

Henry Fielding Reinvents the Afterlife

Regina M. Janes

In *Journey from This World to the Next* (1743), his most extensive play with fictive afterlives, Henry Fielding transforms classical models so as to prepare the way for later popular Christian beliefs about the afterlife that had yet to take hold. Enacting through a classical form hopes that in the next century will be accepted as popular Christian cliché, he indicates as he does so that his inventions might be taken to have implications for orthodoxy. Such popular dissenting writers as Isaac Watts and Elizabeth Singer Rowe had limned the Christian heaven in order to console the bereaved, but Fielding, protected by a classical form, is able to press desires still further into modern shapes. By toying inventively with classical afterlives, modifying Plato, altering Lucian, re-conceptualizing Ovid, he hybridizes classic conceptions and Christian anticipations. Christian orthodoxy is not violated—the context is classical—but its sense of possibility is stretched.

abstract



I desire to have Fielding's posthumous works with his *Memoirs of Jonathan Wild* and *Journey to the Next World*, also the *Memoirs of Verocand a Man of Pleasure*, and those of a *Young Lady*. You will call all this Trash, Trumpery etc.—Mary Wortley Montagu, 22 September [1755]¹

HENRY FIELDING made several trips to the land of the dead: one real in the posthumous *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1755) and others more imaginary, including *Journey from This World to the Next* (1743), several *Champion* essays, and several farces.² None

¹ Mary Wortley Montagu to the Countess of Bute (22 September 1755), *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–67), 3:88.

² Henry Fielding, *Miscellanies by Henry Fielding, Esq. Vol. 2*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1993); Fielding, *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, Shamela, and Occasional Writings*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008); Fielding, *Contributions to the Champion*, ed. W.B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); and Fielding, *Plays, Volume 1, 1728–1731*, ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). References are to these editions.

gets much respect. Mary Wortley Montagu lumped the *Journey* and the *Journal* together as “trash and trumpery,” defensively since she still wanted to read them.³ Martin C. Battestin warns readers away from *Journey from This World to the Next* as a “neglected” work that begins “briskly” but soon dwindles into “tedium”; he reinforces his warning by ascribing to the work Fielding’s own unappetizing “theme that goodness alone can bring true happiness.”⁴ Ronald Paulson’s livelier account finds *Journey* a “primitive picaresque” that has “nowhere to go ... and so trails off.”⁵ Bertrand Goldgar has edited *Journey* admirably and written on it well, perhaps inspiring Ian Bell and Andrew Varney to reprint the text with *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, but without creating new enthusiasts.⁶

Artistically, as a contribution to the genre of fictive afterlives, the book is somewhat better than Fielding scholars let on when they compare it to other Fielding works and not to its own kind. It holds up well beside Lucian, fades to nothing beside Dante, and challenges Mark Twain. Students of eighteenth-century afterlives, including Lieselotte Kurth-Voigt and Benjamin Boyce, cling to it as their best read and fit it into climactic position, even if doing so requires that they violate chronology. Of interest here is that Fielding transforms classical models in a way that primes his readers for later popular Christian beliefs about the afterlife that had yet to take hold. Not only does he enact through a classical form hopes that in the next century will be accepted as popular Christian cliché, but he also indicates as he does so that he is aware his inventions might be taken to have implications for orthodoxy. In effect, Fielding’s *Journey from This World to the Next* revolutionizes both classical and Christian conceptions of the afterlife, forcing each to fulfill human wishes. Such popular

³ Montagu to the Countess of Bute (22 September 1755), *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 3:88.

⁴ Martin C. Battestin, with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), 371, 662n171.

⁵ Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 122–23.

⁶ Goldgar cites other attacks on *Journey* by W.E. Henley, Walter Scott, Leo Braudy, Michael Irwin, and F. Homes Dudden in “Myth and History in Fielding’s *Journey from This World to the Next*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1986): 235. Henry Fielding, *Journey from This World to the Next and Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, ed. Ian Bell and Andrew Varney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

dissenting writers as Isaac Watts and Elizabeth Singer Rowe had limned the Christian heaven in order to console the bereaved, but Fielding, protected by a classical form, is able to press desires still further into modern shapes. By toying inventively with classical afterlives, modifying Plato, altering Lucian, re-conceptualizing Ovid, he hybridizes classic conceptions and Christian anticipations. Christian orthodoxy is not violated—the context is classical—but its sense of possibility is stretched.

Kurth-Voigt and Boyce both conclude their discussions of eighteenth-century afterlives with Fielding's *Journey*, but neither recognizes the novelty of the account. Boyce calls it a "recapitulation of the whole tradition" of satirical afterlives, and Kurth-Voigt uses it to end on metempsychosis.⁷ While Fielding certainly sums up a tradition, he also transforms it, modifying Lucian and intruding the self in order to produce a recognizably modern afterlife—one without visible punishment or God that fulfills the powerful human desire to be reunited with loved ones. Fielding does not explicitly reject either punishment or God, but he retains them only as guarantors—the one for good behaviour, the other for any afterlife at all—and not as active presences. Signifying for the history of Christian and other afterlives, the point has implications for histories of religiosity and conceptions of "Augustan" neoclassicism. It is the afterlife that concerns us here, but a few remarks on the others may not be out of order.

That someone of Fielding's orthodoxy should move God so far off in the eternal plan confirms such earlier suggestions as Roland Stromberg's that a more liberal, tolerant orthodoxy took up and absorbed certain fundamental deist tenets, leading to deism's disappearance as an energetic intellectual movement after 1730 and the emergence of franker atheism later in the century.⁸ Whether or not Fielding ever embraced deism, as Paulson suggests, before returning to orthodoxy in the *Champion*,

⁷ Benjamin Boyce, "News from Hell: Satiric Communication with the Nether World in English Writing of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *PMLA* 58, no.2 (1943): 425. Lieselotte Kurth-Voigt, "Existence after Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature," *South Atlantic Review* 52, no.2 (1987): 10–11. Kurth-Voigt's work on metempsychosis, *Continued Existence, Reincarnation, and the Power of Sympathy in Classical Weimar* (Rochester: Camden House, 1999), includes several chapters on the history of reincarnation before the eighteenth century.

⁸ Roland N. Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 120, 161–62, 170–71.

he certainly read all the books.⁹ The more influential case is Alexander Pope, the poet everyone read, who did not regard the *Essay on Man* as incompatible with his familial Roman Catholicism, and who performed in *The Universal Prayer* the basic deist move of abstracting from all creeds to a “universal” credo. Nor is there a sharper articulation of the atheist’s intellectual project than to “Make God Man’s Image, Man the final Cause.”¹⁰ Such popular literature, with Mandeville himself counting *The Tale of a Tub* dangerous, can infect a period’s consciousness as thoroughly as explicitly theological discourses. The effect of such absorption was not to de-Christianize, but to re-Christianize, defining Christianity more broadly and inclusively, as a comprehensive moral system. Certainly that is the thrust of Fielding’s work.

As to concepts of “Augustan” neoclassicism, Fielding’s practice, channelling Pope and Jonathan Swift, uses the ancients for work going in new directions and breaking old forms into recyclable pieces. Rather than acting as a bulwark against modernity or instancing Robert Markley’s “efforts to model English critical and literary practice on the examples of the ancients,”¹¹ Fielding and his ancestral Scriblerians used the ancients to colonize distinctively modern emotional and discursive spaces. Specifically, the practice of imitation—those irrepressible applications to modernity filtered by a classic text—enabled new assertions of individualism and corporate responsibility, as well as highly detailed accounts of daily life. Swift and Gay give us more of

⁹ In addition to Samuel Clarke’s *Works* (1738), Henry Dodwell’s *Epistolary Discourse Proving That the Soul Is Mortal* (1706), and Anthony Collins’s *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), Fielding owned a biography of Dodwell, works by John Toland, David Renaud Boullier’s *Essai philosophique sur l’âme des Bêtes* (1737), Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique* (1734), two Latin editions of Lucretius and Thomas Creech’s translation, Philip Skelton’s *Deism Revealed* (1749), and *Defence of Natural and Revealed Religion: Boyle Lectures 1691–1732*. Fielding also owned more than an equal number of sermons, from Isaac Barrow to John Tillotson, by way of Ralph Cudworth, Robert South, and William Sherlock. Frederick G. Ribble and Anne G. Ribble, *Fielding’s Library: An Annotated Catalogue* (Charlottesville: Bibliographic Society of the University of Virginia, 1996).

¹⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, in *Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), book 4, line 478, p. 790.

¹¹ Robert Markley, “British Theory and Criticism: Early Eighteenth Century,” in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 105.

the smell of London streets than even Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*. So, too, Fielding's "neoclassic" next world reworks the afterlife that most others, including Defoe, leave where orthodoxy put it, rewarding some and terrorizing the rest. Without the distance created by the neoclassic frame, Fielding did not dare to voice the changes he imagined (and Swift, as we shall see, desired).

Fielding began by revolutionizing the afterlife as proposed by Lucian, then traded Lucian for Plato, and finally went beyond Plato to imagine changes that would later become not quite Christian orthodoxy, but definitely Christian popular belief. Goldgar has shown Fielding moving beyond his declared fondness for Lucian to Plato as his principal source for the afterlife in *Journey from This World to the Next*.¹² Goldgar does not remark that Fielding had already mollified the Lucianic visit to the underworld in his *Champion* essay of 24 May 1740, where he adapts Lucian's cynical fable to newer sympathies with identity and desire. Nor does Goldgar address those aspects of *Journey* that, he points out, have no counterpart in Plato. So let us first address Fielding's relation to Lucian and then, turning to *Journey*, lay out Fielding's innovations in the afterlife business.

As underworld visits, *Journey from This World to the Next* and the *Champion* essay were anticipated by the puppet show in act 3 of *The Author's Farce* (1730) and *Eurydice A Farce* (acted 1737, published as "damned" in *Miscellanies*, Vol. 2, 1743). Fielding admired Lucian enough to propose a new translation in 1752, by subscription,¹³ and *The Author's Farce*, *Eurydice*, and *Champion* use an underworld locale to make typically Lucianic satiric points. Writers of formula fiction—and underworld visits, as Benjamin Boyce shows, were formula fiction in the eighteenth century—are inspired by affection for the genre and recognition of a gap they can fill, a missing presence within the tradition. So Fielding's *Author's Farce* links literary satire in the *Macflecknoe*, *Rehearsal*, *Battle of the Books*, *Dunciad* vein to Lucian's underworld. *Eurydice*,

¹² Goldgar, introduction to *Miscellanies* by Fielding, xxviii–xxxii; Goldgar, "Myth and History," 236–40.

¹³ *Covent Garden Journal* no. 52, in *The Covent-Garden Journal*, ed. Gerard Edward Jensen, 2 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 2:47–50. Nancy A. Mace argues against Lucian's being as influential for Fielding as Fielding and his critics have claimed, but she ignores these works. Mace, *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 39.

subtitled *The Devil Henpeck'd*, does Lucian as marital satire, anticipating Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, as a tale of marital strife among the shades. Fielding's Eurydice longs only for Pluto and Proserpina's court when her luckless husband tries to persuade her to return to the upper world. Rewriting *The Aeneid* book 6, *The Dunciad* book 3 (1728/29) had led literary satire underground. Signalling an affiliation, Fielding adopts the name "Scriblerus Secundus" for the first time in *The Author's Farce*, having turned the *Dunciad* goddess Dulness into Nonsense, and obtrudes himself as self, rather than as mask or character. He names the hero—and the heroine—"Harry" after himself (Henry and Harriet), calls the farce "the author's," and baptizes himself into a literary lineage.

The plays' afterlives have no implications for the Christian one, but in the 1740 *Champion* essay, Fielding begins tampering with Lucianic afterlife protocols. Lucian is harsh. Inventor of the sorcerer's apprentice, Lucian dangles an underworld that is bleak, comical, and unforgiving. The rich grieve, Socrates is terrified, and Menippus jeers at them all. From Lucian, Christopher Marlowe took *Dr. Faustus's* most famous line. Thinking he is kissing a beauty, Faustus exclaims, "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burned the topless towers of Ilium? / Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss."¹⁴ The line originates in a field of dry bones in Hades, where Lucian's Menippus searches for the famous Helen. Handed a fleshless skull, assured it is Helen's, Menippus says, in Greek, "Is this what launched a thousand ships from all of Greece, felled so many Greeks and barbarians, and destroyed so many cities?"¹⁵ The reader of Lucian shrinks or guffaws, as Faustus embraces immortality in a naked skull. That is a Marlowe joke.

Fielding is deliberately, self-consciously softer. Marking his differences from Lucian in the *Champion's* dream vision (341–44), Fielding carefully explains that Lucian's Charon stripped completely everyone who came to his boat. After reading Lucian

¹⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*, in *Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963), act 5, scene 1, lines 99–101, p. 405.

¹⁵ Lucian, "Menippus and Hermes: The Dialogues of the Dead," *Lucian*, ed. M.D. Macleod, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 7:23. The sorcerer's apprentice appears in "The Lover of Lies, or The Doubter," 3:375.

and seeing the successful *Orpheus and Eurydice* (so unlike his own damned *Eurydice*), the author dreams himself at the Styx, where his chin and frequent damnation by the Pit identify him. Softening Lucian, Fielding lets people hold onto what they prize, or what he prizes—beauty with innocence, honour with integrity, and even Colley Cibber’s withered laurel. (Justifying himself, Minos explains the laurel was so small he did not see it, or he would have confiscated it.) Boyce dismisses such differences as “an occasional Christian perversion of the original doctrine.”¹⁶ “Christian” for Boyce evidently includes the preservation of personal identity, character, accomplishments, and sense of self, but there is no theological justification for Fielding’s alterations in favour of self-identity.¹⁷ What Boyce understands as “Christian” has been reshaped so that Boyce misattributes to tradition what Fielding and his contemporaries have invented.

In *Journey from This World to the Next* Fielding goes so much further in introducing material after his heart’s desire that he prefaced *Miscellanies* by denying that he meant to set up a new system.¹⁸ Goldgar assumes Fielding is referring to metempsychosis, which he observes is neither new nor a system.¹⁹ Certainly transmigration (a common poetic trope)²⁰ had its detractors: in

¹⁶ Boyce, 425.

¹⁷ Most accounts of the heavenly afterlife were scripturally based, taking their imagery from Revelation and imagining the presence of the Lamb and his glories; nor were eternal torments forgotten. See, for example, in addition to the sermons and discourses of Sherlock and Tillotson, Hugh Ferguson, *The View of Human Life Taken, and Reconiled by a Prospect of Heaven* (London, 1743); John Henley, *Sion in Perfect Beauty; or, the Heaven of Heavens* (London, 1730); Joseph Trapp, *Thoughts upon the Four Last Things: Death; Judgment; Heaven; Hell* (London, 1735); and most horribly John Cennick, *Letter to the Little Children; Especially to Those Who Want to Know How to Go to Heaven*, 5th ed. (London, 1783). Fielding’s most innovative predecessors in reimagining the afterlife were Isaac Watts and Elizabeth Singer Rowe. Immensely popular—and new—were Watts’s *Death and Heaven; Or, The Last Enemy Conquer’d and Separate Spirits Made Perfect* (London, 1722) and Singer Rowe’s *Friendship in Death: Letters from the Dead to the Living* (London, 1728).

¹⁸ “It would be paying a very mean Compliment to the human Understanding, to suppose I am under any Necessity of vindicating myself from designing, in an Allegory of this Kind, to oppose any present System, or to erect a new one of my own ... I may be misrepresented, without being misunderstood” (preface, *Miscellanies*, xxxi).

¹⁹ Goldgar, “Myth and History,” 240.

²⁰ Deriving from Plato’s and Virgil’s pre-existent souls, transmigration passed metaphysically through Edmund Spenser, comically through Ben Jonson, into high seriousness in John Dryden’s *Anne Killigrew Ode*, and satirically

1725 another Joseph Addison had introduced it to Christian readers as “a pernicious Design of the Devil, to confound the two Doctrines of the Immortality of the Soul, and of the Resurrection of the Body.”²¹ Like the contemporaneous *Heaven Open to All Men*, proudly touted by its translator as “a new System,”²² Fielding may have had other features of his allegory in view, precisely those not adumbrated by Plato. His allegory diminishes and conceals eternal punishments; it trades hell for an open-ended process of self-improvement, and it gratifies desires for reunion with the dead, specifically dead children. Plato had brushed off dead infants as of no interest in the myth of Er; nor do older children appear.²³ Softening Plato as well as abandoning Lucian, Fielding humanizes the metempsychosis of both Ovid and Plato. There will be no more taking of animal forms and little backsliding.

In the narrative—a found manuscript submitted to Parson Abraham Adams, who notes its Platonic indebtedness and potential usefulness—the narrator dies in Cheapside, travels by coach to the city of diseases and death’s palace, before arriving at Elysium’s gates. Some of the deceased are admitted, including the narrator, and most are sent back to try again. A bottomless pit near the entrance promises to swallow those guilty of heinous crimes. In Elysium, the narrator first meets his dead daughter, then assorted notables, including Homer, who with Madame Dacier in his lap enquires warmly after his translator Pope, and finally Julian the Apostate, who explains how he got in. After twenty-three reincarnations, including three Anglican bishops, Julian was finally reborn as Archbishop Latimer. Just as Julian

again when Pope’s Settle muses on Tibbald’s passing through Dutchmen and monks in *The Dunciad* book 3 (1728/29).

- ²¹ Joseph Addison, “Introduction on the Doctrine of Transmigration,” introduction to *Chinese Tales: or the Wonderful Adventures of the Mandarin Fum-Hoam* by Thomas-Simon Gueullette (London, 1725), xxi. Cited in Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30. The other Joseph Addison treated transmigration sympathetically and comically as a literary device in two *Spectator* papers, no. 211 (1 November 1711) and no. 343 (3 April 1712).
- ²² Pierre Cuppe’s translator proudly announced “a new System” almost concurrently in the English-first publication of the Bois priest’s *Heaven Open to All Men* (London, 1743), xxiv.
- ²³ “Concerning infants who die at birth or live but a short time he had more to say, not worthy of mention.” *The Republic of Plato*, ed. Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 352.

begins to take up his bishoprics, the narrative breaks off. The editor observes a new feminine hand in the manuscript, and the morally problematic Anne Boleyn is successfully admitted in the concluding chapter, now attributed to Sarah Fielding.

Goldgar has demonstrated that Fielding laid his Lucian aside and took up his Plato to write *Journey*.²⁴ He finds a single reference to Lucian in the conversation between Homer and Shakespeare and deftly lays out Fielding's Platonic inspirations in the myth of Er (*The Republic*), *Phaedo*, and *Gorgias* for such elements as the lottery (the Spindle of Necessity transformed), lots (new lives embarked upon), and the spirits' travelling together. Where Fielding breaks new ground, and where his "system" is indeed new, occurs at the gates of Elysium and the judgment of Minos, a scene, Goldgar remarks, "that has no parallel in Plato."²⁵

Modern readers find nothing remotely subversive in Fielding's narrative, but a narrow-eyed, suspicious eighteenth-century theologian could find much to carp at: no divine presence, hell minimized, salvation only by works, family relations emphasized, and a flirtation! Arthur Murphy, Goldgar points out, supposes that Fielding had been attacked for his "new system," but finding no evidence of such attacks, Goldgar attributes Murphy's remark to taking Fielding "at face value."²⁶ Goldgar is doubtless correct, but Murphy evidently found it neither incomprehensible nor improbable that someone might have attacked Fielding for his afterlife vision. Defoe detested Swift as an obscene dean, with "progressive" Defoe, dissenter and layman, being far more conventionally pious than the "conservative" cleric Swift.²⁷

²⁴ Goldgar, "Myth and History," 236–40; Goldgar, introduction to *Miscellanies*, xxviii–xxx.

²⁵ Goldgar, "Myth and History," 238.

²⁶ Goldgar, "Myth and History," 240.

²⁷ Defoe attacked Jonathan Swift as "The Copper-Farthing Author," referring to the Wood pamphlets: "the learned Dr. S——; he that can Preach and read Prayers in the Morning, write Baudy in the Afternoon, banter Heaven and Religion, and write prophanely at Night; and then read Prayers and Preach again the next Morning, and so on in a due Rotation of Extremes." Defoe, *Mere Nature Delineated*, cited in John Richetti, *The Life of Daniel Defoe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 368n6. Bernard Mandeville insisted that Swift's "Religion and Piety [were] amply set forth in that undisguised Confession of his Faith, *The Tale of a Tub*" in *A Letter to Dion* (1732), cited in *Private Vices, Publick Benefits? The Contemporary Reception of Bernard Mandeville*, ed. J. Martin Stafford (Solihull: Ismeron, 1997), 597.

His—or someone else’s—Mrs. Veal also objected strenuously to poets who referred to Heaven as Elysium.²⁸ Such readers, Fielding attempted to forestall. Without breaking the reward-and-punishment paradigm of Christian orthodoxy, Fielding contributes to the emergent trend of minimizing punishments and emphasizing benevolent inclusiveness, challenging the residual terrors of hell and judgment revived by Methodism and continuing to afflict Samuel Johnson, William Cowper, Joseph Priestley, and many others.²⁹ Most importantly, he represents the reunion with a beloved, dead child. Before Fielding, that topos had been sketched in a few poems and diaries as an event passionately desired, but it had never been realized on the page for a general reader.³⁰ With new systems of heaven and hell under discussion, Fielding’s disclaiming any intention to set up a new system suggests he was aware of deficiencies in the old that his work remedied.

Among Fielding’s more scandalous innovations are the absence of divine presence and the presence of amorous desire. The author falls in “a very violent Degree of seraphic Love” with a beautiful spirit in the coach (13), whose hand he continues to hold in Elysium (46). Anticipating Emanuel Swedenborg’s and William Blake’s amorous afterlives, Fielding tweaks his censorious and

²⁸ Boyce, 422n62. Defoe’s authorship has been challenged; the issue here is not authorship but attitude. George Starr, “Why Defoe Probably Did Not Write *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, nos. 3–4 (2003): 421–51.

²⁹ The translator of *Heaven Open to All Men* intended his work to oppose the “Methodist poison” spreading terror among the poor, as George Whitefield sermonized on “The eternity of hell-torments” in *Sermons on Several Subjects*, 2 vols. (London, 1739), 134–40; but William Whiston followed Thomas Burnet in hoping that the “Eternity of Hell Torments” would soon be exploded as doctrine and “as little believ’d as Transubstantiation,” in *The Eternity of Hell Torments Considered*, 2nd ed. (1740; London, 1752), 2.

³⁰ See Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 355–60; Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 134–40; Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), 123–32. For Ariès, such topics as reunion with and separation from loved ones do not enter the argument until the nineteenth century, considerably later than other scholars have found and the primary texts indicate. See Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranom (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); and Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1981).

prudish contemporaries for whom there is no difference of sex in the great beyond.³¹ As to absence of divine presence, the Christian God cannot of course be introduced into a comic allegory, but Fielding also insists on an absence of divines. Julian the Apostate is three times a bishop before he becomes the martyr Latimer. Three bishops, princes of the church, have been repulsed from the gates of heaven as deficient in morality and charity; their faith good for nothing, except an opportunity to try again to see if they can get it right in another life.

Fielding also minimizes hell, emphasizes familial relations, and proposes progressive improvement, innovations that dominate later thinking. D.P. Walker traces “the decline of hell” among philosophers and theologians; Pope mocked preachers who “never mention hell to ears polite”; and Fielding fosters that decline in popular literature.³² Hell, called “the Bottomless Pit,” Fielding places at the gates of Elysium, like the little door through which Ignorance vanishes at the last moment in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Fielding reserves the pit not for the ignorant, but for “those who were guilty of some very heinous Crimes, [they are] hustled in at a little back Gate, whence they tumbled immediately into the Bottomless Pit” (32). The pit is offstage, as Fielding the magistrate later suggested hangings should be. No horrors, flames, tortures, or sufferings are described: only disappearance. Fielding’s model, Plato’s Myth of Er, is far more punitive. The wicked endure 1,000 years of torture before they are allowed to take up bodies again, and the worst tyrants never return, pulled back down just as they glimpse the light.³³ Fielding’s Bottomless Pit functions as threat always feared, rarely used, and never used at all for an individual sinner or criminal. Indeed, Fielding’s Bottomless Pit was last used a thousand years before his time.

The only persons specifically plunged into the Bottomless Pit are the forces who massacred, on Justinian’s order in 710, all the

³¹ Fielding is probably not thinking of *Eloisa to Abelard*, where the angels greet Abelard’s entrance to heaven with a “love like mine,” Eloisa’s unabashedly sensual passion. Pope had medieval warrant for such a view, from the lovers’ letters and their contemporaries. Cecilia A. Feilla, “Translating Communities: The Institutional Epilogue to the Letters of Abelard and Heloise,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 16, no. 2 (2003): 363–79.

³² D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Pope, *Moral Essay iv: To Burlington on the Use of Riches*, in *Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, line 150, p. 593.

³³ Plato, *Republic*, 352–53.

inhabitants of the Thracian Bosphorus—roasting them alive, casting them into the sea, putting them to the sword. For such familiar activities, Fielding chose to go back to Justinian's time rather than to more recent books of martyrs or days such as St. Bartholomew's, twined in unresolved religious controversy. When, however, a single soldier presents himself, having committed similar atrocities, he is sent back to the world to try again. Among his "lesser Cruelties," he raped a woman, "murdered a little Infant playing in her Lap, and then burnt her House" (96). But the soldier is recycled, his sufferings after the war compensating for his "barbarities" during it, in a curious economy of retribution. As to poor thieves and robbers arrived at the gates of Elysium expecting to be damned because in this life they were hanged, Fielding always saves them. (*Tom Jones* reproduces this forgiving economy. Found out, Blifil lives as happily as a Blifil can in the north; Black George vanishes.) Fielding thus preserves the traditional Christian punishment of the pit, but does not inflict it for Julian's worst actions. As will be seen below, Fielding's pit and its vanishing action are compatible with annihilationism, a heterodox view proposing that the souls of the wicked are not tortured, but annihilated.

Fielding's "new system" sidesteps both Catholic purgatory and Anglican hellfire for progressive improvement in this life, not the next. Unlike Platonic or Ovidian metempsychosis, no one in Fielding turns into an animal by choice or force. There is no going down the chain of beings to find one's essential nature or to secure retribution. No brutal driver is transformed into a horse to experience the cruelty he inflicted, as Fielding proposes in a *Champion* essay (22 March 1739/40). All is human here.

At the gates of Elysium, most individuals are not admitted, but are sent back for "farther Purification" (32) to live another life. New lives atone for old crimes. Oliver Cromwell, who the narrator's grandmother assured him had been "carried away by the Devil himself in a Tempest" (42), scrambles into Elysium after only one additional life. Reborn as a cavalier, he follows James II into exile, snuffing candles at the Paris Opera, an impoverished loyal servant to the family he had harmed. The *Tale of a Tub's* Cromwellian Jack, reborn as Jacobite Peter, is forgiven. Having illustrated the principle of compensation with Cromwell, Fielding follows up with the even more unlikely Julian the Apostate.

As Paulson gasped, what is Julian the Apostate, “the Roman emperor who outlawed Christianity,” doing in Elysium at all?³⁴ Goldgar, having defended Julian’s eighteenth-century reputation, supposes Fielding chose him because Julian believed he was Alexander the Great reborn, according to a 1735 biography Fielding may have known.³⁵ Paulson’s shock still stands. Julian chooses to remain in eternity not as the martyr Latimer but as the apostate. Although John Dryden favoured Origen’s view that even the devil will eventually be saved, Fielding does not propose it. Still, in his system almost anyone can eventually get in—that is his surreptitious point. Evidently Sarah Fielding agreed. No moral paragon, Anne Boleyn is not required to do another stint as a later Queen Anne, building churches.

Once inside Elysium, Fielding’s attention turns back to this world. Having met the celebrities who interest him, the narrator settles down for Julian’s narrative, about the world they have departed. No other-worldly focus distracts the narrator: the only thing to do in Elysium is discuss the world one has left. Fielding composes Julian’s narrative aesthetically, by contrast and for variety, rather than ideologically, as Bildungsroman, enlightenment, or progressive improvement. Most critics find these adventures tedious. Although aesthetically motivated and thematically justifiable, the structure fails with moderns who want more point, more character, and less history. In his twenty-three tries, Julian is “a Slave, a Jew, a General,” an heir, a monk, a dancing master, etc. (45–46), and finally thrice a bishop. Three times a bishop creates an opening for progressive improvement, but Fielding does not use it. He breaks off just as he begins to meddle with corruptions in the church and gives the ending of his book away, to a lady. Modern readers who complain about this part of *Journey* have discovered the tedium of heaven when one has no interest in God.³⁶

³⁴ Ronald Paulson, *Life*, 124.

³⁵ Goldgar, “Myth and History,” 243.

³⁶ Eighteenth-century writers had already begun to worry about boredom, tedium, and satiety, by insisting that intellectual stimulus, variety, and improvement were indeed to be had in heaven beyond our most eager earthly imaginations. Watts followed Joseph Addison, who followed Tillotson, in addressing the issue. See also Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino, *The Joys of the Blessed; Being a Practical Discourse Concerning the Eternal Happiness of the Saints in Heaven*, trans. Thomas Foxtton (London, 1722), iii–vi.

Where Fielding makes his most visible impact is his inventing for literature the embrace of one's dead children. The passage was much admired by Charles Dickens, who recognized its uniqueness, and was rewritten by Mark Twain, for whom it had become an intolerable cliché.³⁷ The passage itself is brief: "I presently met a little Daughter, whom I had lost several Years before. Good Gods! What Words can describe the Raptures, the melting passionate Tenderness, with which we kiss'd each other, continuing in our Embrace, with most extatic Joy, a Space, which if Time had been measured here as on Earth, could not be less than half a Year" (36–37). Thereafter, he holds his daughter's hand and the lady's from the coach while they all listen to Julian's story. Fielding's amorous language for a six-year-old daughter who died March 1741/42 (36n1) seems more appropriate to a lovers' reunion, equally sentimental and orgasmic, but his language actually displaces that for the soul's vision of God, borrowed and deliberately misapplied from William Sherlock's *Practical Discourse Concerning Death* (1689; 20th ed., London, 1731). Granted, Fielding can do this only in a classical "Elysium," not a Christian "Heaven." The classical model releases the imagination to articulate its desires; the Christian model still struggles with the orthodoxy that is also the guarantor of actual immortality.

Reunions in heaven require two parsings: theological and popular. Recognizing "our friends" in paradise is a common and popular medieval theme, extended to wives and children from the middle to the late seventeenth century. Dante, it will be recalled, sees friends as well as enemies in the *Comedy* and is reunited with Beatrice, but his wife is nowhere in sight.³⁸ Bunyan's Christian is promised, "There you shall enjoy your friends again, that are got thither before you."³⁹ Since Mrs. Christian is still in the City of Destruction, she is not among "your friends," but, like Allworthy in *Tom Jones*, many late seventeenth-century men wanted most

³⁷ Charles Dickens, who named his own son after Fielding, twice used the passage to console mourning friends (Martin C. Battestin with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life*, 341). Mark Twain rewrites the concept (not the passage) in his *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* (New York: Harper's, 1909).

³⁸ Other medieval visionaries also see "friends" and townspeople, but not their domestic intimates. See Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989), 122, 129–32, 182, 193, 205–08, 247–48, 254; and Houlbrooke, 227, 232–33, 242–44.

³⁹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. N.H. Keeble (1678; New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 130.

to see their dead wives. Allworthy's neighbours who did not arraign his sense or his sincerity, arraigned his religion. The desire was doctrinally dubious.

Until Augustine and after Christ, who had no interest in such promises, Roman Christians often supposed, on the model of Roman funerary sculpture and *Scipio's Dream*, a reunion after death with loved ones as well as union with God. Ambrose of Milan (395 C.E.) and Cyprian of Carthage (martyred 258 C.E.) promised parents, children, and spouses, waiting to be embraced.⁴⁰ While such desires doubtless endured, they were not gratified by orthodox doctrine as it developed. God became all-in-all, a view persisting well into the eighteenth century, though gradually sapped and undermined by alternate articulations of desire. The beatific vision and rapturous inclusion in the heavenly city among the souls of the blessed did not guarantee the renewal of domestic ties. Paul had promised resurrection, but only after the Parousia and only in a changed body (1 Corinthians 15:20–54). Through the mid-seventeenth century, any such reunions waited until beyond the last judgment.

In his *Exequy*, longing to see his dead wife, Henry King, the Bishop of Chichester (1592–1669), was confident they would meet again. After judgment, “wee shall rise / And view ourselves with cleerer eyes / In that calme region, where no Night / Can hide us from each other's sight.”⁴¹ Yet this glimpse would not be granted until “the Earth to cinders” turned, the world as “calcined” as her body. Around 1650, Ralph Josselin, burying a son, and later a daughter, was confident their souls rested in Jesus and he would see them again, but only when they all three rose at the last judgment; half a century later, Isaac Archer expected to see his many dead children “at the resurrection of the just.”⁴² These clergymen's wishes were expressed privately, in diaries.

In the next century, Swift entertained no such hopes as Stella lay dying. The dean of St. Patrick's lamented to Pope, “I have often

⁴⁰ Alister McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 139–43.

⁴¹ Henry King, “An Exequy to his Matchlesse never to be forgotten Freind,” *Poems*, ed. Margaret Crum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 70, lines 51–60. Anne King was buried January 1623/24; the poem was published in 1657.

⁴² David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 388.

wished that God almighty would be so easy to the weakness of mankind, as to let old friends be acquainted in another state; and if I were to write an utopia for heaven, that would be one of my schemes. This wildness you must allow for, because I am giddy and deaf.”⁴³ The letters of condolence Swift wrote in his professional function indicate the same despairing resignation. He suggests no consolations for loss except loving less and never promises that loved ones will be restored to sight or consciousness by a loving, commiserating God. Swift’s self-denial is characteristic: he was not given to allowing himself in imagination the full possession of what he desired. Orthodox afterlives remained centred on the divine, as Sherlock and Taylor insisted.

And if not the divine, then divines. Both Watts in a popular sermon and Joseph Trapp in a lengthy poem imagine their male subjects’ meeting their male friends, “holy Priests, for Learning fam’d,” the university’s leading lights, in Trapp; in Watts, Sir John Hartopp greets his good friends Dr Owen and Sir Thomas Abney. As to Sir John’s predeceased wife and daughter, unnamed, they are elliptically invoked in questions and by negatives, “And is there not the same Reason to believe, that our departed friend hath *by this time* renewed his sacred Endearments with those *Kindred Spirits*, that were once related to him in some of the Nearest Bonds of Flesh and Blood?”⁴⁴ Watts and Trapp push considerably further than most divines are willing to go. Fielding takes a further giant step, but his genre is classical, not Christian. The move on behalf of the family that Watts and Trapp do not take, others made.

Equally reverend, Josselin and Archer were more self-indulgent than Swift, Sherlock, Taylor, and others who allowed themselves only such consolations as Swift offered as priest. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fathers, writing down their feelings, developing the practice of articulating inchoate feelings on a page, chart a clear trajectory from writing in order to achieve resignation to writing that facilitates the imagining of a reunion. Prominent in seventeenth-century laments for dead children is the chastening of parental grief. Often the parent advises himself to disengage from attachment to the child and reattach himself to God. So Ben Jonson laments his sin of “too much hope” and

⁴³ Jonathan Swift to Alexander Pope, 27 October 1727, cited in Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 3:549.

⁴⁴ Trapp, 14; Watts, 251 (emphasis added).

prays that henceforth “what he loves may never like too much” (*On My First Son*), a desire incomprehensible at a later period.⁴⁵ In Thomas Parnell’s *The Hermit* (1721) a child is murdered to bring his father’s affections back to God.

Baptized infants were confidently supposed to rest in the bosom of Jesus or Abraham, but parents still required consolation. In Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s *Friendship in Death* (1728), a dead two-year-old writes from the beyond to report on his growth in knowledge and happiness.⁴⁶ Rowe reassures living mothers about the dead child’s well-being, although she promises no reunion with the child when the parent dies.⁴⁷ *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1731) turned up an epitaph that catches precisely the paradoxical anger and misery of parents, bereft and abandoned by their infant,

⁴⁵ Ben Jonson, *On My First Son*, in *The Oxford Authors: Ben Jonson*, ed. Ian Donaldson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 236–37.

⁴⁶ Peter Walmsley attests to the work’s continuing popularity into the nineteenth century and the comfort it gave James Boswell. Walmsley, “*Friendship in Death*: Elizabeth Rowe’s Ethnography of Heaven,” paper presented at the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, McGill University, Montreal, QC, October 2008. See also John J. Richetti, “Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe: The Novel as Polemic,” *PMLA* 82, no. 7 (1967): 522. Parts of *Friendship in Death, or Letters from the Dead to the Living* are reprinted in Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction by Women 1660–1730: An Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Backscheider and Richetti attest to the popularity of the genre: John Dee’s *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years between Dr John Dee ... and Some Spirits* (1659) was still in print; Thomas Brown’s *Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1702) had been popular enough to warrant several more volumes; other works included Fontenelle’s *Dialogues of the Dead*, trans. 1708; Fenelon’s *Fables and Dialogues of the Dead*, trans. 1722; and Daniel Defoe, *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727) (xxi). Frederick M. Keener’s *English Dialogues of the Dead: A Critical History, An Anthology, & A Check List* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973) requires that both participants be dead, rather than communicating with the living. Fielding himself received a letter from Joseph Addison among the shades in 1754; it was a little untimely, but the author could not have known that Fielding would be with Addison so soon. *Admonitions from the Dead in Epistles to the Living* (London, 1754), 215–28, reprinted in Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood, *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), 380–86.

⁴⁷ Such reassurance is rare: Plato ignores children, while Virgil and Dante put them in limbo, and Sherlock says it is not our concern what God does with infants, especially heathen ones. Among the few deliberate conciliators are the ancient Sumerians, who promised mothers that in the other world their dead infants drank honey and butter, playing with silver and golden cups. “Bilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld,” in Jeremy Black, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson, and Gábor Zólyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32ff.

but consoling themselves through the child's state, "Writ on the Tomb-stone of an Infant":

Read this and weep—but not for me;
Lament thy longer Misery.
My life was short, my grief the less
Blame not my haste to happiness.

Missing in both Rowe and the epitaph is the promise of a reunion with the dead child.

As to unbaptized infants, according to David Cressy, they were often given the "benefit of the doubt." Not surprisingly, Isaac Archer in 1675 managed to persuade himself that his unbaptized infant "would still be taken to God's bosom."⁴⁸ Anglicans who held baptism essential to salvation were more concerned than dissenters who abandoned baptism as a practice, like Quakers, or deferred it to adulthood. Fielding reports that among his Ptfghsiumski the Moderate hold that the child who dies before Bdgkntlhs (christening) is "resolv'd into its Primitive nothing," while "the more rigid Zealots believe it is Dmnd" (*Champion*, 9 August 1740, "A Continuation of the Extract from Mr. Job Vinegar's Travels," 417). Sherlock advised that God's will was not knowable in this matter. Henry Dodwell prided himself that his argument for the natural mortality of the soul solved the problem of damnation for unbaptized infants.⁴⁹

By the second decade of the eighteenth century, diarists, usually male, enduring the death of a child, often a daughter, had begun to hope for "a joyful meeting" and to "trust in God we shall all meet in Heaven" without waiting until the last judgment.⁵⁰ Anticipating Fielding, Mr. H—— stretched Christian limits when he demanded to see his dead eleven-year-old again, upon his entering heaven ("Elegiac Poem," *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1731). He first imagines lying beside her in the grave until the general resurrection of the body:

⁴⁸ Cressy, 465, 32.

⁴⁹ *An Epistolary Discourse, Proving from the Scriptures and the First Fathers, That the Soul is a Principle Naturally Mortal: But Immortalized Actually by the Pleasure of God, to Punishment; or, to Reward, by its Union with the Divine Baptismal spirit*, 2nd ed. with additions (London, 1707), lxxx, 310.

⁵⁰ Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship*, 126–27. For additional epitaphs and memorials for children, see Houlbrooke, 355–59.

My Flesh shall rest in Quiet by her Side,
 Like a fond Bridegroom sleeping by his Bride;
 Till the last Day shall both to Life restore,
 When Death shall die and Time shall be no more.

Unlike his seventeenth-century predecessors, however, Mr. H—— did not expect to wait that long to see her again. Souls may reunite at once upon death, before they see God. An angel is invited to notify his daughter as soon as he dies, so she can be there to meet him:

Do you with Heav'nly Raptures meet my Ghost
 On th'utmost limits of that happy Coast:
 Let me receive Increase of Joy from you!
 Till then, my little Saint, *Adieu, Adieu.*⁵¹

Perhaps applying Dante's encounter with Beatrice to his own situation, Mr. H—— mingles the raptures of reconciliation with the raptures of heaven, going considerably further than authorized by such popular manuals on dying as Sherlock's *Practical Discourse Concerning Death* (1689).

Fielding knew his Sherlock, who still centred heaven on God. Illustrating the "decline of hell," Peter Walmsley affirms that Sherlock "tells his reader that 'We are traveling to Heaven,' never stopping to explore other options."⁵² That is true enough of the *Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, but ignores Sherlock's less popular works exploring other possibilities, and finding fewer readers. *A Discourse Concerning the Happiness of Good Men, and the Punishment of the Wicked in the Next World* reached only a 4th edition by 1726; *A Practical Discourse Concerning a Future Judgment*, reached only a 10th edition by 1731. Evidently the word "punishment" in the title could cut even Sherlock's editions by 75 per cent, while "judgment" reduced them 50 per cent.

Nor does Sherlock guarantee reunions in heaven: "Good Men will have no Friends, no Relations in the other World, but those who are truly good, who are Members of the same Mystical Body of Christ, the Children of God."⁵³ Heaven's joys, ineffable,

⁵¹ *Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1731), "Elegiac Poem," 261; epitaph, 170.

⁵² Walmsley, "'Live to Die, Die to Live': An Introduction," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no.1 (2008): 6.

⁵³ William Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning a Future Judgment*, 10th ed. (London, 1731), 191.

undefined, are God-centred: "Our imperfect Conceptions of God in this World, cannot help us to guess what the *Joys* of Heaven are; we know not how the sight of God, how the thoughts of him, will pierce our Souls, with what *extasies* and *raptures* we shall sing the Song of the Lamb, with what *melting affections* perfect Souls shall *embrace*, what glories and wonders we shall there see and know."⁵⁴ Sherlock does not seem to anticipate little angels, like Mr. H——'s daughter, who flutter about in greeting and intervene between the soul and the vision. More lushly affirmative than Swift, Sherlock still allows no space for merely human affections and wishes.

While "Raptures," "melting passionate Tenderness," and "extatic Joy" are the narrator's experiences when he "Embrace[s]" his little daughter in Fielding's *Journey*, Sherlock applies such phrases to seeing the Lamb. The shared vocabulary is not coincidence. In the first volume of the *Miscellanies* Fielding published "On the Remedy of Affliction for the Loss of Our Friends." That essay begins with classical antecedents and gives wise advice: distract oneself from grief, meditate frequently on death, and accept one's loss. It ends with hopes of reunion in heaven, and an alleged quotation from Sherlock. Fielding erases Sherlock's interest in God and the Lamb in favour of reunion with one's dead, and ends his essay manifesting no desire to see a divine face: "The Hope of again meeting the beloved Person, of renewing and cementing the dear Union in Bliss everlasting. This is a Rapture which leaves the warmest Imagination at a Distance. *Who can conceive* (says *Sherlock*, in his Discourse on Death) *the melting Caresses of two Souls in Paradise?* What are all the Trash and Trifles, the Bubbles, Bawbles and Gewgaws of this Life, to such a Meeting?" (*Miscellanies*, 1:225). How important, exactly, is God to such a meeting? Fielding has put in place the modern expectation that in heaven one sees one's family and friends, and God exists only as the underwriter of the experience, no longer its object.

The pressures and pleasures of orthodoxy for Fielding are clear in his *Champion* essays, a year or so earlier than *Journey* and *Joseph Andrews*, or *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, and the posthumous

⁵⁴ Sherlock, *Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, 1689, 85–86; 20th ed. (London, 1731), 55 (emphasis added).

Fragment of a Comment on L. Bolingbroke's Essays (1755). That an afterlife exists, he repeats with some frequency, usually observing at the same time that the way most people act, they clearly do not share his belief. He owned contemporary books that questioned the afterlife, including Samuel Clarke, *Works* (1738); Henry Dodwell, *Epistolary Discourse Proving That the Soul is Mortal* (1706); and Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724).⁵⁵ He derided fashionable people's denial of the immortality of the soul in their lives from the *Champion's* Ptfghsiumgski or Inconstants to *Tom Jones's* "the man of the world," Bunyan's Worldly Wiseman modernized. That gentleman "directs his conduct in this world, as one who being fully persuaded there is no other, is resolved to make the most of this."⁵⁶ So, too, the Inconstants, visited by Job Vinegar in his travels, follow their deity MNEY only in this life: they lose him when they die. "A conclusive Argument, that they really believe no State after Death" is how thoroughly they despise those without MNEY, no matter how virtuous; utterly alien to them is the concept of "laying up Treasures ... in Eternity" (*Champion*, 9 August 1740, 418; compare 20 March 1739/40, 241).

The arguments Fielding brings forward on behalf of the afterlife are often compensatory. Like the virtuous man who lacks money but lays up treasures in eternity, the man not rewarded as he deserves or suffering from this life's arbitrary allocation of goods is warmed with the promise of future justice. If injustice seems to prevail, then this state is probationary, and "Our Happiness here [may be] of very little Account in the Divine Eye" (*Champion*, 26 February 1739/40, 198). A few weeks later, Fielding pushes the argument further. The fact of injustice in this life becomes "a noble Argument for the Certainty of a future State." Since justice is the principal characteristic of God, the unrewarded, disregarded, and overlooked may look forward to a generous recompense: "can the Heart of Man be warmed with a more exstactick Imagination than that the most excellent Attribute of the great Creator of the Universe is concerned in rewarding him?" (*Champion*, 6 March 1739/40, 220).

⁵⁵ See n8 above.

⁵⁶ Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, 4 vols. (London, 1749), 4:46. Book 14, chap. 8.

Reasoning on the afterlife, Fielding shows himself Sherlockian in the style that Walmsley emphasizes. Religion itself “concerns the eternal Happiness of the Souls of Men,” Fielding affirms in *Champion* (29 March 1740, 259), a view he carries forward even more emphatically in *Fragment of a Comment on L. Bolingbroke’s Essays* (1755). Sketching a comforting liberal theology and snatching religion from Bolingbroke’s mockery, Fielding asserts that religion concerns “the eternal *and final* happiness of all mankind” (*The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, Shamela, and Occasional Writings*, 670, emphasis added). What is “eternal and final” is not judgment or justice or God’s immediacy, but “happiness,” and that happiness is “all mankind[’s].” In Fielding’s intuitive phrasing, all mankind ends up eternally and finally happy. Punishments, tortures, coercion, pains, and penalties all vanish, in the eternal future imagined by the disabled Middlesex magistrate. In *Champion*, “Equality of Bliss” for all mankind is ours to lose, by forfeiture here of our “lasting Settlement hereafter” (26 February 1739/40, 199).

While Fielding emphasizes hope and happiness, the *Champion* essays do not deny punishment. He admits to the doctrine of eternal punishments accompanying eternal rewards: “By pursuing the Delights of Sin, the Gospel tells us, we not only forfeit Eternal Happiness, but shall suffer Eternal Misery” (19 April 1740, 284). Yet, like several of his contemporaries, he found disturbing the doctrine of “Eternal Punishment”—only the devil could rejoice at it (284). Certainly salvation was for the virtuous, not the faithful, as *Journey* proposes. Although he does not address the issue directly in *Champion*, both *Jonathan Wild* and *Joseph Andrews* insist that virtuous non-Christians are saved. Heartfree’s generous view is assimilated to orthodoxy when a clergyman, Parson Adams, reiterates it.⁵⁷

Although it sometimes seems that Fielding concedes the possibility of punishment only when he is backed into a corner and the gospel brandished, there are moments when he is eager for punishment. Christians who bring destruction to families by plunging debtors into prisons are advised that not forgiving debts may be dangerous to their eternal health. Such “cursed and

⁵⁷ Paulson, *Life*, 131. Joseph Trapp also includes virtuous pagans among the learned divines he met in heaven (*Thoughts upon the Four Last Things*, 22).

rancorous” pursuit is the only crime meriting infinite punishment: “nor do I know any Crime in this World which can appear to a finite Understanding to deserve infinite Punishment” (*Champion*, 19 February 1739/40, 192). Clergymen in particular are reminded to “suppose (as they will most certainly find them) the Threats as well as Promises of the Gospel should be true” (*Champion*, 19 April 1740, 286). In *Amelia*, the pedantic Dr Harrison frequently threatens his interlocutors with damnation (especially for duelling), but his extended discourse on rewards and punishments focuses, as in *Champion*, on clergymen’s lives.⁵⁸ When such men appear at the gates of Elysium, however, Fielding does not hustle them into his bottomless pit, but sends them back. Possessed of a “finite Understanding,” Fielding does not seize the opportunity to inflict “infinite Punishment.” At the same time, he evidently shared the common assumption that thinking on the next world could improve a person’s behaviour.

Paradoxically, Fielding’s Bottomless Pit is consistent with an annihilationist view of the wicked. The idea that wicked souls were simply destroyed after some punishment rather than tortured eternally, John Locke held secretly, William Whiston voiced publicly, and Isaac Barrow (who converts Booth in *Amelia*) leaned towards.⁵⁹ In Fielding, those hustled off and dropped into the pit simply vanish, and they could be construed as “annihilated” on the way down to no bottom. Although he carefully maintains the familiar language that recalls the biblical pit of burning sulphur, he removes the noxious fumes and agonizing flames.

These changes will doubtless seem very moderate, even negligible, to modern afterlife deniers or fantasists. Fielding proffers no cataclysmic revolutionary overturning of conventional belief systems. What he does provide is, in some ways, more interesting—evidence of the way cultural change inches along, in minute increments, until we suddenly find ourselves in a different world without quite knowing how we got there. New ideas emerge within an older frame that remains in place. In Raymond Williams’s terms, the emergent idea coexists in Fielding with

⁵⁸ Fielding, *Amelia*, 4 vols. (London, 1752), 3:314–17. Book 9, chap. 10; see also book 9, chap. 3; book 12, chap. 4.

⁵⁹ Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 127–29, 145–48.

residual ones.⁶⁰ At the very least, it seems wholly appropriate that the first English author to station a hero beside his wife's childbed should also be the first English author to embrace in his arms his dead child in heaven.



Regina M. Janes is professor of English at Skidmore College and the author, most recently, of *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture* (2005).

⁶⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–27.