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Gambling on Gaming: Mary Robinson's Literary Censures of the Fashionable Vice

In her 1775 "Letter to a Friend on Leaving Town," Mary Robinson decries the origin of the fashionable female gamester:

Each idle coxcomb leaves the wretched fair,
Alone to languish, and alone despair,
To cards, and dice, the slighted maiden flies,
And every fashionable vice apply's,
Scandal and coffee, pass the morn away,
At night a rout, an opera, or a play;
Thus glide their life, partly through inclination,
Yet more, because it is the reigning fashion. (*Poems* 81-2)

She relates the trajectory of female decline to the progress of a day, and by extension, to the progress of a life. Spurred by the absence of her husband – who is most likely engaged in similar amusements – the "wretched fair" follows the "reigning fashion" of the ton, leading her to "fashionable vice." She "pass[es]" her day from morning "[s]candal and coffee" to an evening of dissipation. Robinson's tying of the plight of the female gamester to the vagaries of her husband is especially poignant given that she often found herself in the same position. In fact, Robinson's poem was published during her "tedious captivity" in debtor's prison due, in part, to her husband Tom's gaming (*Memoirs* 1: 168, 2: 32).

Twenty-five years later, at the end of her career, Robinson launched her most striking attack on gaming in "Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England," a four-part series published from August to November 1800 in *The Monthly Magazine*. Writing this time from a "pretty cottage" on Englefield Green in Windsor, Robinson opens her critique by setting the responsibility for the tastes and mores of England's metropolis firmly on the shoulders of the ton:

As the prevailing characteristics of polished life take their impression from example held forth by persons of exalted rank in society; so the customs, opinions, amusements, and propensities, of the community at large may be said to derive their leading features from the pursuits and pleasures which are practiced and tolerated in the metropolis of a kingdom. ("Present" 35)

In this latter critique, then, Robinson extends the influence of the "reigning fashion" mentioned in her early poem to the "community at large."

Given Robinson's mention of "amusements" in the first installment of "The Present State," her focus at the end of the second installment on the "vice of GAMING" likely came as no surprise to her readers. Proclaiming that gaming "seems to have reached its climax at the fashionable end of the metropolis," she berates the magistrates for disparately enforcing the laws against it: "though the magistrates have endeavoured to check its progress among the subordinate ranks of society, it is still not only winked at, but tolerated, in the higher circles" ("Present" 140). While the "petty gambler" is punished "without mercy," Robinson complains, nobles "out-face the magistrates, and defy the laws, with boldness and impunity" ("Present" 140). However, those in the "higher circles" were not impervious to the consequences of gaming that the laws attempted to prevent. "[T]his fatal employment," Robinson contends, resulted in "the many domestic exposures which have taken place within the last twenty years" ("Present" 140). While men occupy their time with gaming and sport, she explains, women engage in "scenes of profligate debasement" accruing "debts of honour, which the *sacrifice of honour* too frequently discharges" and obliges them to use "even the family jewels and the family plate" to "supply the FARO BANK" ("Present" 140). Without qualms, she candidly censures this fashionable vice, exposing the extent of gaming's harm to every rank of the metropolis.

Robinson's observations likely resonated with the British public. In the latter eighteenth-century—particularly after George III issued his 1792 Proclamation Against Vice—Londoners were regularly exposed to stories of gaming's widespread popularity as well as of its players' significant losses (Russell 489). On 2 February 1790, *The Times* calculated the number of gaming establishments in "the County of Middlesex, including the City of London" to be "no less than ONE THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SIX Hazard, and E.O. and Faro Tables, seven hundred and forty two Billiard Tables, besides a little snug room in every Tavern, Coffee House, Porter House, and Wine Shop" (2). Later that year, *The St. James's Chronicle* reported that Brookes's Faro Bank's winnings "since its establishment, appeared to have been something more than a million sterling!" ("London" 1). Pointing out the equalizing nature of such losses, *The World* jested, "When certain of OUR NOBLES are losing their time, their health, their estates at FARO, does it never occur to them, that they are laying the FOUNDATIONS of DEMOCRACY?" (29 July 1793: 2). At times, however, the consequences were no laughing matter: "A LADY of FASHION and FARO, whose name, for the present, we forbear to mention, has been so affected by a run of *ill-luck* at play, that on Saturday morning last she *cut her throat* in so shocking a manner, as to put an immediate end to her existence" (*Oracle* 13 May 1794: 3). Robinson alludes to such suicides in "Present State": "It is at those ennobled midnight scenes of folly and rapacity, that the DEMON of SUICIDE anticipates his triumphs over the weakness, avarice, and false pride of

mortals. The effects of those scenes have recently presented HORRORS and DEATH!" (140). Through news briefs in the dailies, the public learned of gaming's growing impact on all ranks.

Likewise, the public caught glimpses of gaming's excess and depravity in etchings by contemporary caricaturists. Isaac Cruikshank's 1796 etching *Dividing the Spoil! St James's. St Giles's.*, for example, compares the infamous "Faro ladies" collecting their faro bank's winnings on St. James's to the thieves on St. Giles's dividing their pickings.¹ The sword and the military decoration on the table in the depiction of St. James's prefigure Robinson's remarks about using family heirlooms to "supply the faro bank" ("Present" 140).

Robinson's insight into this gamesters's world (followed by the public in news briefs and prints) stemmed from her own access to it. Her circulation within fashionable society and her intimate connections with titled gamesters gave her an insider's view of the world she presented in print and on the stage. This essay examines those portrayals through the lenses of her celebrity, her strategic promotion of her works, and her works' critical reception.² While censuring the fashionable vice, Robinson sought at once to capitalize on both the public's interests in the ton and the ton's self-interests. Understanding how she was positioned to achieve these aims begins with understanding her connections to several fashionable gamesters—as well as her own carefully constructed celebrity.

The Fashionable Gamesters

Just as the British public was aware of gaming's popularity and players' losses, it was also aware of those among fashionable society's elite who succumbed to the gaming table's siren song. Both the prominent Whig statesman Charles James Fox and the Prince of Wales were notorious gamblers, often appearing together in caricatures lampooning gaming like James Gillray's *Modern Hospitality, or A Friendly Party in High Life*. Fox's "passion for play" resulted in "pecuniary embarrassments" amounting to £140,000 in the winter of 1773–4 (91–2, 127). While Fox's father purchased that debt from his creditors, Fox found himself in dire straits twice more: in 1781 and in 1783, he sold off his household to cover his habit (Fox 92; Mitchell 50). A "denizen of both the subscription clubs and private houses," the Prince of Wales found a record of his gaming activities in the press: "Six thousand guineas is the known loss of an unfortunate Duke; but the private bets amount to a much greater sum; and of this sum the Prince of Wales is the principal winner" (Russell 489; *Times* 23 Apr. 1788: 2). However, the Prince did not always walk away a winner. Gillray's 1792 print *A Voluptuary under the Horrors of Digestion* exhibits several items on the floor beside the Prince's dining chair: a cup, two dice, and an accounting book opened to a page headed "Debts of Honor unpaid."³ The thrill, the chance, the hope of

winning kept the Prince and Fox returning to the table in spite of the odds, in spite of their losses.

Another familiar—yet fairer—face at the gaming table was that of the Duchess of Devonshire, Georgiana Spencer. According to Betty Rizzo, the Duchess agonized over her debts “from as early as 1779,” and her losses totaled £62,000 in 1792 and £40,000 at her death (189; Mitchell 50).⁴ Reports of the Duchess’s gaming activities occasionally appeared in the newspaper columns: “The DUTCHESS of DEVONSHIRE and Lady ELIZ. FOSTER, are both, according to their last Letters, in perfect health and spirits; and that they may continue so, the Dutchess protested against Faro, for the table keeper reminds her of CHARLES FOX, when he was in the *same situation*” (*World* 28 July 1789: 2). A report like this would come as a surprise to few: the probability that the Duchess played at—and lost to—Fox’s faro table is strong. Likewise, the Duchess appears in Thomas Rowlandson’s 1791 *A Gaming Table at Devonshire House* hosting a game of hazard with her sister Henrietta Posenby, Viscountess Duncannon. Like her male counterparts, the Duchess continued to play in spite of its costs, and like her male counterparts’, her predilection for gaming was public knowledge.

Mary Robinson became associated in the public mind with these famous gamblers through the same channels of print and caricature. In 1776, at their first meeting, the Duchess of Devonshire gave Robinson “a proof of her good wishes” —the sum of which Robinson does not disclose—and became Robinson’s “admired patroness” and “liberal and affectionate friend” (*Memoirs* 1: 173–4). Robinson dedicated her second publication *Captivity, a Poem. And Celadon and Lydia, a Tale* “by permission” to “the friendly Patroness of the Unhappy” (i). Two years later, the Duchess and Robinson worked together on Fox’s 1784 campaign, tirelessly canvassing Westminster wearing the blue and buff (Byrne 223). The etching *Fatal Ambition! or, Reynard at His Wits End* captures a scene of the Duchess and Robinson with Fox and the Norths, visually connecting the two women. Appearances in the news columns reinforced the connection in the public’s eye: “The D—ss of D. is so *jaded* by the fatigues of canvassing, that she must step down from the *niche* she has hitherto occupied among the BEVY OF BEAUTIES. *Perdita* is nominated for the succession by the *High Priest* of the Temple” (*MPDA* 26 Apr. 1784: 3).

Robinson’s connections to Fox and the Prince, however, were of a more intimate—and often scandalous—nature. In spite of her insistence that “the present intimacy” with Fox was “perfectly *political*,” the daily newspapers began entertaining rumors of their romantic involvement late in the summer of 1782 (*MHDA* 17 Aug. 1782: 2). Caricatures like Thomas Colley’s *Perdita & Perdita—or—the Man & Woman of the People* and social columns suggested Robinson held the reins of the relationship: “In the late Phaetonic expedition of *Perdita* and the *eloquent patriot* it is to be distinguished that the lady gives the gentleman the airing, and not, as usual, the

gentleman, the lady" (MHDA 19 Sept. 1782: 2). Whether platonic or otherwise, Fox allegedly used his winnings from the gaming tables to purchase extravagant gifts for Robinson: "The *Perdita's* new *vis-a-vis* is said to be the aggregate of a few stakes laid at *Brookes's*, which the competitors were not able to decide. Mr. Fox therefore proposed, that as it could not be better applied, than to the above purpose, that the *Perdita* should be accordingly presented with an elegant carriage. The ill-natured, call it *Love's last Stake*, or the *Fools of fashion!*" (MHDA 16 June 1783: 2). Subsequently, in August of 1783, Fox intervened on Robinson's behalf with the Prince of Wales: Fox exchanged the £20,000 bond the Prince had given Robinson in the summer of 1780 (that finally swayed Robinson to meet with him), for a £500 annuity (Byrne 215; Davenport 137; Robinson, *Memoirs* 2: 75–6).

From the onset, Robinson's six-month liaison with the Prince received the attention of the press—and the public:

A certain young Prince, on the eve of being of age, has, we hear, been long enamoured of a Lady called *Perdita*, and made considerable present, both in money and trinkets. The world does not scruple to say that they have met, and had a *tête-a-tête* together. It is further said, that before two months are at an end the fair one will in dress and equipage out-rival the first Duchess in the kingdom. (*Gazetteer* 2)

Even after their brief affair ended, the public followed the ensuing scandal as it unfolded in the press. *The Rambler's Magazine* published the etching *Florizel Granting Independency to Perdita* in January 1783, a suggestive depiction of the circumstances surrounding the gifted bond. Later that year on 6 September, *The Morning Post* published the thinly veiled "A curious Anecdote of an Egyptian *Perdita*" recounting the story of "Thonis, an Egyptian courtesan" who "demanded a great sum of money of a young man who loved her" (2). Alongside these remnants of her past relationship, the public saw signs of her latest with Colonel Banastre Tarleton.

Even before the reports of her liaison with Fox, her name appeared with Tarleton's in the social columns. On May 29, *The Morning Herald* reported, "The *Perdita* was lately made *captive* by Lieutenant Colonel Tarl—n, on one of that officer's amorous reconnoitring parties" (MHDA May 1782: 2). In August, Gillray's *The Thunderer* brought their intimacy to light, featuring Tarleton in a heroic pose—reminiscent of his portrait by Joshua Reynolds—with Robinson appearing as a whirligig over the tavern door.⁵ A month later, *The Morning Post* detailed the pair's budding relationship in naval terms, reminding readers of her past liaisons:

The *Perdita* was captured some time ago by the *Fox*, but was afterwards retaken by the *Malden*, and had a complete suit of *new rigging* when she fell in with the *Tarleton*. Her manoeuvring to escape was admirable: but the *Tarleton* fully determined to take her or perish, would not give up the chace; and at length, com-

ing along side of the *Perdita*, fully determined to board her sword in hand, she instantly surrendered at discretion. ("Ship News" 2)

The public followed Robinson's attachment to Tarleton in the press for the next fifteen years.

Likewise, it followed Tarleton's mounting notoriety on London's gaming scene. In fact, according to accounts in the scandalous, unauthorized *Memoirs of Perdita* and in *The Rambler's Magazine*, their relationship began as a result of gambling. When Lord Malden bet Tarleton one thousand guineas that he could not win Robinson's affections, Tarleton found the wager too good to pass up (*Memoirs of Perdita*, 160–6; *Rambler's* 193–4). Upon learning of the bet, Mary was furious, "refus[ing] to speak to her betrayers" for weeks (Bass 198). Months after Robinson's relationship with Tarleton resumed, *The Morning Herald* confided "A certain Colonel is said to have lost lately at Brookes's upwards of 30,000*l*, and a great part of it to the *wou'd-be minister*" Fox (*MHDA* 20 Mar. 1783: 2; Bass 211). Tarleton eventually convinced his mother to cover his debts: she insisted he retreat to the continent until he recovered financially and end his relationship with then-pregnant Robinson. Desperate to keep Tarleton from leaving England, Robinson borrowed money from Fox to pay Tarleton's creditor and left in the early hours of 23 July to travel to Dover, where she thought Tarleton would be embarking.⁶ As she recounts in *Memoirs*, "The exertions of Mrs. Robinson in the service of Col. Tarleton, when pressed by pecuniary embarrassment, led to that unfortunate journey, the consequences of which proved so fatal to her health" (2: 113). While the exact diagnosis may never be known, the illness she succumbed to that evening "reduced the frame of this lovely and unfortunate woman to the feebleness of an infant" (*Poetical Works* 1: x–xi).⁷

In addition to her personal connections to these members of the ton, news briefs and prints charted Robinson's pecuniary connections. The £500 annuity failed to cover her accumulated debts, and despite her appeals, the Prince would not come to her rescue. According to Hester Davenport, the Prince "was always in debt himself, but that did not prevent him from helping the Duchess of Devonshire when she was in difficulties through her addiction to gambling" (151).⁸ However, when her vis-à-vis was seized to cover debts, "Fox generously advanced the money" to recover it (Byrne 217). Even after Tarleton's return in March 1784, her struggle continued. In August, *The Rambler's Magazine* published *Perdita upon Her Last Legs* showing a hunched Robinson dressed in rags, begging the Prince for money. Although exaggerated, the etching reflected the severity of Robinson's financial straits that left her with no other recourse than to permit creditors to seize her belongings. With her most prized possession in hand – the porcelain miniature of the Prince set in diamonds – Robinson sailed to the continent on 13 August, reportedly "for the recovery of her health" (Davenport 151–2; Bessborough 290; *MPDA* 13 Aug. 1784: 2). Because no

one “would stand surety of £250,” her estate was auctioned in January 1785 with Robinson *in absentia* (Davenport 152).

Upon her return from France in January 1788, Robinson “took up a new life in London” and “became literary,” establishing her home at 45 Clarges Street in Mayfair near Tarleton’s home at number 30 and Devonshire House (Hawkins 2: 33–4; Byrne 242). Tarleton resumed his old life, spending his evenings in the spring of 1788 at the Prince’s new club Dover House: “A certain *Colonel*, of *dashing* memory in America, has made a few successful *skirmishes* against the YOUNG DUKE:—and to compensate for the rugged toils of war, —it is thought he will hereafter be enabled to repose on a *pillow* of *pigeon’s feathers!*” (Bass 266; *MH* 5 Apr. 1788: 2). In this instance, *pigeon* refers to “a person easily swindled, esp. in gambling,” suggesting Tarleton lived by his winnings (“Pigeon”). Unfortunately for him—and for Robinson—luck was not always on his side: on 13 April 1790, *The Times* divulged “Colonel Tarleton, it is said, was a partner in the Faro Bank, the cash of which was taken away by the foreigner at D’Aubigny’s” (2).⁹ In 1794, his half-pay of £320 per annum hardly covered his losses, requiring Mary to support him with her £500 annuity—which the Prince paid inconsistently—and literary earnings (Bass 341; Byrne 306). Often, her meager income failed to cover his losses and their fashionable lifestyles, keeping her in a state of “pecuniary derangement” that strained their relationship (Robinson, “To John” 303; Bass 342). Nevertheless, he continued to gamble with abandon: “General Tarleton, at one time, was out 800l.; but afterwards recovered 312l. on one card” (*Oracle* 21 Jan. 1796: 2). According to Bass, Tarleton quit gambling in the summer of 1796 after his mother fell ill, but by the time she died the following May, he and Mary had already parted ways for good (Bass 366; *Oracle* 30 May 1797: 3).

Mary Robinson’s Celebrity

In light of Robinson’s very public relationships with notorious gamblers, the public read her literary portrayals of gaming just as they had read her portrayals of love, fashionable society, and critics—through the lens of the news briefs and prints. As a celebrity, Robinson provided the public with an insider’s view of fashionable society in her work. By “construct[ing] a speaker who’s associated with herself,” she created a “hermeneutic of intimacy” with her readers, sharing her “intimate concerns” with “those who learned how to read and where to look” (Mole 23). Robinson did not prevent “the association of her own image with that of the women of the court who supplemented their income from private gaming tables” (Guest 268). Instead, she capitalized on those connections by “satirizing them in her writing” (Guest 268). Robinson did not need her work to place her “outside that world, and in the perhaps more pastoral and uncorrupted ‘paths of literature’” because it was that very world that supported her literary path (Guest 270).

Throughout her life, Robinson relied on the power of the press to shape public opinion. In order to craft her own public persona and establish her celebrity, she frequently “puffed” herself, her activities, and her works. In the parlance of the day, a puff was an anonymous insertion into the press to notice or praise a person’s actions or publications. As early as 1781, *The St. James’s Chronicle* accused her of submitting such briefs to newspapers: “PUFFING is now at such a height that even the *fair Frails* practice it with Success. ... Perdita and others, who now puff off their Qualifications in the different Newspapers, write of Intrigues that never happened, and with Persons to whom they perhaps never spoke” (“The Art” 4). Robinson’s strategic puffing continued into the 1790s when she published the majority of her work. In 1797, *The Telegraph* listed Robinson among forty-two others “who pay to have themselves puffed in the Newspapers” (“List” 2). These news briefs and puffs maintained – and marketed – Robinson’s connection to the fashionable world, and her writing gave the public a glimpse of the spectacle and vice she witnessed.

Imitating – and Satirizing – Life

In print, Robinson found a venue for both staging her celebrity and satirizing vice within the ton. Her 1791 collection *Poems* boasted a subscription list that read like a “who’s who” of British and continental fashionable society. George Prince of Wales topped the first page that included Frederick Duke of York, William Henry Duke of Clarence, William Duke of Gloucester, The Duke of Orleans, and Prince Ferdinand Duke of Wurtemberg (Robinson, *Poems* iv). The names of Robinson’s gaming connections appeared on the pages that followed: Her Grace the Dutchess of Devonshire, the Right Honourable C. James Fox, and Colonel Tarleton, Esq. (*Poems* xiii, xvi, xxli). More importantly, the names of notorious “Faro ladies” also appeared: Countess of Buckingham, Mrs. Concannon, Mrs. Sturt (Russell 486, 488; Robinson, *Poems* x, xli, xxi). Ironically, the gamesters’ support of *Poems* validated Robinson’s insider’s view into the world she would censure for the remainder of the decade and provided her fodder for the puffs she would use to promote those works to the public – and provoke the ton.

Tracing Robinson’s treatment of gaming through her corpus exposes the variations of her critique. From the caricatures in *Modern Manners* and *The Widow* to the irreverent mockery in *Nobody*, Robinson shifts focus to the repercussions of fashionable vice in *Angelina* and *Hubert de Seorac*, culminating with its grave consequences in *Walsingham*. At times, her commentary is slight as in “January 1795” and *The False Friend*. At others, it concentrates on gaming’s detriment to women as in *The Natural Daughter*, *A Letter to the Women of England*, and “The Sylphid.” The critique embedded in her later poetry tends to focus on gaming’s broader impacts on life and culture. What follows examines these depictions of gaming and the

relationships among them. Moreover, it explores Robinson's promotional efforts through puffing and considers her works' critical reception.

Modern Manners and The Widow

Robinson published her first critique of gamblers pseudonymously, providing her some protection from potential backlash. In February 1793, the poetic satire *Modern Manners* by Horace Juvenal appeared in James Evans's shop. In two cantos, Robinson lampoons the replacement of art, learning, and literature with fashion, appearances, and vice; and caricatures those who participate in the favored activities of the day merely for the sake of participating:

Where the lank lord, incircled in the throng,
Shews his white teeth, and hums a fav'rite song;
Who, spite of season, crowds it to the play,
Wrapp'd in six waistcoats—in the month of May;
Who, just at noon, has strength to rise from bed,
With empty pocket—and more empty head;
Who, scarce recover'd from the courtly dance,
Sees with disgust the vulgar day advance:
Anticipates the wax-illumin'd night,
CASSINO'S charms, and FARO'S proud delight! (*Modern* 283–92)

The lord dresses with no regard for the season, lives with no concern for money, and anticipates only the evening's vice *du jour*—Faro. In canto two, Robinson adds the female counterpart: "Fair ladies too, o'erwhelm'd by Faro's frown, / Knock up their Lords, till CHRISTIE knocks them down" (*Modern* 65–6). Without assets of their own, ladies losing to the Faro banks exhaust their husbands' holdings until they require the services of Mr. James Christie to conduct sales by auction ("To Knock Up"; "To Knock Down").¹⁰ *Modern Manners* received mixed reviews from the critics—only one of which refers to satirizing "the present fashionable follies"—but no retaliatory remarks appeared in the dailies even after *The Morning Post* revealed Robinson to be the author (Rev. of *Modern Manners* 456; 3 Aug. 1793: 2).¹¹ She was not as lucky, however, with her next.

Published one year later, Robinson's epistolary novel *The Widow* refers twice to the pervasiveness of gaming among the ton. Both instances refer to the vice as an aspect of the London social life preferred by Lady Frances Seymour to the country: "Lady Seymour at Harefield! and the town still full of alluring scenes, faro tables, assemblies, to say nothing of Ranelagh, the opening beauties of Kensington, the ensuing birth day, and the morning lounge of St. James's street. You are a most unreasonable fellow, that is certain, to tear from the enamoured world so fascinating a woman!" (Robinson, *Widow* 1: 8–9). One such "alluring scene" is her friend Lady Clara Allford's Faro bank: "My Faro Bank opens to-morrow night, all the world will come! three hundred cards are out! 'Lady Allford at home!' the

exhilarating proclamation will rush through the regions of taste with the swiftness of lightning! does it not strike thy torpid mind, and reproach it for its apathy?" (Robinson, *Widow* 2: 88). According to the *Analytical Review*, the accuracy of Robinson's "picture of modern times" would not fail to appall its readers:

the characters and manners are evidently drawn from an intimate acquaintance with the fashionable world [...] it rather exhibits examples of fashionable folly, affected sensibility, and abandoned libertinism, bringing themselves into circumstances of disgrace and wretchedness abundantly sufficient to leave upon the reader's mind strong impressions of contempt and disgust. (Rev. of *The Widow* 453)

Immediately after its publication, the newspapers reported that Robinson's novel had enraged fashionable society. On 13 February 1794, *The Morning Post* printed, "All the fashionable Widows are up in arms against Mrs. ROBINSON, and wonder how a woman without rank, dares take liberties with *great people*. -What adds to the crime, is her presuming to espouse the cause of the *Swinish multitude*" (3). On 2 May, *The Oracle* concurred, writing, "The DAUGHTERS of PHAROAH are highly offended at the liberties taken with their honourable employment by Mrs. ROBINSON, in her new Novel" (3). Certainly, considering Robinson's puffing practices, these two "news briefs" could have been strategically placed to attract readers – both within and without the *ton* – through controversy. If she, in fact, penned either of these, then she wanted to create the impression that her depictions offended the ladies of the *ton*; if she did not, then the news briefs certainly informed her she had.

Nobody

Regardless of whether Robinson wrote the puffs for *The Widow* or not, the reviews certainly made her aware of the reaction her comedy *Nobody* would provoke – and the reaction she could elicit. From its inception in 1791, the two-act farce aimed to do just that:

A certain OPPOSITION COLONEL having been detected playing all the game at Faro, by some Ladies of Quality, has been sent to Coventry, and in revenge, he now employs his Mistress to rail against his former associates, and at the pernicious consequences of gaming.

A discarded servant of an OPPOSITION COLONEL, has *peach'd*. The abuse thrown out against several Ladies of Quality are the production of his Mistress's pen. (*Times* 6 Dec. 1791: 2)

Clearly, the Opposition Colonel is Tarleton, and his mistress with a pen is Robinson. The words "revenge," "rail," "pernicious," and "abuse" echo the hostile tone of *The Morning Post's* news brief about reactions to *The Widow*,

suggesting Robinson could also have placed this puff to promote the work by eliciting reactions from those very Ladies of Quality, others within their circle, and the public. As she later recounts in a letter to John Taylor dated 5 October 1794, she had been anticipating its imminent production: "My comedy has been long in the hands of a manager, but whether it will ever be brought forward time must decide. You know, my dear friend, what sort of authors have lately been patronized by managers; their pieces ushered to public view, with all the advantages of splendor; yet I am obliged to wait two long years without a single hope that a trial would be granted" (303).

The play itself takes as its subject the fall and redemption of Lady Languid, who unable to resist "the delights of Vingt un—the solitudes of Rouge and Noir," "ruin'd herself by play" and "rais'd Money till nobody [would] lend" (*Nobody* 2.1; 1.2; 1.2). *Nobody* "apes, the follies of the Time," and Robinson aims barbs directly at the fashionable gamblers through the characters of the "done up" Lady Languid, Lady Squander, Lady Faro, Lady Rouleau, Miss Casino, and Mr. Sharply. Compared to *Modern Manners* and *The Widow*, *Nobody's* portrayal of the "pernicious consequences of gaming" is far more explicit and its gibes, more incendiary (*Times* 6 Dec. 1791: 2).

Days before the play premiered at the Drury Lane Theatre on 29 November 1794, reports of offstage controversy began appearing in the newspapers. According to Robinson's *Memoirs*, Miss Farren "gave up her part, alleging that the piece was intended as a ridicule on her particular friend" (2: 140). Because of her liaison with the Earl of Derby—who was still married at the time—and her hope to marry him some day, Farren most likely wanted to avoid offending the ton (Brewer 266–7; Byrne 310). However, on 25 November, *The True Briton* cited professional jealousy as the cause of Farren's withdrawal from the production: "Mrs. GOODALL takes the part in *Nobody*, destined for Miss FARREN. It is said to be an excellent one, and declined merely because Mrs. JORDAN has one that is perhaps somewhat better. This is a vile affectation of consequence" (3). The following day, *The Oracle* implied that Mrs. Goodall did not share Miss Farren's allegiances: "Miss FARREN has solemnly declared that she will have *nothing* to do with NOBODY. Mrs. GOODALL, not having the same taste, accepts the part, and no doubt will perform it admirably" (26 November 1794: 3). Chances are that Robinson penned these puffs—as she was known to do—to garner interest in a play so likely to offend fashionable society that Miss Farren refused to be a part of it. Her objective, after all, was to attract audiences—both the public seeking the insider's view and the insiders curious about Robinson's depiction of the ton.

Unfortunately, *Nobody* failed to impress the Drury Lane audience. The critical responses to the first performance suggest that the audience responded more to "a sort of weariness which the French call *Ennui*" than to her depiction of fashionable life ("Theatre.—Drury-Lane" 4). *The*

Morning Post's stated that because the "House was full of Fashion," "there were few in the Boxes that were not displeased at the exposure of their dissipation and depravities" ("Drury Lane Theatre" 2). Three additional newspapers—*The St. James's*, *The Whitehall*, and *The Courier*—provided varied accounts of the audience's reactions to the overall play ranging from "strongly opposed" to "considerable" to "little disapprobation," while three other papers ignored the audience's reaction altogether.¹² The following day, however, a puff in *The Morning Post* entertained a "rumor" about some members of the audience that evening: "A Servant in Livery was heard to say in the Gallery, on Saturday night, that he was come to DO UP NOBODY" ("Fashionable World" 2 Dec. 1794: 4).

The newspaper reviews continued to offer conflicting accounts of the audience's reactions to the second staging on Monday, 1 December. The following day, *The Sun's* mentioned a "few *Drunken Bucks* in the Front Boxes" who "made a noise amount to almost an outrage against the audience, of which some perverse Spirits attempted to profit, but the plaudits of the *sober* part of the House overpowered the noisy interruptions of the *Box Lobby Loungers*" ("Drury-Lane Theatre" 2). Interestingly, *The Star's* mentioned no outburst from the audience whatsoever, stating only that "hardly *any body* was disposed to give it a parting plaudit" (2).

Scheduling the third performance five days after the second, the Drury Lane Theatre gave Robinson time to revise her play—and to stoke the objectors' fires in the newspapers. "Mrs. ROBINSON is making several alterations and additions to her Comedy, against its Third Representation," *The Morning Post* puffed. "Instead of Nobody we advise her to call it, '*St James's Square in an uproar*'" ("Fashionable World" 3 Dec. 1794: 3). Two paragraphs below, *The Morning Post* affronted the female gamblers: "The Farce of Nobody has admitted, what few will confess, that among the Daughters of Pharaoh, there is even one woman of *character* and *principle*" (3). The day before the performance, another puff in *The Sun* added to the anticipation: "Mrs. Robinson has so altered her Comedy, that every exceptionable passage is removed, and a new character introduced, to heighten the plot" (2). In spite of the changes to "several of the parts which had been objected to," *The London Chronicle* reported, "the audience still expressed so much dissatisfaction as to induce the author to withdraw it" ("Drury-Lane" 6-9 Dec. 1794: 556). The final account of Saturday's performance printed in *The Oracle* on 8 December appears to be the "official" story of *Nobody* repeated in Robinson's *Memoirs* and in every subsequent biography:¹³

But the first Satire, which was levelled at NOBODY, alarmed certain minds, and a plan was instantly concerted to damn the Comedy. ... Mrs. JORDAN was told, *previous* to the *first* night's representation, that a party was made to oppose the piece; and Mrs. ROBINSON, on Saturday afternoon, received an anonymous letter, informing her (in the *grossest* language) that whatever merit the COMEDY might possess, it *should certainly meet with final damnation!* ("Drury Lane Theatre" 3)

Deviating from the puff in *The Morning Post* on 2 December, *The Oracle* account states “on the *third* night, a number of *livery servants*, and others, were planted in the galleries, to disturb the audience.” Furthermore, *The Oracle* alleges “the audience demanded a fourth representation” — a “fact” *The London Chronicle* left out.

Needless to say, Robinson’s propensity to puff — particularly in *The Morning Post* and *The Oracle* — and the inconsistencies therein render this account suspect. Quite possibly, she fabricated the entire controversy to obscure a few of the first reviews’ suggestions that the audience’s reactions were to the play itself. Leading the public to believe that the insider’s view of fashionable society met resistance — rather than the play’s lack of “novelty” or “Ennui” — would not only serve *Nobody*, but also her future literary endeavors (“Theatre. Drury-Lane,” *Morning* 3; “Theatre. — Drury-Lane” 4). William D. Brewer’s suggestion that Robinson “seriously miscalculated the impact of a satire of the female gamblers on the upper-class Whig establishment” considers neither her awareness of the responses to *The Widow* published — or strategically placed — in the daily newspapers nor her continued indictment of gamblers and gaming in subsequent works (266).

“January 1795,” *Angelina*, and *Hubert de Sevrac*

Three of Robinson’s subsequent works presented critical portrayals of gamblers. In “January, 1795,” a poem published in *The Morning Post* only months after the *Nobody* debacle, the public found, “Ladies gambling, night and morning; / Fools, the works of Genius scorning!” (3). (Undoubtedly, Robinson counted *The Widow* and *Nobody* among “the works of Genius” being scorned.) Then, in January 1796, Robinson’s first bestseller *Angelina* juxtaposes two very different women: the charming Miss Sophia Clarendon, “a more rational companion” than those ladies “plunged in the vortex of a gaming table,” and the “most detestable of women” Lady Selina Wantworth, whose profligate behavior, including gaming, “unhinged” her brother Lord Acreland’s finances (1: 267, 2, 145). At the end of the year, in December 1796, Robinson’s gothic romance *Hubert de Sevrac*, followed the course of the unlucky Count Monteleoni who, early in the first volume, lost his bet of “the hand of his daughter against double the sum which he had lost” and, in the third volume, lost his chateau “[b]y the cast of a die” (2: 58, 3: 167). Neither the reviews from *Angelina* nor *Hubert de Sevrac* comment on these depictions specifically. Of *Angelina*, *The English Review* remarked, “This is an example of that knowledge of fashionable life, and the ways of the world in general,” and *The Analytical Review* concurred, “The characters in the piece are in general naturally portrayed and distinctly marked” (Rev. of *Angelina* 74–5; Rev. of *Angelina* 293). Comments on these portrayals are conspicuously absent from the newspaper columns; for Robinson’s next novel, however, they are conspicuously present.

Walsingham

Months before Longman published Robinson's four-volume novel *Walsingham*, puffs began baiting the ton. In September 1797, *The Oracle* praised the depiction of the characters: "All characters are said to be drawn from life" and "the characters well known in the higher circles" (6 Sept. 1797: 3; 18 Sept. 1797: 3). In October, *The Morning Post* added, "Certain personages dread the appearance of Mrs. R—'s *Walsingham*, lest it should present them a second part of *Angelina*" (MPG 26 Oct. 1797: 2). Days after sales of *Walsingham* began, *The Morning Post* printed two poetry extracts from the novel, baiting the gamesters directly in the headnote: "This work is one of the most entertaining ever published: it is full of interest, full of anecdote of fashionable life, and of satire upon the titled Gamblers. It should have been dedicated to Lord Kenyon. Mrs. Robinson has often delighted and instructed by her pen, but she never before rendered so essential a service to society" ("Mrs. Robinson's" 2). Aligning Robinson with Lord Chief Justice Kenyon reminded the public of the controversy raging only a year earlier following Kenyon's threat to exhibit "the first ladies in the land" in the pillory for gaming—a scene immediately depicted in several caricatures (Russell 490–96). Just days after *The Morning Post's* praise, *The Oracle* reinforced the connection: "Mrs. Robinson's *Walsingham* has literally set the fashionable world in an uproar. Lord KENYON should thank her for the scenes she has developed respecting the female *faro* banks" (8 Dec. 1797: 2).

Weeks after *Walsingham's* publication, the puffs maintained interest in the novels, reminding the public of the earlier controversy regarding *Nobody*: "The pointed dialogue in Mrs. ROBINSON's '*Walsingham*' renders it a matter of regret that she does not write for the Stage. She has handsomely paid the *faro* dames for their conspiracy against NOBODY; and she should recollect that *their* day of rapacity is over" (MPG 22 Dec. 1797: 2). This tack continued the following day in *The Oracle*: "The *Faro Furies* have burnt Mrs. Robinson's *Walsingham*, by the hands of the common Dealer. Their midnight incantations breathe nothing but revenge!" (23 Dec. 1797: 3). Both late notices reinforced the narrative that *Nobody* was damned for its insider knowledge, not for its lack of skill. Not only were such puffs likely to pique the public's interest, but they were also likely to pique the interest of those "in the higher circles" — particularly the "titled Gamblers" and the "*Faro Furies*" — negatively portrayed. Robinson's future with her new publisher Longman hinged on *Walsingham's* success, and the puffing campaign served that endeavor: on 13 January 1798, *The Oracle* reported "The Second Edition of *Walsingham* is nearly sold, and a Third in a preparatory state" (3).¹⁴

In the novel itself, gaming plays a significant role in the fashionable world depicted and in the main character Walsingham Ainsworth's story. From the moment Walsingham describes the *faro* room at a ball and supper in Bath's "*Crescent*," he becomes Robinson's mouthpiece:

Gold flew around, like dust before the whirlwind; and dissipation reared her standard over the brow of reason, terribly triumphant. It was the pandemonium of licentiousness; every vice was tolerated, every mind contaminated by the force of pernicious example. On one side sat a venerable Sybil, withered by age, and endeavouring to obliterate the *memento mori* of time, by the gaudy colours of artificial deformity. Poor atom of mortality! thought I; how vain, how horrible are all thy experiments! (2: 94-5)

Walsingham's description then turns to a woman whose "uncouth figure" clad in "a sable habit" appeared "her only mark of regret for the loss of a lovely and amiable child" as she acted "by turns, the gamester and the coquette" (2: 95, 96). When Walsingham concedes "to hazard a few guineas," he starts "a fine *fracas*" that results in Lord Linbourne's death and his friend Colonel Aubrey's flight from prosecution (2: 103, 122).¹⁵ From that point on, Walsingham reveals gaming's broad, detrimental impact and becomes a stronger voice of opposition: "My reflection naturally turned towards the gaming-table; the vortex of destruction, the nursery of vice, the school of licentiousness: and I shuddered to remember that a propensity which degrades even a masculine education, should be so unblushingly adopted and exercised by those lovely and once feminine beings in whom profligacy appears with tenfold deformity" (3: 189). In one instance, a torch-bearer even contributes commentary anteceding that appearing in "Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England": "Why your lords, now-a-days, only squander their estates at the gaming-table; and while they hang a poor thief for taking a purse on the highway, make no more of picking one another's pockets, than I should do of consigning their bones to the hands of the anatomist" (*Walsingham* 3: 217). Clearly, Robinson censured through satire, and in doing so, received a bit of censure from the critics.

Of the nine known reviews of *Walsingham*, only two specifically address Robinson's satire of gaming. *The Monthly Visitor* praises its presence but criticizes the manner of delivery: "The just satire upon the fashionable vices, deserves the praise of virtue; yet *could* we censure one part of the work, it would be that wherein Walsingham so scrupulously relates these scenes: it is somewhat improbable, that a man bowed down by calamities, could be able to give such ludicrous dialogues, with so much accuracy and apparent ease" (Rev. of *Walsingham* 87). Likewise, *The Anti-Jacobin* praises her efforts: "The author's satire on gamblers is, we think, very just, and the effects of gaming in eradicating virtuous principles, private and public, by narrowing and hardening the heart, are exhibited with great truth and considerable vigour" (Rev. of *Walsingham* 162). However, in true Tory fashion, *The Anti-Jacobin* soon criticizes her approach:

In representing the vices of some persons of rank and fortune, she falls into a very common species of false reasoning. From a few instances, she infers general conclusions. Her peers and peeresses are all either weak or wicked. The miseries and the vices of the *low* are uniformly deduced from the oppressions and the vices of the *high*; a representation, in the first place, not historically true: all peers are not either weak or wicked; and the miseries and the vices of the low are far from being derived from the oppression of the high. (Rev. of *Walsingham* 162)

Both *The Monthly Review* and *The Monthly Mirror* found fault in the novel's "improbability" — the latter actually deemed it "disgusting" — but neither specifically attributes her treatment of gaming to it (Rev. of *Walsingham* 442; Rev. of *Walsingham* 163). Considered through the lens of the puffs relating intentions to satirize "titled Gamblers" and repay the "*faro dames*," the critical responses suggest that Robinson's satirical depictions are extraneous in a novel about matters of gender and birthright.

The False Friend and The Natural Daughter

The portrayals of gaming in Robinson's subsequent two novels relate more closely to those in *The Widow, Angelina*, and *Hubert de Sevrac* than to those in *Walsingham*. In *The False Friend*, gaming is simply one of the "allurements of the fashionable world" for "wasting the midnight hour," a "temptation" the "women of the old school" who "found pleasure in domestic harmony" did not face (1: 232, 302; 2: 126). In *The Natural Daughter*, readers find only a few mentions of gaming in the first volume; in the second, they find two depictions. The first involves Lord Francis's adventure in Spa: "He took his seat at a faro table, lost a few guineas, became irritated by his ill-fortune, redoubled his stake, and in less than half an hour rose a loser of four thousand pounds" (*Natural* 2: 190–91). During the two days that follow, Lord Francis discovers that an Englishman had supplied the faro bank to which he lost and "had won no less than ten thousand pounds, in the course of a few months" (*Natural* 2: 191). Upon further investigation, he learns that the gamester had duped "a credulous and unsuspecting woman," leaving her with "a plentiful share of debts, which had been contracted for their mutual support" and "she was totally unable to discharge" (*Natural* 2: 192). The second depiction involves the once "gentle" Julia, "admired as a model of feminine excellence" who "nearly squandered" her fortune and whose beauty "faded in a perpetual series of profligate dissipation" after establishing "a faro table in partnership with an Irish adventurer" in Bath (*Natural* 1: 7, 2: 226). In *Mary-le-bone*, Julia's "*faro-bank* was resorted to by all the adventurous minors of nobility; and her table was surrounded by divorced women of quality, military school-boys, dotards of distinction, needy dependants, and gamesters of the most unequivocal reputation," the narrator explains and proceeds to recount the scheme that sent "the fair

hostess" to "do penance in the gloomy cells of solitary confinement" for four days (*Natural* 2: 227–28, 230). Interestingly, these depictions illustrate the very points Robinson makes in subsequent work: women lack recourse when wronged and the punishment for gaming differs between classes.

Unlike those for *Walsingham*, neither the puffs preceding nor the reviews following the publications of these novels addressed gaming. The puffs simply touted her basing characters on real people. Of *The False Friend*, *The Oracle* commented that "The character of *Treville*, in Mrs. ROBINSON'S new novel, is said to be drawn from an original" (19 Feb. 1799: 3). Of *The Natural Daughter*, it puffed, "Mrs. ROBINSON'S coming novel takes off many real personages, and will, of course, be taken off by all the readers of *Bon Ton*, as well as the Reviewers" (*Oracle* 29 June 1799: 3). The reviews, on the other hand, even failed to address Robinson's portrayals of fashionable society as they had for *The Widow* and *Angelina*.

A Letter to the Women of England and "The Sylphid"

The absence of commentary on gaming in *The False Friend* and *The Natural Daughter*—and the absence of puffs baiting the *ton* and promoting the novels as they appeared for *Walsingham*—signals Robinson's shift to using the essay form for critique. In March 1799, Robinson published *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, followed by a series of essays entitled "The Sylphid" in *The Morning Post* from October 1799 to February 1800 (later republished in *Memoirs*). In each of these works, Robinson addresses gaming's harmful impact with the same candor later found in "Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England." In *A Letter to the Women of England*, she counts "robbed at a gaming table" among the wrongs that render a woman powerless:

She has therefore no remedy but that of exposing the infamy of her enemy; (for sexual prejudices will not allow her to fight him *honourably*), even then, all that she asserts, however disgraceful to her opponent, is placed to the account of womanish revenge. The dastardly offender triumphs with impunity, because he is the noble creature man, and she a defenceless, persecuted woman.
(72)

In gaming, the cards are literally stacked against women: if cheated, their voice becomes their only recourse—and one easily dismissed by the male offenders. Listing this hazard of gaming with calumny and false accusations of "mean or dishonourable actions" suggests not only its seriousness but also its frequency.

Although lighter in tone, Robinson's criticism continued in "The Sylphid." She contrasts the topics "of a fashionable *conversazione*"—"gaming, scandal, and intrigue"—with discussions of "those enlightened females for which this country is so justly celebrated" (58, 62, 61). "[T]he

vapid nonsense of useless conversation (less pernicious in its effects than either of the preceding vices),” she laments, “precluded women of superior intellectual powers from any attention in this motley rendezvous of ignorance and folly” (62). Such commentary on fashionable society’s declining cultural interests—and preoccupation with “vapid nonsense”—figures heavily in Robinson’s final essay series “Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England.”

Poetry in *The Morning Post*

In addition to these essays, Robinson used her position as poetry editor at the *The Morning Post* in 1800 to contribute four poems that embedded commentary against gaming and warrant brief consideration. The concluding stanza of “The Wintry Day” makes a clear point, contrasting a romanticized perception with the reality of gaming’s detrimental effects:

Is it where GAMESTERS, thronging round,
 Their shining heaps of wealth display?
 Where FASHION’S giddy tribes are found,
 Sporting their senseless hours away?
 Ah! no!
 ’Tis where neglected GENIUS sighs,
 Where HOPE, exhausted, silent dies,
 Where MERIT starves, by PRIDE oppress’d,
 ’Till ev’ry stream that warms the breast
 FORBEARS TO FLOW! (4 Jan. 1800)

Just as in “The Sylphid,” the poet connects “neglected genius” to gaming and the trivialities of fashionable society.

The pseudonyms under which she published the remaining three provide an additional layer of interpretation. “The Gamester” by Laura Maria shows compassion for those affected by gambling:

Now watch the varying gesture, wild,
 See how his tortur’d bosom heaves!
 Behold, misfortune’s wayward child,
 For whom no kindred nature grieves.
 Despis’d, suspected, ruin’d, lost!
 His fortune, health, and reputation flown;
 On mis’ry’s stormy ocean tost,
 Condemn’d to curse his fate; and curse, ALONE! (3)

The poem sustains a sympathetic tone for “misfortune’s wayward child” and the “recreant suicide” that “attends” in the last stanza (“Gamester” 3). The two others by “T. B.”—the initials of Robinson’s pseudonym Tabitha Bramble—have a more lighthearted tone. “Impromptu” contrasts the simple life with that of the fashionable:

Humdrum complains his giddy wife
 Distracts his nights and days,
 And vows he cannot bear a life
 Of gaming, feasts, and plays. (3)

Again, the fact that “he” prefers “His lot” as “hard as fate can give” to that of “gaming, feasts, and plays” diminishes the romanticized perception of fashionable life. In “The Dippers,” Robinson plays with the various meanings of “dip,” ending with a stanza focused on gamesters’ “dipping”:

Ye GAMESTERS, who dip in the vortex so strong,
 And dip, without conscience, the *gudgeons* among,
 Beware, lest a *shark* in the current you find,
 Who will DIP YOU, in turn, and avenge ALL MANKIND. (2)

The warning to gamesters to be careful when baiting “without conscience” takes an interesting turn when Tabitha views their demise as avenging “all mankind.”

In her poetry, Robinson found the means of conveying the threat gaming posed to intellect, fortune, health, reputation, a simple life, and mankind in general. The treatment of gaming in these poems—even those by the satirist T. B.—differs from her earlier works like *The Widow*, *Nobody*, *Angelina*, and *Walsingham*. More closely aligned with “The Syphid” and “Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England,” these poems exhibit a broader reflection on culture and a concern for posterity.

Robinson’s censure of gaming spans her corpus from her first collection *Poems by Mrs. Robinson* published in 1775 to her last essay series “Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England” published in 1800. Her sincere indictments—even when satiric—reflect her familiarity with the dangers gaming posed to the individual, the family, and British culture, gained through her intimate relationships and close associations with gamesters. Examining her critiques, therefore, provides a better understanding of not only how she illustrated contemporary news stories on the page and the stage, but also how her critical voice developed over the course of her career.

Furthermore, examining Robinson’s periodical puffing and her works’ critical reception reveals how she endeavored to attract both the public and the ton. While she understood the gaming’s hazards, she also recognized the phenomenon’s appeal. Clearly, she leveraged her celebrity and the public’s knowledge of her social associations to promote her insider’s view of fashionable society—and to capitalize on it. Robinson’s strategic puffing about the portrayals of gaming in her works coincided with a period of particular hardship (1794–7) due to Tarleton’s gaming, inconsistent annuity payments, and her poor judgment of the demand for *The Widow*,

Angelina, and *The Sicilian Lover*—not to mention *Nobody*.¹⁶ Robinson risked her celebrity, her position within fashionable society, and her relationships with influential figures to publish *Lady Seymour*, *Lady Squander*, *Lady Selina Wantworth*, *Walsingham Ainsworth*, and *Julia Bradford*.¹⁷ By gambling on gaming, Mary Robinson censured the fashionable vice and capitalized on fashionable society.

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Acknowledgments

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Notes

¹ For more information about the infamous St. James's "Faro ladies" like Lady Archer and Lady Buckinghamshire, see Gillian Russell's interesting study on "Faro's Daughters."

² Harriet Guest, and A. A. Markley address Robinson's treatment of gaming to some extent; this is the first to explore it throughout her corpus and through the lenses of her celebrity, promotional puffing, and critical reception. Since the late 1980s, Robinson scholarship has focused on gender politics; contemporary culture; the French Revolution; persona, identity, and self-fashioning; and the Gothic. For Robinson's critical history, see my entry in the forthcoming Routledge *Research Companion for Romantic Women Writers*.

³ According to Robert D. Bass, Tarleton's biographer, the Prince "squandered £800,000" in two years in the early 1780s (210). However, Bass provides no source for this information.

⁴ For information about the Duchess of Devonshire's gaming habits, see Amanda Foreman.

⁵ In addition to its obvious sexual implications, viewers may have been familiar with "whirligig" connoting "a fickle, inconstant, giddy, or flighty person," a reference to Robinson's previous affairs with the Prince of Wales, Lord Malden, and Charles James Fox ("whirligig"). For a discussion of additional implications of this caricature, see Davenport (135) and Paula Byrne (183–4).

⁶ Unbeknownst to Robinson, Tarleton had traveled to Southampton. For full accounts this fateful night and the events preceding it, see Byrne (210–14), Bass (208–25), and Davenport (140–46).

⁷ Byrne speculates that Robinson suffered from "acute rheumatic fever" brought on by a streptococcal infection resulting from a miscarriage; Davenport simply offers

miscarriage as a possibility (213–14; 142). Bass attributes Robinson's subsequent paralysis to "bungled" midwifery (224).

⁸ In a letter to John Taylor dated 5 October 1794, Robinson complains, "Let common sense judge how I can subsist upon £500 a year when my carriage (a necessary expense) alone costs me £200." Then, she questions:

Have I not reason to be disgusted when I see him, to whom I ought to look for better fortune, lavishing favours on unworthy objects, gratifying the *avarice* of *ignorance* and *dullness*; while I, who sacrificed reputation, an advantageous profession, friends, patronage, the brilliant hours of youth, and the conscious delight of correct conduct, am condemned to the scanty pittance bestowed on every indifferent page who holds up his ermine train of ceremony! (303)

Clearly, she took issue with his support of others—particularly involving gaming—above her. Her use of *ignorance* and *dullness* reflects the gamester's "more empty head" in Robinson's *Modern Manners*.

⁹ See Bass for a more complete account of Tarleton's gaming.

¹⁰ Robinson refers here to James Christie (1730–1803), the auctioneer and founder of Christie's auction house, not Thomas Christie, founder of the *Analytical Review*, as the notes in the Pickering and Chatto *Works of Mary Robinson* claim (Herrmann; 1: 406).

¹¹ Byrne claims that Robinson's "satire was said to have 'roused a nest of hornets' among the ton," citing the 1 Dec. 1793 entry in Joseph Farington's diary her source. However, Farington's diary includes no mention of *Modern Manners* or the ton's response.

¹² For reviews of the first performance, see "Theatre.—Drury-Lane," *St. James's Chronicle*; "Theatre. Drury-Lane," *Whitehall Evening Post*; "Drury-Lane Theatre," *Courier and Evening Gazette*; "Drury-Lane," *London Chronicle* 29 Nov.–2 Dec. 1794; "Theatre. Drury-Lane," *Morning Chronicle*; and "Drury-Lane Theatre." *Oracle, Public Advertiser*.

¹³ See *Memoirs* 2: 140–42.

¹⁴ Robinson received £150 for the copyright for the four-volume *Walsingham*. In spite of *Walsingham's* success, Longman paid £150 for four-volume *The False Friend*, £60 for the two-volume *The Natural Daughter*, and a mere £63 for *Lyrical Tales* (Fergus and Thaddeus 204).

¹⁵ See Markley for an additional discussion of gambling and dueling in *Walsingham*, as well as discussions on gaming in "Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England."

¹⁶ For more information about sales, see the following: Davenport 188 for *The Widow* and *Angelina*; Byrne 299–301 for *The Widow*, 315–16 for *Angelina*, and 319 for the *Sicilian Lover*; and Fergus and Thaddeus 196 for *The Widow* and the *Sicilian Lover*.

¹⁷ Based on Robinson's letter to William Godwin dated 20 May 1800, her relationship with the Prince continued to be strained by the arrears of her annuity (311). However, evidence suggests that Robinson maintained relationships with Charles Fox and the Duchess of Devonshire after she began censoring gaming in her work. For example, Robinson presented Fox with a copy of her 1796 *Sappho and Phaon* signed on the title-page "To the R^t Hon^{ble} Charles James Fox from the Author." (This copy is currently held at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia). Further, *The Oracle* announced "The Duchess of

DEVONSHIRE, and the Marchioness of HERTFORD take the lead in patronising Mrs. ROBINSON'S Poetical Works" on 26 April 1798.

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