



The Spectral Hospital: Eighteenth-Century Philanthropy and the Novel

Lisa Zunshine

University of Kentucky

Established in 1739 as a shelter for illegitimate children of the poor otherwise liable to be murdered by their parents or abandoned in the streets to certain death, the London Foundling Hospital loomed large in eighteenth-century cultural imagination.¹ It embodied both the noblest philanthropic aspirations of the British Enlightenment and some of its worst fears, namely that unchecked by the stigma of illicit maternity, women would gain an unprecedented control over their reputations and reproductive behavior. Straightforward praises, such as Henry Fielding's "compliment to the present Age for [this] glorious [Benefaction]," mingled with such underhand commendations as the one voiced by a 1760 anonymous pamphlet that assured the "young Maids" that now they "may safely take a Leap in the dark with their Sweethearts; and if they should chance to be with child, . . . they may go to the Foundling Hospital and get rid of their Bantling, and pass for pure Virgins."² It was widely rumored, moreover, that the reason any man would champion the case of this charity was that he hoped to swindle the public into paying for the upkeep of his own bastards; a 1750 pamphlet claimed that the Hospital's founding father, Captain Thomas Coram, worked so hard on behalf of illegitimate children because he "had many a Lass grappl'd under the Lee."³ The institution's vulnerability to slander notwithstanding, the visit to the beautifully appointed grounds of

the Hospital, to its art exhibition, and to its children's quarters was considered "the most fashionable morning lounge in the reign of George II."⁴ Foreign visitors, especially, saw it as an emblem of the growing public spirit of English men and women. As Jean Andre Rouquet put it in *The Present State of the Arts in England* (translated into English in 1754), "we may say that in England everything is now done by people. This hospital is now a very large building, and was raised by the subscription of a few private persons, who were desirous of seeing such an establishment. The king subscribed to it like others, and the public benefactions are every day increasing."⁵

Surprisingly, however, given the prominence of the Hospital in the mental landscape of the Enlightenment, no eighteenth-century writer cared to capitalize on what appears to us today the obvious selling and sentimental potential of a story featuring a child who grows up in the Hospital and then negotiates the world outside of its walls, perhaps rising above her station through hard work or luck and perhaps even discovering her parents in properly dramatic circumstances.⁶ That no such story was written back in the eighteenth century appears even more remarkable if we remember how eagerly the reading and theater-going public of the period consumed fictional narratives about foundlings. In the theater, they saw Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), Edward Moore's *The Foundling* (1747), and George Colman's *The English Merchant* (1767); at home, they read Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771), Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778), Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1784), Agnes Maria Bennett's *The Beggar Girl and her Benefactors* (1797), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), as well as numerous anonymous novels published at the turn of the century, such as *Fatherless Fanny* (1811)—all featuring children lost and then recovered by their families.⁷ The London Foundling Hospital constituted an important feature of the imaginative terrain of many of these narratives, but it was treated by the eighteenth-century fiction writers in a very particular manner. For them, it was a place where infants *could have been* deposited by heartless strangers, but that threat never came to pass, or where they *might have been* expected to be left by their despairing mothers, but were not, or where they *have been* left, but might as well have died, since nobody ever heard about them again. Often a possible, but never an actual home for a viable protagonist, the London Foundling Hospital was both absent from and present, a just-beyond-reach spectral entity, in the foundling fictions of the Enlightenment.

To bring into a sharper relief this ambivalent status of the Hospital

in eighteenth-century fiction, consider a novel set in the 1740 to 1760s but written more than two-hundred years later. Winner of the Whitbread Children's Book Award, Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* (2000) takes full advantage of the romantic potential of the place where infants could be "lost" but also "found." Building on the late twentieth-century reconstructions of eighteenth-century history and sensibility, including the works of Ruth McClure, Jenny Uglow, and Roy Porter, Gavin tells the story of a young boy, Aaron Dangerfield, "the illegitimate son of the heir to a great estate," who grows up in the Foundling Hospital without knowing anything about his origins.⁸ The boy's remarkable singing talent gets him apprenticed to the famous musicologist Charles Burney. Through Burney, he comes in contact with his own father, Alexander Ashbrook, who left his "great estate" on the night when the boy was conceived to become a composer in London. In a sequence of poignant scenes, Aaron sings first in front of his father and then his mother, neither of whom recognizes him, for the father does not know that his beloved, the "angel" (107) Melissa, got pregnant after their first sexual encounter, and Melissa herself was persuaded that her child was stillborn. After a series of harrowing adventures, involving secret passages, a brutal slave trade, and the amazing metamorphosis of an evil child-murderer into a respectable London gentleman, Alexander is reunited with Melissa, their son is restored to them, and the newly reconstituted family is free to enjoy the Ashbrook wealth.

The reversal of the protagonist's fortune is striking: like other children brought up on public charity, Aaron was expected to become a servant, a soldier, or a sailor; yet the romantic denouement is plausible given the aura of secrecy and possibility clinging to the young charges of the Hospital. But that aura, to adapt Gavin's prefatory observation about her story, "seemed to have been there all along." Why is it then that the eighteenth-century writers, preoccupied as they were with struggling orphans, remained either oblivious or indifferent to that aura, choosing instead to treat the Hospital as a narrative dead end?

To consider possible answers to this question, I begin by discussing the "spectral" representations of the Hospital in six novels spanning the period from the 1740s to the 1810s: Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), John Shebbeare's *The Marriage Act* (1754), Tobias Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), and Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816). I then turn to Ala A. Alryyes's recent analysis of the relationship between eighteenth-century nationalism and the

novel and argue that the peculiar position of the Hospital in works of fiction might have resulted from the incompatibility between its widely publicized emphasis on the regimented upbringing and modest social aspirations of its charges and the novel's interest in celebrating the specifically "English" desire for liberty. I further ask what set the Foundling Hospital apart from other charities that were established at midcentury and similarly based their claim to public support on their ability to discipline disruptive sexual and social tendencies. Here I posit the youth of the foundlings and the ongoing transformation of cultural discourses of childhood as decisive factors for the Hospital's spectral status in the works of eighteenth-century fiction. It would take the later Romantic and Victorian literary traditions to evolve a conception of children that would make a public child-rearing institution into an actual and not a spectral setting for novels featuring adolescent protagonists.

The Eighteenth-Century Child: Not Growing Up in the Foundling Hospital

The bastard protagonist of Fielding's *Tom Jones* could have easily been raised at the London Foundling Hospital or at one of its local branches. We tend to think that Mrs. Deborah Wilkins exhausts the list of options available to the abandoned infant (other than being adopted by a wealthy landowner, Mr. Allworthy) when she suggests that he should be "put in a basket, and sent out and laid at the church-warden's door," for it is a "good night, only a little rainy and windy."⁹ Mrs. Wilkins's assurance that "it is two to one but [he] lives till [he] is found in the morning" (35) is but a thinly veiled death sentence for the infant. One of the first things, however, that the novel tells us about Allworthy is that he partook of the philanthropic spirit of his times, "was charitable to the poor . . . and built an hospital" (33). Allworthy would know, in other words, whom to contact and how to place an abandoned child into a well-run foundling hospital. Moreover, he would not be deterred from doing so by worrying that people would think that it is his own bastard and that he supports public charities precisely to insure himself against such personal emergencies. Common as this kind of slander was, Allworthy is too self-confident about his uprightness to regard it as dangerous. The Foundling Hospital, thus, is a possible alternative for Tom Jones, a road that could have been taken but was not.

The spectral Hospital comes up again later in the story when Nancy Miller is discovered to be pregnant by Mr. Nightingale. “Miss Nancy hath had a mind to be as wise as her mother,” announces Partridge cheerfully, “and so there is a child coming for the Foundling Hospital.” What Tom perceives as Partridge’s “stupid jesting” (667) has more layers than either of them realize, for Nancy’s mother, eighteen years earlier, had conceived Nancy out of wedlock.¹⁰ Her mother, of course, married the father of her child, just as Nancy will soon marry Nightingale. The Foundling Hospital remains a vague presence over the horizon, part threat and part “jest.”

It is still there—an option that is not really an option—in Smollett’s *Peregrine Pickle* (1751). At one point Peregrine overhears a conversation among several ladies of quality trying to decide the fate of a young woman who had married for love against the wishes of her family, thus forfeiting her inheritance and provoking her father’s implacable enmity. Upon the death of her husband, she found herself a destitute widow, saddled with two infants. One lady recommends placing them in the Foundling Hospital:

My lady duchess concluded that [the young widow] must be a creature void of all feeling and reflection, who could survive such aggravated misery; therefore did not deserve to be relieved, except in the character of a common beggar; and was generous enough to offer a recommendation, by which she would be admitted into an infirmary, to which her grace was a subscriber; at the same time, advising the solicitor to send the twins to the Foundling-Hospital, where they would be carefully nursed and brought up, so as to become useful members of the commonwealth.¹¹

Another lady is convinced that once the infants enter the Hospital, their mother would be free to seduce rich young men and thus destroy the emotional and financial well-being of good families. With “all due deference to the opinion” of the duchess, she opines that “the generosity of her grace . . . would only serve to encourage children in their disobedience to their parents, and might be the means not only of prolonging the distress of the wretched creature, but also of ruining the constitution of some young heir, perhaps the hope of a great family,” for it is likely that the widow, “when her month should be up, and her brats disposed of, would spread her attractions to the public, (provided she could profit by her person) and, in the usual way, make a regular progress from St. James’s to Drury-lane” (430).

It hardly matters to either of the ladies that the young woman in question used to be married and that her children are legitimate; their admis-

sion to the Foundling Hospital would automatically activate the scenario of a “fallen” woman now free to continue her depredations upon “great families.” Moreover, having financially contributed to one “infirmary,” the duchess feels that she has done her philanthropic duty, and that a public charitable institution, even if one geared toward bastards, should take care of a distressed person without taxing further her grace’s private benevolence. Finally, the third “member of this tenderhearted society” agrees that “the bantlings” should be “sent to the hospital” and she would take the mother as her servant (430).

Shocked “at the nature . . . of this ungenerous consultation,” Peregrine rushes to the house of the poor woman with a gift of twenty pounds and meets there the celebrated Lady V., “who having heard by accident of [the] deplorable situation [of the young widow], had [also] immediately obeyed the dictates of her humanity . . . and come in person to relieve her distress” (431). The private charity of kind individuals, the novel tacitly assures us, will keep the Hospital where it belongs—at the outskirts of the narrative universe—let the callous philanthropists, such as the duchess, plan and scheme all they want to get their subscription money’s worth!

If within the story an infant gets placed in the Foundling Hospital, we never hear of him again. In John Shebbeare’s *The Marriage Act* (1754), one Miss Standish, a daughter of a well-to-do country attorney, is seduced by her father’s clerk, Mr. Wright, who wants to marry her for her dowry. After finding out that Mr. Standish will not supply them with money (for he had hoped that his daughter would marry a wealthy old neighbor), Wright abandons his pregnant wife-to-be in London. Miss Standish gives birth to “a very fine boy” and is then “persuaded . . . to send the Child to the Foundling-Hospital; which alas! She [is] with much Reluctance prevailed on to do.”¹² Looking at her infant for the last time, Miss Standish cries out: “Unhappy Babe! born in Misery, deserted by thy Parents, whom thou never must know. Alas! Thou goest to live on Charity, unconnected, unsupported by those who should watch thy Infant Steps, and lead thee into Life. May thy Fate yet be better than that of her who bore thee” (2:263). Well after the boy is admitted to the Hospital, Miss Standish is briefly reunited with her lover, although the parents’ reunion makes no difference to the “Fate” of the infant, who is never heard of again.

Prominent among fictional children who might have been brought up in the Foundling Hospital but were not is Rachel/Virginia from Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801). The novel’s main male protagonist, Clar-

ence Hervey, adopts a beautiful foundling girl, Rachel (whom he promptly renames Virginia as a tribute to de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*), to groom her into a perfect future wife for himself.¹³ Hervey's hare-brained scheme nearly destroys both him and his ward, for, as they gradually discover, they are not really attracted to each other. He loves Belinda Portman, compared to whom Virginia is "an insipid, though innocent child," and Virginia, in turn, is secretly dreaming about another man, Captain Sunderland, whom she had met years ago.¹⁴ To take Virginia off her guardian's hands, Edgeworth conjures up a rich "West Indian . . . gentleman" (368), Mr. Hartley, who arrives in London in search of his long-lost child, "his poor Rachel" (358). The father and daughter are soon reunited, Rachel/Virginia confesses her passion for the Captain, who turns out to have saved Mr. Hartley's life several years ago, and Clarence Hervey is free to marry Belinda.

Standing out in the midst of this hurried series of improbable coincidences are the references to the London Foundling Hospital. Hearing that a man who fits the description of Virginia's father is back in England, Hervey immediately surmises that this "gentleman might probably visit the Foundling Hospital" (358) in search of his long-lost child. And, indeed, we learn that upon first arriving in London, Mr. Hartley goes to the Hospital hoping that one of its "oldest girls" would turn out to be his Rachel. Rachel's mother, we have learned earlier in the story, "was carried from a boarding-school, when she was scarcely sixteen, by a wretch [i.e., Mr. Hartley] who, after privately marrying her, would not own his marriage, stayed with her but two years, then went abroad, left his wife and his infant, and has [not] been heard of since" (332–33)—until now. The ambiguous circumstances of Rachel's birth, her mother's poverty, and her father's subsequent inquiry about her at a charity dedicated to saving the lives of illegitimate children imply that Rachel could have grown up at the Foundling Hospital. Once again, however, such a "Romance of the Hospital" remains nothing more than a titillating possibility.

The potential of such a romance is then contemplated briefly in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), which features a beautiful young woman whose complicated personal history and suspected illegitimacy compel her to conceal her identity for most of the story. Left penniless and thrown upon the mercy of strangers, she largely forfeits their good will by her obstinate refusal to reveal who she is. Continuously interrogated on the subject of her name, she admits at one point that she hardly knows it herself, an admission that prompts one of her reluctant benefactresses, Mrs.

Maple, to exclaim with indignation, “Not know your own name? Why I hope you don’t come into my house from the Foundling Hospital?”¹⁵ The idea that the Incognita might have been raised at the Hospital does not, however, seem to faze a virtuous young gentleman, Mr. Harleigh, who has fallen in love with her and who, upon overhearing this conversation, “throws down” the book he has been reading, walks “hastily to Mrs. Maple, and [says] in a low voice, ‘Yet, if that should be the case, would she be less an object of compassion? of consideration?’” (58). Of course, Mr. Harleigh’s romantic sentiments are never put to the test in Burney’s novel, because the mysterious stranger turns out to be well-born, rich, legitimate, and brought up in an upscale French convent rather than the Foundling Hospital, which functions here once again as a vivid point of cultural reference but a narrative cul-de-sac.

Perhaps one of the most interesting allusions to the Hospital is contained in a novel that never even names it directly: Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816). At the close of the story, when Emma finally gives up her plan of arranging the future of her protégé, Harriet Smith, “the natural daughter of somebody”—indeed, when she begins to want to get rid of Harriet temporarily, because she has had the gall to aspire to marry Mr. Knightley—she sends her to London to stay with the family of Emma’s brother-in-law, Mr. John Knightley, and it is there, in the house at Brunswick Square, that Harriet gets engaged to her “common sense” suitor, a “gentleman-farmer,” Robert Martin.¹⁶ This particular setting for the final stage of Harriet’s search for a husband is important, for, as Rachel Ramsey reminds us, at the turn of the century, Brunswick Square was one of the recently developed parts of the Foundling Hospital estate.¹⁷ In fact, the early-nineteenth-century reader might have been first reminded of the Hospital at the beginning of the novel, when Isabella Knightley praises the “neighborhood of Brunswick Square as so different from almost all the rest . . . , so remarkably airy, [the only place] that she could be satisfied to have her children in” (82). From the early days of the eighteenth-century infanticide prevention campaign, its champions spoke about the importance of housing the rescued children “in the suburbs of the city, in a wholesome dry area” (Nichols and Wray, 1), and one of Captain Coram’s inducements for buying the four plots of land in Lamb’s Conduit Fields was the reported healthfulness of the neighborhood. Of course, Austen’s choice of address for the London Knightleys might be accidental, but that seems unlikely for a novel centering as relentlessly as *Emma* does on illegitimate children, orphans, and adoptions.¹⁸ Instead, it is

probable that Austen settles the Knightleys in Brunswick Square precisely in order to be able to ship Harriet there at the opportune moment when Emma's fanciful matchmaking, inspired by her taste in the trashy, late-eighteenth-century romances about foundling daughters of gentlemen who marry aristocrats, becomes inadequate to the point of being destructive, and Harriet has to be "coded" via a different set of cultural associations.¹⁹

And for that the ideological iconography of the Foundling Hospital proves particularly useful. From the inception of the charity in 1739, its governors and guardians maintained that the children should be aware of their humble social station and yet acquit themselves well in the world by using wisely the educational and social resources, however modest, provided them by their adopted home. By arranging Harriet's stay in the vicinity of the Foundling Hospital, Austen both tacitly aligns her with the inmates of the Hospital and asserts her difference from them. On the one hand, making the best use of resources available to her, Harriet marries into a situation of "security, stability, and improvement," in which "retired enough for safety, and occupied enough for her cheerfulness, . . . [she] would never be led into temptation, nor left for it to find her out" (379). Thomas Coram himself would not have been able to put it better if asked to describe what kind of future he and his colleagues at the Hospital envisioned for their young charges. On the other hand, Harriet is *not* an object of public charity, bound by gratitude and duty to humble obedience to her social betters. Her genteel education, her voluntary connection with the Woodhouses and the Knightleys, and, above all, her ready acquiescence to Emma's insistence that she is entitled to marry above her social level ensure that, in spite of its physical proximity, the Foundling Hospital remains a specter on the furthest margins of her social consciousness.

"Transparent" Children and Opaque Literary Characters

To understand the tenacity of the Hospital's spectral status in the works of fiction, we may begin by turning to Ala A. Alryyes's recent analysis of the Enlightenment's triangulation of "child, the novel, and the nation."²⁰ Taking as his starting point Lauren Berlant's "theory of infantile citizenship," with its focus on "a young person" as a "*stand-in* for a complicated and contradictory set of anxieties about national identity" (24), Alryyes argues that the "sufferings of the homeless child" become "a central element in

nationalist narratives” (25) of eighteenth-century England. The period saw the change in the view of the child’s relationship with the state, exemplified by the difference between what could be termed the Lockean and the Rousseauian perspectives. Implicit in Locke’s discussion of the “consensual establishment of the commonwealth” was the troubled realization that “children could not be proper political subjects” (Alryyes 35, 50), that is, they are not able to consent to uphold the commonwealth along with their parents until they have reached the age of political discernment, but when they do reach that age, there is simply no guarantee that their ideological commitments will be identical to their parents’ and that they “will consent to and preserve the commonwealth” (Alryyes, 88). As Locke puts it in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government*,

Nobody can be under a law that is not promulgated to him; and this law being promulgated or made known by reason only, he that is not come to the use of his reason cannot be said to be under this law; and Adam’s children being not presently as soon as born under the law of reason, were not presently free.²¹

Rousseau seemed to have found a way to circumvent this problem (at least theoretically) by substituting the child’s biological parents with a perfect tutor, a substitution that Alryyes reads as an ultimately political gesture aimed at impacting the fate of the republic as much as the fate of the individual family. Rousseau begins by qualifying Locke’s view that the “company of their parents” is the best source of children’s socialization.²² On the one hand, in *Emile, ou l’éducation* (1762), Rousseau agrees with Locke when he points out that as “the true nurse is the mother, the preceptor is the father,” and that the child “will be better raised by a judicious and limited father than the cleverest master in the world; for zeal will make up for talent better than talent for zeal.”²³ On the other hand, the narrator of *Emile* is aware that in real life, the child’s parents, preoccupied with their projects and vanities, rarely find time for their offspring, leaving the child’s early upbringing to domestics who make him “victim of their caprice and of his own.” Having learned to stifle his (originally good) “nature by passions that [were] caused to be born in him,” this “factitious being is [then] put in the hands of a preceptor who completes the development of the artificial seeds that he finds already all formed and teaches him everything, except to know himself, except to take advantage of himself, except to know how to live and to make himself happy” (Rousseau, 48).

Blinded to his own true nature and, by extension, to the true feelings of others, this new adult is then “cast out into the world” (Rousseau, 48), and woe to the world constituted and governed by such “factitious” beings. The personal thus translates into the political, allowing Rousseau, in Alryyes’s view, to brand the whole “modern family as perverse [and] unpatriotic” (113). The individual child’s “suffering as a result of the family failure” (112) leads to “tarnished social relations; for the loss of transparency”—that is, the ability to read “the hearts of others” and one’s own heart—is the cause of “social disintegration, at home or in the republic” (114). It is thus that the ideal tutor emerges as not just a substitute for the biological father, but also as a “national” father. As Alryyes puts it, by “emphasizing the failure of the modern family to restore transparency [and with it, one might add, integrity and social responsibility], thereby healing modern man, Rousseau establishes the need for a national father, the final step in his new correspondence between family and nation” (113).

The concept of “transparency” covers much ground here. Implicit in Rousseau’s recipe for emotional transparency—that is, in his claim that, unlike the unfit biological parents, a perfect tutor can cure the child of any trace of moral duplicity and eliminate the “wedge between seeming and being” (Alryyes, 115)—is a vision of ideological transparency. This vision is an indirect answer to Locke’s apprehension that “some of the ‘thoughts’ and ‘aims’ of the new adults” would “not ‘lean’ in the direction of ratifying or maintaining the commonwealth” (Alryyes, 39).²⁴ Raised in the right way, attuned to himself and to people around him, a young man will work toward the good of his native country.

Moreover, he will do so not because he is forced to follow the “law” passed down to him from his fathers, but rather because, fully aware of the limitations and advantages of every political regime, he has happily internalized the following view:

It makes a difference to you that you are where you can fulfill all your duties, and one of those duties is an attachment to the place of your birth. Your compatriots protected you as a child; you ought to love them as a man. You ought to live amidst them, or at least in a place where you can be useful to them insofar as you can, and where they know where to get you if they ever have a need for you. (Rousseau, 473–74)

Emile’s ideological allegiances are thus vividly illustrated when, at the end of the novel, Jean-Jacques and his grown-up pupil travel around

Europe looking for a perfect place to settle down and raise Emile and Sophie's future children. After two years of studying different political regimes firsthand, Emile ultimately decides to come back to France and raise his family near Sophie's parents.²⁵ And Jean-Jacques, it turns out, knew even before their travels "what their effect would be." The heart of his pupil was open to him (i.e., transparent), and he was confident that Emile would choose France not because France is perfect (it is clearly not), but because Emile knows that he owes to the country of his birth "what is most precious to man—the morality of his actions and the love of virtue" (473). By becoming Emile's "true father" (407), in lieu of his biological father, Jean-Jacques thus becomes his "national" father too, that is, someone who educates his "son" in the best interests of the nation.

It would be anachronistic to claim that Rousseau's model of national father as a substitute for biological father was fully actualized in eighteenth-century fictional narratives. Nevertheless, some aspects of the period's novels, such as their preoccupation with fatherless young protagonists, resonate with this model. Alryyes explores this by looking at the scores of "suddenly independent, and troubled, homeless children," such as Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Pamela, Clarissa, and Tom Jones, each of whom is forced to leave "his/her father's house" (132) or, as in the case of Moll Flanders, is failed by her biological parents even before she can be aware of it.²⁶ The age-old literary trope of a young person striking out on her own in a dangerous world was thus infused with a new relevance in a society increasingly willing to consider its children as "national raw material" (72), whose entrepreneurial ambitions could be used for the good of the empire. It is the emergence of a conceptual framework within which the failure of a specific family could be considered as potentially contributing to (that is, instead of automatically detracting from) a larger national interest that brings the eighteenth-century English novel onto the same plane as Rousseau's philosophical exploration.

A fatherless child is forced to think for herself more often than a child sheltered at her parent's house. This truism acquired distinct nationalistic overtones in the eighteenth-century English novel, which emphasized the individual's right to "rational freedom" (Alryyes, 130) as a function of her national origins. It is not incidental, Alryyes argues, that in *Tom Jones* Fielding "explicitly links Sophia's tribulations and Britain's" when her aunt insists that "English Women" shall not be "locked up like the Spanish and Italian Wives." However short, Sophia's "homelessness" both represented

an appropriate response to a tyrannical biological parent and participated in a broader nationalist discourse. Her story “advertised the yearning for freedom” that Alryyes sees as “an essential element of a central British narrative” (131), in which “God’s gift to Britain was liberty” (129). Both the limits and the attractiveness of grounding the rational in the national would come into sharper relief in *Emile*, in which Rousseau associated rational freedom with an essentially cosmopolitan outlook, but then made his favorite rational cosmopolite settle in France.

However, if we agree with Alryyes’s suggestive argument that not “only is the suffering of the homeless child a central element in nationalist narratives,” but that it also “underpins the rise of the realist novel in the eighteenth century” (25), we are faced with the following problem. The Foundling Hospital appears to be the most natural setting for a “nationalist narrative,” because it embodied the nascent ideal of the “national father”—and let us not forget that all of the Hospital’s governors and guardians were male!—who steps in when the biological father and mother fail to fulfill their duty to the infant.²⁷ Brought under the eye of this “national father,” foundlings could be expected to avoid the dangerous ideological opacity and consequent guile associated with children raised by their own families, for, to put it bluntly, their lives and loyalties are forfeited to the state that saved them from parents who would abandon them to almost certain death. In other words, a “Coram Boy” or a “Coram Girl” would be a perfect subject for an eighteenth-century novel, a bearer of tremendous “symbolic and practical value for the nation” (Alryyes, 51), and yet, the period’s fiction writers steadily avoided depicting just this kind of child hero.

How do we account for such avoidance, particularly since nationalist rhetoric otherwise abounded in the public discourse concerning the establishment and maintenance of the Foundling Hospital?²⁸ I suggest that writers’ reluctance to portray a child raised in the Hospital was indicative of a profound incompatibility between the two political ideals: the dream of the ideological “transparency,” whereby children became not just “open,” but also conformed to expectations and grew into responsible members of society, and the appealing paradigm of the specifically “English” desire for liberty. The absolute condition for the establishment and maintenance of the Foundling Hospital was that its charges would be raised cognizant of their modest station and appreciative of industriousness. They were not to entertain any high-flown ideas about their birth or destiny, and neither

were the visitors to the Hospital to receive an impression that the children were “coddled” and being brought up above their station. (That the Hospital was readily suspected of such indulgence is clear from the advice to its administration proffered by the author of an anonymous 1761 pamphlet that recommends the governors bring the foundlings up “in such a manner as will fit them to bear any hardships”—feed them on “simple fare,” dress them in “cheap” and “light” garments.)²⁹ Children were apprenticed to a variety of domestic and professional services, such as netting, shoemaking, woollen manufacture, and sea service, at an early age, and the Hospital constantly monitored their progress and their behavior. From the 1750s through the 1760s, it was not uncommon to apprentice the child at five- or even three-years old, following the injunction from the governors that all apprentices should be placed “as expeditiously as possible, let their ages be ever so tender” (Nichols and Wray, 184), although by the late 1780s, the typical age for being apprenticed rose to fourteen (196). Knowing quite early what they were destined to do in life and brought up to be grateful to the English public for making it possible for them to have an acceptable social status (the famous appellation “the child of the Hospital” was certainly more respectable than a “child of nobody”) rendered “Coram’s children” the closest real-life approximations to the idealized state of ideological “transparency,” open, without guile, ready to acquiesce to society’s demands.³⁰

Such transparency, however, came at a price. Alryyes’s earlier analysis of Sophia’s rebellion against her father in *Tom Jones* provides a useful metaphor for understanding the terms on which the “Hospital’s children” were thought to be admitted into society. “English women” in particular and English subjects in general “shall not be locked,” yet the evocations of liberty were simply not part of the Foundling Hospital’s public discourse, a hardly surprising reticence in this specific context, given the dangerous proximity of the concepts of liberty and libertinism, and of political freedom and sexual “freedoms.” Here we have to differentiate between the rhetoric of freedom and the practical implications of being brought up at the Hospital. It is possible that in some cases foundlings who were lucky enough to survive past their first year at the Hospital did in fact have a better chance for future economic independence than their hypothetical counterparts taken care of by relatives or strangers, for the charges of the Hospital were given a well-meaning if rudimentary education and medical attention, and were also provided with the all-important money for apprenticeships.³¹ At the same time, some foundlings were later known to

complain that its rhetoric of hardiness notwithstanding, the Hospital actually sheltered them too much and thus did not prepare them well for the challenges of “real life.” It is thus difficult to gauge the extent of the economic and political freedom offered to the Hospital’s children in the long run. It is certainly easy, however, to notice how assiduously its governors and guardians cultivated the image of a highly regimented, protected, and, one might even say, “locked-up” environment, as such, impervious to evil influences that had corrupted their young charges’ parents.

To return to Gavin’s *Coram Boy*, a story that seemed to have been there all along, but, it appears, could not have been written back then, it is possible that one reason why such a tale would not sit well with eighteenth-century readers and writers was that they were actually paying for the upkeep of Coram boys and girls, which meant that they had to construct in their imagination a picture of the bastard child who actually “deserved” their support, and they had to maintain that picture in spite of personal prejudices and the plethora of frequently vicious rumors and pamphlets. The London Foundling Hospital, in other words, was not a place that the eighteenth-century novel-reading and charity-supporting public would want to associate with that particular “English” freedom that the protagonists from Tom Jones to Harriet Smith appear to hold as their birthright as they navigate the world. The charges of the Hospital were to maintain emotional and ideological transparency, an idealized state reflecting the paying public’s expectations that these children’s sexual agency and social mobility remain carefully circumscribed. And such expectations did not mesh with the spirit of economic, social, and erotic adventure pervading the stories of opportunistic and thus ultimately opaque Tom Joneses, Fidelias, Evelinas, Emmelines, Virginias, and Harriets, however comfortably contained and socially sanctioned that spirit may prove toward the end of the narrative.

The Foundling Hospital and the Discourse of the Innocent Child

Broadly speaking, the same argument applies to other charities opened from the 1740s to the 1760s and subsisting on voluntary private donations, such as the Magdalen House and Lock Hospital. Because of their emphasis on restricting and regulating the individual freedom, these charities were not good for eighteenth-century novelists, who preferred to explore

the individualist ethic and the specifically English entrepreneurial spirit attendant upon the development of national capitalism. Still, the sheer frequency with which the Foundling Hospital—as opposed to other philanthropic institutions—is mentioned in the works of eighteenth-century fiction raises the possibility that other factors contributed to the ambiguous appeal of this particular charity for the period’s writers.³²

One such factor must have been the tender age of the Hospital’s charges combined with their particular brand of “innocence.” The public image of the typical inmate of the Hospital, that is, a bastard child paying for her parents’ sins by her lifelong pariah status, an unhappy innocent, was complexly implicated with what historians of early-modern childhood see as the emerging new idea of the “pure” child, free from both the stain of Original Sin and from the corrupting influence of modern society. Linda A. Pollock describes this new perspective as follows:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, children were viewed as the bearers of original sin. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, they were regarded as innocent. (The word “innocent” could be applied to children before the eighteenth century, but it meant weak, in need of protection, rather than pure.) This was a cultural shift of some magnitude. In practice, it meant that parents and educators no longer understood their [goal] to be that of educating children in the ways of the world, and in the process rooting out their faults and thereby preventing further decay, but rather that of shielding children from the evils of society, preserving them from contamination and encouraging a child’s own talents to blossom.³³

The governors and guardians’ emphasis on the “locked-up,” highly protective and regimented environment for their charges, and their practice of separating the children from their family names and their parents’ personal histories transformed the young inmates of the Foundling Hospital into tentative emblems of this new state of childhood purity.³⁴ One telling instance of casting them in this role of paradigmatic innocents is the history of an English “Conservatorio,” a mid-1770s attempt to turn the Foundling Hospital into a public school of music, described in detail in Frances Burney’s *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832).³⁵

For Frances’s father, Dr. Charles Burney, the social encapsulation of the young foundlings—their upbringing “in complete and unsuspecting ignorance of evil” (236)—was the main argument for establishing the first national music school on the basis of the Hospital. Generally, although Dr.

Burney very strongly wanted to foster native talents instead of importing musicians “from foreign shores” (234), he recoiled at the thought of taking “promiscuously the children of the poor, merely where they had an ear for music, or a voice for song, [because it would mean] running the risk of gathering together a mixed little multitude, which, from intermingling inherent vulgarity, hereditary diseases, or vicious propensities, with the finer qualities requisite for admission, might render the cultivation of their youthful talents, a danger—if not a curse—to the country” (235). What would happen, mused Burney, “should a single one of the tribe go astray”? The “popular cry against teaching the arts to the poor would stain the whole community with a stain indelible. . . . The institution itself might be branded with infamy” (236), and—a consideration absent from but easily read into Burney’s worst-case scenario—the reputation of the instigator of the scheme would suffer a terrible blow. A “conservatorio” opened in the Foundling Hospital, however, would be a very different matter, for the governors of the Hospital generally took it upon themselves to insure that their charges “breathed their infantine lives . . . in innocence” (236). *Those* children could be thus counted on *not* to go astray, having apparently dropped not only their family names but also any tendencies for “inherent vulgarity, hereditary diseases, [and] vicious propensities.”³⁶

We can thus see a continuity between the eighteenth-century conceptualization of innocent children as (bastard) children brought up in isolation from their parents and the later Victorian portrayals of children raised in public institutions certainly much less benevolent than the Foundling Hospital, who somehow manage to retain their essential, if wild, purity. As the “spectral”—that is, both present and absent—Foundling Hospital of the eighteenth-century novel transmogrifies into the all-too-present oppressive charity school for unwanted children and into the terrifying workhouse of the nineteenth-century novel, the paradigmatically innocent child of the Hospital metamorphoses into a “noble savage,” such as Jane Eyre, and into a victimized angel, such as Helen Burns and Oliver Twist.³⁷ The young protagonists of such narratives have learned to counter their repressive environments by either resisting their tutors or by evolving an angelic coating of such miraculous density that no machinations of malevolent officials can penetrate it.

The child of the Hospital can thus at last enter fully the world of the novel by becoming a child of *a* hospital, that is, of a generic charitable institution that can be heartily disliked by the reader who is not expected

to volunteer funds for its upkeep. Moreover, if in the eighteenth-century public discourse surrounding the Foundling Hospital the ideological transparency of its young charges can be correlated with their innocence, in the nineteenth-century novel, featuring loathsome workhouses and charity schools, the child's transparency and innocence part company. The protagonist's innocence is now secured by her opacity, her ability to suppress her immediate response to the abuse by the cruel superior, to stifle "an impulse of fury," and to master the "rising hysteria."³⁸ As Jane Eyre observes, whatever Mr. Brocklehurst, the manager of Lowood, "an Institution for educating orphans" (63), might "do with the outside" of his young charges, "the inside was farther beyond his interference than he imagined" (84). These children have become adept at "controlling [their] features, muffling [their] voice, and restricting [their] limbs" (192). These strategies enable them first to survive and later condemn, as Jane does, the "harsh, . . . pompous and meddling" (170) Mr. Brocklehurst with the unabated vigor of unsullied idealism and hard-won belief in justice. The early lack of transparency in a child of "an Institution" thus translates into the more enduring innocence, that enviable state of mind described by Mr. Rochester, as he is looking at Jane, as "clean conscience [and] unpolluted memory" (187).

To return once more to *Coram Boy*, it is in fact a product of the *nineteenth-century* discourse of a very particular brand of romanticized conflict. However benign a place the Foundling Hospital is in Gavin's novel, Aaron Dangerfield is shown to rebel against it in numerous ways: by inexplicably evolving a genteel style of speaking that sets him apart from other children of the Hospital; by gaining an apprenticeship with the man (Dr. Burney) who was known in real life to criticize the governors of the Hospital for denying their charges musical education; and finally by running away from the Hospital never to come back again.³⁹ *Coram Boy* thus builds on the ideal of militant innocence not yet available to the adolescent protagonist of the eighteenth-century fictional narrative, such as Tom Jones, Rachel/Virginia, Juliet (from *The Wanderer*), or Harriet Smith. Those protagonists know how to deny "subordination to [their] elders" and the patriarchal ideologies those elders embody, but they do not yet know how to defy the new public establishments functioning as substitutes for the biological family. It appears then that the Foundling Hospital can achieve only a spectral presence in the eighteenth-century novel because this novel has not yet evolved a mode of resistance to that Hospital in particular and to a public, child-rearing institution in general.⁴⁰

Notes

I am grateful to Cedric D. Reverand, Chris Hair, and two anonymous readers for *Eighteenth-Century Life* for their helpful comments on the earlier versions of this essay.

1. For a discussion of infanticide in eighteenth-century England, see Mark Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550–2000* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002); Marilyn Francus, “Monstrous Mothers, Monstrous Societies: Infanticide and the Rule of Law in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21.2 (1997): 133–56; Peter Hoffer and N. E. H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558–1803* (New York: New York Univ., 1981); and Jennifer Thorn, ed., *Writing English Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print, 1722–1859* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 2003). For the most recent analysis of the Hospital’s cultural prominence, see Laura Schattschneider, “The Infant’s Petitions: An English Poetics of Foundling Reception, 1741–1837,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 33 (2004): 71–99. Some of the seminal reconstructions of the history of the Hospital include R. N. Nichols and F. A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford Univ, 1935) and Ruth K. McClure, *Coram’s Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 1981).

2. Henry Fielding, “The Covent-Garden Journal Number Forty-Four, Tuesday, June 2, 1752.” In *The Covent-Garden Journal* by Sir Alexander Drawcansir, Knt. Censor of Great Britain [Henry Fielding], 2 vols., ed. Gerard Edward Jensen (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 1915), 2:13. The anonymous pamphlet is *Joyful News to Batchelors and Maids: Being a Song, in Praise of the Fondling [sic] Hospital, and the London Hospital in Aldersgate-Street* (London, 1760).

3. Porcupinus Pelaguius, *The Scandalizade, A Panegyri–Satiri–Comic–Dramatic Poem* (London: G. Smith, 1750).

4. John Brownlow, *The History and Design of the Foundling Hospital with a Memoir of the Founder* (London: W. & H. S. Warr, 1858), 60.

5. Quoted in David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 1993), 163.

6. For a discussion of the fictional foundling’s gender, see Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ., 2005), introduction.

7. For recent discussions of eighteenth-century representations of bastards and foundlings, see Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings*, and Wolfram Schmidgen, “Illegitimacy and Social Observation: The Bastard in the Eighteenth-Century Novel,” *ELH* 69 (2002): 139–42.

8. Jamila Gavin, *Coram Boy* (London: Mammoth, 2000), back cover.

9. Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. John Bender and Simon Stern (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1966), 33. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

10. For the analysis of Nancy Miller’s illegitimacy, see Hugh Amory, *Law and the Structure of Fielding’s Novels* (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1964), 344–47.

11. Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle, in which are included Memoirs of a Lady of Quality*, ed. James L. Clifford (London: Oxford Univ., 1964), 429.

12. John Shebbeare, *The Marriage Act* [1754] (New York: Garland, 1974): 2: 262–63.

13. For a discussion of Clarence Hervey's plan, see Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 39, n.2; Susan G. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of the Family Romance: Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State Univ., 2002), 119–21; and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1991), 100.

14. Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. Eva Fidges [1801] (London: Pandora, 1986), 344.

15. Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; Or, Female Difficulties*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor [1814] (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2001), 58.

16. Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19, 50.

17. As Ramsey observes, in *'A Mad Intemperance . . . of Building': The Literary Construction of Early Modern London* (unpublished Ph.D. diss., West Virginia Univ., 2001), by the late eighteenth century, "as the city continued to spread, the Governors [of the Hospital] found themselves in possession of some of London's most valuable development property" (233). For more information about Brunswick Square as a part of the developed Foundling Hospital's estate, see Nichols and Wray, 279–84.

18. As Claudia L. Johnson points out, in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago, 1988), "the orphaned offspring . . . appear to comprise a rather large proportion of the community" (134). Similarly, Greenfield comments on the "abundance of . . . motherless children in the novel" (153).

19. See, for example, Anonymous, *Fatherless Fanny, or A Young Lady's first Entrance into Life, being the Memoirs of a Little Mendicant and her Benefactors* (London: G. Virtue, 1811) and Agnes Maria Bennett, *The Beggar Girl and her Benefactors*, 3rd edn., 5 vols. (London: printed at the Minerva-Press, for A. K. Newman, 1813). Also, on a tale of "a deserted orphan" published in the *Lady's Magazine* in November 1802 as an important source of Emma's fantasy of Harriet as a gentleman's daughter, see Edward Copeland, "Money," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1997), 142–43.

20. Ala A. Alryyes, *Original Subjects: The Child, the Novel, and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 2001).

21. John Locke, "An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of the Civil Government" ["Second Treatise on Civil Government"], in *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 2003), 33.

22. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 127.

23. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 48.

24. Ironically, the French Revolution will make a grotesque version of a dream of “national father” come true, with the Terror first transforming “hundreds of children into orphans by executing their parents and then ritually adopting them as members of the new nation of Frenchmen” (Alryyes, 87). For a further discussion, see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1992).

25. Emile’s decision also indirectly substantiates the belief of the Savoyard vicar that a man would do well to follow the religion of his fathers.

26. On the definition of the term “child” in the context of the eighteenth-century novel, see Alryyes, 122–24.

27. For a discussion of the demographic uniformity of the upper echelons of the Hospital’s administration, see Lisa Zunshine, “The Gender Dynamics of the Infanticide Prevention Campaign in Eighteenth-Century England and Richardson’s *History of Sir Charles Grandison*,” in *Writing English Infanticide: Child-Murder and Narrative, 1664–1876*, ed. Jennifer Thorn (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 2003), 145–71.

28. It was widely argued, for example, that the Hospital would provide the country with much needed human resources, soldiers, and sailors. For discussion, see Solkin, 158.

29. Anonymous, *Some Objections to the Foundling Hospital Considered by A Person in the Country to Whom They Were Sent* (London: T. Pasham, 1761), 19.

30. Legally, the illegitimate child was considered a *filius nullius*—“the son of nobody.” So William Blackstone, in *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols. (London: printed by A. Strahan and W. Woodfall for T. Cadell, 1793–95), asserted that an illegitimate child could “inherit nothing, being looked upon as the son of nobody . . . incapable even of a gift from [his] parents” (1:434).

31. The Hospital’s infant mortality rate was so high that some scholars think one form of death had merely been replaced by another. As Rachel G. Fuchs, in “Charity and Welfare,” from *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1789–1913*, ed. Daniel I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ., 2002), puts it, European foundling hospitals “have reduced criminal infanticide, but . . . replaced it with a semi-organized institutionalized form” (160).

32. For a related discussion of the Lock Hospital and its place in European imagination, see Linda Merians, *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. Linda Merians (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky, 1997).

33. Linda A. Pollock, “Foreword,” *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud*, ed. Marilyn R. Brown (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), xvi. For a complication of this argument, see Leah Sinanogolou Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1978), who explores the seventeenth-century “conservative Anglican emphasis on original innocence and idealization of childhood as a symbolic link with a past untroubled by Puritan agitation” (242). Moreover, Marcus usefully traces the gradual articulation of the view of the innocent child through the late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century

discourse, from James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1676) and Defoe's *Family Instructor* (1715), to Isaac Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1753).

34. However, see Schattschneider, "Infant's Petitions," for a discussion of "tokens" and their roles in tracing the foundlings' past.

35. [Frances Burney], *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, arranged from his own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections, by his daughter, Madame d'Arblay*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 1:233.

36. Dr. Burney's plan for the "English Conservatorio" was turned down by the Hospital's administration only to be resurrected again in the late 1780s, albeit without any acknowledgement of Dr. Burney's role as "the original projector" (*Memoirs*, 234).

37. For a discussion of the Romantic and Victorian child hero as a noble savage, see James R. Kinkaid, "Dickens and the Construction of the Child," *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, ed. Wendy S. Jacobson (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 29–42. As Kinkaid puts it, this "savage child usually appears in the modified form of the moderately naughty child, often in trouble but never malicious, never anything other than the regal and loveable barbarian. The rebellious heroines of Charlotte Bronte tap into this mythology" (34). For a discussion of *Oliver Twist's* innocence, miraculously persistent in the face of terrible institutional and personal abuse, see Kinkaid (37) and Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa, 1994), 81.

38. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2000), 86, 88.

39. In response to the governors and guardians' early rejection of his proposal for a musical school on the basis of the Hospital, Burney wrote that the Hospital had never been conceived as "a seminary, predestined for menial servitude, and as the only institution of the country where the members were to form a caste, from whose rules and plodden ways no genius could ever emerge" (*Memoirs*, 238).

40. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 97.

