

SUBVERTING THE DOMINANT CULTURE:
SARAH FIELDING'S DOUBLE MESSAGE

by

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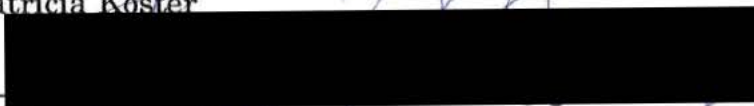
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an inquiry into the eight known novels of Sarah Fielding (1710-1768), a mid-eighteenth-century woman novelist. Using William Godwin's 1797 reader-response theory, it argues that two layers of meaning exist throughout her novels. These layers contradict each other: the first, surface layer supports the dominant cultural norms, while the second, hidden layer subverts these norms and criticizes social conventions. By creating alternative meanings, and then educating her readers in the method of finding these meanings, Fielding escapes possible accusations of impropriety. Chapter One outlines Godwin's reader-response theory and argues that Fielding actively supported female moral education and educated her audience to read critically, in order to find for themselves her hidden meanings. Chapter Two discusses Fielding's treatment of marriage as an essentially hierarchical institution (which she appears on the surface to support), and female friendship as a social mechanism of female integration into patriarchy (of which she also appears to approve). Chapter Three outlines Fielding's criticisms of contemporary moral and religious attitudes and illustrates her double-layered approach to reason and repression as both necessary and damaging to women. Finally, Chapter Four examines Fielding's use of truth and fiction in her novels, and finds that she deliberately used deceptive strategies to widen and improve her audience. This thesis thus concludes that Fielding was a radical, experimental writer who constructed two layers of meaning, one for the unsympathetic world of patriarchy, and one for her sympathetic readers. Fielding's true message(s) can be understood by all those who read beyond the surface level of her work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Introduction	1
1. Education: "Her Female Subject"	3
2. The Instructive Friend	29
3. Religion, Reason, and Repression	47
4. Truth and Fiction: "O, ye <i>Cry!</i> "	65
Literature Cited	80
Appendix: Chronology of Sarah Fielding's Life	86

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Jordie, whose support and encouragement kept me writing when my inclinations lay elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Sarah Fielding's (1710-1768) criticisms of and messages for society through a detailed examination of her work. It will show that Fielding's novels served to educate her public to interpret those criticisms and messages. The most important topics which Fielding discusses are female education, marriage, female friendship, religion, fiction, and truth. Chapter One concentrates on Fielding's beliefs about female moral and traditional education, and the theme of education in her novels; Chapter Two explores her treatment of marriage and female friendship; Chapter Three is a discussion of Fielding's religious philosophy as it appears in her work; and Chapter Four looks into the conflict between truth and fiction in her novels. In each of these areas, Fielding's meanings are sometimes ambiguous and double-layered, in the sense suggested by William Godwin's reader-response theory, presented in "Of Choice in Reading" (1797). Fielding's work can exemplify Godwin's ideas on openly-declared authorial morals existing alongside—or perhaps superimposed on—the underlying message(s) which readers find in a work of literature. The first, superficial layer in Fielding's work conforms to social expectations and socially acceptable modes of thought; this protects her from damaging criticism. The second layer, which she teaches the astute reader to find, generally contradicts the more obvious messages which she has written into the novels. Seen in this way, Fielding's novels can be seen as complex and highly critical, making radical statements against the general rules of society.

The eight novels Fielding is known to have written are the basic texts: *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple* (1747), *The Governess* (1749), *The*

Adventures of David Simple, Volume the Last (1753), *The Cry* (1754; with co-author, Jane Collier), *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759), and *The History of Ophelia* (1760). Secondary literature is limited, since, until recently, little notice has been taken of Fielding and eighteenth-century women writers in general. Those early sources on Fielding that do exist are generally condescending towards her writing and counter-productive to serious investigation, such as B. MacCarthy's 1945 *Women Writers*, Malcolm Kelsall's 1969 Introduction to *The Adventures of David Simple*, and Gwendolyn Utter and Robert Needham's *Pamela's Daughters* of 1936. Because of this, most of the criticism used is from the 1980s onwards. Much of the scant criticism is often not specifically about Fielding, but about eighteenth-century women writers in general. However, this lack of critical interest is not a reflection of her skill as a writer. The importance of Fielding's work should not be underestimated, for her novels were both popular and influential during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Todd *Dictionary* 126).¹

¹ For information about Fielding's life, the reader is referred to Jill Grey's Introduction to *The Governess*, Janet Todd's *Dictionary of British and American Women Writers* and *British Women Writers*, and the chronology of her life given in the appendix.

CHAPTER ONE

Education: "Her Female Subject"

The intent of this chapter is to clarify Fielding's emphasis on education. In particular, I wish to point out the importance which Fielding assigned to the topic of education, apparent through its continued presence and central role in her novels, and to discuss Fielding's own ideas about female education. These include her belief in moral education for women and in the method of group education (e.g. schools) for girls. However, Fielding stops short of voicing full support of traditional education for women;¹ this may indicate a certain desire for male approval and a fear of being scorned—a common hindrance in women's writing. Finally, I wish to discuss the implications of Fielding's concentration upon women's moral education in her writing: her use of this concentration to justify her writing, to protect her reputation, and to push readers towards interpreting her novels for themselves. Through such an investigation, and by applying William Godwin's reader-response theory, I will suggest that Fielding educated her sympathetic readers to understand moral messages hidden within her works.

Before discussing Fielding's literary concentration on education, it is necessary to understand William Godwin's literary theory. Godwin writes that, in all works of literature—from Homer's *Iliad* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* to Swift's and Richardson's novels—an examination of the author's "formal and regular moral" is "futile" to an understanding of the work's true meaning(s) (132). He feels that there are, in every work of literature, "real contents," clearly designated by the author, and a

¹ The term "traditional education" is used in this chapter to describe the academic, classical education generally reserved for men.

“tendency,” which is discovered by the reader and is the work’s actual meaning (132). In fact, the real contents and tendency are often entirely different; in discussing “Esop’s fables of animals,” Godwin writes, “Examine the fable impartially, and you will find that the lesson set down at foot of it, is one of the last inferences that would have occurred to you” (133). Thus, the author’s moral, formally announced at the beginning of a novel or chapter, is not necessarily what the text actually says, and hence what the reader will learn; for “The moral of any work may be defined to be, that ethical sentence to the illustration of which the work may most be applied” (136).² Moreover, “authors themselves . . . show themselves superlatively ignorant of the tendency of their own writings” (132). Godwin explains the author’s common ignorance of “his” tendency:

There is no end to an enumeration of controversies of this sort. . . . If the moral be invented first, the author then did not know where the brilliant lights of his story would fall, nor of consequence where its principal power of attraction would be found. If it be extracted afterwards, he is often taken at a disadvantage, and must extricate himself as he can. (134)

Modern critics, such as Deborah Downs-Miers, find other reasons for certain novels’ moral contradictions. She discusses Fielding’s “recesses of the heart” and “labyrinths of the mind,” in “Springing the Trap: Subtexts and Subversions,” and finds that they contain “secrets which require secret, delicate expression. In fact, these truths are so potent that they frequently must be uttered while seeming to remain unsaid, still hidden in the recesses and labyrinths” (309). In other words, Fielding discusses topics which are so controversial that she must hide her true meanings, so that only sympathetic readers can understand them.

Godwin intimates this, but does not approve of it, as Down-Miers

² It is important to note that there is not one tendency, but as many tendencies as there are “set[s] of readers”, for any piece of literature (Godwin 136).

*stylistically
invented?*

clearly does. He writes that openly-avowed, socially-acceptable authorial morals “are probably calculated to moderate our censures, against many of the authors whose morality we are accustomed to arraign” (138). The radical tendency of novels such as Fielding’s were reconciled to society by the author’s declared real contents; without such moral declarations, Fielding’s “morality” would have been “arraign[ed].” However, Downs-Miers would probably agree with Godwin when he says, “⁶²the moral of a work is a point of very subordinate consideration, and that the only thing worthy of much attention is the tendency” (137). Downs-Miers acknowledges Fielding’s position as a woman novelist, subject to criticism and scrutiny. She says that Fielding, as “perhaps the first of British women writers” to use various fictional strategies to “obscure but not obliterate” her novels’ “subversive impulses,” often “present[ed] acceptable facades for private and dangerous visions” (309):

Many critics highly disapprove of this technique, but [Fielding] has achieved her intent; though risking critical disapprobation, she effectively obscures her real text from the wrong readers while presenting it clearly to her more important audience: other women and sympathetic men. (310)

While Fielding’s *intent* can never be known, the existence of this hidden layer of meaning is plain. To show—via Godwin’s real contents/tendency theory—how Fielding educates her readers to find her hidden layer of meaning, and what that message is in relation to female education, is the purpose of this chapter.

The theme of female education runs throughout Fielding’s works from her first novel, in 1744, to the last, published in 1760; the presence of this topic in so much of her writing suggests that it is a primary concern. For Fielding, female moral education refers to learning both what behaviour is morally correct and how to deal with complex moral questions. In her novel for children, she claims that her purpose is to “*cultivate an*

early Inclination to Benevolence, and a Love of Virtue, in the Minds of young Women" (87), while in other novels, such as *The Adventures of David Simple* and its ensuing volumes, she portrays women who are able to discuss and weigh difficult moral issues, and then act on their decisions. Thus the term female moral education, for the purposes of this thesis, indicates much more than the teaching of manners and etiquette; it denotes the teaching of ethics and morals, as well as the skills necessary for dealing with moral issues. During the course of her writing career, Fielding's belief in the importance of female moral education becomes more evident, so that it moves from playing a secondary role in her first novel, *The Adventures of David Simple*, to being a focal point of the heroine's story in her final novel, *The History of Ophelia*. The importance of this female moral education in Fielding's novels will be traced in the following paragraphs, to illustrate her fundamental and growing concern in this area.

In *The Adventures of David Simple*, the importance of moral and limited academic education for women is emphasized, although it is not the main impetus of the plot. One of the two main female characters bemoans her childhood, in which reading and education were discouraged. Her experience is portrayed as one of deprivation and her parents' attitude appears almost cruel. Cynthia explains, "I cannot say, I ever had any Happiness in my Life" because she was kept from reading, and her parents are quoted: "*Miss must not enquire too far into things, it would turn her Brain; she had better mind her Needle-work, and such Things as were useful for Women; reading and poring on Books, would never get me a Husband*" (I.101). Cynthia's parents, well-intentioned as they may be, obviously represent the common eighteenth-century tendency to value women for their clothing, hair styles, and toilettes—in other words, solely for their external appearances and ornamental worth—and not for their

internal qualities (Straub 67). As well, by emphasizing Cynthia's needlework, her parents upheld the eighteenth-century belief in the propriety and social expectations of certain female occupations. As C.J. Woodward says, "Cynthia's parents, concerned for her commodity value, caution her against reading" (63); her "commodity value" is, of course, determined both by her superficial accomplishments and her conformity to social expectations. By portraying Cynthia's parents' attitude in such a negative light, Fielding illustrates the ridiculousness of such beliefs. She is sympathetic to Cynthia's plight and shows how empty a life can be without enough education for an active mind; Fielding writes that Cynthia is "condemned" to non-education (I.101). However, Cynthia achieves considerable moral education through her own efforts and the companionship of a female friend, Camilla. These two women's moral commentaries throughout the novel display their intelligence and thoughtfulness, although they have had no formal schooling in academic subjects.

Their presence in a novel ostensibly focussed on a male protagonist conforms to Downs-Miers' understanding of Fielding's fictional strategy: she suggests that secondary female characters, in novels supposedly "about" male protagonists, are a subtext available to the interested reader but easily ignored by the patriarchal audience (310). Woodward agrees, pointing out that David Simple's presence can be seen as a disguise: this novel's female issues are viewed through a male character, thereby becoming more acceptable to some segments of the reading public and less painful to others (64). Cynthia and Camilla's presence also suggests that Fielding was concerned with female education from the beginning of her writing career; although she does not address the issue directly in this novel, these women are clearly examples of and arguments for female

moral education.

Fielding becomes more outspoken about female education as her writing progresses. *The Governess*, written in 1749, is explicitly concerned with the education of women: set in a small girls' school, each chapter is designed to be a lesson against "Pride, Stubbornness, Malice, Envy, and, in short, all manner of Wickedness" (xiii). Fielding writes in her Preface,

Before you [the young Readers] begin the following Sheets, I beg you will stop a Moment at this Preface, to consider with me, what is the true Use of Reading; and if you can once fix this Truth in your Mind, namely, that the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better, you will then have both Profit and Pleasure from what you read. (vii)

The Governess, then, is not only *about* female education; it *is* female education: "the stories [of *The Governess*] *become* those very [teaching] materials and serve as the vehicles through which the pupils, and thereby the readers, are taught" (Downs-Miers 314-15). While Fielding is still not discussing traditional male education as offered to women, she is openly tackling the topic of moral education for girls—an education which, according to *The Cry's* heroine, was often neglected during this period (I.62-65). In *The Cry*, Portia speaks out against the general neglect of female moral training: girls are never taught virtuous behaviour, so they grow into ignorant women. She traces the development of this pattern through a female's life, saying:

Little miss is taught by her mamma, that she must never speak before she is spoken to. On this she sits bridling up her head, looking from one to the other, in hopes of being call'd to and adres'd by the name of pretty miss, and of being ask'd some questions, for which her nursery maid perhaps hath furnish'd her with a smart answer: but if this should not happen, and no one should take any notice of her, she is ready to cry at the neglect. (I.62-63)

When the white frock is laid aside, the bigger miss seats

herself in public at a ball, expecting every moment to be chosen by some man for a partner for that evening. If she is baulked, what galling disappointment doth she feel within! (I.63)

The same expectation of being chosen out as a partner for life, continues from miss of fifteen, to miss of — and if no such partner offers, full as many excuses are found out to cover the dreadful appearance of being neglected as miss made use of at the ball. (I.65)

Portia's point is that women are trained from an early age, by their "mamma" and "nursery maid," to behave in a certain way: to wait for others' offers to talk, to dance, and to marry. They are also taught, supposedly by example, to feel inferior if these offers are not made; they are never given the mental preparation to deal with such neglect, and even enjoy solitary life. To refuse women such an education, according to Portia, is "bare-faced contempt" (I.151).

In Fielding's final novels, *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* and *The History of Ophelia*, female education becomes vitally important to the heroines' lives. The downward spiral of Lady Dellwyn's³ life is a result of her lack of moral education, while the naive and endangered Ophelia is protected by her firm moral upbringing. The difference between the two heroines lies in their education: Dellwyn is ignorant, thus an easy victim for her manipulative father and incapable of reforming herself, while Ophelia is innocent, unaware of the dangers which threaten her but personally convinced of the importance of maintaining her virtue. Ophelia has been educated by her aunt, but only within a limited range of topics; she has even written short moral essays on various topics (I.22). This distinction between ignorance and innocence is important, for the

³ For the sake of simplicity, Lady or Countess Dellwyn will hereafter be referred to as Dellwyn; her husband will be specified as Lord Dellwyn and, where the unmarried Dellwyn is discussed, she will be called by her maiden name, Miss Lucum.

eighteenth-century male world prized innocence, yet despised ignorance, in women.⁴ Both conditions entail a lack of education, but innocence combines moral awareness with a complete obliviousness of human sins—in other words, simplicity coupled with enough education to defend one's virtue and be a good conversationalist—a state which would require considerable mental gymnastics.⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks says of this contradiction, "Society demanded that women act much more 'grown-up' than men, penalizing their self-indulgences more harshly than men's. But it also expected women to be like children in their capacity to make their own decisions, control their own lives" ("Ev'ry" 46).

Fielding directly addresses this contradiction in her final novels. Dellwyn, through her ignorance, is brought down in and by society, yet she is portrayed sympathetically. By telling Dellwyn's story from this character's point of view, Fielding offers several messages to the reader: that the "wickedness" of society women is not always deliberate, that their shame is not always deserved, and that women are often the victims of men. In this novel, "it is clear that [Fielding] wishes her readers to be aware that women are routinely victimized by circumstances over which

⁴ Spacks discusses eighteenth-century male novelists' heroines, and finds that innocence, i.e. ignorance, usually leads to the heroine's downfall. She says, "There is . . . something aggressive in [male writers'] formulations of cause and effect, their insistence that women's sheltered lives, limited opportunities, nurture the seeds of their destruction" ("Ev'ry" 31). Fielding, as a woman writer, may have been deliberately arguing that innocence, i.e. virtue, could be used to a heroine's advantage or protection.

⁵ Kristina Straub notes a similar ambiguity in the area of "women's work:" while women were derided for attending to the duties which society had delegated them, they were also scorned for ignoring these duties (62). Ridiculed for their ignorance, women were further humiliated if they strove for scholarship.

they have no control and should be shown compassion” (Downs-Miers 316). The reader learns that Dellwyn, originally morally upright, is corrupted and then tricked by her greedy father and lustful husband, so she is not entirely responsible for her situation; it could be speculated that, had Dellwyn been under the care of a responsible mother-figure, none of this would have happened. Indeed, Fielding suggests that many of Dellwyn’s negative experiences and mistakes would not have happened if she had been under some female guidance when she introduces the character of Miss Cummyns. This woman offers Dellwyn friendship and she stays in Bath “on purpose to endeavour to persuade Lady Dellwyn into a right Reflection on her own Conduct,” but she is unsuccessful (II.187); Dellwyn refuses all guidance. As with so many eighteenth-century heroines, the need for a mother-figure is great; the absence, or denial, of one can be devastating.⁶

However, the male victimization of Dellwyn is obvious; and Ophelia, created one year later, is also a victim. For her, innocence is a triple burden: it is what originally endangers her by attracting the attention of her future abductor, it is what allows her to be a victim—for she has no idea of what he plans for her and can not anticipate, and therefore avoid, his attack—and it is what keeps her from even knowing of her victimization, for she has nothing by which to judge her situation. Men are able to use

⁶ The instances of motherless eighteenth-century heroines are innumerable; the dangerous position of these young women is obvious. Some, however, are fortunate enough to obtain guidance from an older female friend. For example, in Frances Burney’s *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, the heroines seek the guidance of older female mentors. Others are not so fortunate: Frances Burney’s *Camilla* details the difficulties of a young woman deprived of her mother’s guidance, while Sarah Robinson Scott’s *The History of Cornelia* relates the misfortunes of an orphaned girl. The details of Dellwyn and Cummyns’ relationship are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

both Ophelia and Dellwyn because these women utterly lack education; only Ophelia, because of her firm, though selective, early moral training, is determined to keep her virtue. She does not realize during most of the novel what a great degree of danger she is in, since she is not aware of her abductor's intentions and has never heard of adultery;⁷ but she does, nonetheless, maintain her chastity and she never compromises her ideals.⁸ Thus the difference between the two heroines is one of definition: both are denied a full moral education, and it is only Ophelia's limited moral training that protects her from Dellwyn's adulterous fate. Dorchester admits this, and acknowledges that his intentions are such that, had Ophelia displayed any weaknesses or faults, he would have seduced her: "When my Spirits are at the highest, and I think my Passion no longer to be hid, there is a Purity around her, such awful Purity in every Look and Word, that I bow to Virtue, and worship it in her fair Form. . . . Instead of encouraging my Hopes, they Damp them while they charm me" (II.174). Clearly, in Fielding's late writing, female education no longer plays a secondary role; it is central to female existence.

In *The Governess*, Fielding goes further than just encouraging the moral education of girls; she clearly portrays a successful female boarding school. The wisdom or folly of grouping girls together in a school environment was hotly debated during Fielding's life and beyond. Almost a century after her death, the *Imperial Review* of 1867 declared that girls should not be educated in groups; while in the later eighteenth century,

⁷ Godwin cautions against deliberately keeping children ignorant of certain aspects of humankind; he writes that children should know of people's "passions, their singularities, and even of their vices" through reading literature (143).

⁸ However, it can—and will, in a later chapter—be argued that Ophelia compromises herself at the end of the novel by accepting her abductor's proposal of marriage.

Mary Wollstonecraft, although a supporter of female education, spoke out against offensive “knots of young women” in schools and convents (qtd. in Auerbach 14-15). Right into the nineteenth century, arguments against girls’ schools abounded; they were countered by Sarah Ellis, who replied in 1839:

Let us imagine a little community of young women, among whom, to do an act of disinterested kindness should be an object of the highest ambition, and where to do any act of pure selfishness, tending, however remotely, to the injury of another, should be regarded as the deepest disgrace;
Would these girls be weary? Would they be discontented, listless, and inanimate? The experiment remains to be tried.
(83-84)

Ellis is strongly arguing for female education in the form of small schools dedicated to domestic and moral education. In fact, this idea was once “tried,” or at least put into novel form, by Sarah Robinson Scott; in *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), she wrote of a utopian female community, which included a girls’ school remarkably similar to the one described by Sarah Ellis almost one hundred years later. Interestingly, Scott’s book was based upon a personal attempt of her own, while living at Bath, to create a charity school for the girls in the district; it is believed that Fielding contributed to the experiment as a volunteer teacher (Crittenden 13). A charity project much like the one outlined in *Millenium Hall* is also described in Fielding’s *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (I.202-208). It becomes clear that Fielding not only approved of, but actively encouraged, female education in a school setting.⁹

⁹ Fielding appears to approve of the small school setting for boys’ educations, as well. Grey points out that *The Governess*’ aim and techniques in education were taken from John Locke’s “experience in preparing a boy for the life of a gentleman” (44). On the contrary, large schools for boys were not approved. This is apparent in Fielding’s treatment of such schools in *The Cry*, *The Adventures of David*

The common fear of female communities was certainly one of the reasons for Fielding's moral emphasis in *The Governess*, since by upholding vigorous moral standards she could discourage male objections. Nina Auerbach, in her study *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*, points out that the social dislike of female groups, including those formed for educational purposes, is essentially a fear of women's sexuality (15). Katherine Rogers agrees, saying that during the eighteenth century intellectual expressiveness was closely associated with sexual expressiveness "in the public mind" ("Inhibitions" 65). In order to avoid the public's fear of female sexuality, a strict moral tone was necessary in *The Governess*. Auerbach also discusses the common attitude towards female communities as "mutilated" or grotesque; they are antisocieties, or communities of exclusion from men (4, 3). Yet she finds that female communities are given a "subtle, unexpected power" in literature (3); they have the power to include or reject male-defined reality, since women have always existed outside of it (6). "As a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone" (Auerbach 5). Accordingly, the fear of girls and women together in communities, associating for the purpose of education and empowerment, was exceedingly common. Fielding's depiction of such a community is highly subversive by its very existence; the simple fact of a girls' boarding school was seditious—"a rebuke to the conventional ideal" and a statement about women's distinct identity and independence from the male world.¹⁰

Simple, and *Volume the Last*. They are here portrayed as cultivators of bad behaviour.

¹⁰ C.J. Woodward says, ". . . in her vision of women together, where woman can be Self, not other, Sarah Fielding is revolutionary" (64); the

Jill Grey points out in her Introduction to *The Governess* that Fielding herself attended a boarding school for girls, owing to an unstable home life (7). In fact, many of the familial failings described by the girls in *The Governess* can be traced back to incidents in Fielding's own childhood. For instance, Fielding's indulgent grandmother is probably the model for Miss Patty Lockett's grandmother, and Miss Jenny Peace's story of the "Raree-Show" is believed to be based on an incident in Fielding's childhood (Grey 7-8; *The Governess* 209-211, 218). Mitzi Meyers, studying eighteenth-century women's autobiographical writing, notices that "the autobiographical impulse is often deflected into other forms: novels of education, children's books" (193). *The Governess* is an openly declared novel of education, specifically written for children; it also has the autobiographical elements just mentioned. Meyers sees this method of covert autobiography as a more effective educational tool than either direct autobiography, such as diaries, or overt educational writing, such as conduct books (194).

There is no doubt that Fielding strongly believed in the education of women, at least in morals and manners. She is somewhat more ambivalent in her treatment of traditional education for women, which suggests an uncertainty in her own authority and a dependence upon the male literary world. For example, while Portia defends the learned woman's right to her academic education in *The Cry*, she simultaneously degrades this education by equating it with the harmless hobbies of upper-class women, such as needlework (I.151). To support her argument for female education, Portia tells the story of "Miss. C.," a learned woman who, despite her ability to speak Latin, is capable of running a house properly and appearing normally at social functions (I.147-149).¹¹ Yet Cynthia female Selves in *The Governess* are part of this revolutionary statement.

describes the intellectual capacity of one woman as “masculine” (*Familiar Letters* I.150). Thus Fielding appears unsure of her position on women’s access to male education. On the one hand, she assures the reader that it is not detrimental; on the other, she only encourages wealthy women, with extra time and resources, to pursue it independently, and she considers it masculine. However, it is probable that her apparent ambivalence is the result of fear of disapproval by the male literary world and the reading public, not prejudice against women’s right to education, for she herself was highly educated.¹² As an eighteenth-century woman writer, Fielding was highly dependent upon the male literary world; if she was successful with an important male figure, in her case Samuel Richardson, she would also be successful with the reading public and with her finances (Spencer 94). This may be what made Fielding so unwilling to “overturn the sexual hierarchy” in her novels (Spencer 94).

The fear of losing male literary support, coupled with Fielding’s desire to support women’s education, manifested itself in a tendency to portray educated heroines as highly submissive to male-dominated social institutions. This would have made them more palatable to her male critics:

. . . in all her works Sarah Fielding consistently defends women’s right to learning on the one hand, and endorses female subordination on the other; but there is a change of emphasis [from her early to her later works], a new and more anxious insistence on the respectability and submissiveness of the intelligent woman. (Spencer 94)

An example of Fielding’s insistence on women’s non-threatening

¹¹ The identity of “Miss C.” is never given, but she may at least be based on Jane Collier, a known friend of Fielding’s, a highly educated woman, and the possible co-author of *The Cry*.

¹² Fielding’s classical education was excellent, as evidenced by her translation of Xenophon’s *Memoirs of Socrates* from Greek in 1762.

intelligence is her description in *Familiar Letters* of a female friend of Cynthia's: "Her Sentiments and Observations were not inferior to those of the greatest and wisest of Mankind, whilst the Simplicity of her Manner brought to the Remembrance of all her Hearers the prattling Innocence of Infancy itself" (II.202). Straub discusses this balance which eighteenth-century women writers had to maintain, and finds that "overt criticism of the ideology defining women's occupations placed the critic in conflict with society and perhaps with herself" (58-59). Given this, Fielding would not only have been risking hostility from the male literary world and her readers if she had openly supported female academic education, but she would also have been contradicting all that she herself had been taught to believe.

This balance between advocating female education and placating the male literary world may have been all the more important for Fielding to maintain in her novels, since she herself was caught between these two forces in her own life: highly educated, yet kept from working by her gender and social station, Fielding was almost entirely dependent on her male relations. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu believed that Fielding had authored more novels than she actually had, and wrote in a letter dated July 23, 1754, "I . . . heartily pity [Sarah Fielding], constrain'd by her Circumstances to seek her bread by a method I do not doubt she despises" (67). Whether or not she despised writing is a matter of debate, but there is no doubt that Fielding relied on her publications to supplement her income: dependent on Henry Fielding until his death, and then upon her half-brother, John Fielding, and a male friend, Ralph Allen, Sarah Fielding never enjoyed economic independence (Grey 26, 34). As Fielding herself wrote in her Advertisement to *The Adventures of David Simple*, "Distress in her Circumstances" prompted her to write this book. Clearly, economic

dependency on her male relations and on the success of her writing was a daily fact of life for Fielding—a vulnerable position which could easily have led to emotional dependency.

The question then arises, why did Fielding concentrate so much on the moral value of her writing? Even aside from her probable belief that good literature should be morally instructional, the reasons may have been numerous: to protect her reputation, to pacify her own guilt over her unfeminine articulation, to fulfill her female role as a moral caretaker of society, and to win praise from male critics, to name a few. For if Fielding's personal, though socially cultivated, insecurity as a woman writer manifested itself in ambivalence about academic education for women, then her uncertain social position as a woman writer prompted her to emphasize moral education in her works.¹³ "Women have always been under more pressure than men to stay within conventional bounds, in writing as in conduct," so that "By the mid eighteenth century women were allowed to publish and retain their respectability, but the price they paid was strict attention to propriety, constant vigilance over the moral implications of their works" (Rogers "Inhibitions" 65): Fielding had to maintain strict moral standards in her writing in order to avoid public condemnation. This entails more than simply remaining within common bounds; exemplary standards must be encouraged in the readers. As Katherine Rogers points out, women writers' female protagonists were

¹³ The paradox mentioned earlier, that society desires uneducated yet intelligent women, who were morally mature yet emotionally immature, and that society tends to blame women for being uneducated, while deriding their attempts to become educated, is echoed in much of female writing. Women were insulted for being overly masculine because of their writing, yet they were praised as being manly for overcoming their sex's limitations (Nussbaum "Autobiographical" 154). Constantly receiving such conflicting messages, and knowing they were meant directly for her, could easily have added to Fielding's insecurity.

held up as role models for girls to emulate; this placed considerable responsibility on these authors (“Inhibitions” 64). Fielding certainly follows these unwritten rules carefully: every novel has an openly declared moral, be it *The Adventures of David Simple*’s exhortation to communal happiness, or *The Governess*’s simple message of judicious love and affection. Indeed, throughout *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, the narrator insists that people can and should learn lessons from literature.

Judith Lowder Newton suggests that eighteenth-century women writers not only had to protect their public reputations: because they had internalized the values of society, they also had to contend with their own guilt. Newton sees women’s writing as an act of socially unacceptable power, for which women were often ashamed.¹⁴ This shame then led to the creation of literary “excuses,” such as financial need or a desire to instruct (Newton *Women* 8). During the eighteenth century, a female desire for fame or creativity would have been scorned, so women writers emphasized the instructional value of their work, as well as their economic need. Harriet Guest discusses this tendency in her article, “A Double Lustre: Femininity and Sociable Commerce, 1730-60,” and finds that it was more acceptable for a woman to write for money than for fame (479-480); paradoxically, the desire for money is “*more conspicuously immodest and immoral than the desire for admiration,*” and openly admitting to this financial desire became a form of reverse morality (480). Indeed, Fielding herself writes, “perhaps the best Excuse that can be made for a Woman’s venturing to write at all, is that which really produced this Book; Distress in Circumstances” (Advertisement *The Adventures of David Simple*).
 Women novelists of the mid-eighteenth century were able to couple the want

¹⁴ A documented example of this shame is Frances Burney’s vow, at the age of fifteen, never to write again, believing that “her secret pastime was unworthy” of a woman. Upon making this vow, the young Burney destroyed all her notebooks and diaries (Bloom viii).

or need for economic gain with a “pious soundness of opinion” in order to justify their “polemical energy” (Guest 492), so that “female articulation” becomes a sign of “virtuous merit” (Guest 501). This effectively raises women’s writing into the realm of the acceptable. By concentrating on the moral value of her work, backed up by her financial distress, Fielding would have been able to reply confidently to any attacks on the impropriety of female writing. In fact, in *Familiar Letters*, Fielding ventures a reply to these attacks. She comments on the arguments against women’s ability to write and the impropriety of women’s writing: according to Cynthia, such ideas flow out of “the bottomless, the inexhaustible Fund of Nonsense” (I.94), while those who profess them are among “the sillier Part of Mankind” (I.95).

This concentration by women on moral education in their works was both socially liberating and limiting. On the one hand, eighteenth-century society generally believed that women were intellectually inferior, but morally superior, to men (Cosslett 5-6). A prominent example of the internalization of this belief is Hester Thrale’s declaration, despite her reputation as a bluestocking, that she sees “her woman’s role as one who bears and *educates* the children and perpetuates culture” (italics mine; Nussbaum “Commonplaces” 161). Newton finds that women in the mid-eighteenth century were losing their sense of social usefulness, because men were playing a larger role as money-earners; women had to develop a new identity and even a new social class for themselves (“Making” 127). To construct a new identity, women emphasized their domestic potential by concentrating on caring for others—their husbands, their children, and their communities (“Making” 128). According to Newton,

The ideology of woman’s sphere, in effect, helped to forge a class compact between women and men, a compact whereby bourgeois men ran the world for their own profit—a profit in

which their wives and daughters shared—and middle-class women acted as the necessary and tension-relieving voice of conscience. (“Making” 129)

Thus women took advantage of the social belief in their moral superiority to criticize male actions: they “challenged male values,” “provoked male fear and resistance, while at the same time representing an investment in the status quo” (Newton “Making” 136).¹⁵

This belief in women’s moral monopoly inevitably led to the emphasis in eighteenth-century literature on female moral and religious values, at the expense of their intellectual qualities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain, “Freedom for women is freedom of the soul, not society; freedom is attaining access to the heavens, not the professions” (Auerbach 26); in other words, if women wanted freedom, it could only be spiritual. Hence, the continual presence of religion, or at least exemplary moral standards and instructional overtones, in so-called “women’s literature.” This is, at least, a measure of freedom for women, allowing them to write in this area, if not in any other. In fact, the literary area of morals, manners, and relationships was set aside for women writers in the eighteenth century, who were considered experts in such topics by the male literary world. However, they were soon confined to writing about these subjects to the exclusion of all others, and only in a morally impeccable way (Rogers “Inhibitions” 64). Thus what originally freed women to write is also what later limited their creative possibilities; it is also what made them acceptable to male critics. In one of Fielding’s Advertisements, she says that her writing is “as well calculated for Instruction as Amusement” (*The History of Ophelia*). This tactic was highly successful in convincing patriarchal critics of the value of her work,

¹⁵ Apparently, even female conduct books during the time identified men as the creators and perpetrators of social problems, while women were offered as the solution (Newton “Making” 130).

even into the twentieth century. Malcolm Kelsall, in his 1969 Introduction to *The Adventures of David Simple*, is extremely critical of Fielding's literary ability; he nonetheless states that her novel is worth reading, for "Miss Fielding can be recommended for the substantiality of her moral vision" (xvii). By emphasizing her moral commitment, Fielding could simultaneously defend herself, justify her outspokenness, and win acceptance among male critics.

The educational trend in eighteenth-century women's writing was also partly the result of the growing cult of sensibility, strongest from the 1740s to the 1770s (Todd *Sensibility* 4). According to Janet Todd, "This fiction initially showed people how to behave, how to express themselves in friendship and how to respond decently to life's experiences" (*Sensibility* 4). One of the reasons for its development was that mainstream instructional literature, such as pamphlets and handbooks, were neither practical nor accessible enough for the average reader (*Sensibility* 12); this is similar to the development of covert educational writing discussed by Meyers, of which *The Governess* is a clear example. Novels of sensibility, however, go further than simple moral instruction: "[Sensibility] delivered the great archetypal victims: the chaste suffering woman, . . . and the sensitive, benevolent man whose feelings are too exquisite for the acquisitiveness, vulgarity and selfishness of his world" (Todd *Sensibility* 4). In Fielding's writing, this man is, of course, David Simple. Todd notes that *The Adventures of David Simple* is an early sentimental novel, which still combines emotional responses with "moral reflections"; later, "as the cult of sensibility grows more self-indulgent and sensational," the instructional nature of novels is lost and their sole purpose is to make the reader weep (*Sensibility* 92, 91).

But Fielding is writing during the early, and hence educational, era of sensibility, and thus her novels still contain clear moral lessons (Todd

Sensibility 92). To use Godwin's term, Fielding clearly declares each novel's real contents, in order to reassure suspicious readers and achieve legitimacy. This overt moral didacticism immediately places Fielding in a position of moral authority over her readers. By openly announcing her books' instructional value, she legitimized their contents; readers may then accept their contents, often without questioning their secondary "lessons."¹⁶ Henry Fielding's Preface to *The Adventures of David Simple* points out that, in this novel,

there is one Beauty very apparent, which hath been attributed by the greatest of Critics to the greatest of Poets, that every episode bears a manifest Impression of the principal Design, and chiefly turns on the Perfection or Imperfection of Friendship; of which noble Passion, from its highest Purity to its lowest Falshoods and Disguises, this little Book is, in my Opinion, the most exact model. (7)

Fielding's first novel: a model for friendship. She continues this story into *Volume the Last*, with the "Intention . . . not to shew how any Man, but how such a Man [as David Simple] would support himself under the worldly Misfortunes and Afflictions to which human-kind is liable" (311). She is openly laying out her reasons for writing these novels, and these are clearly reasons of instruction: to show how friendship can be attained, and to show how true friends should respond to financial, emotional, and physical disaster.

This open didacticism continues throughout her novels. *The*

¹⁶ Spacks says, "If imitations of real history may affect the mind like direct experience, it follows that the writer possesses incalculable power to subvert morality" (*Imagining* 5). All of Fielding's novels masquerade as real documents—for example, they are supposed to be collections of actual letters or historical accounts—in order to gain authority in the reader's mind. Woodward calls Fielding's attempt to duplicate reality in this way a "disguise" (60). The authority achieved through imitating "real history" gives Fielding greater possibilities for subversion, since her moral lessons will be more easily accepted.

Governess is designed to teach the triumph of virtue over vice, by proving that virtue is the source of “Love and Affection” and that it guarantees “the Happiness of all Societies” (xiii). *The Cry*, constructed as a defence of the simple character and a critique of duplicitous society, declares that its “intention . . . in the following pages, is not to amuse [the readers] with a number of surprising incidents and adventures, but rather to paint the inward mind” (I.11). This novel is not for entertainment: it is a psychological study, for the enlightenment of the reading public. *The Cry* is even more strongly didactic than her other novels, owing to its unique form: Portia defends herself to society, to the figure of truth, and to herself, while the authors explicitly keep the privilege of commentary, to elucidate the text for the readers (I.16). *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* can also be termed a psychological character study: it relates

the Lives of Persons who have already made their Appearance on the Stage of the World, . . . [because] their Actions are better suited to inform, and give us juster Notions of ourselves, as they are Originals, and present the Eye with the prospect of human Nature, taken from Life . . . and may, with greater certainty, be . . . applied to our Service and Emolument. (xliii)

By using historical figures, Fielding gains credibility; she also wishes the readers to use her writing for their own improvement. And likewise with *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, in the Preface of which Fielding writes, “The Perspicuity and Propriety of the Moral is allowed to be another ingredient absolutely necessary to this, and indeed to all kinds of Writings of Invention” (xv), and with *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* which, as already mentioned, was “well calculated for Instruction” (Advertisement). Clearly, Fielding was ever conscious of the moral lessons contained in her writing and the educational value which it was assigned. By declaring this in her prefatory remarks, Fielding was alerting the astute reader, even before she had begun the novel itself, to its instructional

capacity; she simultaneously reassured the surface readers, who noticed no more than a text's real contents. The reader, aware of the presence of moral lessons in what she read, would then naturally look for and find such lessons—the “tendency” of which Godwin writes.

Fielding went further, teaching the reader to interpret the messages contained in her novels. Certainly, there are numerous obvious lessons in each book: the need for friendship, the rewards of virtue (in this life or the next), the importance of moral education, and so forth. Particularly in *The Governess*, there is an announced formal lesson in each chapter: “*the sad Effects of Rage and Anger*” (103), the “*Folly in being so quarrelsome*” (109), “*the different Effects of Love and Goodness from those attending Anger, Strife, and Wickedness*” (117), and so on for each child's story. But beyond this surface message lies another. As Deborah Downs-Miers points out, “*The Governess* is an intentional heuristic, a conscious teaching device. . . . In [this] single text, Fielding manages to present her views implicitly and explicitly” (314); it contains two levels of meaning. The stories in *The Governess* teach the students—and thereby the readers—to read literature critically and interpret subtle moral messages. At several points within the novel, Mrs. Teachum points out the moral lessons contained in the story or play which the girls are reading, urging them “to draw such Morals from your Books, as may influence your future Practice” (277). She goes further than explaining the morals to her students, though; she tells them “the Method she wished they would take with whatever they read” (301), namely, to repeat a story back to a friend in order to imprint its message on their minds. Mrs. Teachum says of herself, “I have endeavoured, my little Dears, to shew you, as clearly as I can, not only what Moral is to be drawn from this Play, but what is to be sought for in all others” (305). She cautions them against superficial readings of literature,

saying, “yet the Moral lies deeper” (305). She teaches the girls how to find their own morals in literature, thereby empowering them and making them less dependent on others; she teaches them to think for themselves. While the morals—the real contents—that Mrs. Teachum draws for the girls are conventional, the girls’ use of her lessons in readership—the tendency—is left entirely open; once empowered as self-reliant readers, they could use their new-found abilities as they wanted. The readers of *The Governess* were thereby taught the same lesson: how to find messages in all literature, particularly Fielding’s other novels.

The surface lessons scattered throughout Fielding’s novels are available even to the most superficial reader; those who deliberately close themselves to the author’s more subtle intentions are called “perversely sour” and have only themselves to blame (*The Cry* I.4). Fielding and Collier specifically wish to avoid this sort of judgmental and bitter reader, saying:

Our address is to the candid reader we will venture to affirm, that every reader by his own disposition, in a great measure, contributes to his own entertainment. . . . When a judicious writer sets before his readers entertainment for their imaginations, and desires them to indulge both him and themselves by playing with their fancies, should any man be so perversely sour as to sit in strict judgement; or if on the other hand, where the judgement ought to be employed, should he give a loose to his own wild imaginations, all time and place must be confused, and every image must be distorted into absurdity. (*The Cry* I.1-4)

Godwin also holds this belief about reader responsibility: “. . . the impression we derive from a book, depends much less upon its real contents, than upon the temper of mind and preparation with which we read it” (144-45). This effectively transfers responsibility onto the reader, leaving the author free to do as she pleases: if the reader is not satisfied, it is her own fault for not taking part in the fiction. As well, any immoral or

unvirtuous actions resulting from a reader's literary experience are also the reader's fault:

Books will perhaps be found, in a less degree than is commonly imagined, the corruptors of the morals of mankind. . . . taken by themselves, they rarely produce vice and profligacy where virtue existed before. Everything depends upon the spirit in which they are read. (Godwin 141)

Thus the tendencies of any novel, although conspicuous, are essentially the work of the reader, who is responsible for finding and interpreting them; the author cannot be blamed for socially unacceptable messages. As Spacks points out, "[The novel's] moral may support the proclaimed standards of society while its 'tendency,' to return to Godwin's term, encourages questioning and challenge" (*Desire* 11). Accordingly, the author is no longer responsible for what the reader chooses to understand in a piece of literature.

Fielding's resolution not to be thwarted by malicious readers is plain. In her Preface to *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, she reflects upon the use of literature in life, namely, to enlighten the reader as to her own personality and failings. Fielding writes:

If an Author happens to live in an Age when a general Fashion of Dissipation banishes Reflexion, and the View in Reading at all is circumscribed within such narrow Limits, that the Pleasure thereby proposed seems to be no other than to discover some Reference to particular Objects, and universal Resemblances to human Nature are overlooked, he ought to content himself without such Applause as is only to be obtained by the Forfeiture of his own moral Character; and would make a very injudicious Bargain, if he so far adapted his practice to their Taste, that he must necessarily be conscious of being a bad Man, in order to be accounted by such Readers a pleasing Writer. (xix)

It is obvious that Fielding believes she lives in just such an age of dissipation. However, she refuses to forfeit her morals to the whims of a

capricious reading public; instead, she will maintain her philosophical didacticism at the loss of public popularity. This functions in several ways: it announces her intentions, chides other more popular writers, and scolds the reading public who, in an effort to exclude themselves from the dissipated and superficial masses that Fielding disdains, will force themselves to read her work and agree with her sentiments.

Fielding has now, very cleverly, placed considerable responsibility upon the reader to interpret her moral lessons and to agree with them. She has simultaneously taught her readers to find the messages or tendencies contained in her writing and abdicated responsibility for them, through the use of openly available real contents. The substance of these moral lessons will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

The Instructive Friend

This chapter will explore one of the most important topics in Fielding's novels: friendship. This includes both female and mixed-sex friendship, namely marriage, for that is the only relationship between the sexes permitted beyond familial friendship.¹ By examining Fielding's treatment of marriage, I will argue that, although she tends to hold women responsible for the success or failure of the marriage relationship, she is also aware of the power differences and double standards for men and women in marriage. In her writing, she appears to support marriage, although it and all mixed-sex relationships can be seen as hierarchical by their nature and generally disadvantageous for the female partner. Then, by distinguishing between the various forms and functions of female friendship within narrative, I will explore Fielding's perception of the role of female friendship; that is, to socialize the female characters into male-defined society by developing their capacity for emotional intimacy, providing mothering, and encouraging marriage. Contradictions quickly become apparent. Fielding used female friendship to encourage marriage, while simultaneously criticizing the institution. She did not directly oppose marriage, but felt it was in need of reform. Still, it is clear that Fielding's novels can be read as the helpful female friend which all women needed: assisting in the socialization of the reader, while offering advice on social improvement. In Godwin's terms, Fielding's real contents encourage

¹ Mixed-sex friendship within families, such as that between brothers and sisters, and their in-laws—for example, between David and Cynthia, Camilla and Valentine—is also an interesting aspect of Fielding's novels but, owing to length constraints, will not be discussed within this thesis.

marriage and the patriarchal perception of women's friendships as socially integrating; her tendency, quite to the contrary, criticizes the sexual power imbalance within and the social attitude towards marriage in her time, while suggesting that female friendship is actually at odds with the demands of her society.

Fielding's ideas about marriage are apparent from her first novel onwards, but they change in the course of her writing. According to Spacks, "Plot arrangements locate a novel's thematic concerns and chart the intellectual and ideological issues implicit in action" (*Desire* 8). Thus friendship is of the greatest concern in Fielding's first novel, *The Adventures of David Simple*, for it is the protagonist's search for friendship that motivates the entire plot and, once found, friendship is the refuge for all the characters. David's purpose is openly stated:

He spent whole Days in thinking on this Subject, wishing he could meet with a human Creature capable of Friendship; by which Word he meant so perfect a Union of Minds, that each should consider himself but as a Part of one entire Being; a little Community, as it were of two, to the Happiness of which all the Actions of both should tend with an absolute disregard of any selfish or separate Interest. (26)

As Miss Catherine Talbot intimates in a letter, dated June 27, 1744, David's desire for an "inseparable friend" is highly unrealistic; it is not applicable in "common life" (Carter and Talbot 61). Nonetheless, David finds that friend in a woman, and they are married. Their marriage-friendship, based on mutual respect and affection, supports David through all the many disasters of his life: the loss of all his money and the deaths of his children, his brother-in-law, and even his wife. Despite his grief over her loss, David is comforted through his great affection for her: "The Dread of her Distress, the Sight or Hearing of her Pains were now at an End, and for the present his own Loss did not even occur to his Mind; he in a manner forgot himself, all his Thoughts were fixed on his beloved Wife; and as he

knew her Innocence, he was filled with the highest Hopes of her Happiness” (413). For David, marriage is the ultimate friendship.

However, marriage is not always this ideal community of two, particularly for the female partner. In Fielding’s novels, marriage is generally a hierarchical relationship dominated by men, and those at the receiving end of this domination—i.e. women—are not always fully satisfied with the arrangement. According to Downs-Miers, Fielding’s “most cherished idea” is “the absolute necessity of equality for women in education and marriage” (313). The hierarchical nature of marriage is only hinted at in *The Adventures of David Simple*, when the narrator speaks of the two couples’ lives together:

Every little Incident in Life was turned into some delicate Pleasure to the whole Company, by each of them endeavoring to make everything contribute to the Happiness of the others. The very Infirmities, which it is impossible for human Nature to escape, such as Pain, Sickness, &c. were by their Contrivance not only made supportable, but fully compensated in the fresh Opportunities they gave each Individual of testifying their Tenderness and Care for the whole. (304)

By itself, this appears to be the perfect family. But immediately after this description, Fielding offers her advice on how to achieve it, which entails each member’s performance of “the Part allotted him by *Nature*, or his *Station in Life*” (304). This ideology protects the status quo and insists upon personal confinement to arbitrary labels of gender, wealth, and class. It should be noted that Fielding is specifically referring to marriage and family life in this passage; she is suggesting that, in this relationship, perfect harmony can only be achieved by the wife’s submission to her husband, according to their *natural* roles in life. Fielding is clearly aware of this power difference within marriage and may be speaking ironically in this passage.

Moreover, Fielding appears to hold the female partner responsible for

the nature of the marriage relationship. In *The Adventures of David Simple*, David encounters two married couples: one husband is happy, despite his wife's manipulative and demanding behaviour, while the other husband is miserable and brutal, despite *his* wife's compliant and pleasing behaviour (50-57). David comments on the oddity of this situation and is unable to understand "how it was possible for good Usage to make a Man despise his Wife, instead of returning Gratitude and Good-humour for her Fondness" (57). The narrator then observes that "[David] never once reflected on what is perhaps really the case, that to prevent a Husband's Surfeit or Satiety in the Matrimonial Feast, a little Acid is now and then very prudently thrown into the Dish by the Wife" (57). Here, Fielding is directly blaming the wife's lack of duplicity for the husband's poor treatment of her; she does not find fault with the husband for his behaviour. She blames the wife's lack of duplicity or "prudence"—a highly ironical word—again, in *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*, when Octavia comments:

. . . what most surprised me, were his repeated Complaints that I did not obey him. I examined myself continually, and still increased my Care, that he should have no cause for these Complaints. But, Fool that I was! by this Management, instead of curing, I augmented the Evil. (171)

This certainly suggests that Fielding supported, or was at least in complicity with, the male prerogative within marriage. At the same time, the reader is free to read the narratorial comments as ironic.

However, while Fielding does not directly criticize the wife's subservience to her husband, she does criticize the amount of power over wives which all men held and many men abused. *The Cry's* heroine, Portia, mockingly translates a typical male lover's speech:

"Madam, I like you (no matter whether from fortune, person, or any other motive) and it will conduce much to my pleasure and convenience if you will become my wife: that is, if you will

bind yourself before God and man to obey my commands as long as I shall live. And should you after marriage be forgetful of your duty, you will then have given me a legal power of exacting as rigid performance of it as I please." (I.70)²

Male power, reinforced by the legal system, is supreme within marriage.

Fielding clearly objects to this power disparity, but she does not overtly blame men or the inherent male-female hierarchy for this negative interpretation of the marriage contract. As Spencer says of this novel, Fielding "criticize[s] the romantic illusion that obscures masculine power, not the power itself" (208).

The marital power imbalance between men and women is not just a gender issue, says Newton: it is also a matter of social class ("Making"). In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British middle class was growing; as it grew, men played a larger and more important role as money-earners, while women "suffered a loss of recognized economic value and perhaps a loss of social value as well" ("Making" 127). As a result, mid-eighteenth-century women were reconstructing their female identity as caregivers for men and as workers in the community ("Making" 128). This led to an emphasis in both society and literature on the domestic responsibilities of women: although women had no legal powers within the community or the family, they did hold considerable personal power over the men in their lives and their children, and they were considered authorities in "emotional matters" (Newton *Women* 3). *The Adventures of David Simple* was published just when this shift to female domestic responsibility was beginning: this could account for Fielding's treatment of

² Fielding also mocks fashionable courtship in an earlier book, *Familiar Letters*, when Isabinda cries, "And then their manner of declaring the Violence of their Passion is ridiculous, almost beyond comparison" (I.73); and also in Lavinia's description to Cynthia of her various lover's addresses (II.210-212).

the marriage situation in this novel. Accordingly, *The Adventures of David Simple* may not only reflect social change, but promote it, as well.

Fielding places less blame on women and more on society later in her writing career. Nussbaum says of one eighteenth-century woman, "Lady Chudleigh, like other feminists of the period, recognizes that women's inferiority is based on custom rather than an essential female nature" ("Commonplaces" 155). The eighteenth-century feminist realized that women's lower status and subservient role, in society as in marriage, was only a social construct; the fault, then, lay with society. In her last two novels, Fielding appears to agree with this analysis, criticizing the seductive powers of social convention. She is particularly outspoken on this topic in *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, which contains two specific examples of social corruption: Dellwyn herself is led astray by society and tempted into adultery, while Sir Harry Cleveland is temporarily debased by high society life. This criticism of society continues in *The History of Ophelia*, in which Lord Dorchester plans to keep Ophelia for his mistress because of his disillusionment with society's attitude towards marriage:

"Have I not often told you," said Lord *Dorchester*, "with how much Justice I dislike Matrimony? The ill Fate of all my Family in that State, has created an insurmountable Aversion to it in me. . . . I could fear [Ophelia's] Truth and Openness of Heart should be corrupted by our vile Customs, she might give herself to me in Marriage out of Prudence and Interest."
(II.175-176)

Fielding, then, develops a tendency to blame society for the personal immorality of individuals, rather than the individuals themselves, including those who misuse the marriage relationship.

However, Fielding also appears more willing to portray marital gender inequities in these novels than she was in previous ones. Although she ostensibly blames society for the corruption of her heroine and Sir

Harry Cleveland in *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, she also, by simple example, leads the reader to suspect that more than marital power is at stake between the sexes.³ She does this by showing society's different responses to Dellwyn and Lord Clermont's adulterous relationship: "Lady Dellwyn's future Life was a continual Mortification; for altho' she carefully avoided ever more falling into any such Snares as that wherein Lord Clermont had intangled her, yet her Name was very seldom mentioned without being strictly connected with that Circumstance" (II.277).

Clermont, on the other hand, disappears abroad when the adultery becomes publicly known and, although "he was sorry to leave the Lady when she was going to suffer so much on his Account," he feels no guilt for his actions (II.158). Clermont was the instigator of and equal partner in his relationship with Dellwyn, yet he suffers nothing; Dellwyn loses all. Clearly, adultery was not an equal crime for both sexes. Fielding gives another example in this novel of the different social expectations of men's and women's behaviour within marriage and adultery: Mr. Bilson, a liar, gambler, and adulterer, is rescued by the unceasing efforts of his wife, who adopts his illegitimate, extramarital child, raises the money to pay his debts, and never reproaches her wayward husband. In both these cases, men are indulged in their sins, even their crimes, while the women are held responsible for their own actions and often those of their male partners. Although Fielding never directly comments on this disparity, her inclusion of these stories suggests that she was aware of the unfairness and imbalance of the social double standard, particularly with respect to adultery. Thus she goes beyond simply pointing out the possible misuse of power by men within marriage, as she does in *The Cry*; she clearly

³ As Spacks says in a discussion of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748-49) and the literature of its period, ". . . the contest for dominance remains the fundamental fact of relations between the sexes" (*Desire* 56).

illustrates the power conferred on men and denied to women in matters of marriage and social relationships.

The marriage-friendship and female friendships sometimes converge, when female friends help to advance the heroine's marriage. It must be pointed out here that the typical conclusion of eighteenth-century novels in marriage is not necessarily an approval of the institution of marriage: "[It] does not reflect the fact that most women got married . . . nor that the writers personally believed that marriage was a good thing—rather it reflects the social assumption that marriage was the only desirable goal for a woman" (Cosslett 2). Marriage endings were also part of the literary convention of comedy—a genre to which, according to Henry Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple* belonged; he also calls his sister a "Comic Writer" (Preface to *The Adventures of David Simple* 6). Female friendship can play an important role in literary marriage endings, since a woman will often act to encourage or hasten a marriage for her friend (Cosslett 7), as the aunt and Miss Baden do for Ophelia in *The History of Ophelia*: they openly "plead" with her to marry Dorchester (II.278). Female friendship—or, more appropriately, female acquaintanceship—indirectly incites Miss Lucum to become Lady Dellwyn, through her jealousy of other women's high-ranking admirers and particularly through her fear that Lady Fanny Fashion will steal Lord Dellwyn's affections; Miss Lucum's rivalry with Fanny, her only female companion, causes her to accept Lord Dellwyn's proposal. The girls' socialization into male-approved behaviour in *The Governess* also indirectly pushes them towards eventual marriage: their friendship causes their transformation into well-behaved women who will please and attract men.⁴

As a literary conclusion, marriage inherently entails issues of

⁴The girls' integration into society in *The Governess* will be further discussed later in this chapter.

power, since “Protest against power inequities between women and men” was expressed “in the ever more determined resistance to conventional marriage plots” (Newton 21). Even as marriage plots were becoming conventional, Fielding was resisting this formula. This can be seen in most of her novels; for example, marriage is only the beginning of the story and certainly does not ward off disaster in *Volume the Last*. Similarly, the heroine’s marriage in *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* is only the beginning of her troubles. In *The Cry*, Portia mocks the tradition of courting and the institution of marriage, as discussed earlier, while *Familiar Letters* contains repeated warnings against marrying for the wrong reasons. Many of the women’s letters in this text discuss marriage and all its potentialities: they praise successful marriages, based on love and respect, and pity those marriages that are founded on pride, ambition, or wealth. Finally, in *The History of Ophelia*, the heroine is persuaded into marriage with an inferior man by her womanfriends; even at the moment of accepting his proposal, Ophelia is aware that she may regret her decision (II.280). Fielding was clearly aware that marriage was not always the most desirable end for both men and women. By resisting the conventional marriage plot, Fielding protested against gender-based power differences, hinting that for a woman, as the powerless partner in marriage, the institution could be ruinous.

For Fielding, female friendships were highly desirable and much more egalitarian than mixed-sex relationships. While men may have authority over women, and men may insist on social distinctions in relationships with other men, women’s friendships are not marked by hierarchies of power. In *The Governess*, a number of girls coexist in perfect, equal friendship, at least by the end of the novel, and Fielding’s “young Readers” are encouraged towards that same friendship: “Certainly, Love and Affection for each other makes the Happiness of all Societies; and

therefore Love and Affection (if we would be happy) is what we should chiefly encourage and cherish in our Minds” (xiii). Friendship is not as simple as this, however. Fielding cautions her readers that “Love and Affection” are not enough on which to base a true friendship:

. . . this Delight in Friendship may lead into all manner of Errors, unless you take Care not to be partial to any of your Companions, only because they are agreeable, without first considering whether they are good enough to deserve your Love: . . . And if you cannot have Resolution enough to break from such pretended Friends, you will nourish in your Bosoms Serpents, that in the End will sting you to Death. (xiv)

Clearly, in matters of female friendships, impartiality is demanded, justice is required, and prudence is necessary: friendship must be based on merit. This is strikingly different from a woman’s role within the marriage-friendship, as can be seen in the story of Mr. and Mrs. Bilson from *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*. Such loyalty to a faithless and even sinful friend was not expected among female relationships, for if one woman were to behave improperly it would only be appropriate for her womanfriends to criticize her and help her change her ways; that failing, they must distance themselves from her. The eighteenth-century term for this basis of friendship is “esteem.” Accordingly, a woman must always esteem her friends; if they are not worthy of her esteem, they are detrimental to her reputation and possibly her virtue, and should be dropped. In the optimal situation, she would also esteem her husband but, once married, she must be loyal despite any loss of esteem which their relationship suffers. In female friendship, loyalty must be deserved; within marriage, it is unconditionally required, for, once married, a woman is “fixed for life the slave of [her] deluder”—her husband (*The Cry* I.73).⁵

⁵ This is probably yet another result of the social contradiction women faced, discussed by Spacks (“Ev’ry”) and outlined in the first chapter, whereby women were expected to behave much more responsibly and

Female friendship performs many more roles beyond simply providing women with an egalitarian, merit-based system of companionship. In 1887, Dinah Mulock Craik wrote,

It is a strange thing to say—yet I dare to say it, for I believe it to be true—that entering a Sisterhood, almost any sort of Sisterhood where there was work to do, authority to compel the doing of it, and companionship to sweeten the same, would have saved many a woman from a lunatic asylum. (“On Sisterhood” qtd. in Auerbach 21)⁶

Certainly, the girls’ friendship in *The Governess*—itself a sort of sisterhood—saved the girls from wickedness and folly (*The Governess* 245). As well, from the wreckage of *Volume the Last*, only two characters are saved: Cynthia and Camilla Jr., the daughter of Camilla and David Simple. David’s dying words are about these women and their destined friendship, and the reader is left with a vision of their continued life together; apparently, their community of two shall provide them with all the “Comfort” and “Protection” they need (432).

According to Tess Cosslett, in her discussion of female friendship through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, female friends fulfill a number of functions within narrative: they develop emotional intimacy and provide mothering for each other, thereby contributing to their personal growth into socially acceptable roles (8). For female friendships to work most effectively, the heroine must be motherless—either orphaned, abandoned, or neglected in some way (Cosslett 7). While orphanhood is a common narrative device in all eighteenth-century novels, including those by male writers, it is more crucial for female heroines, whose vulnerability is greater than any male hero’s could be. Indeed, most of Fielding’s female decorously than men.

⁶ Sarah Fielding’s own life has been called “an example of womanly community” (Woodward 61).

characters are essentially motherless:⁷ in *The Adventures of David Simple*, Camilla's and Cynthia's mothers die while the girls are still young; in *The Governess*, the children are all absent from their mothers; in *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, the heroine has only a father; and in *The History of Ophelia*, the heroine is first orphaned and then removed from her mother-figure. This allows the women characters to be fully open to female friendship and its functions.

Female friends helped girls and women develop their capacity for emotional intimacy (Cosslett 5). As Deborah Goreman says in her study of female conduct books,

Friendships between girls, like so many other aspects of a girl's life, were meant to foster femininity . . . girls' friendships were seen as important because they would encourage the development of a personality capable of intimacy and the mutual sharing, with other girls and women, of a domestic environment. (115)

This was, essentially, a method of integration into the world of male expectations for, according to eighteenth-century social conventions, women were supposed to be intimate, emotionally mature, and relationship-oriented. The narrator of *The Governess* openly acknowledges this, saying of the school, ". . . never did any young Lady leave Mrs. Teachum, but that her Parents and Friends were greatly delighted with her Behaviour," owing mainly to the graduated girls' extreme obedience (343). This social success is a result of the girls' friendships. Mrs. Teachum acknowledges that one student in particular, Miss Jenny Peace, led the other girls by her own example towards socially acceptable behaviour: "[Mrs. Teachum] confessed how much of the Regularity and Harmony of her school she owed to [Jenny's] good Example, for Sweetness of Temper, and Conformity to Rules" (341). Jenny would not have been imitated by the other students, had she not first "completed the

⁷ Fielding, of course, was also motherless from the age of eight.

good Work of making all her Companions Friends" (117), and then been their "instructive Friend" (342). The older girls, at least, appear to be consciously aware of this function of their friendship with Jenny, for while the younger students play in the garden, the two oldest girls ask Jenny for social instructions, "saying, how pleased their Friends and Relations would be, to see such a Change in their Temper and Behaviour, and how much they should be beloved by every one" (316). Fielding is obviously aware of the training towards emotional intimacy which girlfriends provided and which prepared them for wifery and motherhood.⁸

Womanfriends also act as mothers for each other, often fulfilling mother-daughter roles (Cosslett 7). This can be seen in much of Fielding's writing, in which women characters both give and receive care. Camilla and Cynthia, in *The Adventures of David Simple*, continually provide care and guidance for each other. Throughout the novel, they tell moralistic stories for their own and each other's instruction. Before they are married to their respective husbands, Cynthia comforts Camilla, reassuring her that she is "the only Person who could truly touch his [David's] Heart" (303). Later, when Cynthia is widowed and destitute in Jamaica, she writes a reassuring letter to David and Camilla, in which she "impart[ed] some Comfort" and "endeavored, even in that Situation, to throw some kind of Chearfulness into it" in order to spare her friends' distress; she

⁸ Nancy Chodorow has studied the development of children's identities and found that boys create their identities through opposition to womanhood: they strive to become what is not their mother. Girls, on the other hand, must both imitate and separate from their mothers: they identify with their mothers (and sisters and girlfriends), but then must break away from this identity (*The Reproduction of Mothering*). This is similar to the girls' development in *The Governess*, for they forge an identity out of their relationships with each other, but upon entering adulthood they will have to separate completely and bond with their husbands.

particularly remembers her little niece and “Companion,” Camilla Jr. (391, 394). Throughout *Familiar Letters*, Camilla and Cynthia exchange letters of guidance and approbation; Cynthia advises Camilla not to become friends with a particular woman (II.186) and Camilla, agreeing with Cynthia’s judgement, obeys her friend (II.200). Cynthia’s maternal feelings for her womanfriends are made explicit in a letter to Camilla, in which she writes of the death of a virtuous woman and friend named Ophelia: “. . . the fondest Mother’s Love to her newborn Infant is not too strong a Picture of my Affection for *Ophelia*” (II.204). For these women, there is at all times a desire, almost maternal in its strength, to protect and guide each other.

Another example of the mothering function of female friends is found in *The Governess*. The novel’s main female character, Miss Jenny Peace, provides the younger students with affection and guidance, and she says that her own good behaviour is “chiefly owing to the Instructions of a kind Mamma, [and] you may all likewise reap the same Advantage under good Mrs. Teachum, if you will obey her Commands, and attend to her Precepts” (121). Jenny feels that instruction should come from an older female figure, but her schoolmates, rather than receiving instruction from their teacher, look to Jenny for guidance. Mrs. Teachum is not offended by this tendency; indeed, she recognizes that the girls may speak more freely with a peer and may obey instructions from another girl more willingly. She refrains from “interfering” in the girls’ affairs (135) and does not wish to put “them under a Restraint by her Presence” (212). At one point, although Mrs. Teachum “had a great Inclination to hear the History of the Lives of all her little Scholars,” she decides that it would be better not to, since “being present at those Relations might be a Balk to the Narration, as perhaps they might be ashamed freely to confess their past Faults before

her” (176). So Mrs. Teachum does not attend, despite her curiosity to know her students better, because of her greater concern for their self-improvement.⁹ According to Fielding, the girls are plainly and quite naturally more comfortable with Jenny as their mother-figure than with their teacher.

The History of the Countess of Dellwyn offers an example of the consequences of refusing female friendship and guidance. Near the beginning of Dellwyn’s career as a countess, she is offered friendship from a childhood acquaintance, Miss Cummyns; Dellwyn refuses, because of the women’s lower social status and her lack of servility. Many humiliations and mistakes later, Dellwyn meets Cummyns again and “found how much more worthily she thought of Miss *Cummyns*, than of any abject F[!]atterer” (II.168). Dellwyn soon realizes that Cummyns, a woman of strong principles and good reputation, was able to “preserve her Tranquility through such scenes of Distress and Grief, whilst she had rendered herself so miserable” (II.187). Cummyns attempts “to persuade Lady *Dellwyn* into a right Reflection on her own Conduct,” but finds that it is impossible; Dellwyn remains “the Shuttlecock of Vanity” (II.187). It seems that, had Dellwyn accepted Cummyns’ instructive friendship, she might have been able to restore her reputation and her mind. Instead, Dellwyn twice refuses Cummyns’ friendship and guidance; she sinks further into adultery and humiliation. These, then, are the consequences of rejecting female friendship, its guidance, and its mothering.

The importance of female friendship in literature, according to Tess Cosslett, “can be measured by its crucial role in the narrative, rather than by the whole book being ‘about’ a female friendship” (3). Certainly, none of Fielding’s novels is “about” a particular female friendship, but such

⁹ Of course, Mrs. Teachum does not suffer much suspense in this regard: she orders Jenny to tell her all the details of the girls’ conversations which take place in her absence.

friendships exist in most of her books and in some they are “crucial.” For example, in *The History of Ophelia*, the protagonist’s life in the novel is framed by her relationship with two women: in the beginning, she is raised and educated by her aunt; at the end, she befriends a young woman who, in conjunction with her aunt, persuades her to marry Lord Dorchester. Both these women play an essential, if secondary, role in Ophelia’s life; both are present during important times, such as her formative years, her abduction, and her final decision. A woman is even present throughout Ophelia’s imprisonment, and it is a woman who engineers the kidnapping.¹⁰ Moreover, it is a woman who requests Ophelia to write her life story; the entire novel exists because of her instigation. Although these women are not, for the most part, active in the narrative, their presence is “crucial” in Cosslett’s sense of the term.

In fact, female friendships in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature usually exist outside the narrative action, while a male character is needed to instigate dramatic action; this, says Cosslett, is a reflection of both narrative conventions of the time and the ideological perceptions of women’s and men’s roles in society (11). Fielding appears to be aware of the passive female role in her writing, for the narrator of *The History of Ophelia* comments to her intended reader, “I must depend on the Actions of others for making my Narration more agreeable to you, than a long Series of my own Thoughts, which are nothing but a composition of *witty observations . . . Dissertations moral, religious, and entertaining . . .*”

¹⁰ The case of Ophelia’s female rival to Dorchester’s affections is highly unusual, for this woman takes an active stance in the narrative by kidnapping Ophelia and imprisoning her. Perhaps the woman’s complete disregard of the female role frees her to act in this way, just as Cleopatra’s pure wickedness (in *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*) seems to release her from conventional modes of judgement: these women are outside common morality.

(II.108). Her heroine, Ophelia, clearly exists outside the narrative action, for her dramatic life is structured by Dorchester's movements—his abduction of her, his feelings for her, his proposal to her—while her aunt and womanfriend exist in the background, providing her with a moral base from which to spring.

This secondary or background role of women in literature is significant. Newton points out that, "Indeed, it is one of the characteristic strategies of these [eighteenth-century women] authors to subvert masculine control and male domination in their novels by quietly giving emphasis to female capability, as if the pattern in the background of our embroidered piece had been subtly worked into relief" (*Women* 6). The background presence of the women in Ophelia's life comes to be seen as more important, the more closely it is examined: for example, it is her aunt who educates her in moral matters and equips her for a life either of solitude or of marriage. As well, the "female capability" of Ophelia rises to the surface, when she successfully maintains her values and beliefs in spite of Dorchester's intentions, and maneuvers an escape from imprisonment and journeys back to London. Once the reader is aware of these elements of the novel, they become unavoidably obvious; they have "been subtly worked into relief." Newton goes on to say,

Some women writing fiction, it appears, having found it unthinkable, unrealistic, or unhealthy to give their female characters such traditionally masculine power as the power of control, managed to make women *seem* powerful, nevertheless, by giving emphasis and value to power as capacity. (*Women* 6)

This type of power "has been defined both as achievement and competence and, by implication, as a form of self-definition or self-rule" (Newton *Women* 7). Clearly, Ophelia is a capable character, both in her own right and as a result of her aunt's instruction; in this sense, she is powerful and,

what is equally important, this power grew out of her relationship with her mother-figure.

Thus Fielding sees female friendships as potentially empowering; however, for the most part, they are preparatory. Womanfriends function to make the heroines more accepting of marriage and more pleasing to their male partners by encouraging marriage, developing their domestic and emotional abilities, and facilitating their integration into male-defined society. Female friendships aid female survival, both in Dinah Mulock Craik's sense—by providing a place of refuge from the male world—and in a psychological sense, by socializing female characters into the male world. Conversely, Fielding finds marriage itself to be hierarchical, even to the point of gender/class divisions (as discussed by Newton), and generally to the female partner's disadvantage. Because of Fielding's didacticism and strong moral overtones, as well as her overt lessons in reader-interpretation, it can only be assumed that she wanted and expected her readers to recognize these messages. Fielding's "instructive Friend," then, is not only the heroine's womanfriend, who assists in her socialization. She is the novel itself, which advises the reader of her female role in friendship and marriage, assisting in her social integration while criticizing its necessity and emphasizing the need for structural changes in mixed-sex relationships. The sympathetic reader would have been able to perceive Fielding's criticisms, or her tendencies, while others could simply have read her novels in terms of their real contents: female social integration into the world of male expectations.

CHAPTER THREE

Religion, Reason, and Repression

Religion is an important element of Fielding's moral vision. Hers was a more personal and fundamental philosophy than the fashionable and often hypocritical one generally practised by upper-class society. To some extent, her philosophy is based upon friendship, as discussed in Chapter Two, for it is highly dependent on mutual respect, affection, and caring; but it is also based on the earliest known form of Christianity, as described in the New Testament. By encouraging the restoration of early Christianity and its original principles, Fielding is explicitly criticizing contemporary religious attitudes and suggesting religious reform. As well, Fielding is aware of her society's unfair tendency to place all religious responsibility upon women. However, Fielding's religious vision does more than criticize social trends: her ideas on Reason must be understood for a full appreciation of her philosophical position.¹ To a great extent, this is a result of the growing emphasis in the eighteenth century upon the secular philosophies of Reason and personal responsibility. But for Fielding, there is another factor: espousing Reason, and the emotional repression which it

¹ "Reason" is here used in the eighteenth-century sense, during which time it was always capitalized, much as "Christianity" was and still is. It was a noun which referred both to "That intellectual power or faculty . . . which is ordinarily employed in adapting thought or action to some end; the guiding principle of the human mind in the process of thinking" and to a system of "Rationale, [a] fundamental principle." It was also a verb which referred to "The exercise of reason" in either of these contexts. The OED also points out that it was frequently used "with capital initials" in "the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe, during which cultural life was characterized by faith in human reason" (OED XIII.288-290).

involves, was often the only way for a woman to survive during these psychologically stressful times. Her real contents conformed to the eighteenth-century notion of the feminine ideal, an ideal of repression via Reason, while her tendency was one of concern for women's suffering and lack of freedom.

The importance of the early Christian social example to Fielding's religious vision—and hence her disapproval of the Church's movement away from the original principles of Christianity—will be discussed later in this chapter, with the philosophies of humanism and personal responsibility. However, her awareness of eighteenth-century society's readiness to hold women to strict Christian precepts, while excusing men from adhering to even the most basic of the Ten Commandments, must be discussed before entering into any discussion of Fielding's personal philosophy. It is essential to realize that her religion is gender inclusive, and therefore rather revolutionary for her times. Fielding's awareness of the eighteenth-century double standard can be seen in her portrayal of Countess Dellwyn's life-long punishment for her adultery, in comparison with her adulterous companion's complete freedom from guilt (*The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* II.158, 277), as well as in her story of Mr. and Mrs. Bilson in the same novel: he commits adultery, gambles, and destroys his family's fortune and happiness, yet she never reproaches him.² Likewise, Dorchester is completely forgiven for kidnapping and nearly seducing Ophelia, as well as fighting a duel—which is premeditated attempted murder—while Ophelia holds herself responsible for his sins and makes excuses for him (*The History of Ophelia* II.128, 241). On the other hand, the slightest infraction of social rules—real or imaginary—can have serious repercussions for a woman:

The first Rumour, or even Insinuation, to her Disadvantage, that comes to a young Lady's Knowledge, is always attended

² Both of these examples were discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

with great Uneasiness; she presently imagines, that her Story is uppermost in the Thoughts of every Company, and that Politeness alone prevents her being treated with reproachful Language: She imagines every Whisper contains some Reflection on her Conduct; and on every Look she puts some Construction, which tends to her own Disadvantage. (*The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* I.49)

The cause of this particular young lady's mortification is no more than a rumour regarding her unrewarded desire to marry Lord Dellwyn. This is hardly equal to her anxieties, well-founded though they are, for considerable censure was placed on every woman's thoughts and conduct. Isabinda, in *Familiar Letters*, complains of the scrutiny to which women's conduct is subjected:

It is almost incredible what sort of trifling Actions, and nonsensical Incidents, these sort of Men take for Encouragement; and from which they imagine a Woman obliged to spend her whole life with them. Distant Civility they take for a modest Concealment of a Passion; Rudeness they construe into Love; if by chance you look at them, you are eagerly desirous of engaging their Affection; and if by accident you overlook them, you are timorous lest they should engage yours, and cowardly fly from those *Charms*, which must otherwise unavoidably captivate your Heart. (I.72-73)

A woman's every word and action was watched and judged; and if she was observed so carefully in terms of her affections, then she was scrutinized even more closely in terms of her virtue. On the contrary, men such as Mr. Bilson, Lord Dorchester, and Lord Clermont can commit actual crimes without suffering the least public disapproval. Applying the same moral standards to both men and women is rare in eighteenth-century literature, and a character's insistence upon it is viewed with surprise and derision by the rest of the characters. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Bilson insist that Sir Harry Cleveland prove his reform to the family before he can marry their daughter; this is considered quite laughable by his friends (*The History of*

the Countess of Dellwyn). In Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph*, the protagonist and her mother are scorned by male characters, especially Sidney's brother, for their disapproval of Mr. Faulkland's affair and subsequent abandonment of the woman; it is called "a strange insensibility" (Sheridan 83). Clearly, holding both men and women to the same morals is considered ridiculous. By making these gender differences so explicit in her own writing, Fielding is indirectly focussing the reader's attention on the social double standard prevalent during her time.

Moreover, Fielding is occasionally overtly critical of this double standard, although she does not always specifically mention gender. She laments in *The History of Ophelia* that "He shall be suffered to enjoy Liberty, who shall from a false Pride reduce *himself* and *his* Family to Beggary and Shame," while those whose errors injure no one are punished by society (italics mine; II.103). Fielding's commentary on society's strict insistence on women's religious responsibility, as opposed to men's expected disregard of religion, is ironic in *Volume the Last*: Mr. Orgueil sneeringly accuses David Simple of having "principles which were fit for nothing but old Women" (421). Godwin cautions against excessive ignorance of the realities of society, such as David's, calling it an "indolent effeminacy" (143). Woodward says of David Simple:

[He is] womanly in his embodiment of the feminine virtues of innocence, passivity, and privacy; in his demonstrations of nurturance and non-hierarchical sharing; and in his opposition to and retreat from patriarchal values. (62-63)

By giving David so-called "feminine" qualities, Fielding criticizes the imbalance in eighteenth-century society's perception of religion and its over-emphasis on women. For eighteenth-century women, "adherence to the clear, religious moral code will with luck ensure that big difficulties will not arise. The code is there to ensure against behaviour which would set a woman outside the protection of society; it is in her interest to obey it"

(Zeman 94). There is no similar need for men to adhere to this code, since they are not in need of protection. Fielding, on the contrary, believes religion should be more than a mode of social protection; therefore she insists on its applicability to all people, regardless of gender.

It is necessary now to determine what these values are that Fielding encouraged in both men and women. In the closing chapter of *The Adventures of David Simple*, the principles essential for family happiness are illustrated. Here, the two couples are united in marriage and are about to begin their lives together. Camilla and Cynthia, on the morning of their wedding day, congratulate each other on “being for ever joined to the only Men they could really like or esteem” (302); Camilla feels “more Tenderness for *Cynthia* than ever” (303). During the wedding ceremony, the women, “without Reluctance, gave their Hands where their Hearts were already united with so much Sincerity” (303). For now, everything is perfect:

David's travels were now at an end, and he thought himself overpaid in *Camilla's* Goodness for all his Troubles and Disappointments. On the other side, her Happiness was compleat, in having it in her power to give *David* pleasure;—in seeing her Brother, instead of the miserable Condition he was once in—now in the possession of all he desired;—in having her Friend for her Companion, and in her Father's returning and growing Fondness.

Valentine and *Cynthia* had not a Wish beyond what they enjoyed; and the Father had all the Comfort his Age would admit of, in the dutiful and affectionate Behaviour of all his Children towards him. (303)

Several aspects of Fielding's religious philosophy are being promoted as the source of the family's contentment. The women are pleased that they are able to like and respect their husbands; David is happy, because his search for friendship is over and he has found and married a good woman; Camilla, because she is able to please her husband; Valentine and Cynthia, presumably because they have each other; and even the father, because his

children respect and obey him. In other words, respect, friendship, marriage, service, and obedience are being put forward as the primary ingredients of their happiness.

Apparently, Fielding was conscious of the values which she advanced in her writing, for she deliberately avoided any physical obstacles to reader-identification with her characters. She writes in this final chapter of *The Adventures of David Simple*:

Perhaps it may be here expected I should give some Description of the Persons of my favourite Characters; but . . . I shall leave it to my Readers Imagination to form them just as they like best: It is their Minds I have taken most pains to bring them acquainted with . . . (303)

Fielding is concentrating on the internal qualities of her characters—their mental, emotional, and spiritual beings—and wants the readers to concentrate on them as well. On the last page of the novel, Fielding makes a general statement addressed to her readers, saying that “Care, Tenderness, and Benevolence,” as well as a willingness to “make use of [one’s] Talents for the Advantage and Pleasure of . . . Society,” is the only way to achieve “any real Pleasure” (305). In this, her first novel, Fielding focusses on personal care and affection as the essentials of religion and the source of personal happiness; later, her focus changes to duty and Reason.

The characters of *Volume the Last* rely heavily on religion in order to tranquilly survive the innumerable catastrophes of their lives. As one by one the characters die, David Simple and the survivors control their grief with the comforting thought that their deceased friends are unable to witness their despair and have escaped “all earthly Troubles” (415). Upon the death of Camilla, the narrator says of the hero:

Had *David* been an Infidel, not all the Books composed by the wisest Philosophers, would have taken one arrow from a Heart so sensible as his of every Connection. He would have raved to Madness, or wept himself to Death: but when the Christian

Hope came over his Mind, that his *Camilla* was really happy,—that the Loss was all his own—and that a short Time longer struggling through Life would put an End to all his Sorrows also, and render him happy, his Grief would subside, and patient Resignation take its Place. (415)

On his own deathbed, David has “a strong and lively Hope in the Revelation God has been pleased to send us” (432), much as Job, destroyed by God, knows that “[God] canst do all things / and that no purpose is beyond [God]” (Job 42:2).³ Here, Christianity is specifically mentioned and linked to both resignation and mental tranquility. Clearly, the route to peacefulness is uncomplaining endurance, aided by religious belief in the afterlife.

An interesting contrast between a devotee of Reason—a practitioner of Christian virtues—and a complete aberration from these virtues is contained in *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*, Fielding’s sixth novel. The women of the novel are the two women of Mark Anthony’s life. They are not, however, exact portrayals of the historical figures; instead, Fielding allows herself considerable creative license by resurrecting the women and having them tell their own stories and explain their motives in a sort of post-mortem psychological character study. Octavia is calm and rational; asked to tell her life story, she “approach[es] with a Complacence that approved her conscious Virtue,” and says, “From my Infancy, that is, from the Time I became capable of reflection, I was taught, that to contract my Desires, to command my Passions, and to share my Pleasures with others, was the only Conduct which could promise me Happiness; and by Rules like these was all my Future Life governed” (147-148). Octavia, then, views the beginning of life—or at least the beginning of a life worth recording—as occurring at the moment of self-reflection. It is important to notice the active verbs in her statement: “to contract,” “to command,” “to

³ This is in stark contrast to Mr. Orgueil’s utter disdain for Christianity; he believes *only* in human capabilities.

share.” Also interesting is her own passive stance: “I *was* taught” and “my Future Life [*was*] governed” (italics mine). While she may not agree with these rules of conduct, she nonetheless allows herself to be “governed” by them. Octavia appears to live in a world of restrictions, and she also dies in one: “. . . applauded by the *Romans*, valued by their Emperor, gratefully treated by my Children, and with a Mind steady, serene, and calm, I sunk in Peace, and resigned my Breath . . .” (183). Surrounded on all sides by those who demand her service, she preserves her steadiness of mind—the result of Reason—even into death.

Octavia is held up as example of the perfect woman (to some minds, at least), yet she contradicts a common belief about women being overly emotional and unable to think rationally.⁴ In the Dedication to the book, Fielding writes of Octavia, “The Amiable and gentle *Octavia* gives us . . . an Example of all those Graces and Embellishments worthy the most refined Female Character” (xxxix); these graces must include her ability to think rationally and to control feelings. She is commended for both her private and public sacrifices and for her ornamental value to the court. Woodward discusses the mid-eighteenth-century female ideal and finds, “Obedient daughter or wife, chaste maiden, gentle matron: these were woman’s ideal states, and by assuming them she maintained the patriarchal family structure” (57). Octavia fulfilled all of these roles and, like the mid-eighteenth-century woman, “was a chattel” (Woodward 57). A comparison of Octavia—an ancient Roman and a pagan—with a 1747 fictional character of Fielding’s, will show that the pre-Christian Roman

⁴ This stereotype is contradicted in *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, as well: Dellwyn calculates her moves, while Monsieur D’Orville has an “Impetuosity of Temper: His Passions were strong” (II.233). Other women writers also reversed this stereotype, such as Frances Burney, who created a rational and thoughtful heroine opposite an irrational and uncontrollably passionate hero in *Cecilia*.

and mid-eighteenth-century British female ideals were not far apart.

Fielding describes a friend of Cynthia's in *Familiar Letters*:

But the Charms of her Person, tho' she was a consummate Beauty, were the most trifling of her Perfections; for the Goodness of her Heart was so great, that she melted with Tenderness at others Grievs, whilst she had Resolution enough to support any Affliction, in which she alone was concerned. From her Lips could flow no ill-natur'd Expression, as her Heart was incapable of conceiving one malicious Thought. (II.202)

This woman, like Octavia, is able to suppress all feelings for her own sufferings, while constantly caring for others'; she is able to make private sacrifices for the public's welfare.

Kristina Straub traces the gradual separation between the female mind and the female body being made in the eighteenth century, which may be responsible for the acceptance among women, and expectation among men, of female physical self-sacrifice (70). Octavia is a clear example of this physical sacrifice, for she never questions her role and is openly admired for her forfeiture of personal interests. Such sacrifice was acceptable, even commendable, so long as mental composure was preserved—although this composure was also a sacrifice, for its practitioner had to repress all natural feelings. In Straub's terms, this is the "material objectification of female consciousness," and it is closely aligned with the denial of education for women discussed in Chapter One (70). On the surface, Fielding fully supports the ideology of Reason, obedience, restraint, and self-sacrifice which Octavia represents, but she may also be aware of sacrifice as suppression and the perceptual division of the female mind and body which made possible such expectations, for it is Fielding who controls Octavia's speech: her passive and unemotional stance is Fielding's creation. As Spacks points out, characters "exist in subordination to an author's purposes for them" (*Imagining* 6).

Woodward writes of mid- eighteenth-century women, “self-negating virtue, was an ideal toward which to strive. This makes their oppression both less obvious and more insidiously profound than, say, the blatant opposition faced by women writers . . . 50 years or so earlier” (57). Fielding appears to be projecting her social conditions onto Octavia, although their social conditions were already quite similar; Octavia negates herself and is commended for it, yet suffers greatly for her so-called virtue. Octavia may be an example for Fielding’s contemporary women of the consequences of succumbing to the socially-valued feminine ideal of self-denial.

Yet Octavia’s opposite is also highly rational. Although Fielding’s Dedication to *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* describes the women’s differences as “the strongest Contrast of any Ladies celebrated in History” and calls Octavia “the reverse” of Cleopatra (xxxix), the two women have some similarities. For example, Cleopatra displays no true emotions, and only pretends to passion when it is part of a strategy to manipulate someone; Octavia also controls her emotions. Cleopatra’s motives are described as “a boundless Vanity and Avarice” (xxxix), while no motives are given for Octavia, but their essential purposes are not so different. Cleopatra makes rational choices, based on what she wants, namely political power and control over Anthony, while Octavia also makes decisions, based on what she wants, possibly sanity; the difference lies only in their priorities, for they are both, at heart, acting on self-interest.

The true message in the book can be found in their actual life stories: Cleopatra, although dying a tragic death (in the full sense of the word), lives a life of self-gratification; Octavia, dying with a peaceful mind, has had a life filled with “many unavoidable Misfortunes” (183). Reason may comfort Octavia at the moment of death, and may have allowed her to cope with a miserable life, but it is this same Reason—and all that it entails—that causes her misfortunes: “Octavia is miserable because she is virtuous”

(Todd *Dictionary* 125). Cleopatra, on the other hand, uses Reason to her own advantage throughout her life, yet it is her use of Reason towards the ends of personal and political power that brings about her tragic end. Both women use Reason for what they perceive as their own advantage; both women are brought down by their Reason. As Spacks concludes in her discussion of sentimental novels, “The causes of that misery are more interesting than its manifestations” (*Desire* 135). That both Octavia and Cleopatra end in misery is obvious; the foundation of their misery, i.e. Reason, is far more interesting, in that it illustrates Fielding’s implicit moral lesson in the novel: specifically, that these women’s adherence to Reason, and their suppression of emotions, is the source of all their sorrows.

Later, Reason becomes the main virtue articulated in Fielding’s writing. In *The History of Ophelia*, Reason almost comes to replace religion in importance; indeed, it seems to develop into its own religion. There are several narratorial comments on Reason scattered throughout the story. After touring Bedlam, a well-known mental asylum, Ophelia comments,

It was strange to me, that no Person should be thought to deserve confinement, but he whose hurtful Actions proceeded from mistaken Notions. While he, who is prompted by *evil intentions*, who acts in open Defiance of *Religious Virtue*, and *Reason*, and endeavors to form a Happiness for himself in destroying that of Society, shall be imitated by a few, approved of by many, and tolerated by all. (II.103)

The narrator then scolds those who “suffer themselves to wander from Reason’s Path” (II.106). The loss of reason, or the deliberate straying from it, is a major concern in this novel and, as is apparent from the passage above, such Reason is roughly equivalent to “*Religious Virtue*.” Indeed, “Reason’s Path” could be read as the straight and narrow path of religious

cliché: once the sinner has wandered from it, it is difficult to regain.

Certainly, the Reason touted by Fielding is responsible for the inner tranquility and steadiness of mind so highly valued by her characters:

If People once suffer themselves to deviate from Reason's Path, who can pretend to fix any certain Bounds for their misguided Steps; and when the Consistency of Action which she should constitute, gives Place to every Whim of a capricious Mind, is it wonderful that they should wander on till they arrive at Distraction. The Pleasures, Honours, and Misfortunes, of those who are denominated rational Beings, are generally imaginary; they frequently rejoice at what is no Benefit, and grieve for what is no Evil; they eagerly pursue Trifles which are not worth a Thought, and neglect Matters of the highest Importance. (II.106-107)

The loss of true rationality, so different from the socially accepted version of rationality, is utterly devastating to a person's peace of mind. Accordingly, Reason should be pursued as one of the most—if not *the* most—desirable goals; in other words, religiously.

Yet Fielding does not advocate adherence to Reason at the expense of all other philosophies. In *Volume the Last*, Orgueil, a ridiculous man who borders on the malicious, is a firm believer in human reason: “. . . it was one of Mr. *Orgueil's* most settled Maxims, that Man, by the Use of his own Reason alone, has a Power to prevent or heal any Misfortune. He so implicitly worshiped Human Reason, that it appeared to him no less than idolatry to dispute its Omnipotence” (357). Fielding's treatment of Orgueil is satirical, not so much because of his beliefs but because of the extent to which he takes them; it is his pride, as well as his ideals, which she ridicules.⁵ Reason must be balanced with religious faith, for without this important leaven, humanity has no hope:

But *David* told him, that if he had no other Comfort in his Heart, but what could arise from the admiring the Beauties of

⁵ Mr. Orgueil's pride is obvious from his name, which is taken from the French word, “orgueil,” meaning “pride” or “arrogance.”

human Reason, exulting in the Dignity of his Nature, and worshipping the Strength of his own Wisdom, he would weep at the Grave of his *Camilla*, till, like *Niobe*, he was dissolved into Tears. (420)

Fielding, like many of her eighteenth-century counterparts, warns against extremism of any kind; she writes that “Every violent Passion indulged to an Excess, is in danger of turning into its contrary” (*Familiar Letters* I.142). She advocates moderation in philosophy as well as emotions.

The growing popularity of the philosophy of Reason was at least partially a result of the movement away from Christianity towards secular philosophy, which had been developing since the Middle Ages (Faulkner 9). During the eighteenth century, there was an increasing “need” for a “reformulation of Christianity,” which “reflect[ed] the social process of secularization;” the most suitable outlet for this process was in “the novel, the one secular literary form” (Faulkner 9, 11). While Fielding is certainly supportive of religion, it is just such a “reformulated” Christianity which she professes. Often, Christian language is not even used; rather, she encourages personal responsibility and high moral standards, without mentioning Church dogma.⁶ Although Todd writes that Fielding’s “bold and experimental use of narrative was primarily used to inculcate a scheme of conventional moral precepts” (*British* 248), Fielding does step beyond “conventional” morality. She advocates a form of communism—complete financial, as well as emotional, sharing—in *The Adventures of David Simple* and *Volume the Last*, in which the characters do not even consider themselves individuals. The narrator comments upon a letter, sent from Valentine and Cynthia in Jamaica to their friends in England:

In it there were no Professions of Friendship, no Promises of

⁶ Fielding’s repeated references to an afterlife in *The Adventures of David Simple* and its ensuing volumes are the main exception to this statement. She does not mention postmortem rewards again in any of her later writing.

lending or giving, but it was all writ in the plural Number, 'if WE succeed,' and 'WE shall be happy,'—considering them all as one united Family. This, perhaps, would have been very marvellous in the Eyes of many Persons; but when *David* and *Camilla* looked within, it did not in the least appear to them in the Light of a Miracle. (362)

These sentiments are repeated throughout *Volume the Last*, and are not “conventional” moral lessons; they are quite radical statements about the nature of community responsibility.

This absolute sharing of resources—both mental and financial—is clearly an element of Fielding’s personal philosophy. Although these sentiments are founded in the New Testament, they are not an aspect of religion as practiced by most of eighteenth-century society, for David Simple’s belief in “non-hierarchical sharing” is considered both effeminate and a challenge to patriarchal values (Woodward 62-63). The Bible, particularly in the New Testament, promotes friendship, community love, and generosity; it even suggests a complete sharing of resources among the early Christians: “All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required” (Acts 2:44-45), and “The whole body of believers was united in heart and soul. Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own, but everything was held in common” (Acts 4:32-33).⁷ This plural mindset of families and friends such as David Simple’s—apparent from Fielding’s emphasis on the pronoun “we”—is essential to Fielding’s vision, and is obviously taken from the early Christian example as related in the New Testament. Clearly, the religion advocated by Fielding was more fundamental than that practised

⁷ The consequence of withholding money from the community is outlined in the Biblical story of Ananias and his wife who, after donating only part of the proceeds from their sold property to the communal treasury, are immediately struck dead (Acts 5:1-12).

by society. While definitely not secular, her vision could be called humanistic, for “Humanism is a philosophical position, not a matter of casual good-will, and its basis is the belief in human responsibility and human potentiality” (Faulkner 1). Without a doubt, Fielding believed in human responsibility for the community’s welfare.

Eighteenth-century literature generally rewards a character’s adherence to Reason or virtue with a happy ending, such as marriage, health, or fortune. Health in particular becomes a reflection of a person’s mental state, since a clean conscience begets a clean body—an outward reflection of inward reality (Festa-McCormick 223). As Juliet McMaster says, “virtue becomes its own physical reward.” But in Fielding’s works, most obviously in *Volume the Last*, this is not so.⁸ Nearly all of this novel’s characters die of various maladies, despite their virtuous behaviour throughout their lives. *Volume the Last* offers no comfort for the reader beyond faith and resignation; this is remarkably similar to the sorrowful ending of Frances Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* less than ten years later (1761).⁹ As Janet Todd points out in her discussion of the eighteenth-century cult of literary sensibility, “The sentimental work reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue, displayed in

⁸ Interestingly, Walter Crittenden offers *The Adventures of David Simple* as an example of virtue rewarded in literature (19); obviously, he has either not read *Volume the Last* or does not consider the series as a whole work, but rather sees the final volume as a separate work. Whether or not Fielding planned such a dismal ending to her characters when she wrote *The Adventures of David Simple*, it is clear that, at least by the time of writing *Volume the Last*, she did not believe in virtue’s rewards in this life, or was at least interested in investigating her characters’ responses to the problem of withheld rewards.

⁹ This may be due in part to the two authors’ friendship: Sheridan and Fielding were known acquaintances and may have influenced each other’s writing and ideas (Todd *Dictionary* 125).

a naughty world through a vague and potent distress. This distress is rarely deserved . . ." (*Sensibility* 2-3). The characters behave virtuously, in order to highlight the evils of the world around them, but are eventually led to an unfair and sorrowful ending. Most novels of this nature "function through a plot of sudden reversal" (Todd *Sensibility* 4), making *The Adventures of David Simple* and *Volume the Last*—with their sudden turn from marital happiness to domestic destruction—a prime example of sentimental work. This imperfect closure appears to be a tendency of Fielding's, as mentioned in the discussion of marriage as a literary ending previously, for few of her characters' marriages actually bring happiness. Similarly, fortune does not cure her characters' problems: Cleopatra, though wealthy and powerful, is never content, while Dellwyn's reliance on riches proves foolish, and Valentine dies shortly after gaining some financial success. Clearly, the benefits of money are illusory, as are the advantages of marriage.

In the face of such physical, financial, and marital sorrows, Reason as a doctrine of restraint was a necessary strategy for Fielding's heroines. Nancy K. Miller outlines the two possible endings for a heroine during the eighteenth century: "euphoric," which involved the heroine's ultimate integration into society through a social mechanism such as marriage, and "dephoric," which entailed the death or whoredom of the heroine (qtd. in O'Neal 87). Clearly, Fielding opted for the dephoric ending in most of her novels: the only exceptions are *The Adventures of David Simple* which, since additional volumes were later added, is not a final ending when the full works of Fielding's career are considered; *The Governess* which, as an overtly instructional children's book, really required a euphoric ending; and *The History of Ophelia*, whose euphoric ending is quite unconvincing and even debatable: when Ophelia agrees to marry Dorchester, she admits

to all present, "I may repent, but I find, I must comply!" (II.280). Ophelia is openly aware of the regrets she may have over her marriage. This dephoric trend in Fielding's writing indicates a dissatisfaction with unrealistic happy endings. In such a situation, then, a heroine had to be reasonable. Cleopatra and Dellwyn, the evil women in Fielding's repertoire, espouse Reason out of greed and vanity, and are punished for their actions during their lives. Fielding's two model heroines, Octavia and Ophelia, adhere to Reason for their own benefit—psychological survival—but still to their disadvantage—emotional death.

It is probable that Fielding did not really believe that her characters' *reasonable* behaviour was truly virtuous, but rather was aware of Reason's function as a defense mechanism. Spacks discusses the resigned attitude of female characters and comments, "it is striking how often the action of eighteenth-century novels by women emphasizes the sex's social helplessness and introduces the possibility that suffering might be a woman's only recourse" ("Ev'ry" 31-32). Certainly, it becomes apparent in these novels that Fielding used virtue or Reason or religion—whether explicit Christianity or simply a personal philosophy—as a coping strategy. Religion becomes a means towards an end: namely, psychological survival in the face of uncontrollable disasters and during a turbulent time, which was particularly challenging for women: they were expected to surrender everything to their fathers and husbands, were denied education, and were condescended towards by much of male society. Fielding's real contents taught moderation, Reason, obedience, and self-sacrifice. Her tendency, on the other hand, suggests that such adherence is often disastrous, and certainly productive of much female misery. Fielding's reason for this double message, according to Downs-Miers, is that her "expressed intent is to improve the lives of women. She knows she must appeal to persons in power (men) and employs her craft to do so—without alienating them"

(320). In order to “improve the lives of women,” Fielding wanted them to understand the hazards of self-suppression; to escape severe criticism, she placed this message below a surface one, that encouraged that exact suppression. At the same time, Fielding was surely aware that emotional repression was possibly the only choice for women during her time, and that “Only by emotional repression can a woman survive successfully in a world which penalizes female expressiveness” (Spacks “Ev’ry” 43).

CHAPTER FOUR

Truth and Fiction: "O, ye *Cry!*"

Truth and fiction made opposing demands upon eighteenth-century novelists, and much of this era's writing is influenced by their antagonism. Eighteenth-century philosophy and morality required a certain amount of deference to realism and truth in fiction, while simultaneously being frightened by fiction's very authenticity. Fielding, like other eighteenth-century writers, had to deal with this conflict as best she could. She includes moral truths in her work—often disguised as entertainment—and emphasizes her moral vision through the use of simple, or truthful, characters. As well, her writing is deliberately ambiguous, so that the reader may create her own truths about the work. In this way, although Fielding's real contents condemn hypocrisy and duplicity, she nonetheless makes use of deceptive tactics in her writing for the ostensible good of her readers.

The conflict between truth and fiction is prevalent in eighteenth-century writing, for, while the author may wish to write a work of imagination, she must be aware of the social demands for realism and morality—in other words, truth.¹ Spacks explains that eighteenth-century philosophers relied on the evidence of memory to prove their existence; therefore, if memory could be confused with the imagination—as it was within works of fiction—existence could be doubted (*Imagining* 4-5). As a result, philosophers of the time were uneasy about fiction's tendency to cross the boundaries of memory and imagination and were acutely aware of "the danger inherent in the capacity of the imagination to obviate the

¹ For the purposes of this argument, "truth" will refer to both "reality" and moral or ethical "truths"; "fiction" will refer to the literary product of the imagination.

crucial distinction between reality and illusion” (Spacks *Imagining* 6). Since there was this essential distrust of fiction within eighteenth-century society, including its intelligentsia, the author had a particularly fine line to walk. In order to communicate moral truths, fiction must be realistic, since realism was more readily accepted by the reader and “applied to our Service and Emolument” (Fielding *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* xliii). At the same time, fiction had to encourage the readers towards truthfulness, although fiction, as a product of the imagination, is not real and hence is itself untruthful. One critic points out that Fielding’s novels often tend to obscure the “line between ‘real’ and fictive” (Downs-Miers 317).

Fielding was not the only author struggling with this dilemma in the eighteenth century. Johnson, Richardson, and Fielding noticed its difficulties:

[Johnson] considers it neither useful nor appropriate for the novelist merely to imitate actuality. On the other hand, fiction can make “truth”—by which Johnson obviously means moral or ethical truth . . .—palatable: partly . . . by addressing our passions. (Spacks *Desire* 2)

[Richardson’s] hope was that he would succeed in “stealing in” the “great doctrines of Christianity under the fashionable guise of an amusement.” (Faulkner 14)

In reality, what the Ministry are to the State, the Bishops to the Church, the Chancellor and Judges to the Law, the Generals to the Army, and the Admirals to the Fleet; that is a great and good Writer over the Morals of his Countrymen. (Henry Fielding *Familiar Letters* II.298)

Johnson, Richardson, and Henry Fielding all realized the moral responsibility of the novelist to communicate “moral or ethical truth” to the reader, yet both Johnson and Richardson are clearly aware of the reader’s resistance to blatant moralizing. According to Johnson, people will more readily accept “Truth” when it is clothed in “Desire;” once it is accepted,

then the disguise can be dropped (Spacks *Desire* 1). They both, therefore, conceal their lessons of truth: Johnson in desire, and Richardson in entertainment. The paradox is immediately apparent: in order to impress truth upon the reader, the author must be deceptive.

Fielding also tricks the reader into accepting moral lessons. In fact, much of Fielding's writing contains moral elements enveloped in entertainment, as discussed in Chapter One. Fielding opens one novel with the following declaration:

. . . it is pity Adventures so new and entertaining should be buried in Oblivion, especially, when they, and the Reflections scattered throughout the Book, are as well calculated for Instruction as Amusement. (Advertisement *The History of Ophelia*)

She, like Richardson, hoped to win her readers' approval of truth by cloaking it in amusement. The narrator writes in *The History of Ophelia*:

I must depend on the Actions of others for making my Narration more agreeable to you, than a long Series of my own Thoughts, which are nothing but a Composition of *witty* observations that, would make any good-natured Person weep the Poverty of the Imagination, that gave Rise to them; *lively* Remarks that would prove better Soporifiks than all the Opium in *Turkey*; Dissertations *moral, religious, and entertaining*, from which after much Yawning, you may learn, that it is right to do Right, and wrong to do Wrong, that Friendship is better than Enmity, and that it is wiser to please than to offend. (II.108)

This narrator is aware of her duty to promote moral and religious lessons, which she does by combining them with entertainment, and she moreover tries to refrain from lecturing her readers. Occasionally, this narrator will gratify the reader with a suggestive story, then end it with moral commentary. This effectively and simultaneously hooks the reader and frees the writer from all accusations of impropriety. For example, in *The History of Ophelia*, the narrator tells of a drunken man's sexual attack on

Ophelia's guard—a prudish, middle-aged woman. This story is quickly followed by short lecture against drunkenness (II.17). A similar technique is used in *Familiar Letters*; Cynthia and Camilla exchange epistolary stories of both virtuous and malicious characters. Their stories of coquettes, egotists, and mercenaries are alternated with stories of outstanding kindness, virtue, and merit. For example, Camilla devotes three letters to the life of a womanfriend, Isabinda, whose youth was filled with lovers and hypocritical courting; it ends abruptly with her happy marriage to a worthy man (I.59-79, 99-129, 149-167). Fielding combines appealing, almost racy stories with moral didacticism, to attract and entertain her readers while conveying moral lessons. Since Fielding is so conspicuously conscious of these aspects of her writing, one can hardly doubt that her choice of tactics is deliberate.

Perhaps the clearest and most prevalent of Fielding's attempts to impart truth to her readers is in her didacticism and her characterizations. First, she makes general moralistic statements throughout her novels which are intended directly for the reader and can exist independently from the fiction. For example, at the end of *The Adventures of David Simple*, she urges the readers to adopt a way of life similar to the characters', and *Familiar Letters* is filled with moral platitudes. Secondly, she uses simple, honest characters set in a duplicitous society, in order to highlight the sins of society and, hence, those of the reader; she is also able to defend such simplicity as, in fact, a form of wisdom. Her fiction—her creation of these characters—is meant to portray and encourage the truth which she promotes in her didactic speeches.

David, in *The Adventures of David Simple*, is of course the ultimate "simple" character, but not in terms of low intelligence; rather, he is "free

from duplicity, dissimulation, or guile” (Utter and Needham 114). As such, he embodies honesty, trust, and all the other virtues which have been corrupted by a misguided society. Utter and Needham go further, saying that David represented or at least expressed the dove of Christianity (174); in that sense, David would symbolize not only the Holy Spirit but also the spirit of truth or wisdom, for the two are connected.² David, then, is simultaneously simple and wise, and his very simplicity is the goal of much wisdom.

As a narrative technique, Fielding uses the simple character in all her novels to highlight the social corruption which she despises. David Simple is the most obvious among them, yet his companions are also simple, as are several of the peripheral characters in the series, whose stories are related as lessons. Portia, of *The Cry*, is simple; she is judged and praised by Una, the figure of Simple Truth, while her straightforwardness and honesty is ridiculed by the Cry—“ERROR and her NUMEROUS TRAIN” (I.20)—who represents all that is wrong in duplicitous society. As well, the Countess of Dellwyn is, in her youth, simple; as she grows into a young woman, she is imposed upon and manipulated by her father, so that she loses her simplicity. Fielding’s last novel also uses a simple character, Ophelia, whose extreme innocence contrasts the villainy of the characters around her. Geoffrey Carnal describes the honest Ophelia as a “noble savage” thrust into a sinful civilization (455). Fielding uses these simple characters, much as a travel writer uses a foreigner, to expose the ridiculous aspects of society: the

² According to the New Testament, “He who comes from heaven bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his witness. To accept his witness is to attest that God speaks the truth; for he whom God sent utters the words of God, so measureless is God’s gift of the Spirit” (John 3:31-34). The words of God—the words of truth—appear to be the words of the Holy Spirit.

uninitiated, by their very innocence, are able to see a system much more clearly than those within that system.³

These simple characters, notable for their freedom from deception, are themselves a device. Cosslett discusses some of the various narrative devices of women novelists and says, "Fiction, I would say, actually *consists* in narrative devices and conventions, and these reflect, embody, or even create *not* 'reality' or 'experience,' but ideology" (2). Accordingly, the narrative technique of simple characters is not realistic and, by its very fictionality, is a deceit; yet it represents an ideology. Through it, Fielding draws upon the ideology of the innocent victim. This becomes explicit in her final novel, in which the victimization of Ophelia is inescapably apparent. Violently abducted by a man who intends for her a fate worse than death—mistressdom—she suffers the ultimate victimization: self-blame. Ophelia considers,

I was not inclined to complain of the Consequences, but thought myself made for the Destruction of his Virtues, since only in his Behaviour to me, had he ever swerved from the most extensive Generosity and tenderest Humanity. (II.128)

Yet Ophelia was acquainted with Dorchester for only a few days, and spoke almost nothing to him during that time, before he decided to steal her; she can not even be faulted for encouraging his advances, since none were made. Although it seems that Dorchester has only "swerved" from virtue in his relationship with Ophelia, while in all other situations he has been a model of propriety and kindness, the "swerve" is rather too large to pass

³ This may be one of the reasons why the traditional female novel's heroine is often brought out of the country to London at the beginning of the story, so that all the events may be seen from a new perspective. This may also explain the marginal, observer role that so many women writers' heroines assume, discussed by Kristina Straub—for example, the heroines of Frances Burney's *Evelina*, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (66).

over. As Nancy K. Miller says, “the fundamental structuring sequence is set in motion by a confrontation between feminine virtue and illicit masculine desire” (qtd. in O’Neal 88). Ophelia’s virtue never wavers, and so she is never at fault; it is only Dorchester’s illicit desires that instigate the events. Indeed, “The plot of most fiction with women protagonists tells of female innocence and passivity endangered by aggressive male libertinage or parental power” (Todd *Sensibility* 115): the stories of Ophelia and Dellwyn, respectively.

The hypocrisy of Dorchester becomes evident as the story continues, accusing him further of persecuting innocence. When Dorchester prepares to fight a duel, Ophelia comforts herself:

I could not believe that a Man while under the actual Intention of a Crime could possess such Composure of Mind. Confusion and Terror I imagined to be the necessary Consequence of criminal Designs; and therefore, received some consolation at perceiving none of those Symptoms of Guilt in him. (II.146-147)

Ophelia believes that Dorchester is not so insensitive to criminality as to be able to remain calm and rational while aware of such guilty actions. In this case, however, she is entirely wrong; Dorchester is, in fact, preparing to duel, and he does carry out his plans. Essentially, this further incriminates Dorchester, since he was also able to carry out his plans for Ophelia without once showing a sign of remorse: he is a hardened criminal, and a typical example of the hypocrisy which eighteenth-century moral fiction stigmatizes. Like a true victim, Ophelia accepts a portion of the blame, excuses her violator—for he had only “mentally offended” (II.241)—and eventually accepts his proposal of marriage.⁴ She receives no guarantee that he has changed and, since his past deviations from virtuous behaviour are multiple, it is clear that Ophelia is, as the saying

⁴ The argument that Dorchester had only “mentally offended” is completely ridiculous, since he had physically abducted her and forcibly kept her from returning home.

goes, delivering herself into the hands of her oppressor. Her victimization, then, is complete.

Cosslett also points out that, among women in women's novels, "A solidarity *against* men, or *against* patriarchal institutions is never promoted: rather, it is a solidarity against those, men or women, who break the ostensible rules of patriarchy—male seducers, female flirts or hypocritical moralisers" (13). However, Ophelia does not experience this solidarity; the women in her life encourage her to marry Dorchester, although he is a male seducer and has broken the bounds of acceptable behaviour. Actually, Dorchester could also be called a hypocrite, for he is able to disguise the physical signs of evil, as outlined by Juliet McMaster. She emphasizes the role of the body and face as outward reflections of inner states, particularly of guilt; in other words, "the body as text" to be "read." Dorchester is the ultimate dissembler, for he shows no outward signs of his guilt. It is obvious from Fielding's subtle treatment of him that she highly resents such hypocrisy: she portrays him from the viewpoint of his victim and drops hints that he is worse than his victim realizes.

Like Ophelia, most of Fielding's protagonists are victims. David Simple and his friends are victims of a duplicitous society, personified by Mr. and Mrs. Orgueil, Mr. Ratcliff, and Mr. Nichols (*Volume the Last*). Dellwyn is persecuted by her father and future husband—the two men "duped [her] into her own Misery" (I.107):

[Lord Dellwyn] freely confessed her Father's carrying her to *London*, his Pretence of marrying *Lady Fanny Fashion*, and every Transaction from the Time of her Arrival in *London*, were nothing more than the Effects of a Stratagem, concerted between himself and Mr. *Lucum*; to prevail with her to consent to be his Countess. (*The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* I.105)

Octavia, too, is a victim, imposed upon by political considerations. She says, "I dreaded from my Youth that I should be sacrificed to political

Views, and be disposed of in the solemn Tie of Matrimony to some Man, whose Ambition alone would lead him to take me as a Pledge of Friendship from the great *Caesar*" (*The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* 148). Yet this is exactly what happens: ". . . the common Friends of the Two Triumvirs proposed to give me to *Anthony*, as a Pledge of Peace, and a Means of future Union between them" (161). Nonetheless, Octavia marries Anthony and suffers abuse; she sacrifices her private self for the public good. Clearly, most of Fielding's protagonists tend to be victims, both of society and of men.

It must be noted here that the tragic endings of Fielding's novels are deliberate. The novel in which virtue is not rewarded and, in particular, where heroines succumb to male libertines, could make a strong impression on the reading public. Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph*, whose plot of misery was influenced by and is similar to *Volume the Last's*, raised many concerns within the literary world. Johnson wondered whether Sheridan had the "moral right" to make her readers suffer so much on behalf of the heroine (*Todd Sensibility* 113); while *Clarissa* prompted Lady Echlin to write an alternative ending, in which the male libertine was reformed (Echlin 172). Fielding, then, would have been conscious of the effect her writing would have on her readers' minds: *Volume the Last* would have pained them, while *The History of Ophelia* would have disturbed them, for Dorchester is in no way satisfactorily reformed at the end of the novel.

Fielding was also consciously aware of her personal struggle to maintain integrity as a writer, for she refers to her "own CRY" which she daily contended with: people who falsely judged and accused her, without understanding her simple truth (*The Cry* I.24). Throughout this novel, Portia exclaims, "O, ye Cry!" This is Fielding's wail against society—a

society which constantly chooses to believe the worst and to ignore the truth.⁵ Malcolm Kelsall, in a condescending Introduction to *The Adventures of David Simple*, writes, "At her best, however, [Fielding] has something of the vision of a child" (xvi). While intending to reduce her writing to something trifling, he has accidentally made a valid point: Fielding's vision is *child-like*, though not *childish*, in that she uses simple characters and is herself consciously simple, in the full sense of simplicity as honest wisdom or lack of duplicity. Fielding openly discusses this conscious attempt to remain simple in *The Cry* through Portia, who says,

I shall always esteem it a greater effect of true wisdom, to suffer myself to be duped by a great variety of my acquaintance, than to fix myself down as a constant dupe to my own unnecessary anxieties. (I.38)

Portia refuses to become suspicious, at the risk of being "duped," because she feels it will lead to duplicity. For her, as for Fielding, simplicity must be consciously preserved. The wise yet simple Mrs. Bilson of *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* explains the social oddity of acceptable deceit, in the form of "Humberging," to a young, innocent, and newly-arrived lady:

'Among all the strange Things Sir *Harry* hath told you, Madam, (said she) he hath omitted the most marvellous of all; which is, that there are Men, nay, even Gentlemen, and who call themselves Men of Honour too, who take Pride in publishing the greatest Falsehoods of their own inventing, to Persons whose Regard for Truth renders them unsuspecting of the Deceit . . .' (II.64-65)

Fielding dislikes this playful deceit, as much as the more general social hypocrisy which she discusses, because of its very intentionality and pointlessness. As well, it is dependent on the innocence of others, and the "duping" of a young girl into believing ridiculous stories is only one step

⁵ It has been argued that Portia and her female co-protagonist, Cylinda, are an autobiographical construct of Fielding's, and that the two women, as a composite, actually represent Fielding (Downs-Miers 322).

removed from “duping” her into a shameful affair. This particular young woman, the object of Mrs. Bilson’s discourse, “was indeed all Wonder and Amazement;” and that people “should wantonly, almost without Temptation, declare War with [Truth], this Lady’s Ignorance of the World (in that respect an Advantage to her) would not suffer her to believe” (II.66-67).⁶

Fielding was clearly aware of her own desire to remain simple, yet she used fiction and near-deceit to convey truth in her writing. Her intentional ambiguity is a form of deception; she tricks the reader into first listening to her ideas and then agreeing with her. By remaining vague in her writing, Fielding claimed to allow the reader to create her own truth. This can be seen in her treatment of the characters in *The Adventures of David Simple*, whom she intentionally never describes physically: she prefers to “leave it to [her] Readers Imagination to form them just as they like best” (303). Thus the reader has no physical obstacles to identifying with the characters; this facilitates the reader’s personal growth along with the characters’. Fielding goes further in *The Governess*: Richardson, her “printer and friend,” suggested that Fielding should be more specific in discussing the students’ punishment in order to clearly discourage corporal punishment (Grey 48). Instead, she writes only that the girls received “the most severe Punishment [Mrs. Teachum] had ever inflicted on any Misses” (*The Governess* 108). Jane Collier responded to Richardson’s criticisms, and her letter “unquestionably reveal[s]” Fielding’s “consciousness of employing subversive tactics via structural strategies” (Downs-Miers 310):

. . . and give me leave to tell you my reasons for thinking it rather better to remain as she has left it, than to have it altered even as *you* proposed. . . . it is, I think, rather better that the

⁶ The practice of “duping” is also condemned in *Familiar Letters* (I.49-58).

girls (her readers) should not know what this punishment was that Mrs. Teachum inflicts; but they should each, on reading it, think it to be the same that they themselves had suffered when they deserved it . . . (qtd. in Grey 48-49)

Collier says much the same for the readers' parents: if Fielding were to describe the punishment as she envisions it, i.e. nonphysical, those that believed in "corporeal severities" would be prejudiced against the book, so that Fielding "will lose the very chance of a fair reading from one half of those that read;" while those that already share Fielding's belief in noncorporeal punishment will "easily infer, that as no whipping is mentioned, no whipping is implied, and therefore they are also engaged in favour of this book" (qtd. in Grey 49-50). As the modern reader can attest, Collier was successful in these arguments, for the text remains unspecific as to the girls' punishment.

The ending of Lady Dellwyn's story is similarly vague: the reader is simply told that "[Dellwyn] often found herself weary of this Life, and yet anxiously avoided every Thought of Death" (*The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* II.281). The narrator closes Dellwyn's life with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*: "Alack! when once our Grace we have forgot, / Nothing goes right; we would, and we would not" (qtd. in *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* II.281). Thus the reader never knows how she dies, or even how she spends the rest of her life; apparently, it is up to each reader's imagination to paint the worst fate possible. This is indubitably a highly individual matter and, therefore, it is the most effective warning against following Dellwyn's pattern that Fielding could create. All these examples operate on the same principle: to facilitate reader-identification with the characters, in order to encourage the reader's self-improvement. As Downs-Miers says, Fielding successfully uses this strategy of ambiguity to produce "fiction which operates on several levels,

for a wide and varied audience" (311).

However, this deliberate ambiguity is a form of deceit, since, although one meaning is intended, others are allowed to exist; the reader is consciously permitted to gather false meanings from the text. Apparently, although Fielding resents duplicity in society, she is not above using it in her novels for what she considers the good of her readers. Just as Fielding contradicts herself in terms of marriage, female friendship, and religion, her words on truth oppose her actions. For, although Fielding's surface message condemns deception and duplicity, the reader is easily able to read her novels as advocates of meritorious deceit. Thus her tendency is, once again, at odds with her real contents; yet, because of her socially compliant surface meanings, she is immune to attacks on the impropriety of her novels' deeper messages.

This examination of Fielding's most important topics—female education, friendship, religion, and truth—shows that Fielding is immersed in ambiguity. Through exploring her treatment of female education, the reader finds that she promotes moral education yet remains ambivalent about academic education for women, mainly as a result of her gender and uncertain social status. As a woman and a dependent, Fielding could hardly afford to risk losing male literary support. Most important, however, is her use of female moral education in her novels to indirectly educate her readers, to teach them how to critically read literature. By developing her readers' capacity for sophisticated interpretation, she paves the way for readers to delve deeply into her novels and extract their own meanings. In other words, she educates her readers in distinguishing between the real contents and tendencies of her novels.

Fielding then makes use of this distinction in her treatment of friendship, religion, and truth. In terms of friendship, she offers as an

authorial moral, or real contents, the benefits and true happiness of marriage, and the instructional capabilities of womanfriends—the protective and socializing function of female friendships. Her hidden message, or tendency, however, contrasts sharply to this ideal. For Fielding, marriage and, indeed, all mixed-sex relationships, are hierarchical and usually disadvantageous for women; held responsible for all domestic difficulties and scandals, women bear the moral load of family and marriage. As well, the socializing function of womanfriends, while beneficial to a protagonist's successful integration into society, can be seen as sinister. By betraying each other into marriage, women aid their own survival; clearly, natural female existence is at odds with the demands of a male-defined society. Through this discussion, we can view Fielding's novels as the friend who simultaneously prepares the reader for patriarchal society and strongly criticizes that society.

A similar paradox exists in Fielding's treatment of religion. While she encourages Christianity as part of her real contents, particularly its original precepts, she indirectly criticizes society's habit of imposing religion on women but not men—her tendency. She overtly encourages the use of Reason, especially by women, as a virtue, once again as an element of her real contents; of course, Reason should only be embraced to a moderate extent. On a more subtle level, she tends covertly to suggest that Reason is not the source of happiness for women, but rather the basis of all misery, involving them in unrewarding self-sacrifice and repression.

Finally, in the area of truth and fiction, Fielding's double meanings continue to contradict each other. While her real contents openly disparage duplicity and deceit and encourage high moral values, she nonetheless uses deceptive techniques to gain her readers' attention and convey her messages. Fielding mimics reality, creating "realistic" novels based on

history or supposed letters, to capture her readers' faith; she includes moral lessons in all her writing; and uses simple, honest characters to communicate her sense of society's danger and malevolence. Moreover, she deliberately leaves her meanings vague, so that the reader may construct her own interpretations. Clearly, Fielding's tendency could be read as condoning deliberate deceit whose intention is virtuous. In this way, Fielding excuses her fictional deceptions as necessary for the communication of her tendencies, which she would have considered virtuous messages in their goals of enlightening or instructing women and sympathetic men.

Far from condemning Fielding for these tactics, I applaud her resourcefulness during a discouraging time for women writers. By creating alternative meanings for her readers to discover, hidden beneath her surface messages, and then educating them in the method of finding these meanings, Fielding escapes possible accusations of impropriety. Fielding was a radical, experimental writer who constructed two layers of meaning, one for the unsympathetic world of patriarchy, and one for her *well-educated* and sensitive readers. Ambiguous to the uninitiated, perhaps, Fielding can be understood by those who read her work in the way she intended—by “the candid reader” who is sympathetic to the author's designs.

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APPENDIX

This appendix contains a select chronology of the life of Sarah Fielding, taken from the Malcolm Kelsall edition of *The Adventures of David Simple* (xxvii-xxviii) listed in the Literature Cited.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Age</u>
1710	(8 November) Sarah Fielding born at East Stour, Dorset	
1718	Mrs. Sarah Fielding, her mother, dies	7
1719	Edmund Fielding, her father, remarries. The four surviving daughters of the first marriage sent to boarding-school in Salisbury and come under the protection of their maternal grandmother, Lady Sarah Gould	8
1733	Lady Gould dies	22
1737-8	The family estate at East Stour divided and eventually sold	26-7
1742	Henry Fielding, <i>Joseph Andrews</i> . Sarah contributes the letter from Leonora to Horatio?	31
1744	<i>The Adventures of David Simple</i> . Sarah now a member of the Richardson circle at North End.	33
1747	<i>Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple</i> . Preface and Letters xl-xliv by Henry Fielding.	36
1749	<i>The Governess, or, Little Female Academy; Remarks on Clarissa, Addressed to the Author?</i>	38
1750-1	Sarah's three sisters die	39-40
1752	Sarah contributes nos. 63 and 64 of <i>The Covent Garden Journal?</i>	41
1753	<i>The Adventures of David Simple, Volume the Last</i>	42
1754	<i>The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable</i> , with Jane Collier (March). Henry Fielding embarks for Lisbon in June (dies October). Sarah Fielding at Bath (July) recovering from illness	43
1757	<i>The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia</i>	46
1758	Now permanently resident near Bath (at Widcombe Lodge?). A frequent visitor to Ralph Allen at Claverton	47
1759	<i>The History of the Countess of Dellwyn</i>	48
1760	<i>The History of Ophelia</i>	49
1762	Xenophon's <i>Memoirs of Socrates</i> (a translation, with notes by James Harris)	51
1764	Ralph Allen dies. Sarah Fielding left £100 in his will	53
1768	(9 April) Sarah dies	57

VITA

Surname: McPeek-Newman Given Names: Kristin Genevieve

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Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

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Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

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Author:


Kristin Genevieve McPeek-Newman

Sept. 23, 1991
Date