (198). In this way, Defoe reminds the reader of the narrator’s mortality and underscores the risks H.F. must run to offer his exceptional tale, an account that could not exist otherwise. Much like the coins that Robert and Rachel exchange, H.F. is a reminder of both the inescapability of circulation and the danger that it brings. Where the coins symbolize hope in a dangerous world, the grave serves as a *memento mori*—death can only be delayed for so long.

This moment in *A Journal* acquires still more significance when compared to Defoe’s other 1722 plague text, *Due Preparations for the Plague, as well for the Soul as Body*. Published in February, only a month before *A Journal*, *Due Preparations* shares the same concerns but employs a strikingly different style. Despite its occasional display of Defoe’s story-telling acuity, the earlier plague text is largely pragmatic and descriptive, and has been read as a piece of propaganda commissioned by the government in the hopes of minimizing damage to British commerce in the event of another plague outbreak. According to this justifiably cynical reading, Defoe was tasked with securing

the lives and property of the middle classes, and with them the state economy, even at the expense of the vulnerable poor.¹⁴

Although *Due Preparations* lacks a consistent narrator like H.F. and is largely composed of Defoe's commands and supplications to the reader, it finds room for two sustained narratives. The first part of *Due Preparations* tells the story of a family that survives the plague by gathering provisions and shutting themselves up in their home from July to December, never compromising their isolation. The second half tells an even longer story. Framed as a Socratic dialogue among family members, the text weighs the physical and spiritual risks of continuing business as usual in the face of an oncoming plague. Not coincidentally, the family members face the same decision that confronted H.F.: should they flee and risk their livelihood, or protect their business ventures at the hazard of their lives? Greed compels the elder brother to dismiss the worries of his sister (and society in general) as needless, insisting the family remain in town. Just as in the case of H.F., this decision reflects an inability to understand what Providence would have him do, with the added sin of avarice to boot. Once the plague has arrived the brother becomes despondent, realizing he may well have killed his entire

¹⁴ In "Making History Novel: Defoe's *Due Preparations* and *Journal of the Plague Year*," Stephen Brown mounts a class critique of *Due Preparations*, calling Defoe nothing more than a "professional prevaricator" who offers only a "cursory reference to the poor" to "feed the conscience its sop." This is "unlike the Defoe we meet elsewhere," who offers genuine "compassion" when he is not writing simply to make "his daily bread" (195). Brown fails to mention the one moment of true regret in *Due Preparations*, when a wealthy Londoner learns that two poor people he employed as runners have both died. Generally, however, the distinction between the empathy of *A Journal* and the pragmatism of *Due Preparations* is well taken.

family. His sister reassures him that the most important preparation for the plague was and remains spiritual preparedness, for God will decide whether they should live or die. Together the family repents.

Rather than reward the family's newfound piety with miraculous good health, or offer the consolation that they will receive their reward in heaven, Defoe has the elder brother, the greatest skeptic, engineer the family's safety by means of the very commercial connections for which he put their lives at risk. He encounters the captain of a ship he and his younger brother own, learning that the ship is provisioned for a long voyage but has not taken on cargo because the plague has halted trade. His family moves onto the ship, sails away from the infected port, and uses the provisions to sustain themselves and the crew. Moreover, at the moment the brother begins to negotiate this solution with the captain, he is no longer identified as "Brother;" he instead takes part in the narrative as a "Merchant." It is as a man of business, and not a recently converted man of faith, that he saves his family. The tale ends with an account of how commerce saved the lives of the family, delaying their need for spiritual salvation. Indeed, the very last scene depicts the resumption of trade at the once infected port and thus the end of the family's quarantine—commercial circulation once again signals the health of the population.

These two stories are obvious foils for that of H.F., who neither immediately quarantines himself like the first family, nor comes to regret his mistake in not doing so

like the second. Instead he remains steadfastly determined to circulate and wanders around London at the height of the epidemic, his lack of fear standing in stark contrast to the remorseful Brother. This risky behavior is what ultimately affords *A Journal* the sustained narrative perspective we expect of a novel. It is also, in my view, what compels Defoe to point to H.F.'s grave among the newly buried dead of London. Because he fails to distinguish between connections that are indissoluble and those that can be severed temporarily, H.F. incurs unnecessary risks, and Defoe finds it necessary to suggest the ultimate cost of such a mistake.

Problems of Knowing

H.F.'s inability to ascertain who is infected is part of a broader epistemological crisis in *A Journal* that exceeds even what Crusoe confronted on his island. Defoe indicates as much with H.F.'s account of how the plague reached London:

It was about the beginning of September, 1664, that I, among the rest of my neighbours, heard in ordinary discourse that the plague was returned again in Holland; for it had been very violent there, and particularly at Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in the year 1663, whither, they say, it was brought, some said from Italy, others from the Levant, among some goods which were brought home by their Turkey fleet; others said it was brought from Candia; others from Cyprus. It mattered not from whence it came; but all agreed it was come into Holland again.

We had no such thing as printed newspapers in those days to spread rumours and reports of things, and to improve them by the invention of men, as I have lived to see practised since. But such things as these were gathered from the letters of merchants and others who corresponded abroad, and from them was handed about by word of mouth only; so that things did not spread instantly over the whole nation, as they do now. (3)

A Journal begins on an unsteady foot with the circulation of rumor, speculation, and competing claims about the origin of the plague. News of its progress travels primarily by word of mouth, at times supported by letters that offer knowledge acquired through commercial networks. Newspapers, though not in existence when H.F.'s story takes place but clearly on his mind when he writes his *Journal*, also trade in half-truths.¹⁵ As the plague arrives in London the narrator remains unsure as to whether or not he is in danger, unsurprising given his imperfect understanding of the disease's underlying cause and the uneven dissemination of reliable information about its progress.

H.F. immediately begins to marshal evidence to counteract the pervasive doubt his account is generating, turning to government bills of mortality to statistically track the movement of the plague. In the early stages of the epidemic, however, this documentary evidence serves to amplify the dangers of the plague rather than render

¹⁵ The O.E.D. cites the phrase "to spread rumours and reports of things, and to improve them by the invention of men" as an example of "invention" being used to mean contrivance or fabrication, which forces "improve" to adopt the meaning "augment" — otherwise only one of several possible meanings in the eighteenth century.

them knowable or manageable. At times the bills prove to be a source of public panic, in other moments a false signal of safety. Widely tracked by Londoners, the bills are emblematic of the greatest challenge which H.F. faces: though a keen, even obsessive observer of the world around him, he is as likely to be led astray as to be well-guided by the best evidence available to him. When, for example, the plague finally begins to diminish, evidence of its retreat emboldens many Londoners and sends them back prematurely into infected areas. The bills are useful as a predictive tool only for those inhabitants who decide any evidence of the plague is reason to flee. For those who remain, the bills do little more than document the carnage at the height of the epidemic. As Zimmerman puts it, the bills are one example of how “diminishing trust in external authority leaves the people with only their own limited and confused perceptions” (*Defoe and the Novel*, 113).

It is thus no surprise how much of *A Journal* is made up of H.F. wandering the streets of London, ruminating on the chaos and casuistry he witnesses. He cautions against superstitions that take hold of the emotions and overpower self-control, creating vectors of transmission for the disease. At the same time, he condemns quarantine procedures that curtail the movement of citizens to the point of confining them to houses with infected persons. Though these procedures may be well intentioned, their unforeseen consequences end up doing more harm than they good. H.F. particularly dwells on how enforced confinement sends infected people into a desperate frenzy,

leading them to escape and spread the disease even though it does not improve their chances of survival. In its repetitions, revisions, and contradictions *A Journal* is faithful to H.F.'s mental state at various points in the narrative, reflecting his attempts to make sense of his unsettling milieu. From this uncertainty, the only principle that either he or his readers can safely draw is that better management is needed in times of plague; to minimize the death toll, government procedures must account for basic human impulses, not naively expect to curtail them. Thus H.F. laments that had there been more "pest-houses" for those willing to go, "as many were" he insists, "not so many, by several thousand, had died" (56-57). Such probabilistic thinking is the only means by which H.F. gains even a tenuous grasp on how to manage the plague.

Against this backdrop, it is clear why the role of disinformation and confusion in Defoe's fiction has attracted critical attention. Paul Alkon grants Defoe a place in the tradition of the novel on the grounds that his narratives employ a sense of "disorientation in time," a decidedly modern technique that calls "attention to our own situation" and trains the reader to deal with uncertainty (6). Alkon considers *Crusoe* the apotheosis of this effort, in that its inconsistencies encourage the "audience to duplicate—and to notice that they are duplicating—the mental operations of" the narrator (163). Other scholars see this epistemological uncertainty as an indication of the narrator's ambivalence toward Providence in his fiction. For Zimmerman, *A Journal* creates its unsettling effect by positing a divine order whose operations man tries and

fails to grasp, so that the promise of order actually exacerbates H.F.'s disorientation. Skeptical of a *Journal's* pedagogical value, Zimmerman contends that H.F.'s "attempts to instruct the reader frequently become evidence of his psychological turmoil; although the lesson is poorly taught, the character's emotional difficulties are powerfully communicated." (*Defoe and the Novel*, 124). But H.F.'s psychological turmoil is in fact an element of the lesson, as his determination to make sense of a disorienting and frightening world does not diminish as danger mounts. In this sense, his repeated failure to uncover the divine plan that would obviate his fears draws attention to the fact, as I have suggested, that faith itself is subject to management.

Richetti likewise contends that, "as Defoe seems to have deliberately conceived it, *A Journal of the Plague Year* requires not a professional preacher or exegete but a bewildered individual. ... The book is convincingly authentic because it evokes confusion and uncertainty" (*Daniel Defoe*, 122). He does so in order to argue that individual survival is not in the hands of Providence but instead depends on the individual's ability to reorganize the world so that it can sustain him. Indeed, he comes close to naming risk management as constitutive of selfhood when he writes that "it is only paradoxical at first glance that [H.F.] had to stay in the middle of death and disorder in order to live and establish the order of his narrative. More overtly and clearly than Defoe's other narratives, the *Journal* allows us to see that the self does not so much resist disorder as exploit it to create its own order" (*Defoe's Narratives*, 236). As

Richetti says of the narrative, “the act of discovery we read about is what matters, the transition from the natural chaos of the plague and the brief uncertainty of the self that it engenders to the serene contemplation of an extended human order” (*Defoe’s Narratives*, 239). Though Richetti goes too far when he reads a “serene” and presumably static end to the novel, he is right to emphasize that the value of the novel lies in the process it models. On the narrator’s ability to continually negotiate a condition of uncertainty rests both Defoe’s fictional account of a plague-stricken London and the author’s ability to reorganize the world around H.F. Put another way, the constitution of individual selfhood is predicated on epistemological uncertainty.

“Secret Hints” and the Scope of Reason

Poised against this inescapable uncertainty is another central tenet of life for Defoe’s narrators: their belief that God’s plan guides their existence. This plan is itself a source of concern, for while Crusoe and H.F. can be certain that God’s will is just, they cannot see or understand His design. A world that demands risk-taking adds another layer to this problem, in that it forces the narrators to seek out situations which engender uncertainty, and consequently a desire for some authoritative assurance about their chosen course of action. At such moments, Providence cannot make known a plan that can only be understood by man retrospectively, if at all. Absent such an assurance, the protagonists are forced to rely on their own critical faculties.

Accordingly, at turning points in their respective narratives, Crusoe and H.F. confront the question of whether to read material phenomena as signs of Providential order or as products of a mechanistic universe. Near the end of his story, Crusoe sees an English longboat anchored not far from the island. His immediate reaction is “Confusion,” as the “Joy of seeing a ship” that might deliver him is tempered by “some secret Doubts ... I cannot tell from whence they came, bidding me keep upon my Guard” (210). His skepticism is well founded, as he soon discovers that the Englishmen are mutineers come on shore to abandon their captain and the remaining loyal crewmen. Before he reveals this information, Crusoe cautions,

Let no Man despise the secret Hints and Notices of Danger, which sometimes are given him, when he may think there is no possibility of its being real. That such Hints and Notices are given us, I believe few that have made any Observations of things, can deny; that they are certain Discoveries of an invisible World, and a Converse of Spirits, we cannot doubt; and if the Tendency of them seems to be to warn us of Danger, why should we not suppose they are from some friendly Agent, whether supreme, or inferior, and subordinate, is not the Question; and that they are given for our Good? (210)

This admonition underscores the collaborative roles of uncertainty about the external world, Providence, and empirical observation in successfully managing risk. *Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe*, the third of Defoe’s Robinsonade, takes up the question of

“secret Hints” at greater length. In his first *Crusoe* narrative, Defoe is satisfied with the brief recapitulation above, which leaves open the question of whether the narrator’s instincts are guided by God directly or mediated through some entity “inferior” and “subordinate” to man. It is not just the unknown provenance of these intimations that one might find discomfiting, but also their subtlety. They are too easily dismissed as mere chance or the tendency of an observer to impute meaning where there is none. By being sufficiently attuned to the world, those “that have made any Observations of things” will have discovered that these divine suggestions should be taken seriously, for they hint at something real though still unknown. What *Crusoe* models is a double act of attention, first taking note of these hints, then assessing their empirical status and assigning them meaning on that basis. Questions inevitably remain, but they are secondary to his understanding that this process of reasoning mitigates threats to his existence.

H.F. provides a markedly different account of a similar moment of recognition. At the beginning of his story he argues with his brother about whether to flee London ahead of the oncoming plague. H.F.’s initial efforts to make arrangements for leaving the city fail amidst the panic and disorder of the epidemic’s early stages. Upon reflection he concludes that he has settled on “the best Method I can advise any Person to take in such a case,”

namely, that he should keep his Eye upon the particular Providences which occur at that Time, and look upon them complexly ... and then I think, he may safely take them for Intimations from Heaven of what is his unquestion'd Duty to do in such a Case; I mean as to going away from, or staying in the Place where we dwell, when visited with an infectious Distemper. ...

So [my] Disappointments must have something in them extraordinary; and I ought to consider whether it did not evidently point out, or intimate to me, that it was the Will of Heaven I should not go. (10-11)

Later H.F. explicitly rejects this line of reasoning, noting "that tho' Providence seem'd to direct my Conduct to be otherwise; yet it is my opinion, and I must take it as a Prescription, (*viz.*) *that the best Physick against the Plague is to run away from it*" (170). This aphorism is in fact the very phrase with which his brother first urged him to leave, before H.F.'s vacillations and bibliomancy took the decision out of his hands. By contrast to Crusoe, H.F. is forced to acknowledge that he has either mistaken coincidence for divine intervention or misread the signs sent him. This kind of mistake serves as an important counterpoint to Crusoe's worry that "secret hints" might be dismissed too easily as coincidence. The interpreter of signs can go wrong in either direction.

In pairing these accounts of the lesson learned, Defoe emphasizes the open-ended nature of his project, which turns miscalculation into data and a refined understanding of the outside world. Although Crusoe and H.F. observe very much the

same kind of reasoning, one finds his salvation, while the other risks his life unnecessarily. Indeed, if it can be said that there exists any objective criterion for distinguishing divine intimations from random chance, it seems to be a question of minimizing risk. Defoe is cautious when he might be tempted to rush headlong, whereas H.F. fails to properly weigh the downside risk of staying. For the narrators, deciding the precise relation between their individual autonomy and the role of Providence in their lives is the most fundamental aspect of confronting and managing risk. It is no surprise, then, that so much criticism on Defoe dwells on the religious posture or postures of his fiction. Nor is it a surprise that these questions about the role of Providence often lead to arguments or conclusions about the nature of selfhood, like when Richetti contends that Crusoe's "strategy for survival is a means of establishing a relationship between the free self and the determined event so that the self can act upon events and in reaction to events without losing its autonomy" (*Defoe's Narratives*, 54), or when Zimmerman suggests that "in *Robinson Crusoe*, Providence often seems to be a method of interpretation, a theory rather than a force" (*Defoe and the Novel*, 37). As both critics imply, faith is only one element—though a foundational one—of the strategies for managing risk that Crusoe and H.F. shape and reshape as they navigate a dangerous world.

Contagion and the Early English Novel

Defoe helps establish the parameters for a discourse of risk management that plays a formative role in the history of the early English novel. I would now like to call attention to another sense in which his work sets the stage for the novels of the mid-century and the great moral debates they engendered. Defoe's focus on disease hints at a phenomenon that would be commonplace by the time of Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and John Cleland. *A Journal* and *Due Preparations* are both texts explicitly about disease, of course, but it is in fact *Crusoe* that best illustrates the connection between Defoe and the later novelists. In *Crusoe*, Defoe relies on metaphors of contagion to describe certain critical moments of the narrative. Though disease is not his subject matter, contagion proves a useful way of thinking about the issues that worry Crusoe on his island. Crusoe often worries about boundaries and their permeability, including the enclosure of his individual body from outside forces. Here one sees at work the logic of contagion, and by mid-century novels had put the integrity of the individual body on center stage, frequently using metaphors of contagion or references to actual disease as ways of discussing and dramatizing moral dangers. Early traces of this sensibility are legible in *Crusoe*.

Consider the critical moment when Crusoe confirms the presence of cannibals on the island, finding bones and human remains scattered on the beach. This moment is described in the language of revulsion and illness, not fear:

I was so astonish'd with the Sight of these Things, that I entertain'd no Notions of any Danger to my self from it for a long while; All my Apprehensions were bury'd in the Thoughts of such a Pitch of inhuman, hellish Brutality, and the Horror of the Degeneracy of Human Nature; which though I had heard of often, yet I never had so near a View of before; in short, I turn'd away my Face from the horrid Spectacle; my Stomach grew sick, and I was just at the Point of Fainting, when Nature discharg'd the Disorder from my Stomach; and having vomited with an uncommon Violence, I was a little reliev'd; but cou'd not bear to stay in the Place a Moment. (139-140)

In this light, the looming specter of the cannibals that hangs over much of the novel becomes the specter of the morally and physically diseased. The sight of the bones makes Crusoe violently ill, and his unwillingness to make the trip to the mainland alone, a prospect he frequently weighs, becomes an act of self-quarantine. Indeed, all of Crusoe's efforts to isolate himself from "savages" and "beasts," all his building and fortification, look like self-imposed acts of quarantine. The novel relentlessly foreshadows the fact that Crusoe is not actually alone, drawing its dramatic energies from the idea that true isolation is impossible even on a deserted island. Crusoe's isolation and the integrity of his body are at constant risk.

In the aftermath of his discovery, Crusoe's thoughts often turn to the cannibals, and he couches his fears in the medical language of infection. He notes that dwelling on

the anthropophagi “set my very Blood into a Ferment, and my Pulse beat as if I had been in a Fever” (167). Setting the blood into “ferment” is an eighteenth-century theory of infection to which Defoe refers in his writings on the plague. It is similarly worth recalling how frequently the words “imagine” and “imagination” appear in the novel from the moment that Crusoe discovers the footprint in the sand. In eighteenth-century terms the imagination was a source of disease, capable of producing physiological changes in the body. Once Crusoe realizes he is not alone, his imagination runs wild, leaving him constantly at risk of being infected. When, for instance, he considers the implications of the fact that the print in the sand dwarfs his own foot, his reflections “fill’d my head with new Imaginations, and gave me the Vapours again, to the highest Degree; so that I shook with cold, like one in an Ague” (154). In all of these critical moments, Defoe turns to the language of disease to communicate Crusoe’s experiences. This language captures the fear of infiltration and corruption, both physical and moral, which plagues the narrator.

As we shall see, this melding of the physical, spiritual, and moral becomes a key component of later novels. The next chapter considers how Richardson, Fielding, and Cleland— three markedly different novelists—use the language of seduction to erotically charge the narrative of risk management inaugurated by Defoe. Defoe’s focus on disease must have stemmed in part from the arguments for and against the new procedure of smallpox inoculation that were contemporaneous with his novels, in

addition to the looming threat of the plague. By mid-century the sentimental novel had translated this language and fear of disease into moral terms, perfecting similar procedures of risk management as the means of protecting the integrity of a woman's body.

Chapter 2: Moral Rhetoric in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and the Mid-century Novel

Introduction

To rethink in terms of risk management the relationship between Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson—often regarded as the fathers of the gendered novel traditions of realism and sentimentalism, respectively—I will consider *Clarissa* as an exercise in managing risk, and Lovelace, the great villain of the novel, as a fetishistic manager of risk. I mean fetishistic in both senses of the word. Obsessive in his scheming, Lovelace “glories in his contrivances” (as Richardson puts it) to the point that they become the chief form of pleasure he derives from carrying forward his plan to rape the heroine (vii).¹⁶ Writing to his friend James Belford, Lovelace explains that it is only possible “for so universal a lover to be confined so long to one object,” Clarissa, because “there are so many stimulatives to such a spirit as mine in this affair, besides love: such a field of stratagem and contrivance, which thou knowest to be the delight of my heart. Then the rewarding end of all” (147). Here, the unmarked transition from “stratagem and contrivance” to “the rewarding end” of physical conquest erases the line between them,

¹⁶ The phrase “glories in his contrivances” is drawn from the summary of letter XXXI that Richardson inserts in the second edition of *Clarissa*; the page number here refers to the table in the first volume (of seven). Summaries of letters are not included in the Penguin Classics edition of the novel I have chiefly used, which is based on the first printing. For the second edition I have referred to ECCO, and the text is largely a reprint of the first, with the substantial changes Richardson made to the novel appearing only in the third printing. In the second edition the summaries function as a particularly descriptive table of contents rather than an index, appearing before the letters themselves. Thus they are part of Richardson’s increasingly didactic efforts to enforce a particular interpretation of his novel.

an elision that Lovelace recreates throughout the novel when he argues that his schemes will ultimately force Clarissa's consent. Richardson has Lovelace make this pronouncement in the latter's first letter, and as the libertine's intrigues grow so does his boldness.¹⁷ Later in the novel the villain implicates Belford in the scheme by twisting his friend's words, declaring: "More truly delightful to me the seduction progress than the crowning act—for that's a vapour, a bubble!—And most cordially do I thank thee for thy indirect hint that I am right in my present pursuit" (616). This is representative Lovelace, reframing the words and actions of others to his own ends. Insisting on contingencies, redundancies, and plausible deniability, Lovelace's imperative is simple: he wants to foresee and account for all eventualities. He is, in other words, the consummate manager of risk, both courting danger and seeking to control it. By his logic the incorruptible Clarissa is the perfect target, the glory of his expected triumph growing in direct proportion to her resistance.

Lovelace likewise articulates a familiar theory of modern life, one that echoes Defoe. Halfway through the novel, he argues that Clarissa has in fact given her tacit consent to his plans, because her choices to run away with him and pretend to be his

¹⁷ Pierre Saint-Amand has argued, in the context of the French novel, that libertinage and seduction represent the "underside" of the "so-called Enlightenment," manifestations of "sorcery" in an otherwise rational world (4). In his reading, the practices and concept of seduction offer a through line from ancient forms of desire to modern ones. In the context of *Clarissa*, however, I read the rake not as a mysterious, irrational force but as a consummate schemer. Lovelace certainly draws attention to the ways in which the emotional, familial and social aspects of courtship, marriage, and seduction in the eighteenth century exceed the boundaries of reason, but he does so precisely in a demystifying way. He ruthlessly exploits the schism between appearances and intentions, preying on the irrational feelings of Clarissa's family and on her societally-limited options in responding to his schemes and defending her bodily virtue.

wife belie her insistence that he has tricked her and is keeping her against her will. Lovelace objects on principle when Clarissa renews her demands for independence, arguing that “as to the state of obligation, there is no such thing as living without being beholden to somebody. Mutual obligation is the very essence and soul of the social and commercial life—Why should she be exempt from it?” (760). Lovelace reframes the obligations he has forced upon Clarissa in terms of the logic of the social contract, the very logic the eighteenth-century brought to bear on consensual marriage.¹⁸ In this way, he makes her refusal to accept reality, and not his own actions, the cause of their respective tragedies. Although Richardson casts Clarissa in the role of the paragon of feminine virtue, and Lovelace himself frequently refers to her as above all other women, even angelic, the villain nevertheless expects her acquiescence. It is precisely her refusal to give it that prompts Lovelace to come up with ever more schemes, thinking surely the next will prove her fallible. In pursuing this obsession, he looks less the reasoned speculator Defoe admires and more the shortsighted profiteer for whom the obligations of modern life obviate moral concerns. As the villain of the story, however, his failures and successes do not afford the object lesson, and the question, counterintuitive as it may seem, becomes whether and how Clarissa provides a better model of risk management.

¹⁸ As Mary Lyndon Shanley has noted, “it was John Locke who, more clearly than his predecessors, saw the implications of contractarian ideas of marriage, and who solved several dilemmas which has beset earlier attempts to compare the marriage bond to the social contract” (80). Locke sets the stage, in her account, for later writings on the subject by Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor Mill, and John Mill.

To address this question we must confront the paradox at the heart of the novel, one the heroine spells out in a letter to her bosom-friend cum fellow moral philosopher, Anne Howe. Having been tricked by Lovelace into fleeing her father's protective custody, Clarissa declares "I am ... a poor lost creature: and yet cannot charge myself with one criminal or faulty inclination. Do you know, my dear, how this can be?" (565). In response to her own question, Clarissa proffers a plausible explanation: "One devious step at setting out!—That must be it: which pursued, has led me so far out of my path that I am in a wilderness of doubt and error; and never, never shall find my way out of it" (565-566). In this regard Clarissa's thoughts express the claim of her author that "Clarissa was not drawn absolutely perfect, but as having something to blame herself for, tho' not in Intention."¹⁹ I am hardly alone in puzzling over what model of personal agency Richardson established by having Clarissa describe her misfortunes in these terms. Indeed, it seems fair to say that the tradition of criticism of the novel turns on whether and to what extent she is culpable for the calamities that befall her, a question that boils down to the position one takes on her claim to innocence of intent.

Having motivated a long history of important readings of the novel, the question remains stubbornly unanswerable. One can either accept Richardson's authority when he declares Clarissa's intentions pure, in which case the question ceases to generate new readings of the novel, or one can argue through secondary evidence about the

¹⁹ Richardson as quoted by Macpherson, pp. 12, 91.

psychology of her character, with all the pitfalls that entails. Rather than take a side, I would like to bracket this question and ask instead why Richardson does indeed make sure that his heroine “never, never shall find [her] way out of [error].” Why does he intimate to the reader, less than halfway through the novel, that Clarissa’s best attempts at managing the risk of leaving her father’s house on her own terms are doomed to fail? I have argued that for Crusoe near-fatal missteps are necessary to the novel’s exploration of risk management. For Clarissa, however, “one devious step” leaves her no way of changing her path, and she dies a slow, lingering death that those around her are forced to watch. For Lovelace, meanwhile, all the scheming in the world fails to secure Clarissa’s consent, or any alternate means of escape from the consequences that await him. While his stratagems prove capable of bringing about many of his desired ends, Clarissa’s virtue remains for him an unmanageable force, one that leads to his own death in a duel with her vengeful cousin Colonel Morden. Where, if at all, are we to locate a successful model of risk management when both characters die in dramatic fashion?

To argue that Clarissa is nevertheless a successful manager of risk, and on that basis the heroine of Richardson’s novel, will depend on two considerations. First, between Defoe and Richardson we can observe a shift in what is meant by the integrity of the individual body. I have argued that the modern individual is brought into existence by consistently reasserting the autonomy of his (and now her) body within a

milieu that repeatedly threatens to kill him or otherwise erase his individuality. For Defoe that autonomy refers to the body quite literally, to flesh that must be protected from cannibals and disease. Even mental states are translated into these terms; as Virginia Woolf put it, Defoe “takes the opposite way from the psychologist’s—he describes the effect of emotion on the body, not on the mind” (23). When I concluded chapter one with the claim that Defoe anticipates the conflation of physical and spiritual disease, a categorical collapse that becomes increasingly common in the eighteenth century, I gestured toward a new configuration of the relationship between mind and body. *Clarissa*, as one of the earliest psychological novels, produces a world split between material and personal property.²⁰ Her story cannot be the story only of her flesh, because it is more importantly the story of her psyche and emotions. Lovelace’s great misunderstanding, in fact, is his belief that conquering Clarissa’s body also means conquering her mind. As Clarissa’s body weakens her commitment to virtue never does, so that her death underscores her strength, and her triumph over Lovelace.

Secondly, Clarissa’s success as a risk manager stems from the agency which the novel invests in the act of writing. Defoe’s narratives, for all their depth, featured protagonists deliberately removed from the larger social fabric. Richardson reintroduces risk to this broader context, and it is Clarissa who understands better than Lovelace the

²⁰ In “Rape and the Rise of the Novel” Frances Ferguson calls “*Pamela* and *Clarissa* ... the first full examples of the psychological novel,” a representative example of a frequently repeated claim (98).

ramifications of this shift. Lovelace's acquisitive logic of stacking up sexual conquests is analogous to that of Crusoe, who iteratively claims more and more. But this is an impoverished logic for dealing with modern social life, and Lovelace ultimately fails to take possession of Clarissa and build a barrier between her, as his property, and the wider world. Clarissa is the one who understands how to harness the power of narrative, overcoming Lovelace's schemes to control her body by making him part of her story, not the other way around. In managing the risk of authorship, and thus defining the roles of villain and victim for the reading audience, Clarissa succeeds precisely where Lovelace fails. He remains committed to a sphere of action that is defined by staging and dramaturgy, as if his schemes and their consequences form a self-contained unit. Clarissa appeals directly to those who stand outside of the action, and her method of control proves superior to his.

Reading *Clarissa* through risk should therefore allow us to reformulate the Lovelace versus Clarissa binary which has shaped criticism of the novel for decades. Prefatory to explaining why this bind has proven so persistent, however, let me call attention to how frequently the word "risk" (or "risque") appears at critical junctures of the novel. Lovelace is the first to invoke the word when he begins to hatch his scheme for securing a private meeting with Clarissa in the garden. Having tricked Clarissa's family into thinking she attempted to smuggle out forbidden correspondence by bribing a servant, Lovelace revels in the "many good ends this contrivance answers" (164). The

first of these “good ends” is that the family will think Clarissa thwarted when she is not. She has, in fact, been carrying on secret correspondence, but by her own hands. That should now be easier, Lovelace reasons, as the family will assume “she would not have run the risk of tempting a fellow who had not been in her secret” unless Clarissa were truly isolated and desperate (164). Secure in this assumption, her parents will allow her to wander the garden where Lovelace hides in disguise. Thus begins a long pattern wherein Lovelace creates and manipulates risk, the substance of his machinations. Often with an air of delight, Lovelace by turns fabricates a sense of risk where none exists, takes great risks himself, or forces others to do so, whether unwittingly or because of his direct threats.

Clarissa and Anne connect Lovelace to questions of risk from the early pages of the novel. Anne, trying to convince Clarissa that she should love Lovelace and accept him as a husband, argues that “he will have run great risks; caught great colds; hazarded fevers; sustained the highest indignities; braved the inclemencies of skies, and all for—nothing!—Will not this move your *generosity* (if nothing else) in his favour?” (275). Unsurprisingly, this is the exact argument that Lovelace employs as one means of manipulating Clarissa. He has borne great risks for her, he claims, and has consequently earned her trust and esteem. He argues secondly that his awareness of these risks has given him cause to reform his rakish ways. Clarissa, recapitulating for Anne one of Lovelace’s letters, remarks how “He renews his professions of reformation: he is

convinced, he says, that he has already run a long and dangerous course; and that it is high time to think of returning" (262). By thus doubling his argument Lovelace convinces Clarissa that she is running a relatively small risk in granting him their first clandestine meeting in the garden. Meanwhile, as Clarissa chafes at her parents' plan to hold her prisoner until they can marry her to the insufferable Roger Solmes, she and Anne debate whether to run away together or have Clarissa run away with Lovelace. Clarissa considers the former an unacceptable risk: "I do assure you, that were I to take this step myself, I would run all risks rather than you should accompany me in it. Have I, do you think, a desire to *double* and *treble* my own fault, in the eye of the world?" (360). Here, Clarissa's claim—"I cannot risk a plan that would endanger you"—inverts Lovelace's logic—"I would not jeopardize your virtue because it would endanger mine."

This mirroring begins to make clear the opposition between Clarissa and Lovelace's respective strategies of risk management. Clarissa understands risk as a part of an open system. She forecloses the possibility of deliberately putting Anne at risk while simultaneously indicating that running away with Lovelace, though dangerous, may prove her best option. She must hedge precisely because she recognizes the exogenous forces that resist and reshape her attempts at self-governance. It is from the first, after all, that she has attempted to reconcile her own desires with those of her parents, her siblings, her suitors, and her friends. Lovelace's model of risk management certainly allows for the unexpected—Sandra Macpherson shows us how assiduously he

works to distance himself from legal liability as his schemes become more and more vexed—but he ultimately believes every new development can be turned to his ends. His view is teleological, in other words, with everything moving toward the conquest of Clarissa, his final cause that justifies all that came before. Thus it is no surprise that Clarissa expresses concern for Anne while Lovelace worries first for himself, or that the heroine refuses to impose risks on others while he wields risk as a weapon. Lovelace argues that as he has taken risks, so those risks have bestowed upon him rights—rights that he asserts precisely because they impose limitations on her.

When Clarissa's family decides to forcibly move her to her uncle's home, for example, Lovelace uses a mutual acquaintance to reveal that he plans to do violence should this plan come to pass. At the same time, he insists to her that for her sake he will do what he can to "avoid coming to extremities," thus maintaining the threat to the family while distancing himself from responsibility (326). This is a clever manipulation of risk, and as Clarissa recounts, Lovelace describes it in exactly those terms. He knows "he runs a risk, if he cannot be benefited by their fears, from their doubly guarding themselves against him on this intimation," and thus the villain makes clear that he expects Clarissa to feel doubly indebted to him: once because it is only for her sake that he has not already resorted to violence, and again because the absence of actual violence may work against his own ends—is a risk in itself (326). This is the paradigmatic example of what it means to say that Lovelace uses risk to force others into certain

actions and postures, in effect staging the world around him using the force of his constant threats. Clarissa works instead to manage the dissemination and ensure the reliability of information as the means of counteracting Lovelace, as encapsulated in her straightforward and immediate response to his manipulations: "What a dangerous enterpriser, however, is this man!" (326). Here she emphatically identifies Lovelace's schemes as the source rather than the byproduct of danger in a declaration intended for Anne but meant to be shared with everyone else, reader included. She impugns Lovelace early in the story, and by the end of their tale Clarissa has managed information so well that her mechanism of control comes to subsume his. Elaborately staging her own death, Clarissa transforms the performative inclinations of her captor and rapist into evidence of her own virtue, evidence as unassailable as the virtue it represents.

Focusing on these instances of "risk" in the novel means selecting only a few examples from a text that might be characterized as a war of risks. Indeed, the courtship of Clarissa is always risky in the novel, whether in the form of Solmes' intolerable wooing or Lovelace's internecine plots. In an early exchange with Solmes, Clarissa warns that it would be best if he told her parents "that you value too much your own happiness, to risk it against such a determined antipathy," to which he demurs, "I will risk all consequences" (319). One can argue that in the early part of the novel, Clarissa weighs every move she makes in terms of how it might save her virtue or put it at risk. If

she remains with her parents she will likely be forced to marry Solmes, and if she leaves she will turn herself into a public disgrace while putting herself into the hands of a man reputed to be a rake. When she turns to her friends for help she risks implicating them in forbidden schemes, which limits her willingness to accept Anne's counter-schemes and suggestions. These considerations provide the drama of the first fifth of the novel, a stretch of three hundred pages where Clarissa is confined to her room yet never lacks a reason for writing letters. Once she leaves the protection of her father's house, however, her letters are prompted by and preoccupied with an entirely different form of risk. No longer a question of calculated speculation, navigating risk to the body comes to organize and lend purpose to Clarissa's daily life. To address the question of Clarissa's culpability or complicity in her rape and death is to evaluate her responses to these pressures.

Criticism that undertakes this evaluation yields a remarkable variety of assessments of Clarissa's predicament—from arguments to the effect that she, not Lovelace, is in fact the violent party, to claims that she is a moral paragon victimized by a predatory man and a society unwilling or unable to protect her. The source of such injustice has likewise been attributed to different social, economic or political constructs. Positions that trouble the notion of a strict Lovelace-Clarissa dichotomy of blame have also been advanced, ensuring that the full spectrum of possible responses has been brought to bear. But we are in a better position to see what is ultimately at stake in these

arguments if we turn our critical focus to the way in which the novel constantly presents Clarissa, and the reader, with new risks that must be confronted. I would argue that once again, it is the process of management that is the dramatic engine of the story. Thus I am particularly drawn to a passage that Richardson inserted in the third edition, a moment meant to blacken Lovelace's character but one that also underscores, with exquisite precision, the true nature of Clarissa's plight. I read her both figuratively and literally when she laments, "What a creature am I, who have risked what I have risked with such a one!" (volume 3, letter 31).²¹ Though figuratively she means "what have I done!", she also marks herself as an individual that has been shaped by the risks she has taken. It is her choice to "risk what [she has] risked" that has turned her into the "creature" she is, a fact that slips out seemingly unconsciously.

New Ways of Self-Fashioning in a World with New Risks

In "Reclassifying Clarissa," Nancy Armstrong contends that the selfhood Clarissa captures in and shares through her writing establishes that "the agency of an emergent culture rests not in the people who embody power ... so much as in the disembodied power of the writing that calls those people into being as a class" (21). Demonstrating the parallels between Richardson's novels and settler-colonial accounts of Europeans held captive by indigenous peoples in America, accounts widely read in

²¹ This page number corresponds to the twenty-seventh letter of the third volume of the third edition of *Clarissa*, published in eight volumes. It is accessible through ECCO, like the second edition.

England, Armstrong goes on to argue that tales of a writing individual in jeopardy had a cumulative social effect. The reading public came to “think of themselves as similarly self-enclosed centers of consciousness ... and letters in turn ... a way of conducting the most intimate relationships” (22). What this argument does, in short, is bring together the two reasons why Clarissa serves as a model of effective risk management. I take as my starting point for this argument that there is no necessary link between Clarissa’s agency in the text and her complicity in her own death. To find her complicit would be to grant Lovelace’s false assumption that he can have his way with her simply because he controls her body. That he exerts control over her body is true, but Clarissa’s “self” eludes him even after death, when Lovelace’s insistence that her corpse belongs to him is rendered moot by Clarissa’s careful end-of-life arrangements. The power of her “self” to continue to undermine him depends, contrary to his assumption, on the fact that writing is the ultimate source of agency and authority in their story. It is by bringing this argument to bear on the question of risk management, in other words, that we can see how Clarissa succeeds where Lovelace fails. Simply put, the power of her letters overwrites Lovelace’s libertine plots, rendering them obsolete.

He too writes letters, but they are by turns performative, specious, and outright deceitful, the very antithesis of the moral sentiments that Richardson meant to characterize good fiction. Lovelace’s letters are mere attempts to choreograph the action of the narrative in which he plays a part, and thus he has no sense of the risks he runs by

putting these aspects of his character into circulation. Because the self-serving logic of the rake holds that the promise of repentance is enough to ensure social redemption, Lovelace proves incapable of the consistency of character that gives Clarissa her power over him. He assumes that in playing the role of libertine he is not exposing his true nature but simply taking a posture he happens to have the power and opportunity to embody. By giving Clarissa the power to pass judgment, Richardson indicates to the contrary that Lovelace's writing performance, coupled with his actions, ultimately defines his character. This is no doubt the reason why Lovelace's attempts at rationalization and self-pity fall flat—in these moments most of all the reader understands the irreparable damage done to his character by the risks he has taken. When Lovelace seeks sympathy, he reveals the slippage between his posture as all-controlling puppet master and his desire for external legitimation, highlighting the shortcomings of a model of risk management that sees itself as a closed system but remains subject to the judgment of others. Nothing better illustrates this contradiction than Lovelace's plan to "remove" Clarissa to the house of Mrs. Sinclair, where her social partners are limited to disreputable women and Lovelace himself. The more insistently Lovelace removes Clarissa from the social world, the more fiercely her letters expose his machinations to her correspondents and, by way of them, to readers of the novel. Richardson conducts this battle of the sexes in formal terms as a battle between two

modes of self-presentation: drama and letter writing. Lovelace scripts Clarissa's body, and she in turn disseminates her growing emotional resistance to his manipulations.

Critics have noted that there are at least ten instances where Richardson introduces dramatic dialogue into the written correspondence composing the novel, seven of which restage Lovelace's schemes for the reader.²² No such dramatic intrusions occur in Clarissa's letters; as Ira Konigsberg observes, although Clarissa "often writes in dramatic style, ... she never uses exact play form" (114). Thus the very form of Lovelace's discourse attempts to controvert and ensnare Clarissa's private intercourse and personalized narrative style. This manner of self-presentation is tied not just to Lovelace's cruelty but also, it seems, to his sex. As Konigsberg further notes, "In *Sir Charles Grandison* scenes frequently appear in play form," and in that novel the eponymous hero is worthy of being called Clarissa's moral counterpart (114). Yet in pursuing very different ends than Lovelace, Grandison nevertheless wields power over the female body. The hero can only save Harriet Byron by subjecting her to a bodily tug of war, wresting her away from her kidnapper and physically moving her to the safety of his brother-in-law's home.

This physical form of power is not available to Clarissa, who instead works to ensure female safety by appealing to the judgment of the outside world. In so doing, she

²² These instances are enumerated in Barbara G. Teeter's Master Thesis, "The Influence of the Drama on Clarissa: A Survey of Scholarship," which first drew my attention to Ira Konigsberg's *Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel*.

helps to create the very standard for judgment she invokes. As Armstrong puts it, both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* reflect a growing middle class “conviction that you are what you read and write,” and the latter novel locates the woman’s identity at a remove from the sphere of dramatic action and in the grand events of subjective experience (30). It is in this domain that Richardson endows “Clarissa with some of the sophisticated cultural equipment required to negotiate a far more complex and dangerous social world” (32). A decade later, Adam Smith’s *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* would combine an emphasis on risk management with a tradition of gentlemanly good taste drawn from the periodicals of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. In so doing, Smith transformed the gendered “cultural equipment” of *Clarissa* into a universal standard of judgment.²³ Before that could happen, however, Richardson’s fiction had to fully situate itself within the increasingly complex social world. It is for this reason that Lovelace’s error in assuming that he can control the heroine by controlling her body proves fatal. True power resides in the sentiments that circulate in Clarissa’s writing and are to be reproduced in her readers—even after her death. Armed with this conviction, Clarissa’s open system of risk management inverts and at times even uncouples Lovelace’s

²³ Armstrong has argued that the *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers of Addison and Steele helped define “a code that linked gentility to self-government as displayed toward others,” and in this regard it is no surprise that Adam Smith drew so heavily from the periodicals in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (25). I will take up this connection in chapter three, but for now it is enough to note that Clarissa’s letters are themselves transformed into a “yardstick of good conduct” by Lovelace’s actions, and thus part of a common project of inculcating good taste shared by the periodicals, the novel, and Smith’s moral philosophy (36).

operative binaries—male/female, staging/staged, action/emotion, social status/moral authority.

Individual Identity Through Social Risk

Defoe removes his protagonists from the larger social fabric and plunges them in a world fraught with unknown dangers to test their individual autonomy, so that all the decisions they face will be theirs and theirs alone. Clarissa, on the contrary, repeatedly confronts the reality that others have power over her body, pressuring her to submit to the control of one man if not another. It is against this lack of autonomy that she must define her individuality. Denied complete control over her physical actions, she identifies what remains her undisputed domain—namely, how she feels, and how she expresses those feelings. These characteristics consequently define her selfhood. Poised between these two models of self-fashioning stands Richardson's earlier heroine, Pamela. As Armstrong notes, *Pamela* "closes the gap between the writing subject and an available social position," whereas in *Clarissa* "a gulf opens" as the heroine insists on distilling a pure writing subject whose agency only "increases when the text is so disembodied" (37). Like Clarissa, Pamela is embedded in a social world, but the earlier heroine defines herself by means of a literacy that allows her to rise from the servant class into the lower gentry, whereas Clarissa risks that very position as she forges a new form of autonomy. As a result, the purpose and power of writing are markedly different in the two novels, and so too their respective lessons.

Richardson announces the difference between them by having *Clarissa* invert the structure of *Pamela's* plot. The stories share the central conceit of a woman removed from her family and in the hands of a potentially dangerous man, but *Clarissa's* material circumstances are the reverse of her earlier counterpart's. As he is her employer there is no need for Mr. B to kidnap Pamela, and his advances might even be called unsurprising. After the scene, early in the novel, when he bursts from her closet and attempts to force himself on her, Pamela debates whether she should stay on as his servant or return to her parents' home. Mr. B's neighbor, Sir Simon Darnford, openly suggests that the fact Pamela does not come from an important family means she has little to lose from Mr. B's advances in terms of value on the marriage market, and Mr. B is forthright about wanting to make Pamela his mistress. This intention to make Pamela a kept woman empowers her to negotiate with Mr. B in a way *Clarissa* cannot with Lovelace. Most importantly for my purposes, Mr. B successfully controls the circulation of Pamela's letters, intercepting them and taking command of her narrative by communicating falsely with her parents. The sum effect of these circumstances is that, from the first, Pamela senses that if the price of a relationship with Mr. B is her body, then her body is something with which she can bargain. The novel thus maintains a close tie between the heroine's future financial prospects and the integrity of her body.²⁴

²⁴ Maynard Mack puts this rather more strongly when he says in his introduction to the novel that "*Pamela* ... [is] in many ways simply a pioneer capitalist, a middle-class *entrepreneur* of virtue, who looked on her chastity not as a condition of spirit but as a commodity to be vended for the purpose of getting on" (viii).

Much like Crusoe and H.F., Pamela must risk her body to secure her livelihood, which ensures that she will not categorically reject Mr. B's advances as Clarissa does Lovelace's. Indeed, whether it is her inherent goodness or her ability to manipulate others, it is an exceptional personal skill at managing risk that allows Pamela to cross a class boundary. On all of these points and in numerous other ways, *Clarissa* reverses the power dynamics of *Pamela*.

In *Clarissa*, Richardson formulates a fully autonomous individual out of the materials of his contemporary social world. He translates the risk that his first heroine encountered within the country manor house into the risks of eighteenth-century social life itself, embracing the open-endedness of self-definition to which both *Crusoe* and *Pamela* bring at least temporary closure. *Clarissa* is of course every bit as constructed and no less implausible than these earlier novels. But Richardson's second novel is distinguished for including a variety of voices in the composition of the text, voices that grapple for narrative control. By making writing less the means of manipulating action, and more a basis of identity and form of agency in its own right, *Clarissa* destabilizes the idea of an originary self far more than *Pamela*. *Clarissa* neither reduces danger to bodily harm nor equates success with social advancement, but instead calls for the individual to continuously negotiate a complex field of social information. In doing so, I would argue, this novel steps away from a Cartesian subject, transforming "I think, therefore I am" into "I write, therefore I negotiate what I am." If for Descartes *cogito ergo sum* was

the first thing about which the individual could be certain, Richardson challenges that certainty to argue through *Clarissa* that individuation is constituted by uncertainty itself. It is writing that stabilizes that individual, by establishing how well she manages the risks that accompany the modern world.

To produce such an individual, Richardson had to put his heroine in a situation where she seemingly had no right choice to make. Clarissa decides to write and live with an unwavering virtue and a consistently sentimental style, though doing so will make it impossible to achieve the security that Pamela finds. The ultimate achievement of the novel, of course, is that by sheer dint of will Clarissa transforms this decision into the right one. She certainly hopes that her principles will protect her against the rape that Lovelace finally commits. After entrusting her fate to writing, however, her governing principles ensure that her letters will survive inviolate the death of the body that Lovelace overpowers. This is the significant point of departure from earlier novels, where death indicated the protagonist's inability to manage risk and reintegrate her or himself, as a fully-formed self, into a position within society that reflected the importance of successful risk management. *Clarissa* rejects the established markers of status that organize character relations and instead turns outward to defer final judgment to its readers: it is they who must decide, is this a story to be emulated? This

open-endedness is responsible not only for the novel's enormous power to move readers but also for the anxiety Richardson evidently felt in composing and publishing the text.²⁵

Clarissa vs. Lovelace in the Critical Tradition

Richardson's anxiety finds its counterpart in a critical tradition that tends to short-circuit the novel's open system. In her 1987 reading of the novel, Frances Ferguson notes how "the most powerful recent criticism of *Clarissa*—particularly that of [William] Warner, [Terry] Castle, and [Terry] Eagleton—suggests an equivalence between the violence enacted by Lovelace in the act of rape and the violence of any interpretive gesture" (107). This equivalence is the point of intersection for three otherwise divergent readings of the novel. In Warner's account, Clarissa's aggression exceeds that of every other character, in that she wields the most powerful discursive weapon of all: "the idea of narrative, a narrative which is neutral, objective, and truthful" (5). Terry Castle's account of this heroine, as "the subject of [Lovelace's] interpretation, without pleasure or power as such: a hermeneutic casualty," diametrically opposes that of Warner (16). Terry Eagleton, meanwhile, shifts the grounds of the warfare onto the operations of a nascent capitalism: "Sexuality, far from being some displacement of class conflict, is the

²⁵ It is a well-known story that Angus Ross covers in his introduction to *Clarissa* when he notes that "Richardson adopted a strangely deferential posture" in producing the novel, frequently soliciting feedback from both "a small group of professional men of letters" and, "more important, ... a group of ladies, several young and unmarried, others old, for whom ... Richardson became something of a guru" (15). Coupled with the subsequent editions Richardson produced, with increasingly didactic footnotes to the reader and passages inserted to blacken Lovelace's character, the pressure Richardson felt to produce a particular reading of the text is palpable.

very medium in which it is conducted" (88). To modify the assumption on which these readings are based, Ferguson argues that "[t]he privileged position" of the text "is the position of relative inactivity" (107). What this means, in her view, is that the character who is less able or willing to dictate the meaning of the story will become the victim of its violence. In an effort to move criticism of the novel away from the adjudication of a contest over victimhood, Ferguson shows how Clarissa responds to the fundamental contradictions that govern Lovelace's behavior—his belief that Clarissa's non-consent betrays hidden desires or can be transformed retroactively into consent through the power of rape—with a contradiction of her own. The heroine lives within the paradoxical space her tormentor has created, adopting a state of perpetual non-consent that cannot be altered even if she should change her mind. Clarissa's inactivity, then, turns Lovelace's logic against him, and should be understood as an act of resistance rather than an indication of victimization.

Sandra Macpherson's reading takes Ferguson's a step further. To engage the preceding generation of *Clarissa* criticism, Macpherson begins with the observation, "The notion that [Lovelace] might not bear sole responsibility for the calamities visited on Clarissa has been anathema to feminists in particular (including myself in an earlier incarnation)" (81). This claim simultaneously glosses readings of the novel that apportion power and blame in a zero-sum contest between female protagonist and male antagonist and promises to move beyond Ferguson's modification of that stubborn

opposition. For if Ferguson articulates a new view of Clarissa's power, one to which she was drawn because it granted Clarissa agency without complicity, that view nevertheless remains confined to the framework of a zero-sum game between male and female. Or if not a zero-sum game then perhaps a double bind, a lose-lose situation where Lovelace's power kills Clarissa and her power, generated in reaction to his, kills him in turn. In either case, the focus remains squarely on the Clarissa vs. Lovelace struggle, and questions of how to divvy power and blame between them. By contrast, Macpherson asks us to take seriously "the possibility that the agency of and responsibility for the rape might truly *be 'diffused'*" (81). What is more, her reading again depends on decoupling agency and responsibility: "Richardson's persons, like Defoe's, move with the inertia of matter" (94). Operating on this principle, she takes Richardson's characters just as seriously when they claim to be acting under compulsions as when they have made a conscious decision. Like billiard balls that impart momentum but cannot be said to act on their own, these characters represent proximate causes, not distal ones. But "inertia" suggests that the characters in question will continue on their paths unless disturbed by an outside force, and these narratives hardly give characters time to experience undisturbed motion. There are, in fact, two better metaphors that are as historically appropriate as Macpherson's invocation of Newton. The constant flux of the narratives that makes it impossible to establish simple causal relations observes a pattern resembling that of network theory, pioneered by

Leonhard Euler, or perhaps better still, the systems theory that finds some of its earliest traces in the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

Defoe and Richardson dramatize this constant flux through their protagonists, who are frequently and unpredictably assailed by outside forces—Clarissa most of all. Macpherson’s model comes closer to my own argument when she claims that the novel observes “a legal logic according to which self and other are merged so thoroughly as to be ... indistinguishable from one another ... [and] from the plot that yokes them together” (93). Macpherson is right to draw our attention to the fact that the language of the law appears on every tongue, especially Lovelace’s, as the characters attempt to manage the outcome of events in the face of unpredictable human interaction. Nevertheless, I take the hopelessly entangled status of the characters as evidence not of their inertial state, but precisely the opposite. Warner too asks us to conceptualize the motivating force of the novel as one that produces constant fluctuations and reversals when he chooses the metaphor of a “vast electromagnetic field” to describe the interactions of author, characters, and readers (3). Yet even his account shares with Macpherson’s the tendency to naturalize the contradictions internal to Richardson’s model of agency, making those tensions fade into the background and appear as simply the nature of things. No set of laws, whether natural or juridical, will provide anything but an analog for the text. They will not answer the question of how the two major characters, differing in gender and social position, can be, at one and the same time,

active agents and acted upon—both driven by compulsion to do what they do and individuals who make rational choices. Even though Clarissa is acted upon and thus left with no good choices, she must nevertheless choose—if only to let someone else make the choice for her.

Operating within a framework where both principles are true at once, one can well understand why the critical tradition is torn between readings that take up one side of this contradiction at the expense of the other. By holding compulsion and autonomy together, I would like to make a new kind of sense out of adverse arguments. Both Castle and Warner draw attention to the way in which the world “inside” *Clarissa* and the “outside” world mirror each other. In Warner’s construction, “the struggles of interpretation between Clarissa and Lovelace ‘inside’ the book are always already part of the struggles of interpretation ‘outside’ the book” (ix). Warner’s primary concern here is to articulate and then reverse a particular “humanist” reading of *Clarissa* with the heroine as victim, a reading he argues modern scholarship has refined to the point that it is difficult to approach the novel in any other way. Like many readers I cannot concede Warner’s point that Clarissa’s violence matches and even exceeds that of Lovelace, but I nevertheless find his central claim that the novel stages a competition between their respective discursive practices compatible with my own argument. Furthermore, I find convincing Warner’s insistence that the readings that *Clarissa* generates are themselves

part of the novel, at least as a way of thinking about Richardson's ultimately self-defeating obsession with authorial control.

Castle makes a similar claim when she calls attention to what she considers an overlooked aspect of the novel, "the basic link between 'inside' and 'outside' in *Clarissa*, between story and shape: the matter of interpretation itself" (18). In this regard she aligns her argument with Warner's, even as she rejects his casting of Lovelace as victim to Clarissa's power: "the excruciating situation *Clarissa* dramatizes is that a rhetorical system is *not* 'powerful' unless grounded in political power" (25). Instead of seeing the outside of the story replicating the discursive struggle inside the text, Castle proposes that the reduction of Clarissa to a cipher for others primes readers to see the ways in which acts of interpretation in the real world are used as tools of subjugation. She thus inverts Warner's argument on two levels as she refutes his notion that Clarissa reduces Lovelace, as he says, from "a brilliant elaborator of fictions" to "simply insincere" (ix). As she puts it, "the inscription of subjective experience [is] a shockingly compromised (and compromising) activity ... fraught with dangers" and "profoundly indeterminate," and thus a source of conflict within and outside the book (20). Though I consider Castle much too quick in dismissing the idea that Clarissa's rhetorical power is itself a form of political power, she is quite right to highlight the paradox—the risk—of "subjective experience" in forceful terms.

Those who read the novel in social-historical terms avoid the stalemate of a zero-sum game between Lovelace and Clarissa by tying the question of individuation to the appearance of a new class position. Armstrong is among a number of scholars who call attention to the link between the “elusive” history of the middle class and “the discrepancy between that class and its objectification,” or “the time lag between a type and its embodiment” (38). Eagleton, on the other hand, understands the relationship between individual and class to be confrontational and happening in real-time: while in *Pamela* “[t]he pact between bourgeoisie and nobility has been achieved in form,” in *Clarissa* it is “shattered in content.” He continues, “if Richardson is a bourgeois ideologue ... he is equally [obsessive] in his commitment to individual freedom, and the two will prove incompatible” (39). Inverting this claim, E.J. Clery argues that Richardson’s *Clarissa* develops a new model of “feminization” that counteracts older models of “effeminacy” to establish “a new ideal of modern living” that is “ideologically compatible with commercial society” (7). Far from being incompatible, the appearance of the modern individual serves as a counterbalance to “the fracturing force of the capitalist economy” (2). Reading *Clarissa* as a novel about class thus succeeds in moving the conflict and the stakes beyond the personal rivalry between protagonist and antagonist, but risks establishing an analogous conflict at the level of socio-economic organization.

To begin addressing this difficulty, I would like to backtrack to a question subsumed by the concept of class formation. Before we can turn to the novel for historical evidence to suggest that class norms are in place, we have to consider the relationship between class norms and novel readership. There is a reason why Richardson's publication history and his peculiar attempts to enforce certain readings of *Clarissa* in particular remain *de rigueur* considerations for scholars of his work. That he felt his readers had to be coaxed and prodded into compliance raises the question of whether there was a readership with common norms on matters of sexual conduct and emotional expression at all. When we approach the novel as a lesson in risk management, however, we have a natural entry point for making sense of the importance of class positions for Richardson. Which sectors of the literate population would feel in need of risk management? Which, moreover, would feel that women faced very different risks than men in maintaining their intrinsic value as women—not only their value on the marriage market, but their value as individuals with a story to tell? Critics have noted that Lovelace and Clarissa themselves come from different classes, though the Harlowes are technically gentry. Nor is it just the major characters that matter here: Clarissa's rhetorical power ultimately works on and through servants, her nurse, widows, and even prostitutes as much as aristocrats, whether noble or libertine, and the middle class. The novel takes a more diverse set of characters than either *Crusoe* or *Pamela* confronted and builds a consensus among them as to how to read and write

character. In so doing, the novel produces a set of procedures for risk management that might apply across a spectrum of class positions, without suggesting that all the people occupying those positions are fundamentally the same. The novel consequently preserves a sense of difference in its wide readership while establishing a common way of reading character. This, we must conclude, is the persuasive power of the novel that allows the discursive battle between Clarissa and Lovelace to extend itself beyond fictional characters and into the hearts and minds of readers.

This power to engage a widening readership depends on the fact that Richardson makes the procedures of self-management matter more than whether or not a character succeeds. This is particularly evident in *Clarissa*, where successful risk management is not strictly equivalent to displaying good taste or engaging in proper behavior. Lovelace is not vindicated for his successes in manipulating Clarissa before his ultimate failure, because he never embodies the sentimental norms upheld by the novel. Clarissa in turn is not diminished for having been successfully manipulated. She has held to the procedures of risk management that ensure her unblemished selfhood at the cost of her life. To substantiate this claim, we need only compare the deaths of Lovelace and Clarissa. Lovelace continues to seek his exculpation until the very end, which is to say that he seeks precisely the transformative event that the novels of Defoe and Richardson have left behind in their dramas of management. Committed as Lovelace is to the logic of the rake and the possibility of reformation through love, he can do nothing else.

Clarissa, by contrast, prepares letters for her executor Belford to circulate after her death. Not even her passing prevents her from managing the risk that her actions shall be misread. Where she secures herself in perpetuity by ensuring that she will continue to be read correctly, Lovelace is committed to the life of the body and its capacity for action. He consequently sees death as either the culmination of his destiny as a rake or as the means of escape from the ruins of his scheming. That Clarissa dies first underscores Lovelace's failure, rendering his final days and words all the more pitiful in the light of her triumph.

Final Words: Death and Afterlife in *Clarissa*

On learning that Clarissa, her cousin Colonel Morden and her other attendants have begun making final preparations for her death, Lovelace responds to Belford thus:

Curse upon the Colonel, and curse upon the writer of the last letter I received, and upon all the world! Thou to pretend to be as much interested in my Clarissa's fate as myself! 'Tis well for one of us that this was not said to me, instead of written—Living or dying, she is mine—and only mine. Have I not earned her dearly?—Is not damnation likely to be the purchase to me, though a happy eternity will be hers? (1358)

In his desperation and disorder, Lovelace stumbles upon this moment of perfect clarity. His response depicts a world governed by a kind of homeostasis, one in which all his spectacularly failed schemes have worked in vain to bring about a controlled state:

Clarissa's virtue exposed as disingenuous, placing her forever beneath him. As Lovelace sees it, even in their failure his schemes have produced a greater homeostasis, in which Clarissa embodied will be his and only his, consigning him to eternal damnation, her soul to eternal bliss. Their story ends when there can be no further change in the balance of their respective powers. The cruel joke for Lovelace is that he has been placed forever below Clarissa, not the other way round.

That this inversion takes place is attributable to the skill with which Clarissa has managed not only her own affairs, but also his. Clarissa carefully excludes Lovelace from participating in or even witnessing her final moments and death, arguably the only event with any chance of bringing about his desired reformation. To the extent that her death does change the villain, it is a temporary alteration that comes when Lovelace goes into a fit. Though friend and fellow libertine Richard Mowbray begins by describing Lovelace as "mad as any man ever was in Bedlam," he soon accuses the latter of having been feminized by the ordeal and implores him "to behave more like a man," chastising that to react so strongly to Clarissa's death is "a shame to manhood." If Lovelace is to be reformed by Clarissa's virtue, Mowbray suggests, he will have to surrender everything that makes him what he is, including his sex and even his humanity, ultimately leaving Lovelace "chicken-hearted." (1359-1360).

While Lovelace is in a state of feminine "distraction" from contemplating Clarissa's death throes, she is conducting a masterclass in virtuous risk management.

After making a point of refusing to see Lovelace, she also makes a point of repeatedly forgiving him. This ultimate act of charity is also her ultimate act of power, crystalizing Lovelace's role as the villain of her story, deserving of her pity but unworthy of standing before her. Her very last words serve as the last word in their discursive battle. Clarissa is equally successful in positioning other characters, including her old nurse Mrs. Norton, whom she calls, despite her "now lowly ... fortunes, a saint in heaven" (1362). What Clarissa desires she speaks into being, and the results retroactively reshape her story. Mrs. Norton was always the most sympathetic member of Clarissa's household in the days before the girl ran off with Lovelace, though the nurse was ultimately powerless to broker peace within the family. By juxtaposing Mrs. Norton's "now lowly fortunes" against her sainthood, Clarissa legitimates both the nurse's feelings and actions. Limited by her station, Mrs. Norton was not in a position to intercede on Clarissa's behalf, which Clarissa signals by sanctifying Mrs. Norton's character. That this legitimation also sanctifies Clarissa's own behavior is no coincidence. As she implicitly reminds her readers, she and Mrs. Norton are joined not only by their history but by the fact that both are excellent managers. It is for this reason that Clarissa, in turning over to her father the estate her grandfather had given her, recommends Mrs. Norton as housekeeper on this basis: "her prudent management will be as beneficial to my father as his favour can be convenient to her" (1414). Belford notes the class differences that

Clarissa deftly navigates on her deathbed. Momentarily recovering from the affliction that ultimately proves fatal, Clarissa's final living act is to bow

her head six several times, ... as if distinguishing every person present; not forgetting the nurse and the maid-servant; the latter having approached the bed, weeping, as if crowding in for the divine lady's blessing; and she spoke faltering and inwardly: Bless—bless—bless—you all—and now—and now (holding up her almost lifeless hands for the last time)—come—Oh come—blessed Lord—JESUS! (1362).

Clarissa's acknowledgment of everyone whom she has befriended and relied upon in her final days becomes the basis of the eulogy Belford delivers in his letter, praising the heroine for her "unblemished virtue, exemplary piety, sweetness of manners, discreet generosity, and true Christian charity" (1363).

Clarissa's ability to address all social levels and at the same time discriminate among them is especially evident in the gifts she bequeaths in her will. As Katherine Oliver contends, Clarissa understands that "money is the more thoughtful provision for individuals (particularly women) from the working classes," and thus bequeaths rings to those of higher status and coins to those of lesser (49). For those not from the working class "sums of cash might be deemed insulting, at odds with their social position," but in every case Clarissa finds just the right memento to bind others to her and "assure remembrance of the dead" (49, 35). This remembrance cuts both ways in Oliver's

reading, rewarding those who have supported Clarissa and punishing those who have not through a weaponized form of generosity that speaks to their guilt. Simply put, “In death, Clarissa administers her own brand of justice” (59). Clarissa’s will, like her letters, manages risk on her behalf even after she is gone. It is in this spirit that we should understand the statement in her will that she was led to her wretched state “by strange melancholy accidents,” a phrase that speaks volumes in its omissions and oversimplifications (1420). She openly chastises Lovelace, declaring that should

he insist upon viewing *her dead* whom he ONCE before saw in a manner dead, let his gay curiosity be gratified. Let him behold and triumph over the wretched remains of one who has been made a victim to his barbarous perfidy: but let some good person, as by my desire, give him a paper whist he is viewing the ghastly spectacle, containing these few words only: ‘Gay, cruel heart! behold here the remains of the once ruined, yet now happy, Clarissa Harlowe!—See what thou thyself must quickly be—and REPENT!—’ (1413).

If Lovelace should feel any sense of triumph, Clarissa has prepared a statement to remind him that his is a pyrrhic victory. By enlisting none other than Belford, the reformed rake and Lovelace’s closest friend, to compile her correspondence and distribute new letters after her death, Clarissa ensures that a staggering number of words in her defense will remain in circulation long after she is gone.

Lovelace, meanwhile, repeatedly claims he is unwilling to “live in suspense,” and thus provokes a duel with Clarissa’s cousin Colonel Morden, who has come to save her but arrives too late (1478). As if self-condemned to live out an older style of aristocratic masculinity, Lovelace proclaims, “Tomorrow is to be the Day, that will in all probability send either one or two ghosts to attend the *manes* of my CLARISSA” (1484). He does not see the irony of rejecting a life in suspension, the state in which Clarissa long persisted and might be said, through her letters, to still live. Though she proves that this state can be turned to good ends, Lovelace finds it intolerable and instead seeks out her cousin. The next letter informs Belford of Lovelace’s death, and his death, like his life, reads as an inversion of Clarissa’s fate. His demise is a lingering and incoherent one; run through by Morden, he weakens over hours from loss of blood, his injuries cutting off speech at critical moments. So “inwardly he spoke” that witnesses are left to wonder at the sentiment being expressed, as if his words are not fit for public consumption (1486). In his final moments he finds the strength to finally exclaim “LET THIS EXPIATE!” (1488). At the last, then, he renews his hope that a single moment might bring him redemption for killing the woman he claims to love, the woman who is paradoxically the reason for his damnation and his only hope of exoneration. But in this moment there is no more chance of redemption than there was when he raped Clarissa, certain that he would prove her just another of his many conquests.

The Inoculative Novel

By midcentury it was evidently not risk to life and limb but moral risk that was at stake in the novel. In *Due Preparations for the Plague* Defoe anticipated this shift with his repeated admonition that the most important preparation for the plague takes place in the soul, but he proved unable to sustain such a claim in a text that remains fundamentally invested in protecting commercial interests. Rather than the risks Crusoe encountered beyond the reach of English law or that H. F. sought to survive in London under plague conditions, Richardson and other midcentury novelists used what Roberto Esposito calls “the immunization paradigm” to show how one might survive in a society where one circulated among strangers. In keeping with the eighteenth-century practice of inoculation, Richardson infects the reader with a small dose of something morally seductive so that the body can learn to fight off a stronger form of the infection. The vicarious experience of Clarissa’s rape and death, an experience Richardson’s contemporaries found deeply disturbing, would protect them against the kind of misjudgment that caused her downfall. Only by subjecting themselves to the pleasures and torments of Clarissa’s tragedy could they avoid the far greater temptations that were sure to follow if they placed their trust in an immorally deceitful person. Lovelace falls on the wrong side of this divide, vainly hoping to return to his former, inoculated state after having contracted a moral disease. The belief that his sins can lead to his

reformation indicates that he has misjudged a mortal dose of vice for one that will improve him.

As Timothy Campbell remarks in his brief translator's note to *The Immunization Paradigm*, Esposito offers the concept of inoculation as a response to Foucault's work on biopolitics. Foucault offers a biopolitics that regulates life in opposition to the form of sovereign power that 'coerces life'. This "affirmative biopolitics," in Campbell's view, "resists sovereign power" because it acknowledges that life always exceeds the sovereign power that seeks to control it (23). At the same time, Campbell explains, Foucault offers a negative biopower that, in regulating life, arrogates to itself the power to end life. In this configuration, "biopolitics continually threatens to reverse itself into a thanatopolitics; the clear conclusion being that biopolitics is hardly distinct from sovereign power and as such cannot be affirmative" (23). The immunization paradigm overcomes the contradiction within Foucauldian biopolitics by identifying that contradiction with the constitutive paradox of the Hobbesian social contract. Esposito reminds us that the "right ... of life and death" is "the sovereign prerogative that cannot be contested precisely because it has been authorized by the same subject that endures it" (35). It is consequently the right of government to end life only when we cede to government that right.

Clarissa suggests a different resolution. In Richardson's novel the contradiction of sovereignty is transformed into the operations of self-government; rather than

entrusting the preservation of life to an outside force, Richardson grants it to the individual who has been inoculated against the forces likely to compromise the autonomy of her self-control. Nevertheless, the solution *Clarissa* advances is governed by the dialectic relationship that defines the immunization paradigm for Esposito:

[Immunization] saves, insures, and preserves the organism, either individual or collective, but it doesn't do so directly or immediately; on the contrary it subjects the organism to a condition that simultaneously negates or reduces its power to expand. Just as in the medical practice of vaccinating the individual body, so the immunization of the political body functions similarly; introducing within it a fragment of the same pathogen that it wants to protect itself from, by blocking and contradicting natural development. (24)

This logic is at play in *Clarissa*, on two levels. First, at the level of character it is the reason why the heroine “was not drawn absolutely perfect, but as having something to blame herself for, tho' not in Intention.” If *Clarissa* were completely immune to Lovelace's charms *before* misjudging his character, there would be no element of danger in the story capable of producing a model of risk management. This logic works analogously on the diegetic level: if *Clarissa*'s misjudgment had no lasting effect on her, this argument would have it, then it could have none for the reader. Richardson resisted the impassioned demands of his readers that the story have a happy ending because he believed that capitulating would undermine the prophylactic qualities of his novel.

The consequences of this immunitary logic extend beyond the characterization and destiny of the protagonist. Indeed, many of the tensions within both the novel and its critical tradition are produced by the dialectic force of Richardson's didactic version of this paradigm. When Anne declares that Clarissa doth protest too much, it must be somewhat plausible that she indeed harbors secret affection for Lovelace. It is for this reason that *Clarissa* models the sometimes attractive qualities of the rake. Warner himself gives in to the allure of Lovelace's sophistry and hedonism, when he characterizes this villain as "a brilliant elaborator of fictions." In order to immunize his readers against these vices, the novel must have made them seem sufficiently harmless so as not to be dismissed *prima facie* as pornographic. This novel deliberately invites that possibility in order to produce its inoculative effect.

Perhaps the biggest payoff for thinking in immunitary terms comes when we take a wider view and consider this novel as a participant in the mid-century debates on the dangers of novel reading. In sorting through the history of the reception of Richardson's novels, one soon finds that he shared this sense of the novel as a dangerous medium even with his detractors. The eighteenth-century obsession with identifying and classifying salutary and morally harmful works of fiction was, among other things, a question of how to produce an inoculative novel. Authors like Richardson, Henry Fielding, and John Cleland shared the conviction that the novel was a form capable of producing real effects on the characters of readers. Key to ensuring a positive impact on

character was the author's ability to provide the proper inoculant in the proper dose, an error in either respect being likely to cause an infection rather than immunity. So it was that Fielding's literary career was launched because of his disdain for *Pamela* even while he and his sister Sarah held *Clarissa* in high regard. Or that Cleland could write the novel that arguably takes the immunitary paradigm to its logical conclusion, arguing that he must make vice as attractive as possible so that the reader might be prepared to resist it in the real world, only to have his work deemed pornographic and worthy of jailing its author. If an author could set out to write a morally edifying text and instead produced a morally corrupting one, in other words, then writing a novel required its own form of risk management.

Morality and the Danger of Reading

Were accusations of licentiousness and hypocrisy from contemporary readers sufficient to brand a novel unreadable, then Richardson, Fielding, and Cleland would have been quickly relegated to obscurity. In fact, quite the opposite was true. While the novels proved explosively popular, often it was the authors themselves who hurled accusations against one another. Fielding famously called *Pamela* "an index of the woeful incredulity of the times," and in *Shamela* occasionally wrote "politeness" as "Poluteness" to indicate that Richardson was spreading filth under the guise of civility (Bell 65, *Pamela* xxvi). Richardson responded in kind, and no less an authority than Samuel Johnson defended Richardson while declaring *Tom Jones* "a vicious book." As

Johnson said to Hannah More, "I am sorry to hear you have read it; a confession which no modest lady should ever make. I scarcely know a more corrupt work" (*Tom Jones*, xi). There was no end to the inked spill in these debates, and the charges and the very language used to condemn one novel or novelist almost always redounded to attack another.

Of the many insights to be distilled from the overcrowded archive of mid-century anxieties about novels, I find two especially helpful. First, these debates arose from the assumption that novels could shape the way readers imagined their relation to the real world. The words a reader consumed could shape his or her character, and perhaps even alter the body through the mind.²⁶ An author's ability to navigate this danger by using the power of fiction for moral ends would depend on his or her selection of elements of daily life were to be tested and preserved or found wanting and revised. To be compelling the novel needed a certain density of detail that justified the reader's belief, but different authors took radically different approaches to achieving the needed effect. How each made his world "dense" determined where a text fell in this struggle to produce a moral and moralizing novel.²⁷ Second, the language of pollution

²⁶ Katherine Kickel and David E. Shuttleton have noted how in both eighteenth-century medicine and philosophy of mind the boundary between mind and body was thought to be porous, to the extent that the art objects one consumed could produce physiological changes of dangerous kinds. Shuttleton notes that "the emergence of smallpox in Britain coincided almost exactly with what the last generation of literary scholars often termed 'the rise of the novel,'" then draws attention to a passage in Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* suggesting that even reading about smallpox puts one at risk of infection (103).

²⁷ There is a long history in novel theory of references to "density" as one of the defining features of the genre. In *The Theory of the Novel* Georg Lukács calls the novel "an irrational mixture of density and

and infection was frequently used to describe the effects of going wrong in these debates: a corrupt novel was always a corrupting one, its influence spreading among naïve or misinformed readers who did not understand that pleasure alone was not reason enough for choosing what one read.

It is thus that Maynard Mack can argue both that *Pamela* was the first psychological novel and that, for the more worldly Fielding, it must have seemed “a falsification of the world of fact,” full of “improbabilities” that left “complicated issues of moral behavior ... diluted to the single question of female chastity” (*Joseph Andrews*, viii). Mack notes how Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* inverts all of the major conceits of *Pamela* in order to render “a more inclusive world than Richardson’s, and also a more profoundly familiar one,” filled not only of with sex “but also by the humdrum motions of avarice, stupidity, vanity, courage, and love” (ix). While it is certainly the case that Fielding’s work explores a much broader slice of eighteenth-century life, Mack’s argument exposes a preference, one he and Fielding seemingly share, for a certain kind of narrative density. The psychological depth of *Pamela* is dismissed in favor Fielding’s

permeability” that the protagonist must learn to navigate (90). In fact, his vision of the protagonist is similar to my own: “the content of the novel is the story of a soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence” (89). Though Lukács is writing in religious terms, rather than in the individualist language that I employ, his account argues for the same basic configuration of a protagonist obligated to go out into a dangerous world to claim a sense of self. For M.M. Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* and for Frederic Jameson in “The Case For George Lukács,” meanwhile, density, especially density of time markers, are at the heart of the novel form. See p. 250 in Bakhtin; Jameson’s essay mentions density in several places, going so far as to link Balzac’s ability to produce “a genuine totality” with his work to create for his novels “a density of external reality” (13-14).

portrait of “the sprawling diversified life of eighteenth-century humanity” (viii). Dr. Johnson, on the other hand, came to precisely the opposite conclusion, disparaging Fielding for seeing only the hands of a clock where Richardson saw the moving parts—a remark Richardson was happy to repeat in his correspondence, including to Fielding’s sister and fellow novelist Sarah (*Remarks on Clarissa*, iii).

If Fielding’s early works *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews* were primarily interested in satirizing Richardson, he provided his own model of a moral novel with *Tom Jones*, where, as R.P.C. Mutter notes, dissembling is the real crime. As Mutter puts it, the “contrast between appearance and reality, between public profession and private motive, is central to *Tom Jones*. . . . The vice towards which Tom has practically no tendency is hypocrisy” (*Tom Jones*, xiv). This is a point which Fielding makes repeatedly, both implicitly and explicitly. Tom commits many sins in his story, but so long as he remains on a path of self-improvement and can acknowledge his mistakes as such, all can be forgiven. As the narrator reminds us, “whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected by continual conversation with this good man [Squire Allworthy], and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia” (xiv). Yet even as he marks what he understands to be the crucial difference between his novels and *Pamela*, Fielding employs the same inoculative logic as Richardson. His hope is that acknowledging and accepting vice for what it is provides the means of stopping its spread, and thus contributing to its eventual eradication. Likewise, Fielding’s fear of

hypocrisy above all other vice is a response to his sense that it is highly infectious. Even the noble Squire Allworthy falls victim to its catching nature, lamenting the power of hypocrisy to Tom at the very end of the novel by saying, "good heaven how have I been imposed on by it!" (802).

In this instance, in fact, Fielding feels obligated, in a moment that is thoroughly Richardsonian, to warn the reader against misreading:

The reader is greatly mistaken, if he conceives that Thwackum appeared to Mr Allworthy in the same light as he doth to him in this history; and he is as much deceived, if he imagines that the most intimate acquaintance which he himself could have had with that divine, would have informed him of those things which we, from our inspiration, are enabled to open and discover. Of readers who, from such conceits as these, condemn the wisdom or penetration of Mr Allworthy, I shall not scruple to say, that they make a very bad and ungrateful use of that knowledge which we have communicated to them. (802)

One can sense Fielding's balancing act as he betrays the same anxieties about the possibility of misreading that plagued Richardson. He must avoid not only attaching to Squire Allworthy the dreaded sin of hypocrisy, but also avoid it himself. For if a character can be forgiven his or her faults, whatever the reader may perceive them to be, because Fielding decrees it so, then he has not put much distance between his world and the duplicitous one of Richardson after all. Tom himself must balance contradictory

impulses, so much so that at times his distinction from a villain like Lovelace seems to hang on a slender thread. When he says “I am no canting hypocrite, nor do I pretend to the gift of chastity, more than my neighbours. I have been guilty with women, I own it; but I am not conscious that I have ever injured any — nor would I, to procure pleasure to myself, be knowingly the cause of misery to any human being,” it seems that all the difference between them resides in that last claim, that Tom would not knowingly take his pleasure at the expense of another (622).

The entire novel is structured to make the reader weigh the evidence for statements of this kind, a fact which Mutter attributes to Fielding’s legal training (xxvii). But is this not just another method of teaching risk management, to have the reader judge character and characters by constantly discriminating between naïveté and actual malice? In many senses, there is much less distance between Richardson and Fielding than either would have the reader believe. Perhaps this is why both Sarah and Henry Fielding praised *Clarissa* in high terms, though the latter especially was disappointed not to see the novel have a happy ending. In particular, Peter Sabor notes how “both Fieldings appreciate Lovelace’s witticisms while deploring his immorality” (*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, viii). There is irony in the fact that Henry Fielding almost proved to be one of Richardson’s ideal readers, capable of understanding Lovelace’s attractive qualities without reducing the villain’s moral burden. What could be better proof of a shared project than Fielding accepting Lovelace on Richardson’s terms? Yet Fielding

wanted for *Clarissa* the comic ending that he gave his masterpiece, and Richardson could not oblige. Mack makes Richardson's tragedy and Fielding's comedy two sides of a coin:

For the tragic emphasis seems to be on the uniqueness and finality of human experience, as man the transient individual moves through his world from a situation which is a datum to a destiny developing from himself. The curve of tragic action, in other words, is a curve of self-discovery. On the other hand, the comic curve is one of self-exposure. ... The great comic characters of literature ... do not *essentially* change. (*Joseph Andrews*, xiv)

For Fielding, then, Tom is good, no matter how he sins, because he has a good heart, while Pamela is duplicitous because she always negotiates what she declares simply to be true. But through all the recriminations and protestations, Richardson and Fielding share fundamental beliefs that render their works two sides of the same coin.

The Boundaries of the Inoculative Novel

No text better interrogates how far an author was able to push the inoculative logic of the novel than John Cleland's 1748 *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. Vilified by the English printer John Nichols as a text that would bring shame to Cleland so long as "its poisonous contents are in circulation," the novel was sometimes blamed for the two London earthquakes of 1750—though they had already been attributed by some to *Tom*

Jones.²⁸ Cleland's novel is, like *Pamela*, a class-climbing story, telling the tale of a woman, Fanny Hill, who is orphaned at 14 and becomes a prostitute. Rather than resulting in the expected disaster, Fanny becomes fabulously wealthy and happily married, and tells the story of her scandalous youth in two long letters to an unknown correspondent. It is, in a sense, the kind of story Fielding believed *Pamela* to be, though stripped of any pretense and greatly intensified. Cleland, in fact, was a devoted admirer of Fielding, particularly his *Amelia*, which Cleland saw as a novel that "presses vice into the service of virtue" in the same manner he insisted *Memoirs* did. Cleland viewed novels as "public benefits" that guided readers through experiences they were likely to encounter.

Cleland was, on the other hand, ambivalent about *Pamela*, and yet perhaps he undersold his literary debt to Richardson. As Peter Sabor argues, Cleland's style sought to bridge the gap between Richardson's and Fielding's, employing at times both Richardson's strategy of "writing to the moment" and imitating "Fielding's authorial control," with Fanny standing "back from the action, inspecting, criticizing and explaining" (xxii). Sabor traces numerous textual connections to *Pamela* and notes how Fanny's "state of protracted sexual excitement" is an inversion of Pamela's sexuality, which causes her to faint whenever Mr. B threatens an assault (xxiii). Fanny is, at least in retrospect, aware of the dangers that accompany her hyperactive libido, describing her entry into the world of sex as "the first ideas of pollution" (xxv). But even if, as Sabor

²⁸ See p. vii of the introduction to the text.

argues, Richardson and Cleland share a distaste for certain sexual acts they would declare aberrant, that does not prevent *Memoirs* from depicting them in graphic detail. Clearly, Cleland is concerned with the same themes and debates as both Richardson and Fielding; every bit as clearly, he treats his subject matter rather differently. How, then, did he see himself intervening in their great debate?

The answer comes in two mirrored passages in the novel, one at the beginning, and one at the end:

In the meantime, I was so thoroughly, as they call it, brought over, so tame to their whistle, that, had my cage-door been set open, I had no idea that I ought to fly anywhere, sooner than stay where I was; nor had I the least sense of regretting my condition, but waited very quietly for whatever Mrs. *Brown* should order concerning me, who on her side, by herself, and her agents, took more than the necessary precautions to lull and lay asleep all just reflections on my destination.

Preachments of morality over the left shoulder, a life of joy painted in the gayest colours, caresses, promises, indulgent treatment, nothing in short was wanting to domesticate me entirely, and to prevent my going out anywhere to get better advice; alas! I dream'd of no such thing. (23)

...

The paths of Vice are sometimes strew'd with roses, but then they are for ever infamous for many a thorn; for many a cankerworm: those of Virtue are strew'd with roses purely, and those eternally unfading ones.

If you do me then justice, you will esteem me perfectly consistent in the incense I burn to virtue: if I have painted vice in all its gayest colours, if I have deck'd it with flowers, it has been solely in order to make the worthier, the solemn sacrifice of it, to virtue. (187-188)

The phrase “painted in gayest colours” appears twice in the novel, forgiving a few interstitial words. Its first appearance occurs at the moment that Fanny decides—wrongly, as she notes—that the life of a prostitute might not be so bad after all. It describes the manner in which the owner and workers of the house of ill repute convince her to join their enterprise: “a life of joy painted in the gayest colours.” The phrase marks temptation—or, one might say, the moment of infection. Fanny is morally infected by the notion that work as a prostitute can mean a life of ease, generous remuneration, and sensuous pleasures.

The second usage of the phrase, almost as far as possible from the first, inverts the meaning entirely. In addition to the fact that the two appearances bookend the story, in the first instance the phrase is immediately retracted, marked as the mistaken impressions of a naïve girl; in the second, it is justified as fitting, even necessary for the function of the text. In the first, pleasure is its own end; in the second, the “gayest

colours" are invoked only to make "vice" a "worthier ... sacrifice ... to virtue." In the first moment, Fanny is infected; in the second, she has overcome the infection and is thus inoculated. She, after all, gets a happy ending with her beloved Charles, notwithstanding all her "vice" along the way.

The implication is that the reader can learn from this transition: if, in the end, even in its "gayest colours" vice is nothing more than a sacrificial offering at the altar of virtue, the reader ought to skip the vice altogether. But for this moral education to take hold, first the reader must be tempted. The repetition of the phrase isn't coincidental: the first instance is a necessary condition of the second, just as a small dose of infected material is a necessary condition of inoculation. If one doesn't inject the very thing one hopes to prevent, then one can't hope to prevent it. Fanny may have embraced vice naively, but she rejects it knowingly; having experienced the dangers of licentious behavior, having taken her dose, she can go forward without fear of infection. Better still, her letters can do the same for readers, without their hazarding what Fanny herself has endured. The novel itself is the source of the inoculum, with the potential to modify a reader's behavior in ways that safeguard both physical and spiritual health. This, seemingly, is the logic of the inoculative novel brought carried through to the end, yet Cleland never lived down the scandal of publishing the text or achieved the literary recognition he felt he deserved. Indeed, the person most put at risk by *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* was Cleland himself. He finished the text while in debtors' prison,

likely in the hope that it would help him clear his debts. Instead, a year after the publication of the novel, Cleland was arrested again, along with his publishers and printer.

I have turned to this brief sketch of the mid-century debates about novels for two reasons. First, these debates demonstrate that risk and risk management permeated all levels of novel production and consumption. Just as readers had to be careful in choosing which novels they read and how they interpreted them, authors had to worry whether their efforts to produce a morally improving novel would succeed, and what the consequences would be—both to themselves and to readers—if those efforts failed. Second, understanding these debates in terms of an inoculative paradigm and the potentially corrupting or purifying force of novels brings into sharp relief how reading was coming to be understood as a practice that fundamentally reshaped the reader. The underlying logic that what one read determined what one was is a constant touchstone for my project, and not coincidentally this belief is never more apparent than when novels are at their most dangerous. The greater the risks of novel reading, the more important it becomes that they serve as good manuals of risk management.

Combatting the Danger of Sentimental Infection

The difficulty of how to write a morally salutary novel was not resolved in the mid-century. Critics would continue to recommend some novels for general reading while interdicting others, until the dangers of infectious novels came to be seen as

simply a matter of fact. In 1759, Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* began to chip away at this intractable problem from outside the novel tradition. From the narrative of risk management tested in conduct books and novels Smith extrapolated a moral-philosophical concept of "sympathy" and the ultimate figure of risk management. Drawing on "Mr. Spectator," Joseph Addison's figure of a moral aesthete, Smith developed an account of the "man within," an internal judge that views himself through the eyes of an ideal spectator. Smith's model is designed to distinguish the man of critical self-awareness from the popular reader who wantonly identifies with the sentimental appeal of popular novels.

Fittingly, Smith drew heavily on the Stoic tradition as a way of managing the danger of mass emotion. He began to refine the ability to judge others, to read their character, through all of their actions, not only in moments of crisis. In doing so, he set the stage for the novels of Jane Austen, which synthesize the seduction story so common to eighteenth-century novels with a Smithian ability to judge others in order to produce a novel form in which economic and moral risks are simultaneously managed. These novels transform the physical peril encountered by earlier heroines into a loss of virtue that risks devaluation on the marriage market, and thus economic ruin. Ultimately, then, the turn-of-the-century household is secured by daughters who learn to read the characters of others. Austen brings us to a world, in other words, in which exposure to the kind of risk Defoe imagined is no longer necessary to develop good judgment—there

are safer, more effective options, if only one knows the procedures. By means of self-management, over the next century the household displaced official forms of government as the means of providing for an increasingly mobile and diversifying population. But before any of that could happen, Smith had to set the stage with his moral and economic philosophy.

Chapter 3: “The Impartial Spectator”: Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Adam Smith on the Tasteful Individual

Introduction

“I know of no Evil under the Sun so great as the Abuse of the Understanding,” Richard Steele writes in the opening lines of *The Spectator* number six, published March 7, 1711, “and yet there is no one Vice more common.” The “unhappy Affectation of being Wise rather than Honest,” he goes on, “is the Source of most of the ill Habits of Life.” When men of discernment live as if “they are no more shock’d at Vice and Folly, than Men of slower Capacities” there “is no greater Monster in Being,” and though an unscrupulous wise man may find “the Satisfaction of Luxury, of Wealth, of Ambition,” there is no recompense for what he has lost: “the Taste of Good-will, of Friendship, and of Innocence” (28). “Taste” is the term for the acuity and adaptability of mind that distinguishes those thinkers and public figures who, in Steele’s view, should serve as models for readers. More than just a class marker, Steele transforms taste into a form of risk management, as only “Men of Honest Minds and true Taste” can resist the “false Beauty” of the modern world (29).

This transformation begins in issue six, where Steele defines taste as a mental faculty distinct from wisdom or erudition. Without the oversight of good taste, he argues, a clever man may put his mind to work rationalizing his ill behavior. Lesser minds then mimic the affectations of these clever men, and all of society is put at risk. It

is here that the concept of risk management put forward by Steele and Joseph Addison, who collaborated on both *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1712) periodicals, differs from that of either Defoe or Richardson. With the exception of a famous series in *The Tatler* on the absurdity of dueling, the warnings of Addison and Steele are generally not about physical dangers or violations of the body. Rather, they want to teach readers how to choose the appropriate models of behavior, whether through one's choice of company, reading material, or rituals and traditions. For Addison and Steele, associations breed habits of thought and action, and so the right social interactions and performative uses of language are critical safeguards of morality.

This is the very model the authors had in mind when they dedicated the first volume of the corrected and reprinted *Spectator* papers to Sir John Somers, one the earliest supporters of Addison's literary career and a luminary of late seventeenth-century British politics. Though Baron Somers was a man of many honors—a key figure in the Glorious Revolution, then a member of Parliament, Attorney General, and finally Lord Chancellor after being granted a peerage—Addison and Steele celebrate him for his humility. Their encomium reaches its high point in the claim that the important offices Somers held and the public service he did his country are matched only by “the Pleasure You afford all who are admitted into your Conversation, of Your Elegant Taste in all the Polite Parts of Learning, of your great Humanity and Complacency of Manners” (3). The periodical is dedicated to the consummate man of taste, and his is the

sensibility that Addison and Steele wish to propagate. The word “taste,” I should add, appears over 200 times in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.

The eponymous “Mr. Spectator” personifies this definition of taste, and the authors credit him with signing the dedication. Even before the signature line, though, they foreground the quality that links their fictitious counterpart to Lord Somers, with Mr. Spectator declaring, “I should not act the Part of an impartial Spectator, if I dedicated the following Papers to one who is not of the most consummate and acknowledged Merit” (1). It is on the basis of much more than Steele’s indirect identification of the “impartial spectator” —by way of a double negative, no less—that I have begun a chapter that focuses on Adam Smith with *The Spectator* papers. While it is well known that Smith was an admirer of Addison, and somewhat less remarked that he drew on Mr. Spectator for his own “impartial spectator” in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), it is not nearly so obvious how extensively Smith drew on Addison in writing *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). But while Addison and Steele wrote for an era of gentility that defined risk in terms of behavior unsuitable for a class of readers who presumed to lead by example, a half century later Smith wrote for a broader and more diverse readership facing several decades of political and economic turmoil. Thus it made sense for Addison and Steele’s Mr. Spectator to be a member of the gentry and an idealized “observer” of early eighteenth-century London, whereas Smith’s impartial spectator was called on to personify traits that every man could cultivate within himself. By this

means, Smith replaced the trickle down principle of cultural capital at the heart of Addison and Steele's project with a trickle up procedure whereby each individual conscientiously disciplined his or her responses to social phenomena, for the good of all. Smith imagines risk management as an educational process in which each individual internalizes his own ideal spectator to temper potential excesses of feeling—whether in response to art, reading, or direct encounters with the world.

Moral Sentiments makes this inward turn explicit: the phrase “impartial spectator” first refers to an actual spectator, not the mental procedure Smith makes famous. It is by observing models of tasteful responses that an individual learns to make the impartial spectator part of his own psychic apparatus, or what Locke meant by “Property in his own Person.”²⁹ A well-known, early passage in *Moral Sentiments* celebrates “the acute and delicate discernment” of the exemplary man of taste who initially “directs and conducts our own sentiments,” yet Smith's true aim is a standard of taste that frees the individual from depending on the example of others (20). This revision of the figure of the spectator raises two important questions: what does Smith gain by replacing living examples of the discerning spectator with fictional ones? What,

²⁹ In *Two Treatises on Government*, Locke begins his account of property by affirming the ownership each individual has of his own body. By mixing the labor of that body with elements of the external world, man comes to claim additional property. Smith extends this notion to include the products of intellectual, purely imaginative labor, which in this case produces the figure of the impartial spectator. Man so thoroughly owns this figure that he carries it within himself and, over time, comes to almost completely identify his sense of self with the man in his breast.

furthermore, are the political implications of this psychological transformation of the modern individual?

To address these questions, I will begin by examining episodes from *The Spectator* that both identify the risks confronting Addison and Steele's readers and propose a notion of taste for mitigating them. We are then in a position to understand how Smith takes up and revises this notion of taste as a theory of risk management that replaces a member of the gentry and patron of the arts with an idealized figure of "normativity." Establishing a standard that any reader can approach but none ever fully realize, Smith shifts the focus from being a gentleman to becoming one through the acquisition of taste. Finally, in reading the political economic Smith through the lens of Smith, the moral philosopher, I plan to show how *Wealth of Nations* re-externalizes the system of self-regulation that organized the individual mind in *Moral Sentiments*. In this process, wealth becomes an extension or prosthesis of the self in the Lockean sense.

The Impartial Spectator Fifty Years Earlier

Steele begins *The Spectator* number eleven with Mr. Spectator's encounter with Arietta, a "Woman of ... Taste and Understanding" who enjoys the company of "Persons of both Sexes, who may have any Pretence to Wit and Gallantry" (44). On the day they meet, Mr. Spectator finds her in the company of "a Common-Place Talker" who offends Arietta by telling the story of the Ephesian Matron, a woman who vows to grieve her dead husband until she perishes of grief or famine but instead remarries the

same night he is entombed.³⁰ True to his type, the Common-Place Talker offers this account as evidence of the inconstancy of women. An aggravated Arietta offers the counter-narrative of Inkle and Yarico, a story that would seem to forecast the ascent of economic self-interest to the point where, as A. O. Hirschman observes, it replaces traditional Christian morality as the means of curbing the passions, especially sexual passion.

Thomas Inkle was an English trader whose party was ambushed by natives upon landing in America. He escaped by fleeing into the woods, where the indigenous Yarico concealed and sustained him. They fall in love and decide to return to England together, but once aboard ship, Inkle recalls the purpose of his venture to the colonies. His passion for Yarico dissipates in the face of economic reality, and he sells her as a slave in order to recoup his investment. When she protests that she is carrying his child, he seizes the opportunity to negotiate a higher price for her sale. Arietta finishes this story without providing a moral, but Steele leaves no question that he has aimed the tale at the discerning reader, not the Common-Place Talker, by giving Mr. Spectator the final word: "I was so touch'd with this Story, (which I think should be always a Counterpart to the *Ephesian Matron*) that I left the Room with Tears in my Eyes; which a Woman of *Arietta's* good Sense, did, I am sure, take for greater Applause, than any Compliments I could

³⁰ The story of the Ephesian Matron exists in at least two forms. As it isn't retold in *The Spectator*, only alluded to, it isn't certain which version of the story Steele had in mind. There exists a more complex version where the wife offers the body of her husband as a replacement for a stolen corpse in order to save her new lover, the soldier who was responsible for guarding the dead. In either case, the story's function is the same.

make her" (48). What are we to make, then, of a tale in which a man decides to sell his lover and child into slavery?

The answer rests on the precision with which Arietta chooses and tells a story that perfectly counterbalances the offending tale of the Ephesian Matron. To begin, she did not respond to the "Common-Place Talker" until "she had a little recovered herself from the serious Anger she was in" (45). By waiting until reason returns with equanimity, Arietta avoids displaying a weakness of character that *The Spectator* considers typical of women and which would prevent Mr. Spectator from sympathetically sharing her response to an allegory about the inconstancy of her sex. As he makes a point of underscoring, "Women, whether out of a nicer Regard to their Honour, or what other Reason I cannot tell, are more sensibly touched with those general Aspersions, which are cast upon their Sex, than Men are by what is said of theirs" (45). Steele has put Arietta in a double bind where she cannot forcefully express her indignation at the Common-Place Talker's denigration of her sex, but must instead mobilize a counter-narrative to undermine her interlocutor's position. Quickness to take insult is the risk that Arietta must rhetorically master, a risk that comes with having one's mind bathed in the passions of the female body.

Her acquisition of "Taste and Understanding," no doubt the more difficult to achieve as a woman, gives her the means of managing her natural disposition. Along with his insistence that the story of the Ephesian Matron should always be paired with

the tale of Inkle and Yarico, Mr. Spectator's testimony that he "left the Room with Tears in my Eyes" demonstrates that Arietta's ability to exercise taste despite her justifiable anger has shaped his own response to the encounter with the Common-Place Talker. He trusts that his silent tears will tell Arietta that his taste echoes her own. The episode is not complete, however, until Mr. Spectator has excluded the Common-Place Talker from this community of taste by dropping him from the narrative without further comment. With this unspoken gesture, issue eleven manifests the paradox of good taste, namely, that to recognize and acquire it, one must already possess it in some degree. Taste is a closed system, in other words, within which certain individuals can refine a faculty they already possess while others, in merely emulating this sensibility, become either gross parodies or seductive manipulators.

Addison and Steele are fully aware of this paradox, if unsure of how to draw into their community those who are not obviously born with good taste. They often resort to humor and allusiveness as a way to bridge the gap, hoping to broaden their readership, if not their social circle, by modeling the wit and liveliness characteristic of a tasteful reader. As Mr. Spectator explains in number ten, "[i]t was said of *Socrates*, that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables, and in Coffee houses" (42). Largely tongue-in-cheek, this comparison occurs in a passage where Mr.

Spectator vastly exaggerates the size of his readership and influence of his letters, but one that contains a germ of sincerity concerning his ambition to put into everyday circulation issues that might otherwise be reserved for the “academic” reader. In order to do so, *The Spectator* sets out to systematically displace the discourse of philosophy with one of taste. As Brian Cowan contends, “Addison and Steele [take part in] an important moment of *transition* where we find the enlightenment’s prototypical ‘man of taste’ emerging” (276). Writing near the beginning of this transition, however, Addison and Steele lack of the means of distributing the protocols of taste beyond those who have already internalized them—the very problem that Adam Smith works to resolve in *Moral Sentiments*.

Issue 409 of *The Spectator* spells out this lack. It is well into the periodical’s run that Addison offers an explicit definition of taste, which he calls “*that Faculty of the Soul, which discerns the Beauties of an Author with Pleasure, and the Imperfections with Dislike*” (708). Though he is speaking specifically of taste in writing, Addison explicitly compares this sensibility to the discernment of a fine palate and notes a metaphorical usage of the term “taste” that he acknowledges is widespread. It stands to reason that one can be discerning in many ways, and as Erin Mackie puts it, the periodicals “tend to submit all the social practices they address ... to a shared, transgeneric notion of taste” (x). Yet without something like the apparatus Smith will offer for turning experiences in the world into mental faculties, Addison finds it “very difficult to lay down Rules for the

Acquirement of such a Taste as that I am speaking of. The Faculty must in some degree be born with us. ... [Regardless] there are several Methods for Cultivating and Improving it," among them studying "the Writings of the Most Polite Authors ... Conversation with Men of Polite Genius ... [and being] well versed in the Works of the Best *Criticks* both Ancient and Modern" (709). The best that Addison and Steele can offer is a model of immersion, in which the periodicals themselves represent one thread in the mantle of good taste that readers must wear to claim a quality that resists both naming and transmission.

A singular figure who is nevertheless meant to provide a model for readers, Mr. Spectator personifies this paradox. *The Spectator's* first issue introduces the narrator by describing how in his early life he is preternaturally able, if not unnaturally compelled, to control his emotions. While still in the womb, his mother's dreams are interpreted by her neighbors to mean that her child is destined to be a judge. As an infant, he does nothing to deter these expectations: "The Gravity of my Behaviour at my very first Appearance in the World, and all the Time that I sucked, seemed to favour my Mother's Dream: For, as she has often told me, I threw away my Rattle before I was two Months old, and would not make use of my Coral till they had taken away the Bells from it" (5). Mr. Spectator's strange combination of precocity and reserve finds new application as he matures. As he puts it, "I applied my self with so much Diligence to my Studies, that there are very few celebrated books, either in the Learned or the Modern Tongues,

which I am not acquainted with. ... An insatiable Thirst after Knowledge carried me into all the Countries of *Europe*," and then into Egypt (5). When he subsequently returns to England, he finds "[t]here is no Place of general Resort wherein I do not often make my Appearance." He can go everywhere because he can become anyone, passing as a "Merchant upon the *Exchange* ... and sometimes ... for a Jew in the Assembly of Stock-Jobbers" (6). In so appearing everywhere, he thinks of himself "rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species" (8-9).

Given his tendency to fade into the background, Mr. Spectator seems an odd choice as a counterpart to Lord Somers, a man of public reputation and esteem. This pairing is representative of the challenge facing Addison and Steele as they seek to inculcate the Baron's sensibilities in their reading audience, who do not move in Somers' political and aristocratic circles and must refine their good taste through simpler social fare. If Somers offers the end goal, he cannot provide the means by which it is to be realized. What Addison and Steele require is a narrator who can travel widely so that readers might have the variety of experience needed to test their sensibilities in different social contexts; who is especially attuned to the unfolding of interpersonal interactions and the way he is received by others; who is well informed on a broad range of subjects and so never misses a lesson through his ignorance; and who does not unduly influence the observations he sets out to undertake. Addison and Steele need a "spectator" rather than one of the "species," in other words, and the work they set out to do is precisely

that of bridging the gap between the real Somers and the impossible Mr. Spectator, who in practice share only one quality: taste. Smith will later propose a mechanism of transmission that is dependent on the presence of neither the inimitable Somers nor the inimitable Mr. Spectator, but before that Addison and Steele offer up the loosely tied episodes of their perambulatory narrator.

Wise, but not “Overwise”: The Risks of Posturing and Misreading

Conspicuously absent among the topics of the *Spectator* papers is any discussion of politics, an omission all the more notable given that Addison and Steele had gone to the trouble of giving Mr. Spectator near-universal reach. That a periodical devoted to furnishing the middle class with both the substance and style of enlightened conversation should assiduously avoid explicit mention of politics in an age where writing was keenly political demands explanation. In two issues from the periodical’s short-lived second run in 1714, in which Steele did not take part, Addison makes reference to this gap. Number 567 opens with Mr. Spectator admitting that he has often been counseled that his paper might have a longer run if only he “should take care to season it with Scandal” (478). Rather than acquiesce, Mr. Spectator proceeds to lampoon what he sees as the tawdry print customs of the day, like replacing parts of names with dashes so that the reader must fill in the gap, or the unnecessary “sprinkling” of polemical words that have been italicized to draw the eye and spur “Modern Controversie” (478). The satire ends with Mr. Spectator arguing that the nonsense he has

produced is already a fair example of most “State-tracts” and claiming, on this basis, “that if I would apply my Mind to it, I might in a little time be as great a Master of the Political Scratch as any the most eminent Writer of the Age” (479).

While Addison chooses to avoid scandalous material, even though it might attract readers, as an indication of the journal’s good taste, this choice does not prevent him from taking political hacks to task. Good taste indeed requires it. That Mr. Spectator puts distance between himself and such “newspaper” writers takes on special significance when one recalls that *The Tatler* frequently included the latest domestic and international news.³¹ Mackie attributes this change in direction to *The Spectator*’s focus on the “sociocultural and ethical criticism that proved the great strength and irresistible draw of *The Tatler*”; the later periodical learned from its earlier incarnation that good taste meant the appearance of impartiality, even though both were known as Whiggish publications (2). This pretense notwithstanding, issue 567 does not set out to justify the papers’ lack of political fodder. Rather, its real thrust is to dramatize the risks of seeing scandal and politics everywhere, especially where they are absent.

Number 568 confirms this claim. When Mr. Spectator joins three pipe smokers in a coffee house to ask what they thought of the previous number, one fellow responds that the issue was “more witty than wise,” while another thinks it relatively harmless.

³¹ *The Tatler* did not want to be thought of as a newspaper, it must be said, so it disguised its news by claiming that everything shared in its papers was drawn from conversations in coffee houses. Nonetheless, it frequently included detailed analyses of political issues at home and abroad, though with diminishing emphasis over time.

But the last interlocutor is incensed; having misunderstood the satire and unaware that he is in Mr. Spectator's presence, he objects that the narrator "can't for his Life keep out of Politicks" (480). Despite the fact that Mr. Spectator's targets are imaginary, the irate gentleman condemns the entire issue as libelous, earning the narrator's open mockery. He is, to use Mr. Spectator's word, "otherwise," a defect so common "in this censorious Age" as to risk turning "even the best Books in the World Into a Libel" (480). With this remark, Mr. Spectator clarifies the true stakes of the encounter in the coffee house. Not one of his interlocutors has grasped the fact that the group is objecting to a parody of political discourse—not even the fellow who tries to defend the publication against patently false accusations. Still and all, only the angry respondent earns the periodical's derision. The one who considers the issue "more witty than wise" neither speaks another word nor is mocked, while the fellow who fails to understand the joke but considers it harmless redeems his misunderstanding by his "Mild Disposition" and "Whig ... Heart" (480). Worse still than lack of understanding, then, is pretending to know more than one does, and that is the crime of the angry gentleman. *The Spectator* is designed first of all for those readers who *do* get the joke, and yet, as this incident demonstrates, it must leave room for others to enter those ranks.

For this reason, Addison dramatizes the range of responses possible in those who miss the point, from casual dismissal, through harmless and cautious misunderstanding, to damning overconfidence. The last is held up as a warning against transgressing the

boundaries of good taste. Should Mr. Spectator take the advice of his readers, Addison implies, he would be drawn into a world of debate whose terms have been set by the “otherwise,” and he is therefore better served in distancing himself through irony, a simultaneous display of wit and caution. Indeed, given the chance to confront directly a misreader of the kind against which he cautions, Mr. Spectator prefers to remain anonymous; for the man who can go anywhere, it is equally important to choose where *not* to go. The angry gentleman, moreover, has done exactly what Mr. Spectator warned against by turning a good periodical “into a Libel.” In so censoring what he considers “politicks,” this fellow has not only taken the risk of opening up a political division within polite discourse, but also diminished his own standing by making himself the butt of the joke. To conclude, then, numbers 567 and 568 are exercises in risk management on three levels: *The Spectator* avoids the temptation of muckraking; Mr. Spectator avoids diminishing himself by associating with the angry pipe smoker; and readers are reminded that by posturing they risk becoming a target of satire, which means exclusion from the community of good taste.

Addison and Steele are indeed so intent on policing membership in this community that even physical dangers are deemed the result of choosing the wrong people with whom to associate. The seven issues of *The Tatler* Steele devotes to the topic of dueing between June and July 1709 bring this principle to bear. Number twenty five begins in earnest as the narrator, Isaac Bickerstaff, vows to “examine into the causes

which precipitate men into so fatal a folly" in order to strip dueling "of all its false pretences to credit and reputation amongst men" (207). Bickerstaff recognizes that he takes a grave risk in so addressing the practice of dueling: "when I consider what I am going about, and run over in my imagination all the endless crowd of men of honour who will be offended at such a discourse, I am undertaking, methinks, a work worthy an invulnerable hero in romance, rather than a private gentleman with a single rapier" (207). In a moment that prefigures the creation of Mr. Spectator, Bickerstaff acknowledges that he is able to confront this risk only because life has provided him with "great opportunities" to acquaint himself "with the nature of man." It is on the basis of this familiarity that he proclaims dueling "a custom which all men wish exploded, though no man has courage enough to resist it" (207). Bickerstaff reverses the customary relationship between courage and dueling and finds nothing admirable in the irrational practice of upholding tradition for tradition's sake. When the practice of dueling is judged on its own merits it reveals itself the product of "cowardice, falsehood, and want understanding" that serves only the "valiant coxcomb's ... [tendency] to defend some prevailing folly, and preserve himself from the ingenuity of owning a mistake" (208, 209).

Steele did not allow this issue of *The Tatler* to stand alone on the question of dueling, however, returning to the topic no less than six times. Abandoning the earnest tone of number twenty five, twenty six stages a dialogue between the souls of Socrates

and a man who has just died as a second in a duel. Bickerstaff exploits Socratic reasoning to excoriate the deceased for being more careful in the management of his estate and accounts than in looking after his life. Issue twenty eight makes an explicitly class-based argument that a gentleman should never take part in a duel because it makes him no better than a common mercenary, the kind of man who would “clap his jaw right within two inches of the touch-hole of a musket, fire it off, and huzza, with as little concern” as if he were eating a chicken (232). Then, for good measure, number twenty eight attacks the prestige of the military, where one might *expect* to find gallantry rather than self-interest and ambition. Twenty nine likens the custom of dueling to the battles of ancient knights who sought out mythical monsters because they had nothing better to do, while modern courtship is compared to a castle siege: only by surviving the assaults of repeated challenges to duel can a man win the affections of a lady. Number thirty one provides a satirical history of the custom of dueling, and thirty eight and thirty nine finish the series, tongue still firmly in cheek, by reporting how the reading public has reacted to this protracted exposé.

Why devote so many issues to the custom of dueling and make so many people, places, and institutions the target of mockery after Bickerstaff has already dismissed the practice on its merits? Aside from the fact that he means for *The Tatler* to entertain its readership, Steele wants to attach a set of negative stereotypes to those who choose to duel: they are “slaves to fashion,” hotblooded Spaniards who kill at the slightest

provocation, corrupt military officials, and upholders of ancient and ridiculous customs, among other things (238). Most of all, Steele wants his readers to *feel* the incongruity between the traditional justification of dueling as a noble social practice and the standard of good taste that he hopes to bring into being. If his first appeal is to reason, then his strongest appeal is to good taste, which explains why so little of his broadside aims directly at the risk to life and limb, in return for no palpable gain, that dueling entails. Because its fruitless nature has proved insufficient to dissuade gentlemen from dueling, Steele must displace the association between dueling and honor with a more powerful and timely social distinction—one that values fine sensibility over and above traditional displays of masculine virtue.

Bickerstaff identifies the greatest obstacle in this endeavor as “one unintelligible word which ... I confess to you I find very hard to explain, which is, the term ‘satisfaction’” (208). As custom would have it, a grievously man offended can demand of his antagonist the “satisfaction” of settling their dispute by means of a duel. But this, in Bickerstaff’s view, only obscures a “contradiction” in the very terms of dueling that Steele exposes in an imaginary letter from an aggrieved party to his insulter:

SIR,

Your extraordinary behaviour last night, and the liberty you were pleased to take with me, makes me this morning give you this, to tell you, because you are an ill-bred puppy, I will meet you in Hyde Park an hour hence; and because you want

both breeding and humanity, I desire you would come with a pistol in your hand, on horseback, and endeavour to shoot me through the head; to teach you more manners. If you fail of doing me this pleasure, I shall say, you are a rascal on every post in town: and so, sir, if you will not injure me more, I shall never forgive what you have done already. (209)

The letter exposes what the terms “satisfaction” obscures—that a duel is as likely to compound injustice as to remedy it, and thus the only real value in demanding satisfaction lies in what that act signals to others. In order to modify that signal, Steele replaces the axis of honorable-dishonorable with that of tasteful-distasteful. To duel is not to defend one’s honor, but to be a boor.

Disavowing the Distasteful: *Tatler/Spectator* and the Lack of Normativity

Despite the great lengths to which Addison and Steele go in search of good taste, they never come closer to defining it in positive rather than negative terms than in issue 409. Addison concedes as much at the very end of the number, choosing instead to pursue another tack. He hopes that his famous series “*on the Pleasures of the Imagination* ... will perhaps suggest to the Reader of literature what it is that gives a Beauty to the many Passages of the finest Writers both in Prose and Verse” (710).³² This is a telling choice on several counts. First, Addison is looking to define taste indirectly by exploring

³² This series consists of issues 411 through 421, originally published as one very long essay. It covers a range of topics loosely tied together because Addison believes they stimulate the powers of the imagination.

the qualities to which it is drawn rather than the thing itself. Second, even this indirect identification is provisional, as indicated by Addison's double equivocation that he can "perhaps suggest" what qualities taste finds attractive. Most importantly, this is only a lateral move; he finds it necessary to invoke a second mental faculty, the imagination, in order to define how good taste is exercised. As I will soon demonstrate, Smith seizes on the faculty of imagination as the means of developing good taste in oneself and transmitting it to others, but for Addison the imagination remains just another component of an underspecified system.

The slipperiness of Addison and Steele's definition of taste is evident in the difficulty Mackie has in defining the term. While she credits their notion of taste for "advanc[ing] modern standards of British culture," she also claims that the periodicals "do not so much repress or expel the objects of their criticism as appropriate and transform them" (3,6). But the question at hand is precisely this: transform them into what? Following Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Mackie is quite right when she states that "the middle ground of bourgeois standards of taste and culture was often carved out through negotiation with 'high' elite culture and 'low' popular culture [with] ... the excesses of each rejected," as the examples of dueling and the Common-Place Talker make clear: outdated aristocratic sensibilities and unwarranted posturing are equally boorish (6). Yet the best positive models of taste offered by the papers are oddly mute—Arietta cannot speak her mind, and Mr. Spectator proves his good taste by

declining to speak his admiration of her aloud. In the absence of this positive definition, it is no surprise that one approach to understanding taste is to always see it relationally, in terms of what it is set against or what it is not. In a sense, this constitutes a theory of risk management, insofar as taste is explicitly conceived in terms of avoiding social missteps. But it is an impoverished theory, for as we have seen strict risk avoidance is not a sustainable and productive strategy for self-fashioning.

Smith is able to reconceive taste as something more than just a compromise formation. To be sure, he shares Addison and Steele's commitment to moderation: *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is heavily influenced by Smith's admiration of the Stoics, in particular their belief in the importance of "self-command."³³ As he rethinks taste for the later eighteenth century, however, the concept takes on a normative function that it lacks in the early periodicals devoted to the subject. To transform the taste of gentlemen into a potentially democratic norm, Smith had to open up and expose what remained a black box in the earlier discourse on taste, namely, the mechanism by which taste is transmitted from individual to individual. He rejects the idea that taste is an internal faculty of mind that some have and others lack, instead presenting taste as a perspective

³³ Margaret Graver has challenged the traditional reading that Stoic philosophers extolled the suppression of emotions, arguing instead that they understood the emotions as another source of data that could be evaluated by the rational mind in its quest for perfection; see *Stoicism and Emotion*. Smith, however, understood the Stoics as many other critics have, and followed what he saw as their line of reasoning in his own insistence that any excessive display of feeling, even positive feeling, was harmful to the individual and to society. The Stoics make only two minor appearances in the *Spectator* papers, the first when Steele mocks their excesses in issue 243. Steele chides Cato for his belief that "all good Qualifications, of what kind soever," must be attributable to virtue, so that Cato "would not allow any one but a virtuous Man to be handsome" (130).

one can adopt for seeing the world. This point of view is embodied by an individual who has learned to bear witness to the emotions of others, imagine himself in their respective positions, and then judge whether the strength of their reaction to a given stimulus is commensurate with the underlying provocation. The individual aspiring to tasteful conduct, moreover, imagines his own behavior being judged in the same way, and in time comes to behave as if he were always being observed by an impartial spectator. In short, the imagination both allows individuals to trade places and encourages emotional moderation. This sets the stage for the second act of imagination Smith requires, analogous to the first, through which individuals internalize the figure of the spectator and learn to judge themselves. As each man comes to believe that he carries in his “breast” an internal spectator capable of rendering judgment, the need for the validation of an external observer—an early version of Freud’s social ego—dissipates, replaced by self-generated approbation. Just as an external observer becomes redundant, in time the operations of this imagined internal spectator fade from an individual’s conscious attention, until he reflexively judges and modifies all of his own behaviors.

In this regard, Smith’s model anticipates the disciplinary power that Foucault argues flourished in the modern educational apparatus and became widely institutionalized, alongside other mechanisms of population management, during the nineteenth century. Rather than work on the mind through the body, like the older

system of corporal punishment, disciplinary power works through the mind to ensnare the body “in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions,” that define the limits and obligations of normative behavior (*Discipline and Punish*, 11).

Insofar as an individual subjected to the standard of the ideal spectator feels compelled to temper his emotional responses to respect the bounds of propriety as enforced by the gaze of others, Smith’s ideal spectator exerts the same interpellative effect that British culture will later put in practice in the first national educational system. As in Smith’s voluntary norm, the power of institutionalized discipline depends on inducing “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (*Discipline and Punish*, 201). Just as Smith’s conception of the impartial spectator depends on the individual becoming his own most rigorous observer, so Foucault’s subject of institutionalized discipline internalizes the sense of always being watched and consequently becomes self-disciplining. I stress the relationship between Smith and Foucault to underscore Smith’s relative democracy by contrast to Addison and Steele. That Smith’s model should appear so similar to a theory of disciplinary power Foucault based on Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the panopticon, the institutional apparatus par excellence, implies that any individual can internalize taste and use it to distinguish him or herself from others.

This theory also helps me situate Smith’s model in a broader historical trajectory that moves away from the elite taste that Addison and Steele personified as Mr.

Spectator, a one-off who proved instructive for readers but remained fundamentally different from them. Smith's impartial spectator, on the other hand, both generates and asserts its moral authority by creating an individual whose refinement does not set him apart from the rest of humanity but allows him to disappear into it. The taste he embodies determines the protocols for polite social interaction, rather than the rules by which he can prove his understanding superior to that of others. In short, the relation of reader to spectator that Smith imagines is in this respect diametrically opposed to the ideal imagined by Addison and Steele. The internalized spectator of Smith anticipates a model of discipline that, as Foucault puts it, "individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations" (*Discipline and Punish*, 146).

It must be said that Foucault's theory of discipline is focused on institutions of power—prisons, hospitals, schools, and so on—that do not map readily onto Smith's model of taste. But Foucault eventually acknowledged that his first effort to describe disciplinary power took too rigid a view, which he revised by dividing managerial power between "discipline" and "security."³⁴ To make this distinction, Foucault notes that

³⁴ Foucault says explicitly "[he] was wrong" in describing discipline as the power underpinning "the establishment of liberal ideologies and liberal policies in the eighteenth century." Instead, the notion of freedom on which these developments depend "is nothing else but the correlative of the deployment of the apparatuses of security" (48). Insofar as security neither proscribes, like the law, nor tries to stifle, like

[d]iscipline works in a sphere that is, as it were, complementary to reality. Man is wicked, bad, and has evil thoughts and inclinations, etcetera. So, within the disciplinary space a complementary sphere of prescriptions and obligations is constituted that is all the more artificial and constraining as the nature of reality is tenacious and difficult to overcome. Finally security, [rather than work] in a sphere complementary to reality, tries to work within reality, by getting the components of reality to work in relation to each other, thanks to and through a series of analyses and specific arrangements. (*Security, Territory, Population*, 47)

If Smith's model of taste depends on the omnipresent gaze of the other to lend it its force, it also works outside formalized institutions of power and within networks of reciprocal relations that Foucault positions at the heart of security. In this respect, security as well as discipline constitute the legacy that enlightenment Europe bequeathed to the nineteenth-century and the fully-formed culture of capitalism. It is thus no surprise that Foucault cites risk as one of the "new notions" of the eighteenth century that demand the introduction of a security apparatus, one designed not "to nullify" danger as discipline did but instead to establish its "normal" parameters (*Security, Territory, Population*, 61-62). On this basis, we can see Smith's impartial spectator as a norm that not only draws considerable authority from disciplinary

discipline, but rather seeks to manage the dynamic forces of the modern world so that they tend toward the correct target, it is the system of power suited to a world based on liberal ideas about self-determination.

apparatuses, but also distributes and reproduces that power through networks of circulation designed to minimize risk.

The codependence of different forms of punishment and control that Foucault establishes should call to mind Albert O. Hirschman's account of the emergence of economic interest as the primary check, displacing moral philosophy, on dangerous human passions—an account in which Smith plays a central role. Resisting the notion that the growing emphasis on economic interests throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represents a break between the pre-modern and modern worlds, in *The Passions and the Interests* Hirschman argues instead that the “lengthy ideological change” was “an endogenous process” in which “commercial, banking, and similar money-making pursuits become honorable ... after having stood condemned or despised as greed, love of lucre, and avarice for centuries past” (4, 9). Feudal and Renaissance notions of a society organized by aristocracy and heroism were dismantled very quickly under concurrent attacks by the likes of Hobbes, La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and Racine, Hirschman concedes, though those notions were not, as generally assumed, immediately replaced by bourgeois ideals. Indeed, as Hirschman traces the philosophical effort to redefine vice and virtue for a world where moral philosophy was seen to have failed, we see that the establishment of modern social norms was not the result of simply substituting one philosophy for another but an integral part of the secularization process.

Though they are not explicitly in conversation, Hirschman's account begins with the same seventeenth-century emphasis that Foucault identifies as authorizing disciplinary institutions, namely, the need to address man's fundamental wickedness. In Hirschman's view, three strategies developed over the course of the following century to control human passions: repressing them, harnessing them, or playing them off against each other. Hirschman is primarily concerned with the development of the third of these strategies, which rests on manipulating "countervailing passions." For a long time, Hirschman explains, the countervailing passions were considered the most promising means of ensuring human morality. This line of thinking assumed that man's "interests" could counterbalance their "passions," the former being relatively predictable and focused on a longer time horizon, while the latter were impulsive and therefore risky.

The extent of the philosophical effort to establish the interests as a natural curb to the passions was quickly overshadowed by the phenomenal success of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which turned on a single idea that, in Hirschman's estimation, reduced the philosophical argument of its age to a proto-utilitarian ethic: if avarice were turned into a virtue, then economic self-interest would subsume all other passions. Greed was suddenly elevated to the position formerly occupied by virtue and self-restraint. As Hirschman puts it, "Adam Smith abandoned the distinction between the interests and the passions in making his case for the unfettered pursuit of private gain; he chose to stress the economic benefits that this pursuit would bring rather than the political

dangers and disasters it would avert" (69). Where Machiavelli had first distinguished "passions" from "interests" in writing on statecraft, which he regarded as a separate sphere from economics, Smith's move to make economic interest the sole countervailing passion, and therefore a virtue, proved so successful that it collapsed the space between the terms, transforming what had been "antonyms" into "synonyms" (111).

With his emphasis on control, predictability, and long- over short-term gratifications, the newly formed man of interest envisioned by Smith and theorized by Hirschman is remarkably similar to Smith's impartial spectator. This is no accident, Hirschman contends, as "[i]t is precisely in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that [Smith] paves the way for collapsing these other passions into the drive for 'the augmentation of fortune'; or, as Smith had originally put it, "it is chiefly from this regard to the sentiments of mankind, that we pursue riches and avoid poverty" (108). It is here, finally, that we arrive at a theory of taste that is neither complement nor accessory to Smith's economic theory but, to the contrary, the very condition of possibility for the emergence of modern economic man. The internal spectator provides the instrument for the production of a subject formed by a method of risk management quite different from the one at work in the novels of Defoe and Richardson, but a method which nevertheless shares in the belief that self-management provides the means of achieving economic independence. Through the imagination the presumptive head of household forecasts the consequences of acting on his passions; if he is interested in belonging to respectable

society he must, before taking charge of his estate and dependents, take charge of what Locke called every man's "Property in his own Person." Smith's internal spectator shows how the individual so invested internalizes a normative model that becomes his own second nature, controlling his body through his mind regardless of his social situation.

The Role of Risk in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

It is only possible to be virtuous, Smith argues, in the face of moral or physical risk: "To act according to the dictates of prudence, of justice, and proper beneficence, seems to have no great merit where there is no temptation to do otherwise. But to act with cool deliberation in the midst of the greatest dangers and difficulties ... is the character of the most exalted wisdom and virtue." He thus places "self-command" at the center of his moral philosophy, calling it a "great virtue" in its own right and the characteristic from which "all other virtues seem to derive their principal lustre" (241). At the same time, Smith acknowledges that self-command does not, by itself, ensure successful risk management. Though "[t]he command of fear, the command of anger, are always great and noble powers," he continues, when directed by the wrong motives "they may be excessively dangerous." One may be valorous in the pursuit "of the greatest injustice," or use calmness to mask "the most determined and cruel resolution to revenge" (241). Only the man within is privy to motive and intention, and so the

judgments of the impartial spectator one has taken into his breast are far more reliable than those of an external spectator, no matter how objective.

Given that “danger” and its variants appear no less than seventy times in *Moral Sentiments*, it can be no coincidence that Smith identifies two different kinds of risk in his description of self-command. By first praising self-command “in the midst of the greatest dangers and difficulties,” Smith links virtue directly to risk management. As with Defoe, Richardson, and Addison and Steele, it is in the face of risk that one forms and exhibits the traits that make him an individual. Like Richardson, however, Smith is particularly concerned with separating the appearance of virtue from the real thing, noting that self-command itself becomes “excessively dangerous” when it masks sinister intentions; Lovelace, for one, demonstrated incredible patience and restraint in his scheming. With this possibility in mind, Smith argues that a robust theory of risk management has to account not only for the dangers presented by an inherently risky material world but also for those mobilized by individual choice. If Defoe self-consciously examines the errors of his protagonists and Richardson gives the lie to Lovelace’s assumption that a single transformative moment can redeem a lifetime of profligacy, Smith manifests the same impulse by insisting on a more dynamic model of risk management. Self-command may be the best protection against external danger, but it is not inherently good. Thus where Addison and Steele refused to boil down risk management to the precept “all that is needed is good taste,” Smith resists the

temptation to say “all that is needed is self-command.” In both cases, it is the process of exercising these traits that matters.

Indeed, Smith puts a barrier in the way of acquiring self-command that is reminiscent of the paradox of good taste that Addison and Steele confront. “Hardships, dangers, injuries, misfortunes, are the only masters under whom we can learn the exercise of [self-command],” Smith contends, “[b]ut these are all masters to whom nobody willingly puts himself to school” (153). Just as one must have good taste before he can recognize it in others, so self-command is the precondition for successfully managing the risks that teach self-command. As a result, Smith finds it difficult to identify men “of the most perfect virtue,” who join “the most perfect self-command of ... selfish feelings” to “the most exquisite sensibility to the ... feelings of others” (152). Men who command their “selfish feelings” tend to be soldiers, for example, habituated to controlling their emotions in the face of constantly renewed danger, while men of “exquisite sensibility” tend to live lives of ease, allowing them to worry less about their own well-being and more for that of others. As a way to bridge the gap, Smith proposes that an individual should interact with people from all parts of society. “Live with strangers” and “do not even shun the company of enemies,” he advises; “frequent those who are independent of you, ... those who were once your superiors,” and even those who “render their company too disagreeable.” Whether one is “in adversity” or “in

prosperity," the individual who lives by this principle will develop patience and learn to resist the temptation (154).

Smith's method of risk management differs in two respects from that of Addison and Steele. The protocols of good taste were designed first of all to define and protect an elite community, whereas Smith's more democratic impulses are clear. It is his hope that exposure to various kinds of social relations will improve an individual's character, not endanger it. Even more importantly, Smith's emphasis on temperance turns a key facet of Addison and Steele's schema on its head. Taste is meant to be performed, even if at times in subtle ways. Arietta performs taste for Mr. Spectator, and though he is not ostentatious in returning her performance, he makes it a point to say that his tears were proof enough of his approbation. At other moments, the connection between taste and performance is more pronounced, as when Addison and Steele emphasize wit as a sign of sophistication. Self-command, on the other hand, is not a characteristic one strives to display; it may be noticed, true, but it is first of all about control, not social signaling. Smith thus dispenses with the ironizing distance employed by Addison and Steele, because there is nothing in the least bit playful or ironic in his tone or substance. True to Smith's Stoic influences, the risk manager that he imagines is first of all distinguished by a genuine disinterest in attracting attention to his own misfortunes. A son who mourns his father will win the approbation of every witness, Smith contends, because the mourner stresses the loss of his parent rather than his own pain. It would be a great

dishonor, however, if that son should “indulge the same weakness upon account of any [personal] misfortune,” so much so that “if he should even be led out to public execution, and there shed one single tear upon the scaffold, he would disgrace himself for ever” (49). It is not against any display of emotion that Smith cautions, but against any display that serves self-interest.

With risk, then, comes opportunity, and at times Smith seems more than a little pleased to find so many dangers in the world. Thus, in his view, a monarch who attains his position by overcoming “immense dangers and difficulties” is preferable to one like Louis XIV, to whom authority came by default (54). Smith indeed goes so far as to say that a “brave man exults in those dangers, in which, from no rashness of his own, his fortune has involved him” (59). The linking of risk with opportunity is by now familiar, but only Smith speaks of exultation in the face of danger. The choice of word is made all the more striking because, in Smith’s view, that exultation cannot be allowed in any way to become visible. More so than other risk theorists, Smith offers a granular account of precisely how risk, risk management, and virtue interact. He deems only certain combinations of danger, social context, and expressions of character productive or laudable, and he is exhaustive in distinguishing good combinations from bad. To explain the complex relation between benefit and risk, for instance, Smith quotes a French Cardinal who claimed that “Great dangers have their charms, because there is some glory to be got, even when we miscarry. But moderate dangers have nothing but

what is horrible, because the loss of reputation always attends the want of success” (61). To make sense of how Smith distinguishes the risks he values from those he does not, I find it instructive, once again, to compare his attitude on political treatises to that of Addison and Steele.

Where Smith’s forbears had seen fit to lampoon political writing, Smith finds that “[n]othing tends so much to promote public spirit ... [as] political disquisitions,” which, “if just, and reasonable, and practicable, are of all the works of speculation the most useful. Even the weakest and the worst are not altogether without their utility. They serve at least to animate the public passions of men” (187). Addison and Steele consider bad political writing a source of temptation to transgress the boundaries of good taste, which is for them reason enough to avoid political discussions in the first place. Smith, by contrast, advocates that one confront and overcome such overtures to bad taste, thus developing ways of making even the shoddiest argument serve some productive end. At other moments, however, we find Smith taking up a decidedly cautious attitude toward potential influence from others, particularly when it comes to money. Though he acknowledges a general tendency to admire the rich and powerful, Smith believes this is more a function of habit than a sign they are in fact praiseworthy. Indeed, power and riches are themselves dangerous, “enormous and operose machines contrived to bring a few trifling conveniences ... and which in spite of all our care are ready every moment to burst into pieces, and to crush in their ruins the unfortunate possessor” (183).

If wealth invites so many temptations to excess, then wealth would seem paradoxically at odds with the self-restraint that Smith, as well as Hirschman, see as serving self-interest. Indeed, we might hear Crusoe's father speaking through Smith when the latter recommends a steady middle state of being as the surest course to prosperity:

The man who lives within his income, is naturally contented with his situation, which, by continual, though small accumulations, is growing better and better every day. He is enabled gradually to relax, both in the rigour of his parsimony and in the severity of his application; and he feels with double satisfaction this gradual increase of ease and enjoyment, from having felt before the hardship which attended the want of them. He has no anxiety to change so comfortable a situation, and does not go in quest of new enterprises and adventures, which might endanger, but could not well increase, the secure tranquillity which he actually enjoys. (215)

By invoking "ease," "comfort," and "tranquillity," and by warning against "enterprises and adventure," Smith appears to align himself with an older notion of social position determined by birth, not by the ability to acquire material property. The elder Crusoe's argument is first and foremost a moral one, however, making contentment in the middle station of life necessarily antecedent to the right combination of pleasure and temperance. While Smith would surely admire this call to moderation, his goal is not to

secure this notion of the good life but rather to advance the new project of capital accumulation. In showing that both impulses aim at the same objective, Smith can reconcile the restless acquisitiveness of the son with the father's preference for moderation over greed.

On the question of innovation, Smith again advocates moderation. Arguing that "partiality" for traditional social relationships acts as a check on "the often dangerous spirit of innovation" (232), he goes on to chastise "political speculators" who model themselves on "sovereign princes" in their attempts to engineer forms of social advancement (234). Contrary to the logic underlying such ventures, Smith claims that speculators put the delicate balance of finely tuned nature at risk. He focused instead on the perfectibility of existing systems, as one of his former students suggests in characterizing *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as "a very ingenious attempt to account for the principal phenomena in the moral world from this one natural principle, like that of gravity in the natural world" (3). The description accurately assesses Smith's insistence on systematically working outward from first principles; innovation, by contrast, is the top-down imposition of order on human feelings by an arrogant "man of system" who "cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of" his plan (234). Smith sees the static system that seeks to make the complex order of nature conform to an artificial plan as the greatest threat to a natural equilibrium among the passions.

Rather than hark back to an earlier view of a universe governed by Providence, *Moral Sentiments* rests on a belief that the operations of the natural world, thus the rules for managing those operations, are perfectly clear to those willing to observe them. To make that task easier, Smith takes it upon himself to catalogue those rules in all their minutiae and, in this way, demonstrate that many systems, but especially economics, have self-regulating characteristics. Risk taking remains as important to Smith as it was for Defoe; believing that everything can be modeled in time, Smith renounces only the persuasive power of ceding what escapes one's cognitive grasp to the mysterious workings of Providence. Thus while he shares Defoe's obsessive attention to detail, Smith never advises his reader to look for hidden clues and secret signs. Instead that reader must do the hard work of fleshing out the details of complex logical systems that are at work all around him. The impartial spectator, in other words, is nothing if not the embodiment of close attention to material circumstances. Only within such a carefully compiled framework can one decide which risks to take without upsetting the delicate balance of the natural world. It is for this reason Smith declares that no other theory of moral judgment can "give, or even pretend to give, any precise measure by which the propriety of affection can be ascertained and judged." Only the sympathetic investments of "the impartial and well-informed spectator precise" can provide such a measure (294). Smith builds the figure of the impartial spectator systematically, and if the concept

of “sympathy” serves as his foundation, then the requirement that the spectator be “well-informed” can sometimes achieve comparable importance.

The Impartial and Well-Informed Spectator

Consider Smith’s first example of sympathy in action, in which he addresses the question of how one judges the propriety or impropriety of another individual’s emotional responses. Smith divides his model into two parts: first when the respondent has no personal connection to the stimulus eliciting the response, and second when a response stems from an impetus that is “peculiarly affecting” to one of the parties involved (19). In the first instance, the correct response is one of “taste and good judgment,” which is exercised when, for example, the individual being judged praises “the beauty of a plain, the greatness of a mountain, ... the secret wheels and springs which produce” the movements of the universe, or any subject “of science and taste” that has general appeal (19). In order to truly exhibit good taste, however, that individual must distinguish the acuity of his observation of the phenomenon from that of public opinion. There is little to be admired, Smith contends, if one praises what is “obvious and easy, and in which, perhaps, we have never found a single person who” might disagree in our assessment (19-20). When, on the other hand, the sentiments of another

not only coincide with our own, but lead and direct our own; when in forming them he appears to have attended to many things which we had overlooked, and

to have adjusted them to all the various circumstances of their objects; we not only approve of them, but wonder and are surprised at their uncommon and unexpected acuteness and comprehensiveness. ... It is the acute and delicate discernment of the man of taste, who distinguishes the minute, and scarce perceptible differences of beauty and deformity; ... it is the great leader in science and taste, the man who directs and conducts our own sentiments ... who excites our admiration, and seems to deserve our applause. (20)

In Smith's view, "science and taste" fall under the same rubric, a point he drives home by repeating the phrase in consecutive paragraphs. Thus the well-informed spectator determines the quality of all forms of inquiry, and by uncovering and reframing what public opinion misjudges the figure has a corrective effect on those with weaker powers of perception. In Smith's system, in other words, the well-informed spectator is the means of transmitting taste interpersonally.

In the second instance of evaluating an emotional response—where some personal bias or attachment is likely to color one's judgement—Smith deems it "more difficult to preserve this harmony and correspondence" of sentiments he identifies with sympathy. After all, a "companion does not naturally look upon the misfortune that has befallen me ... from the same point of view" as a stranger (20). In this instance, too, the well-informed spectator bridges the gap between individuals if he will "first of all ... put himself in the situation of the other" and "bring home to himself every little

circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer." To do so, the spectator "must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded" (21). Thus again we find attention to material context as the condition of possibility for sympathy. This social awareness works in two directions, as a reciprocal requirement that falls not only on the observer, but also on the observed.

A person in distress must be aware that an observer can only summon "a passion somewhat analogous to what is felt by the sufferer," never "any thing that approaches to the same degree of violence" (21-22). For the sufferer, however, "relief" can only be found through "the entire concord of the affections of the spectators with his own," a sympathetic correspondence he can "only hope to obtain ... by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him" (22). The sufferer must therefore judge the social context to bring himself into "harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him," creating a "correspondence ... as is sufficient for the harmony of society" (22). There is, in other words, a double modulation at work in Smith's system, whereby observer and sufferer each internalize the emotional response of the other, and through this joint effort produce a social equilibrium—provided the individuals have internalized the model of sympathy.

Having made it clear that taste and sympathy provide instruments of social risk management, Smith goes on to demonstrate how the impartial spectator also guarantees personal safety. "Though it may be true," he says, "the every individual, in his own breast, naturally prefers himself to himself to all mankind, he dares not look mankind in the face, and avow he acts according to this principle. ... If he would act so as that the impartial spectator may enter into the principles of his conduct," Smith continues, "he must ... humble the arrogance of his self-love, and bring it down to something which other men can go along with" (83). Again, by the mutual modulation of self-love, an individual learns to love his competitors as he would have them love him, a twist on the Golden Rule that Smith spells out in a famous passage of *Moral Sentiments*: "In the race for wealth, and honours, and preferments, [man] may run as hard as he can, and strain every nerve and every muscle, in order to outstrip all his competitors. But if he should juggle, or throw down any of them, the indulgence of the spectators is entirely at an end. It is a violation of fair play, which they cannot admit of" (83). On this basis, man's desire for sympathetic support from his fellow man ensures that no individual will be eager to transgress the boundaries of justice.

Without this sense of justice, Smith contends, an individual would find life to be an endless series of dangers: "Men, though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for one another" and "have it so much in their power to hurt" that, without the constraints of justice, "they would, like wild beasts, be at all times ready to fly upon [others]; and man

would enter into an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions" (86). Like social contract theorists before him, Smith transforms the restraint of self-interest into a form of self-interest, performing a sleight of hand that Hirschman would surely recognize. What is especially notable about Smith's version of what was a late eighteenth-century commonplace is the manner in which the figure of the impartial spectator manages risk at every level of social organization, securing individual safety, propriety in small social interactions, and general social harmony. Just as taste links science, art, and indeed all forms of human inquiry for Smith, sympathy and impartiality link all forms of social interaction, a homology that rests on Smith's belief in a general cosmic order composed of intertwining, self-regulating systems that cooperate to maintain equilibrium.

Smith goes so far as to name the impartial spectator a "demigod within the breast," a figure "partly of immortal, yet partly too of mortal extraction." If, claims Smith, "his judgements are steady and firmly directed by the sense of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, he seems to act suitably to his divine extraction: But when he suffers himself to be astonished and confounded by the judgments of ignorant and weak man, he discovers his connexion with mortality" (131). Though the description of the impartial spectator as a demigod appears in only two passages in *Moral Sentiments*, it prepares the reader for a still more remarkable claim that Smith advances roughly two-thirds of the way through his *Theory*. God, Smith writes, "is determined, by his own unalterable perfections, to maintain in [the universe], at all times, the greatest possible

quantity of happiness" (235). His omnipotence is manifest not in his ability to purge imperfection from the world, but rather in an ability to absolutely maximize good. Put another way, God's is nothing other than the perfect risk manager.

When in this light, Smith's emphasis on the well-informed spectator takes on new significance. To be well-informed in the way Smith intends is to exhibit some small part of God's omniscience. "The wise and virtuous man," Smith says, should be "willing that all [his] inferior interests should be sacrificed to the greater interest of the universe, to the interest of that great society of all sensible and intelligent beings, of which God himself is the immediate administrator and director." Knowing that God "can admit into the system of government, no partial evil which is not necessary for the universal good," the wise man accepts "all the misfortunes which may befall" him (235). Nor is "this magnanimous resignation ... beyond the reach of human nature"; it is evident in the manner of "good soldiers," who "cheerfully sacrifice their own little systems to the prosperity of a greater system" (236). Here, Smith brings *Theory of Moral Sentiments* full circle and redefines man as a risk manager who observes God's model by striving to understand the workings of the world as fully as possible.

In his emphasis on attention to the individual's material environment, Smith aligns himself with the theories of risk put forth by Defoe, Richardson, and Addison and Steele. All these risk theorists agree that risk management begins with self-management in the face of unknowable and ever-changing dangers generated by a newly complex

social world. What Smith chooses to de-emphasize, however, is of equal importance. Though attention to context is vital, in comparison to earlier theories Smith's notion of context is remarkably self-contained. He replaces Defoe's "secret hints," as evidence of God's direct intervention in the world, with a god-like figure man is able to carry in his breast. He likewise dismisses Clarissa's insistence on shaping the narrative of her life and afterlife, guaranteeing that others will read her as she wants to be read. Smith argues instead that the best reader of one's character is oneself, and it is by securing the approbation of the impartial spectator that an individual indirectly secures the approbation others. Finally, Smith jettisons the social signaling at the heart of Addison and Steele's model of taste, more concerned as he is with what man manages *not* to signal to others. By defining risk in terms of excess emotion that must be restrained, in other words, Smith significantly advances the project of individuation inaugurated by earlier risk theorists.

Smith says as much in a passage describing "[t]he man of real constancy and firmness," he who has been "thoroughly bred in the great school of self-command, in the bustle and business of the world." This training ensures that such a man "maintains ... control of his passive feelings upon all occasions; and whether in solitude or in society, wears nearly the same countenance, and is affected very nearly in the same manner" (146). By minimizing the importance of social context, Smith opens the door to a version

of the individual that is truly autonomous. Thus the man who has mastered self-command

has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment which the impartial spectator would pass upon his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to suffer the man within the breast to be absent one moment from his attention. With the eyes of this great inmate he has always been accustomed to regard whatever relates to himself. ... He does not merely affect the sentiments of the impartial spectator. He really adopts them. He almost identifies himself with, he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel. (146-147)

Smith stops short of saying that through self-command the individual becomes a self-enclosed entity, with no need for any external check, real or imagined, on his behavior. But he comes right up against that claim, arguing that an individual can very nearly fashion himself into what he wants to be, even at the levels of his emotions. If the man Smith imagines is embedded within the interlocking systems that connect all of Smith's philosophy, that man nevertheless comes remarkably close to being a truly independent agent.

The Operations of Taste and Sympathy in Smith's Economic Theory

In issue 69 of *The Spectator*, Mr. Spectator proclaims that "[t]here is no Place in Town which I so much love to frequent as the *Royal-Exchange*" (259). So great is his love

of commerce that he is overcome by its beauty: “[t]his grand Scene of Business gives me an infinite Variety of solid and substantial Entertainments. As I am a great Lover of Mankind, my Heart naturally overflows with Pleasure at the sight of a prosperous and happy Multitude, insomuch that at many publick Solemnities I cannot forebear expressing my Joy with Tears that have stolen down my Cheeks” (260). Though Arietta puts tears into Mr. Spectator’s eyes with her tasteful decorum, the Royal Exchange does one better, eliciting a public display of emotion from the otherwise reserved narrator.

In his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Smith reverses Mr. Spectator’s claim that economic activity produces beauty, arguing that taste is the driving force of commercial activity:

The taste of beauty, which consists chiefly in the three following particulars, proper variety, easy connection, and simple order, is the cause of all [human] niceness. ... These qualities, which are the ground of preference and which give occasion to pleasure and pain, are the cause of many insignificant demands which we by no means stand in need of. The whole industry of human life is employed not in procuring the supply of our three humble necessities, food, cloaths, and lodging, but in procuring the conveniences of it according to the nicety and delicacy of our taste. (417)

Like Mr. Spectator, Smith links beauty and economic activity through a desire for a “variety” which brings “pleasure.” It is no mere coincidence that Smith repeats these

terms. The human “niceness” to which Smith attributes man’s productive impulses is an apt description of Mr. Spectator’s own standard of taste based on close observation and subtle discrimination. For both Addison and Smith, beauty and economic productivity are intimately tied and depend on the human desire for something more than the bare necessities.

Mr. Spectator’s sense of the beauty of commerce is only augmented as the reach of economic activity expands. Listing exhaustively the goods that England imports and their place of origin, it is a source of pride for him that the advantages of trade are shared by all nations:

I am wonderfully delighted to see such a Body of Men thriving in their own private Fortunes, and at the same time promoting the Publick Stock ... by bringing into their Country whatever is wanted, and carrying out of it whatever is superfluous.

Nature seems to have taken a particular Care to disseminate her Blessings among different Regions of the World, with an Eye to this mutual Intercourse and Traffick among Mankind, that the Natives of the several parts of the Globe might have a kind of Dependance upon one another, and be united together by their common Interest. (260-261)

By asserting that trade is in the “common Interest,” Addison anticipates the anti-mercantilist arguments Smith advances in both *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and *Wealth of*

Nations. Rejecting the long-held belief that a country must export more than it imports to remain economically and politically strong, Smith argues instead that trade between countries is intrinsically mutually beneficial, just as is commerce between individuals. Mr. Spectator, at least, recognizes the value of foreign trade, warning his fellow Englishmen: “[i]f we consider our own Country in its natural Prospect, without any of the Benefits and Advantages of Commerce, what a barren uncomfortable Spot of Earth falls to our Share!” (261). Still, there is another, more important sense in which Addison anticipates Smith.

By arguing for a correlation between private fortune and public benefit, Addison anticipates Smith’s celebrated theory that an “invisible hand” guides individual interests toward economic choices that benefit all of society. In a certain sense, Addison is even more sanguine on this point than Smith, as Addison evidently felt no need for the mediating figure of the invisible hand. Where Mr. Spectator had no trouble imagining the simultaneous advancement of private and public fortune, *Wealth of Nations* makes it clear that individuals think only of self-interest as they make economic choices, uninterested or unaware of the effect those choices have on an aggregate scale. Mr. Spectator’s ability to take in simultaneously the granular and aggregate effects of commercial activity is in large part why he finds the scene so moving. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that it is in *Moral Sentiments*, rather than in *Wealth of Nations*, that he most closely approximates Addison’s formulation, when Smith writes, “what are the

advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation" (50). Smith aligns the desire for better material conditions with the desire for sympathetic approval and thus with the system that ensures personal and social stability.

By inscribing taste and sympathy at the very heart of his economic project, Smith ensures continuity in the strategies of risk management between *Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. Even in his economic theory, he is characteristically committed to moderation and self-control. Smith prefers reinvesting profits over spending them on luxuries, expresses skepticism of excessive margins for businesses, and explicitly ties the remuneration of certain professions to their moral bankruptcy, arguing that only extraordinary wages could attract workers to ignoble work. But where *Moral Sentiments* worked to form a particular type of individual molded through social interaction and expectation, *Wealth of Nations* re-externalizes the very characteristics Smith painstakingly brought into the breast. The self-regulating and temperate qualities that mark the modern individual are also the qualities of larger systems which aggregate those individuals, like economic activity. Having secured the stability of the constituent parts, Smith is able to fashion an analogous system on a far grander scale.

The Role of Risk in *The Wealth of Nations*

Smith uses the word “risk” in a technical sense in *Wealth of Nations*, to indicate that wages and profits must scale to account for the relative desirability and likelihood of different occupations and economic outcomes. The quantitative approach to risk that Smith takes helps explain why some readers understand the text as the first modern, laissez-faire economic treatise, despite the fact that neither “laissez-faire” nor “capitalism” appear in any of Smith’s major writings or university lectures. For a time, the pronounced shift in tone between *Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations* led to what was famously called “the Adam Smith problem,” an argument to the effect that Smith’s two major works presented contradictory views of human nature—the former emphasizing self-sacrifice and the latter self-interest. More recent scholarship has dispatched with the Adam Smith problem, citing ideological connections between the texts that override the difference of their subject matter and the specialized language that Smith uses for each. The concept of risk, in my view, provides the key to the overarching argument that connects the two. Even as Smith shifted to a technical, economic understanding of risk for *Wealth of Nations*, his concern for moral risks remained an important factor.

Recent readings of Smith have resolved the so-called the Adam Smith problem by focusing on the question of what thinking he bequeathed to nineteenth-century political economy. Although Smith is regularly called the father of free market

capitalism, he is also claimed by some behavioral economists, like Richard Thaler, who focus on the intersection of psychology and economics.³⁵ On the other hand, such heterodox theories as those of the anarcho-capitalists discount entirely Smith's contributions to economic history, on the grounds that his corpus is incoherent and overshadowed the work of more keen-sighted predecessors and contemporaries.³⁶ The problem, in my view, lies in Smith's concept of "risk"; he can be accepted or rejected by competing schools of economics because *Wealth of Nations* vacillates between contrary conceptions of the term. Smith's eighteenth-century desire to design a single system that could achieve balance between economic and moral risk allows for him to be understood in technical, psychological, or self-contradictory terms. Although in his view wages and profits should be adjusted to compensate workers and businesses in proportion to the financial risks they take, he feels equally compelled to weigh this impulse against his desire for moderation and restraint in all aspects of life. In this way, I am suggesting, the arguments of *Moral Sentiments* extend to the economic realm.

Smith sets the stage for this tension to play out in the opening pages of *Wealth of Nations*, where he attributes most of the benefits of modern society to the division of labor: "It is the great multiplication of the productions of all the different arts, in consequence of the division of labour, which occasions, in a well-governed society, that

³⁵ See *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics*, p. 7. Thaler has also spoken publicly about Smith's emphasis on the human questions of economics.

³⁶ See chapter 16 of Murray N. Rothbard's *An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*.

universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people" (22). Smith makes here a tempered version of an argument present in *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and an early draft of *Wealth of Nations*, where he calls the division of labor the dividing line between modern and "savage" societies. In the early draft, Smith writes that it is difficult to explain why the "peasant" of modern society should fare better than the "savage," given that the peasant "bears, as it were, upon his shoulders the whole fabric of human society, seem[ing] himself to be pressed down below the ground by the weight" (introduction *Wealth of Nations*, 19-20). On this basis, he concludes that only the efficiencies springing from the division of labor shield the peasant from this fate. Although he deletes the comparison of the peasant to the savage, Smith nonetheless remained true to this argument in the final version of *Wealth of Nations*: where man in a "savage" society provides only for himself and his immediate dependents, modern man produces an overabundance. This shift in terms de-emphasizes the economic stratification of modern society, in order to stress the point that a rising tide lifts all ships. That is to say, everyone will benefit from the division of labor, even though some will be better off than others. Yet the vestiges of Smith's earlier argument still make themselves apparent, first in his desire to extend "opulence" even to "the lowest ranks of people," and second in his use of the qualifier "in a well-governed society," which indicates that government plays a role in assuring the health of both the economy and

the populace. Smith measures a productive society not only in terms of its efficient turning of a profit, but also in its redistribution of that gain to care for all of its members.³⁷

Smith returns to the problem of how to turn particular good into the general good under the topic of specialization in Book Five, but with a very different agenda: “In the progress of the division of labour, the employment ... of the great body of people, comes to be confined to a very few simple operations,” he warns (781). As a result, the understimulated worker “has no occasion to exert his understanding” and “generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become,” gaining “dexterity at his own particular trade” at “the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues” (782). Although the division of labor spreads economic risk so that the individual is not dependent on what he alone is able to acquire and produce, the same division may result in intellectual and moral differences that entail risk of another kind. This state of affairs is inevitable, Smith concludes, “unless government takes some pains to prevent it,” and it is for this reason that he proposes a system of universal education (782). Though “the common people cannot ... be so well instructed as people of some rank and fortune,” he goes on, “the most essential parts of education ... can be acquired at so early a period of life” that even those “bred to the lowest occupations” can be protected against the intellectually corrosive effects of their trades (785). Most

³⁷ In this way, Smith anticipates Jeremy Bentham’s calculus of “the greatest good for the greatest number.”

tellingly, Smith is happy to “impose” this requirement “upon almost the whole body of the people,” through a mix of private and public funding designed to ensure that students can hold teachers accountable for the quality of instruction without needing to absorb the entire cost of their education (785). This comingling of private and public responsibilities, and of economic and moral imperatives, is characteristic of *Wealth of Nations*.

It is clear that Smith’s choice to begin with a discussion of the division of labor allowed him to emphasize the social over and above the technical operations of his economic theory. He was aware, in other words, that he was proposing a biopolitical model of economic relations. Book One goes on to cover price, wages, and profits extensively, but only after establishing the impact of the division of labor on the body politic. What is important about the division of labor, in his view, is that it ensures individuals are no longer responsible for singlehandedly producing what is needed to meet the modern standard of living. This emphasis on the general good recalls *Moral Sentiments*, which made it clear that while participating in society put the individual at risk—in that it exposed him to the unregulated passions of others—such participation provided the only means of learning to overcome that risk. Where Smith’s moral philosophy would prepare each individual to manage the risks of circulating in society, and so come to define himself as an individual on that basis, Smith’s economic theory works on the scale of population, which requires social institutions specifically design to

manage risk. If in Smith's moral philosophy risk precedes and creates the need for risk management, then, his economic theory reverses the order of cause and effect. To become an impartial spectator one must first confront risk in order to immunize himself against it. When it comes to economic relations, however, the division of labor will mitigate individual risk only to open up a new order of social risk that demands a new order of intervention. In short, where *Moral Sentiments* turned inward to the mechanics of the self to manage risk, *Wealth of Nations* turns outward to social institutions.

This contrast is all the more striking when we read *Wealth of Nations* against the models of risk management proposed by Defoe, Richardson, and Addison and Steele. These authors share a concept of self-formation whereby one acquires individual autonomy as he or she circulates in a world of risk that repeatedly assaults the protagonist, forcing him or her to carve out a privileged space of self-mastery. It is in resisting these threats of invasion and corruption that the protagonist achieves self-enclosure. *Moral Sentiments* follows much the same model. The individual requires repeated exposure to the emotions of others in order to internalize the impartial spectator who rejects those displays of feeling that would compromise the integrity of the man of taste and judgment. *Wealth of Nations*, by contrast, imagines a new form of social risk based on the *absence* of stimuli to test the individual's resolve and train his mind. Without this training in taste and discernment, those deprived of an education cannot be expected to model themselves on the more fortunate members of society. At

the aggregate level, then, even a self-regulating citizen is endangered by a population capable of the unrestrained behavior of which we catch but a glimpse in *Moral Sentiments*.

To deal with a form of risk that is systemic, thus well beyond the individual's ability to manage and capable indeed of managing him, Smith returns to the principle of equilibrium among interconnected systems in order to justify the operations of his proposed market. In perhaps his most contentious example, he asks us to distinguish the market price from the "natural" price of a good. The natural price, Smith maintains, is reached "[w]hen the price of any commodity is neither more or less than what is sufficient to pay the rent of the land, the wages of the labour, and the profits of the stock employed in raising, preparing, and bringing it to market, according to their natural rates" (72). Thus the natural price of a produce is based on the entire cost of production and consumption, rather than to the ephemeral circumstances of supply and demand. Even in his own time, these priorities were met with skepticism. David Hume, for example, insisted in his correspondence with Smith that supply and demand establish price.

Classical economists would agree, and the most radical advocates of the free market have seized on Smith's preference for a steady state to claim that Smith is more

accurately the predecessor of Marx's critique of capitalism than of capitalism itself.³⁸ As for Smith, he was determined to maintain the distinction between natural and market price, even as he conceded that "[t]he actual price at which any commodity is commonly sold is called its market price. It may either be above, or below, or exactly the same with its natural price." In any case, the natural price "is regulated by the proportion between the quantity which is actually brought to market, and the demand of those who are willing to pay the natural price of the commodity" (73). If he thought that the market price was indeed the "actual price" of a good, then why bother to distinguish the two, especially when the logic of supply and demand was ready and waiting to explain how prices were set?

Smith is obviously unwilling to offer a model of the free market in which social stability plays no part. For should the market price be indeed understood as completely free of the natural price, which is to say, free of the price needed to make an industry self-sustaining, the market would present a threat to the very livelihood of those whose labor supported it. Rather than address directly the problem of the uneven distribution of wealth, Smith introduces an alternative problem in the form of a gap between market

³⁸ Once again, see chapter 16 of Murray Rothbard's *An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, which is devoted to the great harm Smith did to the development of free market economics. Rothbard believed that government is simply theft of private property, and that the market should be the only force structuring the interactions of modern individuals. I do not cite the arguments of anarcho-capitalists because I agree with them or grant them any intellectual authority in writing the history of economics, but to highlight how Smith had immediately put his finger on capitalism's greatest pressure point. Rothbard's political views were particularly reprehensible.

and natural price. He no doubt found this conception of the problem more satisfying to address because he could solve it by invoking the dynamic powers of a self-regulating system. "The natural price," as he puts it, is "the central price, to which the process of all commodities are continually gravitating" (75). The equilibrium-seeking tendency of natural systems will guarantee that risk is eventually diminished, ensuring that the market price never drifts too far from the natural price. In fact, in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* Smith had explicitly tied natural price to the question of risk. Defining the natural price on a case by case basis, Smith contends: "A man then has the natural price of his labour when it is sufficient to maintain him during the time of labour, to defray the expence of education, and to compensate the risk of not living long enough and of not succeeding in the business" (424). Natural price, the price to which all goods tend, is indexed to the well-being of an individual producer and the level of risk he accepts in order to bring a particular good to market. It is, simply put, a means of managing economic risk by managing the conditions for the social basis of economic production. Any economy will falter if it lacks the means of replenishing the supply of labor.

Smith next turns to an explanation of how wages and profits provide the means of managing both economic and moral risk. On an economic level, wages must take into account both the physical dangers and the probability of success in a given career. Smith links the tangible risk to the body with which his readers were perfectly familiar to the quantitative and technical economic risk that he wants the public to understand.

Perhaps the most interesting question of risk on which the matter of wages have bearing, however, is a moral rather than a financial one. Though Smith is consistently earnest in his analysis, what he has to say about a career in the arts sounds gratuitous:

[t]here are some very agreeable and beautiful talents of which the possession commands a certain sort of admiration; but of which the exercise for the sake of gain is considered, whether from reason or prejudice, as a sort of publick prostitution. The pecuniary recompence, therefore, of those who exercise them in this manner, must be sufficient, not only to pay for the time, labour, and expence of acquiring the talents, but for the discredit which attends the employment of them as the means of subsistence. The exorbitant rewards of players, opera-singers, opera-dancers, &c. are founded upon those two principles; the rarity and beauty of the talents, and the discredit of employing them in this manner. (124)

It is a testament to how much Smith insists on personal reserve that he would liken actors and opera performers to “publick” prostitutes, especially when actual prostitutes operate publicly themselves. He also returns to the question of the status of performers in a later section of *Wealth of Nations*, classifying their work as “unproductive labor.” But in this context, his chief objection seems to be that entertainers present a false self for public consumption. By seeking to elicit an emotional response from the audience, and one that does not necessarily reflect their own emotions, performers betray the ideals of the impartial spectator twice over. Like prostitutes, in other words, they inflame a

passion that isn't a genuine reflection of their own.³⁹ Smith argues that these talents are not so rare as they appear, in fact, but rather are frequently hidden from public view, before transitioning seamlessly into the argument that individuals generally tend to overestimate both their abilities and their luck. They are bad risk managers, in other words, and this shortcoming is responsible for underwriting many losing ventures—everything from buying lottery tickets to choosing the dangers of a life at sea.

Individuals make the same mistake in overestimating how far their profits will go. Though it is clear to them that they must be able to cover the costs of a financial venture, in Smith's view they often fail to adequately cushion themselves against the risk of future failure. As he notes, "[b]ankruptcies are most frequent in the most hazardous trades," especially those for which insurance markets do not exist (128). But when it comes to profit, the greatest risk is *not* undercompensation but rather greed. The most "fatal" of all the negative effects of excessive profits, Smith argues, is that they destroy that parsimony which in other circumstances is natural to the character of the merchant. When profits are high, that sober virtue seems to be superfluous, and expensive luxury to suit better the affluence of his situation. But the owners of the great mercantile capitals are necessarily the leaders and

³⁹ In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke argues that rhetoric serves no purpose but to "insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment," concluding that it is a "perfect cheat." Rhetoric is "wholly to be avoided," but there is a catch: it is seductive, like the "fair sex," and thus "it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving, wherein men find pleasure to be deceived" (452). Smith seems to be following the same logic in his criticism, linking seduction with forms of expression meant to move our feelings rather than our understanding.

conductors of the whole industry of every nation, and their example has a much greater influence upon the manners of the whole industrious part of it than that of any other order of men. If his employer is attentive and parsimonious, the workman is very likely to be so too; but if the master is dissolute and disorderly, the servant who shapes his work according to the pattern which his master prescribes to him, will shape his life too according to the example which he sets him. (612)

Echoing both Defoe and Mr. Spectator, Smith sees merchants as the economic and moral lifeblood of the nation. The temptation to rake in excessive profits puts at risk the stability of society as a whole, and Smith is concerned that this proclivity has already taken root in English merchants. Thus, while he regards “parsimony” as their “natural ... character,” elsewhere in *Wealth of Nations* he laments “the mean rapacity, the monopolizing spirit of merchants and manufacturers, who neither are, nor ought to be the rulers of mankind” (493). This is one of Smith’s more difficult contradictions to reconcile—how can the merchant be naturally parsimonious and rapacious?

When Smith laments the greed of merchants, he has in mind a mercantilist economy hell-bent on enriching itself by “beggaring all [its] neighbors” (493). The temptations of greed melt away, however, when one replaces these mercantilist principles with a belief in the mutual benefits of trade. Deciding what economic system was best for England, in other words, was in Smith’s mind also a moral question. By

rejecting mercantilism in favor of a more natural, self-regulating system of exchange, he understood that the world would reap moral benefits that exceeded the economic payoff. For Smith, to minimize economic risk is almost always to minimize moral risk as well, and when the two are incongruent, his argument will intervene on the side of morality. With this in mind, we can see the reasoning behind some of his otherwise surprising claims about profit. When, for example, he seems to assume that the insurance industry is not particularly lucrative, or that employers typically reserve very little profit for themselves above what they need to protect their business against unforeseen financial difficulties, he challenges our modern economic sense. Modern business practices indeed demonstrate how far economic and moral well-being can diverge without jeopardizing profits. For Smith, this discrepancy was simply unthinkable.

To make economic frugality equivalent to the temperate behavior of the impartial spectator, Smith introduces another questionable distinction: “productive” versus “unproductive” labor. Productive labor “adds ... to the value of the materials which [one] works upon,” as when one manufactures cloth (330). Unproductive labor, by contrast, no matter “how honourable, how useful or how necessary soever, produces nothing for which an equal quantity of service can afterwards be procured” (331). Which is to say, unproductive labor produces nothing durable. This category embraces an incredible span of professions, from that of servant to that of soldier, indeed from the

“gravest and most important” to the “most frivolous professions: churchmen, lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds; players, buffoons, musician, opera singers, opera dancers” (331). Productive labor has the advantage of supporting the growth of capital, one of Smith’s chief economic goals, and it is for this reason that Smith privileges it. It is not enough, however, to prioritize labor that produces tangible goods; Smith also requires frugality, which he sees as productive labor’s natural complement. “Capitals are increased by parsimony, and diminished by prodigality and misconduct,” Smith reasons, concluding that “every frugal man [is] a publick benefactor” (337, 340). His insistence on saving and reinvesting profits over spending on luxuries is given an economic justification, to be sure, as it is the most efficient way to grow the economy as a whole, but it is clear that Smith’s motivating principle is first of all a moral one. To have individuals spending their profits on extravagancies is to encourage the perverse incentives for which he chastises the merchants, and thus to risk the stability of the entire moral-economic system.

The close ties that Smith establishes between moral and economic risk naturally culminate in his pronounced distaste for economic inequality. Arguably the most damning critique of modern capitalism advanced by the man many consider its father comes in *Moral Sentiments*, where Smith writes that the “disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain

the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (61). Across his writings Smith is generally critical of the rich, whom he sees as profligate and therefore poor models for the working classes. Moreover, in *Wealth of Nations* he measures the health of society by its ability to care for the laboring poor: “No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged” (96).

Though he does believe that some amount of disparity is necessary to incentivize hard work, Smith consistently warns of the danger that will result if the rich fail to meet their moral obligations. It is not the indolence of the poor that prevents them from achieving a better standard of living, it is the tendency of those who already live comfortably to be tempted by excess. Smith thus takes a remarkably sanguine view on the relationship of government to liberty, and of the ability for government to intervene in economic processes in ways that benefit society. On the question of regulation he says, when it “is in favour of the workmen, it is always just and equitable; but it is sometimes otherwise when in favour of the masters” (157-158). Toward the end of *Wealth of Nations*, furthermore, Smith declares that “[e]very tax ... is to the person who

pays it a badge, not of slavery, but of liberty” (857).⁴⁰ If it is the state that secures the liberty of its citizens, then the state is the instrument of “public good.” These opinions may come as a surprise to that reader who expects to find in Smith a strict adherent to the principles of free market economics, but to a reader who understands the tradition of risk management that Smith perpetuates, they are nearly inevitable.

With his thoroughgoing integration of moral and economic risk in *Wealth of Nations*, Smith takes the project of risk management that had, to his point in history, proceeded on an individual level and distributes it by means of social institutions and state regulations. In this respect, he sets the stage for a model of risk management that does not arise through the production of the modern individual. Once British subjects no longer think of managing risk in terms of securing their individual safety and prosperity, but rather in the systemic terms of a state economy, universal education, class consciousness, and national identity, the individual as such becomes the given unit of society. When Jane Austen writes *Emma*, she consequently does so with the aim of showing that the risks confronting earlier protagonists have been displaced by risks within the private arena of daily life. These new risks test how well an individual can detect them and deal with them politely. The formation of a model individual no longer requires grave external threats to fuel it. To the contrary, the materials of an increasingly

⁴⁰ It should be noted Smith is defending regressive poll taxes in this case, so he didn't always side with the workmen. This only underscores how inherently noble he finds government.

complex external world provide the training needed for an individual to refine his or her taste and economic judgment. The real threat now comes from within, should the individual fail to learn these lessons.

Conclusion: Jane Austen's *Emma* on the Dangers of the Mind

In its famous opening lines, Jane Austen's *Emma* alerts the reader that the heroine has not yet been educated in the ways of the world: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." Emma's enviable position apparently blinds her to the risks she faces: the narrator continues, "The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her" (5). Having had her social precocity met with indulgence, Emma has not learned to manage risk of the kind or in the manner required by her station. Until she secures her good fortune, the implication is, she will but seem "to unite some of the best blessings of existence." Austen's metallurgical metaphor of "alloy" leaves open the question of whether Emma will diminish the value of her position by mixing it with something of lesser worth, or whether she will add to that position a substance that strengthens it. The unalloyed life that appears to Emma such an advantage, in other words, also presents a potential danger: to manage the risks of social circulation, she requires something to "distress or vex her." *Emma* is not a novel about the dangers of misreading, then, so much as it is a novel about the necessity of misreading.

Even the observant but reserved Mr. George Knightley is occasionally caught on the wrong foot by the ever-shifting social relationships of Highbury. He nevertheless proves that both the frequency and the consequences of misjudging others can be diminished through the patience and moderation championed by Adam Smith. Unwilling to deny herself the pleasure of making relationships, Emma acts on impression and impulse and, because of the indulgence of her restricted social circle, never adjusts her beliefs in the face of new information. She is consequently anything but impartial, lacking, in Smith's terms, the judgment essential to good taste. In her novels, however, Austen pushes past Smith's emphasis on temperance and updates Alexander Pope's aphorism that "a little learning is a dangerous thing."⁴¹ The gravest danger to Emma's "comfortable home and happy disposition" comes from too familiar and too little social experience, not from the contagious properties of unchecked emotion. If one has been blessed with the spark of intellect, in Austen's view, the mind is fully capable of retraining itself.

Emma is thus not required, as Smith would have it, to consistently project herself into the position of others in order to learn from her mistakes. Instead there is a single moment of this kind at the turning point of the novel, when Mr. Knightley tells Emma that she has not only behaved badly, but failed to set an example for those who look to her for social guidance. Rather than curtailing the excess of emotion that Smith worries about, Emma in fact risks disseminating it. On the basis Mr. Knightley's admonishment,

⁴¹ This is the one of the most famous lines from "An Essay on Criticism," drawn from the beginning of part two of Pope's poem.

and with the help of other clues she has slowly accrued over the novel, Emma is able to immediately begin compensating. Austen moves the question of risk management into a socially rich world that calls upon the individual to become emotionally self-correcting, capable of playing both the sufferer and the impartial spectator in the Smithian scenario of sympathy. In this way, Austen arguably completes the trajectory that began with the physical dangers of Defoe, moved through the sentimental dangers of Richardson, and settled on the social dangers of Addison, Steele, and Smith. Writing at a time in which the notion of the individual has been secured, the bounds of propriety established, and the markers of class fixed, Austen translates the drama and risk of earlier risk theorists into intellectual terms.

In so doing, she provides the link between Adam Smith's gentlemanly culture and the disciplinary culture of the nineteenth century which Foucault describes, in which suffering the pains of embarrassment or loss of prestige—in mind, not in body—trained the individual to move gradually toward the new ruling class standard. As he puts it in *Discipline and Punish*, this new form of “relational power . . . sustains itself by its own mechanism,” namely “the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes. Thanks to the techniques of surveillance,” power came to operate “without recourse, in principle at least, to excess, force or violence” (177). This is what I mean when I say that Austen shows the full force of disciplinary power in action, and completes the trajectory of risk management: no longer are the threat of violence to the body or the ubiquitous dangers of unchecked emotion needed to control behavior. It is enough for Emma to feel that she is always watching, and always being watched. Of course, it is her great failure in the novel

to think only of the former, and not of the latter. When Emma finally learns to behave as if she too is being judged in the way she judges others, she finally enters into the reciprocal social relations that guarantee order.

By bringing risk management fully into the psychological realm, Austen frees herself to explore dimensions of risk management that her predecessors could address only superficially. *Emma* is a story of individuated personalities as well as social types that exist at the intersection of problematized class and gender roles. It is a story motivated by the interactions between competing desires and strategies, which must not simply fulfill but also adjust the prevailing social rules. No wonder we feel, on entering Highbury, that we are entering the framework of a game. Austen never lets us forget that although Emma may think she knows the rules of the game she is playing, they change whenever a new character is introduced, and the consequences can be all too real. Each decision Emma makes, in some small degree, affects the system of social relations as a whole.

For all these differences, *Emma* is a capstone project. Like her predecessors, Austen believes that her writing can teach readers how to manage the risks of the world. For Austen, that means putting the reader in the same position as her heroine, where we must try to parse textual clues as to the intentions and desires of others. Dependent on the heroine, the reader of *Emma* is bound to be wrong, making this a novel that demands to be re-read. Only on a second or subsequent reading can we correct all the social misunderstandings and missteps that spell out the rules of the game, correctly placing the novel's characters in social relation to each other on the basis of gender, class, and

personality. Austen draws her readers into this complex world so that they, like the heroine, can test their deductive powers and learn where and how they have failed to deal with the evidence provided by the novel.

Emma's inability to distinguish self-indulgence from sound reasoning is evident from the beginning, which finds her at once lamenting and taking credit for the marriage of Miss Taylor, her former governess, to Mr. Weston. Overestimating her role in bringing about the marriage of two well-suited people, Emma rebuffs Mr. Knightley's suggestion that she has done nothing more than make "a lucky guess." Reminding him that there is a third option, "something between the do-nothing and the do-all," she leaves us uncertain as to whether her judgment is as trustworthy as her instincts (11). Mr. Knightley then delivers the lesson that will require an entire novel before Emma learns it: "[a] straightforward, open-hearted man like Weston, and a rational, unaffected woman like Miss Taylor, may be safely left to manage their own concerns. You are more likely to have done harm to yourself, than good to them, by interference" (11). Emma will have to suffer the social consequences of interfering in relationships that do not involve a "straightforward, open-hearted man...and a rational, unaffected woman" before she acquires the judgment required to recognize relationships for what they are.

There is an even more fundamental problem with Emma's judgment in declaring the match of Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor a success: if she is in fact responsible for the marriage, she failed to weigh the risk of losing a member of her household. Miss Taylor "had been a friend and companion such as few possessed: intelligent, well-informed, useful, gentle" and, most importantly, "peculiarly interested in [Emma], in every

pleasure, every scheme of hers—one to whom she could speak every thought as it arose, and who had such an affection for her as could never find fault” (6). This is a clear warning sign about Emma, who would have benefited from a governess more inclined to correct her habits and curb her ego than indulge her as a friend and equal. The narrator goes on: “How was she to bear the change?—It was true that her friend was going only half a mile from them; but Emma was aware that great must be the difference between a Mrs. Weston, only half a mile from them, and a Miss Taylor in the house; and with all her advantages, natural and domestic, she was now in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude” (6). In deciding to encourage the marriage between her governess and Mr. Weston, Emma failed to weigh the long term risk to her social life against the short term satisfaction of matchmaking. She is in danger of being understimulated by her aged and rather vapid father, just as Smith warns, and has brought this risk upon herself. In short, Emma’s social management should, but doesn’t, begin at home.

The solution to Emma’s understimulation is at hand, yet she cannot see it. Where Miss Taylor was reticent to find any fault in her charge, “Mr. Knightley ... was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them: and though this was not particularly agreeable to Emma herself, she knew it would be so much less so to her father, that she would not have him really suspect such a circumstance as her not being thought perfect by every body” (9).

Austen’s direct comparison between the governess and Mr. Knightley establishes the latter as the best risk manager of the novel and the one person from whom Emma should learn to manage her own impulses. It also highlights Emma’s greatest flaw, her vanity, as

what prevents her from accepting Knightley's view of her imperfections as her guide. Because she focuses only on outcomes, not process, she can never include the uncertain nature of other characters in her social planning—to do so would be to admit imperfection. When she sets a goal, she consequently does so without assessing the contingencies and thus the risk of a given outcome, and she holds to the plan despite new evidence to the contrary. Thus, when chastised by Mr. Knightley for her matchmaking, Emma never considers the possibility that her meddling might amount to nothing, much less that it might do more harm than good. To maintain her vanity, she is determined to prove Mr. Knightley wrong by making another successful match.

Far from securing its safety, Emma's decision to prove herself a matchmaker who can knit the community of Highbury together for at least another generation sets in motion all the social risks that community will face. Emma must encounter these risks and learn, as a result, to manage the impulses that feed her vanity. Her next project is the eligible village vicar Mr. Elton, for whom Emma is determined to find a wife. Mere pages later, on first meeting Harriet Smith, Emma has her match. This hasty decision, predicated on far too little observation and thought, encapsulates many of the qualities that make Emma a poor risk manager. To begin, Emma fails to account in her planning for the underlying uncertainty of the situation. Harriet is both a relative stranger to Highbury and a woman of unknown parentage, making her an unlikely match for Mr. Elton. Moreover, it is implied that Emma thinks highly of Harriet in the first place because of the latter's willingness to follow Emma's every whim. Though well-intentioned, Harriet has an uninspiring mind as is prone to the power of suggestion. It is

on the basis of this character flaw, rather than any of Harriet's other, more laudable qualities, that Emma decides she will elevate her new friend to higher social standing.

Emma is likewise unable to distinguish her best interests from Harriet's. Harriet has already formed a romantic attachment to Mr. Martin, a simple but kind and well-to-do farmer, but because the marriage would not satisfy Emma's desires to raise her friend's social standing, it is rejected out of hand. Indeed, Emma is alarmed from the moment she realizes the connection, never stopping to consider if Mr. Martin and Harriet would make a fine match. Emma consistently makes plans on the basis of too little information, is too rigid in her thinking to change those plans in the face of new evidence, and sees her schemes in strictly mechanistic, not moral and emotional, terms. None of these qualities demonstrate the adaptability and self-awareness that are the hallmarks of good risk management. While Emma prides herself on her ability to subtly orchestrate, her strategy is ultimately remarkably simple: she pairs a man in need of a wife with a woman in need of a husband, as determined by her, and seemingly in the order in which she meets them. If Emma hopes to distinguish herself as particularly clever on the basis of her matchmaking, such a brute force approach can hardly be the means. As Adam Smith warns, one of the greatest sources of social risk is the tendency to overestimate one's abilities.

In all of these shortcomings Emma is counterbalanced by Mr. Knightley, the best risk manager of the novel and the character who consistently points out her missteps. Knightley sees the suitability of the match between Harriet and Robert Martin immediately, intuiting that they will end up together. When the handsome and clever

Frank Churchill, who has been living with his aunt and uncle in London, visits his parents at Highbury, Knightley is the only character who is unimpressed, correctly predicting that Frank is hiding something. Eventually Mr. Knightley susses out that Frank is secretly engaged with Jane Fairfax, another visitor to Highbury, whom Emma dislikes for jealous reasons. Knightley manages to recognize this secret connection while Emma is busy trying to promote a match between Frank and Harriet, after having failed in spectacular fashion with Harriet and Mr. Elton. In short, Knightley represents the joint powers of careful observation and personal restraint, which together allow him to collect the information needed to decode the secrets of Highbury. His comportment as these intrigues unfold is always juxtaposed with that of Emma, underscoring the distance between the investigatory powers she believes to possess and her actual foolishness.

It is thus no surprise that Mr. Knightley demonstrates to Emma her greatest failure of risk management, at the turning point of the novel. Emma, ever eager to prove her cleverness, insults Miss Bates, Jane's aunt and a kindly, unmarried woman of simple ways. While playing a word game at a party, Emma slights both Miss Bates' habit of verbal bumbling and her lack of sociability. Miss Bates takes the insult with her characteristic good nature, saying she must be rather dull indeed for Emma to say such a thing about a friend, and in a public setting. Though the party goes on, Mr. Knightley waits for his moment to reprimand Emma, eventually pulling her aside to declare, "I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible" (258). For the first time Emma is

absolutely crestfallen at Knightley's disapproval: "She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued! And how suffer him to leave her without saying one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness!" (259).

Emma's remorse is framed in terms of risk management: she has left herself "exposed" to "ill opinion" by failing to foresee how harshly she would be judged, a mistake compounded by the fact that, in her embarrassment, she allows Mr. Knightley to leave before she can affirm the truth of his observation. She thus leads him to believe that, once again, she has not learned her lesson. Emma's desperation, and the changes in behavior it sets into motion, has everything to do with her recognition of how much credit she has lost with Mr. Knightley. For the first time, Emma sees herself through the eyes of another; she has had to suffer the loss of Knightley's respect before she can begin to discipline herself. Until she learns the means of self-discipline, Emma will have a social position greater than that of any other woman in the novel, and beauty equal to Jane's—but she will also share the unbearable vanity of Augusta Hawkins, Mr. Elton's new wife whom he parades before Harriet. That Mrs. Elton takes an immediate liking to Emma is all the proof the reader needs that the heroine has gone terribly wrong.

Despite the shame she feels, Emma is not instantly cured of her character flaws. The novel would not be a good manual for risk management if on the basis of a single transformational event she internalized all the lessons she required. Instead, what Emma brings forward with her is a new commitment to being cautious in her social calculations. Though she and Knightley have further misunderstandings, and one could choose any

number of plots points as additional examples of her imperfect judgment, Emma has shed her false certainty and is improving as a manager of risk. The novel is interested in modeling the way in which she develops this faculty, and so her piecemeal progress is instructive. Emma's behavior is now influenced by her awareness that any misstep might renew her shame, which is to say, by her sense that she is always being watched and judged. If a single traumatic event is not enough to turn her into the fully matured version of herself, it nevertheless proves sufficient to integrate her within the "uninterrupted play of calculated gazes" that lie at the heart of disciplinary power; Emma no longer naïvely assumes she can remain outside of these reciprocal social relations.

It is fitting that Emma's transformation can be understood by way of a reference to the powers of observation, because her novel closes the book on an older model of spectatorship. The internal spectator that first Addison and Steele and then Smith theorized operated on the principle that careful observation of the world could teach an individual habits of good taste that protected them from the dangerous influence of others. After a long process of turning inward in order to ensure self-enclosure, Smith began to finally turn back outward in *The Wealth of Nations*, which suggested that the quality of moderation that defines the respectable individual has counterparts in social structures and institutions. Austen too turns outward, but she does so on very different terms. She does not need to diffuse the qualities of the individual onto society, because for the first time it is understood that society is fully organized around the notion of the individual. In fact, disciplinary society circumscribes the individual; when Austen turns outward, it is into the world of panopticism, the inescapable gaze of the other. Mr.

Spectator is defined as the perfect observer, and the impartial spectator of Smith translates this idealization into procedures that real individuals can follow. But for Austen, the question is not how to create the right kind of observer, but how one should behave in a world in which observation is inevitable and mutually reinforcing.

Put another way, the impartial spectator taught individuals to behave as if they were being watched only as an intermediate step on the path to becoming their own closest observers and critics. After they internalized these functions, the need to feel judged by others melted away. The risk defined by this model of selfhood was always that of an external danger threatening the hard-won boundaries of self-enclosure. This is why Smith takes his Stoic influences so seriously: if one is hardened against the emotional impact of the outside world, nothing can ever truly disturb the modern individual. For Austen, self-enclosure is not at stake, nothing can ever be done to escape surveillance, and the gravest threat to an individual is that their own judgment will betray them, leaving them exposed to contempt. This, finally, is what it means to be fully situated in a world of risk management. Even if your body is safe, your livelihood secure, and your individual autonomy unquestioned, you are nevertheless at risk, because nothing can wall you off from a danger that is present within you.

At the beginning of this history of risk management, Defoe offered what was perhaps the first model of embodied consciousness when he linked mind and body in a figure that extends his domain geographically and consequently encounters risks that simultaneously threaten both sides of the mind/body divide. Though Defoe's protagonists lack psychological depth, they do have a compulsive self-reflexive quality in which one

can recognize the beginnings of a more secure link between mind and matter. Like the risks they must constantly renew in order to maintain their autonomy, Crusoe and H.F. obsessively catalog the world around them and reflect on their prior actions and beliefs. This early form of self-awareness serves to ensure that the protagonists are constantly interrogating the operations of the world around them, thereby learning to become good risk managers.

Samuel Richardson then began the process of bringing these risks away from the body into the more permanent register of reputation. When Clarissa defies her father's wishes and decides to leave her family home with Lovelace, she learns that she cannot defend her body in the traditional sense. Her virginity, her financial security, and her life are all at risk, and there is no way to simultaneously secure them all. Under these conditions, she develops a new strategy for protecting the integrity of her selfhood, namely through writing. She mobilizes the power of narrative and moral rhetoric to ensure that whatever may happen to her body, she will live on in a manner of her choosing. Though Lovelace initially gets what he wants, he can only do so by ceding narrative control to Clarissa, who reaffirms her purity despite the rape and death of her body and in so doing indelibly stains Lovelace as a villain.

Adam Smith, drawing on the work of Addison and Steele, then moves risk management away from the question of securing the integrity of the body and into a social world. What is now at stake is not the claiming of the body as the first form of property, but whether and how one can safely circulate in a world of strangers. For the first time, in other words, the threats that risk management seeks to address are primarily

aimed at an individual's mind. In response to these new threats, Smith posits the importance of self-regulation, a principle that is simultaneously the goal of the modern individual and inherent in the interconnected systems of the world. His moral philosophy and economic theory prove to be linked and homologous systems, built on the principle that people and institutions have a naturally tendency to move toward the appropriate ends. It is the responsibility of the modern individual to do nothing which might upset the natural equilibrium of a well-calibrated world. This emphasis on interconnection paves the way for the disciplinary model of *Emma*, in which all of society is organized around the goal of keeping individuals in their rightful place. No longer a natural cosmological tendency, order is now maintained through a strict set of procedures taking place at every level of society.

It is for this reason that a novel that begins with Emma concerned about her family breaking up ends with her as part of a new family, but on different terms. When Emma finally becomes the risk manager she needs to be, she is ready to marry Mr. Knightley. She is now equipped to handle the dissolution of her old, closed circle of acquaintances. In its place, she is prepared to manage the home while Mr. Knightley manages the finances, each falling into their prescribed role and able to maintain the ideals of taste and propriety in a dispersed and mobile community. Despite some passing references to problematic class and gender roles—Jane famously compares the “governess-trade” to the slave trade, saying that though the two are “widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on ... as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies”—*Emma* remains a conservative novel, reaffirming the

natural order of things (207). Harriet marries Robert Martin, and Frank and Jane's secret engagement is revealed and approved. There is even some evidence that Emma, who early in the novel expresses fear that marriage would deprive her of her intellectual vigor, will find her life will be circumscribed in just that way. Of her marriage to Knightley the narrator says:

The joy, the gratitude, the exquisite delight of her sensations may be imagined. The sole grievance and alloy thus removed in the prospect of Harriet's welfare, she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security.—What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future. (327)

The word "alloy" appears again, this time not to introduce uncertainty but to suggest that with all loose ends tied up, Emma has been left pure. In this sense, perhaps the story does not deliver the most hopeful ending imaginable, one in which Emma does not substitute Knightley's judgment for her own. Nonetheless, she has undoubtedly learned to manage risks that she mismanaged at the beginning of the novel, and she has found a husband who does value her mind at least as much as her beauty. Austen has brought risk management fully into the psychological apparatus, where it is subject to new demands and complications. From this point on, risk management is no longer the condition of possibility for subjectivity, but rather has been transformed into a function of that subjectivity.

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