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INTERIORITY

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THE PANOPTICON REVIEWED: SENTIMENTALISM AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY INTERIORITY

BY DAVID ROSEN AND AARON SANTESSO

One can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society that stretches from the enclosed disciplines . . . to an indefinitely . . . generalizable mechanism of “panopticism.” . . . In [Bentham’s panoptic principle] there was much more . . . than architectural ingenuity: it was an event in the “history of the human mind.”

—Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*¹

Jeremy Bentham is one of the most familiar and least read of eighteenth-century authors. When he *is* read, moreover, powerful but biased claims made in his name practically ensure that his ideas—and, by extension, a particular strand of intellectual history—will be misunderstood. For Foucault and other prominent interpreters, Bentham’s best-known project, the panopticon, marked a watershed moment in the history of human interiority.² In this view, Bentham’s prison, with its abject inmates and unremitting observers, allowed the State to invade and rewrite the very structure of the human mind, where previously it could only exert crude pressure through physical violence. As Foucault commented, “[The object was] no longer the body, with the ritual play of excessive pains. . . . [I]t [was] no longer the body, but the soul.” The prisoner’s mind was now treated as “a surface of inscription for power,” with the final goal of creating an “obedient subject, [an] individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that [was] exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically *in* him.”³ Indeed, the argument continues, in Bentham’s prisons, a process that had been underway for most of the eighteenth century was suddenly made explicit and given overt spatial expression. The modern disciplinary State, made possible by the coupling of newly perfected human sciences (psychology, criminology, educational theory, and so on) with unremitting surveillance, found an early, concrete symbol in the Benthamite penitentiary.

So goes the familiar account.⁴ We would argue, however, that to read Bentham as a prophet of “internalization” and the modern Sur-

veillance State is anachronistic. In this essay, we propose to address two consequent (and related) errors in the way eighteenth-century psychological and social thought is now received. The first is a tendency to read eighteenth-century texts, literary and otherwise, through lenses colored by powerful developments in poststructuralist or late-Marxist philosophy; the most influential interpreters, in this tradition, of Enlightenment Europe, from Foucault, to Jürgen Habermas, to Terry Eagleton, have tended to ignore, or simplify beyond recognition, highly complex period thinking about interiority and the development of the self. The idea that eighteenth-century society was “disciplinary”—an idea rooted in Foucault’s idiosyncratic interpretation of Bentham—is thus used to explain the behavior of characters ranging from Robinson Crusoe to Mr. Spectator; blessed with twenty-twenty hindsight, we commonly read works from the period as parables of internalization and monodirectional social control, in ways that anticipate contemporary discourse theory.⁵ Yet consider how this position is complicated by a typical passage from Shaftesbury:

There was a time when Men were accountable only for their Actions and Behaviour. . . . Every one took the Air and Look which was natural to him. But in process of time, it was thought decent to mend Mens Countenances, and render their intellectual Complexions uniform and of a sort. . . . Imagine now, what the Effect of this must needs be; when Men became persecuted thus on every side about their *Air* and *Feature*, and were put to their shifts how to adjust and compose their *Mein*, according to the right Mode; when a thousand Models, a thousand Patterns of Dress were current, and alter’d every now and then, upon occasion, according to *Fashion* and the Humour of the Times. Judge whether Mens Countenances were not like to grow constrain’d, and the natural Visage of Mankind, by this Habit, distorted, convuls’d, and render’d hardly knowable.⁶

In Shaftesbury’s rueful but representative account, the relation between observation and interiority, between social pressure and the formation of personality, is understood to be dialectical: the more closely people are watched, the more they tend to perform according to the expectations of their viewers. The more individual behavior, as a result, is perceived as performance, the greater the social anxiety about individual authenticity. Control of any situation, it follows, is inevitably complicated by the arts of impression management: a person must at once meet expectations, but give no sign of calculation; his or her audience, in turn, must watch constantly for insincerity. Though the community exerts an unremitting influence on personal comportment,

the individual, at any given moment, is at least as likely to be dictating terms. For reasons we will discuss presently, the modern theorists most helpful in understanding this triangle of observation, interiority and behavior are not Foucault or Habermas, but rather mid-century sociologists like David Riesman and Erving Goffman, who analyzed the ways that self-aware, theatrical tactics influence and complicate the development of selfhood. In Goffman's well-known statement of the case,

In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. . . . [As] performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized.⁷

Goffman's favored term is "dramaturgy." The thought process that lies behind public actions takes into account social observation but is not controlled by it.

We do not propose to replace a "Foucauldian" or "Habermasian" reading of eighteenth-century social thought with an equally reductive "Goffmanian" model. Rather, the mid-century Anglo-American sociologists provide a practical set of tools, a vocabulary, to analyze eighteenth-century texts without the usual late twentieth-century accretions. By their own admission, the sociologists were refining, updating, and providing a more sophisticated lexicon to describe Enlightenment thinking about selfhood, its nuanced understanding of human relations and the power of sympathy to shape complex behaviors. Specifically, period thinking about sentimentality, both in the work of philosophers like Hume and Smith, and in the long, psychologically probing novels of the period, was an overt and acknowledged influence on the work of Riesman, Goffman and George Herbert Mead.⁸ Admittedly, Habermas's comment that, during the early development of the bourgeois public sphere, "the innermost core of the private . . . was always . . . oriented to an audience," seems to accord well with the dialectical view of social persona we are urging.⁹ Ultimately, however, the particular tradition from which he emerges forecloses on the possibility of taking seriously a personal autonomy that stands (at least partially) outside, and dynamically engages with, the pressures of public expectation; the individual is inevitably overwritten, subjected or interpellated by the prevailing discourses of the time. As Habermas concludes, the subject is only "apparently set free from the constraint of society."¹⁰

Thus the second line of inquiry we intend to pursue: if we can correct the habit of reading Enlightenment texts as anticipatory of (a late twentieth-century) Bentham, might we not also return to Bentham himself, and recover the way his panopticon writings are a product of their own century, the result of a distinctly eighteenth-century way of thinking about personality? His concept of the relation between social observation and individual psychology was surely derived, at least in part, from the intellectual culture around him—and not only from philosophy. As it happens, he was a surprisingly avid reader of sentimental literature, with one author in particular standing out:

When I got hold of a novel, I identified myself with all the personages, and thought more of their affairs than of any affairs of my own. I have wept for hours over Richardson's "Clarissa."¹¹

Bentham the apostle of passionless objectivity is hardly visible in this remark, or in his numerous other references to Richardson. He admits to John Bowring that, as a young man, his "interest [in *Pamela*] became extreme. 'Clarissa' kept me day after day incessantly bathed in tears."¹² It is all too easy to turn Clarissa herself into just one more inhabitant of the panopticon, her personality shaped at unawares by the unremitting strain of being constantly under watch.¹³ Yet rather than ask how Bentham (as he is presently understood) sheds light on her behavior, might we not ask how Clarissa taught Bentham to understand everyday conduct? Could the man committed to the "suffocation of individuality," as critics have had it, have been deeply affected by sentimentalism and its urbane understanding of sympathy?¹⁴ In the space of a brief essay, we cannot read widely, so—taking our cue from Bentham himself—our main focus will fall on his key philosophical and literary influences, two near-contemporary works which, independently and in very different registers, grappled with self and society: Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and Richardson's *Clarissa*.

I. RICHARDSON, SMITH, AND SOCIAL THEATER

Re-reading Richardson, with his impact on Bentham in mind, reveals a surprisingly skeptical and resistant—one might even say tortured—view of behavior under observation, a view that challenges dominant contemporary presumptions about surveillance and self. Even his earliest characters are far from naïve about the power of social scrutiny; nevertheless, in the space between *Pamela* (which Habermas dismisses in a sentence as "mediocre") and *Clarissa*, one can perceive

a startling leap in Richardson's own awareness of the problem and its complexities.¹⁵ To begin with the earlier (1740) work: Pamela and Mr. B, certainly, are conscious of being observed, and worry frequently about "the world's censure."¹⁶ Yet rather than absorbing this disapproval, they imagine themselves as actors able to manipulate the narrative by which they are understood. Thus Mr. B explains that he has "acted too much the Part of a Libertine formerly," and Pamela responds, "I hope I shall know how to be humble, and comport myself as I should do under all these Favours."¹⁷ Her thoughts, that is, remain her own, independent of observational control; far from being instinctively or unconsciously reactive, she behaves in certain ways to control how she is perceived. As Goffman might put it, she and Mr. B are players in an "information game":

[C]ontrol upon the part of the individual reinstates the symmetry of the communication process, and sets the stage for a kind of information game—a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery. It should be added that since the others are likely to be relatively unsuspicious of the presumably unguided aspect of the individual's conduct, he can gain much by controlling it. The others of course may sense that the individual is manipulating the presumably spontaneous aspects of his behavior, and seek in this very act of manipulation some shading of conduct that the individual has not managed to control.¹⁵

Not a bad description of Richardson's novel—but it's all too easy to see why so many of his early readers responded with shock at the apparent hypocrisy of his protagonist.¹⁹ Indeed, her strategic behavior is so pronounced that she was often scorned as a shrewd counterfeiter of emotion, and her author accused of a kind of moral idiocy.²⁰ In *Shamela* (1741), by far the most famous such response, Fielding parodies what he sees as Pamela's cynical performance of the "bashful virgin":

I left off at our sitting down to Supper on our Wedding Night, where I behaved with as much Bashfulness as the purest Virgin in the World could have done. The most difficult Task for me was to blush; however, by holding my Breath, and squeezing my Cheeks with my Handkerchief, I did pretty well.²¹

Fielding, with an Augustan's acute awareness, but also distrust, of the performative, focuses his parody on the seeming moral independence of Pamela's physical mannerisms: her affectation of innocence, her "resolv[ing] not to smile" after a fight because "[n]othing can be more

prudent in a Wife, than a sullen Backwardness to Reconciliation.”²²

Fielding’s work is often judged to have revealed critical flaws in *Pamela* and indeed in sentimental literature generally—flaws that Richardson himself was forced to admit, and which led him to try again with *Clarissa* (published, by happy coincidence, in the year of Bentham’s birth). In the most general sense, this account is surely correct; all the same, in order to understand the terms of Richardson’s response, greater historical specificity is necessary. To take a step back: both Fielding and Richardson, in their views of character development, were influenced by the basic empiricist claim that the persistent observation of surface behavior, though profoundly flawed and unreliable, is nonetheless the best source of information about another person’s real, inner self.²³ Their responses to this insight, however, were diametrically opposite, in historically contingent ways. Fielding’s intellectual conservatism is essentially anti-empiricist; in the world of his novels, reliable old squires are named “Allworthy,” Frenchified fops “Didapper,” and (of course) feigning maidens “Shamela.” They belong to—or express their author’s aching nostalgia for—a moment before the empirical revolution that we might call *allegorical*, a moment, possibly fictitious, when social role and inner persona were indistinguishable, when—still more to the point—a division between surface and interiority would patently make no sense. When Fielding levels his main charge—inauthenticity—at Pamela, he means that her public role, the virtuous maiden, is at variance with her behavior; the social allegory has been disrupted by the heroine’s hypocrisy.

Richardson, on the other hand, worked intellectually in the wake of Locke and Berkeley. In response to empiricism’s basic point—that steady observation is our only source of knowledge—it takes precious little insight to gauge the importance of impression management; reality, before long, becomes less a matter of ontological fact than something made and then broadly consented to—in short, an information game. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which appeared little more than a decade after *Clarissa* (1747), we can see Smith working through these problems in the abstract. Beginning with the Lockean (and Humean) premise that, because “our senses . . . never . . . carry us beyond our own person,” we therefore “have no immediate experience of what other men feel,” Smith identifies our imaginative capacity for sympathy as the root of all social interaction: “[W]e place ourselves in [the other’s] situation . . . changing places in fancy with [him].”²⁴ This act of identification, however, has the perhaps ironic consequence of creating within us a detachment about our *own* behavior:

As [the observers] are continually placing themselves in [the person under observation's] situation, and thence conceiving emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs, and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which he is sensible that they will view it. . . . [He is] constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation . . . [and begins] to view his situation in [a] candid and impartial light.²⁵

With this “coolness” and impartiality, Smith concludes, we become “masters of ourselves,” shaping our own behavior to fit “the particular company we are in.”²⁶

And thus one can observe a process of historical return in the work of writers like Goffman and Mead. In the Anglo-American tradition the purest philosophical expression of this vein of post-empiricism, in which behavior is instrumental and truth is something made, is pragmatism; by their own account, the mid-twentieth century sociologists were extending basic pragmatic insights from the nineteenth century into the study of culture.²⁷ It should come as no surprise, however, that a nascently pragmatic testing of empirical claims should have begun almost at once, in the Georgian period; nor, it follows, should the fit between mid-century sociology and sentimental theory be much of a shock. In contrast to the Foucauldian analysis of eighteenth-century culture, in which distinctly modern ideas about discourse and power are applied retroactively to a foreign set of phenomena, mid-century sociology, which privileges individual autonomy over the power of society, is the natural descendant of sentimentalism and its belief in intuitive moral knowledge.

In the gap between *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, we can witness a growing consciousness of Richardson's sentimental project, his work of pragmatic testing. *Pamela* may be understood as an expression of naïve or unreflective doubt, and when Fielding opened fire with *Shamela*, branding Richardson's heroine, and by extension Richardson himself, a hypocrite, one can imagine that the charge hit home—Richardson suddenly being confronted, as it were, with his own great subject. In a manner of speaking, one of the key debates in Richardson criticism—whether his work is merely an enormous rhetorical experiment or a portrayal of real characters experiencing real things—is beside the point.²⁸ Richardson's mature idea of character fully took into account the way in which, for a sentimental reader, these two questions cannot be separated. Though Fielding's position was profoundly reactionary, and based on an outmoded idea of authentic persona that had no ap-

peal to Richardson, *authenticity itself*, and its treacherous relation to personality, was now revealed as a problem, perhaps *the* problem of the age.²⁹ On practically every page of *Clarissa*, Richardson asks—now fully aware that he is doing so—what authentic character might mean. Is it something inherent—and if so, can it be observable, or does it lie hidden away from all eyes but God’s? Or is it, rather, a matter of performance and consensus? Is personality inborn, or does it grow? If the latter, does it grow in solitude or in the back-and-forth of social interaction? In *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640–1770*, Scott Paul Gordon labels as “Mandevillian misreaders” those critics who see *Clarissa* as an insincere manipulator; to read her behavior as anything but entirely unaffected is to indulge in cynicism.³⁰ Certainly, Richardson himself expressed exasperation at a “worse than Sceptical Age” determined to doubt his characters—and yet a recognition of social theater is not necessarily cynical.³¹ Smith, anticipating a similar displeasure in his readers, had strenuously cautioned against dismissing performative behavior as “only an assumed appearance,” going so far as to make nearly the opposite claim: authentic selfhood could *only* emerge from social intercourse: “Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in a solitary place . . . he could no more think of his own character, . . . of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than . . . of his own face. . . . Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror . . . he wanted before.”³² In much the same spirit, the sentimental novel acknowledged that the public *display* of personality was a necessary step towards the *development* of personality: keeping everything entirely to one’s self was a recipe for emptiness and ethical ignorance. To focus on *Clarissa*’s performative behavior, therefore, is not to discount her individuality or her reality as a character; the danger, instead, lies in assuming a too clear-cut dichotomy between social role and self. To put it mildly, *Clarissa* complicates the view of observed behavior that Fielding satirized, and in a way that perhaps explains Bentham’s move from extreme “interest” (his reaction to *Pamela*) to incessant tears. If Richardson had been stung by Fielding’s criticisms, we would suggest that one result was his energetic investigation, in *Clarissa*, of the ways that behavior is both deliberately executed and authentic—and of the moral and personal consequences of social theater.

In this endeavor, he had at his disposal an almost perfect medium: ritualized interaction, that highly controlled and edited dialogue between actors, found no better literary expression than the epistolary novel.³³ In keeping with empiricist scruples, moreover, the author

could claim no deeper insight into his characters than that provided by the characters themselves.³⁴ Habermas, in short, is correct to call the eighteenth century the “century of the letter”; but by commenting further that letters gave the individual the opportunity to “[unfold] himself in his subjectivity,” he misses the bigger picture: it is worth remembering that the age produced, as an outgrowth of its obsession with social persona, an entire subgenre inspired by the idea that character could and indeed should be manipulated and displayed like a literary text.³⁵ The novel of letters seconds narrative development to character development, and allows plot to be put on hold while characters imagine new ways to invent and present themselves before a scrutinizing public. Much more than *Pamela* (and indeed later works in the genre like Tobias Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* and Frances Burney’s *Evelina*), *Clarissa* discovers these formal strategies for the exploration of ritualized public life.³⁶ As in *Pamela*, the protagonists see themselves as actors playing with established expectations. Lovelace, explaining why he doesn’t pursue Clarissa in a more “virtuous” way, answers, famously, that “it is cruel to ask a modest woman for her consent”; he behaves as he does because, he imagines, any failure to fulfill a social expectation will be noted. Clarissa, in turn, comments about avoiding “a too-ready consent,” suggesting a deep investment in the role of “virtuous lady.”³⁷ So far, not so different from *Pamela*; yet in *Clarissa*, in which so much of the action occurs even as the protagonists are writing, the characters much more explicitly figure themselves as manufactured, as much edited objects as the correspondence they present for scrutiny.³⁸ Lovelace, who takes pride in his ability to present a striking self-portrait in letters, “compare[s] himself to Julius Caesar; who performed great actions by day, and wrote them down at night: And valued himself, that he only wanted Caesar’s out setting, to make a figure among his cotemporaries.”³⁹ Clarissa, meanwhile, likens herself to the stereotypical coquette, quoting a poem that concludes, “[men’s] false hearts / *Compel* our Sex to act dissembling parts.”⁴⁰ In doing so, she participates in the novel’s own reflexivity about action and selfhood; the epistolary description of her behavior conveys a meaning to an audience, and is akin to the tales she hears of other women: illustrative “histories.”⁴¹

There is a temptation, in discussing *Clarissa*, to read the novel as postmodern more than two hundred years before the fact, the idea of authentic selfhood (and reality itself) disappearing down the rabbit hole of discourse. And to be sure, the novel sometimes seems uncannily avant-garde in its gestures: Clarissa is naturally dramatic,

perhaps, because she grew up partly in a simulacrum—her nouveau-riche grandfather’s “Dairy-House,” in which she played at being a commoner—which introduced her early to the advantages of constructing an artificial public façade. To follow this line of speculation too far, however, is to miss the period-specific complexity of Richardson’s engagement with the authenticity question. Once again, Goffman provides a terminology to describe what’s at stake:

Ordinarily the definitions of the situation projected by the several different participants are sufficiently attuned to one another so that open contradiction will not occur. I do not mean that there will be the kind of consensus that arises when each individual present candidly expresses what he really feels and honestly agrees with the expressed feelings of the others present. This kind of harmony is an optimistic ideal and in any case not necessary for the smooth working of society. Rather, each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable.⁴²

Even under the best circumstances, consensus is underscored by discontent. Though reality is an artificial projection commonly agreed on, the projection is unlikely to satisfy any one participant fully, and complete harmony is but an “optimistic ideal.” Yet where Goffman (pragmatically) shrugs his shoulders (full happiness of all participants is not necessary for society to work), Richardson belonged to an age more likely to worry the issue. In contrast to *Pamela*, *Clarissa* is notable less for its view of behavior as performative than for the strenuousness with which it tests this view. What happens, *Clarissa* asks, when the projected realities of the protagonists are not merely dissonant, but incompatible—when consensus cannot be realized? When a “rake” and “paragon” are set on a collision course, does a performative reality survive, or does something break? Under the duress of physical assault, does something of the essential self emerge from behind the mask, or does selfhood, having *become* the mask, crumble? Can life still be understood as theater when staged personae come up against brute force—and once this kind of violation has occurred, what is left for a genre, indeed an ethos, premised on natural theatricality?

The results are ambiguous. Lovelace’s infamous revelation of his scheme—“the haughty Beauty will not refuse me, when her pride of being corporally inviolate is brought down”—might be read as a simple admission of evil, or an act of violent desperation; but this misses the way Richardson’s characters are themselves entangled in

the labyrinth of their own dramaturgy.⁴³ Lovelace—more than anyone alert to Clarissa's tactics ("Then who says, Miss Clarissa Harlowe is the Paragon of Virtue? . . . Has her Virtue ever been *proved*? —Who has dared to try her Virtue?")—seems to conclude that the only way to challenge a performance of virtue is through plain physicality: to remove the physical proof of virtue, and thus cause Clarissa to drop as futile the mask of chastity.⁴⁴ Yet just as Clarissa's performance perhaps creates actual virtue, so Lovelace's strategy has the commensurate effect of transforming a performance of evil into the real thing. It is on this question of real versus performed ethics, in any case, that the twentieth-century sociologist and eighteenth-century moralist part ways. Goffman is anything but an amoralist when it comes to action; nevertheless, his moral views would be profoundly disturbing to an earlier religious sensibility. Reality, for Goffman, is finally a gentleman's agreement; if getting on in society is a matter of consensus, it is unethical to break form:

Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is. . . . Since the sources of impression used by the observing individual involve a multitude of standards pertaining to politeness and decorum, . . . we can appreciate afresh how daily life is enmeshed in moral lines of discrimination[.]⁴⁵

It is a conclusion that replaces God with society as the source and judge of proper behavior—a conclusion that, in very different ways, neither the humanist Smith, nor the polemically Christian Richardson would ever find satisfying; and yet, disturbingly, it was a natural consequence of each author's post-empirical position.⁴⁶

Thus the profound ambiguity of the novel's ending. On the one hand, Clarissa's demise can be read as a final affirmation of impression management. In this view, Lovelace underestimates the power of performance, or in any case Clarissa's commitment to performance as self-construction. Her reaction to the rape is to starve herself to death—and in doing so, she chooses a new type of public display (though now of shame rather than chastity), which affects her body more violently than Lovelace could. Even critics determined to defend Clarissa from charges of hypocrisy recognize the final turn as transforming a private body into the ultimate public stage: those around her are forced to wit-

ness Clarissa's withering away.⁴⁷ Virtue, in a manner of speaking, wins, even as dramaturgy is overtly acknowledged as a necessary condition of modern life. He or she who assumes a role most effectively and convincingly gains power over the surrounding narrative (of the book as well as the life), even if the power gained is annihilating. And yet something in this conclusion rankles, seems implausible. Contrarily, we might recognize Richardson's sensitivity to the way that social posturing, wearing masks, is a necessity in which we all engage to control the public meaning of our lives. It is also, however, something that, in extremis, must inevitably be surrendered. For Richardson the moralist, this is the way of the world, and the novel necessarily ends with Clarissa's death, the moment when she can finally surrender her mask, confident in the knowledge that the only adequate judge of true personhood is God.

II. PANOPTIC SPACE AND SOCIAL REFORM

With Clarissa's sorry end, we may return to Bentham, "bathed in tears." Those tears, we suggest, were prompted not only by Clarissa's fate, but also in part by the suicidal end-logic of Richardson's thought experiment, a logic whose premises he had to accept even as they challenged his attempts at social reform. The arguments in his *Panopticon Letters* that have had the most lasting influence (via Foucault) are to be found in a handful of passages towards the beginning. Most notorious, perhaps, is his claim in the preface that the prison offers "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example."⁴⁸ While the cells (and the prisoners) are open at all times to inspection from the central guard tower, the reverse is not true; in a crucial innovation, the windows of the inspector's "lodge" are furnished with Venetian blinds, which are always closed. The prisoners, in short, never know whether they are being watched or not—and in his first letter, Bentham concludes that this uncertainty will produce certain desirable effects:

[T]he more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose of the establishment have been attained. . . . [T]he greater chance there is, of a given person's being at a given time actually under inspection, the more strong will be the persuasion—the more *intense*, if I may say so, the *feeling*, he has of his being so.⁴⁹

Especially in this obscure and ominous “purpose of the establishment” one seems to hear the prophet of modern authoritarianism, with the Powers That Be colonizing and rewriting the individual personality. Bentham, it seems plausible to conclude, is outlining a psychology of internalization, with the inmate, under the pressure of constant observation, gradually and unconsciously absorbing the rules of the prison; eventually, the rules become, permanently, part of his very identity.

And yet with the slightest further reading, it is all too clear how selectively Bentham has to be read for this conclusion to be reached. Bentham conceived of his panopticon as anything but an “indefinitely generalizable mechanism”: while he imagined it might be employed in certain other institutional settings designed for “inspection” (such as work-houses and schools), he warned against its “perverse applications” and certainly did not consider it a model for society as a whole.⁵⁰ Indeed, he probably would have resisted the coinage “panopticism” as altogether too abstract a concept. While Foucault, very much a product of the twentieth century as well as an intellectual tradition given to totalizing claims, grandly pronounced that “there is no outside” in a surveillance society, Bentham was quite certain that the effects he hoped to achieve could only occur in a discrete and controlled, indeed, a walled, environment: as he noted at the outset, his prison must occupy “a space not too large.”⁵¹ Nor was Bentham sure that the psychological effects of internalization would be appropriate, let alone possible, for all classes of society. Russia, a land of “stupid people,” inured to centuries of despotism, offered ready fodder for his prison houses, as did the British underclass—but one could hardly expect internalization from the better-educated, “superior ranks of life”: the Foucaults of this world would not be deceived.⁵²

It is worth remembering that Bentham’s panopticon writings are dauntingly extensive. After the initial series of letters, published in 1787, he composed two long postscripts, each far longer than the original series, as well as a finely detailed comparison—longer still—between his prison scheme and the convict settlement in New South Wales. These last three documents are barely known today, and most of Bentham’s vast correspondence, in which he pursued his panopticon scheme for the greater part of three decades before finally admitting defeat, is only now, slowly, finding its way into print.⁵³ In this subsequent writing, the idea of internalization is barely to be descried, but Bentham the heir to the sentimental tradition is evident at all points. For one thing, his intentions, contrary to the picture offered by Foucault, are explicitly philanthropic. To a modern sensibility, his plan might well seem bar-

baric; compared, however, to the appalling prison conditions of the time, it was a great leap forward.⁵⁴ Natural light, relative privacy and safety from other prisoners, indoor plumbing, no need for shackling in irons: the Newgates of popular dread could boast nothing like it.

More relevant to our point, his psychology, when examined more closely, is essentially of its age, rather than anticipatory of Foucault. When Habermas remarked that “Bentham was unthinkable without Adam Smith,” he was thinking primarily of economics, and the immense influence *The Wealth of Nations* had on Bentham’s writings about political economy.⁵⁵ But Smith’s work on sympathy and sentiment was no less an inspiration: his insight that, to produce “concord,” a person must modify his or her behavior to win the sympathy of his observers, found a practical echo in the panopticon, a machine designed to promote such modifications of behavior.⁵⁶ Panoptic observation, Bentham made perfectly clear, was meant to encourage and channel the natural theatricality of inmates. Forty years earlier, Samuel Johnson had identified, as the chief source of recidivism in jails, unstructured social relations among the prisoners:

The misery of gaols is not half their evil; they are filled with every corruption which poverty and wickedness can generate between them; with all the shameless and profligate enormities that can be produced by the impudence of ignominy, the rage of want, and the malignity of despair. In a prison the awe of the publick eye is lost, and the power of the law is spent; there are few fears, there are no blushes. The lewd inflame the lewd, the audacious harden the audacious. Every one fortifies himself as he can against his own sensibility.⁵⁷

As if in answer to Johnson’s insight, Bentham asserts that the prison is meant to *model* right conduct. Foucault, naturally, had seen the most distinctive spatial feature of the panopticon—the central position of the inspector and peripheral, sequestered aspect of the prisoners—as irredeemably oppressive, a physical embodiment of the way State power traps the individual within limiting discourses. Bentham would have found this idea utterly foreign; as Goffman observes, there is an opposite way to understand the building’s configuration:

As both effect and enabling cause of [one’s] commitment to the part one is currently performing, we find that “audience segregation” occurs; by audience segregation, the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting. . . . [It is] a device for protecting fostered impressions.⁵⁸

It is perfectly natural, in other words, for a person to act differently towards different people; different social situations require different kinds of performance, a fact likely to be lost on criminals and social outcasts. The individual, properly, is manifold—and the radiating spaces of the panopticon answer to and demonstrate this basic psychology, rather than insist on delimiting power. At stake is a proper structuring of the prisoners' autonomy, not their subjection to the dicta of a monolithic authority.

Thus, where Foucault makes much of Bentham's insistence on the isolation of each prisoner—the better to internalize the rules of the watchers—Bentham in fact retreats from this position almost at once. As he comments in the first postscript, "Of perfect solitude . . . I know but of one use,—the breaking [of] the spirit."⁵⁹ Isolation, in other words, reduces the naturally sociable inmate to idiocy, not obedience. A few pages later, in perhaps his most startling insight, he suggests that prisoners wear masks when observed. Constant surveillance, he reasons, might well encourage a hardening of the spirit and recalcitrance, rather than an internalization of the rules; so how better to encourage right behavior than dress the prisoners in costumes?

A mask affords [remedy] at once. Guilt will thus be pilloried . . . without the exposure of the guilty. With regard to the sufferer, the sting of shame will be sheathed, and with regard to the spectators, the salutary impression, instead of being weakened, will be heightened, by this imagery. The scene . . . will be decorated by—why mince the word?—by a masquerade . . . a serious, affecting, and instructive one.⁶⁰

In the final reckoning, Bentham was never as sanguine as Foucault about the process of internalization itself. For Foucault, the end-result of constant watching was perfect certainty on the part of the watchers: an "omnipresent and omniscient power."⁶¹ Bentham's concluding thoughts, in a passage that present-day commentators tend to ignore, were far more ambiguous, and indeed sentimental:

Detection is the object of [the spy]; *prevention*, that of the [panopticon]. . . . The object of the first was to pry into the secret recesses of the heart; the latter, confining its attention to *overt* acts, leaves thoughts and fancies to their proper *ordinary*, the court *above*.⁶²

Hardly the language of an authoritarian seeking to smother individuality; rather, the phrase "secret recesses of the heart" is—perhaps consciously—a near quotation from Richardson.⁶³ The idea that the

State could (let alone should) take over the very consciousness of its citizens could not have been further from Bentham's intentions; rather, like Richardson, he drew a sharp distinction between the performance that is part of everyday social action and the truth of inner life, whose only possible spectator is God. These passages, perhaps, have been overlooked by critics because their Christian trappings seem quaint; in fact, in his anticipation of the "dramaturgical" view of social behavior—a view developed in the literature which so affected him—Bentham's understanding of interiority is more to the moment than that of his modern interpreters.

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NOTES

We would like to thank Dan Mitchell and the staff of Special Collections at University College London.

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 216.

² See, for example, Michael Ignatieff's *A Just Measure of Pain: the Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 109–13.

³ Foucault, 101–2, 128–29; emphasis ours.

⁴ See, for example, D. J. Manning, *The Mind of Jeremy Bentham* (London: Longmans, 1968); or D. G. Long, *Bentham on Liberty* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977). Janet Semple, in the Introduction to her *Bentham's Prison* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1–16, offers a good review of anti-Benthamite positions.

⁵ The most influential application of Bentham's theories to eighteenth-century literature has been John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), chapter 2 of which (43–61) is dedicated to *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Bender focuses particularly on how "Defoe's narratives record the onset of an epoch-making revision in men's exercise of final authority over one another" (64). For Mr. Spectator as panoptical agent, see Scott Paul Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 90–100.

⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vol. (London, 1711–1714), 1:83–84.

⁷ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 251. See also Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), and *Relations in Public* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); and David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961). We will not review here the numerous critical applications of Goffman's theories to literature (which, at least since J. A. Hall's "Sincerity and Politics: The 'Existentialist' vs Goffman and Proust" [*Sociological Review* 25 (1977): 535–550] have often focused on the question of role-playing in the novel); we will note, however, that queer theory has served as a sort of counter-balance, with numerous critics (such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) attempting to mark out an idea of performativity distinct from Goffman's.

⁸ As it happens, both Goffman and Riesman were avid readers of, and engaged closely with, eighteenth-century texts. See Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 213, notes 1 and 2 and Riesman, 92–93 and 101. See also Charles W. Morris's introduction to Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1934), xxiv.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 49.

¹⁰ Habermas, 46.

¹¹ Bentham, in John Bowring, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 10 in *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. Bowring, 11 vol. (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 21.

¹² Bentham, in Bowring, 22.

¹³ See, for example, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989); and Daryl Ogden, *The Language of the Eyes* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 67 and forward. Work on *Clarissa* by a number of other critics, including Kristina Straub and Terry Eagleton, also reflects the deep influence of Foucault.

¹⁴ This quotation is from Long, who disputes this view (218).

¹⁵ Habermas, 43.

¹⁶ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded*, 1st ed., 3 vol. (London, 1741), 2:170.

¹⁷ Richardson, *Pamela*, 2:56.

¹⁸ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 8.

¹⁹ These responses included both critical replies and innumerable parodies, ranging from Eliza Haywood's full-length *Anti-Pamela; or, Feign'd Innocence Detected* (with its protagonist, Syrena Tricksy) to anonymous pamphlets. See Bernard Kreissman, *Pamela-Shamela: A Study of the Criticisms, Burlesques, Parodies, and Adaptations of Richardson's Pamela* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1960).

²⁰ Certainly, there is at least a rudimentary awareness of this problem in *Pamela*. After the heroine's fortunes have turned, for example, and her marriage with Mr. B is arranged, Pamela's main concern is to assure the world that her actions have been sincere, that she hasn't simply been a calculating gold-digger. This produces passages of remarkable nuance, as in her explanation to her father and Mr. B why she does not want to rush the wedding: "Sir, . . . were I too sudden, it would look as if I doubted whether you would hold in your Mind, and was not willing to give you Time for Reflection. But otherwise, to be sure, I ought to resign myself implicitly to your Will" (2:112).

²¹ Henry Fielding, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*, ed. Sheridan W. Baker, Jr. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953), 64.

²² Fielding, 69.

²³ The question of the readiness of novelists' acceptance of empiricism has of course been central to criticism of the novel since Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957); more recently, Michael McKeon, in *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987), argues for the importance of the tension between "naïve empiricism" and "extreme skepticism" over the course of the early seventeenth century. McKeon views these tendencies as dialectically related (47–52).

²⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 11–12. All future page references are to this edition.

²⁵ Smith, 27–28.

²⁶ Smith, 28. Haakonssen summarizes the argument pithily: "As agents or moral beings, other people are . . . the creation of our imagination. But the most remarkable feature of Smith's theory of sympathy is that the same can be said of ourselves; as moral agents we are acts of creative imagination" (xiv).

²⁷ See Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 48–49; see also Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 3–26, 114, and following. For a contrasting view, see Alan Wolfe, "The Missing Pragmatic Revival in American Social Science," in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), 199–206.

²⁸ This debate, which has its roots in the earliest responses to the novel, was given new life by the rise of poststructuralist readings of *Clarissa*, such as William Beatty Warner's *Reading Clarissa* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979) and Terry Castle's *Clarissa's Ciphers* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), and the ensuing responses by those committed to exploring or celebrating the psychological reality of *Clarissa* herself (such as Eagleton and Gordon).

²⁹ Modern critical treatments of the problem date back at least to Lionel Trilling's discussion, in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), of the gradual replacement of the former by the latter during the Enlightenment; other works, including David Holbrook's *The Novel and Authenticity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), assume that the problem only coalesces fully as a literary concern at the end of the eighteenth century.

³⁰ See Gordon, *Power of the Passive Self*, 20 and throughout, and "Disinterested Selves: *Clarissa* and the Tactics of Sentiment," *ELH* 64 (1997): 473–502. See also Heather Zias, "Who Can Believe: Sentiment and Cynicism in Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Eighteenth Century Life* 27:3 (2003): 99–123.

³¹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed. Florian Stuber, 3rd ed., 8 vol. (London, 1751; repr., New York: AMS, 1990), 8:291.

³² Smith, 28, 129.

³³ For an interesting discussion of Richardson's use of the epistolary form to create psychologically "real" characters and personalities, see Stephen M. Cohan, "*Clarissa* and the Individuation of Character," *ELH* 43 (1976): 163–83.

³⁴ Several critics have pursued Robert Adams Day's suggestion that "the earliest English epistolary novels may have evolved from the drama" (*Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson* [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1966], 195). See especially John Richetti, "Richardson's Dramatic Art in *Clarissa*," *British Theatre and the Other Arts 1660–1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1983), 288–308.

³⁵ Habermas, 48.

³⁶ While *Evelina* sounds the Richardsonian theme of following Evelina's "first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life" and tracking "her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world," its use of the epistolary form is not as radical as Richardson's (Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. Stewart J. Cooke [New York: Norton, 1998], 6). Frances Ferguson argues that "[i]n *Pamela* or *Clarissa* an almost infinite number of reprises and complications can take place without affecting the basic movement of the narrative" ("Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61 [2000]: 157–80, 165).

³⁷ For "It is cruel," see *Clarissa*, 3:229; for "too ready consent," see 1:11.

³⁸ *Clarissa* consistently imagines moments in her life as "scenes": "May but my closing scene be happy!" (2:246); Lovelace consistently imagines his life as a play he is writing, and famously opens volume 5 with a dramatic relation of his interaction with *Clarissa*

in Hampstead ("Scene: Hampstead Heath," and so forth). See also Tom Keymer's investigation of the letters as partly rhetorical and partly "spontaneous transcription" of the heart in *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 6, 32.

³⁹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1:67.

⁴⁰ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1:11.

⁴¹ *Clarissa* and Lovelace both refer to the salutary "histories" of other female characters; see for example 3:331, 5:117.

⁴² Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 9.

⁴³ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 5:283.

⁴⁴ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 3:80. Warner views Lovelace's actions similarly, though he is more willing to see the logic behind them as justifiable: "rape is the most cogent response to Clarissa's fictional projection of her self as a whole unified body" (49).

⁴⁵ Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, 13, 250.

⁴⁶ Smith's solution to the dilemma, which does not merit extended discussion in the body of our essay, is to posit an ideal and impartial spectator, abstracted from our social interactions. See Smith, 169 and following.

⁴⁷ The idea that Clarissa's death is inherently performative is a unifying one: while Eagleton excoriates Warner as a misogynist out to ruin Clarissa's good name, his assertion that Clarissa's death is designed to identify her as "a saint and martyr" resembles Warner's claim that the death is Clarissa's attempt to exert "Godlike authority" over those around her (Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982], 74; Warner, 75).

⁴⁸ Bentham, "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House," *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, 4:39.

⁴⁹ Bentham, "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House," 4:40, 4:44.

⁵⁰ Bentham, "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House," 4:66.

⁵¹ Foucault, 301; Bentham, "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House," 4:40.

⁵² Bentham, "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House," 4:49, 4:45. The first panopticon was actually designed and constructed by Samuel Bentham (Jeremy's brother) on Potemkin's estate in Russia.

⁵³ The UCL Bentham Project aims to publish a new edition of all the works and correspondence of Bentham. Twenty-six volumes (of an estimated seventy) have so far appeared.

⁵⁴ Indeed, Bentham's place in the contemporary, largely Christian effort to create more humane prison conditions in order to encourage reflection (led by Jonas Hanway, William Blackburn and others) is often underestimated.

⁵⁵ Habermas, 86.

⁵⁶ Smith, 27.

⁵⁷ Samuel Johnson, *Idler* 38 (6 January 1759), in *The Idler and the Adventurer*, ed. W. J. Bate et al, vol. 2 in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 23 vol. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1958), 120.

⁵⁸ Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, 49.

⁵⁹ Bentham, "Postscript, Part I," *Works*, 4:71–72.

⁶⁰ Bentham, "Postscript, Part I," *Works*, 4:79.

⁶¹ Foucault, 197.

⁶² Bentham, "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House," 4:66.

⁶³ Anna Howe refers to the "inmost recesses of your heart" (*Clarissa*, 1:255); Lovelace speaks of his desire to trace human nature "thro' its most secret recesses" (*Clarissa*, 5:213).