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# The culture of crime: representations of the criminal in eighteenth-century England

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THE CULTURE OF CRIME:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CRIMINAL  
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores how literary criminal narratives reflected public anxieties over the increasing commercialization of England during the early eighteenth century. It accounts for the popularity of the criminal in literature as well as public concerns about commercialization and the individuality it encouraged, revealing how these concerns were expressed in the most popular form of criminal narrative in this era, the criminal biography. Chapters on the criminal narratives of John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe and John Gay reveal how the criminal narrative functioned as a means of critiquing a developing commercial society in England. Bunyan first employs the formula of the criminal biography to offer a prophetic critique of the burgeoning market society in England, while Defoe explores the triumphs and moral dilemmas of life in an age of commercialism. The conclusion reads Gay's criminal narrative as the culmination of a nation's early and ambivalent experience with the marketplace. Its implication is that in the modern age, commercialism makes us all in some sense criminals.

**Chapter 1**  
**"No Generals Worth Making a Parallel":**  
**Accounting for the Criminal in**  
**the Eighteenth Century**

Like many young dispossessed men of his kind in eighteenth-century England, the young highwayman, Jamie Maclaine, met his fate on the triple branches of Tyburn Tree in the year 1750. It is ironic that the celebrated author and bon vivant of Strawberry Hill, Horace Walpole, was also in attendance at the execution; it is even more ironic that he was complaining. As the fourth son of Robert Walpole, Horace was directly related to the former prime minister whose draconian increase in capital punishment statutes throughout the eighteenth century resulted in the celebrated public executions of young, glamorous outlaws such as Maclaine. Even more ironic was the simultaneous mixture of fascination and anxiety evident in Walpole's complaining. His complaints typified the attitude of commentators on such events and helped explain why less than twenty years later a public execution in Moorfields in 1767 could attract a crowd as large as 80,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Of the popularity of such "Hanging Fairs," as they were commonly known, Lucy Moore writes,

The streets were thronged with well-wishers; in some places the crowd was so dense the procession had to stop and wait for the way to be cleared. On some hanging days, spectators were trampled to death in the crush. There was a carnival atmosphere as people from all levels of society flooded the streets to see their hero die a noble death.<sup>2</sup>

Moore's comment is revealing in dispelling the myth that such spectacles were solely the haunts of society's dregs in search of drunken release or worse. Unsavory activity did play a large role in such events—executions were notorious opportunities for pickpockets, for example—but public executions were also notable for the large cross-section of society they attracted; pickpockets rarely made their living off the poor. Like a Sunday's visit to Bedlam after church, public executions in the eighteenth century were entertainment for the fashionable as well as the middling sort. Samuel Pepys got a cramp in his leg from standing on a cart wheel to get a better view at a hanging in 1663, and the dandy James Boswell himself confessed he was "never absent from a public execution."<sup>3</sup>

Walpole was a little less enthused by the proceedings, however. Of the clamor surrounding Maclaine's execution, Walpole wrote,

The first Sunday after his condemnation, 3000 people went to see him; he fainted away twice with the heat of his cell. You can't conceive the ridiculous rage there is of going to Newgate; and the prints that are published of the malefactors, and the memoirs of

their lives and deaths set forth with as much parade as—as Marshal Turenne's—we have no generals worth making a parallel.<sup>4</sup>

It is tempting to believe that the author of *The Castle of Otranto* is sensationalizing his account for posterity here. Perhaps, but the public spectacle of execution was grand in eighteenth-century England, and with this spectacle came what seemed to many observers like Walpole an almost insatiable hunger among the public for representations of criminality—a hunger that was as disconcerting as it was fascinating. As the title of this study should suggest, this dissertation aims to account for this increasing representation of criminality in England throughout the eighteenth century. And as the title of this opening chapter indicates, this introduction aims to account for the methods and biases that inform this study and are utilized throughout.

A broad topic such as criminality requires qualification. Thus, the parameters that limit this study need to be accounted for from the outset. Chronologically, this analysis focuses on notable patterns in criminal representation in England from the late seventeenth, through the first three decades of the eighteenth century, loosely from the Restoration of Charles II to the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble and the public outcry

over the crime wave of the 1720s. Clearly, the representation of the criminal in English literature is not limited to the eighteenth century. Suffice it to say, the chronology of criminal representation in English literature is a lengthy one. That much admitted, it is outside the scope of this dissertation to attempt to detail all or even most of this lengthy progression. Nor is it the design of this dissertation to contend that the representation of the criminal even reached its apex in England during the years encapsulated by this study (although the decade of 1720s could make a strong argument for this claim). In fact, the emphasis on representing criminality—in the novel, for example—only seems to increase throughout the eighteenth century, culminating in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels of the London underworld such as William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and the Newgate Novels of William Ainsworth, *Rookwood* (1824) and *Jack Sheppard* (1839), with their emphasis on subversive and criminal activity and its policing by society.<sup>5</sup>

The chronological scope of this study is limited in part by necessity, but also because, as I endeavor to show in the following pages, between 1660 and the end of the 1720s, the political, social, economic and cultural

landscape of England—indeed the totality of English society—begins to show visible signs of the transformation into modernity, a transformation that is vital to an understanding of the representation of the criminal in England throughout the eighteenth century. This is not to claim that these signs cannot be found before this era, nor that they were, in fact, not accentuated even more as the eighteenth century drew closer and closer to the age of industrialization; rather the period of 1660-1720 is most useful because it reveals how a specific form of cultural discourse, the writing of criminality, functioned as a means of coming to terms with the shock of the new for the citizens of a dawning era.

Culturally, this study focuses on the literary representation of criminality throughout the era, that is literary in the sense of the written word, not as indicative of a distinctly high-class discourse. The representation of criminality throughout this era encompassed a wide variety of literary genres—pamphlets, broadsides, dying speeches, novels, and even drama—but the majority of the writing on criminals in this era was specifically written for the popular audience. It was this new sense of catering to, and exploiting, the popular, as much as the subject matter of these narratives, that gave

rise to a disquiet and fascination with the figure of the criminal. Still, it would be remiss to begin such an analysis without noting that the variety of criminal representation throughout English culture in this era is wide. When necessary and profitable, I do take into account the larger cultural framework of criminal representation, examining the significance of Hogarth's engravings in the debate over crime and apprenticeship, for example. Inevitably, however, the patterns of criminal representation examined in this study hold true across different artistic mediums throughout this period. We can recognize similar patterns and functions in Hogarth's representation of criminality in the *Industry and Idleness* series of engravings and in Defoe's representation of Moll Flanders, for example. Another reason for focusing on the specifically literary representation of criminality is that it was through the employment of socially contested figures like the criminal in new genres such as the novel that literature itself became more accessible to a popular audience throughout this period; in this respect the figure of the criminal not only functioned to lend expression to the desires and fears of a new reading public, but it also played a role in popularizing the written word itself. Thus, the figure of the criminal is

historically tied closely to the advent of the novel and to the increase in the reading public throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Returning to chronological distinctions, it is perhaps already necessary to define exactly what is meant in employing the term "criminal", as well as other distinctions made frequently in this study, such as "criminal narrative" and "criminal biography." What distinguishes the early eighteenth-century representations of criminality from those that came before them? Clearly there had been criminals and representations of criminals before in English literature. How do these predecessors differ from the early eighteenth-century representations of the criminal? Take the fact that a number of Chaucer's tales concern themselves with the duping and swindling of others, and it would seem one could make a case for placing his Miller or hypocritical Pardoner in the realm of medieval criminal activity, for example. Robert Greene's cony-catching pamphlets of the 1590s take the Elizabethan underworld of petty thieves and their victims as their subject, and these works and their imitators were very popular examples of pre-eighteenth-century criminal representation.<sup>7</sup> What then separates these characters from Defoe's Moll Flanders or Gay's Macheath?

In many respects, these earlier criminal representations function similarly to those that are the focus of this study. They all share a transgressive function: an emphasis on subverting traditional social, religious and economic standards of value and propriety. However, one fundamental difference in the representation of criminals in this period is in the single-minded emphasis placed on disciplining such transgression—particularly social and economic transgression. As I'll examine throughout this study, a growing emphasis on commercialism, combined with what Murray Pittock refers to as the "defensive obsession with property rights" throughout the eighteenth century, focused criminal representation on the regulation of the individual, and specifically on the regulation of property and property relationships among individuals.<sup>8</sup> Of course this operation still worked both ways to an extent: criminality still temporarily provided a vicarious license for misbehavior and subversion of hierarchies. However, in the criminal biography, the most fundamental and influential of the criminal genres, satire and carnivalesque humor increasingly give way to an emphasis on punishment and the reestablishment of hierarchy. Chaucer's Miller's Tale, then, is more a product of the social function of the

fabliau than it is of a society increasingly obsessed with the preservation of property. Chaucer does depict a duplicitous world of rogues and tricksters inevitably receiving their due punishment, but the emphasis of this representation is usually comic. Greene's cony-catching pamphlets are similar in their picaresque representation of the naïve country cousins, the bumpkins, the conys, the guls, in stark contrast to the never-ending variety of urban nips, anglers, foists and cony-catchers that consistently torment them and prey upon their foolishness. Again, these satirical tales share more with the tradition of the jest books that inform such sixteenth-century works as Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* than with anything in Defoe's, Gay's, or even Bunyan's representation of the criminal. In effect, the criminals of this earlier era function more as picaros than as scarecrows.<sup>9</sup>

National and cultural boundaries also require definition for this project. While a comparison of eighteenth-century criminal representations throughout Europe and even the colonies would be a tempting and certainly enlightening endeavor, such a study is beyond the scope of this investigation and would take far more time and research than perhaps any one—and certainly this

one-scholar could devote to such a project. Therefore while there is much to be said for *Causes célèbres et intéressantes*, the twenty volume collection of criminal histories that appeared in France in 1734, or for the tradition of the *Kriminalgeschichte*, the miscellaneous writings on crime in Germany, for example, or for numerous other variations of criminal representation in the larger eighteenth-century continental tradition, in the interests of focus this examination of criminality is centered squarely in England and in the English tradition.<sup>10</sup>

There is a more compelling reason than necessity for choosing England as my focus, however. England stands as the clearest example of how the representation of criminality during the eighteenth century was strongly influenced by, and, in turn, came to reflect new social and economic developments. I will contend throughout this study that these social and economic developments gave rise to an increasing attention to the subject of criminality in eighteenth-century English culture, and specifically in eighteenth-century English literature. In short, I suggest in the following pages that a variety of interlinking factors in eighteenth-century England gave rise to the fascination with the figure of the criminal. And while criminality may not have actually existed as it

was popularly portrayed in the literature of the era, this fascination ensured that it was becoming more acceptable, profitable and almost necessary to invent, define and classify the criminal for public consumption. In effect, I contend that cultural representations of criminality, particularly in the literature of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth century, in part functioned as a means of fulfilling a growing desire among the English public for transgressive expression—that is, expression that called into question and in many cases subverted traditional and existing political, social and economic boundaries. Therefore while I admit to the wider variation in the eighteenth-century continental representation of criminality, the pattern in England is the one that most clearly and accurately illustrates this thesis, and as such the focus of this study rests there.

It is necessary to begin by addressing what makes England an appropriate model for this analysis. A primary factor is that England was among the first European countries to enter, perhaps almost unwillingly at times, into what we could still, I believe, usefully refer to as the period of modernity. In employing what has perhaps become an overused phrase, let me attempt to qualify this

usage further by noting the characteristics of this modernity central to this study.

Namely England serves a good example of one of the earliest among European countries to begin developing into a modern nation-state throughout the long eighteenth century. This transformation inevitably and irrevocably changed the way the English saw themselves as a people and as individuals. This is to say that England was among the first European countries to arrive at a system of government in which the powers of a monarch were increasingly being limited by a parliamentary structure of representative government. This claim is based to a large extent on the success of the English Civil Wars of the seventeenth century (both those of the 1640s and 1688) in challenging the divine authority of the crown and in giving voice to a broader range of society than had a voice in other European societies. The historian Derek Jarrett writes,

Although most of those who have studied the English revolutions of the seventeenth century would doubt that the constitutions which emerged from those upheavals did much to guarantee the liberties of ordinary men or to ensure a fairer distribution of wealth. . . they had nevertheless had the effect of giving the populace a political importance such as it had in no other European country.<sup>11</sup>

What the English Civil Wars led to was a greater sense of personal representation in government than was the case in most of the continent—certainly than was the case in France, for example, that feared member of the auld alliance with Scotland, and the continental standard against which eighteenth-century Englishmen most often compared themselves. In this respect, the Civil Wars truly were a revolutionary event in English history, not only in the magnitude of the beheading of a divine monarch on a wintry January day in Whitehall in 1649, but in a more profound sense in the awakening of a sense of the importance and potential of the individual.<sup>12</sup> In killing a king, the English did free themselves, and in more than the literal sense. While the extent of this freedom, and of the actual representation and tangible benefits gained through the Civil Wars, are still a subject of debate (particularly the extent to which the common “Freeborn Englishman” had an actual say in the governing of the country), the fact remains that the English Civil Wars changed England into a country unlike any other in Europe at the time. Subsequently a large part of the cultural and political self-image of eighteenth-century English citizens was strongly influenced by this almost jingoistic

pride in the importance of the self-governing citizen, whether such a citizen ever actually existed or not.<sup>13</sup>

This system of government in turn depended on the development of early capitalist structures, as witnessed by the rapid growth of urban marketplaces such as London, the establishment of a system of national credit, and the birth of large public corporations that financed this national credit, such as the South Sea Company, for example.<sup>14</sup> W.A. Speck describes the rise of England after the revolution of 1688 as an early example of the rise of the "fiscal-military state," that is of a state that depended upon intricate financial systems of public credit to support its debt—in England's case, debt largely accrued from wars against Louis XIV in the years 1689-1697 and again in 1701-1713.<sup>15</sup>

A number of recent studies have called attention to this role of credit and finance in the formation of eighteenth-century English culture, and to an extent this analysis also takes this phenomenon into account in analyzing the cultural function of the criminal.<sup>16</sup> Thus while this study is specifically concerned with the literary representations of criminality during this period, the varying fascination and horror that the English public felt at the new concept of credit and the

financial structures of modernity do play a visible role in the representation of criminality—particularly in the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble financial market crash of 1720. In some ways, the anxiety over credit and the anxiety over crime came to be linked in the public imagination and in the public discourse on both subjects. This analysis explores in part how the sense of anxiety over the new fluidity and transparency of credit found popular cultural representation in equating modern commercial practices with traditional criminal practices. In the works of Daniel Defoe, for example, the criminal heroines Moll Flanders and Roxana consistently resist social and cultural identification, and as such seem to mirror the instability and fluidity feared by the landed interests in their debate with monied interests of eighteenth-century society.<sup>17</sup>

The simultaneous fascination and fear the English public had with the concept of credit, and indeed with the role of the marketplace itself in daily life, was tied to increasing changes in the economic fabric of eighteenth-century life. Recently critic David Hawkes has conjectured that, "one of the attractions of early modern England to left-wing historians is the fact that it displays the capitalist world system in embryonic form."<sup>18</sup> Insofar as

this analysis employs a variety of what could be classified as left-wing historical and critical interpretations of eighteenth-century English history and culture, I confess that I agree with him completely. However, this study only echoes other eighteenth-century historians—left wing or otherwise—such as Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, in further contending that this early development of capitalist infrastructure in England led to a growing adoption of a commercial culture and its accompanying ethos.<sup>19</sup>

The term "commercialism" is referred to often in this study, and also needs further definition. According to J.G.A. Pocock, commercialism is "an ideology and perception of history which depicted political society and social personality as founded upon commerce: upon exchange of forms of mobile property and upon modes of consciousness suited to a world of moving objects."<sup>20</sup> This study reads the growing adoption of commercialism and its values by the English people in the eighteenth century in part as an early example of the historical transition from a world characterized by stasis to one characterized by mobility. Nor was this transition a tranquil one; Pocock characterizes this struggle as "an enduring conflict between two explicitly post-feudal ideals, one agrarian

and the other commercial, one ancient and the other modern."<sup>21</sup> Indeed the struggle between these two competing ideologies, and between the two principles they represented—stasis and mobility—affected and changed not only the economic foundations of English society, but also its religious, political and cultural foundations. Thus the adoption of an economic system that emphasized the values of "exchange" and "mobile property," namely money and credit, over traditional values rooted in land and property, changed the face of English society. Moreover, this rise of commercialism, and what McKendrick calls the "unprecedented propensity to consume" that it begot, indeed that it depended upon to subsist, was a central topic of social and cultural debate throughout the eighteenth century, and this discourse also informs the representation of the criminal in a number of important ways.<sup>22</sup>

Commercial transformation was widely welcomed throughout much of the early and middle eighteenth century, however; in fact, an almost awestruck wonder at the possibilities of commercialism found great expression in the literature of the era. On the representation of commerce in literature, James Sambrook writes of the Augustan poetic tradition that "while it is hardly

surprising that eighteenth-century poets should celebrate the ancient pieties of rural life, what is perhaps remarkable is that so many of them should applaud the benefits of trade and commerce."<sup>23</sup> But applaud many of them did, and so we have, for example, John Dyer's lengthy georgic of 1757, *The Fleece*, celebrating what seems to be, in a description that cheerfully presages Adam Smith's famous metaphor, the invisible hand of divine providence ordering the world of commerce, and more specifically the textile industry in England. Dyer's speaker rhapsodizes "that all is joy; and trade and business guide the living scene," while simultaneously warning in earnest that "To censure Trade / Or hold her busy people in contempt / Let none presume."<sup>24</sup> Even earlier in 1729, we have in Edward Young's poem "The Merchant" another attempt to fuse England's grand fate mystically with the inevitable progression of commerce: "Britain, fair daughter of the seas / Is born for trade, to plow her field, the wave / And reap the growth of every coast. . ."<sup>25</sup> Again, both poems are notable (and, I would suggest, suspect) in the lengths they go to in linking the fate of England with the fate of commercialism, and in their underlying ideological warning that to question the expansion of the marketplace

and its values is to threaten the glory and growth of England itself.

Moreover, while the championing of commerce wasn't the central priority of the georgic poets, it was central to the work of other popular authors examined in this study, such as Daniel Defoe. Even earlier than Dyer and Young's verses, we have Defoe's paean to commerce in England, *The Complete English Tradesman*, published in 1726, and "calculated for the instruction of our inland tradesmen; and especially young beginners."<sup>26</sup> Ironically, it is the sentiment of this treatise that Defoe's earlier criminal heroine, Roxana, herself a trades(wo)man of the flesh and once an eager young beginner in vice, heartily affirms when she claims "that a true-bred merchant is the best gentleman in the nation."<sup>27</sup> That Defoe's criminals habitually walk, talk and act like eager students of commerce and eventual master tradesmen is a fact that will be returned to again in this study. For now, it is enough to recognize that this characterization hints at the reality that even the most ardent apologists of the new commercialism such as Defoe recognized: that while commercialism may have been the primary engine of England's growth in the eighteenth century, it also sparked a good measure of heated debate, anxiety and

confrontation in English culture and society on the morality of trade. Towards the close of *The New English Tradesman*, Defoe himself would ultimately have reason to lament that "it must be confess'd. . . trade is almost universally founded upon crime."<sup>28</sup> Telling words for one of the age's greatest champions of commerce.

Similarly, in his study of the representation of the merchant in English literature, John McVeagh notes that while an enormous amount of cultural discourse was summoned and duly dispatched to justify and champion the advent of commercialism throughout the eighteenth century, there simultaneously always remained an underlying "hostility to commercial men" and a "distrust of the natural tendency of commercial enterprise in its own right."<sup>29</sup> In his study of the rise of capitalism, Albert Hirschman traces this negative cultural sentiment to its ideological grounding in medieval religious and social doctrine—a point that will be returned to in looking at the deep religious influence on John Bunyan's representation of the criminal in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, for example.<sup>30</sup> Conjecturing on the historical roots of this ambivalence towards commerce, Hawkes goes further in arguing that the advent of commercialism and

the market economy in England caused a radical restructuring of value in English society. Hawkes writes:

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the rise of a consumer culture, the growth in the power of money, the exaltation of the merchant classes, and the new social mobility combined to produce a crisis in traditional understandings of hierarchy and order.<sup>31</sup>

I would expand Hawkes' contention to include the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century as well. Furthermore, this study echoes Hawkes in suggesting that this crisis in the traditional understandings of hierarchy and order was a recurrent and troubling topic in the cultural discourse of the era. The discourse surrounding commercialism in the eighteenth century was a pervasive one, and one that had far-reaching implications politically and socially, and culturally as well. As Marc Shell has written of the effects of the new market economy on language, "the new forms of metaphorization or exchanges of meaning that accompanied the new forms of economic symbolization and production were changing the meaning of meaning itself."<sup>32</sup> Shell's claim is a radical one, but what all of these critics do agree upon is that the critique of commercialism and its values played an important role in the formation of eighteenth-century culture. This contention is one of the cornerstones of

this study, and, as this analysis will suggest, this oftentimes fractious discourse surrounding the effects of commercialization in England also played a central role in the cultural representation of criminality.

The early development of modernity in eighteenth-century England then, is marked by, among other factors, the weakening of monarchical authority and a concurrently strong belief in individual freedoms and liberty, the burgeoning development of capitalist infrastructure and the increasing commercialization of society, and finally a tangible recognition and concern over what Hawkes calls "the growing influence of the market economy" in daily life.<sup>33</sup> These political and economic factors, coupled with not least the emphasis in English Protestantism on the life of the inner self, led to an increasing concern throughout the eighteenth century with the role of the individual in this brave new world—another distinguishing characteristic of the onset of modernity in England.<sup>34</sup> It was the fact that this emphasis occurred so early in England that led her citizens to be among the first in Europe with a newfound sense of the possibilities—as well as the problems—of social and economic mobility that would have been hardly imaginable only a few generations before. Finally this study intends to explore how it was that this

newly emerging sense of individual possibility, and of the growing opportunities for movement both up and down the class ladder, gave rise to a set of new aspirations in the English public that came to be uncannily—and often discomfotingly—represented in the figure of the criminal. Thus, while my intention in these first pages is only to sketch out the parameters of this dissertation, the manner through which these longings and anxieties can be charted in the varying representations of criminality in England throughout the early eighteenth century is the focus of this study, a study that ultimately suggests that cultural representations of the criminal in this period are most accurately viewed as both symptom and expression of a new sense of social and economic mobility.

However, other scholars have also recognized such patterns. Among others, John Richetti made similar claims years ago.<sup>35</sup> Richetti's work still stands as one of the first critical studies to highlight the cathartic effects of criminal representation in popular literature, challenging the old moral line of criticism that viewed criminal narratives as appealing only for their crude and salacious employment of scandalous detail. In categorizing the historical response to popular literature such as the criminal narratives, his rejoinder at the time was an

accurate one: "Literary historians have usually been horrified by this growth of popular literature and have resorted to accurate but useless moral analysis."<sup>36</sup> What Richetti added in his work was a necessary emphasis on the social dimension of these popular narratives by exploring just how "the sensationalism which played the largest role in attracting readers to criminal biography was not gratuitous but depended upon an ideological context for its force."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Richetti and other critics such as Pat Rogers, J. Paul Hunter and Michael McKeon served notice that the popular fiction of the early modern period, and particularly its treatment of criminality, was indeed a valid, worthy and enlightening field of enquiry.<sup>38</sup> Of the social function and utility of criminal narratives, Richetti argues:

Criminal fiction helps to perpetuate the criminal as a compelling and fascinating type-figure not simply because he and his environment satisfy a need for the recognizable rather than the ideal in literature, but also because his story and its significance evoke and exploit the deepest hopes and fears of his audience.<sup>39</sup>

A good deal of the critical work on the representation of criminality in eighteenth-century English culture since Richetti's statement echoes this comment in reading the popular fascination with criminality as an expression of the struggle in the eighteenth-century audience between

the possible and the prohibited in their society, between the transgressive and the regulated.<sup>40</sup> In a society where social and economic boundaries were rapidly becoming more fluid, the representation of the criminal functioned to probe and test those boundaries.

In one of the most recent studies on criminal narratives in the eighteenth century, Hal Gladfelder epitomizes the genre especially well in claiming:

Criminal narratives raise in its most aggravated form—at the point of rupture—the problem of relations between the individual and the community which was coming to define itself more and more through the discourses and institutions of secular law. In foregrounding acts of violence, theft, disruptive sexuality, and rebellion, such narratives test the limits both of individual self-assertion and of communal tolerance as they appeal, often ambiguously, to the threatening possibility of subversive desire in even the most orthodox of their audience.<sup>41</sup>

Gladfelder's use of such descriptive terms as "aggravated," "disruptive," "threatening," "subversive," and "rupture" is telling. The critical vocabulary regarding criminality is replete with such modifiers. This vocabulary suggests that the representation of criminality during this period is one that fundamentally seeks to undermine, or at least in a Bakhtinian sense, disrupt and call into question traditional hierarchical distinctions.

In the following chapter, this study begins by analyzing how the often troubling changes in early

eighteenth-century English society were reflected and given expression in the most prominent form of this type of criminal narrative throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the criminal biography. However, while the criminal biography's strongest attraction lay in its subversive appeal, this narrative form equally functioned as a constraining force, and as a form of popular entertainment that ultimately reinforced hierarchical boundaries and mandated rigid limits to individuality. In exploring how these two impulses coexisted in the criminal biography, and how they mirrored the new social realities of the world of their audience, I attempt to establish a standard formula from which later modes of criminal narrative deviated and expanded.

In the third chapter on John Bunyan, I show how Bunyan employed the formula found in criminal biographies to offer a prophetic critique of the new individualism and the burgeoning market society in England. Often regarded as a failed compromise between the allegorical style of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the more realistic style to be found in later authors such as Defoe, Bunyan's curious criminal biography *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* is one of the earliest criminal narratives to explore the crisis in valuation sparked by the growth of a market-driven

society in England. In this respect, Bunyan's criminal narrative is best understood as a transitional work that functions as a precursor to the later depiction in authors such as Defoe and Gay of crime as a troubling consequence of the triumph of commerce and the values of the market.

The fourth chapter on Defoe and his criminal narratives *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* takes up this linkage and attempts to show how in the hands of Defoe, the criminal narrative became a vehicle through which to explore the exhilarating individual triumphs and difficulties of life in an age of nascent commercialism. Defoe manipulates the popularity of the criminal in service of his tradesmen's agenda, but ultimately these fictional narratives reveal the anxieties over the rise of commercialism that Defoe struggled with throughout his lifetime of writing on trade.

Finally this dissertation ends with a closing look at the nightmarish and darkly comic landscape of Gay's notoriously popular play of 1727, *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay's criminal narrative serves as the culmination of a nation's early and ambivalent experience with the marketplace. Serving as a fitting close to the crime- and scandal-ridden decade of the 1720s, Gay's opera presents a bleak picture of an England dominated by a selfishly

individualistic and commercial ethos where value is dictated solely by economic worth and possibility. Drawing upon the scandal of the South Sea Bubble and the infamous career of the thief-taker general, Jonathan Wild, *The Beggar's Opera* reveals the extent to which Gay saw contemporary existence itself as a deeply corrupted enterprise. Its dark implication that in the modern age, we are all, in fact, criminals, not only captivated its eighteenth-century audience, but has fascinated subsequent ages as well, as witnessed by the continuing popularity of the play.

Above all, I hope to show in this study that the representation of criminality in eighteenth-century England was a more complex and contested one than has often been acknowledged, and one that had deep implications in defining the role of the individual in society in the modern era. Whose interests the criminal spoke for was never quite assured, but the voice of criminality was a compelling one, and the struggle over the cultural representation of the criminal was always controversial. This introduction closes by suggesting that it is precisely the tension and controversy surrounding criminal narratives in England throughout the eighteenth century that makes them such an intriguing and charged

area of study. Ultimately, in viewing the cultural representation of the criminal throughout this period, we are witnessing an important part of the creation of the modern self as well, a self that, in coming to terms with a rapidly expanding range of social and economic possibilities, sought to find cultural expression of these possibilities in the transgressive figure of the criminal.

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lucy Moore, *The Thieves' Opera* (New York: Harcourt, 2000), p. 220. This number of attendants at the public executions was uncommon, but Moore notes that at many of these events, particularly those of well-known and well-publicized criminals, crowds were often as many as 30,000 people.

<sup>2</sup> Moore, *The Thieves' Opera*, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, *The Thieves' Opera*, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup> Horace Walpole, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. 20, *Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, W.S. Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith and George L. Lam, Eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century is another interesting period regarding the representation of criminality, particularly in the novel. A variety of contemporary scholarship addresses this era, and, while this study owes much to these predecessors, it makes no claims to examine the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century underworld with the same rigor and attention. For general secondary accounts, I've relied upon Donald Low's *The Regency Underworld* (Trowbridge: Sutton Publishing, Ltd. 2000) as well as Marie-Christine Leps' *Apprehending the Criminal: The Production of Deviance in Nineteenth-Century Discourse* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992). In addition, John Bohstedt's *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983) offers a good account of

rural political unrest and its increasing categorization as crime throughout the nineteenth century. Finally, D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) is still the best literary criticism on the Foucauldian conception of policing in the novel.

<sup>6</sup> As Lennard Davis writes in *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): "The project of reading and writing novels was criminalized from the outset. . . . Indeed, without the appearance of the whore, the rogue, the cutpurse, the cheat, the thief, or the outsider it would be impossible to imagine the genre of the novel," pp. 124-25.

<sup>7</sup> Gamini Salgado's *The Elizabethan Underworld* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), pp.21-21. Salgado's account is a good general introduction to the Elizabethan underworld, while his collection *Cony Catchers and Bawdy Baskets* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972) focuses more on the accompanying literary representations of criminality in this period. Paul Salzman's *English Prose Fiction, 1558-1700: A Critical History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) also addresses the subject of Elizabethan criminal literature.

<sup>8</sup> Murray Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685- 1789*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> My reading of the picaresque tradition here and its similarities to and differences from the tradition of criminal narratives is indebted to Alexander Parker's *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1559-1753* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the varying patterns of criminality and some cultural repercussions of these patterns throughout Europe, see V.A.C. Gatrell's collection *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London: Europa, 1980). Gordon Wright's *Between the Guillotine and Liberty: Two Centuries of the Crime Problem in France* (New York: Oxford University, 1983) discusses the publication of *Causes*

*célèbres et intéressantes*, and Richard Evans' collection *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History* (New York: Routledge, 1988) discusses the German tradition of criminal representation.

<sup>11</sup> Derek Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 17. In explaining the predominant political view of the men of property of eighteenth-century England, Jarrett sums up what made England unique in this period. Above all, propertied English citizens felt that "kingly tyranny must be resisted at all costs; and such resistance could only be effective if men of real substance asserted their rights individually in their own localities and collectively in Parliament in London. By forcing the central government to respect their own very extensive freedoms and privileges, they automatically guaranteed to those beneath them as much freedom as it was proper for such people to have," p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> My interpretation of the results of the English Civil Wars is greatly influenced here by the historian Christopher Hill, most notably by his works *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1975) and *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714* (New York: Norton, 1982). A general account of the role of the Civil Wars in shaping the perspective of eighteenth-century Englishmen is found in two standard studies of the period: Roy Porter's excellent *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New: Penguin, 1982) and James Sambrook's *The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> For an extended discussion of the concept of English liberty, see Jarrett's opening chapter on "The Freeborn Englishman" in *England in the Age of Hogarth*. For an examination of the cultural effects of this freedom on public expression, see Jurgen Habermas' account in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> For standard accounts of England's development into a financial power throughout the eighteenth century, see Fernand Braudel's *The Wheels of Commerce, V. II* (New York:

Harper & Row, 1982), Paul Langford's *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Richard Grassby's *The Business Community of Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), P.G.M. Dickson's *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), and John Brewer's *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990). For the social effects of these changes on English life throughout the century, see Roger Hart's *English Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Wayland Publishers, 1972), Kirstin Olsen's *Daily Life in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), and Dick Leith's *A Social History of England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> W.A. Speck, "Eighteenth-Century Attitudes Towards Business," Institute of Economic Affairs.  
<<http://www.iea.org.uk/pdf/r53/r53speck.pdf>>

<sup>16</sup> For contemporary readings on the public debate over credit, a good general introduction to Addison and Steele's Whiggish perspective is found Erin Mackie's *the Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1985). For readings of the relationship between eighteenth-century financial practice and the English novel, see Elizabeth Bellamy's *Commerce, Morality and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Colin Nicholson's *Writing and the Rise of Finance: Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), James Thompson's *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), and Patrick Brantlinger's *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> In its economic context, the debate between the landed and the monied interests centered around the question of civic humanism and which group had the nation's best interests at heart. As Sambrook writes in *The Eighteenth Century*, the landed interests "believed, as many others did, that it was vital for the public interest that the government should not be invaded by men who had

'no natural interest in the soil,'" p. 97. This traditional formulation of land as the source of wealth and power increasingly came to be threatened throughout the eighteenth century by the rise of the merchant or 'monied' class and their growing role in bankrolling, and therefore running, the nation. While there is some truth to the claim that the landed interests were generally rural Tories and the monied interests largely Whiggish men of trade, the reality is that the distinctions were never quite that rigid or simple. Still the standard account of this ideological struggle, and of the concept of civic humanism, is J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) and also his collection *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> In *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb were among the first historians to study the commercialization of eighteenth-century England and its effects on the English economy, political structure and society. Although they chart much of this commercialization after 1750, they do acknowledge that "One can see the embryonic signs of a consumer society appearing clearly enough in seventeenth-century England," p. 5, and that "once again the foundations for that [consumer] advance were laid during the seventeenth century," p. 13. While what they call "the consumer revolution" may have finally ignited in the latter half of the century, my readings will strive to show that the stirrings of this revolution were making themselves felt in English cultural life as early as the later seventeenth century. For a more specific account of the ways in which culture itself came to stand as a central object of consumption in this period, see Ann Bermingham and John Brewer's *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, History*, p.109.

<sup>21</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, History*, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> McKendrick, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century*, p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in Speck's "Eighteenth-Century Attitudes Towards Business."

<sup>25</sup> As quoted in Speck's "Eighteenth-Century Attitudes Towards Business." In his discussion of Edward Young's work in *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), David Shields goes so far as to claim that "the task of British literature, according to Young, was to recognize trade as the predominant heroic action in the modern era," pp. 23-25.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (New York: Guinn Company, 1966), p. 1. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Roxana, the Fortunate Mistress* (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 210. As the editor of this edition, David Blewitt, reminds us in his endnote, ironically perhaps, this was also a popular expression of Charles II—ironic in light of the role the Whiggish business interest ultimately played in overthrowing the last of the Stuarts, James II.

<sup>28</sup> Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, p. 108.

<sup>29</sup> John McVeagh, *Tradefull Merchants: The Portrayal of The Capitalist in Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992). While McVeagh's account focuses on the shifting ideological tides in the representation of the merchant in English literature from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, Hirschman's argument is more specifically focused on the political rhetoric summoned in both the defense of and attack on capitalism. Hirschman's *Rival Views of Market Society* (Cambridge,

Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Joyce Appleby's *Capitalism and a New Social Order* (New York: New York University Press, 1984) are also useful introductions to the subject, as is Hawkes own *Idols of the Marketplace*. For a challenging conservative reading of the political issues involved in contemporary scholarship on the rise of capitalism, see Richard Grassby's *the Idea of Capitalism before the Industrial Revolution* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 80

<sup>32</sup> Marc Shell, *Money, Language and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 214.

<sup>33</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> For one of numerous explorations of the growth of individualism during the early modern era, see Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). Stone writes that "In the seventeenth century there is a clear iconographic and literary evidence for a new interest in the self, and for recognition of the uniqueness of the individual," p. 153. This is based, according to Stone, on "the secular Renaissance ideal of the individual hero" as well as the "religious introspection arising from the Calvinist sense of guilt and anxiety about salvation," p. 153. "In England," Stone concludes "both influences were at work, although the second seems to have been the most important, at any rate before 1660," p. 153.

<sup>35</sup> John Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1969). Another early study of the origins of criminality in literature is *The Literature of Roguery* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1958) by Frank Chandler and more recently Lars Harveit's *Workings of the Picaresque in the British Novel* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1987). While Richetti's argument is the most compelling, Chandler's study still offers a useful analysis of the attraction and function of the criminal narrative, and Harveit's work aptly traces the influence of the picaresque and the 'outcast/criminal' character on the British novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>36</sup> Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*, p. 10. Thankfully, a number of critics have since begun exploring the importance of popular culture throughout the early modern era, and this study is deeply indebted to them. In particular, I have drawn upon Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971) and Steven and Eileen Yeo's collection *Popular Culture and Class Conflict* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981). J. M. Golby and A.W. Purdue's *The Civilization of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750-1900* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) and Timothy Harris's collection *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) are also excellent introductions to the subject. More recently John Mullan and Christopher Reid's *Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture: A Selection* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 2000) offers among other things an insightful collection of contemporary accounts of criminality during the eighteenth century.

<sup>37</sup> Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> A wide variety of critics have written on the impact of popular fiction—particularly its influence on the development of the novel. Diana Spearman's *The Novel and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) is a general introduction, while Pat Rogers' *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1985) and *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1972) offer a detailed look into the productions of the early eighteenth-century English popular press. Michael McKeon's *Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), Lennard Davis' *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* and J. Paul Hunter's *Before the Novels: The Cultural Contexts Of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990) are also all standard and valuable works on the subject.

<sup>39</sup> Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> My reading of criminality here and throughout this study owes a good deal of general inspiration to Peter Stallybrass' and Allon White's *the Politics and Poetics of*

*Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), particularly in my characterization of criminal narratives as texts that subvert the artificial distinction between high and low. In this respect then, my reading of criminality in eighteenth-century English culture also owes a debt to Mikhail Bakhtin's now classic concept of the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1968) as a force that "marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions," p. 109. For further discussion of the carnivalesque, also see Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) as well as Terry Castle's *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

<sup>41</sup> Hal Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 5.

**Chapter 2**  
**"All Disorder and Confusion":**  
**Early Eighteenth-Century England**  
**and the Criminal Biography**

There is a telling moment in the middle of Daniel Defoe's last fictional effort, *Roxana* (1724), that offers a useful insight into understanding the cultural climate of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, into understanding the representation of criminality in this period, and into understanding the appeal of the most prominent form of the criminal narrative in this era, the criminal biography—the source from which the Bunyan, Defoe and Gay derived their own criminal narratives.

Throughout this study, we will have reason to return to the basic narrative patterns initiated by the criminal biography. This chapter begins then by exploring how *Roxana's* example sheds light on the early eighteenth-century reaction to what was seen as an increasingly unchecked promiscuity in English society, specifically in rapidly expanding urban centers such as London, and then analyzes how these reactions came to be embodied in the threatening popularity of the criminal biography.

In Defoe's scene, his criminal heroine and the novel's namesake, Roxana, reaches what will be, unbeknownst to her, the height of her almost meteoric social and economic ascent in English society. Abandoned by her husband after his failure to manage his family's brewing business, Roxana has to this point successfully navigated a career of prosperous wickedness, literally fornicating her way not only to security, but indeed opulence and excess. Having been tutored in matters of early eighteenth-century finance by a number of merchant admirers including the well-known financier and previous Lord Mayor of London, Sir Robert Clayton, Roxana has achieved great wealth and would seem to have reached the height of her powers.<sup>1</sup> However, at this point she abandons Clayton's financial advice, as well as his "scheme of frugality" for her upkeep to pursue the decadent pleasures of the court of Charles II.<sup>2</sup> She celebrates her ascent into this highest circle of London society in a number of lavish parties she hosts, and in particular one event where

there came such an appearance of gentlemen and ladies, that my apartments were by no means able to receive them; and those who in particular appeared as principals, gave order below, to let no more company come up; the street was full of coaches with coronets, and fine glass chairs; and in short

it was impossible to receive the company; I kept my little room, as before, and the dancers filled the great room; all the drawing-rooms also were filled, and three rooms below stairs, which were not mine. (219)

This scene exhibits many of the hallmarks of Defoe's style in his criminal narratives: a voice that takes great pride in detailing success in climbing up the social ladder, an emphasis on the details of the material objects this social mobility provides—"coaches with coronets" and "fine glass chairs," as well as "dancers" filling "all the drawing-rooms" and "three rooms below the stairs" that need to be made use of, and a particularly middle-class recognition of the social boundaries that divide and literally separate "those who in particular appear'd as principals" and the "company" who are being kept out from participation.

In and of itself, however, this scene depicts no more notable an event than that which still occurs any weekend outside of popular nightclubs or celebrity gatherings in modern-day London. Indeed, part of Defoe's purpose here and throughout his criminal narratives is to show how his criminals become obsessed with their own individuality and with the trappings of luxury a commercial age was making more and more possible for a

greater number of people. In this respect, Roxana's description seems true to her character; like a number of other notorious criminals in this era, Roxana has become a celebrity, and her parties and even her tone of voice reflect as much. What stands out here, however, is the following observation Roxana anxiously makes as she looks over the spectacle:

It was very well that there was a strong party of guards brought to keep the door, for without that, there had been such a promiscuous crowd, and some of them scandalous too, that we should have been all disorder and confusion. (219)

To begin this chapter I would suggest that Roxana's comment here on the "promiscuity" of the crowd threatening to enter just outside the door, and more importantly on the "disorder and confusion" that she fears will occur should they gain entry, speaks volumes on the prevalent social anxieties of this era, anxieties that were given expression in the popular formula of the criminal biography.

To return to the scene in *Roxana*, however, the fact that Roxana herself expresses a fear about the "promiscuous" and indeed even "scandalous" crowd and about the state of "disorder and confusion" their arrival threatens illustrates an irony Defoe himself

seems to savor in his criminal narratives. Both of Defoe's criminal heroines Moll Flanders and Roxana are avowed social climbers, so much so that their aggressive drive upwards threatens their very conception of identity; both Moll and Roxana find themselves confronted by figures from their questionable past that threaten to ruin their prosperous futures: Moll's brother whom she unwittingly marries, and then her son from that marriage, and Roxana's bastard child, Susan, who pursues her mother with a vengeance throughout the second half of her narrative, haunting her "like an evil spirit" (358). But in this passage, Roxana's overwhelming desire and ambition to become someone else, to escape from her past, cause her to fail to recognize in herself the very same qualities she criticizes in those just outside the door, and indeed to project and fear in others, the "promiscuity" that the rise of individuals like herself represented in English society.

In its eighteenth-century usage, the term "promiscuous" had less of the sexual connotation it holds today. True, its use was generally still depreciative, but it referred more to the mixing of elements indiscriminately, without respect for kind,

number, or order—that is, the mixing of types without a proper value judgement on the difference between these types. Thus its earliest usage is characterized by Richard Knolles' description of "the promiscuous common people" of Turkey, naively "doubling and redoubling the praises of the King" in his *Generall Historie of the Turks* in 1603.<sup>3</sup> In 1667 John Milton writes similarly in *Paradise Lost* of the "promiscuous crowd" in Hell awaiting the arrival of the arch-devils (I.380). In 1751 in number 144 of *The Rambler*, Samuel Johnson decries that "secrets are not to be made cheap by promiscuous publication." By 1816, the term begins to take on sexual connotations, when in Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*, we are told of "the profane custom of promiscuous dancing—that is, of men and women dancing together in the same party." In each of these passages, promiscuity is characterized by a suspect or absent sense of judgement. In the sense it is used in Defoe's passage, promiscuous often referred to the mixing of social classes without resort to this proper sense of judgement, and therefore it was used in a derogatory sense to criticize such mixings.

It is a purposeful use of irony on Defoe's part that Roxana the social critic is herself the clearest social and economic beneficiary of the sort of promiscuity and mixing of classes she fears among her party guests. In Defoe's England, it appears that money opens the door to social advancement, and it is only Roxana's financial success as a prostitute and criminal that has allowed her to move beyond traditional social distinctions and the value judgements once founded upon these distinctions. The irony of the entire situation points out a social truth that, directly or indirectly, Defoe and other authors would make over and over again in criminal narratives: that money was rapidly replacing family, land, and class distinctions as the new arbitrator of value in eighteenth-century society. As Gay was to write only a few years later in *The Beggar's Opera* (1727), in English society it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish whether "the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen," or, as in the case of *Roxana*, whether the prostitutes were ascending to the level of aristocracy or whether the aristocracy were descending to the level of prostitutes.<sup>4</sup> What

Roxana's rise implies is that in a society that values money above all things, promiscuity is the unavoidable and threatening result. Patrick Brantlinger writes that "as Balzac and many other nineteenth-century novelists suggested in countless works of fiction, the ultimate standard of value in modern society was not religion, or even a nation's culture, but money."<sup>5</sup> Brantlinger traces this sentiment all the way back to the early eighteenth-century, noting that this idea "had already been expressed by Defoe and other eighteenth-century novelists" and that "the universal, leveling power of money is a theme apparently intrinsic to, perhaps even definitive of, the novel form itself."<sup>6</sup> Likewise it is a theme of the criminal narratives, and of the criminal biographies they sprung from. What criminal narratives threaten to enact is a leveling of society, and it was from this threat that they drew most of their appeal and their notoriety. Roxana's comment is most revealing then in the manner through which it underlines the sense of foreboding an increasing social promiscuity (and the threat of leveling it contained) gave rise to in eighteenth-century society. It also underlines its inevitable corollary: the suspicion that in this new

England, particularly in its urban centers such as London, one always had to be, like the "strong party of guards brought to keep the door," vigilantly defending against the agents of "disorder and confusion,"—agents that, like barbarians at the gate, were always threatening to overrun the social institutions that protected order and hierarchy.

In confronting these looming agents of disorder and confusion, the early eighteenth century witnessed the enactment of draconian, severe and hitherto unknown legislation to regulate social behavior—and particularly, the social behavior of the poor; it also saw a sharp increase in the popularity of cultural forms that mirrored this sort of social regulation, the most popular of these being the criminal biography.<sup>7</sup> This overriding social concern with disorder and confusion, and with the obsessive need to control and regulate this kind of confusion, played a central role in the formulaic structure and social function of these criminal biographies.

To understand the powerful ideological currents that energize the criminal biography, however, it is necessary to identify the social and economic

developments that gave rise to these currents, as well as to reexamine some of the traditional notions of early eighteenth-century culture that have previously tended to obscure these developments. But even before undertaking such an exploration, it will be helpful to at least briefly sketch out the underlying narrative structure of the criminal biography to begin foregrounding the reasons why this form was so expressive of, and appealing to, the popular audience of its age. Later in this chapter we'll review a more detailed historical account of the criminal biography, as well as a more detailed analysis of what were the two most popular specific types in criminal biography: the highwayman and the apprentice. For now, however, this general description may suffice.

Foremost in explaining the popularity of the criminal biography is the fact that the depiction of the criminal offered in popular early eighteenth-century criminal biographies was formed by a dual narrative emphasis on the sensational details of criminal activity as well as an inevitable lesson on the moral and gruesome physical consequences of crime, specifically closing with the criminal's execution and the equation

of crime with individual rebellion—against social, economic, monarchical, and inevitably divine authority.

Thus, the criminal biography had a distinct social function during this period. Adapting the work of Foucault, Lennard Davis notes the capacity of criminal narratives to serve as textual embodiments of the ideological and social struggle that occurred at actual public hangings throughout the eighteenth century. Thus, the formula of rebellion and inevitable judgement at the hands of religious and secular authority not only occurred in the elaborate staging of public executions (such as the execution of Jamie Maclaine that Walpole attends, for example), but also was reinscribed by the textual equivalents of public executions: the criminal biographies. Davis writes that while

the felonious act committed by the criminal was frequently associated with the political aspirations of the poor and the lower classes. . . . it is important to remember that such literature served the needs of the upper classes, too, since the moralizing of the repentant felon amounted to a form of social control and was, as Foucault would remind us, an exercise of power and authority as tangible as that manifested during the ritual of execution.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, as the earliest form of the eighteenth-century criminal narrative, criminal biographies served as brief and rigidly formulaic models of social and religious

regulation, models whose tone an early eighteenth-century audience would have been familiar with from experience with sermons, spiritual autobiographies and other strongly religiously-influenced narrative forms. While these biographies contained the rudiments of what we could call the realistic style that came to fruition in more fully realized narratives such as Defoe's *Roxana*, for example, the earliest criminal biographies are perhaps best characterized as moral tales.

On the surface level, however, it was the frequent injections of these realistic, or rather sensationalistic, physical details that kept readers captivated. These details ranged from the seemingly everyday facts any reader of a newspaper today would expect to find in the first paragraph of a story—the who, the what, the where of a crime—to larger narrative sections that followed the Elizabethan tradition of cony-catching tales and London guides in vicariously letting readers in on the wide variety of criminal actions. These actions ranged from such age-old tricks of the trade as a prostitute's basic "crossbite" to more recent and alarming trespasses such as the "nip and tuck," with its scandalous employment of children, for

example.<sup>9</sup> In one of the most popular collections of criminal biographies of the era, *The Complete Newgate Calendar* (1734), then, the criminal biography of Thomas Dun, thief, begins by situating him economically, socially and geographically as a "person of very mean extraction, and born in a little village between Kempston and Elstow, in Bedfordshire."<sup>10</sup> Methodically, the narrative moves on to a more specific detailing of his preferred method of criminal activity, his use of disguise, and to describe how

when he had committed any remarkable roguery his usual custom was to cover his body all over with nauseous and stinking sear-cloths and ointments, and his face with plasters, so that his own mother could not know him. He would be a blind harper to commit one villainy, and a cripple with crutches to bring about another; nay, he would hang artificial arms to his body.(1)

Inevitably, the biography progresses to detail the specific intricacies of Dun's criminal activity, such as how

the gang under his command consisted of several sorts of artists. . . some of these being very expert in making false keys and bobbies; others were ingenious at wrenching of locks and making deaf files, which wasted the iron without noise, making the strongest bolts give way for their passage. (2)

Today, inundated with cinematic criminal narratives, we have become jaded. But for a young man or woman in the

eighteenth century, for example, grudgingly resigned to a future of monotonous and taxing farm work, and to the narrow existence of knowing and seeing only the same hundred or so people for the rest of their lives, such passages must have come as a thrilling revelation of the larger world indeed.

Such biographies held a dual appeal then for their growing audience. The introduction of detailed criminal activity lent to the sense of realism and immediacy of these tales, and this seems to be representative of an increasing public taste for graphic detail, the same sort of taste the novel would eventually satisfy. But these narrative scenes also offered the sort of thrill of the unknown that early forms of journalism were beginning to provide as well. As Paula Backscheider has written of the early eighteenth-century reading audience:

Greedy for knowledge, experience, novelty, and opportunity, early eighteenth-century readers wanted to look through others' eyes at what they could not see and undergo themselves. . . . Freak accidents, gory murders, congenital deformities, and gallows behavior fascinated them.<sup>11</sup>

More importantly, perhaps, a large part of the growing fascination with these criminal narratives must have arisen from the exhilarating sense of freedom and escape

that these strongly individualistic criminal figures embodied for a struggling middle- and lower-middle class audience whose life in the eighteenth century was anything but free and escapable. This sort of vicarious freedom afforded by the criminal biography was, and remains, one of the most telling hallmarks of all popular fiction, but it also mirrors the growing interest in the possibilities of the individual and in individual psychology throughout the eighteenth century, as well as in the details of the great world just beyond one's own door, or village, as it were. Thus, Thomas Dun's biography is keen to note,

The better to carry on his villainies, he changed himself into as many shapes as Proteus, being a man that understood the world so well—I mean the tricks and the fallacies of it—that there was nothing he could not humor, nor any part of villainy that came amiss to him. To-day he was a merchant, on the morrow a soldier, the next day a gentleman, and the day following a beggar. In short, he was everyday what he pleased himself. (1)

Merchant, soldier, gentlemen, and beggar. Except for the purposeful exclusion of religious vocations (particularly in English criminal narratives, religious lines were rarely if ever crossed), Thomas Dun's choices of identity encompass a wide gamut of eighteenth-century experiences available to a young man of the middle

class, experiences that even the lower-class audience of the criminal biographies were beginning to see within their realm of possibility and to which the criminal biographies gave transgressive expression. Clearly it was a shame that Dun undertook such transformations only "to carry on his villainies," but the fact that through a life of crime he could "under[stand] the world so well" and "everyday [be] what he pleased himself" would not be lost on an eighteenth-century audience.

In a telling way, Thomas Dun's criminal transformations are a forerunner of Roxana's deceptions; the fluidity of his identity as a criminal is mirrored in her troublesome and threatening social rise as a prostitute, as well as in her own ability to disguise herself as something she is not. One reason criminal narratives were seen as threatening by many was because they seemed to affirm for a hungry and eager middle-class public that it was quite possible to move beyond one's social and economic limitations. Furthermore, criminal biographies seemed to specifically equate this sort of desirable movement with the breaking of established and traditional laws, so much so, in fact,

that it could almost seem necessary to break the law in order to move ahead in society.

Thus criminal biographies could serve as pregnant cultural expressions of liberation. However, inherent in the formula of the criminal biography was the means for harnessing and regulating such energies. The second aspect of the criminal narrative's appeal lay in the overt brand of moralizing that was another hallmark of this style. Thus, Thomas Dun's biography is littered with comments on his "insupportable mischiefs. . . outrageousness. . . [and] thousand villainies" (2). The insistence of moral interjection, and the marriage between the vicarious escape and the inevitable punishment of execution reinforced upon readers the ultimate triumph of such traditional bastions of authority as state, king, and divine providence. Most often, punishment was even more graphically represented than rebellion. Thus in Dun's unenviable, but typical, case,

He yields, and the executioners chop off his hands at the wrist, then cut off his arms at the elbow, and all above next, within an inch or two of his shoulders; next his feet were cut off beneath the ankles, his legs chopped off at the knees, and his thighs cut off about five inches from his trunk, which, after severing his head from it, was burnt to ashes. So after a long struggle with death, as

dying by piecemeal, he put a period to his wicked and abominable life; and the several members cut off from his body, being twelve in all, besides his head, were fixed up in the principal places in Bedfordshire, to be a terror to such villains as survived him. (7)

Such an extended description of bodily mutilation may seem almost silly to us today in its insistence on spotlighting the graphically violent nature of Dun's execution, but it is notable for revealing how the same sort of detail that could function to liberate readers, albeit vicariously, also functioned to regulate them. The extent to which this literary form of social and authoritarian reification was in fact a welcome one or not for the readers of criminal biographies, and how they may or may not have struggled with such social manipulation is still a matter of historical debate, and one that will be taken up again later in this chapter. However, that the arrangement of this dualistic formula is repeated over and again in criminal biographies is clear enough.

In order to fully understand exactly why, and by whom, such narratives were seen as threatening, however, we need to recreate some of the social and historical context from which they arose. The early eighteenth century was often referred to by literary critics as an

'Age of Reason' and stability, with, as A.R. Humphreys once referred to it, a culture that "reflected a society fairly stable in structure and expectations" and a literature that "like society, was a more orderly spectacle than at any other time."<sup>12</sup> In hindsight, however, it now seems this characterization was one that was more convenient than realistic, one based in a widely and perhaps too-easily accepted Whiggish view of historical progress through the growth of personal individualism and liberty, the adoption of the values of the marketplace, and the advent of commercialism. While these stages did indeed mark stages of historical progress, I would also contend that this progress was rarely an orderly development, nor one unaccompanied by fierce cultural debate between Whiggish and Tory interests—the former inclined to embrace the leveling values of the emerging marketplace, the latter more inclined to view such developments as dire and disastrous. That the Whiggish interests spoke loudest in the Age of Walpole is the view that seems most likely. Subsequently, in their groundbreaking collection of essays, *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown

were among the earliest critics to take aim at such benign characterizations, arguing that previous scholars "came to a field already restrained. . . by Whig historians. . . which viewed the eighteenth century as the tranquil haven of political stability in modern English history."<sup>13</sup> In fairness, whatever the level of political stability, we can certainly identify a neoclassical movement that stressed stability in the works of such Tories as Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot or other Augustans of the early eighteenth century. Moreover, to prove the centrality of balance, structure and order in the work of the most prominent writers of this era requires no lengthy argument, or defense, for that matter. But no number of epistles, pastorals, or heroic couplets could alter developments that were irreversibly transforming—and to the conservative Augustans, in particular—destabilizing English society during this period. In fact, one could just as soon view the Augustan obsession with order and balance as a reactionary and defensive expression against what they saw as the changes ravaging their society—particularly changes in the underlying economic structure of this

society. In his study of the Augustans, Isaac Kramnick writes of them that

The financial revolution of 1690-1740 was. . . the most meaningful social experience in [their] lives. . . it informs all their writings on politics and society, and it feeds their gloom, their satire, and their indignation. They saw an aristocratic social and political order being undermined by money and new financial institutions and they didn't like it.<sup>14</sup>

For many of these Augustans, Tories, and other critics of the new, it often seemed that it was, as Josiah Tucker would later call it, that "kind of monster," the booming city of London, "with a head enormously large, and out of all proportion to its body" that most ominously represented these threatening new social and economic changes to the established way of life.<sup>15</sup>

To an extent, in fact, these critics were correct in their assessment. London did embody the changing face of English society, and for many contemporary observers, Tory and otherwise, these social and economic changes came to be linked with what was perceived as a rise in criminal and other forms of threatening activity in the nation's capital. Thus while London was clearly not altogether the cause of the nation's ills, like most urban centers even today, it attracted the most attention, and offered the greatest, the most visible,

and to many, the most disturbing panorama of change in English society. More specifically, London functioned as the most powerful symbol and public illustration of change in English society throughout the eighteenth century, and by extension what was popularly seen as an increase in crime during this era as well. Whether you applauded or were disgusted by these changes, then, there does seem to have been, as the historian John Brewer writes of London, a "remarkable agreement that the city signified variety, instability and change" and that above all, "it embodied the protean character of the commercial world"—"protean" being an especially popular word during the eighteenth century that should recall the unfortunate example of the notorious Thomas Dun's ill-fated transformations.<sup>16</sup> Change, and the desire and ability to effect it then, came to be viewed as a thrilling possibility for some, and a threateningly suspect development for others. Both of these attitudes were expressed in the literary representations of London throughout this era, and subsequently both also informed the criminal biography.

Historically, at least some of this instability, change, and apparent rise in criminal activity during

this period was being caused by the shifting demographics of England, and indeed the "protean character" of the new commercial world was in part responsible for these demographic realignments, particularly the realignments brought on by the enclosure movement. Commercial growth helps to explain the rapid growth of urban centers such as Edinburgh in Scotland, Dublin in Ireland, and the industrial boomtowns like Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield in the north of England throughout the later eighteenth and nineteenth century. However in our period, the most spectacularly growing city remained London, and a good deal of London's growth was due to a steady increase in enclosures and consequently the changing landscape of the English countryside.

In accounting for these changes and how they contributed to the popularity of criminal representation, we again need to attempt the difficult and inexact work of separating the mythology of the eighteenth century from the reality. For however romanticized it may have been in the English cultural imagination, the lot of the English peasant was never an easy one. In *The Village* (1783), George Crabbe writes

"Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains / Because the Muses never knew their pains: / They boast their peasants' pipes, but peasants now / Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough."<sup>17</sup> The opening of Book II of *The Village* is less grim, but similarly focused on exposing the reality of rural existence in the eighteenth century:

No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain,  
But own the village life a life of pain.

Even this difficult existence has its moments of joy and happiness, however, as Crabbe admits that

I too must yield, that oft amid these woes  
Are gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet  
repose.<sup>18</sup>

This opening is particularly representative of the difficulties involved in arriving at the historical reality of life in the countryside in the early eighteenth century. For, although *The Village* was composed much later in the century, the realities Crabbe exposes in his poem had been commonplace throughout the earlier years of century as well; the lot of rural peasants and common squatters was one that had been deteriorating since the end of seventeenth century.

But Crabbe's poem also suggests that not all was declining in the English village of old, and indeed it

all depended on one's standing. In fact, "that it was a golden age for the squire and still more so for 'the Great,' is certain," as Dorothy George points out.<sup>19</sup> Such comes as little surprise, however, and George is quick to add that "there was no revolutionary change between the [1688] England of Gregory King and the England of Defoe, more especially where the small farmer and the village labourer were concerned" (19). Ultimately, in George's view "the poverty of the small farmer persisted" (19). Still, even in light of George's comments, it is just as easy to mythologize the miserable plight of the peasant-farmer as well as to nostalgically laud "the transient mirth and hours of sweet repose" that Crabbe acknowledges. One important demographic and social pattern we can recognize, however, and one that played a large role in the increasing representation of criminality throughout this era is the increase in land enclosures and royal decrees such as the notorious Act of Settlement of 1662, acts that forced large numbers of the English population to migrate from the rural pastures of 'Merrie Old England' and made paupers and desperate people of traditional rural squatters. In a tone typical of such statutes

regulating the behavior of the poor, the Act of

Settlement of 1662 explained:

By some defects of the law, poor people are not restrained from going from one parish into another and, therefore do endeavor to settle themselves in those parishes where there is the best stock, the largest commons or wastes to build cottages, and the most woods for them to burn and destroy; and when they have consumed it, then to another parish and at last become rogues and vagabonds.<sup>20</sup>

Where these rogues and vagabonds invariably ended up, it seemed to many alarmed eighteenth-century commentators, was in the increasingly crowded metropolis of London.

By the early eighteenth century, roughly one in ten English people lived in London, and one in six Britons spent at least part of their working lives in the city. With a population of 750,000 by mid-century, London was not only the largest city in Britain, but arguably the largest city in Western Europe.<sup>21</sup> As such, London was the pride of England, and indeed the envy of much of Europe as well. But with this notoriety came an unprecedented influx of people from the country to the city—in particular, it seemed, young people wistfully looking to escape the limitations of a life on the farm, or trying to escape a lifetime of almost enforced poverty, the same young people who would be fascinated by the possibilities lying just below the surface in a tale

such as Thomas Dun's. Indeed, the growth of London as the center of trade in England made it a destination of choice for many, and especially for the laboring poor. The agriculturalist Arthur Young lamented that "Young men and women in the country fix their eye on London as the last stage of their hope. . . The number of young women that fly there is incredible."<sup>22</sup> Young's comment only underlines the harsh social facts that popular illustrated criminal narratives such as Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress* (1732) and *The Rake's Progress* (1733-35) took as their subject and made explicit: that a good number of these youngsters ended up unemployed, dissolute, and more than likely to take up lives of crime in order to survive.<sup>23</sup> In part, it was the unease surrounding this sort of new social reality that the criminal biographies portrayed and exploited, and that provided part of their popular appeal.

That crime was often the result of a misplaced and an almost over-reaching social ambition was one part of the popular mythology of crime then, and as we can also witness in the example of *Roxana*, right or wrong, this prevalent fear of ambition and the possibility of mobility it represented informs much of the writing on

crime in this era. And yet while this sort of aristocratic and conservative notion may seem unfair and limiting to our modern sensibilities, there was a large measure of truth to it, as witnessed in the numerous and expanding slums of London. Indeed, for the young, optimistic urban transplant, there was no guarantee of work in London either. Moreover, the poor were not eagerly welcomed in London any more than they were in neighboring counties. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, "there was a prolonged struggle, by ruling-class interests, to restrain the growth of London, and in particular to prevent the poor from settling there."<sup>24</sup> In some respects then, increasingly severe legislation in London concerning the construction of new housing attempted to ensure that the results of the Enclosure Acts would be replicated in the city. For the newly underemployed in London, it very well then may have seemed that they were, to paraphrase a later musical group of English malcontents, The Who, "meeting the new boss, same as the old boss." However as the growing interest in criminal biographies seemed to make evident, even these attempts at regulation were unsuccessful. Williams notes,

Poor people and vagrants, the casualties of a changing rural economy, or the hard-pressed or ambitious seeing in London some escape from their subordinate destiny, were the explicit objects of exclusion from the developing city. Yet the general changes were of an order which made exclusion impossible. Not only the retinue of servants but many thousands of others flooded in, and the main consequences of the limitations was a long-continued wave of overcrowded and insecure speculative building and adaptation within the legal limits: forced labyrinths and alleys of the poor.<sup>25</sup>

Such a squalid social reality led to a real increase in the fear of crime in London in this period, and to contemporary observations such as Henry Fielding's that

Whoever considers the cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast increases of their suburbs, the great irregularity of their buildings, the immense number of lanes, alleys, courts and bye-places, must think that had they been intended for the very purpose of concealment, they could not have been better contrived.<sup>26</sup>

Ironically then, the result of the reactionary measures to regulate the actual physical geography and developing layout of London throughout this era came to mirror the era's prevalent fears about criminals: that increasingly, as Fielding noted, the "gang of thieves and sharpers" in London had become "almost too big for the civil authority to suppress," and yet somehow they were frighteningly able to conceal themselves and escape detection.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, to recall once again the opening example of the scandal surrounding the promiscuous nature of Roxana's festivities, one could make the case that in part the increased fear of criminality during this era arose from the shock of coming to terms with the strange and unknown elements the new urban centers invariably drew together. In contrast to the rural communities of an earlier England, where one interacted with the same people daily, monthly, yearly, and indeed for one's whole time in this mortal coil, in a city of London's size, in the space of twenty-four hours a man such as the young James Boswell could very well drink with the literary set at Will's Coffee House, take in a play at Covent Garden with visiting Scottish compatriots, and still spend the night enjoying the pleasures of an orange girl after the theater—as Boswell indeed boasts in his *London Journal*.<sup>28</sup>

And while this dazzling arena of possibility that was eighteenth-century London may have seemed like a paradise on earth for a romantic and melodramatic country laird like young Boswell, for others, London was just as easily viewed as a hellish manifestation of all that seemed to be rapidly and inexorably going wrong in

English society. Thus as a young country gallant come to the city, Boswell sees London as a lover, and boasts to his impoverished Scottish friends who must stay behind, that, after only a few weeks, he loves her with "as violent an affection as the most romantic lover ever had for his mistress."<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, in *Humphrey Clinker*, Tobias Smollett's wiser, if clearly less enthusiastic, Squire Bramble—himself perhaps only the embodiment of an older, sadder and wiser Boswell—sees London rather differently upon his return; his voice is representative of all the fears that urban centers such as London symbolized in the popular imagination. For Bramble, like Boswell, "London is literally new to me," but the changes in the city are far from welcoming. He laments, "what I left open fields, producing hay and corn, I now find covered with streets and squares, and palaces, and churches."<sup>30</sup> Like Josiah Tucker, Bramble also avails himself of the popular image of London during the era, claiming "The capital is become an overgrown monster; which, like a dropsical head, will in time leave the body and extremities without nourishment or support" (118). Both of these comments underline the changing landscape of

city and country, and the fact that for many Englishmen the growth of the city seemed to be draining the country, and England itself, of its vitality.

Moreover, this exodus from the country was increasingly being linked in the popular imagination to an increase in criminality and inevitably to the wheels of commerce that initiated this exodus. Of this army of nascent criminals, Bramble explains

The plough-boys, cow-herds, and lower hinds are debauched and seduced by the appearance and discourse of those coxcombs in livery [other urban servants visiting the country in summers]. They desert their dirt and drudgery, and swarm up to London, in hopes of getting into service. . . Great numbers of these, being disappointed in their expectation, become thieves and sharpers; and London being an immense wilderness, in which there is neither watch nor ward of any signification, nor any order or police, affords them lurking-places as well as prey. (118)

This "immense wilderness," with "neither watch nor ward," only reinforces Fielding's observation of London as a place of concealment. But while the popular fear was that criminals were everywhere, yet undetectable, what was gaudily visible to observers such as Bramble in this new London was the growing role of commerce in the maddening circus of the city. On seeing the frightening increase in commercial industry in London, Bramble exclaims "What wonder that our villages are depopulated,

and our farms in want of day-labourers. . . The tide of luxury has swept all the inhabitants from the open country" (118). Subtly perhaps, but Bramble's comments still underline how the growth of commercialism also came to be linked with an increase in crime.

The encroachment of urban geography on the country that Bramble and others complained of was in fact symptomatic of some of the less desirable effects of commercialization and England's development from an agricultural to an industrial nation. Indeed as scholars like John Sekora have made clear, with commercialization in England came a new and worrisome obsession with luxury.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, the mania for getting and spending, in fact, was what helped keep the English economy afloat. A commercial economy depended on people spending money, and above all on keeping the act of exchange in a state of perpetual motion. Commerce itself was a vicious circle, as contemporary observers like Bernard Mandeville suggested in such cynical and controversial essays as his *The Fable of the Bees* (1714). Private vices led to public virtues, he wrote, and in eighteenth-century England, while "every part was full of vice / Yet the whole mass [was] a paradise."<sup>32</sup> That is

to say that the engine of the nation, trade and commercialism, was in fact, according to Mandeville, based on the very natural human traits of greed and vice.

In a commercial society, one wheel turns the other, and exchange was a necessary part of this cycle, Mandeville argued. Criminal activity itself was a necessary cog in the commercial machine. Thus, he writes,

If an ill-natured miser, who is almost a plum [slang: wealthy, a "plum" meant the sum of £100,000] and spends but fifty pounds a year, though he has no relation to inherit his wealth, should be robbed of five hundred or a thousand guineas, it is certain that as soon as this money should come to circulate, the nation would be better for the robbery. (65)

Indeed, Mandeville was very particular to expose just how every cog in the machine of modern commerce depended upon the other, criminal or otherwise, and this entire chain all begins, for example, with the reality that

*Thieves and pickpockets* steal for a livelihood. . . they want to gratify their senses, have victuals, strong drink, lewd women, and to be idle when they please. *The victualler*, who entertains them and takes their money, knowing which way they come at it, is very near as great a villain as his guests. But if he fleeces them well, minds his business, and is a prudent man, he may get money, and be punctual with them he deals with. *The trusty out-clerk*, whose chief aim is his master's profit, sends him in what beer he wants and takes care not

to lose his custom; while the man's money is good, he thinks it no business of his to examine whom he gets it by. In the mean time, *the wealthy brewer*, who leaves all the management to *his servants*, knows nothing of the matter, but keeps his coach, treats his friends, and enjoys his pleasure with ease, and a good conscience; he gets an estate, builds houses, and educates *his children* in plenty, without ever thinking on the labour which *wretches* perform, the shifts *fools* make, and the tricks *knaves* play to come at the commodity, by the vast sale of which he amasses his great riches. (65, my emphasis)

As Mandeville's example reveals, the oil that greased the chain of eighteenth-century commerce was quite clearly money, and, unlike land and property, as money in and of itself held little value, it was rapidly spent to purchase "luxuries" and thus to begin the cycle anew.

Furthermore, in a society where value was increasingly being equated with material possessions, the obsession with such luxury items not only took on a more urgent tone, it indeed came to define London and the urban experience itself. Nor was this new and unsettling urban experience ever very far from being linked with criminal behavior. In the *London Journal* (1761-62), the impressionable Boswell displays a prescient capacity for absorbing the cultural imagery of his adopted hometown when he compares himself to a dashing Captain Macheath while carousing through the

streets of London with his whores.<sup>33</sup> Clearly the phenomenal popularity of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* had no small part in his choice of imagery, but it does display the extent to which London and the new urban experience to be had there seemed to be increasingly defining the nation, and how this experience was increasingly characterized by its criminality.

Thus, while there were indeed different sections of the city for different tastes, and while the difference between White Chapel on the east side and St. James Square on the west could literally be defined by when their inhabitants made their livelihood, night in White Chapel and day in St. James, the increasingly cosmopolitan and commercial nature of an urban center such as London insured that there would be an almost unavoidable mixing of these social elements. London in the early eighteenth century was a new social and economic experiment. The yearly fairs had traditionally provided the commercial outlet for rural England—a chance to buy and trade goods, a place to socialize and occasionally gawk at the rare and more exotic items to be seen. The experience of London, however, was something far greater. London was a city where not only

was there a continual marketplace for necessities, but also all manners of luxuries to be had as well. In London it seemed that the city itself bowed to the values of the new marketplace.

As briefly witnessed in the career of Defoe's Roxana, one of the effects of this new commercialization was that it began narrowing the gap between the social classes, reducing all segments of society to the level of consumer. As even luxuries became more available, one of the last material distinctions between the classes was being gradually eroded. Where a particularly prosperous merchant may have been able to eat like a lord before, it was rapidly becoming possible for him to dress and furnish his home like one as well. Neil McKendrick writes of this period,

Objects which for centuries had been the privileged possessions of the rich came, within the space of a few generations, to be within the reach of a larger part of society than ever before. . . Objects which were once acquired as the result of inheritance at best, came to be the legitimate pursuit of a whole new class of consumers.<sup>34</sup>

This new consumerism did not come without visible social repercussions, however. While the growing commercialization of England, and London specifically, aided in leveling society—at least in terms of the

capacity for material acquisition—it also brought social classes materially and geographically closer in a manner largely unseen before.

It was precisely this sort of promiscuity to be found in London—the type of promiscuity that was mirrored in criminal narratives like the criminal biography—that alternately fascinated and disturbed visitors and residents alike. The visiting Newcastle wood-engraver, Thomas Bewick, wrote of London, “I did not like London—it appeared to me to be a world of itself where every thing in the extreme, might at once be seen—extreme riches—extreme poverty—extreme grandeur & extreme wretchedness.”<sup>35</sup> In describing his city, London resident and versifier John Bancks embodied this new social experience in verse:

Rogues that nightly rob and shoot men,  
Hangmen, alderman, and footmen,  
Lawyers, poets, priests, physicians,  
Noble, simple, all conditions:  
Worth beneath a threadbare cover,  
Villainy bedaubed all over.<sup>36</sup>

The emphasis here on the mixing of high and low cultures, of rogues and lawyers walking the same city street, and of all of them being tainted by London’s inherent “villainy” is not coincidental, nor should these lines be too quickly passed over as just popular

verse tossed off for the marketplace. One of the effects the new national focus on London had on eighteenth-century culture was that figures that had once existed at the margins of society could no longer be largely ignored or written off as cultural anomalies. Again Smollett's Bramble diagnoses this unsettling social development best when he complains,

In short, there is no distinction or subordination left—the different departments of life are jumbled together—the hod carrier, the low mechanic, the tapster, the publican, the shopkeeper, the pettifogger, the citizen, and the courtier, all tread upon the kibes of one another: actuated by the demons of profligacy and licentiousness, they are seen every where rambling, riding, rolling, rushing, jostling, mixing, bouncing, cracking, and crashing in one vile ferment of stupidity and corruption. (119)

As can be inferred from Bramble's comment, part of the growing fear and fascination with the criminal—and with the representation of criminals in the criminal biographies—was due to this leveling. In the new London of the early eighteenth century, the criminal was becoming as much a part of the social and cultural fabric of society as Banck's alderman, poet or physician, or Bramble's publican, shopkeeper or pettifogger.

While the new commercialization of London did increase the social capacity for material acquisition, it did not remedy traditional social disparities among classes. In fact, it seems more likely that since commercialization made class disparities more visible, it exacerbated them. What urban commercialization brought about was the capacity for material advancement, not necessarily its likelihood. As Dorothy George's earlier comment about a golden age for wealthy rural squires in this era suggests, those who were born into wealth still by and large remained wealthy, and those who were born into poverty still by and large remained poor. More specifically perhaps, for every apprentice to rise to middle-class respectability (as Samuel Richardson did, for example), another gang of idle apprentices was formed in the dark alleys of the city streets. They just had more stores to rob now.

This led to another new characteristic of urban centers such as London: the increased visibility of the criminal world and its inhabitants. In fact, as some historians have suggested, it was this visibility that did more than anything else to contribute to the sense of panic over criminality in early eighteenth-century

England.<sup>37</sup> There was a clear difference between criminal activity in rural and urban areas. The country poacher or rural highwayman could often be more than just a nuisance, and these sorts of outlaws were, in fact, subsequently dealt with quite harshly by the laws of the era.<sup>38</sup> But these rural bandits paled in comparison to the number, variety, and perhaps most importantly, visibility of London's criminals.<sup>39</sup> As prostitution, theft, and exploitation became a daily way of life for many of the newly urban dispossessed, it became more and more difficult to depict, or even envision, city life accurately without accounting for them. Consequently as English culture, and more specifically English literature, began to take the city, particularly London, for its new subject, the problems inherent to city life became more prominent as subjects of artistic representation—and to observers outside and in, one of London's greatest problems seemed to be crime.

Contemporary historical research seems to show that the level of criminal activity, if it changed at all, decreased slightly in early eighteenth-century England. However, as we've seen, this was far from the general

perception of English society. Of this phenomenon, W. A. Speck, for one, has argued that

As serious work started on the evidence for actual criminal activity . . . several investigations of eighteenth-century court records substantially modified the lurid picture conjured up by the literary sources. The pattern for indictments, for instance, did not document the notion that England was experiencing a massive and uncontrollable crime wave.<sup>40</sup>

While this point is still a matter of debate, Speck's contention in fact only emphasizes the growing role that criminal narratives were playing in forming public opinion. This growing public concern with crime was reflected in the popular interest in the criminal as a sort of celebrity. Ironically, watching and reading about criminals became daily social activities during this period. Again we need only remember Horace Walpole's fascination and disgust over the public spectacle caused by Jamie Maclaine's execution as he complained that "You can't conceive the ridiculous rage there is of going to Newgate."<sup>41</sup> This "ridiculous rage" of this literary accompaniment is to be found in the criminal biographies that Walpole mentions, the memoirs of their lives and deaths set forth with such a parade that no generals were worth making a parallel. In light of these developments in English society, we can now see

how Walpole's comments echo Roxana's in their uneasy concern over the leveling of social distinctions. Criminal biographies were threatening not only in their rebellious subject matter, but also to the extent to which their commercial popularity bespoke the growing importance of the promiscuous crowd in establishing just what was and was not of cultural value in the modern world.

To this point, we've examined how developments in English society throughout the early eighteenth century lent a new currency and even energy to a form of criminal representation, the criminal biography, that had been around since at least the mid-seventeenth century. For the remainder of this chapter then, we'll explore more particularly just how these developments were expressed in this earliest form of criminal representation, and specifically in the example of two compelling figures in these biographies, the highwayman and the apprentice.

One of the principal problems in discussing the criminal biographies is that so many of them were published in so many varying forms, and that their authors were usually anonymous and primarily interested

in profit, not posterity. That much said, working with criminal biographies also allows some flexibility in the sense that the majority of these narratives contain similar formulaic narratives and similar generic structures.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, there is variation to be found in the biographies; as Lincoln Faller points out in his excellent survey of the field, *Turned to Account*, there was a difference between the biographies of family murderers, for example, and the "liberating" biographies that gave expression to subversive social desires in their middle- and lower-middle class reading public. The latter would hardly seem to fall into the same comfortable formula as former.<sup>43</sup> Faller's point is well taken, yet even he resorts to categorizing the biographies—if only more subtly than other critics have—into more manageable divisions and subsets. Ultimately, this practice seems unavoidable when dealing with this diffuse material, and my analysis proceeds similarly. Therefore the intent here to identify a set of general patterns, specifically two general patterns, that run throughout the majority of them and that play a large role in influencing later criminal narratives throughout this era.

This analysis of the criminal biography is largely based on the most popular and complete collection of these biographies, *The Complete Newgate Calendar*.<sup>44</sup> First published in 1734, *The Calendar* itself was based upon the lives of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century's most popular criminals: criminal lives that had in some form circulated in written format since the seventeenth century in various collections. *The Calendar* is composed of some 300 or so collected criminal biographies written, as we've seen, in a sensational, but inevitably, and thoroughly, moralistic style. Thus, the collection purports to offer the authentic lives of some of eighteenth-century England's most infamous malefactors, and as an earlier edition of the calendar proclaimed, *The Calendar*

fully display[s] the regular progress from virtue to vice. . . of those abandoned to dissipation, interspersed with striking reflections on the conduct of those unhappy wretches who have fallen a sacrifice to the injured laws of their country. . . the whole tending to guard young minds from the allurements of vice and the paths that lead to destruction.<sup>45</sup>

This emphasis on guarding "young minds" from the "allurement of vice" is typical of all of these collections, and provided justification for the vicious and sensationalistic narratives that followed.

*The Calendar's* authors were anonymous, as were most of the authors of criminal biographies. In some ways, however, the authorship of such collected tales was unimportant: the moral behind them was of the essence, and in denying any individual authorship at all, the biographies can again be seen to be attempting to regulate the troublesome issue of personal identity that rebellious criminal activity brought into focus; by its nature, the criminal biography took the example of the many and enforced a single moral explication upon them. The majority of information within the criminal biographies did have specific real world references, however. The prominent facts were largely culled from Sessions papers, or the calendar of trials held at the Old Bailey. Another primary source of the biographies was the confessions and last words of criminals as recorded by the prison chaplains, or Ordinaries of Newgate, who received a substantial monetary bonus from the publication of their accounts.<sup>46</sup>

That these criminal biographies were popular throughout the eighteenth century should be evident; that this popularity was also a source of controversy and unease in England would seem to be borne out by

contemporary observers such as Walpole and others. Again, sales figures from this period are difficult to document accurately, but the sheer number of references to criminals in the literature of this era—both popular and high literature—would seem to assure the claim that citizens of this era were, as Lincoln Faller claims, both “notably troubled and greatly fascinated by crime” and hungry for instances of its representation.<sup>47</sup> Thus critics in a 1729 copy of *The Flying Post* offered an oft-repeated verse on the audience for such narratives: “Down in the kitchen, honest Dick and Doll / Are studying Colonel Jack and Flanders Moll.”<sup>48</sup> These critics specifically target the popularity of Defoe’s narratives, but these biographies had always been popular. Again as Faller notes “Even the earliest criminal biographies seem to have been highly popular and widely read. By the 1670s, public interest in the lives, crimes and fates of even rather ordinary criminals had grown great enough to sustain the printing of regular accounts.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, while these contemporary comments seem to suggest that the readers of the criminal biographies were composed largely of the working or lower classes, the audience for these tales

was hardly confined to the servants' quarters—or the kitchen—as the editors of *The Post* might lead us to believe. That the popularity of the criminal biographies cut across class lines and was also a cause for concern seemed clear at least to James Arbuckle, who complained in the *Dublin Journal* in 1725:

Your Robinson Crusoes, Moll Flanders, Sally Salisburys and John Shepards have [all] afforded notable instances how easy it is to gratify our curiosity, and how indulgent we are to the biographers of Newgate, who have been as greedily read by people of the better sort as the compilers of last speeches and dying words by the rabble.<sup>50</sup>

Again, Arbuckle's comments, like Walpole's, also point out the extent to which criminal biographies exemplified the troubling capacity of commercialization, here in the form of popular publishing, to break down traditional social distinctions.

Granting the notoriety of such narratives then, let us recall the earlier contention that the criminal biography's appeal was in proportion to its cultural utility. These biographies were so widely popular and yet notorious because through their methodical formulae they served an important cultural function throughout the early eighteenth century—testing the boundaries of individualistic desires while simultaneously

reinscribing the values and social hierarchy of sanctioned society. In this respect, the criminal biographies not only reflected changes in society, but also played a part in maintaining cohesion and equilibrium in that society: the criminal biography as safety valve, if you will. Again, this line of analysis is hardly a new one in dealing with popular culture.

John Richetti describes the popular literary representation of the criminal

as a necessary social myth whose triumphs and abasements mirror the ideological tension between the new secular world of action and freedom and the old religious values of passivity and submission.<sup>51</sup>

Today this characterization may seem a bit simple, too ready to relegate the criminal biography to the role of psychological soap opera. However in the majority of criminal biographies, and certainly in the most popular lives, such as that of Jonathan Wild, Jack Shepherd, Dick Turpin, or even the female variety, such as the case of Moll Cutpurse, or "The German Princess," Mary Carleton, the primary appeal does seem to be with the limits of transgression that the example of these criminals helped define for their audience. The most popular criminal biographies provided a sort of mirror reality to the established social world, a reality where

criminal lives functioned as powerful symbols of the possibilities and consequences of upsetting the applecart. As we've seen, the early eighteenth century was a historical moment when social and economic boundaries were often being rapidly redrawn, and the representation of the criminal offered in criminal biographies was a compelling means through which to address the troubling questions these diminishing societal demarcations raised. In an age alternately fascinated and repelled by the notion of mobility, the figure of the criminal captured the public imagination as a cultural expression of these very sorts of transgressions.

Yet this analysis closes by attempting to expand this conception somewhat. As we've seen throughout this chapter, the "ideological tension" that Richetti accurately diagnoses is one that ultimately calls for and benefits from an added historical dimension. Although the prevailing manner in which these conflicts were situated in the biographies was as between "active" secular values and "passive" religious ones, there was also a more specific set of values coming into conflict in the early eighteenth century. In a broad sense,

Richetti's formulation is representative of these larger conflicts, but it is useful to contextualize this conflict historically and ideologically to arrive at a better sense of the role these biographies played in expressing early eighteenth-century ideological conflicts. That is to say, the criminal biographies are central to this study not only for the manner in which they express conflicts within the individual during this period, but also for the manner in which they foreground and give play to specific social conflicts that would continue to haunt the eighteenth-century imagination and the representation of criminality throughout this period: conflict between the Tories and Whigs, between Jacobites and Hanoverians, between landed and monied interests, between country and city, and between an older, conservative and traditional social and economic order and a developing fluid and mobile one. Two specific types of criminal biography this chapter closes with help exemplify both the psychological and ideological energies that inform the criminal biography: the first depicting the romanticized exploits of the rural highwayman, and the second depicting the more

threatening career of the urban apprentice turned criminal.

One of the most representative forms of the criminal biography concerns the dashing figure of the highwayman, those horseback robbers that haunted the highways and robbed coaches and roadside travelers. Of all the types of criminal biography, the tales of the highwaymen were the most romanticized, and as such the most clearly indebted to the rogue and picaresque tradition in literature. The figure of the highwayman is also one that most openly gives expression to the kind of subversive imaginative play we've discussed. As such, the highwayman perhaps best illustrates the liberating energies of criminal narratives, but this figure also ties these energies to a particular political and ideological agenda.

The most popular mythology of the highwayman in criminal biographies was that of the gallant gentleman thief, usually a Cavalier or Jacobite, whose estates had been ignobly seized by Roundheads or Hanoverian sympathizers. Even at this surface level then, we have an example of the political and ideological predispositions that often surfaced in the criminal

biographies. Most often, highwaymen were characterized as outlaws, not criminals—that is as champions of a vanishing social and hierarchical order, not as common thieves. Thus in the tale of Captain Zachary Howard, for example, we are immediately set to know that with “a sincere love of loyalty and allegiance inspiring him,” he mortgaged his estate and “performed wonders to the honour of the Royal army,” turning highwayman only when “the republican party became sole conqueror, and triumphed over religion and monarchy” (84). In a manner representative of most highwaymen biographies, Captain Howard then proceeds to undertake economic “revenge, as far as lay in his power, on all persons who were against the interest of his Royal master” and to justify his lengthy career as a criminal by claiming only to steal that money “which had been squeezed out of forfeited estates, church lands and sequestrations” (85). Captain Howard’s career of crime culminates, fantastically enough, in the robbing of Oliver Cromwell during their mutual stay at an inn in Chester, where in a vulgar display of symbolism, he takes “a pan out of a close-stool” and “clap[s] it on the head of the rebel, crowning him in such a manner as he deserved” (89).

In this sense, highwaymen like Captain Howard shared a romantic and picaresque resemblance with other political outlaws such as Robin Hood, for example, and their biographies often contained many of the same elements as earlier rogue tales. What is most notable here, however, is the extent to which the figure of the criminal could be and frequently was manipulated in the interests of both high and low poles of society. Thus the criminal enabled a sense of wish-fulfillment not only among the downtrodden, as was widely claimed by contemporaries, but among a wider cross section of the reading public as well. This in part explains the popularity criminal representations held for those "people of the better sort" as well as "the rabble" that Arbuckle castigates in *the Dublin Journal*. This popular depiction of the highwayman mythologized the criminal as a charming gentleman, who more often than not became "by his politeness and gallantry on the road the romantic darling of the ladies"(xiv). And yet this figure of genteel civility was also forcefully engaged in an anachronistic struggle with the forces of radical change represented by the Hanoverians and the monied and commercial interests. Frank McLynn epitomizes and even

more specifically politicizes the popular conception of the highwayman throughout the eighteenth century when he writes

Since the post-1688 regime was illegitimate, it followed that in a sense all its property relations were bogus, and that the highwayman was merely claiming back what had been stolen. Anticipating Proudhon, the Jacobite insinuated the idea 'that all Hanoverian property was theft'.<sup>52</sup>

In this sense the appeal of criminals such as highwaymen was psychologically universal—that is they encouraged the fantasy that, to quote another infamous highwayman, Captain James Hind—"any brisk young fellow might easily make his fortune. . . and live like a gentleman, by going upon the highway."<sup>53</sup> Yet the appeal of the highwayman figure was also vitally influenced by and expressive of specific historical and ideological conflicts. True, there is a historical precedent for such representations. Some dispossessed Jacobites and Royalists did take to the road; in addition, the necessity of strong horsemanship in such a career did make it more likely to be populated by a better sort of criminal, if such a thing was possible. But the reality of the highwayman was probably closer to the brutality of Dick Turpin—who viciously murdered a number of his rural victims as they slept, as well as butchered

members of his own gang—than to the ostensible gallantry of Captains Howard or Hind. What the example of the highwayman in criminal biography reveals is one of the ways through which the mythology of criminality was historically employed to contest established social and political relationships—a development that strongly characterizes the later development in the criminal narratives of Gay, for example.

In direct contrast to the example of the highwayman stood an equally notorious figure in the annals of criminal biography: the apprentice turned criminal. While the biographies of highwaymen emphasized the freedom and gallantry of these heroic figures, the regulative corollary to this sense of liberation is apparent in the criminal biographies that take for their subject the apprentice turned criminal and the miserable consequences that invariably attended their misguided ambitions. The mythology of the apprentice was frequently politicized as well, and, in effect, while the popular figure of the highwayman could be seen to represent the values of land, country and king, the urban apprentice represented the transience of money,

city and the encroaching consequences of unchecked commerce and the destructive quest for luxury.

Since before the civil wars, criminals in English society had been readily cast as symbols of the breakdown in traditional authority, symbols that inevitably faced divine and human retribution for their transgressions. "All Thieves and Murders" were "Rebels" the Ordinary of Newgate preached, and it was also a central function of criminal biographies to reform and ultimately punish these rebels, thus providing a clear example to their audience; nowhere was this punishment harsher than in the case of the apprentice turned to crime.<sup>54</sup> While the criminal as highwayman could be justified and manipulated to legitimize a variety of conservative political movements (most notably Jacobitism, but also a variety of rurally-focused movements, such as the Waltham Blacks, who illegally hunted in newly enclosed forests), the example of the criminal apprentice who disobeyed the standards of hierarchy was one that allowed little room for such maneuverability.<sup>55</sup>

One particularly representative example is the tale of Thomas Savage, "a profligate apprentice. . . and

unhappy wretch. . . who fallen to the influence of whoredom, drunkenness and theft" murdered a fellow servant, stole heavily from his master, and was eventually hung, not once, but twice, ". . . being only seventeen years of age" (202). Savage indeed, it would seem, but this young man's case is exemplary of another very popular mythology of the criminal throughout the eighteenth century: the cause of the young apprentice's descent into vice is, more often than not, "a vile common strumpet," who encourages, indeed demands, that he lead a life beyond his proper station, a life he can't afford, and one that inevitably leads to theft and usually murder (202). Thus the few liberating moments an apprentice such as Thomas could enjoy are demonized in such a tale. He is "carried at first to drink by an acquaintance," a friend who afterwards "went to sea," one of the convenient places the urban poor could be hidden away in reality as well as in criminal biographies throughout the eighteenth century (203). Eventually his attentions turn to a jade, who continues him on his path to ruin. To their trysts he carries "a bottle or two of wine to junket with her," but this not "satisfying her wicked desires, she told him frequently

that if he would enjoy her company he must bring good store of money with him" (203). Inevitably, his passions get the best of him and he kills a fellow servant in order to ransack his master's possessions.

This myth of the ruined apprentice was employed over and over again throughout this period in a variety of genres from the criminal biography to Hogarth's series of prints, *Industry and Idleness*, to George Lillo's well-known adaptation, *The London Merchant*. Where the focus in the highwayman's biography is on liberation, the focus in the apprentice's biography is on detailing the subject's repentance, the gruesome judgment of providence, and inevitable meeting with the hangman. Savage's biography resists the romanticizing of crime, focusing its energies instead on repentance and warning to others. Thus after his criminal homicide, Thomas begins

to reflect on the horrid deed he had perpetrated, and to cry out to himself, 'Lord, what have I done!' wishing that he could have recalled the fatal blows, even at the price of ten thousand worlds, if so many had been in his power. After this he was in so much horror and dread of mind that he stirred not a step but he thought everyone he met came to apprehend him. (205)

These sorts of reflective passages are common in such biographies of ruined apprentices (there are at least

three lengthy ones in Savage's biography, for example) and are reminiscent of and at least in part derived from the tradition of the spiritual autobiography, with its extended passages of introspection.

Depicting remorse as explicitly as possible is one necessary component of this strain of biography. The inevitable reality of execution is another. Both of these constitutive elements are highlighted in the closing of Savage's biography:

Being brought to the place of execution at Ratliff Cross, he made a short speech, wherein he exhorted people, both old and young, to take warning by his untimely end how they offended against the laws of God and man. After which, having said a very pathetic prayer, and breathed forth such pious ejaculations as drew tears from the eyes of the beholders, he was turned off the cart, and struggled for a while, heaving up his body. (207)

This much would have been standard in the biography of a criminal apprentice; what follows was not, but it does reveal the importance of the role of punishment in the representation of criminality in these biographies:

Wherefore after he had hung a considerable time, and was to all appearance dead, the people moving away, the sheriff ordered him to be cut down, when, being received into the arms of some of his friends. . . he began to breathe, and rattle in the throat so that it was evident that life was in him. . . hereupon he breathed more strongly, and opened his eye and mouth, and he offered to speak, but he could not recover the use of his tongue. (208)

According to rural custom in some areas, criminals who survived a hanging were said to have been blessed and let go free. Such was not the case with disobedient apprentices, however; nor was it with Thomas Savage:

However his reviving being blazed abroad within an hour, the sheriff's officers came to house where he was, and carrying him back to the place of execution, hung him up again until he was really dead. (208)

The religious overtones to Savage's tale are purposeful: in a sense he is intended to be seen as resurrected through his heartfelt repentance. But while he may be forgiven in the next life, his return to this one will be brief. As we'll see in the discussion of John Bunyan, the figure of the ruined apprentice represented a more direct and tangible threat to the traditional social order, one that struck too close to home to be tolerated. The highwayman could ride into the sunset; the apprentice needed to be made an example of.

This chapter opened with a scene from Defoe's *Roxana*, a scene which reveals the possibilities of existence in a world where traditional systems of values were rapidly being transformed. It was the criminal biographies that were among the first forms of popular literature to give expression to this sort of

promiscuous leveling of eighteenth-century society. But these biographies could and were also employed to reinforce the same sort of economic and societal boundaries Roxana so successfully transgresses. Finally, we can see the example of Thomas Savage, one of a countless number of eighteenth-century apprentices turned criminal, as a cultural means of punishing and regulating the same promiscuity Roxana uses to her advantage. It is telling that the tale of Thomas Savage hails from the seventeenth century and the tale of *Roxana* from the early eighteenth. In just this short time, criminal narratives would move from regulating social behavior to chronicling the aspirations of the individual in what seemed to many an age of unbridled commercialism. This movement would remain a contested one, however, as is apparent in the work of John Bunyan, the next writer this study examines.

#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Defoe's relationship with Sir Robert Clayton and his curious inclusion in this narrative is one that is still open to debate. As David Blewitt explains in his edition of *Roxana* (New York: Penguin, 1982), Clayton (1603-1707) amassed "a huge fortune" as Whig Lord Mayor of London in 1679-80 and subsequently "acquired a reputation for avariciousness and unscrupulousness," as well as acting as financial advisor for Charles II's notorious mistress, Nell Gwynn, p. 392. This negative opinion of Clayton is echoed by Max Novak in a number of

works on Defoe, among them "Crime and Punishment in *Roxana*" in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65 (1966): 445-65. Both critics read Defoe's inclusion of this historical figure in his criminal narrative as an attempt to represent underhanded financial activity as morally wrong at best, and criminal at worst.

<sup>2</sup> Defoe, *Roxana*, p. 208. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized.

<sup>3</sup> My reading of "promiscuous" here is informed by its historical development as detailed in the compact edition of *Oxford English Dictionary*. The following citations from Knolles, Milton, Johnson and Scott are likewise taken from the compact *OED*, p. 2323.

<sup>4</sup> John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Brantlinger, *Fictions of State*, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Again the most complete source on the formulaic aspects of the criminal biographies of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is Lincoln Faller's *Turned to Account: The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). John Richetti's chapter on "Rogues and Whores: Heroes and Anti-Heroes" in his study *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 23-59, is also enlightening. More recently, Hal Gladfelder's chapter "Criminal Biographies" in *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 72-91, and James Kelly's introduction to *Gallows Speeches from Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 11-69 are valuable reconsiderations of the genre.

<sup>8</sup> Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 129-130. The most noted author on the ideological implications surrounding public executions throughout the eighteenth century is Michel Foucault. In his chapter on "The Spectacle of the Scaffold" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979) Foucault argues that "We must regard the public execution, as it was ritualized in the eighteenth century, as a political operation," p. 53. Foucault characterizes the public execution as "a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. The public execution, however hasty and everyday, belongs to a series of great rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored (coronation, entry of the king into a conquered city, the submission of rebellious subjects); over and above the crime that has placed the sovereign in contempt, it deploys before all eyes an invincible force. Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength," pp. 48-9.

<sup>9</sup> "Crossbiting" was an age-old ploy typically practiced by a prostitute and a male partner in which the prostitute would engage in sex with a customer while her male accomplice would either rob or otherwise attempt to blackmail her customer. On the other hand, "Nip" was Thieves Cant for a cutpurse, and to "nip and tuck" meant to literally snatch a purse and run for it if detected. Because of the dexterity and speed necessary, nips were often recruited as young children. John McMullan's *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld, 1550-1700* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984) offers a good, beginning glossary of Thieves Cant as well as a detailed discussion of the seemingly infinite variety of early modern criminal activity.

<sup>10</sup> *The Complete Newgate Calendar, V. I.* Ed. John Rayner (London: The Navarre Society, 1925), p. 1. Subsequent citations will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>11</sup> Paula Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: Ambition and Innovation* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> A.R. Humphreys, *The Augustan World: Society, Thought, and Letters in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 47. My usage here is taken from Brantlinger, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, Eds., *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 5. From Brantlinger, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 4. From Brantlinger, pp. 48-9.

<sup>15</sup> As quoted in Raymond Williams' *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 146. It was Josiah Tucker (1712-1799), the economic writer and Dean of Gloucester, who first referred to England as a "shopkeeping nation," a phrase later popularized by Adam Smith when he referred to England as a "nation of shopkeepers" in *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 51. My reading of London and the cultural implications of its centrality in the English imagination throughout the eighteenth century is indebted to Brewer's chapter on "Changing Places: The Court and the City" as well the work of Roy Porter and Raymond Williams, particularly Williams' *The Country and the City*.

<sup>17</sup> George Crabbe's "The Village" in *Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), p. 1424.

<sup>18</sup> George Crabbe, "The Village", p. 1427.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy George, *England in Transition* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1962), p. 19. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.

<sup>20</sup> Dorothy George, *England in Transition*, p. 17. Of all the numerous acts during this period aimed at regulating the movement and livelihood of the poor, the Act of Settlement of 1662 which "restricted the movement of all those who were not freeholders and could not afford to rent a tenement of £10 a year" was perhaps the most notorious, p. 17. My reading of the Enclosure Acts and other related statutes that, in effect, legislated the behavior of the poor is influenced by a number of leftist historical accounts, including E.P. Thompson's *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), his *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), Louis Chevalier's *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) and Tim Hitchcock's collection *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of The English Poor, 1640-1840* (London: Palgrave, 1997). Robert Shoemaker's *Prosecution and Punishment: Petty Crime and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1725* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and David Jones' *Rebecca's Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime, and Protest*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) also offer good accounts of the increasing legislation of what had traditionally been "rights of the poor." Finally Roger Sales' *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1983) offers a good analysis of how these conflicts were played out in the literature of the later eighteenth century.

<sup>21</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> As quoted in Williams' *The Country and the City*, p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> A brief and useful discussion of *The Harlot's Progress* is found in Moore's *The Thieves' Opera*, pp. 47-52. For a more detailed account, see Ronald Paulson's *Popular and Polite Art in the Age of Hogarth and Fielding* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> As quoted in Williams' *The Country and the City*, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Fielding, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robbers*, 1751, quoted in Stephen Copley's *Literature and the Social Order in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 178. The subject of how new urban centers such as London came to represent a wide variety of fears—bourgeois and otherwise—is a fascinating subject, particularly as this phenomenon is increasingly manifested in nineteenth-century literature. In this respect, this study is indebted to, among others: Donald Low's *The Regency Underworld*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, as well as Gareth Stedman Jones' *Outcast London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) and Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal 1762-1763* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> James Boswell, as quoted in Brewer's *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 51

<sup>30</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 117. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized.

<sup>31</sup> For the classic account of the representation of luxury throughout the western cultural tradition, see John Sekora's *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). For an interesting analysis of how concerns over luxury influenced other popular genres, particularly the later eighteenth-century literature of the supernatural, see E.J. Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, (New York: Capricorn

Books, 1962), p. 31. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized. For a good introduction to Mandeville's ideas and their influence on eighteenth-century political, economic and social doctrine, see Thomas Horne's *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

<sup>33</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, p. 264. As Frederick Pottle writes in his edition of the *London Journal*, "in one way or another the figure of Macheath dominates this entire journal," p. 252.

<sup>34</sup> Neil McKendrick, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> As quoted in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> The debate concerning the increase or decrease in actual criminal activity is a difficult one to maneuver through. While early modern historical records do remain in abundance, what we can garner from them is inexact at best. For example, while leftist historians such as E.P. Thompson, Peter Linebaugh, Douglas Hays and others make much of the increasingly severe legislation against property crimes throughout the eighteenth century, even they admit that such archaic practices as pleading benefit of the clergy, taking sanctuary in various Mints throughout town (most notably in Southwark), and finally accepting transportation, greatly lessened the numbers of the executed. For their account of the increase in criminal legislation, see Hay's, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Pantheon, 1975). John Langbein takes issue with Hay's statistics in "Albion's Fatal Flaw" in *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 96-120.

<sup>38</sup> See Douglas Hay's "Property, Authority and the Criminal Law" in *Albion's Fatal Tree* as well as Thompson's *Whigs and Hunters*.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the difference between urban criminals and rural 'outlaws,' see Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Praeger, 1959) and his more recent *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> W.A. Speck, *Literature and Society in Eighteenth-Century England, 1680-1820: Ideology, Politics and Culture* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 117. This is the general consensus of most recent historical studies. While the number of historical studies of crime that have informed this study is too numerous to cite here, I have included what I hope will be a helpful selection of the relevant literature in my bibliography. In particular, however, I am indebted to the work of Ian Bell, Clive Elmsley, V.A.C. Gattrell, and most of all, E.P. Thompson and Peter Linebaugh.

<sup>41</sup> Horace Walpole, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. 20, *Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, W.S. Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith and George L. Lam, Eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 199.

<sup>42</sup> For a more specific discussion of the publication information and popularity of various editions of collected criminal narratives, see Michael Harris' "Trials and Criminal Biographies: A Case Study in Distribution" in *Sale and Distribution of Books*, Eds. Robin Myers and Michael Harris, (Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1982).

<sup>43</sup> For the difference between these two types of patterns, see Lincoln Faller's *Turned to Account*, specifically his chapter "In the Absence of Adequate Causes: Efforts at an Etiology of Crime," pp. 52-71.

<sup>44</sup> References, unless otherwise noted, will be from Sir John Rayner's edition of *The Complete Newgate Calendar, V.1-4* (London: Navarre Society, 1925). Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Sandra Kerman's edition of *The Newgate Calendar, or Malefactor's Bloody Register* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. iv.

<sup>46</sup> In his essay "The Ordinary of Newgate and his Account," in J.S. Cockburn's *Crime in England 1550-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), Peter Linebaugh writes that "In the case of the *Accounts* . . . all the evidence suggests that the income deriving from their publication must have been substantial," p. 250.

<sup>47</sup> Lincoln Faller, *Crime and Defoe: A New Kind of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. xi.

<sup>48</sup> As quoted in the Norton Critical Edition of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 325.

<sup>49</sup> Faller, *Crime and Defoe*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*, p. 123.

<sup>51</sup> John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson*, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 57.

<sup>53</sup> Faller, *Crime and Defoe*, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> Faller, *Crime and Defoe*, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Murray Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 92. Ironically, while the cultural mythology of the highwayman was traditionally associated with the dispossessed defenders of the monarchy, it was also used to justify the nocturnal activities of such rural transgressors in the royal forests as the Waltham Blacks, who persisted in comparing themselves to Robin Hood and other political outlaws. Of the persistence of this type of popular criminal representation, Pittock reminds us that "such traditions concerning the social background and

political outlook of the highwaymen long persisted; they are found, for example, in R.D. Blackmores's *Lorna Doone*, two centuries after Hind [the most infamous highwayman of the seventeenth century], where the Doones are a colony of Royalist gentlemen turned bandits," p 94. The hold of the romantic highwayman on the English popular imagination continues far past *Lorna Doone*, however: 1980's English pop-star Adam Ant was also known for his outlandish eighteenth-century highwayman costumes as well as his aptly titled 1981 hit, "Stand and Deliver."

**Chapter 3**  
**"Making the Sheckle Great":**  
**Bunyan's *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman***  
**and the Perils of the Marketplace**

In the preface to *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, his 1680 sequel to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan apocalyptically writes that

Wickedness like a flood is like to drown our English world: it begins already to be above the tops of mountains; it has almost swallowed up all; our youth, our middle age, old age, and all are almost carried away of this flood. O debauchery, debauchery, what hast thou done in England! Thou hast corrupted our young men, and hast made our old men beasts; thou hast deflowered our virgins, and hast made matrons bawds. Thou hast made our earth to reel to and fro like a drunkard; 'tis in danger to be removed like a cottage, yea, it is, because transgression is so heavy upon it, like to fall and rise no more.<sup>1</sup>

In the pages that follow this opening clarion call, the painstakingly detailed anatomy of the wickedness that has England reeling "to and fro like a drunkard" is the subject of *Mr. Badman*. In his study of criminality, Bunyan traces in a style not unlike that of the criminal biographies we've just examined the career of a typical bad man of this period: literally, his "Mr. Badman." Moreover, this "badness of the times" is directly attributable to the behavior of men such as Mr. Badman during the Restoration era (13). From his first words, Mr. Wiseman, one of the two interlocutors whose discussion

makes up the dialogue that constitutes *Badman*, singles out the cause of this flood of wickedness, claiming "that they are bad times, and bad they will be, until men are better; for they are bad men that make bad times" (13).

Regarding the target of Bunyan's censure, critics have noted that *Mr. Badman's* representation of criminality aims for the socially and historically particular as well as for the universal and allegorical. David Hawkes reminds us that "Bunyan inserts numerous anecdotes from real life to drive home his allegorical lessons, and he apparently intends a local denunciation of Restoration England as well as a general description of the unregenerate soul."<sup>2</sup> Stuart Sim goes even further and contends that the character of Mr. Badman is specifically "designed to symbolize the Restoration society Bunyan so despised."<sup>3</sup> What this chapter proposes is an expansion of these claims, or rather a more specific evaluation of them. This evaluation suggests that Bunyan's dire and catastrophic warning in *Mr. Badman* can be read as more than an allegorical depiction of the bad man's life, or of the more particular "debauchery" of Restoration society. It reads Bunyan's employment of the bad, or criminal type, as one of the earliest critiques of the encroaching values of the marketplace that accompanied England's transition into

a commercial economy. In the previous chapter, we saw an example of how the discourse concerning commerce and its representative urban centers like London could be channeled into cultural representations of criminality. In this chapter we'll see how the criminal figure of Mr. Badman embodies the early eighteenth-century discourse contesting the morality of the marketplace. This discourse is played out in the dialogue between the narrative's two principal speakers, Wiseman and Attentive; my analysis of this discourse will reveal how Bunyan's foray into criminal biography expresses his attack on the economic practices inherent in market society, practices that during his era may have indeed seemed to be "already. . . above the tops of mountains. . . swallow[ing] up all. . . like a flood is like to drown our English world" (7). Furthermore, Bunyan's representation of the criminal in *Mr. Badman* offers a scathing and prophetic critique of the moral dangers accompanying the unchecked individualism that seemed connected to the increasing adoption of the values of the marketplace by society. In the trajectory of this study then, Bunyan's representation of the criminal in *Mr. Badman* can be viewed as a precursor to the later representation in authors such as Defoe and Gay of crime as a troubling consequence of the growth of commercialism,

as well as a forerunner of their depiction of the criminal as the embodiment of the values of the marketplace.

*Mr. Badman* has traditionally been categorized as a religious dialogue influenced by a variety of narrative genres such as the judgement story, the picaresque, and the spiritual as well as criminal biography.<sup>4</sup> The story of Mr. Badman is narrated through a dialogue between the older Mr. Wiseman and his younger companion, Mr. Attentive. The interlocutors' names are apt, one discovers, as Attentive's increasing appetite for the graphic depictions of Mr. Badman's crimes is consistently delayed and disappointed by Wiseman's frequent biblical and theological interjections. A brief summary of Badman's life begins with his birth to good parents in a rural village—much like Bunyan's own Bedford, one would imagine. But from an early age, Badman revels in lying, swearing, and, to the specific dismay of Wiseman and Attentive, stealing. Eventually, Badman is apprenticed to a good master, but he cannot bear him, and so quickly falls under the influence of a bad master. After stealing from and quarrelling with this new master as well, Mr. Badman borrows money from his long-suffering father to set up his own business. He then marries a wealthy and god-fearing young woman for her money, and begins to run his crooked

shop in earnest. After his godly wife's death (to which his behavior largely contributes), Mr. Badman remarries a whore who plays his own criminal game as well as he, stealing from him and playing the whore to supplement her income. After some years of this debauchery, the pair part "as poor as howlets" (148). Finally Mr. Badman dies "as quietly as a lamb," unrepentant till his very end (157).

While the first half of Mr. Badman's tale loosely follows the narrative style typical of the criminal biographies of Bunyan's day—graphic depiction of a descent into crime interspersed with lengthy moral judgement—the latter half of the narrative enters into a detailed description of Badman's duplicitous business practices, moving from how Badman uses "deceitful weights and measures," (101) for example, to how he would extort his peasant customers by "hoisting up the price" of wheat and thus "making the sheckle great," (107) to how he would "sell his commodity always as dear as he [could]" and thus "make a prey of the ignorance of his chapman" and "make a prey of his neighbor" (111). This second half of the tale is most notable in the development of criminal narrative patterns, and will be my focus later in this chapter.

In the most recent edition of the text, however, James Forrest and Roger Sharrock draw attention to the

wide and often uneven mixture of literary traditions that constitute the work. In an earlier study of Bunyan, Sharrock anticipates this focus in classifying the book as "a blend of Puritan exhortation, middle-class ethic, and folk attitudes" that ultimately remains "part compromise, part confusion" in its inability to reconcile these varying narrative threads.<sup>5</sup> Sharrock's classification underlines some of the problems that occur in trying to situate *Mr. Badman* in the Bunyan canon. *Mr. Badman* blends the allegorical style that was extremely successful in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* with a new emphasis on realism and a critique of the specific abuses of late seventeenth-century business practice, culled from what Jim Borck calls "a wealth of historical data taken from a mercantile and quite middle-class society."<sup>6</sup> Still, the disparate threads of *Badman's* narrative never seem to come together effectively.

In a number of articles on *Mr. Badman*, Sharrock has attempted to reconcile these narrative threads, seeing this as one key to accounting for Bunyan's "Puritan rogue narrative."<sup>7</sup> However, I would suggest that *Mr. Badman* can be most revealingly read as a reaction to the threat of a rural way of life under attack by the rise of commercialism. In form and structure, *Mr. Badman* reveals

Bunyan's debt to the popularity of such contemporary genres as the criminal biography. Sharrock claims it has "probably been read more than any work of Bunyan after *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Grace Abounding*," and on its own merits it still holds a high place in the Bunyan canon; my analysis will attempt to situate it in the canon of criminal literature as well.<sup>8</sup>

For the purposes of this study, *Mr. Badman* highlights a number of developments in the criminal narrative. Bunyan's linkage of commercial with criminal practice in *Mr. Badman*, for example, is more specifically developed than in previous criminal narratives. As critics such as David Hawkes and John McVeagh have shown, while trade and commerce had numerous champions in English literature, they had also been implicated with fraud and crime since the medieval period.<sup>9</sup> Hawkes notes that "Elizabethan and Jacobean Londoners frequently remarked on the commercialization of their environment," citing a mid-sixteenth-century pamphlet that reports on this growth:

And now from the Tower to Westminster along, every street is full of [luxuries], and their shops glister and shine of glasses, painted cruses, gay daggers, etc., and that is able to make any temperate man to gaze on them and to buy somewhat, though it serve no purpose necessary.<sup>10</sup>

In his collection of 1604, *Epigrams Served Out in 52*

*Several Dishes*, John Cooke similarly diagnoses the development of commercialism, registering an attack on the merchants of luxury, in particular:

There's an outlandish man now newly landed,  
 With rare inventions, rich conceited tires;  
 From Court unto the City he is bandied,  
 To show his wares which suddainely inspires  
 The inconstant fancie of the foolish buyers,  
 The price is great, therefore the wares the better,  
 Halfe on't downe paid, halfe on't remaine his debtor  
 And this superfluous waste expence in spending,  
 Makes Courtiers ever borrowing, never lending.<sup>11</sup>

Cooke's verse is uncannily accurate in its diagnosis of the mania for luxury items and the birth of modern systems of credit, as well as the results such developments would have on the social and economic fabric of early modern life—transforming courtiers into lifelong borrowers, for example, and irrevocably transforming traditional systems of value and hierarchy. Originally composed in 1604, Cooke's verses would have appeared to have become only more accurate in detailing the changing face of English society during Bunyan's era. However, the link between commercial and criminal practice appears to undergo a development in narratives such as Bunyan's: that is, narratives that actually attempted to explore, as opposed to simply satirize, the way in which modern commercial relationships seemed to be dangerously similar to, and almost even dependant upon, criminal practice. This

subject that would continue to vex writers such as Mandeville and Defoe throughout the eighteenth century.

Another mark that distinguishes *Mr. Badman* from the criminal biographies that precede it is that in some respects, Bunyan's narrative actually attempts to account for criminal behavior in society, not just punish it. It is true that one could argue that Bunyan's explication of the criminal mindset is not much further developed in *Mr. Badman* than in the criminal biographies we've seen. Like the majority of perpetrators in criminal biography, it seems that "from a child," Badman is "very bad," and "his very beginning was ominous, and presaged that no good end, was in likelihood, to follow thereupon" (16). Such a view however fails to take into account the complexity of Protestant religious theology, or of the influence this theology had on the representation of crime in works such as the criminal biographies, and more particularly Bunyan's *Mr. Badman*. As U. Milo Kaufmann has shown, Bunyan's entire account of the origins of criminality in the individual is strongly informed by the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Kaufmann notes that "the influence of Calvinistic thinking upon Bunyan's allegories is evident in the attention Bunyan gives to those two great mysteries of divine will, election and providence."<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, Kaufmann suggests that while election is a central concern of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "the mystery of providence is a central concern of *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*."<sup>13</sup> Thus at the narrative's open, Bunyan explains to his readers that

As I was considering with my self, what I had written concerning the progress of the pilgrim from this world to glory; and how it had been acceptable to many in this nation: It came again into my mind to write, as then, of him that was going to Heaven, so now, of the life and death of the ungodly, and of their travel from this world to Hell. (1)

However, while Badman's "refusal to see providence at work in the world" acts as "the chief evidence for his lack of ordering grace," and seems to mark him as damned throughout the narrative, we can still see in *Mr. Badman* the beginnings of a more detailed exploration of the subject of criminality taking shape. This exploration increases throughout the eighteenth century and appears more specifically in our study in the work of Defoe, who is still strongly influenced by a providential view of criminality, but whose narrative scope encompasses and acknowledges a variety of new factors in exploring the eighteenth-century phenomenon of crime.<sup>14</sup>

Still, the central contribution Bunyan's *Mr. Badman* makes to the representation of the criminal is in its representation of the shifting social and economic

dynamics that characterized late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England and that increasingly began to find expression through narratives on crime. As we've seen, the struggle between the landed and monied interests, and between the values of the country and those of the city played an important role in early eighteenth-century cultural discourse. This conflict can be mistakenly viewed as a narrow political struggle between landed Tory interests and urban Whiggish ones, but to do so leaves out a sizable segment of eighteenth-century society: notably those Englishmen and women who were not squires with comfortable estates, nor gentlemen with financial interests in London, but common people of the land. Nor were these people necessarily the lowest and most ignorant of peasants or squatters; they were, according to historians such as E. P. Thompson, a plebian culture, to be sure, but one that was aware of the changing pace of the world around them and willing to rally in their own interests when necessary to the extent of their albeit limited power.<sup>15</sup>

In the introduction to his anthology of eighteenth-century popular culture, John Mullan characterizes Thompson's "plebian culture" as "articulate, assertive and robust," and yet simultaneously "defensive, reactive, and

even conservative."<sup>16</sup> I would add that the largely rural plebian culture Thompson describes was by the very nature of its traditions resistant to change, particularly to a set of changes that did not seem to benefit them, but those who increasingly came to "own" land and property that had been worked as communal fields for centuries. Indeed, some powerful elements in rural England did in fact welcome the growth of commercialism and the marketplace. Historian David McNally reminds us that English commercialism had its original roots in the country, not the city.<sup>17</sup> The monstrously bloated head of England, the city of London, may have come to symbolize the triumph of commercialism throughout the eighteenth century, but for its early growth English commercialism depended upon the expropriation of the traditional peasantry and the transformation of farming into "an economic activity based upon the production of agricultural commodities for profit on the market."<sup>18</sup> Thus it would have been an increasingly wealthy, but limited, number of squires and rural merchant farmers who actually experienced the tangible benefits of the adoption of market practice; for others in the country, the commercialization of farming with its attendant enclosures and property demarcations meant their traditional way of

life was rapidly coming to a close. Above all, Mullan explains, this rural segment of the eighteenth-century population was socially and culturally characterized in this period by its reaction against "the forces of change which extended the laws of the market into rural social relations and threatened a culture governed by custom."<sup>19</sup>

Bunyan stands as a spokesmen for this plebian culture, and it is through the criminal figure of *Mr. Badman* that this contest between the traditional "customs of the country" and the values of the marketplace is given the most powerful expression in Bunyan's work. A number of critics have also historically situated Bunyan as a champion of the vanishing English rural order, and it is to the values of this rural order that Bunyan appeals to against the encroaching "laws of the market" in *Mr. Badman*. In this vein, Sharrock sees Bunyan as "the greatest representative of the common people to find a place in English literature," a man whose voice "remains that of the popular culture of rural England, preserved much as it had been in the middle ages until it was swept away by the enclosures of the following century."<sup>20</sup> Henri Talon remarks on Bunyan's "longing for rural civilization where there were vast pasture grounds" and where "sales were made direct from producer to consumer."<sup>21</sup> Leftist

critics such as Alick West and Christopher Hill have gone even further in this estimation, positioning Bunyan as among the most ardent opponents in English literature of the new commercialism that threatened the traditional rural way of life.<sup>22</sup> It should seem no great leap then to suggest that Bunyan's own rural experience played a formative role in his characterization of Mr. Badman, and in the relationship he implies between criminal and commercial practice.

How exactly then is this conflict expressed in *Mr. Badman*? The first half of the narrative loosely follows the popular moral formula of the criminal biography. Thus, Mr. Badman's fall is a gradual one, with particular attention paid to the progression of sins—each more serious than the last—and to the many opportunities Badman has on the way down, as it were, to take stock of his life and of the visible signs of his ruin. In one particularly graphic example, Mr. Badman falls off his horse and breaks his leg while returning home from the village alehouse where he had "drank hard the greatest part of the day" (131). Upon hearing Mr. Wiseman recount the particulars, Mr. Attentive exclaims "It is worthy of our remark, to take notice how God, to show his dislike of the sins of men, strikes some of them down with a blow; as the

breaking of Mr. Badman's leg, for doubtless that was a stroke from heaven" (134). Wiseman replies in a passage that evokes the loose-talk and small-town social realities of village life that inform the entire narrative, but also foregrounds what would have been apparent to a seventeenth-century audience raised on such tales—that Badman's fall is a clear sign from God:

There was Mr. Badman laid, his stroke was taken notice of by everyone: his broken leg was at this time the town-talk. Mr. Badman has broken his leg says one: how did he break it? Says another: as he came home drunk from such an ale-house, said a third; a judgement of God upon him, said a fourth. Thus his sin, his shame, and punishment, are all made conspicuous to all that are about him. (134)

And yet Badman remains ignorant of the signs of providence, and as such would have been following a formulaic depiction of sin familiar to Bunyan's readers.

In the early section of the narrative then, Badman's sins, particularly in his youth, appear to be ones that are the subjects of such traditional moral tales. We discover that from an early age Mr. Badman "was so addicted to lying, that his parents scarce knew when to believe he spake true" (18). Accordingly, Mr. Badman also speaks with a foul mouth, and "counted it a glory to swear and curse, and it was as natural to him, as to eat and drink and sleep" (27). Mr. Badman also abhors attending

church, and prophetically even takes "great pleasure in [the] robbing of gardens and orchards" (21).

However, a closer analysis reveals that even these traditional sins have a subtle sense of economic necessity behind them—a sense that from the outset of the text presages Bunyan's larger concern throughout this narrative in detailing the negative effects of commercial values on rural life. Again, Hawkes argues that "in fact Bunyan is careful to connect even those of Badman's sins that are not obviously economic in nature to his status as a trader."<sup>23</sup> Subsequently we are told, as Attentive is by Wiseman, that whoring and drinking are bad not necessarily because they are immoral in and of themselves, but because they "tendeth to impoverish and beggar a man," because "many that have begun the world with plenty, have gone out of it in rags through drunkenness" (45-6). Likewise "many children that have been born to good estates, have yet been brought to a flail & a rake, through the beastly sins of their parents" (46). Swearing must be a product of "the promptings of the spirit of the Devil" because

Swearers think also that by their belching of their blasphemous oaths out of their black and polluted mouths, they show themselves the more valiant men: and imagine also that by these outrageous kinds of villainies, they shall conquer those that at such a time they have to do with, and make them believe their lies to be true. (29)

Moreover, to ensure readers won't miss the economic motives behind such behavior, Wiseman reminds Attentive that "They also swear frequently to get gain thereby, and when they meet with fools, they overcome them this way" (29). Luckily for Attentive, it would seem, Wiseman then suggests some practical business advice of his own, offering that

If I might give advice in this matter, no buyer should lay out one farthing with him that is a common swearer in his calling; especially with such an oath-master that endeavoureth to swear away his commodity to another, and that would swear his chapman's money into his own pocket. (29)

The pattern of moral edification established here—detailing bad business practice, then suggesting the way god-fearing men should deal with such practices—is one Wiseman repeats throughout the narrative, though at much greater length and detail later. Even Mr. Badman's earliest sin, habitual lying in his youth, is expounded upon by Mr. Wiseman as much because "you shall have some that will lye it over and over, and that for a penny profit," as for its traditional categorization as "the Devil's Brat" (19). Finally in Wiseman's estimation, all of Mr. Badman's early sins are the result of "a daring boldness that biddeth defiance to the law" (29). However, the law that Wiseman refers to here is not solely the law

of religious practice, but of traditional economic practice as well—a practice that had been informed in the past by the medieval standards of moral economy, but that was increasingly being replaced by the values of a market society that seemed to honor above all, in language that is reminiscent of the titles on today's business bestseller shelves, "a daring boldness" and individual willingness to "def[y] the law." In some ways, Wiseman seems to be castigating Badman for "thinking outside the box," as it were.

In a manner again suggestive of the criminal biographies, Badman's small sins lead to larger ones. Eventually his innately evil ways are able to find even greater expression in the world outside of his parents' home: that is, Badman follows in the footsteps of countless other youths during the eighteenth century and is sent out into the world as an apprentice. In this respect, Mr. Badman's descent is an early example of an enduring eighteenth-century fable: the "way of the criminal," a mythological presentation of the criminal's life that again left little room to maneuver. Once having fallen into this downward spiral, few criminals escaped final judgement. So influential is this fable in the later representations of criminality throughout the eighteenth

century, that, as his narrative progresses, Mr. Badman resembles no one so much as Tom Idle, Hogarth's infamous apprentice turned criminal, and perhaps the most well-known example of this figure in this period.<sup>24</sup> As we've seen in our earlier discussion of the criminal biography and of the example of Thomas Savage in particular, the systematic road to perdition that Bunyan invokes was a popular one throughout this era, to the extent that it became almost formulaic. What is observed less often, however, is the extent to which this popular narrative formula is informed not only by standard religious principles and characterizations, but also by specific economic realities that were changing the nature and value of work in eighteenth-century society. In his representation of Badman, Bunyan is among the earliest authors to reveal, perhaps even unintentionally, how closely the road to ruin was tied to developments brought about by advances in commercialism.

At almost every step in Badman's descent, Wiseman warns of how quickly bad business practices can transform a youthful and eager mind into a criminal one. A greedy master is particularly harmful because "if he be not moderate in the use of his apprentice; if he drives him beyond his strength; if he holds him to work at

unseasonable hours. . . this is the way to destroy him" (39). Furthermore, Wiseman warns Attentive that "if the master be unconscionable in his dealing, and trades with lying words; or if bad commodities be avouched to be good, or if he seeks after unreasonable gain, or the like; his servant sees it, and it is enough to undo him" (40). The emphasis placed here on the strict necessity of proper moral instruction for young tradesmen-to-be foregrounds the social anxieties that came to surround the apprentice system and its contribution to the production of criminals in the eighteenth century.

Ostensibly, the apprentice system operated as a form of job placement through which landed families could breed their younger sons to a trade (in lieu of an estate left to the eldest son); additionally the apprentice system afforded the more prosperous of lower-middle-class families an opportunity to breed their own sons to a trade and thus improve their own prospects for upward social mobility, that most sought after of eighteenth-century goals. As such, the apprentice system was initially viewed as a positive vehicle of social and class maintenance, if not outright mobility.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, however, apprentices themselves were becoming increasingly troubling and highly visible representatives of the manner

through which commercialism was threatening established patterns of English life.

As changing economic dynamics decreased its social and economic utility, the embattled apprentice system became increasingly cutthroat, as the description of Mr. Badman's master would indicate. Apprentices had to be clothed, fed and kept for a period of up to seven years. That in and of itself could amount to a harsh burden for a small tradesman, such as a chandler in Bunyan's own Bedford, for example, who would have had to struggle year in and year out to meet the needs of his own family, and at best would make less than £20 a year supplying his neighbors with evening lighting, and hawking his candles at regional markets, perhaps supplementing this with the odd sale he could make to a traveling urban chapmen now en route to London to sell these new candles for twice what he originally paid.<sup>26</sup> Such was the lot of the majority of small tradesmen, and another mouth to feed, moreover a mouth that was not theirs by blood, could indeed be burdensome and lead to resentment on both the part of the masters and the neglected apprentices.

In addition, the talented and skilled apprentices that did show promise often represented future and certainly unwelcome competition for their masters,

specifically in rural areas such as Mr. Badman's village, where the likelihood that apprentices would remain in the area could be great, especially considering the high probability of such apprentices marrying locally. For this reason, many masters cared little if their charges properly learned their craft or not, often even encouraging youthful misbehavior in the hopes of eventually preserving their own businesses and livelihoods. Thus the relationship between apprentice and master was usually a strained if not altogether violent one. Such seems to be the case in the relationship Badman has with his second master, with whom he takes up after deserting his first, good master. This second master would "laugh at and make merry with the sins of his servant Badman," according to Wiseman, but then "often fall out with young Badman his servant, and chide, yea and sometimes beat him too for his naughty doings" (59). Luckily "nothing offended Badman but blows, and those he had but few of now, because he was pretty well grown up" (59). As Lawrence Stone shows, not all apprentices were so fortunate; many were

exposed to almost limitless sadism from their masters. . . Law suits reveal a female apprentice who was stripped naked, strung up by her thumbs and given twenty-one lashes; a boy who was beaten so severely that he could not stand upright and who spat blood

for a fortnight; another who was flogged, salted and then held naked to a fire; another who was beaten so severely with a boat-hook that his hip was broken; and so on.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed in this case, Bunyan's narrative attempt at realism in *Mr. Badman* pales in comparison with the actual facts of apprenticeship in this period.

Moreover, while the comment on apprentices and local marriages might appear contrived, in actuality the stability that at least theoretically accompanied marriage was a welcome alternative to the fear of lawlessness that was increasingly associated with apprentices in this era. Stone writes that throughout the eighteenth century, "there was constant anxiety about the danger to the social and moral order of the huge numbers of unmarried apprentices."<sup>28</sup> Then as now, marriage symbolized a new level of maturity and commitment, not only towards one's spouse, but also towards the larger civilizing and regulating institutions of adulthood. It was ironically telling then that one of the major reasons many young men put off marriage was not to have more idle time to spend carousing the streets of London or the village green, but because they could not afford to support a family under the meager subsistence wages meted out to them as

apprentices and subsequently in their first years on their own.<sup>29</sup>

The cultural significance the decline of the apprentice system seemed to have on the English self-image may have been worse than the actual social realities, however. As the pressure of increasingly cutthroat commercial competition increased throughout the eighteenth century, there was a simultaneous decline in the optimistic assurances that young apprentices would be able to reach the heights that Samuel Richardson did, for example, in moving from poor man's son, to printer's apprentice, to master of his own thriving business, to nationally famous author. Nor might it seem likely that they could follow in the footsteps of William Beckford, that simple tradesman who had risen to become Lord Mayor of London (whose son, in an interesting corollary to the example of Horace Walpole, Prime Minister Robert Walpole's son, would also cloister himself in a self-fashioned exotic palace and write gothic novels). Beckford was in fact a real-life version of the most towering example of the apprentice done well, the fictional Francis Goodchild, Hogarth's popular symbol of successful apprenticeship in his *Industry and Idleness* series (1747). Indeed, eighteenth-century popular culture seems to have been

enamored of binary oppositions, and if Tom Idle represented one threatening popular myth about apprentices and criminality, Francis Goodchild embodied the other far rosier myth about apprentices and commercialism: that apprentices could and did rise to positions of power, influence and importance, and that hard work—or “industry” as the popular phrasing went in the eighteenth century—in one of the growing commercial trades was the proper and culturally sanctioned road to riches.

Again, it is often difficult to separate myth from reality in analyzing eighteenth-century social history and its influence on the culture of the era. The fact that Samuel Richardson and William Beckford did indeed rise to positions of prominence at mid century witnesses the fact that the apprenticeship system could still work. We need to remember, however, that the system that produced Richardson and Beckford later in the century also produced Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild during the 1720s, two of the most notorious eighteenth-century criminals who often boasted of how they learned their “art” during their apprenticeships. If the records of public executions are any guide, it seems likely that there were far more Sheppards and Wilds produced by the system. Peter Linebaugh agrees. In his study of eighteenth-century

criminality, he has argued that "the crisis of apprenticeship was part of a deeper, structural recomposition of the London proletariat."<sup>30</sup> Linebaugh traces this crisis to the decline in the medieval guild organization (and the accompanying protection they offered journeyman, small masters, and apprentices in trade), as well as the increase in competition due to new forms of division of labor and more efficient forms of industrial organization, all of which led to a social tension between those who persevered through the system and those who dropped out. Accordingly, this economic phenomenon was expressed in the popular culture of the time as a choice between industry and idleness, to which Hogarth's famous series of prints bears witness.<sup>31</sup> But the reality of the situation may have been less reassuring. Linebaugh argues that, no matter what their level of sober Protestant industry, "many apprentices, journeyman and small masters would have experienced substantial periods in which they were without wage work and would therefore have sought out other expedients, such as the sea, gaming, the tramp, "Going on the Account."<sup>32</sup> "Going on the Account" was slang for undertaking the criminal's life, and Linebaugh's historical analysis of the apprenticeship crisis

highlights how diminishing opportunities for apprentices frequently led to a life of crime.

Furthermore, at least in the popular imagination of the time there was also a direct correlation between this failure as an apprentice and the transformation into a criminal. Thus according to the popular conception, behind every youthful criminal could be found an idle apprentice. Lucy Moore writes that, according to one early eighteenth-century Solicitor-General, Archibald MacDonald, of every twenty offenders executed in London at the time, roughly eighteen would be under the age of twenty-one, and that a full forty per cent of Tyburn's victims were or had been apprentices.<sup>33</sup> The Ordinary of Newgate believed being "bred to no trade" was a factor that contributed to the high numbers of young people dying on the gallows. In fact more than half of all London apprentices who had left their master before completing their term of apprenticeship, fell into this category. Of these youth who had apparently slipped through the cracks of commercial prosperity, Moore writes "unable to succeed through the routes offered to them (learning a trade and then setting up their own business) they rejected convention and turned instead to crime, following the path down which Hogarth's idle apprentice slipped."<sup>34</sup> Whether they were victims of

changing economic dynamics or of their own "idleness" will never be known for certain, but that Bunyan was giving literary shape to this anxiety about the effects of commercialism on English life in *Mr. Badman* seems likely.

Nor was Bunyan the only author concerned with the apprenticeship system. Apprentice conduct manuals were already popular during Bunyan's time, and numerous writers, including Samuel Richardson, would tackle the issue in a series of popular pamphlets and chapbooks.<sup>35</sup> The apprenticeship problem was one which reached critical concern primarily in crowded urban environments such as London, where the threat of idle apprentices with no hopes of economic sustenance was more readily apparent every day on the streets and in the overcrowded alehouses of Gin Lane. In Bunyan's Bedford and the surrounding Midlands, the problem never achieved the same measure of cultural concern as it did in the crowded environment of London. Still Bunyan's lengthy treatment of this issue in *Mr. Badman* reveals one of the ways in which crime was increasingly given cultural representation as a distressing accompaniment to the commercial growth and expansion of England. While Bunyan's treatment of the apprenticeship crisis foregrounds the social anxiety which came to surround what was largely perceived to be an urban

phenomenon, however, the majority of Wiseman judgements on the ethics of the marketplace that comprise the second half of *Mr. Badman* reflect Bunyan's own rural experience, an experience we should perhaps more briefly characterize now.

Bunyan himself was born in 1628 in the English Midlands in the rural village of Elstow, near the country town of Bedford. Like other neighboring hamlets in the Midlands, Bedford was a Puritan town, decidedly for the Parliamentary interest in the English Civil War, and also home to a small, Nonconformist congregation in which Bunyan was later to become active. In many respects, Bedford at the time would have served as a good example of the old English village of popular imagination: nostalgic and halcyon, insular and unspoiled, a place peopled with the inhabitants of the rural past—the husbandmen, the yeoman farmers, the smith and the ploughwright, the miller and the collier, and above all, the earthly representative of the divine, the preaching parson. To use Peter Laslett's phrase, the world of Bunyan's youth was "the world we have lost," the world of "Merrie Old England" and of the Maypole and the country fair.<sup>36</sup> But Laslett helpfully reminds us as well that "the world we have lost. . . was no paradise or golden age of equality, tolerance

or loving kindness."<sup>37</sup> While the relative isolation of Bunyan's world may have led to a more ordered existence for its inhabitants in comparison to London, for example, it was still a world uneasily poised on the cusp of intense commercial growth. Like its neighboring towns, Bedford's community was an agrarian one that was slowly being transformed by the commercialization of England, and ultimately it is from the daily commercial activities within such a town in transition that Bunyan draws most of the examples of commercial malpractice that inform *Mr. Badman*.

One of the most troubling effects of the influence of commercialism on the countryside evident in *Mr. Badman* concerns social mobility. In the example of Defoe's *Roxana* that opens Chapter Two, we saw how the promiscuous mingling of classes in urban centers such as London could be seen as a menacing development that threatened to level age-old class and social distinctions. Bunyan's countryside was still a different place than *Roxana's* London, however. In Bunyan's depiction of *Badman's* ambition and quest for social mobility, these goals are threatening not only because they have the capacity to level social distinctions, but also because they confuse man's ability to see and recognize God's providence

clearly. Again, the example of Badman breaking his leg after his fall and not seeing the hand of God is one illustration of his spiritual blindness, his obsessive grasping after money and the social status it brings is another.

Having fled both his masters now, Badman borrows money from his father to set up a shop—a business that remains unnamed throughout the narrative, and that seems to be symptomatic of the threat commercialism raises in this text, no matter what the specific variety. After a few more bouts of whoring and drinking, followed by the inevitable commentary by Wiseman, Badman needs more “start-up” capital to keep his floundering business afloat. Subsequently he enters the marriage “market” and is crafty and dissembling enough, as Wiseman tells Attentive, to get “a rich wife, with whose money he paid his debts” (83). Here Wiseman again enters into a lengthy discussion with Attentive on the catastrophic and far-reaching consequences of marital unions between the godly and ungodly, but Wiseman particularly stresses the fact that Badman sought a wife primarily for the dowry she’d bring with her:

The thing was this: a wife he wanted, or rather money; for as for a woman, he could have whores enow

at his whistle. But as I said, he wanted money, and that must be got by a wife, or no way. (65)

As Wiseman's comments reveal, in Badman's world of commercial relationships, everyone is a commodity, and the value of all things is reduced to the new universal medium of exchange, money. On the subject of money, J.G.A. Pocock reminds us that "the Western moral tradition displays an astonishing unity and solidarity in the uneasiness and mistrust it evinces towards money as a medium of exchange," and Wiseman's comment here illustrates this point.<sup>38</sup> It also foregrounds the concern in the narrative with the troubling effects money has on social relationships, a concern that runs throughout the tale, but that is increasingly underlined in the examples Wiseman proceeds to give of Badman's crooked business practices.

Patrick Brantlinger's comments in *Fictions of State* on the "universal, leveling power of money" in modern society and on how "the ultimate standard of value in modern society was not religion, or even a nation's culture, but money" are particularly illuminating in interpreting Badman's behavior here.<sup>39</sup> One of the points that Wiseman seems to imply is that the pursuit of trade itself tends to make men concerned with money above all

else. Moreover, money itself seems to act as a physical embodiment of commercialism that mirrors the instability and fluidity inherent in the values of the marketplace. With money all realities become possible, and, as West has argued, while Badman "wants to make money," it is the freedom and mobility that money brings that are his real desire.<sup>40</sup> Badman ultimately sees—and cheerfully embraces—what I'd suggest Bunyan and many others of his contemporaries saw—and feared: the reality that in a commercial society money gave one the power, as West notes, "to make himself capable of all acts," and to "enjoy the power and freedom to metamorphose himself into anything and everything," and not be "limited by any fixed character and category within which society could confine him;" ultimately money makes possible an existence free of the traditional "restraints of morality and religion" and for Bunyan this alone was reason to be suspect of its promises.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, while money liberates, it also enslaves. Thus, while Badman's money apparently gives him the capacity to "metamorphose into anything and everything," he is increasingly forced to play a number of roles, but to only one overall purpose: to dissemble, to trick, to play the hypocrite, but above all, to sell:

And to pursue his ends the better, he began now to study how to please all men, and to suit himself to any company; he could now *be* as they, *say* as they, that is, if he listed; and then he *would* list, when he perceived by so doing, he might either make them his customers or creditors for his commodities. If he dealt with honest men, (as with some honest men he did) then he would be as they; talk as they, seem to be sober as they, talk of justice and religion as they, and against debauchery as they; yea, and would too seem to show a dislike of them that said, did, or were otherwise than honest. (83-4, original emphasis)

More revealing is how Badman exaggerates even his own inherently bad behavior among other bad men to curry favor and ultimately profit:

Again, when he did light among those that were *bad*, then he would be as they, but yet more close and cautiously, except he were sure of his company: Then he would carry it openly, be as they; say, *damn 'em* and *sink 'em*, as they. If they railed on good men, so could he; if they railed on religion, so could he: if they talked beastly, vainly, idly, so would he; if they were for drinking, swearing, whoring, or any like villainies, so was he. This was now the path he trod in, and could do all artificially, as any man alive. And now he thought himself a perfect man, he thought he was always a boy till now. What think you now of Mr. Badman? (84, original emphasis)

This characterization of Badman is uniquely illustrative of the new social relationships that inevitably accompany the adoption of the values of the marketplace.

Even in the relatively sleepy countryside of Bunyan's Bedford, it would appear, the power of money was beginning to reshape traditional social relationships. Historians such as Stone have written of "the seismic upheaval of

unprecedented magnitude" experienced in English society "between 1500 and 1700" with the advent of commercialism.<sup>42</sup> Ironically, in his study of the eighteenth-century criminal underworld, John McMullan cites this social upheaval as one of the causes of the rise in crime as well in the early modern era, claiming, in a manner reminiscent of Mandeville, that the rise in new and increasingly ostentatious wealthy citizens led to new possibilities for professionals, even professional criminals. McMullan writes that "widening opportunities and rapid social change were persistent features of the time, particularly during the 'century of mobility 1540-1640.'"<sup>43</sup> Even more threateningly for critics such as Bunyan, the agents of this fluidity—the traders, merchants, and men of commerce of the age—were not limited to booming urban centers such as London, but were already beginning to make their appearance and impact felt in Bunyan's own beloved countryside.

What historical data has a difficult time conveying, but what would have been evident to critics of the marketplace like Bunyan, was that commercialism was perhaps most importantly effecting and reshaping the simple relationships between people, people that rapidly went from seeing themselves as first friends and neighbors

to seeing themselves as sellers and buyers. Mr. Badman's success as a tradesman is tied to his skill at playing the hypocrite, a point that Defoe would tellingly recognize when he wrote in *The Complete English Tradesman* that the successful tradesman

must be all soft and smooth; nay, if his real temper be all fiery and hot, he must show none of it in his shop; he must be a perfect *complete hypocrite*, if he will be a *complete tradesman*.<sup>44</sup>

Later in the same work, Defoe seems to go even further in arguing that lying is a necessary component of modern business practice:

Let [tradesman] confine themselves to truth, and say what they will: But it cannot be done; a talking rattling mercer or draper, or milliner, beyond his counter, would be worth nothing if he should confine himself to that mean silly thing called Truth; they must Lie, it is in support of their business, and some think they cannot live without it.<sup>45</sup>

In fairness to Defoe, he does also rail against the dishonesty of tradesmen throughout this text with the same vehemence as here; however, as becomes apparent in the next chapter, Defoe's entire conception of commerce was plagued by an underlying ambivalence and nagging suspicion that "Trade. . . the whore he doated upon," was "almost universally founded upon crime."<sup>46</sup> In fact, it was precisely this sentiment that Defoe used his most famous criminal narratives *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* to explore.

Nor were these anxieties regarding the hypocritical nature of trade limited to Bunyan or Defoe. As Sharrock notes, Arthur Dent's religious dialogue, *The Plaine Mans Pathway to Heaven* (1601), went through forty editions in the seventeenth century and was a major influence on Bunyan, who received a copy of the book as part of his wife's dowry.<sup>47</sup> In it, Mr. Wiseman's forerunner, the "wise" Theologus writes,

It is too true, that lying and dissembling are most rife, and over-common among all sorts of men; but especially it both overflows and superabounds in shopkeepers and [their] servants, For both these make a trade and occupation of it. They can do no other but lie. It cleaveth to them as the nail to the boot.<sup>48</sup>

A year after the publication of *Mr. Badman*, in 1681 Benjamin Keach would write similarly in *Sion in Distress: or the Groans of the Protestant Church*:

What lying, cheating, couz'ning and deceit  
Do traders use? O! how they over-rate  
What they would sell? But if they be to buy,  
They undervalue each commodity.<sup>49</sup>

What all of these examples would seem to suggest is that the relationship between merchant and consumer was often characterized as an adversarial one in this era, and one that, in the case of *Mr. Badman*, could be seen as increasingly transforming social relationships in rural

areas that had been previously and popularly considered out of commercialism's reach.

It is in this anxious historical moment that Bunyan's cautionary tale takes place, a moment against which the tale seems to react in its characterization of Mr. Badman. Indeed *Mr. Badman* would be an easier text to come to terms with if its structural opposition were simply one between the country and the city, to use Raymond Williams' phrasing, or simply between agrarian and urban ways of life.<sup>50</sup> But for all of his allegorical qualities, Mr. Badman remains a character who resists the eighteenth-century urge for binary categorization. He is no bumbling country merchant or even a grasping urban one; he is clearly a product of Bunyan's rural world, albeit a deformed product as Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive make abundantly clear. But the crooked business practices he adopts, and the criminal behavior he displays, are troubling extensions of the new commercial morality working its way through the social and geographic stratifications to reach even the most removed village tradesmen, tradesmen who increasingly were being forced to adopt these new crooked economic practices, and the values that informed them, or lose their livelihoods. In order to

compete with the bad man, it would appear, one must adopt their very own behavior and business strategy.

Indeed if Bunyan's *Mr. Badman* can be faulted for anything in its representation of the criminal, it is that Bunyan's prevailing theological beliefs made it difficult if not impossible for him to sympathize with Badman at all, or to conceive of a world where Badman's commercial practices could have arisen from anything other than his inherently sinful nature. While Bunyan's captures the anxiety of a historical moment, he understands this moment in theological, not historical terms. What his analysis of criminality does not lessen, however, and what is one of the most frightening realizations in *Mr. Badman* is this recognition that Mr. Badman's life of crime is not an attack from without, but a conscious adoption of principle from within. In this respect, Bunyan has seen the monster and the monster is us, and in *Mr. Badman* this shock of recognition is only heightened by the monster's capacity to set up a crooked shop in rural Bedford as easily as in that traditional den of commercial iniquity and popular fears, London.

Bunyan never reveals exactly what trade Mr. Badman plies, but, judging from the examples of commercial malpractice Bunyan provides in the second half of the

narrative, it seems likely that Mr. Badman is a food dealer of some sort.<sup>51</sup> The gradual revelation of Badman's profession throughout the second half of the narrative also helps crystallize what Wiseman and Attentive's criticisms of Badman imply: that their attacks on Badman's "art" or uncanny ability to "get a man at advantage" (108) is an expression of the larger historical contest between two traditions of economic thought that culminated in this era: the traditional rural standards of moral economy, "derived from Aristotle's *Politics* and Deuteronomy," as Hawkes notes, and the new and aggressive standards of the commercial marketplace, justified by the "rationalizations of large-scale trade and capital investment."<sup>52</sup> Moreover in examining this contest, we arrive at a clearer conception of just what constituted the "values of the marketplace" and how they differed from those of an earlier era. Bunyan, for one, stands quite clearly on the side of Aristotle and biblical scripture, as does Wiseman. Thus, Wiseman champions selling only in good conscience and always adhering to the Aristotelian notion of the "just price," that is the inherent value an object holds. Wiseman explains,

If thou sellest, do not commend; if thou buyest, do not dispraise, any otherwise, but to give the thing thou hast to do with, *its just value and worth*; for

thou canst not do otherwise knowingly, but of a covetous and wicked mind. (116, my emphasis)

Once Wiseman's ideological standard is set, it becomes much clearer as to why he attacks Badman's practices, which represent the relativity of value as ushered in by a the modern marketplace economy.

Wiseman's condemnation is hardly expressed in such theoretical terms, however; moreover his criticism of Badman is linked to a conservative and patriarchal tradition that expected at least nominal assistance for the poor from the rural powers that be—squire, vicar, parish, or the town council as in Bunyan's Bedford.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Wiseman heaps special scorn on Mr. Badman's raising of prices during times of necessity, thereby extorting the poor:

Extortion is a screwing from men more than by the law of God or men is right; and it is committed sometimes by them in office, about fees, rewards, and the like: but 'tis most commonly committed by men of trade, who without all conscience, when they have the advantage, will make a prey of their neighbor. And thus was Mr. Badman an extortioner; for although he did not exact, and force away, as bailiffs and clarks have used to do; yet he had his opportunities, and such cruelty to make use of them, that he would often, in his way, be extorting, and forcing of money out of his neighbors pocket. (108)

More specifically, Wiseman insists on characterizing commercial practices such as the reselling of commodities for higher prices, or acting as a "middle-man," as

criminal when these practices are detrimental to the rural poor. Thus, Mr. Wiseman denounces the new middlemen such as Badman:

But above all, your hucksters, that buy up the poor man's victuals by whole-sale, and sell it to him again for unreasonable gains, by retale, and as we call it, by piece-meal; they are got into a way, after a stingeing rate, to play their game upon such by extortion: I mean such who buy up butter, cheese, eggs, bacon, & c. by whole sale, and sell it again (as they call it) by penny worths, two penny worths, a half penny worth, or the like, to the poor, all the week after the market is past. (109)

Wiseman's denunciations are among the most sympathetic and moving in a narrative that borders on the Jeremiad style for long stretches. However, it should seem all the more clear to us as modern readers that, like the nail on the tradesmen's boot, Wiseman is himself cleaving to a fading notion—that of an inherent and fixed value of commodities—a notion that was being replaced by the values of the marketplace where, as Aristotle himself confessed, "all things are measured by money."<sup>54</sup> In the rapidly approaching world that Badman symbolizes, the world of the marketplace, everything is reduced to a commodity, and commodities only have as much value as the price the next buyer is willing to pay.

Not only does the increase of men like Badman presage a threatening relativity of value that "like a flood is

like to drown our English world," but Wiseman shows how Badman's belief system, or lack thereof, corrupts everything he touches and poisons the very instruments on which any commercial activity depends (7). Mr. Wiseman first reveals Mr. Badman's usage of faulty scales:

He dealt by deceitful weights and measures. He kept weights to buy by, and weights to sell by; measures to buy by, and measures to sell by: those he bought by were too big, those he sold by were too little. (100)

Not only are Badman's own instruments of measure corrupted, however, but he corrupts others' as well:

Besides, he could use a thing called slight of hand, if he had to do with other men's weights and measures, and by that means make them whether he did buy or sell, yea though his customer or chapman looked on, turn to his own advantage. (100)

Ultimately no standard forms of valuation can remain stable before Badman:

Moreover, he had the art to misreckon men in their accounts whether by weight, or measure, or money, and would often do it to his worldly advantage, and their loss; What think you of Mr. Badman now? (100)

Weight, measure, and money: all of these traditional standards become useless in Badman's presence. Moreover, in this example, Wiseman actually takes the inevitable last step in defining what his attacks on Badman's commercial practices have implied throughout the text: that Badman is a plain criminal—no different or,

appearances to the contrary, no more exalted than the common village footpad that slinks along by night.

Yea he is a very cheat. . . so I say now, concerning his using these deceitful weights and measures, it is as bad, as base, as to take a purse, or pick a pocket; for it is a plain robbery, it takes a way from a man that which is his own, even the price of his money. (103)

In examples such as this then, we can see how Wiseman's characterization of Badman serves as a judgement on what Bunyan saw as the catastrophic fluidity and inherent falsehood of the changing practices of the marketplace in this era.

As the narrative pattern of *Mr. Badman* dictates throughout the text, Wiseman now characteristically offers a corrective to the example of Badman's relativity, in this as in most cases, by citing that bedrock text of value, Holy Scripture:

And first we will look into the Old Testament: You shall, saith God there, do no unrighteousness in judgement, in mete-yard, in weights or in measures, a just balance, a just weight, a just ephah, and a just hin shalt you have. This is the law of God, and that which all men according to the law of the land ought to obey. So again: Ye shall have just ballances, and a just ephah, &c. (101)

Again, like the prophets of old, Wiseman appeals to stability and order, to "the law of God" and "the law of the land." As we've seen, however, these laws were being

made increasingly irrelevant by the growth of commerce and the adoption of its values.

To this point, we've explored how Bunyan's *Mr. Badman* can be read as a cultural reaction to the increasing spread of commercialism and the values of the marketplace into rural England. We have mentioned many times this dialogue's two principal speakers, Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive, and yet have not dealt with their narrative personas at any great length. In closing, an examination of these two speakers in a little more detail reveals that the interaction between Wiseman and Attentive suggests the extent to which Bunyan felt the values of the marketplace had infiltrated and threatened England.

In one telling section, Mr. Wiseman goes into some detail on the manner by which Badman employs the all-too-common practice of "breaking," or declaring a bogus bankruptcy, and then later reopening shop with a tidy profit, "put[ting] his head out a doors again. . . a better man than when he shut up shop, by several thousands of pounds" (89). But Wiseman's argument doesn't seem to convince his younger interlocutor in the dialogue, Mr. Attentive. In fact, Attentive persistently questions Wiseman's sermonizing on this point, over and again forcing Wiseman to clarify his argument by asking, "What

do you mean by Mr. Badman's breaking? You speak mystically, do you not?" (88) Flustered by his companion's questioning, Wiseman clarifies his "mystical speaking" as best he can, citing another litany of biblical allusions and sources to reinforce his point. Yet Attentive never seems entirely convinced in this passage, finally ending the discussion by claiming in frustration, "Well: Let us at this time leave this matter, and return again to Mr. Badman" (100). That Wiseman's employment of the standard rhetorical procedure of biblical precedents would begin to seem as "mystical speaking" to Attentive is a telling indictment of Attentive's own moral lapses.

In another example, Attentive seems to be tiring of yet another of Wiseman's lengthy sermons on God's providence and mysterious way of dealing with transgressors such as Badman, and suggests that Wiseman make his next point "with as much brevity as you can" (100). When Wiseman questions if Attentive is "weary of my relating of things?" it would appear that Attentive dissembles in answering "No. But it pleases me to hear a great deal in a few words" (100). These are brief asides, to be fair, but they do seem to suggest that the "mystical speaking" and overwrought explanations of Wiseman do not have as much effect on Attentive as the older professor

might think, or like. Moreover, Attentive's desire for "a great deal in a few words" almost mirrors Badman's own desire for instant gratification—a desire that was increasingly coming to be satisfied by the marketplace, not the wearying lectures of "Wisemen" in village squares.

In fact, Attentive often appears to disagree outright with Wiseman's categorization of Badman's commercial practices as sins and crimes. True, throughout most of the narrative, Attentive does play the role of eager student to the older and wiser professor, Wiseman. Moreover, part of Attentive's pedagogical function as the figure of the eager student in this religious dialogue is to encourage Wiseman to further clarify his responses. But particularly towards the end of Badman's career of wickedness, Attentive disagrees with Wiseman's traditional categorization of Badman's new commercial practices more than seems necessary for Bunyan's didactic purpose. In addition, Attentive persistently offers economic apologies and attempts to justify Badman's actions—to the chagrin of Wiseman, who prefers to frame his discussion through the traditional means of Puritan instruction, replete with stock biblical quotes and allusions. Undeterred by Wiseman's bullying tone, however, Attentive still challenges him, once arguing, for example, "You said that

drunkenness tends to poverty, yet some make themselves rich by drunken bargains" (46). To which Wiseman replies, "I said so, because the Word says so. And as to some men's getting thereby, that is indeed but *rare*, and *base*: yea, and base will be the end of such gettings" (46, original emphasis). Hardly an authoritative response, and one that suggests Wiseman's frustration in arguing against the conquering morality of the marketplace.

As Badman's narrative continues, Attentive becomes even more specific in questioning Wiseman's doctrines, and in particular Wiseman's defense of the medieval doctrine of the just price. Attentive asks,

Well, but what will you say to this question? (you know that there is no settled price set by God upon any commodity that is bought or sold under the sun; but all things that we buy and sell, do ebb and flow, as to price, like the tide:) How (then) shall a man of a tender conscience do, neither to wrong the seller, buyer, nor himself, in buying and selling of commodities? (115)

Even the phrasing of Attentive's question here mirrors the instability of value inherent in the market economy. There is no "settled price set by God," but rather value flows to and fro, "like the tide," that most fluctuating of nature's elements.

To this most direct of Attentive's probing questions on the proper morality of the marketplace, Wiseman almost wearily answers,

This question is thought to be frivolous by all that are of Mr. Badman's way; 'tis also difficult in itself: yet I will endeavor to shape you an answer.  
(115)

Wiseman's rejoinder to Attentive, "This question is thought to be frivolous by all that are of Mr. Badman's way," links the younger Attentive to that new generation of commercial tradesmen and criminals, that rising generation of bad men whose values were threatening England itself. Hawkes writes of this exchange, that

the inadequacy of [Wiseman's] response pays reluctant testimony to the degree to which the market's dominance had already made it impractical and unrealistic to insist on the traditional essentialist ethics in economic practice.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed by the close of his narrative, Wiseman seems less triumphant than the subject he has spent the day attacking: Mr. Badman, who dies "as quietly as a lamb," as unrepentant of the pleasures the marketplace has afforded him throughout his life as of the crimes he has committed. In confessing in a rare moment then that "'tis also difficult in itself" to fashion an answer to the growing irrelevance of the doctrine of just price, Wiseman also reveals some of the overall ambivalence that

surrounded the contesting of commercialism throughout this period. West writes that "Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive speak as men of substance who, if not merchants themselves, belong in that level of society."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he claims, "when they saw 'we,' that word does not include the poor."<sup>57</sup> While Attentive and Wiseman clearly stand on the side of a traditional moral economy, if we read their comments carefully, we can hear occasionally a whispering tone of inevitable resignation to the spread of commercialism and the values of the marketplace. This tone, moreover, would swell to a selfishly individualistic roar of acceptance and almost jubilation in the voices of Moll Flanders and Roxana, the "criminal heroines" whose author, Daniel Defoe, is the next subject of this study.

In summing up her study of *Mr. Badman*, Monica Furlong argues that psychologically Mr. Badman serves as a sort of Jungian "shadow" for Bunyan, reflecting for him "the side of oneself that one would rather not see or be aware of. . . the side which all one's life one has repressed in order to be the 'good' person one would prefer to be."<sup>58</sup> Furlong's contention may be grounded a bit too loosely in psychoanalytic theory, but the similarities between Badman's and Bunyan's own youthful

indiscretions as they are related in *Grace Abounding* seem to support at least part of her claim.<sup>59</sup> To an extent, Bunyan does implicate his speakers, Wiseman and Attentive, his own Puritan community of Bedford, and perhaps even himself, in his representation of the criminal in *Mr. Badman*. But the values of the marketplace were ones that Bunyan clearly never accepted. Finally, on the economic changes that accompanied Bunyan's age, Hawkes writes,

With capitalist social mobility, human identity becomes fluid and relational; with the rise of usury and credit the opinion of others comes to define personal worth; with the growth of mercantile wealth and power, disguise, theatricality, and shape-shifting become predominant themes in literature.<sup>60</sup>

The example of *Mr. Badman*, John Bunyan's "part compromise, part confusion" of a text, reveals that while the themes of mobility may have been becoming predominant in literature, they were even more particularly influential in the development of criminal narratives, and in the representation of criminality throughout the eighteenth century.

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman: Presented to the World In a Familiar Dialogue Between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive*, Eds. James Forrest and Roger Sharrock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 7. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in

the text. Spelling and capitalization has been regularized.

<sup>2</sup> David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 219. Hawkes also points out the tendency towards realism in Mr. Badman's world, suggesting that "The world Badman inhabits is portrayed as realistic, indeed topical. Neither Mr. Badman nor his neighbors show any awareness that theirs is an allegorical landscape, and it is left to the narrator, Wiseman, to explain this to his pupil, Attentive," p. 219. For an interesting argument of how Bunyan fashioned *Mr. Badman* from the criminal activities of Bedford at the time, including the relationship between his own son Thomas and local criminals, see Patricia Bell's "Thomas Bunyan and Mr. Badman" in *Bunyan Studies* 2:1 (Spring 1990), pp. 46-52.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Sim, "'Safe for Those for Whom It Is to Be Safe': Salvation and Damnation in Bunyan's Fiction," in *John Bunyan and His England, 1628-88*, Eds. Anne Laurence, W.R. Owens and Stuart Sim (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed account of these specific influences, see the introduction to Forrest and Sharrock's edition of *Mr. Badman*, pp. ix-xlii, as well as E. Beatrice Batson's chapter on *Mr. Badman* in *John Bunyan: Allegory and Imagination* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Roger Sharrock, *John Bunyan* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Springer Borck, "Mr. Badman, Presented" in *Review* 12 (1990), p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, Preface, 3rd page. Sharrock's "The Life and Death of Mr. Badman: Facts and Problems" in *The Modern Language Review* 82:1 (1987) deals specifically with the difficulties in placing this text in the larger tradition of Bunyan's work, and his earlier article "An Anecdote in Bunyan's *Mr. Badman*" in the *Times Literary Supplement* (25 July 1958) also touches briefly upon the mix of narrative genres that inform Bunyan's text. For a look at the specific influence of the picaresque in *Mr. Badman*, see J.B. Wharey's "Bunyan's *Mr. Badman* and the Picaresque Novel" in

*University of Texas Studies in English* 4 (1924): 49-61. For an account of Bunyan's employment of allegory in his works that underlines some of the differences between *The Pilgrims Progress* and *Mr. Badman*, see Clifford Gay's *The Transformations of Allegory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, Preface, 3rd page. For a standard account of Puritanism, the Puritan literary tradition, and how Bunyan fits into this tradition, see William Haller's *The Rise of Puritanism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972). For a look at Puritan self-fashioning and its influence on the development of the novel, see Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tenenhouse's *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor and the Origins of Personal Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, and John McVeagh's *Tradefull Merchants: The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Hawkes focuses his study on the manner in which the development of trade in the early modern period seemed to undermine "the core assumptions of natural teleology" and how "the people of Reformation England received an analogous violation of natural teleology in the growing influence of the market economy," pp. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in Hawkes, p. 249.

<sup>11</sup> As quoted in Hawkes, p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> U. Milo Kaufmann, "Spiritual Discerning: Bunyan and the Mysteries of Divine Will" in Neil Keeble's collection of essays, *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 171.

<sup>13</sup> Kaufmann, "Spiritual Discerning", p. 171. For an interesting discussion of how Bunyan handles the theological problem of predestination in *Mr. Badman*, see Stuart Sim's article "Isolating the Reprobate: Paradox as a Strategy for Social Critique in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*" in *Bunyan Studies* 1:2 (Spring 1989), pp. 30-41.

<sup>14</sup> Kaufmann, "Spiritual Discerning", p. 186.

<sup>15</sup> For E.P. Thompson's account of eighteenth-century rural social groups and their influence in eighteenth-century life, see his *Customs in Common* (New York: New Press, 1991) as well as Tim Hitchcock's collection *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of The English Poor, 1640-1840* (London: Palgrave, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> John Mullan, *Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture: A Selection* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> David McNally, *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> McNally, *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. xii.

<sup>19</sup> Mullan, *Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture*, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Sharrock, *John Bunyan*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Henri Talon, *John Bunyan: The Man and His Works*, (London: Rockliff, 1951), p. 294. Talon's chapter "Political and Social Thought" offers a standard account of Bunyan's rural upbringing and its influence on his ideological leanings.

<sup>22</sup> For an extended treatment of Bunyan's criticism of the increasing commercialism in English society, see Alick West's chapter on Bunyan in *Crisis and Criticism and Selected Literary Essays* (New York: Norwood, 1975), pp. 131-77, and Christopher Hill's "John Bunyan and the English Revolution" in *Marxist Perspectives* 7.2 (1979), pp. 8-26, as well as Hill's *Society and Puritanism in Prerevolutionary England* (London: Panther, 1969).

<sup>23</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 223.

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent discussion of Hogarth's dialectic representation of his two apprentices, Tom Idle and Francis Goodchild, and of the prevalent cultural myths that informed this series of engravings, see Ronald Paulson's "The Simplicity of Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness*" in the *Journal of English Literary History* 41 (1974), pp. 291-320.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the apprentice system and its effect on social mobility see Richard Grassby's "Social Mobility and Business Enterprise in Seventeenth-Century England" in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays Presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 355-81.

<sup>26</sup> These figures are an estimate, but one based on Roy Porter's figures in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Penguin, 1982), especially in his chapter on "Getting and Spending", pp. 201-231. A good comparison of the relative salaries of different occupations in the early modern period is also found in Magali Larson's *The Rise of Professionalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, p. 318. For a history of the anxiety over juvenile delinquency, see Geoffrey Pearson's *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> For an excellent discussion on the role of marriage throughout the early modern period, see Stone's, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, particularly Chapter Seven on "Mating Arrangements."

<sup>30</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed some critics have interpreted Hogarth's sympathies as lying with the idle, as opposed to the industrious, apprentice in this series. Echoing Ronald Paulson, Lucy Moore contends in *The Thieves' Opera* (New York: Harcourt, 1998) that while "ostensibly lauding the rise to wealth and responsibility of Francis Goodchild, the Industrious 'Prentice, in contrast to the dissolution of Tom Idle, the Idle 'Prentice," Hogarth "is in fact looking up at the progression of events from the perspective of Tom Idle," and thus "the hero of the piece is really a villain; and the good-for-nothing Tom no more than a victim of circumstance," p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Moore, *The Thieves' Opera*, pp. 192-93.

<sup>34</sup> Moore, *The Thieves' Opera*, pp. 192-93.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Richardson's *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, v. 169-170, 1975). Richardson's earliest known publication of his own writing was not printed until 1734, pp. iii. However, this genre was already attaining popularity in the later seventeenth century, as witnessed by the publications of works such as Caleb Trenchfield's *A Cap of Gray Hairs for a Green Head: Or, The Fathers Counsel to his Son, an Apprentice in London* (1671; other editions 1678, 1688, 1710). Other notable examples from the period include *The Apprentice's Companion* (1681) and *Advice to an Apprentice* (1698), pp. iii. R. Campbell's better known work of 1747, *The London Tradesman*, (Devon: David & Charles Reprints, 1969) is also a later example of the genre.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 103-104.

<sup>39</sup> Brantlinger, Patrick. *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> West, *Crisis and Criticism*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>41</sup> West, *Crisis and Criticism*, pp. 166-67.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence Stone, "Social Mobility in England 1500-1700" in *Past & Present* 33 (April 1966), p. 16. However, Stone also notes that while the middle class and gentry experienced real growth in this period, "the living standards of the labouring classes went down sharply in the sixteenth century, and stayed down throughout the seventeenth," p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> John McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld, 1550-1700* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 15. McMullan's contention is that the increasing social mobility in urban centers such as London provided a ready-made breeding ground for criminals. For his extended discussion, see his chapter "The Making of an Underworld," pp. 7-25.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, (New York: Guinn Company, 1966), p. 94, original emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, p. 251-252.

<sup>46</sup> Defoe's revealing personification of trade as a whore comes from *The Review*, IX, no. 106, (11 June 1713), p. 214. His contention that trade indeed seemed to be founded upon crime is from *The Complete English Tradesman* (New York: Guinn Company, 1966), v. ii, p. 108.

<sup>47</sup> Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, p. xv.

<sup>48</sup> As quoted in Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 223.

<sup>49</sup> As quoted in Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 286.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). Williams' *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) has also informed my reading of Bunyan's "rural" and demonstrably plebian outlook.

<sup>51</sup> Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, p. xxxi. Based on the minimal evidence available, Sharrock sees Mr. Badman either as a corn factor or as a small tradesman dealing in provisions.

<sup>52</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 222. Hawkes writes that "Bunyan takes up a firmly conservative stance, defending the scholastic tradition of the 'just price' and the 'good conscience' that enables traders to adhere to it," p. 222.

<sup>53</sup> Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 142-149. While poor relief was dealt with both on a national and regional level, Porter's ultimate evaluation

is that neither of them worked particularly well, and that regarding regional areas, such as would have included Bunyan's Bedford, "the migraine of local government were the poor," p. 142.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Richard McKeon's *Introduction to Aristotle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 447, (5.5.1133b, 15-22).

<sup>55</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 230.

<sup>56</sup> West, *Crisis and Criticism*, p.165.

<sup>57</sup> West, *Crisis and Criticism*, p. 165.

<sup>58</sup> Monica Furlong, *Puritan's Progress* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1975), p. 132.

<sup>59</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners and The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to come*, Ed. Roger Sharrock (London: Oxford University Press, 1996). In particular the descriptions of Badman's and Bunyan's youthful indiscretions seem almost identical at times.

<sup>60</sup> Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, p. 230.

**Chapter 4**  
**Crime and Commerce:**  
**Defoe's Heroines and the**  
**Criminal Narrative**

Perhaps more than any other single eighteenth-century author, it is the amazingly prolific writer Daniel Defoe who triggers the explosion in the literary representation of criminals during the early eighteenth century, and particularly during the 1720s.<sup>1</sup> In a period of no more than five years (1720-25), Defoe composed his four major criminal narratives, *Captain Singleton* (1720), *Colonel Jack* (1722), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724), as well as numerous accounts of crime for *Applebee's Journal* and a series of criminal biographies on the two most notorious criminals of the day, Jack Sheppard (1724) and Jonathan Wild (1725). More particularly, Defoe's two "criminal heroines," *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, remain to this day among the most celebrated criminals in English literature, as well as among the most memorable characters in eighteenth-century literature altogether. In fact, Defoe's own reputation is inextricably tied to theirs. Or as Virginia Woolf summed up in her estimation of Defoe, "On any monument worthy of the name of monument the names of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, at least, should be carved as deeply as the name of Defoe."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the characters of

Moll and Roxana are the most representative of Defoe's influential contribution to the criminal narrative, and as such this chapter will focus on these two criminals from Defoe's notable rogue's gallery.

Moll and Roxana are referred to throughout this chapter as "criminal heroines." Part of the claim in the following pages is that while Defoe was just one of many artists who saw the figure of the criminal as representative of the modern experience, his criminals are the ones that best express the vital individuality and transgressive energy that appealed most to the readers of criminal narratives. Furthermore, it is that same dogged resourcefulness, stubborn will to succeed, and drive that seem admirable and heroic in both Moll and Roxana that were also vital characteristics of the enterprises of trade and commercialism as Defoe conceived of them, and which he spent his entire writing career championing. Thus, the energies that fueled crime and the energies that fueled commerce were powerfully linked in Defoe's imagination, and his ambivalence about trade and commerce is given its most vibrant expression in his criminal narratives. Commerce truly was a heroic endeavor for Defoe, and inevitably his criminals come to represent some

of this heroism of the tradesman while simultaneously expressing some of the prevalent anxieties regarding the increasing role of trade and commerce in eighteenth-century life. Thus, while both Moll and Roxana are in part cultural reactions to the increasing fear of crime during the 1720s, they also represent the fierce energies of individualism that accompanied and seemed to be validated by the new possibilities in the development of commercialism: In short, Defoe's criminals are economic and social climbers. Defoe's criminal heroines serve as another example then of how the transgressive energies represented by criminality could be viewed as both threatening and attractive: an explanation that helps account for why their struggle not only to survive, but indeed to thrive, came to be seen as heroic by some segments of society, and deeply disturbing by others.

At least part of this mixture of fascination and uneasiness with the figure of the criminal, especially Defoe's, can be linked to one of the new social realities criminals increasingly seemed to foreground: that in an age of commercialism, one's value was largely the function of one's wealth, and that behind the facade of social propriety and custom, it hardly mattered how one attained

that wealth—legally or illegally—so long as it was successfully attained, and retained. Thus, as in the example of Mr. Badman, the eighteenth-century criminal was coming to represent the relativity of value in an age of commerce, Defoe's criminals included. Bram Dijkstra describes Defoe's age as "the world of Hobbes and Locke, of competition, of individual responsibility, of the apotheosis of movement and change, and the establishment of self-interest as the central axiom of human experience," and as one when the middle classes were "caught up in a feverish pursuit of gain from commercial enterprises which seemed capable of unlimited expansion."<sup>3</sup> Defoe's criminals reflect this spirit and are nothing if not self-interested. Of the cultural significance of criminality in such an age, Lucy Moore writes,

The criminal underworld was a mirror image of normal society, a complement as well as a threat to it. Unwritten codes of honor, obligation and respect reflected acceptable modes of behavior; the formality of eighteenth-century life had as its counterpart and balance, the lawlessness, bravado and cruelty of the life of crime.<sup>4</sup>

Defoe's criminals in particular seem to function as an especially disturbing "mirror image of normal society" in their display of characteristically middle-class values, desires and fears.

In categorizing the behavior of Moll Flanders, for example, Martin Price takes a page from Max Weber in describing Moll as "the product of Puritan society turned to worldly zeal," and as "a supreme tradeswoman" who finally turns to "those bolder and franker forms of competitive enterprise, whoredom and theft."<sup>5</sup> Thus Moll is both "the embodiment of thrift, good management and industry" as well as the "perverse and savagely acquisitive outlaw. . . turned to the false worship of wealth, power and success."<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, Max Novak reads Roxana as an embodiment of eighteenth-century commercial values, and ultimately as "both the victim and product of a society dedicated to luxury and consumerism."<sup>7</sup> Like the majority of English society in the 1720s, however, Defoe's criminals just want to get ahead. In fact, they are perhaps marked by the decidedly middle-class trait of ambition more than any other single quality.

Moll shows this ambition from her earliest days. The orphaned Moll desires only to be "a gentlewoman," and when her nurse mocks her and questions how the orphan plans on attaining this lofty goal, the precocious child answers she will "work with my needle and spin worsted," and then

"work for her. . . and work very hard" and finally "work harder then. . . and you shall have it all."<sup>8</sup> Moll's early belief here in the liberating power of work is indeed a good illustration of Weber's Protestant work ethic. More centrally, this belief defines Moll quite early by her trust in a characteristic middle-class ideology of her day: that is, the ideology that believed in the power of hard work, as opposed to aristocratic lineage, or connections at court, the ideology embodied in figures such as Hogarth's Francis Goodchild, that most industrious of apprentices.

However, this kind of industry which seems admirable in the young Moll is turned to vicious and criminal purpose later in her life as her avenues of legitimate advancement are thwarted. To the very end of her tale, however, Moll takes pride in her work ethic—legal or illegal. Even as a criminal, Moll closely details for us how she learned her craft, step by step, as if her readers were in fact her own apprentices she was instructing. This sort of "tell-all" narrative style was part of the original thrill for the readers of such criminal tales, and her readers would have identified with Moll's commitment to her chosen discipline. Even throughout her

career as a notorious criminal, as a woman who sleeps with her brother, steals from burning houses, robs small children, aborts her own, brings honest tradesmen to the brink of financial and legal ruin, and steals handily from onlookers during the Queen's procession, Moll still takes pride in being "keen in [her] trade," and "vigilant and industrious," with an eye always open for the "many opportunities [that] must happen" for a skilled craftswoman such as herself (167). When Moll finally refers to herself as "the greatest artist of my time" then, Defoe's readers could have easily mistaken her tone for that of an ambitious and hard-working tradesman, not a criminal irrevocably doomed to perdition as in traditional criminal biographies (167).

Roxana's ambition is also clear from the outset of her tale, although hers is realized through the marriage, not the criminal, marketplace (though as Roxana contends later in her narrative, there are a number of similarities between the two). Roxana, too, is orphaned early in her tale, although not by her family, but rather by her "silly fool" of a first husband who deserts her and their children when his business fails, leaving Roxana "in rags and dirt. . . looking almost like one starved."<sup>9</sup>

Inevitably, Roxana is forced into a life of prostitution to support herself and her children, but she, too, takes an uncannily middle-class sense of self-achievement in mastering her craft and in her success as a prostitute:

I was rich, beautiful, and agreeable, and not yet old; I had known something of the influence I had had upon the fancies of men, even of the highest rank; I never forgot that the Prince de— had said with an ecstasy that I was the finest woman in France; I knew I could make a figure at London, and how well I could grace that figure; I was not at a loss how to behave. (201)

Roxana's comment here also shows how middle-class ambition could lead to vanity, and how vanity itself could be seen to lead to greed, particularly when one felt above one's station—a fear of which greatly informed English society in this new era of fluid social mobility. The transformation of Roxana's originally defensible ambition to support herself and her children into a consuming greed is witnessed in Roxana's dispatching of her children to nurses and relatives as well as the new goal she sets for herself:

I aimed at being a kept mistress, and to have a handsome maintenance; and that I was still for getting money, *and laying it up too*. . . only by a worse way.<sup>9</sup> (original emphasis)

Defoe's narrative suggests in these examples that, far from being the result of idleness, crime is a more

aggressive form of industry. In fact, it is the most readily available form of industry for those society leaves out of the spoils of legitimate commercialism: namely women without husbands, the poor, and other marginalized figures who cannot prosper in the new marketplace of commercial activity.

For Defoe's criminals, crime acts as a way into middle-class society, and in Defoe's narratives, middle-class ambition is as characteristic of criminals as it is of gentlewomen, or mercers, or drapers, for that matter. It was this sense of recognition by Defoe's audiences that could make his representations so disturbing. In identifying with such criminals as Moll and Roxana, readers were in a way defining their own world of acquisition and consumption as criminal. Defoe's criminal narratives forced his readers to look through a glass darkly, as it were, and they were morbidly captivated by what they saw. John Mullan clarifies this observation in noting of eighteenth-century readers that,

Such a literary preoccupation [with crime] tells us more than that crime was in this period, as it ever is, an issue of widespread social concern. It also reveals something of how crime could be thought to be—sometimes worryingly, sometimes comically—close to the experiences of polite readers. This might be because the activities of criminals could be seen as the distorted consequences of an increasingly

commercial society. Some of the kinds of adventurer widely mythologized in the first half of the century, highwayman and pirates for instance, could be thought of as opportunists in an age of economic individualism.<sup>10</sup>

To highlight then how *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* were among the earliest extended narratives to represent criminals as "opportunists in an age of economic individualism," and to reveal how this representation remained a contested and ambivalent one even for such a champion of commercialism as Defoe is the central aim of this chapter.<sup>11</sup>

One reason Defoe was likely to see criminals as opportunists was that he was one of the first authors to also see them as people, not simply figures of allegory and instruction. Defoe knew firsthand the economic misery that made many criminals turn to crime in the first place. He had a wide experience and sympathy for actual criminals, particularly those in jail, many of whose greatest crime was falling into debt, as Defoe himself had numerous times. In this respect, Defoe's narratives come closer than anything to this point in the eighteenth century in attempting to represent criminals as fully-realized individuals, individuals struggling for survival in what could be a very cruel and ruthless world. Defoe's

writing on crime struggles with the increasing problems of urban squalor and poverty and the influence of these social factors on the creation of criminals.<sup>12</sup> Moll Flanders and Roxana both make much of the desperations of poverty, or as Moll herself states succinctly in quoting "The Wise Man's Prayer," "Give me not poverty lest I steal" (149). After a while these justifications become disingenuous, but initially they reveal a part of the criminal experience with which many of Defoe's readers would have sympathized. Defoe himself spent far less time in jail than Bunyan, for example, and yet it is Defoe's work on criminals that appears more influenced by this experience.<sup>13</sup> Defoe spent much of the year 1703 in hiding from authorities or imprisoned in Newgate for the writing of *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*, and then he eventually returned and spent over a year in frequent visits with some of Newgate's inhabitants even before he began to write his own story of Moll Flanders, "a poor desolate girl without friends, without cloaths, without help or helper in the world"(7).<sup>14</sup> These close range experiences with crime were important ones for Defoe, and they would influence the manner through which he tried to justify his heroines' careers as criminals.

However, the central difference between Defoe's work and that of his predecessors is that Defoe's heroines offer their audiences not only the liberating effect characteristic of earlier criminal narratives, but also validation for a successful, albeit scandalous, course of economic and social self improvement. Whereas Bunyan's representation of Mr. Badman's underhanded commercialism reveals the conflict that surrounded England's development in the early eighteenth century from a society adhering to rural values to one adopting commercial ones, Defoe's heroines leap forward to embrace commercialism in a way that seemed morally and socially catastrophic to commentators like Bunyan. Dijkstra has described the tendency among some critics to view *Roxana* as a "*Life of Mrs. Badwoman*," but far from dying as Mr. Badman did, "quietly as a lamb," Defoe's criminal heroines quite vocally and energetically defend the role of the commercial economy in society, and in doing so serve as embodiments of a new morality being infused in English culture during this period, a morality based on the values of trade and consumerism, those two socially and economically leveling forces of Defoe's era.<sup>15</sup>

We've seen briefly how Moll defines her criminality by using the language of a tradesman, but the most notable example of how Defoe's criminal heroines embody and espouse the values of commercialism is to be found in Roxana's ascent to wealth through prostitution. Roxana's example implies that an essential key to prosperity, indeed even to survival, in the England of the early eighteenth century lies in the embracing of commercialism. Although Roxana's choice of targets may initially seem arbitrary, her selection of lovers reveals a clear progression in her development as a "she-merchant," as Dijkstra refers to her.<sup>16</sup> From the start, that "silly fool," her first husband, fails her (40). While "a handsome man and a good sportsman," (40) he "has no genius to business. . . no knowledge of accounts" (42). In this respect, Roxana's husband's description reads like a characteristic depiction of the profligate English squire; even worse, it would appear that this first husband apes the gentry without the means to do so. Of the distinction between what Defoe implies are the landed men of the past and the monied men of the future, he writes in *The Complete English Tradesman*:

To the gentlemen of fortunes and estates, who are born to large possessions, 'tis certainly lawful to

spend their spare hours on horseback with their hounds or hawks, pursuing their game.<sup>17</sup>

However to the new breed of commercial men, such a frivolous lifestyle is imprudent, if not disastrous:

To the prudent tradesman. . . nothing of pleasure or diversion can be innocent to him, whatever it may be to another, if it injures his business, if it takes either his time, or his mind, or his delight, or his attendance from his business.<sup>18</sup>

Roxana's first husband learns this the hard way, but in a society where a woman's status is a direct reflection of her husband's, so in fact does Roxana. It is a mistake, however, she will not repeat on her ascent upwards.

Roxana eventually takes up with a jeweler, and it is he who first begins to educate Roxana in the ways of eighteenth-century commercialism and to effect her transformation into a "she-merchant" and woman of commerce. Even the jeweler, however, symbolizes outmoded economic practices. Dijkstra sees the jeweler, "like the goldsmiths of the seventeenth-century," as "representative of a group of informal bankers whose position in the world of capital was well past its peak."<sup>19</sup> For Defoe, such a system of exchange and valuation was decidedly pre-commercial, and as such, it is the jeweler's physical possession of jewels on his person that leads to his assault and murder by highwaymen. The jeweler's example is

one that underlines the importance of economic fluidity and mobility—characteristics of the new commercial markets Defoe champions, and characteristics that also come to define Roxana. Throughout the narrative, Roxana is distinguished by the fluidity of her identity: she is, to borrow even today's business parlance, quicker, faster, and able to adapt better than her competitors. Such traits are valuable ones in the cutthroat world of eighteenth-century commerce. In *Roxana*, mobility leads to success, stasis to failure and even death; thus the early example of the jeweler's death in the narrative foregrounds graphically the difference between "living" and "dying" systems of commerce and exchange.

After the jeweler's murder, Roxana indulges in aristocracy in an aborted affair with a French prince. Upon the end of this affair, she remarks,

I could not but sometimes look back, with astonishment, at the folly of men of quality, who immense in their bounty, as in their wealth, give a profusion, and without bounds, to the most scandalous of our sex, for granting them the liberty of abusing themselves, and ruining both. (110)

Slowly, but surely, Roxana's journey as a prostitute opens her eyes not only to the foolishness of men in their amours, but also to the futility and irrelevance of

outdated modes of economic conduct (the prince's aristocratic beneficence, in this example).

Roxana's education in the world of commerce reaches its pinnacle in her affair with the Dutch merchant, however. In the early Hanoverian era in England the ties between the Dutch and the English were as glaringly visible as the odd German dress and foreign appearance of their new monarch, George I, with his broken English and general disdain for English customs, and to some extent even its people.<sup>20</sup> In 1730, the Tory opposition paper *Fog's Journal* characterized the prevalent cultural reaction to the Hanoverian succession:

Poets and philosophers are fit ornaments . . . of a polite and sensible court, such as was that of *Augustus*, but fiddlers, singers, buffoons, and stockjobbers, would best suit the court of a *Tiberius* or a *Nero*, where stupidity, lewdness, and rapine sat in council, and exerted all their strength and opposition to every thing that was sensible. (original emphasis)<sup>21</sup>

This charge was leveled against George II, who although a military man, was arguably a philistine in his appreciation and patronage of the arts. However, this comment could have just as easily been applied to the state of the monarchy during his father's reign. The specific reference to "stockjobbers" here also underlines the fact that the Hanoverians were frequently implicated

throughout this period with the ascension of those slippery men of finance who were feared to be holding the country's interests hostage to their purse strings.

But while the Tories in particular enjoyed mocking the Hanoverian court and their lack of taste and suspect manners, there was as well a grudging respect for the Dutch during this period, particularly among the Whiggish commercial interests that were perceived by the Tories to operate hand in hand with the new "stockjobbers" and men of financial interests. The Dutch had been the preeminent merchants of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and for Defoe, the Dutch were "sober, industrious people," whom, as Dijkstra argues, "Englishmen of the seventeenth century were always discussing with a mixture of admiration, envy and hatred," observing, for example, "the efficiency of Dutch agriculture, shipbuilding, industry, commercial methods and banking."<sup>22</sup> The first part of Roxana's narrative ends with her own affair with a "sober, industrious," Dutch merchant. The majorities of their transactions (the most fitting word in this case) are decidedly unromantic, however, and stand in direct contrast to the romantic carelessness she formerly allowed herself with the prince. Thus they spend their

longest discussion haggling, first over "the very nature of the marriage contract" the Dutch merchant seeks to engage Roxana under, then over "the weight of business," "the toil of life," and "the anxiety of living" that accompanies the life of a successful merchant such as the Dutch merchant (187). By this point, Roxana's relationships—romantic or otherwise—have been reduced to coolly mercantile transactions.

What is finally most revealing in Roxana's progression is the extent to which the whore and criminal Roxana has in fact acclimated herself so readily to the language and values of commercialism. She has moved from being impressed by her first husband—a "jolly, handsome fellow," who "danced well, which was the first thing that brought [them] together" (39), to an appreciation of a sober and aging merchant whose best attribute, it appears from her description of him, is that he "was far from being poor, or even mean" with an "estate of between three and four thousand pounds, which was in itself equal to some princes abroad" (279). Roxana's final comparison here between the wealth of merchants and the wealth of princes offers a good insight into her own development: where she once placed her faith in the traditional paternal figures

of her society such as her "jolly, handsome" husband, and the "bountiful" and aristocratic French prince she happily took up with, in her final analysis, she agrees with her financial advisor, Sir Robert Clayton, in claiming

that a true-bred merchant is the best gentleman in the nation; that in knowledge, in manners, in judgement of things, the merchant outdid many of the nobility; that having once mastered the world, and being above the demand of business, though no real estate, they were then superior to most gentlemen.<sup>23</sup>  
(210)

In a way that is central to her identity then, Roxana becomes an eager student and ultimate mistress of the world of commerce, not as a criminal in the traditional manner of the criminal biography.

In this respect, Defoe's criminals aren't as easily categorized as the formulaically murderous killers, thieves, and usurpers of earlier criminal biographies. Defoe's criminals are more of a marriage between the notorious, if stock, figures of criminal biography and the new champions of a morality grounded in the individualistic values of trade and commerce. While it is difficult to definitively categorize Defoe's economic ideas, we can see that he was clearly a strong and avowedly vocal proponent of the new commercialism then,

and he championed its accompanying morality throughout his works.<sup>24</sup>

Although Defoe's criminals can be read as champions of commerce, and to a large extent they should be, to read this approval as unconditional is to miss the complexity and ultimate importance of Defoe's criminal narratives. Thus, I'd like to complicate Defoe's criminal narratives by suggesting that while Defoe openly champions the interests of commerce in all of his works, his acceptance of the new values of trade and business is simultaneously tinged with a sense of ambivalence that is often expressed most prominently in his fictional works. This ambivalence arises from a concern over the increasing split in his society between traditional values grounded in the religious and moral economy we saw championed by Bunyan, and the increasing adoption of what often appeared to be the amoral and ruthless values of the emerging commercial markets, a morality that reduced all things to commodities. Of this tension in Defoe's work, Michael Shinagel writes that

Defoe was himself, like Crusoe, suspended between the new mercantile spirit of the 'merchant adventurers' and the old traditional order of the seventeenth century, a tradition of men like Richard Baxter or Samuel Amnesly in divinity and John Bunyan in

literature. . . This tension between the two orders is traceable in Defoe's entire career.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, while Defoe was a champion of trade, particularly in his non-fictional works such as *The Complete English Tradesman*, for example, his fictional works, and particularly his criminal narratives, are often at pains to address what Defoe refers to as "the general scandal upon business," or more specifically the eighteenth-century contention, particularly strong in the scandal-ridden years of the 1720s, that emerging forms of business were themselves somehow inherently and troublingly akin to crime.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, while the actual increase of crime throughout the 1720s is still a matter of debate, it is clear that whatever the reality, the public perception of crime increased notably in this decade. John Brewer notes:

The 1720s was a decade notorious in England for crime in both high and low life. In 1720 Whig politicians and financial speculators, all deeply involved in manipulating the stockmarket, had swindled the public. . . out of enormous sums in what came to be known as the South Sea Bubble, a pyramid scheme of crazed speculation. Five years later the Lord Chancellor was convicted of embezzling public funds to the tune of £80,000. In the same year Jonathan Wild, a former pimp and protection racketeer who, under the guise of a "thief-taker". . . had run the largest criminal network in London, was hanged at Tyburn, to the joy of the attending crowd.<sup>27</sup>

It is no coincidence that two of these incidents, The South Sea Bubble and the career of Jonathan Wild, played large roles in the criminal narratives of both Defoe and John Gay.

Both the South Sea Bubble and the career of Jonathan Wild seemed to reinforce the notion that new forms of commercial activity were in fact legitimizations of criminal activity. Jonathan Wild was a runaway apprentice who had made enough connections during his stay in a variety of London prisons to begin serving as a local "thief-taker" in London, namely one who informed on thieves for a reward and returned stolen property for a price. Novak refers to him as "the illusory hero of the propertied class"—illusory since it turned out that it was Wild who was arranging the robberies in the first place, then playing his robbers off against each other by manipulating their fear of being turned in.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, criminals like Wild threatened the social order in openly comparing their larcenous activity to legitimate commercial activity, and indeed they took great public pride in doing so. Wild, for example, was well-known for comporting himself like a gentleman about town and, with a straight face it appears, even keeping an "Office of Lost

Property" from which he ran his various business operations. As such he was London's first organized crime boss, a spiritual father of Al Capone. After Wild's arrest and execution, Defoe would write two separate pamphlets on Wild's life and career as "Thief-Taker General" for John Applebee, the publisher whose name was synonymous with criminal biographies during the 1720s. In his own criminal narrative, *The Beggar's Opera*, Gay would use Wild as the model for his character Peachum—the mercenary criminal boss who sees everything and everyone as commodities for sale. As we'll see in the conclusion of this study, it was also the figure of Wild who in the end most came to symbolize the similarities between crime and commerce, and even more disturbingly, the complicity of the well-to-do and middle class in his illegal activities.

However, Wild's case was little more than a nuisance compared to the collapse of the South Sea Bubble, the first stock market crash of the modern era and an event that changed the public opinion on what appeared to be the wonders of commercialism and speculation. In brief, the South Sea Company was a joint-stock company originally founded in 1711 to trade in slaves. In 1720 it took on a large part of the national debt, and its stock value rose

as the public became fascinated with stocks, as well as the variety of business possibilities in the new world, including slavery. When the Bubble finally burst, thousands of investors in England lost everything. Nor did the Bubble discriminate; it effected all social classes who had joyfully embraced stock mania as well as that "favorite gambling concern of Exchange Alley," The South Sea Company, with its very name evocative of the riches to be reaped from the New World, as well as "the Forward Humor of the Age in New Adventures," according to Defoe.<sup>29</sup> In his study of the cultural effects of the South Sea Bubble, Silke Stratmann calls the Bubble, "a man-made fraudulent scheme conceived and perpetrated by a financial adventurer, [and] aided and abetted by a number of highly corrupt or highly naïve politicians."<sup>30</sup> More specifically, three Whig ministers were eventually implicated on charges of corruption and complicity in the speculative operations of the South Sea Company, and, although numerous officials escaped punishment, it became frightfully apparent that there had been high levels of government involvement in the scheme.

Not only were results of the crash fiscally disastrous for many; in some ways the crash set a bleak

and apprehensive tone for the rest of the decade. The 1720s were to be characterized by a sudden retrenchment from the wistful dreams fostered by the notion of Public Credit and Addison's celebrated Royal Exchange. They were to be characterized by an increasingly dubious public and their skepticism over government corruption, and characterized by a perhaps unjustified, but nonetheless real, loss of faith in the glittering promises of commercialism. Stratmann only underscores the cultural significance of the event in claiming that "the final bursting of the Bubble cast a shadow of doubt not only over the new speculating fever, but also over some parts of the traditional claims of trade and commerce."<sup>31</sup> Gay lost almost all of his wealth in the Bubble, and Defoe himself had been a particularly savage critic of the South Sea Company and its minions of "stockjobbers" even before its spectacular collapse, publishing *The Villainy of Stockjobbers Detected* in 1701 and *The Anatomy of Exchange Alley* in 1719, just before the Bubble's collapse. Indeed, his representation of the swarms of stockjobbers as common cheats and criminals had been prophetic.

Even Defoe's more general works on trade and commerce exhibit a sense of ambivalence over the moral deficiencies

inherent in the commercial doctrine. We have seen this before, but again it bears mentioning that in *The Complete English Tradesman*, after pages of paean to the early eighteenth-century businessman, Defoe himself almost melancholically admits that "It must be confess'd. . . trade is almost universally founded upon crime."<sup>32</sup> It was this sort of moral ambivalence towards commercialism that Defoe displayed even more keenly in his imaginative and fictional works. Faller writes that while

Defoe's novels display the role of providence in human affairs with greater moral effect and theological correctness than the general run of criminal biography. . . Defoe had a much harder time dealing with the troublesome implications of theft. The freedom of writing fictions allowed him to skirt the problems raised by capital punishment-- he could simply leave his thieves unchanged-- but there was no simple "fix" for the prevalent suspicion that modern economic life was the pursuit of criminal ends by other means.<sup>33</sup>

At least part of Defoe's motivation for writing fiction was to arrive at just such a fix. Indeed it seems clear that the concerns of Defoe, the merchant, also dominated the productions of Defoe, the author.

As Defoe reminds us in his own memorable and telling words in the closing issue of his *Review*, "Writing upon trade. . . was the whore I really doated upon, and designed to have taken up with."<sup>34</sup> We see evidence of this

focus on trade in Defoe's fictional works most clearly in *Robinson Crusoe*, with its insulated locale serving as an ideal arena for the representation of man as "homo economicus."<sup>35</sup> But as the example of *Roxana* bears out, Defoe's criminal narratives also display an overriding concern with the issues of trade and commercialism in society. The metaphor of prostitution Defoe chooses to epitomize his writing career is an apt one. For as the linkage between criminal activity and legitimate commercial activity in Defoe's narratives suggests, for Defoe, "trade" and the modern commercial system it represented was a "whore" that came with a heavy price—the vitiation of established traditions of morality and value. Patrick Brantlinger is a keen reader of Defoe's in recognizing this conflict between a traditional religious morality and the values of the new commercial world England was entering. Moreover, Brantlinger also ties Defoe's ambivalence over commercialism in his fiction with his own status as a literary profiteer:

Just as Defoe understood modern literature to be a form of commercial activity and "manufacturing," so the main characters in his novels are representatives of the emergent capitalist ideology and commercial order he heralded in his *Essay on Projects*, his *Compleat English Tradesman*, and many of his other journalistic endeavors. This is as true of *Roxana*, *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, and *Captain*

Singleton as it is of Robinson Crusoe. As in Johnson's allusion to prostitution in "London," so in Roxana's "whoredom," Defoe offers a paradigm of the new commercialization and commodification of all social relations.<sup>36</sup>

It is this disturbing "new commercialization and commodification of all social relations" that Defoe appears compelled to explore, explain, and ultimately attempt to justify throughout his criminal narratives. Again Brantlinger notes the striking similarities between the eighteenth-century world of commerce and the eighteenth-century world of crime in Defoe's works, arguing that the world of nascent and early capitalism, that is to say as well, the world of England in the early eighteenth century, is in fact visibly marked by "criminal" activity. Brantlinger writes,

Before commerce or trade, moreover, can settle down to something like a normal, even-keeled, and civilized routine, kidnapping, robbery, piracy, and perhaps even cannibalism seem to constitute the normal if also violent, precarious mode of production—or rather, mode of survival—which in Defoe's always insecure world is also the mercantilist, imperialist mode of primitive accumulation.<sup>37</sup>

Of all of Defoe's criminal narratives, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* are the texts that most passionately describe this Hobbesian landscape, this "always insecure world" of eighteenth-century England, and of the "violent,

precarious mode of survival" its inhabitants engage in daily. But both Moll's and Roxana's narratives function as more than just celebratory hymns to the victors in this commercial struggle; ultimately these narratives also underline the troubling manner through which commercialism appeared to transform all things into commodities, and all relationships into ones between buyers and sellers.

Ironically perhaps, although they were frequently categorized as decadent and degrading, Defoe's criminal narratives actually offer a more complicated interpretation of middle class ascent than those witnessed in a number of other popular eighteenth-century middle-class narratives, such as Richardson's *Pamela*, for example.<sup>38</sup> True, *Pamela* spends much of her narrative resisting the depredations of Mr. B. and his cruel lackey Mrs. Jewkes, and her rise to affluence is not an easy one, but in a way *Pamela* turns the social reality of life for an eighteenth-century servant girl into melodrama, all the more to celebrate her eventual rewards. Thus, Mr. B's advances are overwrought and clumsy; Mr. B himself is almost a farcical caricature of the lascivious and landed patriarch, who is then, in what could only be categorized as a supernatural occurrence, improbably healed of his

wanton ways by Pamela's final acquiescence to marriage. For all of its other excellent qualities—and there are many—the sterling example of virtue rewarded set in *Pamela* seems a rather optimistic, if not ultimately unbelievable narrative of middle-class aspirations, a narrative in fact finally divorced from the significantly dirtier struggle to acquire and consume that characterizes the modern world of commercial relationships.

Defoe's criminal narratives, on the other hand, insist on representing graphically and almost brutally, without reservation, the actual stakes in such social maneuverings: namely money, and then only by extension the status and position in society that come with it. Defoe's narratives relentlessly focus attention on the manner in which money establishes value in society. The physical representation of money appears everywhere in Defoe's narratives, and we see how even the simplest of daily activities in Defoe's age demands money. Early in her narrative, a youthful Moll is seduced by the eldest brother of the family that has taken her in. Moll is still inclined, in a manner similar to Roxana's attraction to the French prince, to romanticize her

affair with the eldest son, a "young gentleman of promising parts," a dashing rake who already "knew the town as well as the country" (16). But the sort of romantic, middle-class wish-fulfillment that characterizes Moll's behavior here is rapidly extinguished in Defoe's criminal narratives, indeed almost within the same paragraph. The brother's sister comments in Moll's presence,

I wonder at you, brother. . . Betty wants but one thing, but she had as good want every thing, for the market is against our sex just now; and if a young woman have beauty, birth, breeding, wit, sense, manners, modesty, and all these to an extreme; yet if she have not money, she's no body, she had as good want them all, for nothing but money recommends a woman; the men play the game all into their own hands. (17)

The brother protests, but as his inevitable rejection of Moll's desire for marriage reveals, his sister is correct. Money does allow one to play the game into his or her own hands, as Moll realizes when the brother repudiates their affair, and confesses a marriage to her would, in fact, be "stark mad" (31).

However, even the youthful and ostensibly naïve Moll herself comes to categorize her experience through money. Much as we saw in her earliest example of preparing herself to "work harder" to become a

gentlewoman, from a young age Moll readily identifies what is valuable in her society, money, and indeed her entire range of experience comes to be defined by it: by its accumulation, its "stocking" or "laying up" as Roxana calls it, or its absence. Thus after her original seduction by the elder brother, Moll is sure to note he "put five guineas in my hand and went away down stairs" (20). On his next visit, Moll tells us "he pull[ed] out a silk purse with an hundred guineas in it, and gave it me" (24). For her part, Moll "spent whole hours in looking upon it; I [counted] the guineas over and over a thousand times a day" (22). Compare Defoe's narrative then to Richardson's, and Pamela's reaction to the bundle of fine clothes he attempts to seduce her with:

My master has been very kind since my last; for he has given me a suit of my old lady's cloaths, and a half dozen of her shifts, and six fine handkerchiefs, and three of her Cambrick aprons, and four Holland ones: the clothes are fine silks, and too rich and too good for me, to be sure. I wish it was no affront to him . . . and send it to you: it would do me more good.<sup>39</sup>

The laundry list here of luxuries for consumption characterizes narratives designed to appeal to middle-class readers. But Pamela's wholesome reaction stands in stark contrast to Moll's reflex to grasp, to "spend whole hours looking upon it," to count her possessions "over

and over a thousand times a day." Actual life in the commercial and consumer society of eighteenth-century England, however, includes just such "looking upon" and "counting over and over a thousand times a day." Defoe's narratives accept this reality, and by extension implicate their readers in this consumer process; Richardson's narratives begin the long process of mythologizing this aspect of consumerism, and thus disguising the messy reality of the marketplace. Richardson lets his readers look, but inevitably delays their enjoyment of the spoils of commercial activity, because it "would do [them] more good" to follow Pamela's virtuous example.

In this respect, Defoe's criminal narratives function as a more compelling if disturbing alternative to competing middle-class narratives popular in this era. Moll's and Roxana's rise to middle-class respectability is one that is at every turn inescapably linked to the criminal compromises they have to make in order to succeed in a commercial society: Moll is forced into a life of petty crime and transportation to the colonies; Roxana is forced into prostitution and the murder of the abandoned daughter that threatens to expose her.

Moreover, their social and economic rise is contingent upon ultimately recognizing and adhering to a doctrine that reduces everything to money, ultimately even identity, as Moll reveals in personifying herself:

In the next place, when a woman is thus left desolate and void of council, she is just like a bag of money, or a jewel dropt on the highway, which is a prey to the next comer. (101)

Such is the price of admission Defoe's criminal heroines pay for their entry into the world of the middle class: not only do they lose their innocence, which one would imagine would happen anyway, but they undergo a transformation in the way they view and value their lives.

Moll's individualistic sense of exhilaration at her successes dominates the tone of her narrative. But even from the outset, her ascent is tied to a recurring sense of guilt and dread over her triumphs. Moll alternates between an extreme and very vocal, almost braggart, sense of self-satisfaction and an equally vocal and extreme sense of guilt over her "ill-gotten" spoils. From the very beginning of Moll's narrative, for example, she tells us that she was blessed more than most by natural gifts:

By this means I had. . . all the advantages of education that I could have had, if I had been as much a gentlewoman as they were with whom I lived, and in some things I had the advantage of my ladies, though they were my superiors, but they were all

gifts of nature, and which all their fortunes could not furnish. First, I was apparently handsomer than any of them. Secondly, I was better shaped, and thirdly, I sung better, by which I mean, I had a better voice; in all which you will I hope allow me to say, I do not speak my own conceit of myself, but of the opinion of all that knew the family. (16)

Nor is Moll's celebration of her success here just a youthful flash of vanity. After her subsequent descent into crime, Moll also claims to have become "the greatest [criminal] artist of my time," and brags that "the people at Newgate did not so much as know me" although "they had heard much of me indeed, and often expected me there, but I always got off" (167). These examples highlight Moll's flair for notoriety, and also underscore her middle-class propensity to define herself in relationship to others—at first by her superiority over her benefactor's children, and in the second example, by her exalted place even among the lowly denizens of Newgate. In a way, Moll's triumphs aren't as sweet unless they can be compared to others' failures, a characteristic of hers that also evokes the image of the marketplace, an arena by its nature defined by binaries—sellers, buyers, winners and losers. These examples also exhibit Moll's almost obsessive desire to rise above others, no matter what the field of pursuit—

legitimate as in the former example, or criminal as in the latter.<sup>40</sup>

However, Moll's rise is a treacherous one, and her moments of middle-class triumph are inevitably tempered by the lingering admission that her success and advancement come at an undeniable moral cost, as witnessed, for example, after her first successful theft. Moll confesses,

All the while I was opening these things I was under such dreadful impressions of fear, and in such terror of mind, though I was perfectly safe, that I cannot express the manner of it; I sat me down and cried most vehemently; Lord, said I, what am I now? A thief! Why I shall be taken next time and carried to Newgate and be tried for my life! And with that I cried again a long time, and I am sure, as poor as I was, if I had durst for fear, I would certainly have carried the things back again, but that went off after a little while. (150)

True, Moll's expression of guilt here is in part a response to her initiation into the life of the criminal. Even still, her outbursts, and other expressions of guilt throughout hers and Roxana's narratives suggest Defoe's own ambivalence. This ambivalence arises from his attempt to reconcile commercialism and the "freedom" of a marketplace that opens the way to fluid economic and social advancement, with the oftentimes amoral principles necessary to succeed in such a society.

This underlying ambivalence over the amoral benefits of commercial development rises in vibrant bursts in these narratives: in Moll's "dreadful impressions of fear," and the "terror of mind" that overtakes her when she reflects on her gains, in Roxana's "secret horror upon [her] mind" (323) and in the "blast from heaven" that leaves her "in a fit of trembling. . . raving about the room like madwoman" when she recognizes her own part in her daughter's death (372). It is moments of self-recognition like these, moments when the criminal heroines are forced to acknowledge their true identity, that Defoe's criminals fear. Like the marketplace they successfully manipulate, Moll and Roxana depend upon continual movement for their livelihood; as the marketplace depends on the circulation of goods and money, they, too, must literally keep in circulation, as Moll's voyages back and forth from the New World and Roxana's endless rounds of parties demonstrate.

In fact, both narratives are strongly characterized by movement and instability; neither heroine can stay settled for long. Roxana moves from lover to lover, keeper to keeper, citing personal independence; "O! 'tis pleasant to be free, the sweetest Miss is Liberty," she sings (188). Moll moves from opportunity to opportunity, citing

necessity; "What to do I knew not, the terror of approaching poverty lay hard upon my spirit," she pleads (101). David Hawkes reminds us that "with capitalist social mobility, human identity becomes fluid and relational."<sup>41</sup> Defoe's criminals both profit and lose from this new reality. Their ability to change shapes, to become an exotic Turkish dancer—a literal "Roxana"—or to slip in and out of a crowd or shop almost unnoticed, enables them to corner the market, to thrive in the cutthroat commercial world of the early eighteenth century. But their identities always pursue them as well, only one step behind them, compelling them to keep moving. Moll fears that her husband will find out he has in fact married his own sister; she fears the authorities will find her, that the thieves she collaborates with will learn her name, and thus trap her by uncovering her identity. Roxana fears the Jew will prove her theft of her murdered husband's jewels, that the nobility who court her will recognize her as the scandalous dancer, that the Quaker sees through her, and above all, that the abandoned daughter who pursues her with a vengeance will ruin the life she has made for herself. As in the example of Badman, the mastery of commercialism and the acquisitive

economy Moll and Roxana achieve brings a kind of economic freedom, but it also leads to mental and physical entrapment—an entrapment they can only escape by remaining hidden. Ultimately, Defoe's criminal heroines fear discovery most.

The sense of conflict Moll and Roxana feel over their spoils is also reflected in the inadequacies of the arguments they offer throughout the narrative to justify their criminal activity and acquisitive behavior. Most often they appeal to poverty.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned earlier, Defoe was always concerned with the connection between poverty and crime. In his criminal narratives, however, the extents to which his narrators plead poverty eventually seem suspect. Thus, Moll's favorite proverb, "Give me not poverty lest I steal," is exemplary of the sort of defense she offers for herself throughout the narrative in justifying her crimes (149). In fact Moll's arguments are previewed eighteen years before the publication of *Moll Flanders*, in Volume 1, No. 85 of *The Review* (26 December 1704), when Defoe writes on the criminal justice system, that "punishing vices in the poor, which are daily practiced by the rich, seems to me to be, setting our Constitution with the wrong end upward,

and making men criminals because they want money."<sup>43</sup> As was often the case with Defoe, his fictional works served to enlarge upon and reinforce the ideas he espoused in nonfictional tracts and pamphlets such as this one, and such is also the case with the issue of poverty.<sup>44</sup>

This concern with poverty is especially notable in the apologetic pleas Moll frequently employs to rationalize her actions. For example, before her first theft, Moll preempts her audience's moral criticism of her behavior by arguing that her detractors should judge her circumstances before judging her:

Let 'em remember that time of distress is a time of dreadful temptation, and all the strength to resist is taken away; Poverty presses, the soul is made desperate by distress, and what can be done? (149)

While previous authors of criminal narratives had touched upon the question of poverty in the formation of criminals, the question was rarely addressed at any length or with any real seriousness before Defoe.<sup>45</sup> Some criminal narratives, particularly those published after the English Civil Wars of the 1650's and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, featured dashing Cavalier highwaymen and disaffected Jacobites who were ostensibly forced into lives of crime after being robbed of their lands and livelihoods by villainous Roundheads and Hanoverians.<sup>46</sup> But this sort of

representation was more a product of political propaganda and romantic imagination; the role of actual poverty in the formation of the criminal was never central. In these earlier, more romanticized criminal narratives, we may view poverty as the original cause that starts a criminal on his or her life of crime, but the representation is never extended or convincing, and just as soon as the narrative prop of poverty is introduced, it is as quickly forgotten in lieu of sensational and criminal detail.

However, Defoe's criminals are all, in fact, characterized by poverty from the outset, and indeed all of them, at first at least, can convincingly claim poverty as the root cause of their criminal careers. Thus Moll Flanders, Roxana, Colonel Jack, and even Captain Singleton all begin their criminal careers in reduced circumstances. From page one, Moll in effect prefaces her narrative by comparing the English poor laws unfavorably to those on the continent, claiming that while other nations take in their poor orphans, the English do not, and thus

Had this been the custom in our country, I had not been left a poor desolate girl without friends, without clothes, without help or helper in the world, as was my fate; and by which, I was not only exposed to very great distress, even before I was capable of either understanding my case, or how to amend it, nor brought into a course of life, which was not only scandalous in itself, but which in its ordinary

course, tended to the swift destruction both of soul and body. (7)

Roxana's case is slightly different in that she starts life off well enough, but is inevitably ruined by marrying a fool for a husband, a man who squanders her fortune before the narrative ever really begins at all. In fact, Roxana's tale can be said truly to begin when, early in the narrative, she, too, is reduced to poverty and lies alone waiting for her servant Amy's return:

You shall judge a little of my present distress by the posture she found me in: I had five little children, the eldest was under ten years old, and I had not one shilling in the house to buy them victuals, but had sent Amy out with a silver spoon, to sell it, and bring home something from the butcher's; and I was in a parlour, sitting on the ground, with a great heap of old rags, linen, and other things about me, looking them over, to see if I had any thing among them that would sell or pawn for a little money, and had been crying ready to burst myself, to think what I should do next. (50)

Both of these openings evoke sympathy. Throughout the course of the narratives, however, the apologetic pleas of Moll and Roxana become hardly more than justifications for their almost insatiable need to consume.

In fact, Defoe's representations of criminality mirror the addictive and nearly obsessive desires a commercial marketplace gives rise to in society, and indeed depends upon to survive. Time and again Moll tells

us she could have left off her "horrid trade," but was somehow held fast by her greed, or "Avarice" as she personifies it (161). Reflecting on her life after one particularly profitable robbery in which she stoops to rob the residents of a burning house, Moll tells us,

By this job I was become considerably richer than I was before, yet the resolution I had formerly taken of leaving off this horrid trade, when I had gotten a little more, did not return; but I must still get farther, and more; and the Avarice joined so with the Success, that I had no more thoughts of coming to a timely alteration of life; though without it I could expect no safety, no tranquility in the possession of what I had so wickedly gained; but a little more, and a little more, was the case still. (162)

In another example even earlier in her career as a thief, Moll herself admits that it was the lure of more money that kept her in her criminal profession long after she could afford to quit, claiming that "I grew audacious to the last degree," and that her partner and she "not only grew bold, but we grew rich, and we had at one time one and twenty gold watches in our hands" (158). It was her obsession with accumulation that kept her in her life of crime, she confesses,

The busy Devil that so industriously drew me in, had too fast hold of me to let me go back. . . as poverty brought me into the mire, so Avarice kept me in, till there was no going back; as to the arguments which my reason dictated for perswading me to lay down, avarice stept in and said, go on, go on; you have had very good luck, go on till you have gotten four or

five hundred pound and then you shall leave off, and then you may live easy without working at all. (158)

Moll's original description of the "busy Devil that so industriously drew me in," as well as her personification of avarice here, as the force that "kept [her] in," is a telling one in underlining the conflicting value systems at work in the entire narrative. Moll's choice of language exhibits as much. In attempting to explain to her audience what it was about the life of crime that "had too fast hold of me to let me go back," Moll uses the traditional Protestant language of religious imagery (the busy devil, "Avarice" personified) to explain the underlying drives of a new, commercial and consumerist culture that is transforming these very same Protestant values.

Ironically, but revealingly, she attempts to justify the "sins" of an increasingly commercial society with the language of an earlier more religiously-focused one.

The sheer repetition of these confessions by both Moll and Roxana gives the lie to their pleas of poverty. As Defoe seems careful to point out, Moll and Roxana move far past the point where they need to commit crime to survive. But like the unbounded appetite for expansion of the commercialist doctrine they represent, Defoe's heroines always have to have "a little more," and "a

little more. . . still." Ultimately, Moll's and Roxana's acquisitive criminal drive represents the larger drive in Defoe's society, the drive to consume, a drive that Defoe viewed as necessary to support the expanding machinery of commerce, but that he also recognized brought to the fore a different sense of morality and value than even he himself had grown up with. Moll and Roxana become criminals due to poverty, but they remain in their careers because, after all, they are still hungry.

In closing, I'd suggest that when read together the endings of both *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* also express Defoe's ambivalence towards commercialism and its troubling linkage with crime during the eighteenth-century, and particularly during the 1720s when he wrote his criminal narratives. At the end of her narrative, Moll Flanders appears to have finally reached the respectable middle-class tranquility and contentment that always seemed to stay one step ahead of her. Of her husband and her she writes,

In a word, we were now in very considerable circumstances, and every year increasing, for our new plantation grew upon our hands insensibly, and in eight year which we lived upon it, we brought it to such a pitch, that the produce was, at least, 300£ sterling a year; I mean, worth so much in England.  
(267)

Even in old age, Moll's concern with money and her place in the world has not changed. Moreover, while her fortune, as a good merchant's should be, is being made in the New World—that place of commercial possibility and promise where “many a Newgate Bird becomes a great man” (69)—she herself

am come back to England, being almost seventy years of age, my husband sixty eight, having performed much more than the limited terms of my transportation: and now notwithstanding all the fatigues, and all the miseries we have both gone through, we are both in good heart and good health. . . and he is come over to England also, where we resolve to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence, for the wicked lives we have lived. (268)

Roxana's narrative, on the other hand, ends with a strange, ambiguous and providential close. After the tragic murder of her daughter by her servant Amy, Roxana reconciles with her servant and goes off to Holland with her husband, the Dutch Merchant:

Here, after some few years of flourishing, and outwardly happy circumstances, I fell into a dreadful course of calamities, and Amy also; the very reverse of our good days; the blast of heaven seemed to follow the injury done the poor girl, by us both; and I was brought so low again, that my repentance seemed to be only the consequence of my misery, as my misery was of my crime. (379)

Moll's ending is certainly more characteristic of Defoe's narratives, closing as it does with its criminal heroine triumphant. In fact, *Roxana* is the only novel Defoe wrote

where his protagonist does not ultimately triumph. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was also his last. Even as he offered a new vision of the criminal as a heroine in an age of commerce and ambition, it would appear that the providential style of earlier criminal biographies still held its influence on Defoe, and that he was not so ready then to condone the inevitable triumph of the commercial spirit without imparting one last judgement.

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Max Novak writes in *Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe's Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) of Defoe's role in the popularizing of criminal narratives throughout the 1720s, noting that "his fictions appeared concurrently with the sudden surge in crimes of all sorts during the period spanning 1715 to 1725, and there is much to be said for Defoe as the mythologist of this crime wave," p. 123. In *Imagining the Penitentiary*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), John Bender goes so far as to claim that due to Defoe's experience at Newgate, "Contemporaries of Defoe considered him a specialist in prison narratives," p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Woolf's comment here is taken from an essay originally written in 1919 and included in *The Common Reader, First Series* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925), pp. 89-97. My usage of the quote comes from the included essay in the Norton Critical Edition of *Moll Flanders* (New York: Norton & Co., 1973), edited by Edward H. Kelly, p. 338. Woolf contends that Defoe is too often praised for *Robinson Crusoe* as opposed to *Moll Flanders* or *Roxana*, for example, because the latter two criminal narratives are perhaps "not works for the drawing room table," p. 338. Her claim is dated, to be sure, but her overall contention is not altogether different from the claims of later feminist critics such as Paula Backscheider that have taken up these two novels as particularly illustrative of Defoe's interest in women.

Woolf writes that "the advocates of women's rights would hardly care, perhaps, to claim Moll Flanders and Roxana among their patron saints; and yet it is clear that Defoe not only intended them to speak some very modern doctrines on the subject, but placed them in circumstances where their peculiar hardships are displayed in such a way as to elicit our sympathy," p. 341. For an example of Bacscheider's reading of Defoe's women, see Paula Bacscheider's "Defoe's Women: Snares and Prey" in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 5 (1976): 103-20.

<sup>3</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Defoe and Economics: The Fortunes of Roxana in the History of Interpretation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 7. For a standard account of the growth of "possessive individualism" during this period, see C.B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Moore, *The Thieves' Opera*, (New York: Harcourt, 2000), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Price, "Defoe as Comic Artist," in the Norton Critical Edition of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Ed. Edward H. Kelly, (New York: Norton & Co., 1973), p. 377. Max Weber's classic thesis on the manner through which Protestantism accommodated itself to capitalism is found in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publications, 1998). Weber's thesis has come under attack almost from its conception, but it does provide a useful, if broad, framework through which to begin explaining the influence of Protestantism in Defoe's fiction. Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) also offers a distinctive interpretation of how inevitably "the unfolding of capitalism destroyed the Protestant ethic," p. 295.

<sup>6</sup> Price, "Defoe as Comic Artist," p. 377.

<sup>7</sup> Max Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 622.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, Ed. Edward H. Kelly, (New York: Norton & Co., 1973), p. 10. Subsequent

references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Roxana*, Ed. David Blewitt (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. The first quotation on Roxana's husband as "a silly fool" is from p. 40, the second on the "rags and dirt" Roxana is left in is from p. 50. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized.

<sup>10</sup> John Mullan and Christopher Reid, Eds. *Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture: A Selection* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> There are too many studies of Defoe's historical place in the development of the novel for me to name them here, but the following works pay particular attention to Defoe's role in the development and popularization of the criminal narrative, and this study is greatly indebted to them all. John Richetti's *Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1969) as well as Paula Backscheider's chapter on "Crime and Adventure" in her biography *Defoe: Ambition and Innovation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986) are both good starting points. Backscheider especially points out Defoe's influence on the development of the criminal narrative, noting that "More than any other writer, Defoe is responsible for leading other writers to see new potential in these forms and for giving them lasting vitality," p. 153. Lincoln Faller's *Turned to Account: The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and more specifically his excellent study *Crime and Defoe: A New Kind of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) also offer detailed analyses of Defoe's manipulation of the criminal narrative genre as well as his strong influence on the genre's development.

<sup>12</sup> There are a wide variety of sources that analyze the role of poverty and its link to criminality. David Taylor's *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) offers two chapters that are especially helpful in clarifying the facts from the myths, "Crime and Crime Statistics" and

"The Criminal: Myth and Reality." Another good account of London's crime problem and its social causes is John McMullan's *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld, 1550-1700* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> Bunyan spent nearly a full twelve years in Bedford gaol, and Defoe was imprisoned on at least three separate occasions. For an introductory account of Defoe's experience with the pillory and imprisonment in Newgate, see Richard West's chapter on "The Pillory and Newgate Prison" in *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Daniel Defoe* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997). The most detailed analysis of the influence of prison on Defoe's novels is John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> For a more specific discussion of the possible sources for Defoe's characterization of Moll Flanders, see John Moore's account in *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 242-244, as well as Gerald Howson's article "Who Was Moll Flanders?" in *Times Literary Supplement* (18 January 1968): 63-64.

<sup>15</sup> Dijkstra, *Defoe and Economics*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Dijkstra, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (New York: Guinn Company, 1966), p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> Dijkstra, *Defoe and Economics*, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> For a comparison between the culture of the Hanoverian court and the Stuart one, see John Brewer's chapter "Changing Places: The Court and the City" in *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> As quoted in Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Dijkstra, *Defoe and Economics*, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> Defoe's relationship with Sir Robert Clayton and his inclusion in this narrative is still open to debate. As David Blewitt explains in his edition of *Roxana*, Clayton (1603-1707) amassed "a huge fortune" as Whig Lord Mayor of London in 1679-80 and subsequently "acquired a reputation for avariciousness and unscrupulousness," as well as acting as financial advisor for Charles II's notorious mistress, Nell Gwynn, p. 392. This negative opinion of Clayton is echoed by Max Novak in a number of works on Defoe, among them "Crime and Punishment in *Roxana*" in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65 (1966): 445-65. As such, both critics read Defoe's inclusion of this historical figure in his criminal narrative as an attempt to equate underhanded financial activity as morally wrong at best, and criminal at worst.

<sup>24</sup> Defoe's exact opinions on commerce and trade at any given time are difficult to pin down at best, impossible at worst. While it is clear that Defoe was a proponent of the new commercialism, he was also very often a severe critic of the abuses of business. For a brief and enlightening discussion of Defoe's views on commerce and its effect on his writings, see Thomas Keith Meier's *Defoe and the Defense of Commerce* (Victoria, British Columbia: University of Victoria, 1987). Meier writes that while "Considerable effort has been expended in attempts to discover Defoe's theoretical economics. . . this is a more difficult task than one might imagine, for Defoe contradicts, in one or another of the pamphlets attributed to him, virtually every economic pronouncement he makes," p. 27. For a more detailed analysis of how Defoe's economic ideology effects his fictional works, the standard account is perhaps still Maximillian Novak's *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962). Novak acknowledges the inevitable difficulty in discerning an underlying set of economic principles in Defoe's work, writing that "The problem in determining Defoe's economic ideas is to reach behind the mask and even the surface arguments in an effort to ascertain what particular interest or idea Defoe is seeking to advance. Such a project can, at best, be only partially successful, but it is the only method by which the impossible contradictions that emerge from the canon of his writings can be reconciled," p.5

<sup>25</sup> Michael Shinagel, *Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 195.

<sup>26</sup> Faller, *Crime and Defoe*. See in particular, Faller's chapter "The general scandal upon business: unanswerable doubts, and the text as a field supporting some very nice distinctions," pp. 137-166.

<sup>27</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 433-34.

<sup>28</sup> Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, p. 641.

<sup>29</sup> Silke Stratmann's *Myths of Speculation: The South Sea Bubble and 18<sup>th</sup>-Century English Literature* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000). The quotation regarding the South Sea Company as a favorite gambling concern is from p. 26. Defoe's comment is quoted on p. 33. For another excellent account of the South Sea Bubble and its effects on English culture, finance and politics in the 1720s and throughout the eighteenth century, see John Carswell's *The South Sea Bubble* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960).

<sup>30</sup> Stratmann, *Myths of Speculation*, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Stratmann, *Myths of Speculation*, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, p. 108. As Max Novak notes in *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*, early biographers of Defoe's were so taken by the overall pro-English business sentiment of *The Complete Tradesman* that they often failed to see its closing sense of ambivalence over the similarities between trade and crime. Such was clearly the case with William Chadwick, who not only declared *The Complete English Tradesman* Defoe's best work, but "the best book that was ever written in the English language," p. 645. High praise indeed.

<sup>33</sup> Faller, *Crime and Defoe*, p. 139. While Faller's work specifically traces the eighteenth-century popular linkage between trade and criminal activity and how Defoe struggled with this conflict in his criminal narratives, he does credit Defoe with a rather sophisticated narrative

method that allows him to at least partially circumvent this paradox. Previous critics have been less accommodating in censuring Defoe's narratives for their simplistic and neat endings. In "The Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe," *Modern Philology*, no. 39 (1941), Hans Andersen writes that while "The work of Defoe is an intimate revelation of the conflict between morality and commercialism in his age. . . he did not see the paradox with the complete intellectual detachment of Mandeville. He looked before and after. But he was consistent with reference to either direction and consistent also, finally, in voicing and supporting to the last the aspirations of England's increasing commerce, though he continued to pay morality the conventional, if economically inexpensive, tributes," p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Review*, IX, no. 106 (11 June 1713), p. 214.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 63. For the classic account of Crusoe's role as economic man, see Watts' chapter III, "'Robinson Crusoe', Individualism and the Novel." As Watts writes "Crusoe's original sin is really the dynamic tendency of capitalism itself, whose aim is never merely to maintain the status quo, but to transform it incessantly," p. 65. More recently in *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), Patrick Brantlinger reminds us that Defoe's Crusoe has always been a figure that "looks to the future" and "has always also been understood as representing both nascent capitalism and nascent imperialism, the characteristic bourgeois citizen of emergent Great Britain," p. 74. Moreover, Brantlinger claims "Defoe's novel has seemed to many commentators to offer a paradigmatic account of possessive individualism and even, perhaps in some more basic or prior sense, of primitive accumulation and imperialism," p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> Brantlinger, *Fictions of State*, p. 75-6.

<sup>37</sup> Brantlinger, *Fictions of State*, p. 84. More specifically, Brantlinger notes how the criminal activities of prostitution, most evident in *Roxana* and, to a lesser extent *Moll Flanders*, and piracy, most evident in

Defoe's *A General History of the Pyrates* (New York: Dover, 1999) and *The Life of Captain Singleton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) are indeed necessary to the development of the modern capitalist state. Of prostitution in Defoe's works, Brantlinger writes "In *Roxana*, Defoe offers a detailed dramatization of one of the key metaphors of cultural modernism in relation to capitalism, namely, prostitution as in Johnson's 'London,' but also as later in Blake, Balzac, Dickens, Baudelaire, Zola and many others. According to Walter Benjamin, in the 'Hell,' which is also the 'Golden Age' of modernity associated with fashion, advertising, and the growing hegemony of commodity fetishism—a culture of 'immediate sensible evidence' built on the phantasmagoria of consumerist desire—prostitution becomes the norm. In the capitalist metropolis, woman as prostitute 'appears not merely as commodity but as a mass-produced article,'" p. 79. On piracy, Brantlinger writes "Defoe no more approves of piracy than he does of prostitution, and yet he recognizes that both forms of economic activity are central rather than marginal to modern economic activity and therefore to social and political reality. Moreover, they are forms of economic activity which, in a Hobbesian way, stem directly from the natural condition of scarcity and which therefore in some sense come before, underlie, or seem more basic than do 'honourable' forms of trade, just as primitive accumulation underlies capitalism," p. 79. Ultimately Brantlinger argues that "Prostitution and piracy are forms of economic activity that also in some sense underlie and largely determine the very identities of Defoe's characters," p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> The choice of *Pamela* for comparison here may seem designed to invite debate. However, my purpose in this comparison is not to open another chapter in pro- or anti-Richardson argument, but to suggest that while writing 18 years after the publication of *Moll Flanders* (1722), Richardson perhaps offered a middle-class portrait of more nuanced and psychological detail in the character of Pamela Andrews, but the moral dilemma Defoe's heroine faces seems more compelling, if not as finely drawn.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> In *Daniel Defoe and Middle Class Gentility*, Shinagel, in particular, reads *Moll Flanders* as a novel about middle-class aspirations as embodied by the principal character. Of Moll, he argues that "her 'settled way of living' and her representativeness of 'the bourgeois world' must be seen in terms of Defoe's characterization of her as an extension of his own middle-class values. Interpreted in this way, we must see her as seeking and in the end fully realizing the bourgeois dream of gentility, a dream that Defoe shared intensely with his heroine," p.160.

<sup>41</sup> David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 230.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Linebaugh's *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) offers a compelling argument on the linkage between poverty and crime throughout the eighteenth century, and specifically on how an increasingly draconian legislation to protect property led to what amounted to a criminalization of England's laboring poor. Douglas Hay's "Property, Authority and the Criminal Law," in *Albion's Fatal Tree*, pp. 17-63, is also an excellent introduction to the subject. Hay argues that "The Glorious Revolution of 1688 established the freedom not of men, but of men of property. John Locke distorted the oldest arguments of natural law to justify the liberation of wealth from all political or moral controls; he concluded that the unfettered accumulation of money, goods and land was sanctioned by Nature and, implicitly, by God. Henceforth among triumphant Whigs, and indeed all men on the right side of the great gulf between rich and poor, there was little pretence that civil society was concerned primarily with peace or justice or charity," p. 18. Hay's political ideology may be a bit overwhelming in passages such as the above, but his essay does shed light on the remarkable increase in criminal legislation during this period. He writes "In place of police, however, propertied Englishmen had a swelling sheaf of laws which threatened thieves with death. The most recent account suggests that the number of capital statutes grew from about 50 to over 200 between the years 1688 and 1820," p. 18. Finally, Sir Leon Radzinowicz's classic, if dated, study, *A History of English Criminal Law and its*

*Administration from 1750* (London: Stevens, 1948), also offers a wealth of concurring statistics, as does E.P. Thompson's detailed study of the effects of the Black Acts in the eighteenth century, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).

<sup>43</sup> Defoe's quotation here is taken from Stephen Copley's collection of contemporary eighteenth-century writings on crime in *Literature and the Social Order in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 172.

<sup>44</sup> In *Defoe and Economics*, Dijkstra makes this argument concerning the similarities in *Roxana* and Defoe's non-fictional works on trade and the proper behavior and morality of the tradesman. Dijkstra notes that "the close relationship between the language of *Roxana* and the works on economic subjects written by Defoe concurrent with, or immediately following this narrative is, however, far too specific to be so easily dismissed. Key phrases, and even sometimes whole paragraphs from *Roxana* turn up nearly verbatim in *The Complete English Tradesman* (1725-27), *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-5), *Augusta Triumphans* (1727), and *A Plan of English Commerce* (1728)," p 4.

<sup>45</sup> The significance of poverty in the representation of criminal behavior does go back at least as far as the picaresque tradition and works such as the Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes* and its seventeenth-century English equivalents such as Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller, or the Life of Jacke Wilton*. Poverty also plays a role in the English criminal narratives of the later seventeenth century, but, by and large, the focus of these narratives is not to arrive at an understanding of the roots of criminality, but rather to entertain and excite, but inevitably leave no doubt as to the final outcome of crime: death at the hands of authority. The more focused linkage between poverty and criminal activity in an author such as Defoe can be attributed at least partially to a growing appetite for social realism in his audience. This appetite was fed by producing characters, that while at least superficially "alien" and exciting (Captain Singleton, the pirate, Robinson Crusoe, the shipwrecked sailor, Moll Flanders, the street thief, and even *Roxana*, the exotic courtesan), inevitably faced the same problems and situations as Defoe's middle-class audience: staying

alive, prospering, and trying to succeed while simultaneously living a moral life.

<sup>46</sup> As discussed at greater length in Chapter One, Captain James Hind, Captain Zachary Howard, and the Frenchman Claude DuVall, all included in the rogues gallery of *The Newgate Calendar*, are exemplary of this variety of popular criminal: what we could call the dispossessed gentlemen-bandit. For a good discussion of this aspect of eighteenth-century popular culture, see Murray Pittock's section on "Marginal Societies in Britain," pp. 44-56, as well as his chapter on "Crown Culture and Counter-Culture," pp.98-128, in his excellent study of cultural identity in eighteenth-century Britain, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997). On the political linkage throughout the eighteenth century between crime and the Jacobites, Frank McLynn explains in *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989) that "Since the post-1688 regime was illegitimate, it followed that in a sense all its property relations were bogus, and that the highwayman was merely claiming back what had been stolen. Anticipating Proudhon, the Jacobite insinuated the idea 'that all Hanoverian property was theft,'" p. 57. A standard author on this form of criminal activity is E. J. Hobsbawm, whose works *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Praeger, 1959) and *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon, 1981) fully explore the concept of "social banditry," that is, of criminal activity with an overt political motivation.

**Chapter 5**  
**Conclusion: *The Beggar's Opera***  
**and the Making of the Modern**

A little less than three years after the public execution of Jonathan Wild, and eight years after he, like many of his countrymen, had lost the majority of his fortune in the bursting of the South Sea Bubble, John Gay opened his curious play, *The Beggar's Opera*, at Lincoln's Inn Fields on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1728.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the play was a curiosity. With its unlikely blend of criminal subject matter and political satire, its queer combination of popular street balladry and operatic airs, and above all, its prevalent, almost insistent, mixing of high and low culture, Gay's strange creation was fortunate to get produced at all.

The renowned impresario of the early eighteenth-century theater, Colly Cibber, certainly didn't take to it. As manager of the rival theater at Drury Lane, he quickly turned the play down. John Rich, manager at Lincoln's Inn Fields, was only finally persuaded to put the play on by the urging of Gay's powerful patron, the Duchess of Queensberry, and supposedly "after the first rehearsal, he gave it up, as a piece which to a certainty would be condemned."<sup>2</sup> Even the play's leading actor, James

Quin, refused the lead part of Macheath for fear of being ridiculed by the audience.<sup>3</sup> And yet *The Beggar's Opera* was to become a phenomenal success, indeed even a cultural craze, establishing itself as the most popular performance piece of the eighteenth century, with productions mounted every season in London for the remainder of the century.<sup>4</sup> This study closes with a brief look at *The Beggar's Opera* because Gay's play serves as the fitting culmination of the various themes that comprise the representation of criminality in this era. It is a brief analysis because many of these patterns should seem familiar to this point; Gay's representation primarily serves to throw them into relief one last time. More importantly, while its appearance in 1728 draws the curtain on the crime-ridden decade of the 1720s, *The Beggar's Opera's* persisting popularity and notoriety only bear witness to the manner through which criminal narratives such as Gay's "forecast the modern world" and continue to fascinate us, while simultaneously implicating us in that world's corruption.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, there has always been a tendency among commentators on *The Beggar's Opera* to apologize for the play's attraction and its continuing popularity. This focus is understandable. With its criminal cast, seedy locales, and disturbing morality, *The Beggar's Opera* has

been a difficult work to account for. William Congreve's opinion of its reception in London is typical of early opinion: "Either it would take greatly, or be damned confoundedly," as is the Duke of Queensberry's response: "This is a very odd thing, Gay; I am satisfied that it is either a very good thing, or a very bad thing."<sup>6</sup> To some, in fact, it was "a very bad thing," and from its opening night the corruptive amorality that underlies the entire play was denounced in publications such as *Mist's Weekly Journal* and *The London Journal*, as well in numerous English pulpits. The tone of these attacks ranged from disgust to patriotism, to which the anonymous author of the 1729 *A Satyrical Poem: or, the Beggar's Opera Dissected*, seemed to appeal:

Rouze then ye Britons! Rouse at Shakespear's Call,  
His Hamlet suffers, by this spurious Droll.  
A Beggar Poet, now has found an Art,  
Of pleasing Thousands, with a Tyburn Cart.<sup>7</sup>

Even today, one can imagine how earlier generations of critics may have felt at pains to account for the play's questionable morality and gallows humor. But the play itself only presents us with a love story, and an age-old one at that: one where a young maid, Polly, falls in love with a dashing man about town, Captain Macheath, but is forbidden to marry him by her heartless parents, the

Peachums. Through adventure and hardships, they eventually reunite, and all ends happily. Not very questionable in itself, it appears—until it becomes evident that Polly is a deluded slut who learns romance from novels, that Macheath is a highwayman who drinks and whores, and steals to support both habits, and that the Peachums are cheerfully mercenary thief-takers who regularly sell their employees to the authorities for “profit”—a concept which seems to be their sole measure of value and is never far from their minds.

So account for *The Beggar's Opera* the critics have then. In what historically appears to have been an effort at repudiating or at least ignoring the play's quite brutal view of life in early eighteenth-century London, *The Beggar's Opera* has accordingly been seen as a mock pastoral, or a Swiftian-inspired satire of Prime Minister Robert Walpole and Whiggish corruption, or a literary burlesque of the heroic dramas and sentimental comedies of the 1720s.<sup>8</sup> *The Beggar's Opera* is also acknowledged as an attack on the English mania for Italian opera as well, and more specifically, on the outlandish tradition of the dueling divas—a tradition which culminated in England in the June 1727 performance of Bononcini's *Astyanax*, when the Italian rivals Cuzzoni and Faustina so far forgot

professional decorum as to come to actual blows upon the stage, ending the opera in that most feared of eighteenth-century English, not Italian, performances: the mob scene (10).

*The Beggar's Opera* is, at once, mock pastoral, political satire, and literary burlesque. But while these lines of inquiry have focused on the sources of the play's humorous appeal, I'd suggest that it is *The Beggar's Opera's* equally disturbing capacity to represent a set of persisting social anxieties that accounts for the play's continuing appeal. That is to say, as William McIntosh has referred it, the simultaneous "feeling of uneasiness among those laughing" is just as important as the laughing itself in accounting for the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera*, and ultimately in accounting for the popularity of criminal narratives throughout the entire era.<sup>9</sup>

Of all the criminal narratives discussed in this study, *The Beggar's Opera* is the one that gives the bleakest representation of the rising tide of commercialism and consumerism in early eighteenth-century England. It is also the one that exhibits the bleakest consequences for the world of individual relationships in this study. True, the consequences of failure in the commercial marketplace are underscored in the criminal

biographies of apprentices, and Bunyan's Badman serves as a prophetic warning of the triumph of the marketplace just as Defoe's heroines exhibit the underlying ambivalence that accompanied this triumph. But it is in the dark satire of *The Beggar's Opera* that the effects of commercialization appear at the surface of human behavior. Dianne Dugaw has noticed how Gay's representation of commercialism in *The Beggar's Opera* is as valid today as it was in the eighteenth century. In *The Beggar's Opera*, she suggests, "Gay critiqued the moral and political dynamics of an emerging world order driven by acquisition and expansion of capital," and that "his reading of individuals propelled by profit in a society organized around the possession and exchange of property avails to our present day."<sup>10</sup> In this respect, Gay's criminals are proof positive of Defoe's misgivings regarding the morality of commercialism, and they are also the dark realization of Bunyan's Badman. The fact that their values can be so similar to those in our own culture today makes them even the more compelling and disturbing.<sup>11</sup>

In the world of *The Beggar's Opera* all is commodity. Even that most primal unit of humanity, the family, acts as a corporation, its members remaining together only because it best serves their individual, acquisitive

interests. A monstrous parody of the burgeoning middle class and their values, the Peachums quite literally bring their work, and the commercial ideology that informs it, home with them, conceiving of everything as a potential loss or profit. Central to this operation throughout the play is the persistent reduction of human relationships to commercial transactions. For the unfaithful and lecherous Mrs. Peachum, "A wife's like a guinea in gold / Stamped with the name of her spouse / Now here, now there; is bought, or is sold / And is current in every house" (51). For Mr. Peachum, who hardly seems bothered by his wife's suggestive comments, his daughter is valuable because, like a whore among lawyers, "a handsome wench in our way of business is as profitable as at the bar of a Temple coffeehouse" (50). Peachum only disapproves of Polly's marriage to Macheath because Peachum doesn't stand to gain himself. The whole scenario quite realistically evokes actual eighteenth-century marriage practice, where fathers would regularly haggle with prospective suitors, and play one off against the other for their own gain.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the Peachums are married strictly by fiscal necessity (an incorporation, as it were), and accordingly consider their daughter's naïve romance with Macheath a fruitless squandering of capital. A highwayman makes a

poor husband, and even worse customer. Much as Mrs. Peachum sees herself as a matured "guinea in gold," Polly is characterized as nascent profit, "like the golden ore / Which hath guineas intrinsical in't" (51). Indeed, the characterization of the Peachum women, the way they see themselves, replicate Moll's identity as "a bag of money, or a jewel dropt on the highway."<sup>13</sup> As Mrs. Peachum's metaphor exhibits, in the world of commerce, all existence is fluid—"now here, now there; is bought or is sold"—particularly for women, whose only real value is inextricably linked to their sexual worth and desirability.

Moreover, as Patricia Spacks has noted, among all the relationships reduced to economic benefit throughout the play, it is love relationships that are the most visibly and insistently perverted by the values of the marketplace. Spacks writes "Sex seems to be hardly more than business for anyone in the play," and the other "love" relationships are entirely commodified as well: the Peachums treat their daughter as an asset, Macheath sees no difference between the pursuit of love and money, and finally, "the money-love imagery sums up and emphasizes the nature of a society completely dominated by money."<sup>14</sup>

In underscoring how money and exchange relationships infiltrate and pervert even the most basic of human interactions—the familial and the romantic—*The Beggar's Opera* leaves one with the frightening impression that, to paraphrase Sartre, there is "no exit" from this modern world, no escape from the mercenary commercialism it has adopted. In comparison to the Peachums, Bunyan's Badman is a relatively harmless figure; he has the capacity and tendency to corrupt, to be sure, but there is some respite afforded by Wiseman's insistent alternatives. Even Moll and Roxana offer the defense of poverty—not a convincing defense, but a defense after all. In *The Beggar's Opera*, the nightmare of critics like Smollett's Bramble has come true. Nor does there seem to exist a rural alternative to this existence in *The Beggar's Opera*, as was so often posited in the early eighteenth-century. Indeed it appears all of England has become the blighted landscape of London in this play.

If there is any respite to be found in *The Beggar's Opera*, it would lie in the character of Polly. Gay's characterization of Polly does encourage us to sympathize with her youthful romanticism, if only for the reason that she is the most likeable of a thoroughly bad bunch. But even her emotions are eventually discovered to be at least

partially a product of the romances her lover Macheath has carefully supplied to her. As Polly claims to her unfaithful highwayman as he departs for the company of his many whores, "Nay, my dear, I have no reason to doubt you, for I find in the romances you lent me, none of the great heroes were ever false in love" (65). The irony of this situation is not lost on Mrs. Peachum, who echoes the societal backlash against popular fiction in exclaiming, "Those cursed play-books she reads have been her ruin. One more word, hussy, and I shall knock your brains out, if you have any" (62). In this world of reductive commercialism, even Polly's ideas of love are informed, and to some extent, fashioned, by that middle-class leisure object and cultural commodity: the romance novel, or for that matter, their equally popular, if more shadowy, counterparts, the criminal narratives. That Polly falls in love with a highwayman in the first place is an indictment of the popular, commercial culture of the era. As criminals were often romantically envisioned by swooning lasses of the day, Polly imagines Macheath at his execution:

Methinks I see him already in the cart, sweeter and more lovely than the nosegay in his hand! I hear the crowd extolling his resolution and intrepidity! What volleys of sighs are sent from the windows of Holborn, that so comely a youth should be brought to

disgrace! I see him at the tree! The whole circle are in tears! Even butchers weep! (64)

Would that even Jamie Maclaine had cut such a dashing figure at his execution; it would have certainly caught Walpole's eye—and disdain. However, for all its romantic extravagance, Polly's example here does show the manner in which criminals were made celebrities, and how the representation of crime itself fell victim to the very development it critiqued, commercialism—that engine of the nation that swallows all culture and regurgitates it into the house screens, fans, and even playing cards that were sold to make a "profit" off the success of *The Beggar's Opera*.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, in attending the performance of *The Beggar's Opera* itself, Gay's audience would have been implicated in the same manner as Polly is. Formally, *The Beggar's Opera* is a scattershot collection of new popular genres, taken from works that were, as John Brewer writes, "vernacular, topical, sensational and commercial, [and] that dealt with the particularities of everyday life."<sup>16</sup> Thus the work is composed of the stuff of songbook, of popular balladry, of city gazette, and criminal biography—namely of the new commercialized forms of print culture. Polly is ignorant of the fact that Macheath is shaping and

"fashioning" her through the stuff of popular culture; Gay's were not.

Moreover, the commercial concepts of exchange and fluidity characterize the relationship of *The Beggar's Opera* to its era as well. *The Beggar's Opera* was itself reciprocally influenced by the world of popular culture and commerce it nightmarishly parodies. In this respect, Gay's narrative is most noteworthy in its reference to the historical figure of Jonathan Wild, a figure that came to be seen as perhaps the most troubling embodiment of the new commercialism.

In 1693, in light of a provincial, ineffective, and largely decentralized police force, the Highwayman Act was enacted. It offered 40£ to whoever took a highwayman and secured his conviction with evidence.<sup>17</sup> In 1706, amazingly enough, this act was expanded to include criminals themselves, and now "an informer who succeeded in convicting his accomplices was to be given not only a free pardon, but the reward of 40£ [as well]" (37). As Gerald Howson writes in his biography of Jonathan Wild, thief-taking itself was an old practice that existed since at least the 1600s, but "those who drew up the acts did not foresee that they would immediately create an army of professional informers who would soon become blackmailers,

perjurers, and false-witnesses" (37). Thus, while thief-takers had been present in England as far back as the Elizabethan age, the acts of 1693 and 1706 legalized, and in a sense, legitimized the activity, making it a form of commercial enterprise and giving rise to Jonathan Wild, a man who would come to quite literally represent the Mandevillian precept that commerce indeed depended upon crime.

Wild's "genius" lay in arranging robberies, selling back stolen property to its previous owners, and then inevitably informing on his employees for the hefty 40£ reward—all the while never actually handling the property himself, and thus remaining above the law. Wild was able to corner the "market" on criminal activity because during his own stay in London prisons during his youth as a failed apprentice, he had made considerable connections that he used to push smaller criminals out of business. In short, Wild incorporated crime, crushing his competition, and forcing his competitors to work for him or to be eventually informed upon by one of his many paid contacts.

As such, Wild appeared to serve not as a criminal, but as a conduit of property and a trafficker in commodities: in short a man of exchange, a man of business. Moreover, in legitimizing what had always been

an unsavory occupation, he boastfully advertised himself as an upstanding gentleman and citizen tradesman, an avatar of the middle class that was performing a valuable service for his fellow citizens of London. As Defoe wrote of him,

He openly kept his compting house, or office, like a man of business, and had his books to enter every thing in with the utmost exactness and regularity. . . he took none of your money for restoring your goods neither did he restore you any goods; you gave him money indeed for his trouble in enquiring out the thief, and for using his interest by awing or persuading to get your stolen goods sent you back, telling you what you must give to the porter that brings them, if you please, for he does not disoblige you to give it.<sup>18</sup>

That such a system could exist seems preposterous today, but how far is it really from the methods our own organized racketeers used in our golden ages of crime? Or even today? In fact, from his "Lost Property Office" in the Old Bailey, Wild actively advertised his "Corporation of Thieves" in the newspapers of the day. From Wild that Gay drew the inspiration for Peachum, the name itself, a version of the thieves cant, "to peach," or to inform.<sup>19</sup>

To return one last time to McIntosh's characterization of the "feeling of uneasiness among those laughing," then, part of the unease Gay's audience must have experienced upon viewing *The Beggar's Opera* comes from the fact that Wild's, and Peachum's, services as

criminals had indeed not only been legitimized, but were being eagerly sought after by London citizens anxious to regain their precious property—their periwigs, timepieces, candlesticks and petticoats. These citizens realized that only through the legal employment of criminals could they successfully regain their goods. In manipulating the market on stolen commodities, Wild was one of the most glaring examples in the 1720s of how commercialism destroyed traditional class, social and economic distinctions, to the chagrin of such social observers as Lord Chesterfield, who sarcastically recalled of Wild,

His levee was crowded with personages of the first rank, who never regretted any expense or imposition that gave them the opportunity of paying court to so illustrious a man. Jonathan was a merry facetious fellow, had a very dexterous volubility of speech, yet received them with an awkward familiarity, than with that submission and civility which he owed to his superiors.<sup>20</sup>

We must recognize, of course, the cynicism underlying Chesterfield's comments, but in fact his tone simply highlights the unsettling reality that the economic and social success of men such as Wild, and Gay's Peachum, made all too clear to Gay's audience: that money had become the great equalizer, or as Michael Denning has succinctly stated, that "Money has no origin, no smell; it doesn't distinguish between a thief, a shopkeeper or a

gentleman."<sup>21</sup> In evoking the troubling figure of Jonathan Wild in his play, Gay again forced his audience to acknowledge the thin line between crime and commerce, while simultaneously giving the public's complicity in this operation monstrous representation.

If there is a reprieve to be found from the suffocating characterization of *The Beggar's Opera*, it is to be discovered in the play's ending. After Macheath is finally sent to the gallows, the Player and Beggar, whose conversation frames the play, appear. Of Macheath's imminent demise, the Player complains, "This is a downright deep tragedy. The catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an opera must end happily" (121). To which the Beggar surprisingly replies,

Your objection, sir, is very just; and is easily removed. For you must allow, that in this kind of drama, 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about. So—you rabble there—run and cry a reprieve—let the prisoner be brought back to his wives in triumph. (121)

Thus, Macheath ultimately escapes poetic justice and the hangman's noose.

Gay's ending is an ingenious one: as dark as its humor may be, *The Beggar's Opera* is a comedy, and a very funny one at that. Like the endings of the Italian operas it lampoons, it should end happily. But even this final

escape is marked by deep resignation, as the Player admits with a wink and a nod, "All this we must do, to comply with the taste of town"—a taste that Gay's play, and the other criminal narratives we've discussed in this study, reveal was increasingly coming to be dictated by the forces of a rapidly commercializing England, and by its uneasy members—that ever expanding nation of shopkeepers (121).

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 7. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Spelling and capitalization have been regularized.

<sup>2</sup> William Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera: Its Content, History & Influence* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 430. Brewer's chapter "Borrowing, Copying and Collecting" offers an excellent reading of *The Beggar's Opera* as symptomatic of the possibilities and problems accompanying the rise of the new popular audience for culture in the eighteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 444.

<sup>5</sup> Dianne Dugaw, *Deep Play: John Gay and the Invention of Modernity* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera*, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 442.

<sup>8</sup> The best single source for the historical reception of *The Beggar's Opera* is still perhaps Schultz's *Gay's Beggar's Opera*. A sample of more recent criticism is collected in *Modern Critical Interpretations: John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*, Harold Bloom, Ed., (New York: Chelsea House, 1988). Calhoun Winton's *John Gay and the London Theatre* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1993) and Dianne Dugaw's *Deep Play* are also excellent reappraisals of Gay's work, and my sincere thanks go to both of them for their personal input into this chapter specifically, and into this study overall.

<sup>9</sup> William McIntosh, "Handel, Walpole, and Gay: The Aims of *The Beggar's Opera*" in *Modern Critical Interpretations: John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*, p. 80.

<sup>10</sup> Dugaw, *Deep Play*, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (New York: Guinn Company, 1966), p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of eighteenth-century marriage practice, see Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), particularly his chapter on "Mating Arrangements," pp. 181-216.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, Ed. Edward Kelly (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Beggar's Triumph" in *Modern Critical Interpretations: John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 442.

<sup>16</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 440.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Howson, *Thief-Taker General: The Rise and Fall of Jonathan Wild* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), p. 37. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Howson's is still the standard account of this controversial figure of the 1720s.

<sup>18</sup> As quoted in Michael Denning's "Beggars and Thieves" in *Modern Critical Interpretations: John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*, p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Lucy Moore, *The Thieves' Opera* (New York: Harcourt, 1997), p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> As quoted in Moore, *The Thieves' Opera*, p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> Denning, "Beggars and Thieves," p. 108.

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