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The Lottery in British Prose Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century

"They bring an immense revenue to the Government; and diffuse a taste for gambling among the poorest of the poor, which is very comfortable to the coffers of the State, and very ruinous to themselves".[1] This was Charles Dickens's summation of the effects of the lotteries in Naples, put forth in his *Pictures from Italy* (1846).[2] Dickens had witnessed firsthand the Neapolitan preoccupation with lotteries when, on a rare break from writing novels, he toured Italy in the mid-1840s. Back in Britain, the state lottery had been shut down some twenty years earlier – it would have been something he remembered from his penurious youth.[3] Seeing the still legal and still popular lotteries in Naples, he found them to be an "extraordinary feature in the real life" of the city and, with his gaze ever drawn to structures of power and the plight of the lower ranks of society, it was a feature that both fascinated and appalled him. For his readers in Britain, this episode in the travelogue could have been read as a validation of Parliament's abolition in 1826 of a fiscal-cultural institution that had been a part of British life for 130 years. At the same time, the passages offered a simple demonstration of the magnetic power of lotteries – of their multiple attractions not only for gamblers, but also for writers and readers.

He gave his readers a meticulous account of how the lottery in Naples worked. It was a version of the Genoese *lotto*, with 100 numbers of which five were drawn. Gamblers staked what sum they chose on three numbers, winning a small prize if one came up, a larger prize for two and a vast, potentially life-changing payout – "three thousand five hundred times" the stake – if all three came up. An affordable stake and a top prize so large that its aura distracts from the long odds of winning it – that was the formula which distinguished lotteries such as these from most other forms of gambling. As a psychological manipulator, the lottery

1 Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 423.

2 I am grateful to Carmela Maria Laudando for drawing my attention to Dickens's account of the Neapolitan lottery. For other suggestions and for comments on an early draft of the chapter, I am grateful to the "Invention of the Lottery Fantasy" project team.

3 For traces of Dickens's memories of the lottery, see his creative essay "Bill-Sticking" which includes recollections by the "King of the Bill-Stickers" concerning how the lottery was advertised: *Household Words*, 22 March 1851, 601–606; reprinted in *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism*, Volume II: *The Amusements of the People and Other Papers: Reports, Essays and Reviews 1834–51*, ed. Michael Slater (J. M. Dent, 1996), 339–350.

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111445540-013

encouraged big dreaming rather than rational calculation, whilst providing a trickle of smaller prizes which offered occasional consolation and kept hope in the populous alive. It worked with the Neapolitans and it had worked in Britain, albeit with a significantly different design. The British lottery had been a blanks and prizes game, with each purchased ticket drawn alongside another ticket indicating a loss or a win, and for much of the lottery's life – up until 1769 – the gamble was the icing on the cake of an annuity scheme; buying a ticket was an investment, akin to the Premium Bonds available in Britain today.

Lotteries tapped into people's dreams and aspirations, but they also offered immediate diversion and entertainment. The drawings were highly theatrical events. Dickens described in detail the Neapolitan ceremony, which was held in a mouldering Court of Justice, with officials seated around a raised horse-shoe table, and a group of soldiers protecting them from a crowd of "the commonest of the Neapolitan people" bristling with hope of a win. The box containing the numbers was sprinkled with holy water by a priest, and the drawing of the tickets – "rolled up, round something hard, like a bonbon" – was performed by a boy in a "tight brown Holland coat" with just one sleeve, leaving the "right arm bared to the shoulder, ready for plunging down into the mysterious chest".[4] The whole ceremony was designed to show that no deception was involved and that the proceedings were sanctioned by the church with God keeping a watchful eye.

That sense of divine involvement underpinned the superstition of Italian gamblers which, Dickens observed as he reported on how the locals chose their numbers, reached quite extraordinary levels. "Every accident or event, is supposed, by the ignorant populace", he wrote, "to be a revelation to the beholder, or party concerned, in connexion with the lottery".[5] Earlier in *Pictures from Italy*, among the scenes from Rome, he had described, in gruesome detail, the public execution by beheading of a young man. Looking at the crowd of observers he witnessed no signs of "disgust, or pity, or indignation, or sorrow", but he noted how on such occasions the "speculators in the lottery, station themselves at favourable points for counting the gouts of blood that spirt out, here or there; and buy that number".[6] Arriving in Naples he found comparable beliefs in the capacity of the dead or dying to signal lucky numbers. He heard a tale of a man dashed down by a horse who was implored to state his age so that he might "play that number in the lottery". Basically, any event could be interpreted as a sign of a number likely to be drawn – the collapse of a roof, "a fire in the King's Palace", and so on. In

4 Dickens, *American Notes*, 424–426.
5 Dickens, *American Notes*, 424.
6 Dickens, *American Notes*, 391.

the city's lottery offices, many gamblers would consult "a printed book, an Universal Lottery Diviner" which listed numbers alongside "every possible accident and circumstance" that the player might have encountered.[7]

The account shows a detachment from such popular superstitions. But here, as in his fiction, Dickens is fundamentally sympathetic to the poor, including those who gamble. Ignorance and credulity are not the products of personal fault, his report suggests. The gambling poor of Naples emerge from the description more as choiceless automata than as autonomous players – subjects steered towards losing what little they have by a mechanism of the state. And in Dickens's hands, the lottery is only a cause of suffering. He finds no-one in Naples whose lottery fantasies have been realised and he concludes his description with a scene of misery:

> Where the winners may be, nobody knows. They certainly are not present; the general disappointment filling one with pity for the poor people. They look: when we stand aside, observing them, in their passage through the court-yard down below: as miserable as the prisoners in the jail (it forms a part of the building), who are peering down upon them, from behind their bars; or, as the fragments of human heads which are still dangling in chains outside, in memory of the good old times, when their owners were strung up there, for the popular edification.[8]

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"[N]o manner of Reason can be given why a Man should prefer one [number] to the other before the Lottery is drawn". This observation would be quite at home in Dickens's account of the Neapolitan lottery but, in fact, it was written and published more than 130 years earlier, on 9 October 1711 in *The Spectator*.[9] This issue of the magazine was written by Joseph Addison, who reflects on the behaviour of gamblers in the British state lottery arranged earlier that year, with the draw beginning in late summer. The point of this lottery, dubbed the "Adventure of Two Millions", was to raise funds for campaigns in the War of the Spanish Succession,[10] but Addison was interested primarily in the abandonment of human reason in the adventurers' selection of their numbers. He saw just as much superstition at work as Dickens witnessed in Naples, albeit that the demographics were different; the British state lottery would come to have a wide social reach (through

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7 Dickens, *American Notes*, 424–425.

8 Dickens, *American Notes*, 426–427.

9 Joseph Addison, *The Spectator No. 191*, 9 October 1711, in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Clarendon Press, 1965), II, 249.

10 See C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Lotteries and Sweepstakes: A Historical, Legal, and Ethical Survey of Their Introduction, Suppression and Re-Establishment in the British Isles* (Heath Cranton, 1932), 136–138.

the dividing of tickets and subsidiary gambling) but in Addison's time the investment scheme, with its alluring chance element, was targeted at the monied classes. The superstitious practices noted by Addison are not as gruesome as those discovered by Dickens, but the irrationality is as strong. He writes of a "well-meaning Man" who is "pleased to risque his good Fortune upon the Number 1711, because it is the Year of our Lord", and, among other capricious gamblers, he knows of a "certain Zealous Dissenter" whose choice is 666, "the Number of the Beast". "The wisest of Men", Addison finds, "are sometimes acted by such unaccountable Motives, as the Life of the Fool and the Superstitious is guided by nothing else".[11] Seeing such continuity between the observations of Addison and Dickens might well lead to the conclusion that the lottery, as Jesse Molesworth has suggested, was the eighteenth-century's "least enlightened institution" – a bastion of unreason stretching across Europe that endured by tempting vast numbers of people to invest money and hope in a possible but highly unlikely event.[12]

But lottery writing between Addison and Dickens shows not only continuity, and the purpose of this chapter is to survey British "long eighteenth-century" literary treatments of the lottery and to draw out their nuances, asking both what the lottery offered authors and how fiction was used in attempts to intervene in lottery culture, including bids to stamp it out. From early parodies of lottery proposals such as *The Love-Lottery* (1709) and *A Scheme for A New Lottery for the Ladies* (1730?) to later creative anti-lottery diatribes such as Samuel Roberts's *The State Lottery, a Dream* (1817), the period saw a wide range of lottery literature, published as stand-alone works, in magazines, and in literary miscellanies. The lottery also crops up in incidental references in numerous works of fiction, both by well-known figures such as Daniel Defoe and Oliver Goldsmith, and by lesser-known authors.

The survey is not comprehensive. Conveying the contours and standpoints of selected works has been prioritised over any (quixotic) pursuit of completeness, while limits of space have led to the exclusion of whole categories of works which could well have been considered. The lottery found a small place within eighteenth-century children's literature, but there is no discussion here of such works as *The Good Boy and Girl's Lottery: All Prizes and No Blanks, as Drawn in the Presence of Master Tommy Trim, Corporal Trim's Cousin* (1790) or *The Lottery, Or Midsummer Recess; Intended for the Information and Amusement of Young Persons of both Sexes* (1797). A further conscious omission is the significant body

11 Addison, *Spectator*, 249–250.

12 Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.

of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century plays which concerned the lottery. These dramatic works have been left out of the story on the grounds, firstly, that they warrant a study of their own in which their straddling of the worlds of print and performance can be examined and, secondly, that the exclusion productively draws focus away from the most celebrated and analysed lottery work of the period – Henry Fielding's ballad opera *The Lottery* (1732) – and so allows light to be shone on the period's far less well-charted lottery literature in prose.[13] Ushering Fielding's play to one side here is not a refusal of its significance but rather part of an ambition to trace the lottery's penetration of literary culture beyond that work (which, along the way, may suggest ways in which Fielding's play connects with other works preoccupied with the same hot topic).[14]

Literary responses to the lottery in prose have attracted some critical attention but have generally been sidelined in both literary history and lottery history – overshadowed by Fielding's play or seen as too uncanonical or prosaic to warrant consideration. Some literary critics have been drawn to the state lottery as a historical phenomenon and used it as a springboard into analyses of eighteenth-century prose fiction, but they have given curiously little attention to those literary works which are patently *about* the lottery. Molesworth, for example, examines the "lottery fantasy" in *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (2010) as a prelude to probing how a series of largely canonical novels of the period grappled in their narratives with statistics, probability, logic, coincidence, and other philosophical/mathematical issues upon which the lottery invited reflection. His selection of fiction for analysis shows a concern with an inferred rather than direct or explicit impact of the lottery on literary culture. A key text for Molesworth, for example, is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) since it displays a deep concern with chance, but it includes no direct reference to the lottery. Jessica Richard similarly considers the lottery in *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (2011), devoting a chapter to "Lotteries and the Romance of Gambling" before advancing the case that "eighteenth-century novels use gambling to examine the ongoing appeal of romance in a transforming economy that was experienced by participants as anything but predictable". "Novelists", she argues, "both critique and capitalize on the romance of gambling".[15] Here again, there is slight attention to fiction concerned directly with the lottery. Works by Maria Edgeworth are cen-

13 For a study of lottery plays, see my *Spectacular Gambling: Lotteries and the Theatre in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (forthcoming).

14 Fielding's play is also discussed in James Raven, "Imagining Trust and Justice", *infra.*

15 Jessica Richard, *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 44.

tral to Richard's study, for example, but these do not include Edgeworth's *The Lottery* (1807). The aim of this chapter is not to critique these original and sophisticated studies but rather to supplement them by highlighting some of the more direct literary responses that were spawned by the British lottery and to show that whilst the lottery undoubtedly invited philosophical and abstract thinking which can have informed fiction it also prompted mimetic representation and reaction – often critical reaction – directly *to itself.*

1 Early fiction, satire, and the metaphor for marriage

The most substantial and developed prose-fictional responses to the British lottery were published in its last fifty years – that is, after the change in 1769 whereby, probably because the government saw the possibility of greater revenue, the lottery became a winner-takes-all game rather than a scheme combining a gamble with an investment.[16] The later period of the lottery saw a widening of its social reach and its enfranchisement of greater numbers from the lower classes was, as will be seen, undoubtedly a motivation behind some of the period's anti-lottery literature, such as Hannah More's *The Wonderful Advantages of Adventuring in the Lottery!!!* (1796).[17] But from the earliest years of the state lottery in the 1690s, authors began using fictional forms in their responses to the growing phenomenon. *Fortunatus's Looking-Glass* by Tib. Saunders, for example, was published in 1699 and used the form of a dialogue between two characters – "*a Citizen and a Country-Farmer of* Hatfield" – as a way of structuring a discourse about modern lotteries.[18] In the words of the lengthy subtitle, this pamphlet is

> *An Essay Upon Lotteries in a Dialogue between* Jack *and* Harry, *wherein are discovered the Intrigues of Lotteries in general, and the great Advantage the Undertakers reap by them; more particularly the extravagant Profit of some of them now on foot; with other remarkable Passages in several of their Proposals.*

16 Bob Harris, *Gambling in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 179. Harris does not account for why the shift occurred. I am grateful to James Raven for pointing out that the reasons behind the change remain obscure but were most likely based on calculations of income against the costs of prize money and the long-term payments on annuities plus administration.

17 A cautious account of the expansion of lottery participation is given in Harris, *Gambling in Britain*, 179–205.

18 Tib. Saunders, *Fortunatus's Looking-Glass; Or An Essay Upon Lotteries* (A. Baldwin, 1699), 1.

This work, then, is not only concerned with the state lottery; it is a discussion also of the array of privately organised schemes that had mushroomed since the official lottery of 1694 (and would soon be limited by legislation at the end of the decade). The pamphlet addresses how "*the Commonalty are almost mad, if they are not got in one Lottery or other to venture their Fortunes*". Saunders's aim is to provide useful knowledge of these schemes – concerning the odds, the organisers' profits, and so on – and in an introductory epistle he states that he has chosen the form of the dialogue since it is "*most readily and easiest to be understood by the Vulgar*". The work has been written in a "*partly jocular and partly serious*" mode, he states, in order to furnish readers with "*better Information in the New Trade, so much crep't in among us of late*".[19]

The work's aspiration to mix pleasure and learning also involves some of the classic tropes of textual sociability that were beginning to proliferate at this time. As Addison and his collaborator Richard Steele would soon be situating many issues of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* in the congenial setting of the coffeehouse, so Saunders has Jack and Harry hold their dialogue "*over a Dish of Coffee*", inviting readers imaginatively to step into the same social space.[20] The work remains an essay in terms of function, but Saunders has entered into the realm of fiction in his bid to appeal to readers – and, with an obvious irony, he has done so in order to expose the true nature of the recent lotteries. When Jack, for example, explains that the organisers of a lottery called "*The Honourable Undertaking*" have factored in a vast profit margin for themselves – "a compleat third" – Harry asks why the scheme is so called. "It's only a fine gloss to put off a bad Commodity", Jack tells him.[21] There is fiction operating in the puffs of lottery promoters, the work warns, but the truth about them may be gleaned from this imagined conversation.

This early period also saw different types of fiction at play in a succession of lottery satires, some mocking or reproving those who participated in state and private lotteries as organisers or adventurers and others parodying the form of the lottery proposal and comically offering pretend schemes to the reading public. For the former type, verse was commonly used, as in *Diluvium Lachrymarum: A Review of the Fortunate & Unfortunate Adventurers. A Satyr in Burlesque Upon the Famous Lottery, Set up in Freeman's-Yard in Cornhill* (1694). This is a humorous catalogue in rhyming couplets of some of the "jolly Crew of gaping Fools", as the author saw them, who had assembled at a genuine private lottery arranged

19 Saunders, *Fortunatus's Looking-Glass*, "The Epistle", no page.
20 Saunders, *Fortunatus's Looking-Glass*, 1.
21 Saunders, *Fortunatus's Looking-Glass*, 7.

by Thomas Neale, the MP who became the organiser of the first government schemes.[22] For the pamphlet parodies, prose was the natural form and in these, as Amy Froide has observed, there was a recurrent tendency to transplant the lottery from the financial market to the marriage market. In such works, Froide argues, there was "a clear cultural connection between unmarried women and the lottery" and she examines a clutch of satires, mostly from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which "represented women, especially single ones, as playing the lottery to win a marriage portion or as lottery 'prizes' for prospective husbands".[23]

The Love-Lottery: Or, A Woman the Prize (1709) is one such work which, with all the trappings of a genuine pamphlet, was proffered as "*a Pleasant New Invention, Where any Maid or Widdow that puts in Ten Shillings, shall be sure of a Husband, and perhaps Five Hundred Pound to her Portion*".[24] It is a discreet type of parody with the author capturing the tone of a real lottery projector and only rarely giving hints of the ruse. The opening, for example, is entirely deadpan:

> Tis something strange, that among the Number of Wise Projectors, with which this Nation is plentifully Stock'd, none of 'em shou'd ever think of a Lottery for Marriages; which seems to be of a much more taking and edifying Species, that one lately propos'd for raising 3 Millions.[25]

As the work progresses, there are more visible glimpses of satire but still the piece might be read as genuine – as, for example, when a vetting procedure for participation is described:

> [A]ll due Care will be taken by the Office to enquire, not only into the Qualities, Humours and Imperfections of the Subscribers, but also into their Reputations: So that none will, or must expect to be admitted, that are Obnoxious by any Disease or Deformity, or have any way suffer'd their Reputations to be Tainted.[26]

Then, as the pamphlet draws to a close and the street address of the lottery office is given, the parody is flagged more obviously:

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22 Anon., *Diluvium Lachrymarum: A Review of the Fortunate & Unfortunate Adventurers* (Randal Taylor, 1694), 3.

23 Amy Froide, *Silent Partners: Women as Public Investors during Britain's Financial Revolution, 1690–1750* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

24 Anon. *The Love-Lottery: Or, A Woman the Prize* (Undertakers of this Lottery, 1709). The quoted passage is from the elaborate full title.

25 Anon., *Love Lottery*, 3.

26 Anon., *Love Lottery*, 6.

> [A]ll Maids and Widdows, Batchelors or Widdowers, that are inclin'd to Subscribe, are desired to send in their Names and Money, together with the Places of the Aboads, forthwith to the Office, in *Cupid's-Court*, in *Heart-street*, on the Backside of *Love-Alley*, in the New-Buildings; which Places are so call'd and Christen'd, from the Erecting this Memorable and Beneficial Office among them.[27]

By the end of the work, then, most readers in 1709 would have realised that they had a *jeu d'esprit* in their hands, but they might have hesitated in singling out the parody's purpose. Was the aim critical mockery of the contemporary interest in lotteries or was the author using the idea of the lottery as a trope for commenting upon the marriage market, or is there a vacillation between the two? Froide persuasively makes the case that such publications were grappling with "new concerns about surplus single women" at a time when "the numbers of women in England who never married were on the rise".[28] The fact that *The Love-Lottery* was one of several works employing the very same device certainly supports the case that while the lottery offered comment-worthy subject matter in itself it was also emerging as a powerful metaphor which could be applied to other chance-laden aspects of life and society. Marriage is sustained as the topic here; the pseudo-pamphleteer sticks closely to the conceit. But still there are underlying and implied comparisons by which the work also reflects back upon the actual lotteries from which it springs. For example, the projector boasts that "the Benefit of this Lottery will be such to every Subscriber, that there will be no Blanks, or at least but one to Twenty Prizes".[29] The good odds of "this Lottery" imply the worse odds of other lotteries – the work plays with the idea of chance in love, but also invites reflection on the wisdom (or folly) of gambling in other genuine schemes.

A more pronounced double-focus is found in *A Scheme for a New Lottery for the Ladies; Or, A Husband and Coach and Six for Forty Shillings*, a later parody using the same conceit as *The Love-Lottery* published in London around 1730 with a subsequent Dublin edition claiming to be "Written by Dean Swift".[30] The attribution to Jonathan Swift has been deemed false but it is not a far-fetched one since this work – a more extended parody than *The Love-Lottery* – presents numerous likenesses to *A Modest Proposal* (1729) in its presentation of "another

27 Anon., *Love-Lottery*, 8.

28 Froide, *Silent Partners*, 30.

29 Anon., *Love-Lottery*, 5.

30 "Dean Swift", *The Ladies Lottery: Or, A New Scheme For A Ten Thousand Pound Fortune* (1733?). The publishing history of these two works is unclear. The Dublin edition states: "Dublin printed: London re-printed, and sold by Mrs. Dodd without Temple-bar, Mrs. Nutt at the Royal Exchange, and by the bookseller of Lond. and West". The *ESTC* dates the London edition to "1730?" and the Dublin edition to "1733".

Lottery, which may prove a general Benefit to all concern'd".[31] Both this *Scheme* and Swift's *Proposal* are concerned with reducing a human surplus; both treat the human as a commodity which, in the moral economy of the parody, can unproblematically be inserted into a monetary scheme. Here the proposal is that "fifty thousand Tickets be deliver'd to Maids, or Widows, or any that appear as such in the Eye of the People, who can raise forty Shillings for the Purchase of a Ticket; and are willing … to live in the State of Matrimony with moderate good Husbands".[32] The parody is sustained for some forty pages, but in the conclusion, as in *A Modest Proposal*, there are slips of the mask and an exposure of attitudes which may be deemed authorial rather than part of the parodic register. In the penultimate paragraph, the matter of marriage recedes as a type of warning about general lottery participation is proffered:

> And, as all the World is called a Lottery, and somebody must have the largest Prize, and many Persons of tollerable Fortune in Life, think themselves in a sad State, when there are, perhaps, Millions could wish themselves no better, till that Wish was fulfill'd, and then he who could once wish for a Thing out of his Power, by Consequence, if he obtain that Wish, would venture to wish once again; so I hope my Adventurers will excuse me, if I forewarn them to wish at all, but be content with their Chance; and when that is done, study the best Means to keep themselves in that happy Station.[33]

The warning reads almost like the famous advice that Robinson Crusoe receives from his father: be content with the "middle station"; don't take risks under the delusion that greater happiness lies beyond that station; don't be an *adventurer.* There are also gloomy ideas about the nature of human happiness that would later find expression in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas:* lasting satisfaction is elusive; on the tailcoats of one desire comes another one. Most significant here, though, is the basic shift from the fictional persona's voice and the expression, around the edges of the parody, of suspicion concerning lotteries. In the final paragraph, the warnings continue:

> [A]s it is but a Lottery, I would have you think that there are high and low Prizes, and more Blanks considerably than Prizes; and perhaps the worst may fall to your Share; and as Chance is the Deity of Fools, possibly what you might think an Advantage, might end in general Confusion.[34]

31 Anon., *A Scheme For A New Lottery For The Ladies*, 2.
32 Anon., *A Scheme For A New Lottery For The Ladies*, 2–3.
33 Anon., *A Scheme For A New Lottery For The Ladies*, 43.
34 Anon., *A Scheme For A New Lottery For The Ladies*, 44.

Genuine lottery projectors do not warn their readers that "Chance is the Deity of Fools". This parodist has abandoned the joke in favour of commenting obliquely but with apparent sincerity on the lotteries that inspired the joke.

Further uses of the lottery as a metaphor for the marriage market are also found among the incidental lottery references that are scattered across the period's fiction – and here again the deployment of the metaphor could bring with it critical commentary on the lottery itself. In *Moll Flanders* (1722), for example, Defoe has his narrator compare desperate lottery adventurers with women who are impatient to be married and so take a chance on a little-known man. Defoe had earlier written positively about lotteries; his *An Essay on Projects*, written during the craze for private lotteries in the 1690s, includes a proposal for a charity lottery to generate funds for poor relief.[35] *Moll Flanders*, though, is suggestive of a more sceptical attitude – particularly towards long odds lotteries – when Moll declares that overly eager brides should be "pray'd for among the rest of distemper'd People", observing that to her "they look like People that venture their whole Estates in a Lottery where there is a Hundred Thousand Blanks to one Prize".[36] Defoe's Moll is, of course, characterised by a canny business sense and an adeptness at totting up the gains to be had from both stolen goods and male companions. Given her shrewdness, it is unsurprising to find her taking a distance from the very long odds of the lottery when she makes this comparison.

A later lottery-charged reflection on marriage is found in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, published in 1766 but written earlier in the decade when state lotteries were being used to raise funds for the costly Seven Years' War (1756–1763). An early chapter sees Goldsmith's vicar, Dr. Primrose, discussing the marital prospects of his daughters with his wife who can "see no reason why the two Miss Wrinklers should marry great fortunes, and her children get none". Her optimism is met by Primrose's pessimistic sense of social inequality and the vicissitudes of chance as he protests that he "could see no reason for it neither, nor why one got the ten thousand pound prize in the lottery, and another sate down with a blank". He adds that those "who either aim at husbands greater than themselves, or at the ten thousand pound prize, have been fools for their ridiculous claims, whether successful or not".[37]

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35 Daniel Defoe, *An Essay on Projects* (Tho. Cockerill, 1697), 185–191.

36 Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 62.

37 Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ed. Aileen Douglas and Ian Campbell Ross (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 28. The text is as given in the first edition; Goldsmith later amended this passage, removing Primrose's second assertion but adding a specifically imagined winner: "I protested I could see no reason for it neither, nor why Mr Simpkins got the ten thousand pound

In the hands of neither Defoe nor Goldsmith does the lottery emerge positively; it is like a distemper for Defoe and a fool's game for Goldsmith. For both, the lottery offers a metaphor, but it appears to demand judgmental commentary in the process – droplets of critique that others would swell into a wave of literary opposition in the British lottery's final decades.

2 Magazines and miscellanies

In the mid-century the lottery would be referenced further in prose fiction in an incidental manner, but there was a lull in the publication of fiction which was actually centred on the lottery. Fielding's satirical *The Lottery*, with its debut in 1732, was the mid-century's outstanding lottery work and it is certainly possible that the success of this stage work left little room – or little need – for other dedicated literary treatments of the subject. Fielding's mockery of corrupt lottery officials and foolish gamblers remained popular not only on the stage but also in print for half a century. There were more than 150 performances on the London stage by 1750 and then around half that number in the three decades following.[38] The play was furthermore enjoyed in theatres outside the capital, while the text of the play was regularly reprinted, with at least eleven editions by 1788.

As the play's popularity began to wane, further prose fictional treatments began to be published, some in the increasingly popular magazines which were becoming a crucial vehicle for the dissemination of short and serially published fiction. An issue of *The Weekly Magazine, Or Edinburgh Amusement* from January 1770, for example, opened with "*The* Lottery Ticket. *A* Moral Tale", a succinct piece spanning four and a half plot-filled pages. This anonymously authored story charts the changing fortunes of the Clinton family – a father and mother and their daughter, Fanny – to warn against the lures of fashionable life and to show how profligacy can readily lead to misery. Mr Clinton is an "eminent merchant" in London, but, through no personal fault, his business declines and the family is forced to relocate to the more affordable countryside.[39] There they live a happy modest life until Mr Clinton wins a £10,000 lottery prize which causes a transformation of his wife "into a new woman … suddenly seized with a violent

prize in the lottery, and we sate down with a blank". *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ed. Stephen Coote (Penguin, 1982), 54.

38 Henry Fielding, *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding: Plays, Volume Two, 1731–1734*, ed. Thomas Lockwood (Clarendon Press, 2007), 137.

39 "*The* Lottery Ticket. *A* Moral Tale", *The Weekly Magazine, Or Edinburgh Amusement*, 18 January 1770, 65.

desire to return to her old neighbourhood in London" and to flaunt her status as a woman of wealth.[40] Mr Clinton's head is not turned so easily, but soon after he unexpectedly inherits "a fortune more than double his prize", and with this further wealth he too aspires to cut a figure in the elite circles in London.[41] Moving back to the city, they start to squander their vast fortune on fashionable living. In the process they wrench Fanny from a worthy suitor; she ends up, in the space of a single sentence, married to an "old debauched lord" who, "in a fit of jealousy", hits her, delivering a blow which, in a curious medical twist, brings on a fatal cancer.[42] In the conclusion, the older Clintons have exhausted almost all of their fortune and are forced once again to retire from the city and they end their days bickering and "completely miserable".[43]

Fuelled by two sources of wealth – the lottery win and the inheritance – this story is arguably as concerned with critiquing the *beau monde* and a particular way of wasting money as with warning readers against playing the lottery. There are no corrupt lottery office keepers depicted here; participating in the lottery is not the first step towards gambling-fuelled ruin. But the title of the tale and the fact that the lottery win is the event that sets in motion the destruction of the family nonetheless brings the lottery to the fore as an aspect of British life worthy of condemnation. The story is illustrative of the fact that, generally, lottery fictions expressed suspicion of the lottery.

But not all lottery stories were critical. Late in 1775, as the year's state lottery was being drawn at the Guildhall, a seasonal miscellany was published under the title *The Christmas Frolick; Or, Mirth for the Holidays*, which included, among its offering of stories, songs, jokes and anecdotes, "The Lottery, a Christmas Tale". The aim of the collection was to provide festive entertainment, or, as the subtitle puts it, "*to warm the Imagination, raise the Spirits in the gloom of Winter, and procure, what every one wishes, A Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year*". With lightheartedness required, "The Lottery, a Christmas Tale" is something of a rarity: a story involving a lottery win which does not bring problems for the winners. Running to just two pages, it concerns Lucinda, a young lady of Lincolnshire, who is courted by several suitors who believe that she will inherit her father's fortune. Her father, though, dies insolvent, and the suitors turn tail – all but a Mr. Freeland, a worthy man of means (with a name suggesting a mercantile profession: it recalls "Sir Andrew Freeport", the merchant of the *Spectator* essays). Lucinda selflessly refuses Freeland, not wanting to burden him with a wife who

40 "*The* Lottery Ticket", 66.
41 "*The* Lottery Ticket", 67.
42 "*The* Lottery Ticket", 68.
43 "*The* Lottery Ticket", 69.

brings no fortune. But then, in this tale of rapidly changing luck, she inherits £12,000 from an uncle, at which point she plans a trick – a test of male virtue – and it is here that the lottery comes in: she lets it be known that she has won £10,000 in the recent draw. The suitors renew their courtship, all except for Freeland, who does not want to appear to be a fortune hunter. When the actual winner of the £10,000 prize is announced in the newspapers, the suitors are enraged and abandon her again. Lucinda reveals the true situation to Freeland and they are happily united. But there is more joy in store for the couple. "What heightens the Beauty of this Story", the final sentence informs, "is, that Mr Freeland obtained a Prize of 5000 l. in that very Lottery, which, as his Fortune was ample, he settled on Lucinda the Day preceeding their Marriage".[44]

There are echoes of the tale of the reckless Clintons here – with inheritance and the lottery granting a double fortune. But, unlike the Clintons, Lucinda and Freeland are figures in a "virtue rewarded" narrative which stops before any testing of how the couple might use their wealth. Money has a curious status in this miniature romance as both the reward of virtue and something that the virtuous partly rise above. Lucinda and Freeland show that they are not in the marriage game for money; they are free of avarice. Yet preoccupations with money are suggested by Freeland's implied trade and Lucinda's devaluation of herself as a marriageable commodity when her father dies penniless. And then the happy ending, alongside the couple gaining one another, comes in the form of a deluge of money, none of it truly needed since Freeland already has his "ample" fortune. Fortune favours the good and it is right, the festive story implies, that these worthy lovers walk off with the cash. But it was not a given that virtuous people knew how to put great wealth to good use – and that was a problem that lay at the heart of the eighteenth century's most extensive lottery fiction, *Edal Village: Or, The Fortunate Lottery Ticket*, a novel published around five years later.

3 *Edal Village: Or, The Fortunate Lottery Ticket* (1781)

"[S]uddenly acquired wealth is no light burden to bear!"[45] This is the central warning of *Edal Village*, a two-volume novel which probes at length the question that "The Lottery, a Christmas Tale" leaves open: what is the right thing to do

44 Anon., *The Christmas Frolick; Or, Mirth for the Holidays* (G. Allen, 1775), 25.

45 Anon., *Edal Village: Or, The Fortunate Lottery Ticket*, 2 vols. (T. Lowndes, 1781), I, 94. Further page references are given within the main text. Whilst dated 1781, this novel was published late in 1780.

with a fortune? Published anonymously in London towards the end of 1780, the novel is both light-hearted and serious and it offers a sceptical response to, in the narrator's words, the "present rage of lottery-adventurers" (I, 92). It is sceptical but not fiercely anti-lottery. The author's principal conceit is the creation of a well-meaning, benevolent protagonist who, when in possession of a £10,000 lottery fortune, wants to act in charitable ways. *Edal Village* eschews, then, the much-trodden territory of rash gambling and greedy self-indulgence. It offers instead a fictional meditation upon unselfish spending and the potentially destabilising effects of large-scale charity.

The lottery winner of the story is one Jerry Last – his surname being a sign of his trade as a shoemaker. He is a worthy and industrious inhabitant of the remote village of Edal (another suggestive name, bearing hints of both "Eden" and "idyll"). Having saved £15 from his earnings, he ponders how to use the money and, after much agonising over the propriety and wisdom of gambling, he buys a lottery ticket. Crucially, he does this not with a view to becoming "the greatest man, and lording it over every one in the village" (I, 18), but rather because with a greater fortune he could improve his shoemaker's shop and help the poor.

Seen in terms of common tropes or character types, then, Jerry Last is pointedly not a lower-class social climber; he has none of the fantasies of, say, Chloe in Fielding's drama: "I will buy one of the best Houses in Town, and furnish it. – Then I intend to set up my Coach and Six, and have six fine tall Footmen" and so on.[46] He is rather a version of "the man of feeling" – that emotionally susceptible and infinitely generous type which is found at the centre of numerous sentimental novels of the period, and indeed vaunted in the title of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771).

The author of *Edal Village* – whoever that may have been – was clearly well-versed in the tradition of sentimental writing. In fact, this novel is filled with literary references of many kinds: Latin tags from Virgil's first *Eclogue*, quotations from Shakespeare, as well as pointers to more recent authors including Defoe, Pope, Swift, Dyer, Fielding, and Johnson. But it is the celebrated sentimental humourist Laurence Sterne, author of *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), who seems to provide the most important literary model.

There are several mentions of Sterne in *Edal Village* and also scenes which are almost certainly inspired by his fiction. For example, *A Sentimental Journey* includes two maudlin chapters relating the travelling narrator's roadside en-

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See James Raven and Antonia Forster, *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles, Volume I: 1770–1799* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 298.

46 Fielding, *The Lottery*, *Wesleyan Edition*, 160.

counters with a dead ass and its grieving owner. Similarly in *Edal Village*, Jerry, travelling to London with a companion and an attorney to collect his winnings, finds his way blocked by an "ass loaded with earthen ware", which has been run over and injured by a speeding cart (I, 158). The scene of the accident offers many tugs upon the heartstrings and, for Jerry, the purse strings. The distressed owner of the ass – present with his wife and child plus a heap of broken crockery – is "an old soldier with a wooden leg" (I. 159), a "withered arm" (I, 163) and a tale of suffering to match his disabilities. There are distinct echoes of the sentimentalism of Sterne's scene here, and Jerry steps readily into the "man of feeling" role as he becomes deeply moved and insists, against the advice of the attorney, upon charitably compensating the family for their loss.

Edal Village deviates from the mode of the sentimental novel, though, in its examination of the larger-scale charitable projects that are facilitated by the £10,000 prize. Sterne's protagonist has only slight wealth; his charitable giving is impulsive and limited and, as such, has no real social reach. Jerry's lottery-derived wealth, on the other hand, allows for the design of a benevolent spending plan. And here the appropriateness of the novel's title comes into focus, as the work explores how a sudden arrival of wealth is not only an issue for the individual beneficiary but can also affect a broader community – in this case, with disastrous results.

The work depicts two phases of the lottery win causing social disintegration in the village. The first is initiated by the villagers themselves as they insist upon celebrating the good fortune of the shoemaker, imposing hardcore revelry upon the naturally sober Jerry. Chaos ensues; there is widespread drunkenness, while the roasting of a whole ox goes badly wrong, with the villagers hacking at half-burnt, half-raw meat like "a hungry pack of hounds let loose upon a carcase after a hard day's chase" (I, 81). So easily, the simile suggests, can a disciplined community slip into savagery.

The second phase comes about through Jerry's own actions as he starts to distribute his new-found wealth. One of his ambitions is to alleviate true poverty, and here he is partly successful but also has his charity abused as fraudsters prove "an overmatch to his simplicity and humanity" (II, 86). Further projects are more quixotic – and more catastrophic. A scheme to turn his old shoemaking business into a non-profit enterprise so that "the poor people" can have shoes "at an underprice" fails because it enrages other shoemakers who are threatened by the competition (II, 88). More damaging is a broader vision he has of a new Edal relieved, thanks to his wealth, of the pains of work: "he hoped poverty would be no more heard of; that labour would cease; and the villagers of *Edal* would be the happiest people in the world" (II, 90). Here sentimental charity meets naïve pastoralism, and what happens is that, when freed of work, the villagers do little

other than drink; the work operates with the bleak thesis that the first destination for a labourer with no labour is the pub. The harvest is neglected and the traditional patterns of rural life start to fall apart. The lottery win has become a serpent in the paradise of Edal/Eden.

The narrator is very ready to point out the dangerous whimsicality of Jerry's thinking:

> Such were the phantasms that our hero's imagination had pictured; and so much does the eager pursuit of some favourite scheme blind mens' reason for the present. How often has the castle-builder and visionary-schemer calculated upon as equally false premises; entirely forgetting the certainty of losses, misfortunes, accidents, &c. &c.! So he, in his present phrenzy, had quite forgot that labour was absolutely necessary, and that society could not subsist without gradation of ranks. (II, 90–91)

The novel also shows the correction of Jerry, with "the veil" being "soon withdrawn from before his eyes" (II, 91), and thereafter the restoration of village life. Jerry's cure comes in the form of a long lecture from the local rector concerning the necessity of labour and of social divisions. The rector, speaking from a patrician Christian position, acknowledges that Jerry's project was "well intended" and sprung from "a benevolent heart" (II, 122). But he argues that it defied God in its challenge to the stratification of society:

> The Great Author of all things, in his infinite wisdom, knew what was right; and … has thus constituted the system of nature. And we find mankind in all civilized countries in a state of subordination; the one part laborious, and the other feasting upon the fruit of their labours; and since God knew things must be thus at the time of creation, why should we call him to account, and say this or that is wrong? (II, 132–133)

To reestablish order, the rector tells Jerry to talk with the villagers when they are sober; he becomes an envoy of the rector's position, and the village starts to function once again (II, 147). Through this story, then, *Edal Village* evolves into a type of didactic tract on charity and economics in the guise of an entertaining fiction. It does not oppose charity, but it warns against large-scale charity disturbing the status quo. It is not forcefully opposed to the state lottery either, but it points clearly to the fact that the sudden possession of a fortune can be a problem rather than a blessing. To any readers who might fantasise about winning the lottery, the implied lesson is reminiscent of that expressed half a century earlier in *A Scheme for a New Lottery for the Ladies:* people have already been correctly placed in society by God; in that situation, why should anybody really want to buy a ticket?

4 Anti-lottery prose fiction

While *Edal Village* displays scepticism, much later lottery literature was explicitly oppositional, setting out to warn readers against participation with bold but simple narratives suggesting that wretchedness is the likely consequence of both losing and winning in the lottery. As James Raven has written, the shift in 1769 in the lottery from, in part, an annuity scheme to a pure hit-or-miss gamble "brought the lottery full-square into debates about gambling and the misuse of riches".[47] The lottery no longer had the gloss of investment and so could attract the same type of critique that moralists had long been levelling at other forms of gambling. Raven's detailed analysis of why lotteries were stopped in England in the 1820s shows conclusively that the moral campaign actually played little part in the abolition. It was fiscal rather than moral pressure that brought about the change: the lottery had become a "negligible contributor to the exchequer" after 1788, when its running and administration was taken over by contractors.[48] Anti-lottery fiction, then, should not be seen as influential in determining government policy; nor does it appear to have deterred notable numbers of gamblers: the state lotteries, Raven notes, enjoyed "unprecedented popularity between 1810 and 1818".[49] Still, such fiction formed a noteworthy part of the literary landscape, with contributions by leading authors of the day, and collectively it presents evidence of a *belief* that fiction could affect gambling culture – a faith in the admonitory power of representation – despite its ultimate ineffectiveness.

Almost certainly the most widely read British anti-lottery fiction was Hannah More's *The Wonderful Advantages of Adventuring in the Lottery!!!* (1796), the sprightly title of which is an ironic gateway to a bleak cautionary tale warning of the mortal dangers lurking in the lottery office. Perhaps some readers would have missed the title's irony and taken *Wonderful Advantages* to be a work of lottery promotion, not least since the title page has a wood-cut illustration depicting the drawing of the lottery showing well-dressed, expectant adventurers. It is an inviting scene; there are no disappointed holders of blanks here, no signs of the desperate poor. Also absent from the title page is the name of the author whose adherence to the moral purpose of literature – and less than frequent ventures into irony – would have been known by many potential readers. By the 1790s Hannah More (1745–1833) was established as an author and educationalist – a pious,

47 James Raven, "The Abolition of the English State Lotteries", *The Historical Journal* 34, no. 2 (1991): 374.

48 Raven, "The Abolition of the English State Lotteries", 379.

49 Raven, "The Abolition of the English State Lotteries", 375.

conservative Evangelical who wrote prolifically to promote social reform, not through violent revolution as had been seen in France, but through orderly legal processes and the spread of useful knowledge.

More presented her lottery tale in the concise form of the chapbook – sixteen pages within which she compressed a tragic story of a family ruined by the temptation of a lottery fortune. It is a slippery-slope narrative, told in an authoritative third-person voice and centred on one John Brown, a London servant, whose initial call from the path of virtue comes in the form of a handbill advertising the lottery. As he reads, he is spurred to ask the classic question which, when asked by many thousands, underpinned the institution of the lottery: "Why may not I get a prize as well as another?"[50] Defying the pleas of his pious, Bible-quoting wife not to risk their limited funds – much needed for clothing their son – John becomes rapidly enmeshed as a gambler and is shown moving through increasingly desperate stages of risk. An initial investment in one ticket becomes a more daring purchase of "six policies, which he got a guinea a piece" (5). He then hears about lottery insurance and is taken in by a "cunning office keeper" whose smooth salesmanship leads him to place further doomed bets (9). Keen to watch the drawing of the numbers, he finds himself amongst "a number of drunken, ragged, blaspheming wretches" and is soon "laying wagers whether the number next drawn would be a blank or prize" (9–10). One thing More does in this tale, then, is present an informed picture of the several realms of lottery gambling; she was an outsider to that world, but *Wonderful Advantages* demonstrates knowledge of it not only to condemn but also to showcase the mechanics of gambling and thereby underscore that, in addition to rebelling against the word of God, the usual outcome of gambling is loss. When the tale exposes, for example, the lure of the insurance seller's dishonest recommendation that John insures "at least ten or twelve numbers, that you may be *certain* of winning. … Five Guineas, Sir, for 6s. 10d.!" (9), it functions as a mathematical warning as well as a moral one.

Gambling and crime are close companions in More's tale. John's losses lead him to steal "a silver goblet and some spoons" from his master; he pawns the booty, raising money which he quickly loses back at the lottery's "place of drawing" (10). Increasingly desperate and fuelled by drink, he is persuaded to turn highwayman and ends up committing a murder for which he is sentenced to death. Before his trial and execution, his wife herself dies broken-hearted, faithful to both God and her husband to the end, praying that John "might yet obtain mercy at the hands of God" (14). The scene of sentencing allows More to place a clear-cut

50 Hannah More, *The Wonderful Advantages of Adventuring in the Lottery!!!* (J. Marshall, 1796), 3. Further page references are given within the main text.

anti-lottery speech in the mouth of the judge. Didactic clarity and force trump verisimilitude as she has this authority figure declare to the condemned man:

> You might have lived long, useful, and respected, had you been content with what you acquired by honest industry; had not the desire of hasty and unrighteous gain taken possession of your heart. I mourn over the existence of such a public nuisance as appears to have been the first occasion of your fall: and I cannot help declaring, that I have never sat upon this bench after the drawing of the Lottery, but I had reason to think it had proved the ruin of many of the unhappy culprits who appeared before me. I would earnestly exhort the crowds that hear me to abhor the thoughts of adventuring in it, and to fly from it as from a plague, which will destroy domestic happiness and inward peace, and bring upon them every kind of distress. (15)

The judge's speech to the crowds before him forms More's imploring address to her readers, who would themselves have added up to crowds given the channel in which *Wonderful Advantages* was published. The tale appeared as part of the series of Cheap Repository tracts which More had initiated in 1795 with the ambition of spreading religious, morally improving literature amongst the literate poor. As a conservative and anti-Jacobin, More was responding with this series to the recent spread in England of popular radical broadsheets and chapbooks (she collected such works into what she called her "sans-culotte library"), and the print form she adopted was, as Gary Kelly has put it, an "expropriation of popular culture" – an aping of the form of street literature designed to counter the radical street literature she saw as dangerous.[51] The works in the series were indeed cheap and for many readers would have been free. The title page of *Wonderful Advantages* states the purchase price of one penny but also gives prices for bulk buying: "4s. 6d. per 100.–2s. 6d. for 50.–1s. 6d. for 25. A cheaper Edition for Hawkers". As Kelly writes, the idea was that the "tracts were to be sold in bulk, to the gentry and middle classes, and distributed free to the labouring classes. This practice had been developed earlier … but Cheap Repository made it systematic and on a grand scale".[52] The model proved successful. A published prospectus for the tracts, including a lengthy list of already signed-up subscribers, described the purpose of the works and the rapid popularity:

> This institution was opened in March, 1795. Its object is to furnish the People at large with useful Reading, at so low a price as to be within reach of the poorest purchaser. Most of the Tracts are made entertaining, with a view to supplant the corrupt and vicious little books and ballads which have been hung out at windows in the most alluring forms, or hawked

51 Gary Kelly, "Revolution, Reaction, and the Expropriation of Popular Culture: Hannah More's *Cheap Repository*", *Man and Nature* 6 (1987): 147–159.
52 Kelly, "Hannah More's *Cheap Repository*", 154.

> through Town and Country, and have been found so highly mischievous to the Community, as to require every attention to counteract them.
>
> The Sale of the Repository Tracts has been exceedingly great, about two millions having been printed within the year, besides great numbers in Ireland.[53]

How many copies of *Wonderful Advantages* were printed is unknown, but there can be little doubt that it had a print run far higher than most other anti-lottery publications, and it certainly would have reached more readers than, say, *Edal Village.* The work might, in fact, be regarded as a type of anti-advertisement in the form of fiction, and, regarding print rivalry, whilst some tracts in the Cheap Repository were designed to unseat politically radical street literature, *Wonderful Advantages* may be seen as a righteous alternative to the kind of handbill which, in the tale itself, is given free to John Brown and sets him on the road to ruin and death. With its title and title page illustration, it could readily be taken to be a promotional pamphlet; if handed out for free, that guise would only be accentuated.

Following More's work, a further notable anti-lottery tale was produced by Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849), the popular and prolific Anglo-Irish educationalist, novelist, essayist and playwright. Edgeworth's *The Lottery* was published in the second volume of her *Popular Tales* in 1804, a collection of stories that was reprinted numerous times in the century that followed, such that her oppositional story was made newly available to readers long after the lottery itself had been abolished. *The Lottery* is a moral tale warning of the dangers of speculating on the lottery, but it is also broader than that since Edgeworth combines the lottery theme with representations of other societal and individual issues that preoccupied her. Lottery gambling is seen and judged in conjunction with other forms of gaming, as well as neglect of work, the perils of drunkenness and hollow fashionable life. These iniquities are set up against a set of virtues including the value of work for modest financial gain, the benefits of reading books and of investing time and creative energy in the latest methods of manufacture. It is a tale in praise of modesty and industry offering clear-cut admonitions against temptations which threatened to derail the unassuming, productive individual, and here the state lottery – with the dreams of social mobility it fosters – is depicted as a powerful force of social corruption. "[M]ay every man, who … is tempted to be a gamester", writes Edgeworth in the closing lines, "reflect that a good character, and domestic

53 Anon., *Cheap Repository for Moral and Religious Publications* (J. Marshall, 1795?), 1.

happiness, which cannot be won in any lottery, are worth more than the five thousand, or even the ten thousand pounds prize".[54]

The work is set initially in the environs of Derby, one of the centres of the industrial revolution, known for its cotton and silk mills. Edgeworth had herself attended a school there as a young girl in the 1770s, and writing *The Lottery* some thirty years later she used the area as a locus of virtue and productivity which could provide a contrast with fashionable London, specifically Paddington, to which the action of the story moves. A cotton mill provides employment for the protagonist, Maurice Robinson, who, in Edgeworth's straightforward telling, is presented as "remarkable for his good conduct and regular attendance at his work" (5). His cottage, shared with his "industrious, prudent … constantly clean and neat" wife Ellen and their saintly young son George, provides the main stage for the opening which, following a loss-of-Eden pattern, presents a contamination and destruction of the Robinson's homely existence by an incoming evil.

The poison arrives when one of Maurice's relations, Mrs. Dolly Robinson, comes to live with them. A former laundry made with a thirst for both alcohol and social elevation, Mrs. Dolly sets about disrupting the development of George, who has been receiving an informal education in mathematics and manufacturing from a family friend, William Deane. Mrs. Dolly also mounts a campaign to get Maurice to speculate in the state lottery. She is inspired by "a favourite story" from her past concerning "a butler, in the family where she had lived, who bought a ticket in the lottery when he was drunk, which ticket came up a ten thousand pound prize when he was sober; and the butler turned gentleman, and kept his coach directly" (8). The anecdote displays Edgeworth's interest in showing the connections between vices whilst also hinting proleptically of what is to come regarding both plot and didactic direction. It includes the familiar association of a lottery win and social elevation – the fantasy which *The Lottery* as a whole, with its promotion of industriousness, deems deeply destructive. Meanwhile, the butler's drunken state when he buys the ticket makes an association between gambling and unreason, even though it results here in a win, which, for Edgeworth, is more of a curse than a blessing since money can only be good if well used – not spent on vanities such as coaches. The drunkenness itself is also far from incidental. Edgeworth had an ongoing interest in using literature to promote temperance; it is a key theme, for example, in her final work *Orlandino* (1748), written both to educate the young and raise funds to relieve the Irish poor. Through Mrs.

54 Maria Edgeworth, *Popular Tales* (J. Johnson, 1804), 63. Accessed via: https://archive.org/details/populartales02edge/mode/2up (27 November 2024). Further page references are given within the main text.

Dolly and other drink-fuelled characters in *The Lottery*, then, Edgeworth pushes a temperance agenda whilst displaying the stock association of drinking and gambling.

Where Hannah More charted the fall of a lottery loser, Edgeworth, like the author of *Edal Village*, explores the challenges faced by a winner. Maurice, when persuaded to buy a ticket, wins a £5000 prize and, encouraged by Mrs. Dolly, the family moves to London where the fortune is steadily squandered. Mrs. Dolly's alcohol consumption increases – she ends up dying after a drunken accident, leaving a pile of unpaid bar bills. Maurice meanwhile proves unqualified for a life of leisure and ultimately loses his money "with a pack of rascals at the gaming-table" (40). The family's one attempt at enterprise has been the opening of a shop – mere retail rather than truly worthy manufacture, the tale suggests – and this has not worked out well. The story does not end as bleakly as More's *Wonderful Advantages*; following the downfall, the family is saved by William Deane who has become rich "by having made an improvement in the machinery of the cotton-mills" (61). But Edgeworth's condemnation of the lottery is just as vehement as More's, with the moral message hammered home in the story's action – including depictions of despondent lottery losers at the lottery office – as well as in narrative statements and in dialogue. "[Y]ou have trusted to your own sense and industry, and not to gaming and lotteries", Maurice says to William Deane when he has come to recognise his own errors (61). It is easily digested advice offered to both gamblers and potential gamblers. In this example of her *Popular Tales*, Edgeworth, like More, was writing for a broad public and attempting to scupper the temptation of the lottery at the level of the gambler. But there was also anti-lottery fiction which attempted to sever the head of the beast itself.

In 1817 a highly unusual fictional diatribe against the lottery was published in the form of a long, satirical dream vision. Entitled *The State Lottery, A Dream*, it was written by Samuel Roberts (1763–1848), a successful cutler from Sheffield who became a prolific author of works devoted to a range of benevolent causes, from the abolition of slavery to the ending of child labour and the alleviation of poverty. Driven by a fervent religiosity, Roberts' dream vision is set mostly in a fictional debating chamber in Parliament – one in which both the Commons and Lords are merged – and it imagines a series of fantastical debates over the legitimacy of the state lottery. The dreamer who narrates the tale is an observer in the gallery, witnessing procedures conceived by Roberts to showcase the iniquities of the lottery, the suffering it causes the lower classes, and also, in Roberts' view, the hypocrisy of the legislators of a state which reaps profits from gambling. And the conceit allows for a good deal of pointed fantasy, as when the dreamer witnesses the proposal of a revenue-raising scheme:

> What was intended to be submitted to the consideration of the House, or rather Houses, was to grant to the highest bidder, or bidders, the privilege of retailing leave to transgress the established laws of the realm, in some way or other, during one year. For instance, for keeping public or State Brothels, for licensing State Highwaymen, State House-breakers, or even State Murderers; for establishing State Gambling-houses, for granting State Indulgencies, for lying and perjury, or any other privileges of a similar nature.[55]

If Britain has a state lottery, the work asks satirically, why should it not have state-sanctioned vices of other kinds? Later, in a section which departs from the scene of Parliament, the dreamer finds himself following the procession of the lottery wheels into the Guildhall and here the manner of expressing loathing of the lottery shifts from satire to the creation of a diabolical, Dantesque vision. He finds the Guildhall "filled with a smoke so dense and noisome, as not only to render every object invisible, but also to prevent respiration". There are "faint flashes of a greenish flame" and in the gloom is heard a "dismal, wild, and incoherent uproar" emerging from "a crowd of invisible beings" (67). The work takes an allegorical turn as the dreamer begins to see more: "Before me … towering on a kind of throne of rugged rock, and seated on a heap of instruments of destruction, appeared the God of Riches, *Mammon*" (68). And in this demonic reimagining of the lottery ceremony, the boys who draw the tickets are transmuted into sacrifices: "I found that they were victims devoted to be offered up at the Shrine of the God Mammon" (69). It is a bold scene – certainly one of the more audacious depictions among the many eighteenth-century representations of the Guildhall, both literary and graphic. The allegorical elements perhaps recall William Hogarth's "The Lottery" (1724), but Roberts goes much further than Hogarth in creating a gothic vision of horror.

Roberts includes in his dream vision a series of petitions and pleas presented in Parliament to end the lottery. The success or failure of these is left unresolved as the work draws to a close. The debating chamber is invaded by "[t]hree furious maniacs (driven mad, as I understood, by speculations in the State Lottery)" and the disruption means that the matter cannot be voted upon. But a further creative fantasy on Roberts's part does supply an envisioning of what Britain could be like should it be freed of the lottery. The dream is prefaced by an imagined King's speech, opening the session of Parliament a century hence, in 1917. In this speech the fantasy king takes a historical turn and looks back "a *full* Century since the Legislators of these Kingdoms evinced their conviction, that no iniquitous mea-

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55 Samuel Roberts, *The State Lottery, A Dream* (Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1817), 2. Further page references are given in the main text. Appended to Roberts' work in this volume is *Thoughts on Wheels, A Poem* by a fellow Sheffield author, James Montgomery, which also contains critical reflections on the state lottery.

sure could contribute to the welfare of the State, by cancelling one of the foulest blots that ever stained the Records of any Government" (viii). The blot is, of course, the state lottery, and as Roberts has the King describe how the nation has progressed subsequently, he proffers a Christian reformer's fantasy of the future. The country has become a pious one; every child can read and has a Bible; the populace has become more sober and more industrious; children are no longer sweeping chimneys; new forms of taxation have been found to raise revenue once generated by the lottery. The speech also references Britain's involvement in the slave trade, and here the work makes a highly strategic rhetorical point: if Britain could survive ending its involvement in the slave trade with the Slave Trade Act of 1807, surely, the work suggests, it can survive the ending of the lottery.

Roberts would not have to wait long before his hope became a reality. Meanwhile, there were voices in the literary world more positively disposed towards the lottery and fully supportive of the government perpetuating this kind of revenue generation, even if, as Raven shows, the sums arriving at the Treasury were slight. Indeed, published in the same year as *The State Lottery, A Dream* and by the very same publishers – Sherwood, Neely and Jones – was an English translation of the Italian lottery novel *La Giuocatrice di Lotto* (1757) by Pietro Chiari (1712–1785) and this included a translator's preface which is so positive about the lottery that it reads almost like the work of someone with a vested interest in its continuation. Presented as *The Prize in the Lottery; Or, The Adventures of a Young Lady*, the novel was translated by Thomas Evanson White, about whom, as Marius Warholm Haugen points out in a study of the translations of Chiari, little is known.[56] This obscure figure, though, expressed clear, patriotic views on the lottery when he justified his translation project in his preface:

> In this country … where this expedient of national finance is reduced to a system, and conducted on a plan and principle so incalculably superior, in all respects, to those of every other nation, the Translator was strongly impressed with the idea, that the production before us would be so much the more appropriate and popularly welcome.[57]

He continues, momentarily pretending to neutrality in the debates surrounding the lottery:

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56 Marius Warholm Haugen, "Translating the Lottery: Moral and Political Issues in Pietro Chiari's *La Giuocatrice Di Lotto* and Its French and English Translations", *Comparative Literature Studies* 59, 2 (2022): 256.

57 Pietro Chiari, *The Prize in the Lottery; Or, The Adventures of a Young Lady*, trans. Thomas Evanson White, 2 vols. (Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1817), I, iv.

> It certainly is not the intention of the Translator … to offer any opinion whatever on the strong and pretty extensive contrariety of sentiment which exists in this country, as to the political, or rather the *moral* effects of a continued series of Public Lotteries, proposed by the Executive, and sanctioned by the Legislative Authorities of the Kingdom. He cannot, however, refrain from recording in these pages, the forcible and felicitous *dictum* of a late very celebrated Minister of Finance* [i. e. William Pitt], on the subject, who emphatically styled the measure of a State, or Public Lottery, '*a Tax upon Gambling!*' And he presumes to remark, in addition, that a species of tax it certainly is, and perhaps the only one in existence, which is not only voluntarily, but *cheerfully*, contributed by those who pay it.[58]

Nine years later those in Britain would lose the opportunity to choose cheerfully to pay this tax. Like Dickens they would have to travel abroad – perhaps to the land of Chiari – should they want to see the phenomenon of the lottery in action.

5 Conclusion: the draw of the draw

Henry Fielding famously saw the lottery not as a tax upon gambling, but as "a taxation on all of the fools in creation".[59] It was also Fielding who wrote what is probably the best-known incidental reference to the lottery in a work of eighteenth-century prose fiction. It appears in the first chapter of Book II of *Tom Jones* (1749) in which Fielding has his narrator develop a comparison between the lottery and the craft of the novelist. *Tom Jones* is laden with self-conscious probing of its own narrative methods, and here the narrator is discussing his uneven dedication of narrative space to significant and insignificant events, and he finds an appropriate analogy in the manner in which the lottery is drawn and publicised:

> When any extraordinary scene presents itself … we shall spare no pains nor paper to open it at large to our reader; but if whole years should pass without producing anything worthy his notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history … and leave such periods of time totally unobserved.
>
> These are indeed to be considered as blanks in the grand lottery of time. We therefore who are the registers of that lottery, shall imitate those sagacious persons who deal in that which is drawn at Guildhall, and who never trouble the public with the many blanks they dispose of; but when a great prize happens to be drawn, the newspapers are presently filled with it, and the world is sure to be informed at whose office it was sold: indeed, commonly two or three different offices lay claim to the honour of having disposed of it; by which, I suppose,

58 Chiari, *The Prize in the Lottery*, I, iv–v.

59 Fielding, *The Lottery*, *Wesleyan Edition*, 153.

> adventurers are given to understand that certain brokers are in the secrets of Fortune, and indeed of her cabinet-council.[60]

The passage has absorbed critics interested in Fielding as a participant in the development of novelistic realism and as a narratologically concerned craftsman who forged a playful, teasing relationship with his readers. Stephen B. Dobranski, for example, has discussed the "obvious joke here" that Fielding, as creative author, is the one who determines when things happen; he "creates everything we read" including both the consequential matters and the chasms. "To pretend otherwise and suggest that the events the narrator reports are independent of the novel", Dobranski writes, "is presumably meant to enhance the story's verisimilitude".[61] For Molesworth, the passage is most interesting for what it says about Fielding's construction of his readers as it casts them as "little better than lottery addicts, interested in remarkable rather than the ordinary turns of fortune".[62] Such responses as these – both valid readings – follow Fielding's analogising; they see the passage as one that uses the lottery to comment on matters beyond the lottery. But there is a sense in which the passage also offers more – or rather less – than analogy and remains in part a commentary on the lottery itself. The mid-point of the final sentence is significant here; arriving at the colon, the analogy is entirely complete and yet Fielding has his narrator continue in his observations about the claims of different lottery offices to have sold a winning ticket and the motivation behind them. Fielding, in other words, appears to have been drawn further into the topic of the lottery than his analogy requires and, albeit momentarily, digresses from his narratological thread.

It is a small detail, but it is demonstrative of the power of the lottery to fascinate and of the simple point that writers of this period could become engrossed in the lottery itself. It was generally not the same kind of engrossment that was experienced by those who participated in the lottery as gamblers – those who perhaps became lost in wild fantasies of wealth, followed superstitious beliefs when choosing their numbers, neglected their normal work, perhaps drank their way through disappointment, plus those lucky few who walked away with a fortune. It was rather a fascination springing from seeing all those aspects of the lottery and more from the outside – a fascination which became an urge to depict in

60 Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. R. P. C. Mutter (Penguin Books, 1985), 60. Fielding's ongoing interest in the lottery is also seen in *Amelia* in another analogy: the "lottery of preferment" – see Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, ed. David Blewett (Penguin Books, 1987), 509.

61 Stephen B. Dobranski, "What Fielding Doesn't Say in *Tom Jones*", *Modern Philology* 107 (2010): 632.

62 Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 33.

some way a remarkable phenomenon that was a part of the financial and cultural landscape in Britain for more than a century. Dickens found the lottery to be an "extraordinary feature in the real life" of Naples; up until his youth it had been an extraordinary feature of life in Britain and, unsurprisingly, many of his predecessors in the business of fiction had felt compelled to grapple with it.

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