

Caught Unawares by a Benefactor: Embodying the Deserving Object of Charity in the Eighteenth-Century Novel

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When on their way to London, Tom Jones and Partridge are attacked by a highwayman, who wants a hundred-pound bank-note that Tom carries in his pocket, Tom's behavior manifests both his personal bravery and what strikes Partridge (and some readers) as a rather extravagant kindness. After deftly disarming the robber, Tom lets him tell his story. He learns that this is the first robbery that the man has attempted, that the pistol is not even loaded, and that the "poor wretch" has been driven to this act of violence by the "greatest ... imaginable" distress, "that of five hungry children, and a wife lying in of a sixth, in the utmost want and misery."¹ To prove that he is not lying, the man offers to take Tom and Partridge to his house, "not above two miles off." When Tom pretends that he and Partridge would indeed go with him and "his fate should depend entirely on the truth of his story," the man expresses "so much alacrity," that Tom feels "completely satisfied with his veracity, and [begins] now to entertain sentiments of compassion for him." As Fielding puts it, "He returned the fellow his empty pistol, advised him to think of

1. Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. John Bender and Simon Stern (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 593–94. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

honester means of relieving his distress, and gave him a couple of guineas for the immediate support of his wife and family, adding, 'He wished he had more for his sake, for the hundred pound that had been mentioned was not his own.'" The novel's narrator anticipates that his readers will be "divided in their opinions" concerning Tom's action:

Some may applaud it, perhaps, as an act of extraordinary humanity, while those of a more saturnine temper will consider it as a want of regard to that justice which every man owes his country. Partridge certainly saw it in that light; for he testified much dissatisfaction on the occasion, quoted an old proverb, and said, "He should not wonder if the rogue attacked them again before they reached London." (594)

Although the narrator presents the two responses to Tom's behavior as more or less mutually exclusive, I can think of a third response combining some elements of the two. When I imagine myself having barely escaped a robbery at gun point, I suspect that I would be beset by doubts similar to that of Partridge; I might think that left at large the robber would soon attack somebody else and that by letting him go, I would be unintentionally complicit in that future crime. Even if I learn of strongly mitigating circumstances and begin to pity my attacker and want to help him, my feelings *still* would be tinged with uneasiness. Somewhat paradoxically, then, it is my sympathy with Partridge's position (however unattractively he behaves throughout the whole incident²) that aligns me with those readers who would "applaud" Tom's "extraordinary humanity." Because I am aware of my own ambivalence, I admire even more Tom's leap of faith,

2. Partridge first throws himself on the ground, flat on his face, expecting to be shot and loudly begging the mercy of the robber, and, then, when the danger has passed, implores Tom to "kill the villain ... this instant" (593). And yet, shortly before the incident, he had been trying to talk Tom into breaking the hundred-pound note that belongs to Sophia.

his ability to believe sincerely the best of the man; for by trusting him without second thoughts, Tom might be able to touch the budding highwayman as no doubting benefactor could and to make him truly repent his recent action.

And yet there is something that we miss in the highwayman episode as we consider Tom's and Partridge's respective reactions and try to imagine ourselves in a similar situation. Significant as this episode is in highlighting once more Tom's striking good nature, it also addresses a very particular concern of eighteenth-century public life. Grounded in the changing dynamics of early modern philanthropy, this concern can be formulated as follows: How do we recognize a truly deserving object of charity in a society wherein the increasing dissolution of traditional communal ties has made it difficult for a charitably disposed individual to verify the (presumably impoverished) claimant's story? As I argue in this essay, the eighteenth-century novel offered a kind of compensatory fantasy for a reader anxious about being duped into ill-judged almsgiving by a crafty professional mendicant. From Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and Sarah Fielding's *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759) to Frances Burney's *Evvelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782) and Thomas Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792), novels include scenes in which a truly deserving poor person encounters a benefactor in a situation where the deserving person does not recognize the benefactor as such and thus has no incentive to behave in such a way as to excite the latter's compassion. Such a person *embodies* a truly desperate need precisely by failing to *perform* in accordance with the established expectations of one who is impoverished.

After all, the intention of Fielding's Mr. Anderson (the name of the highwayman) is to victimize Tom Jones and Partridge, not to present himself as a victim. Indeed, by attempting to rob Tom and Partridge, the highwayman's distress becomes more immediately believable than it would have been if he had approached the travelers with an outstretched arm and described his miseries in moving detail. Of course, it is very likely that Tom would have still given him something had he actually presented himself as a victim. However, such an act of giving could have been perceived

by eighteenth-century readers as more naïve than the one described in the book because Tom would be relying on Mr. Anderson's words alone; as it is, Tom is responding to the man's unmistakable willingness to risk his life and liberty to procure some money. I say this not to diminish our impression of Tom's kindness (for example, by implying that Tom gives alms only when he receives the strongest possible proof of need) but, rather, to point out that Tom might actually be wiser and more discriminating in his charitable impulses than we tend to think.

To foreground the novel's portrayal of a deserving object of charity caught unawares by a potential almsgiver, I begin by considering challenges faced by the period's benefactor wishing to assist the poor on his or her own, that is, outside of or in addition to the established or newly emerging organized channels of philanthropy. Here I rely on the classical study of English philanthropy by David Owen, as well as its recent revisions by such scholars as Donna T. Andrew, Bronislaw Geremek, and Sarah Lloyd, drawing in particular on Andrew's illuminating examination of the philanthropic career of Margaret Georgiana, Lady Spencer. I further turn to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* (1760–61), and then to *Tom Jones*, *Countess of Dellwyn*, *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Anna St. Ives* to discuss those narratives' treatment of private philanthropy. Here I focus in particular on the eighteenth-century novel's productive violation of the implicit cultural script mandating the behavior of the benefactor and her prospective beneficiary upon their first meeting. I conclude by touching briefly on the genre's response to the philanthropist's anxiety about assisting strangers whose social accountability becomes increasingly problematic under the conditions of the unprecedented growth of urban population.

I.

Henry Fielding was only partly right when he proudly proclaimed charity "the very characteristic virtue [of his] time."³ The

3. Henry Fielding, *The Covent-Garden Journal and a Plan of the Universal Register-Office*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1988), 247.

eighteenth century was not unique in its charitable impulses. The two preceding centuries saw an “extraordinary outpouring of wealth from the merchant aristocracy and gentry”⁴ aimed at easing the lives of the poor in their communities. What made the eighteenth-century practices of giving different from those common under the Tudors and the Stuarts, and thus must have justly struck Fielding and his contemporaries as particular to their age, was the emergence of *organized* philanthropy. Along with the traditional figure of the individual giver now appeared the philanthropic association, such as the Hospital—a secular institution supported by numerous donors, the majority of whom rarely came in direct contact with the immediate objects of their charity—the *specific* illegitimate children of the poor, disabled soldiers and sailors, indigent pregnant women, prostitutes, and the like. The number of hospitals establishing this new kind of relationship between the giver and the recipient of charity rose from two before 1700 to thirty one by 1800 (not counting numerous regional hospitals), a statistic that reflects deeper transformations in the social fabric of early modern England.⁵

Because of my essay’s emphasis on the “embodied,” that is, difficult-to-fake, proofs of financial need, I shall limit my discussion of the changes of the early modern philanthropic landscape to one specific issue that assumed paramount significance for both associated philanthropies and private benefactors as the century went on, namely, how to tell if the person asking for assistance truly deserves to be assisted. There was one particular form of charity for which this question was less pressing. Wealthy landowners helping the poor of their own large parishes had the advantage of living in relative proximity to them and thus knowing their actual situation or being able to consult other people who knew it. Thus we learn from Donna Andrew that

4. David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660–1960* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), 64.

5. For an important recent analysis of the period’s philanthropic effort, see Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989).

Lady Spencer had sponsored for ten years as a seaman a man whose case was apparently vouched for by her brother, Charles Poyntz, who was minister in the young man's parish. At the same time, she refused, on moral grounds, to help another man from a local parish because, as she wrote to him, he "must remember that her first knowledge of him was his living with a Wife he had publicly married while another Wife by whom he had many children was still alive."⁶

On the whole, visiting and helping the local poor was as routine a feature of the daily life of eighteenth-century gentry as it had been for their forefathers, and so the problem of the lack of information about the needy person's background did not arise. Not surprisingly, this issue does not come up when fictional heroines such as Richardson's *Clarissa* or Austen's *Emma* engage in charitable activities in their own parishes. We hear instead that *Emma* "understood [the] ways [of the poor], could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little, entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will."⁷ Similarly, *Clarissa*, before her ill-fated elopement with Lovelace, visited her neighboring poor about twice a week, bestowing "two or three hours at a time ... in this benevolent enjoyment"⁸ and thus had all the information she needed when she wanted to assist a "set of honest indigent people whom [she called her] poor" (1418).

6. Quoted in Andrew, "Noblesse oblige: Female charity in an age of sentiment," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1995), 284.

7. Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 81. For a different view of this passage, see Jane Nardin, "Charity in *Emma*," *Studies in the Novel* 7.1 (1975): 61–72.

8. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), 1471. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

In contrast to Clarissa and Emma, who know well the poor of their respective parishes, a villainous nobleman from Amelia Opie's novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1805), one Sir Patrick O'Carrol, is willfully ignorant of "poverty and distress" surrounding his "mansion-house."⁹ When after seeing the sufferings of his "poor cottagers," Sir Patrick's newly arrived stepdaughter, Miss Mowbray, asks him to give her some money to relieve them, he replies that he is "never roused to charity by descriptions of others" and "must always see the distress which [he is] solicited to relieve" (59). The next day, Sir Patrick indeed descends upon the cottagers, discharges their debts, and gives "them a sum of money for their future wants" (60). These deeds seem motivated by desire to impress favorably the attractive Miss Mowbray, and the readers of the period must have recognized the behavior as faulty. Had Sir Patrick been a responsible landowner, he would not have needed to visit the cottage to check the "descriptions of others," for he would have known the situation of his poor better than Miss Mowbray, who had moved in just yesterday. The need for a special investigation should be out of place in the relationship between a lord of the manor and his tenants.

With the move from the traditional parish model to institutionalized urban charities, such as the Foundling Hospital, the Magdalen, the Lock Hospital, the Lying-In Hospital, the Small-Pox Hospital, and the Marine Society, the issue of investigation assumed a different form. When British men and women wanted to contribute to these new philanthropies, they did not have to concern themselves with checking out situations of individual unwed mothers, prostitutes, syphilitic patients, disabled sailors, or indigent pregnant women to ensure that these people were not professional mendicants hoping to profit by their countrymen's kindness: various safeguards implemented by the governors and guardians of those charities aimed at weeding out the impostors. For example, when the first group of prostitutes ap-

9. Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray, or The Mother and Daughter*, ed. Jeanette Winterson (London: Pandora Press, 1986), 58. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

plied for admission to the Magdalen, at least one woman was rejected on the grounds of not really being a prostitute.¹⁰ Similarly, to ensure that no legitimate children would be admitted to the Foundling Hospital, its administration took in no infants over two months old,¹¹ and it required a woman who wanted her infant to be admitted to bring in either a letter from her clergyman or another document proving that she was not married.¹²

These safeguards received spotty coverage in the popular discourse. On the one hand, some people thought that there was still room for abuse of the system. It was rumored that the reason any man would champion the case of this charity was that he hoped to swindle the public into paying for the upkeep of his own bastards; a 1750 pamphlet claimed that the Hospital's founding father, Captain Thomas Coram, worked so hard on behalf of illegitimate children because he "had many a Lass grappl'd under the Lee."¹³ On the other hand, given the fact that eighteenth-century novels rarely feature *any* characters using services of the new hospitals (for reasons that I discuss elsewhere¹⁴) they do not seem to be, on the whole, preoccupied with the possibility that people other than actual prostitutes, or actual

10. See Owen, *English Philanthropy*, 58. See also Jennie Batchelor, "'Industry in Distress': Reconfiguring Femininity and Labor in the Magdalen House," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28.1 (2004): 1–20.

11. It was assumed that a child over two months old would be given up by its parents not for the reasons of illegitimacy but for a variety of economic reasons.

12. This latter rule did not apply, of course, during the period of indiscriminate admission beginning in 1756, when in exchange for Parliamentary support, the Hospital had to take in all infants brought to its doors.

13. Porcupinus Pelaguius, *The Scandalizade, A Panegyri-Satiri-Comic-Dramatic Poem* (London, 1750).

14. See the introduction to Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2005).

disabled mariners, or actual illegitimate children would benefit from those services. Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) does contain a scene in which an unsympathetic character suggests that two *legitimate* infants be sent to the Foundling Hospital, but her suggestion is ignored. Similarly, a character in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) does go to the Foundling Hospital to look for his long-lost *legitimate* daughter, but he does not find her there since she has been brought up elsewhere.

In a way, the anxiety about sponsoring "undeserving" objects of charity would not have been such a persistent feature of the period's social landscape had it only been possible for eighteenth-century almsgivers to limit themselves to aiding people in their respective communities whom they knew relatively well and to contributing to various associated philanthropies. As it was, however, such conveniently limited charity was rarely an option either for prominent benefactors such as Lady Spencer or Quaker philanthropist Richard Reynolds,¹⁵ who routinely received begging letters from total strangers, or for a man or a woman in the street accosted daily by unfamiliar beggars or ragged children.

Of course the practice of investigating before giving was already well in place by the preceding century. The famous seventeenth-century philanthropist Thomas Firmin (1632–97) was known to have "a wholesome suspicion of ordinary almsgiving and a habit of investigating alleged distress before moving to relieve it." Firmin's "knowledge of the poor was unexcelled," and so he was frequently employed as a "middleman between benefactor and beneficiary."¹⁶ And, even before that, the 1531 edict of Henry VIII authorized justices of peace and other town officials to "draw up a list of those who were genuinely unable to work as a result of age, sickness, or infirmity; these were to receive a cer-

15. As Owen puts it, Reynolds was "concerned with aiding both institutions and individuals" (*English Philanthropy*, 79) and thus was constantly faced with the challenge of investigating the individual claims.

16. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, 18–19.

tificate enabling them to beg in a specified area."¹⁷ Those who begged without the certificate were to be arrested; meanwhile ordinary citizens (as opposed, that is, to members of aristocracy and representatives of monasteries) were not permitted to give alms so as not to encourage laziness and irresponsibility among the lower classes. The effectiveness of the latter measures had been steadily diminishing throughout the seventeenth century because, as historian Paul Slack has demonstrated, by the 1620s, the lists of certified beggars drawn by parish officials did not reflect anymore the actual proportion between those who qualified to receive support and "a great mass of equally genuine poor who received no support because they did not fit in with the traditional doctrine of charity."¹⁸ As "pauperization on a huge scale" emerged as a fact of life encompassing working families plagued by low wages and unemployment, the old rules for giving or refraining from giving became palpably inadequate.

Compounding the dilemmas of the eighteenth-century benefactor learning to live with this shift in the "old image of poverty"¹⁹ were the changes in the population distribution associated with the industrial revolution. Commenting on the "cataclysmic" growth of urban population in London as well as in "newer industrial centers," Owen points out,

It would be out of the question to translate to an urban environment the network of relationships, personal and professional, that made rural England an ordered society. Thus those who sought to improve the lot of their fellows faced a situation in which some of their traditional methods came to be seen as grossly inadequate, if not actually mischievous. Direct almsgiving and neighborhood charity, which in a village could be carried on

17. Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty, A History*, trans. Agnieszka Kolakowska (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 164.

18. Geremek, *Poverty*, 173.

19. Geremek, *Poverty*, 173.

without fear of being unduly imposed upon, now served to encourage the professional mendicant.²⁰

One specifically eighteenth-century twist on the institution of professional mendicancy was the new availability of “many published guides” that included begging-letters tailored to concrete situations, such as *The Compleat Letter Writer* (1756), George Brown’s *The New and Complete English Letter Writer* (1770), and George Hawkins’s *The London Universal Letter Writer* (1781).²¹ People not willing to buy the whole *Letter Writer* for the sake of a few relevant form letters could use services of a professional begging-letter writer, “often a person of some education, perhaps a schoolmaster, who would write letters of appeal for a fee of twopence each.”²² As Andrew observes (quoting J. M. Bourne), begging letters were “pathetic and heart-rending, whining and cringing, hopeless and expectant, commonplace and incredible, threatening, cajoling, imploring, invoking friendship and kinship, decency and honour, justice and merit, mammon and God.”²³ Faced with numerous appeals of such emotional intensity, an aspiring benefactor could hardly hope (to quote clerics who “recommended the spiritual merits of expansive giving”) that as “the truly Christian donor,” she “would easily discern the ‘due limits and measures of charity’”²⁴ in each particular case.

20. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, 91–92.

21. Andrew, “*Noblesse oblige*,” 297.

22. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, 109. For further analysis of the professional practitioners of the genre, see Andrew, “‘To the Charitable and Humane’: Appeals for Assistance in the Eighteenth-Century London Press,” in *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850*, ed. Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (London: Macmillan, 1998), 87–107.

23. Andrew, “*Noblesse oblige*,” 296–97.

24. Sarah Lloyd, “‘Agents in their own concerns’? Charity and the Economy of Makeshifts in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *The Poor in England, 1700–1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003), 123.

Andrew's recent analysis of the large collection of begging letters received and commented on by Lady Spencer (1737–1814) offers a valuable insight into strategies used by well-to-do benefactors in discriminating among deserving and fraudulent objects of charity. Lady Spencer had supported generously a variety of associated philanthropies as well as many private individuals known personally to her and her extended family. When it came to the letters from strangers, however, she had a policy of not doing anything for a person unless she could obtain some personal knowledge of him or her. This emphasis on personal knowledge in a world "where such information was more and more unusual and hard to come by" led to what Andrew sees as the creation of "structures for investigation" of "the demands of the 'unknown' but potentially deserving poor."²⁵

Such structures included, first of all, a variety of personal references. To support his or her story, the writer could call as a witness a friend or a relative of Lady Spencer, another patron who has assisted him or her in the past, or another recipient of the countess's charity. In the cases where no such references were available, and sometimes even when they were, Lady Spencer sent her agents over to check the truth of the writer's words:

In order to do this she set up a network of investigators throughout Britain, to whom she could write, asking them to visit the cases under consideration, view their circumstances, speak to their neighbors, and generally get a sense of their merits. This was not an entirely new procedure: the Countess of Liverpool had used the Rev. Mr. Stephens to investigate Mrs. Sarah Jackson before recommending her to her banker; Lady Spencer employed James Traille, an apothecary of Hatton Garden, to investigate the story of Mary Barker, who wanted to set up a small business ...²⁶

25. Andrew, "Noblesse oblige," 287.

26. Andrew, "Noblesse oblige," 292.

Andrew observes that sometimes the “need for disclosure ... created a real problem.” While Lady Spencer refused to aid “anyone of whom she did not have ‘knowledge,’ [her] attempts to obtain such knowledge might in themselves lead to the financial ruin which the letters were seeking to avert,” for many of the people who appealed to her were at pain to keep up appearances among their neighbors so as to preserve credit from tradesmen. For example, when “a lady agent of the countess’s came to visit the family of the Rev. Mr. Perfect to investigate his claims, but missed them, Perfect wrote angrily to Lady Spencer: ‘If it was Curiosity alone that led this Lady to such an Enquiry,’ he commented, ‘it was a little uncharitable, as it laid open my sores to a Creditor.’”²⁷

If it was not possible to check the veracity of the story, relief was denied:

When Harriot Douglas wrote in 1796 of her great distress, apologizing for the absence of an address since she was hiding from her creditors, Lady Spencer noted: “Wrote how sorry I was I could not assist her as a place of enquiry seemed purposely avoided.” Similarly when a woman wrote for relief, using the name Matilda Crayfield, which she admitted was not her own but was employed because her real name would “disgrace my Relations in High Life,” Lady Spencer noted that her reasons for anonymity were not sufficient, and that if she wanted her assistance she must make it possible for enquiry to be made into ‘the truth of the particulars’ of her story.²⁸

So crucial was the task of gathering knowledge for the benefactors wishing to assist people whose problems could not have been addressed by any organized charities (i.e., a majority of the eighteenth-century poor) that in 1770 several of them formed an

27. Andrew, “*Noblesse oblige*,” 291–2.

28. Andrew, “*Noblesse oblige*,” 283.

organization called the Ladies' Charitable Society, also known as the Society for Charitable Purposes. According to Elizabeth Carter, the organization was supposed to "relieve those who are really entitled to it, and, so far as can be lawfully done, punish impostors and cheats."²⁹ Although, as Andrew tells us, the Society "has unfortunately left only the faintest trace of a record,"³⁰ it appears to have had strong connections with the network of agents working for Lady Spencer.

Of course, few people in the eighteenth century had Lady Spencer's resources for investigation, and, moreover, many everyday decisions about giving or refusing alms had to be made on the spot without the benefit of prolonged consideration. Goldsmith's story of the "Man in Black" in *The Citizen of the World* highlights the dilemma of men and women wishing to relieve the distress of beggars they met in the streets despite some fear of having their kindness imposed upon. The story features one Mr. Drybone (the "Man in Black"), caught between his natural charitable impulse and his hard-earned realization that this impulse makes him an easy target for cheats. Brought up by his idealistic father to be a "mere machine of pity," "incapable of withstanding the slightest impulse made either by real or fictitious distress,"³¹ the Man in Black used to be strikingly ill-fit for this avaricious, calculating, and treacherous world. It was not until he ended up in jail (after "becoming ... bail" [118] for a friend who then skipped town leaving Mr. Drybone to take his place) that he has learned, as he claims, to stifle his best impulses. In fact, now he is "amazed" at those of his countrymen who help "occasional

29. Quoted in Andrew, "Noblesse oblige," 292.

30. Andrew, "Noblesse oblige," 292.

31. Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman, vol. 2, *The Citizen of the World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 114. All subsequent quotations from this short story are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

objects of charity," since the Poor Laws³² already provide more than adequate relief for the needy:

"In every parish-house," says he, "the poor are supplied with food, clothes, fire, and a bed to lie on; they want no more, I desire no more myself; yet still they seem discontented. I am surprised at the inactivity of our magistrates, in not taking up such vagrants, who are only a weight upon the industrious; I am surprised that the people are found to relieve them, when they must be at the same time sensible that it in some measure encourages idleness, extravagance, and imposture. Were I to advise any man for whom I had the least regard, I would caution him by all means not to be imposed upon by their false pretences: let me assure you, sir, they are impostors, every one of them, and rather merit a prison than relief. (109–10)

As the Man in Black proudly proclaims, *now* if "a wretch solicits [his] pity, [he merely observes] that the world is filled with impostors, and [takes] a certain method of not being deceived by never relieving" (120).

The actions of the Man in Black, however, belie his words. He still gives generously to every beggar who approaches him, but he is painfully "ashamed of his natural benevolence" (109) and thus endeavors to help the needy while his friend, the narrator of the story, is looking in the other direction and so presumably cannot call him out on his strange conduct.

32. On the "wilting" of the "faith in the moral and financial effectiveness" (69) of the Poor Laws since 1750, see Michael J. D. Roberts, "Head versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charity Organization in England c.1700–1850," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850*, ed. Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (London: Macmillan, 1998), 66–86. On the practical implementation of the Poor Laws in the context of the eighteenth-century economy of makeshifts, see Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, eds., *The Poor in England 1700–1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003).

The three people to whom the Man in Black gives alms are an old man who still has about him “the remnants of tattered finery” and who claims to support “a dying wife and five hungry children”; a sailor with a wooden leg who used to be “an officer on board of a private ship of war”; and a woman in rags, with two children in her arms and “attempting to sing ballads, but with such a mournful voice that it was difficult to determine whether she was singing or crying” (111–12). Mr. Drybone is thus moved by such signs of desperate need as rags, physical deformity, tears, and sad stories. In a way, this is precisely the kind of evidence that many eighteenth-century thinkers advised their contemporaries to distrust. As Thomas Malthus wrote in his *Essay on Population* (1798), the giver has to do a thorough background check of the person she is to relieve, disappointing the “hopes of clamorous and obtrusive poverty with no other recommendation but rags” and helping instead the “silent and retiring sufferer laboring under unmerited difficulties.”³³ Otherwise, a benefactor may find herself in a position of a kind duchess described by Holcroft in his *Hugh Trevor* (1794–97): Besieged by the “importunate, ... on such she lavished her favors, till report said that she impoverished herself; for a tale of distress, whether feigned or real, if obtruded upon her, she knew not how to resist.”³⁴

Although nothing in Goldsmith’s narrative suggests that the three beggars that the Man in Black and the narrator encounter that day are impostors, the painfully ambivalent position of the Man in Black makes him, in principle, extremely vulnerable to fraudulent calls for help. Because he takes such a pride in his assertion that he *never* relieves the poor, he cannot attempt even the most rudimentary check of their claims. Instead, he has to rely solely on his first impression and give alms as quickly as possible so as not to be caught by his companion.

33. Quoted in Owen, 98.

34. Thomas Holcroft, *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor*, ed. Seamus Deane (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 237.

Incidentally, that companion, the story's narrator, shows just as much inconsistency (if not more) as the Man in Black himself. On the one hand, he seems to have resolved a long time ago his own dilemma of giving or not giving: he does not give anything to anybody and sounds completely content with himself on that account. On the other hand, he ardently admires Mr. Drybone. As he puts it:

Though fond of many acquaintances, I desire an intimacy only with a few. The Man in Black, whom I have often mentioned, is one whose friendship I could wish to acquire, because he possesses my esteem.... Though he is generous even to profusion, he affects to be thought a prodigy of parsimony and prudence; though his conversation be replete with the most sordid and selfish maxims, his heart is dilated with the most unbounded love.

(108–109)

Such sentiments call into question the narrator's seemingly uncompromised stance on charity: Is he yet another "man in black" professing himself averse to almsgiving for the benefit of the reader and yet doing something very different when the reader is "not looking"? The contradictions of the story capture the vicissitudes underlying the eighteenth-century practices of private benefaction; vacillating between the sincere desire to help an apparently distressed person and the nagging fear of being duped makes for a profoundly ambivalent almsgiving experience.³⁵

The novels that I am about to discuss respond to this ambivalence by presenting an appealing scenario in which the proof of the poor person's desperate situation is apparent to the benefactor even before she knows she will need it. Although frequently depicting upper-middle-class benefactors, this fantasy is geared

35. For a discussion of the "dilemma of the culturally sensitized yet apprehensive giver," see Roberts, 68.

toward a reader of relatively modest means:³⁶ it was more typical for the latter to find herself in a situation in which she had to make an instant decision about giving than it was for a wealthy person, who was largely protected from the immediate street appeals and dealt instead with begging letters. This is not to say either that only the rich and/or titled people received the begging letters—poorer people did too—or that wealthy people were never approached by begging strangers in person—they were. Still, it was primarily the people with certain social and financial means who had at their disposal the “structures of investigation,” and it is thus significant that the novels in question depict situations in which the benefactor cannot take advantage of such a structure. Instead, the benefactor takes stock of the immediately available evidence and, being an intelligent and sensitive person (as befits a fictional hero or heroine) instantly grasps its one correct meaning.

II.

For *Evelina*, the eponymous protagonist of Burney’s 1778 novel, the moment of unexpected philanthropic glory comes when she saves an indigent stranger from imminent destruction. When *Evelina* first encounters Mr. Macartney, a lodger of her vulgar London relatives, the Branghtons, she is struck by his genteel manners (particularly conspicuous in contrast to those of his common middle-class landlord) and by his apparent poverty. One day, unbeknownst to him, she observes him going up to his room with a pistol in his pocket and, terrified by what she perceives as his growing despondency, follows him upstairs just in time to prevent him from blowing out his brains with two pis-

36. For an important discussion of class and philanthropy in the eighteenth-century novel, see Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternal Landlords in British Fiction, 1770–1860* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), particularly chap. 1–4.

tols. Shortly thereafter, she gives him a “purse”³⁷ with enough money to sustain him until he recovers his financial footing. It is only then that Mr. Macartney writes to Evelina and tells her his story, which features an unhappy love affair, a discovery of illegitimate origins, and a gradual descent into humiliating poverty. Although the letter presents Mr. Macartney as a victim of circumstances, it is important that the embodied evidence—the attempt at suicide—precedes this verbal explanation, thus serving as unconditional proof of Mr. Macartney’s worthiness as an object of Evelina’s spontaneous charity.

Burney carefully constructs the whole episode so as not to leave the reader any room for thinking that Mr. Macartney might have planned to excite a potential benefactor’s compassion and thus performed his suicide attempt for Evelina’s viewing benefit. First she points out that it was “by a wonderful chance, [that Evelina] happened to seat [herself so that she] had a view of the stairs [leading up to Mr. Macartney’s lodging] and yet could not be seen from them.” Second, the reason that Evelina spies the “end of the pistol start[ing] from his pocket” is that when Mr. Macartney inadvertently slips on the narrow landing, falls, and “instantly” rises, the pistol hits against the stairs (194). Upon becoming alarmed by the view of the pistol, Evelina follows Mr. Macartney; he does not know that she is behind him because she is “stepping very softly.” Finally, when Evelina bursts upon him and catches his arm just as he is about to shoot himself, and then falls down at his side breathless with fear and anxiety, Mr. Macartney regards her “with a look of unutterable astonishment.” A minute later, he still remains motionless, “his eyes cast wildly towards [her], ... too infinitely amazed to be capable of either speech or action” (195). Mr. Macartney’s body language shows that he did not expect anybody, much less Evelina, whom he met only briefly, to interrupt him at such a moment. His is a classic novelistic case of being caught unawares by a benefactor.

37. Frances Burney, *Evelina, or The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 232. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

Sarah Fielding explores the same motif in her *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn* (1759) when she briefly veers away from the novel's vain and miserable protagonist, Lady Dellwyn, to tell the story of a virtuous Mrs. Bilson. The accomplished and beautiful Mrs. Bilson discovers one day that her thoughtless husband has incurred a debt so enormous that he cannot ever hope to repay it and so must become a lifelong prisoner in the Fleet. Far from despairing at their financial ruin or even so much as reproving her husband's irresponsible actions, however, Mrs. Bilson joins him in the debtor's prison. She finds a "tolerable room with two beds: one of which served for Mr. Bilson and his two sons; the other for herself, her daughter, and his natural child,"³⁸ for just as Mr. Bilson is sent to jail, it is revealed that he also has an illegitimate daughter, a girl whom the angelic Mrs. Bilson immediately agrees to accept as part of her family.³⁹

Once the Bilsons are settled in the Fleet, Mrs. Bilson proceeds to support all of them by working as a milliner. Her natural taste and genteel demeanor soon enable her to establish a wide clientele among both aristocratic women and those "in a middling station" (1:187). One of her clients, an elderly Lady Dently, is so moved by the young gentlewoman's plight and fortitude that she offers to take Mrs. Bilson and her children into her own house on the condition that they would leave behind the man whose vanity and recklessness has ruined them. Naturally, Mrs. Bilson

38. Sarah Fielding, *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, 2 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1759), 1:182. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

39. Plots featuring virtuous wives taking in the bastard children of their husbands became increasingly popular as the century went on. As Susan Staves observes astutely, in "women's fictions, especially, there is a desperate quality to these plots since only what is marked as superhuman goodness in the woman seems powerful enough to effect the conversion of libertine husbands into men of ordinary morality" ("Resentment or Resignation? Dividing the Spoils among Daughters and Younger Sons," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves, [London: Routledge, 1995], 212).

refuses to abandon her husband (who has by now completely reformed and become an exemplary husband and father). It is shortly after this “mortif[ying] refusal” (1:197) that Fielding introduces the motif of a deserving object of charity (here, Mr. Bilson) caught unawares by a benefactor (Lady Dently) who until now has not considered him worthy of her help.

Fielding leads the reader toward the change of heart. When Mrs. Bilson is seized by a fever, Lady Dently is so “shocked at the news of her illness,” that she goes to the Fleet to see her. And, as “few polite ceremonies are regarded in that place, her Ladyship [is] introduced without any previous notice, and [finds] Mr. Bilson on his knees, at the side of his wife’s bed, endeavoring to recover her out of a fainting fit, the tears flowing fast from his eyes” (1:197–98). Both the husband and the children are “so engrossed by the poor invalid, that little notice [is] taken of Lady Dently” (1:198) until Mrs. Bilson recovers her senses enough to become aware of the distinguished visitor and to thank her for her goodness.

By that time, however, Lady Dently has seen enough to begin to waver in her erstwhile conviction that Mr. Bilson does not deserve her assistance. When a former man of the world, who used to live on being “flattered [by] the Men” and “caressed [by] the Ladies” (1:163), does not even notice that a great lady has entered his squalid prison because his attention is so focused upon his ailing wife, his very inattention to the potential benefactress testifies to the depth of his present despair and his repentance for the past actions. Having correctly read Mr. Bilson’s unintentionally rude behavior toward her as a sign of his newly found virtue, Lady Dently soon extends her previously qualified offer of hospitality to the whole family. The Bilsons gratefully accept. Later, when Lady Dently dies, they are named the sole heirs to her estate and embark upon a joint lifelong career in private philanthropy.

Another novel by Burney, *Cecilia* (1782), features an upper-middle-class protagonist engaged in many charitable activities, including the assistance of the poor of her own parish and pri-

vate benefaction based on investigation.⁴⁰ Still, the narrative contains several instances of Cecilia's encountering potential objects of benefaction who fail to recognize their "scripted" role and *as such* prove themselves worthy of Cecilia's help. One such instance involves a young woman, Henrietta Belfield (whose family has fallen on hard times after the death of their father because of the profligate behavior of Henrietta's older brother), who refuses to perform her poverty in order to win the patronage of a wealthy lady.

Cecilia first meets Henrietta through an eccentric old gentleman, Mr. Albany. Cecilia agrees to follow Mr. Albany, who wants to employ her kindness and wealth in the service of philanthropy, to what she imagines will be a dwelling of "some family in distress, some helpless creature in sickness, or some children in want."⁴¹ Instead, Mr. Albany leads her to a "small and very-meanly furnished apartment," in which they encounter, "employed in washing some china, a very lovely young woman, genteely dressed, and appearing hardly seventeen years of age. The moment they came in, with evident marks of confusion, she instantly gave over her work, hastily putting the bason she was washing upon the table and endeavoring to hide the towel with which she was wiping it behind her chair" (205). Mr. Albany, who considers social niceties and euphemisms superfluous,⁴²

40. For a suggestive analysis of other aspects of the theme of charity in *Cecilia*, see Catherine Keohane, "'Too Neat for a Beggar': Charity and Debt in Burney's *Cecilia*," *Studies in the Novel* 33.4 (2001): 379–401; Keohane, "'Spare from Your Luxuries': Women, Charity, and Spending in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 31 (2002): 41–59; and Cynthia Klekar, "'Her Gift Was Compelled': Gender and the Failure of the 'Gift' in *Cecilia*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17.4 (2005): 107–26.

41. Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, ed. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 207. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

42. For an original and insightful recent analysis of Mr. Albany's position in respect to Cecilia, see Klekar, "'Her Gift was Compelled.'"

frankly explains to Henrietta the role that she is to play in the upcoming exchange of material and spiritual goods, drawing, in particular, on the old tradition of considering “the poor a spiritual conduit or currency converters, a means [for the rich] to lay up ‘Treasure in Heaven.’”⁴³ As the prototypical “Poor,” Henrietta is to benefit from the prototypical “Affluent” (i.e., Cecilia) and, by doing so, to bestow a “blessing” on her rich benefactress:

“Look here,” said he, pointing to Cecilia, “I have brought you one who has power to serve you, and to relieve your distress: one who is rolling in affluence, a stranger to ill, a novice in the world;—unskilled in the miseries she is yet to endure, unconscious of the depravity into which she is yet to sink! receive her benefactions while yet she is untainted, satisfied that while she aids you, she is blessing herself!” (206)

“Blushing and abashed,” Henrietta replies, “there is no occasion—there is no need—I have not any necessity—I am far from being so very much in want.” Mr. Albany then lectures her some more on how wrong she is to be “ashamed of poverty” (206) and leaves the house, hoping that the young women would sooner come to an understanding without him. Far from being relieved by his absence, however, Henrietta continues to look “surprised, and infinitely more embarrassed.” She surveys “her apartment with vexation, and her guest with confusion.” Having “listened to the exhortation of the old man with visible uneasiness,” she seems “overwhelmed with shame and chagrin” now that he is gone (207). When Cecilia offers to be her friend, Henrietta replies:

You are condescending indeed, madam, ... looking as you look, to talk of a friend when you come to such a place as this! up two

43. Lloyd, “‘Agents,’” 123. For a suggestive recent analysis of this doctrine, see Richard Ashcraft, “Lockean Ideas, Poverty, and the Development of Liberal Political Theory,” in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1995), 43–61.

pairs of stairs! no furniture! no servant! every thing in such disorder!—indeed I wonder at Mr. Albany! he should not—but he thinks every body's affairs may be made public, and does not care what he tells, nor who hears him;—he knows not the pain he gives, nor the mischief he may do. (208)

When, moved by all she hears and sees, Cecilia does offer Henrietta money, the latter starts “back with a look of resentful mortification” and exclaims, “No, madam! you are quite mistaken; pray put up your purse, I am no beggar! Mr. Albany has misrepresented me, if he has told you I am” (208). By refusing to recognize Cecilia as a benefactor and herself as an object of benefaction and by insisting, instead, on casting both herself and Cecilia as victims of Mr. Albany's well-meant but socially disastrous enthusiasm for meddling into other people's affairs, Henrietta proves that she deserves something more than just immediate pecuniary relief: an enduring social patronage and affection (and the various forms of financial assistance inevitably accompanying such a relationship).

There is something slightly paradoxical in Cecilia's visit of “investigation.” On the one hand, hers certainly is that kind of visit: Mr. Albany wants Cecilia to see with her own eyes how Henrietta lives (together with her brother, who, as we are to find out shortly, is dangerously wounded and has no money for a physician), thereby enabling Cecilia to acquire the personal “knowledge” so important for eighteenth-century philanthropists, such as, for example, Lady Spencer. And, as a visit of investigation, this one is very effective: it shows Henrietta in her element, it demonstrates her poverty, and it makes Cecilia want to help her. On the other hand, Burney portrays Henrietta as ostensibly doing everything to botch the “investigation” by claiming that she is not in any need and that Cecilia's almoner is very wrong about bringing her here. Just imagine any of Lady Spencer's agents encountering a person whom they thought to be in need asserting vociferously that she is fine and does not want anything from a wealthy benefactress! It would take a very discerning agent or a

very particular set of circumstances to keep this person on Lady Spencer's list of charity recipients.

Cecilia thus has to see through Henrietta's failure to recognize the script and to perform her role as an object of charity encountered by a benefactor, just as Tom Jones, Evelina, and Lady Dently have to see through the similar failures of Mr. Anderson, Mr. Macartney, and Mr. Bilson. They do see through them, and they appreciate this kind of evidence more than any other they could get. As Burney puts it, whatever doubts had at first indeed "arisen in the mind of Cecilia, [Henrietta's] anxiety to disguise, not display her distress ... cleared her of all suspicion of seeking by artifice and imposition to play upon her feelings" (208). The pleasing outcome of Cecilia's, Evelina's, Lady Dently's, and Tom's charitable impulses—they follow their heart and they turn out to be right—brings a vicarious satisfaction to the reader routinely plagued by a fear of being duped by alms-seeking frauds.

In fact, such stories placate more than just the fear of being deceived by professional mendicants. They also offer an agreeable respite from a closely related anxiety familiar to eighteenth-century readers living through rapid urban expansion and thus witnessing a constant influx of strangers into their parishes. In many a novel featuring a needy person caught unawares by a benefactor, the benefactor and the beneficiary turn out to belong to the same closely knit community. The stranger that you help, in other words, is really no stranger at all. The novel returns the reader to that comfortable world in which everybody knows everybody else, if not directly, then through an intermediary. Thus, the problem of social accountability of aliens does not arise.

Consider in this respect Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives*, which begins by revisiting *Tom Jones's* motif of intended-victim-of-the-robbery-turned-benefactor. As Anna and her father, Sir Arthur, travel to London to begin their longer journey to France, while carrying with them "more money than [Sir Arthur] would have chosen to

have lost,"⁴⁴ they are attacked in the woods by two highwaymen. Luckily, the son of Sir Arthur's steward, Frank Henley, an accomplished and courageous young man, is accompanying them on their trip. Frank repulses the robbers, wounding one of them, but in the fracas he himself is shot (not dangerously) in the shoulder.

When the travelers arrive in London, they send the information about the attempted robbery to the "office in Bow Street," promising a forty-pound reward, and, soon enough, the wounded highwayman is caught and is expected to be hanged. Frank, however, "abhor[s] the taking away the life of a man, instead of seeking his reformation," and persuades Sir Arthur to testify that he is not certain that the apprehended man is the same who attacked them earlier. He then arranges for Mr. Webb (the name of the robber) to be conveyed to a safe lodging where the Bow Street "bloodhunters" cannot find him; lectures him on the danger and folly of his ways, mingling in his lecture "soothing, reasoning, and menace"; and, upon learning that the man is poor, leaves him some money, "endeavoring by every means to restore a lost wretch to virtue and society" (17). The fellow, Frank observes with satisfaction, is "not flint. The tears [gush] into his eyes, and [Frank goes] away with hopes that [his efforts have] not been wholly ineffectual" (18).

By following the best impulses of his heart, Frank discerns a worthy object of charity in the man who failed to recognize and "perform" in accordance with his poverty during their initial encounter; indeed, wounding a potential benefactor in the shoulder with a pistol hardly makes for the best introduction. Assisted by Frank, the former highwayman now has a chance to escape a certain evil associate of his, who has been using Mr. Webb's poverty and debts to force him into a life of crime. The "embodied" evidence received by Frank (including, in this case, two wounds: the robber's own and Frank's) proves the man's desperate need more effectively than he himself would have been able to had he

44. Thomas Holcroft, *Anna St. Ives*, ed. Peter Faulkner (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 12. All subsequent quotations from this novel are from this edition with page numbers noted parenthetically in the main text.

adhered to the established script of approaching a charitably minded person with a story of his woes and persecutions.

Upon leaving the repentant highwayman, Frank takes a short airing in the park. By chance, he comes across a young man chased by bailiffs and observes the man's wife pleading in vain with his cruel pursuers. Frank finds out that the debt for which the fellow is to be arrested was not originally contracted by himself, but by his wife's brother, who has apparently absconded from his creditors and left his brother-in-law to pay for him. Moved by the situation of the young couple, Frank pays off the bailiffs and procures the man's freedom.

Note that, in a setup somewhat reminiscent of the first meeting between Cecilia and Henrietta, had Frank focused only on what the young man was saying on the occasion, he might have gotten a distorted picture of why the young man was being dragged off to prison. The noble youth refused to blame the brother-in-law who had gotten him into this trouble, just as Henrietta refused to bewail her poverty and distress (and to blame her profligate brother who caused it!) in front of a stranger. It is thus by *failing* to perform the role of the innocent victim of the circumstances beyond his control (a role typically assumed by the writers of the real-life begging letters⁴⁵) that Holcroft's character impressed the discerning benefactor as truly deserving compassion and relief.

Remarkably, the two seemingly unrelated charities of Frank Henley turn out to be closely connected. Anna St. Ives, the object of Frank's secret and, as he thinks, hopeless passion, has a former housekeeper, one Mrs. Clarke, a "careful good woman, and a great favourite with [Anna's] dear mamma, when living" (38). Anna herself "almost revere[s] Mrs. Clarke as [her] mother, because of the excellence of her heart and the soundness of her understanding" (39). This Mrs. Clarke "had a sister whose name was Webb, and who left a son and a daughter, who are both married. The son ... has been a wild and graceless fellow; but the daughter is one of the most agreeable and engaging young crea-

45. See Andrew, "To the Charitable and Humane," 96–97.

tures [Anna] ever saw" (39). Sure enough, we soon find out that the "nephew of the worthy Mrs. Clarke ... is the very highwayman who shot Frank Henley" and whom Frank has subsequently saved from the gallows and assisted with money and, moreover, that Mrs. Clarke's niece and the highwayman's sister is the wife of a young man that Frank has snatched from the bailiffs.

This improbable coincidence is, of course, only too common in the world of the eighteenth-century novel dealing with private charity. We may remember now that Mr. Anderson, pitied and helped out by Tom Jones after the former's unsuccessful stint as a highwayman, turns out to be a cousin of Mrs. Miller, a worthy London protégé of Mr. Allworthy. In *Evelina*, Mr. Macartney, the object of Evelina's impromptu concern and charity, is later discovered to be her half-brother. In *Cecilia*, Henrietta turns out to be a sister of Cecilia's impetuous but good-hearted friend Mr. Belfield. In *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*, Mr. and Mrs. Bilson are revealed to be closely related to Lady Dently through Mrs. Bilson's side of the family.⁴⁶ (And do I even have to mention that a strange infant adopted by the philanthropic Mr. Allworthy is then found out to be his own nephew?)

Of course, not every eighteenth-century novel that set out to encourage charitable behavior in its audience ended up by tacitly celebrating nepotism. Moreover, it is difficult to deduce any kind of unambiguous "message" from such a celebration. On the one hand, it certainly created an appealing vision of blood ties still holding together a world that otherwise appeared to be bursting at the seams with the influx of newcomers, particularly for readers who lived in the rapidly growing urban centers. On the other hand, it may have reaffirmed the importance of the traditional kinship networks in the face of new economic and social forma-

46. Note that Lady Dently discovers that she is related to the Bilsons *after* she is impressed by the fortitude and virtue of Mrs. Bilson but *before* she visits the whole family in jail. In this respect, her story differs slightly from that of other benefactors, who do not learn that they are related (or otherwise connected, as in the case of Tom Jones and Mr. Anderson) to the objects of their charity until after they have helped them as strangers.

tions grounded in cooperation of people previously unknown to each other. (Remember Richardson's *Clarissa* who insisted that the world is one big family, and look where the rupture with her real family and the belief in the kindness of strangers have gotten her in the end!) Caught between different types of philanthropy, such as the increasingly influential associated model and the traditional private model now in need of new "structures for investigation," the eighteenth-century novel and its readers had no choice but to grapple again and again with such questions as, what is a deserving stranger? how must she perform or embody her poverty? how can she really prove her deservingness? how much of a stranger could she really be?