

“Mum Budget”: Henry Fielding and the Articulations of Audibility

Lisa O’Connell

University of Queensland

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES RELATIONS among three different eighteenth-century domains. The first I will call “the audible”; the second covers government censorship and the political structure underpinning it; and the third is literary culture. More specifically, I will examine the final phase of Henry Fielding’s theatrical career as a key moment for literary culture’s response to new governmental attempts to control audibility. My analysis will place Fielding’s 1736–37 Haymarket stage sensation *Pasquin: A Dramatick Satire on the Times* alongside his little-known “Mum Budget” letter, an anonymous and ironical celebration of silence, published in the wake of the Walpole government’s stage Licensing Act of 1737, which effectively closed down the Haymarket and other illegitimate theaters. *Pasquin* and “Mum Budget” belong to a short era of irregular eighteenth-century stage comedy in which irreverent humor and formal experiment were bound not just to cultural critique and political satire but also, and self-consciously, to audibility. Finally, so as to set my argument about literature, politics, and a regime of the audible into a context broad enough fully to suggest its possibilities, I will conclude by gesturing to William Wordsworth’s innovative concept of sound, a concept that was also, arguably, a poetic practice.

But why “the audible” precisely? The answer is because it is a very general notion that covers a set of subcategories whose relations are not fixed but, rather, are continually readjusted historically in response to shifting social forces. In fact, these subcategories are not distinct from one another, even if they do not neatly fold into one another either. For my interests, the most important such categories are sound, noise, music, voice, and speech. Of course, it might be said that all noise and all music are sounds. But not all sounds are noises or music, just as, for instance, all that is voiced is not spoken. This is particularly worth bearing in mind since one category of the

audible—noise—functions in the period as a signifier, metonymical and metaphorical, of social and ethical disorder. We see this in Jonathan Swift’s influential description in *The Battle of the Books* (1704) of the malignant and ignorant Deity “Criticism” as visited by Momus, god of the Moderns: “about her play’d her Children, *Noise and Impudence, Dullness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-Manners.*”¹ Here Noise, Criticism’s eldest child, is a strut and sign of chaotic modernity, which, it would seem, absorbs voice, sound, and speech.

The audible’s most difficult subcategory, however, and the one that is most central to my analysis here, is something like noise’s opposite: silence. Silence is, of course, precisely what one cannot or does not hear. But within the realm of the audible, absence of sound itself becomes significant.² Silence, in other words, is a signifier of an absence—the absence of whatever can be heard—and, as such, it becomes, despite itself, a category of audibility, and itself a mobile and ambiguous figure. My general argument, then, is that in the eighteenth century, audibility was, as it often is, an object of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense and also of politics in the conventional sense. Indeed, at particular times and in particular sites, the audible, including silence, was *highly* politicized. I also wish to claim that late in the century, possibly just because of that politicization, a new, positive category emerged—one that was simultaneously spiritual and aesthetic and that had a new relation to silence, the category of sound as presented by Wordsworth.



Let us begin with an earlier moment in the governmentality of the audible. Public theaters, as they emerged after the Stuart Restoration, were dedicated to two senses in particular: vision and hearing. In relation to the latter, noises, sounds, voices, and even music happened not just onstage but also in the auditorium, as it later came to be called. Audiences were loud, not just those audience members in the pit but even more so those in the upper gallery. Those in the lower tiers of the gallery often rowdily objected to noise from above (we can think, for instance, of the 1737 Drury Lane riots over the footmen’s “rights” to the upper gallery, which interrupted the performance of Fielding’s *Eurydice*).³ It may even be that theaters became louder and louder as the century proceeded until, around 1800, mainly for reasons of economics and design, they fell silent; at least while the play was being performed. Earlier in the century, audiences talked while the play proceeded; they loudly clapped and huzzahed their approval; they whistled, catcalled, and booed their disapproval; they often sang along with the music; sometimes they even brought into the theater instruments designed to make discordant noise so as to enact legally sanctioned riot. Audibility—and noisiness in particular—more than visibility, constituted the physicality and the importance of sheer presence in theatergoing.

¹ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 154.

² See, for instance, Joseph Roach’s reading of silence in Fielding’s drama as a signifier of unspoken thought. For Roach, Fielding’s theatrical work anticipates the significance of silence in modern drama per se. Joseph Roach, “‘The Uncreating Word’: Silence and Unspoken Thought in Fielding’s Drama,” in *Henry Fielding (1707–1754): Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate; A Double Anniversary Tribute*, ed. Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware, 2008), 40–57.

³ On the riots, see Kristina Straub, “The Making of an English Audience: The Case of the Footmen’s Gallery,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730–1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O’Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 134–35. On their effects on the performance of Fielding’s *Eurydice*, see Martin Battestin and Ruth Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 2007), 213–14. Fielding’s farce *Eurydice Hiss’d* is an account of what happened.

This noisiness was not, however, the primary reason why various authorities and social groups viewed the theaters as dangerous and disorderly places to be brought under governmental control. For the moral reform movement, as for Swift, noise was merely a symptom of the wider moral and religious malaise spearheaded by commercial entertainment. Nonetheless, when the government did exercise its full control over the theaters, it was said that they were, precisely, *silenced*. Thus, for instance, in 1709 when, after Drury Lane's actors complained about Christopher Rich's managerial tyranny, the Lord Chamberlain's office shut the theater down, the official notice of the act read as follows:

Whereas by an order dated the 30th. day of Apr^{il}. last upon the Peticon of Sev^{ll}. Players &c. I did then direct and require you to pay to the respective Comedians who had benefit plays last winter the full receipt^s. of such plays....

And whereas I am inform^d y^t in Contempt of the said Ord^r yⁿ still refuse to pay and detain from the s^d Comedians y^e profits of y^e s^d benefit plays I do therefore for the s^d Contempt hereby silence you from further acting & require you not to perform any Plays or other Theatrical entertainment^s till further Ord^r; And all her Maj^{ty}s Sworn Comedians are hereby forbid to act any Plays at y^e Theatre in Covent Gardⁿ or else where wthout my leave as they shall answer the contrary at their perill.⁴

This was a notorious example of what was called an "Order of Silence": the removal of a theater and a theatrical management from the regime of audibility.

The most famous instance of the silencing of theater came twenty-five or so years later when, in the wake of its triumphant reelection, the Walpole government passed the stage Licensing Act of 1737. The act targeted the unlicensed playhouses that had proliferated in the wake of the 1729 opening of Thomas Odell's theater in Ayliffe Street, Goodman's Fields, in defiance of the royal patents.⁵ It did so by reinforcing the exclusive rights of the patent theaters under royal license and by subjecting scripts to the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. Every theatrical production required a license to proceed, and all actors had to be registered with the government. The measures forced illegitimate theaters to limit their repertoires to musical entertainment or to close, thereby stifling political satire.⁶ Not only did the act provide a model for modern practices of state censorship by permanently changing the structure of the theater world and limiting the political content of plays, but in doing so, it also provided one underpinning for the extension of print narrative and fiction in the literary marketplace—that is, for the extension of a certain silence into society.

The Licensing Act's precise immediate causes remain uncertain, but it was clearly a response to a long sequence of plays that had satirized the Court-Whig administration set in place after 1714. It was thought at the time that the stunning theatrical hit of the 1736 season, Henry Fielding's *Pasquin: A Dramatick Satire on the Times*, was a key proximate cause, and probably for good reason. *Pasquin* certainly contributed to the aggressively anti-Walpolian lineage of theatrical

⁴ Public Record Office LC 5/154, p. 437. Quoted in Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "The Silencing of Drury Lane in 1709," *Theatre Journal* 32, no. 4 (1980): 435–36.

⁵ The opening of Odell's theater was quickly followed by a new unlicensed theater in the Haymarket in 1720. See Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 16–17, 58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60–63.

satire and experimentation that reached back at least as far as John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and included a number of Fielding's own earlier plays. Thus, the eponymous *Pasquin* referred to Rome's famous headless "talking statue," upon which anonymous satirical epigrams and political commentary had been publicly displayed since the sixteenth century. And the play itself was pure metatheater, a burlesque of the rehearsal genre, presenting rival productions under rehearsal in a London playhouse: "a comedy call'd *The Election*," followed by an "emblematical Tragedy" titled "*The Life and Death of Common Sense*."⁷

Certainly *Pasquin*'s rehearsal comedy satirizes contemporary political electioneering. However, it attacks not one or other of the Country and Court parties but both indifferently, on the grounds of the political system's corruption and venality. Predictably enough, the Court candidates, *Lord Place* and *Colonel Promise*, resort to bribery while their opponents, *Sir Henry Fox-Chace* and *Squire Tankard*, rely on empty populist sloganeering. Debate in this climate is, precisely, noise, as the following stage direction indicates:

*Each Mob on each Side of the Stage, crying out promiscuously, Down with the Rump! no Courtiers! no Jacobites! down with the Pope! no Excise! a Place and a Promise! a Fox-Chace and a Tankard! At last they fall together by the Ears, and cudgel one another off the Stage.*⁸

Yet, for Fielding, politics itself is not reducible to noise. It is arguable, for instance, that *Pasquin*'s insistent critique of the connection between money and party links the play to the oppositional Patriot movement in its Bolingbrokean guise, despite many recent critics' skepticism about this connection.⁹ Indeed, *Pasquin*'s rehearsal tragedy is also vaguely Bolingbrokean. Drawing on Pope and Swift, it mounted a hard-hitting critique of ignorance and superstition as enemies of a generalized right reason, here personified as "Queen Common Sense." Its real target, however, was the established church itself, allegorized in the figure of "Firebrand Tartuffe, Priest of the Sun." This satire of priestcraft was in tune both with Bolingbroke's politics (the attempt to create a political system with no ecclesiastical agency) and with his personal deism (as it was most famously expressed in Pope's *Essay on Man* [1734]).¹⁰ Indeed, the recent scholarship is likely correct in supposing that it was Fielding's unapologetic anticlericalism—more than his attack on

⁷ The original idea for a "burlesque of contemporary drama in dual comic and tragic rehearsal play form" came from Benjamin Hoadly and John Hoadly's play *The Contrast*, staged at Covent Garden in April–May 1731. See Thomas Lockwood, introduction to *Pasquin*, in *Henry Fielding: Plays*, vol. 3, 1734–1742, ed. Thomas Lockwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 221.

⁸ Henry Fielding, *Pasquin*, in Lockwood, *Henry Fielding*, 3:271.

⁹ There is a large and complex body of scholarship on Fielding's political views and connections. I accept Keymer's argument that Fielding's allegiances were "pragmatic and mobile" and also Downie's view that changes in the nature of the Whig government, rather than his own vacillations or compromises, prompted Fielding's interventions in political debate. See Thomas Keymer, "Fielding's Theatrical Career," in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18–19; J. A. Downie, *Political Biography of Henry Fielding* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009); and Linda Bree's review of Downie, "Henry Fielding, Politician?," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35, no. 1 (2011): 240–42. Nonetheless, I also follow Battestin and Battestin's argument that much of Fielding's satire on bribery and corruption echoes the "Patriot" thinking of George Lyttelton and the Cobham circle of Dissident Whigs, itself drawn from Bolingbroke's *Dissertation on Parties* (1733–34), whose earlier work had influenced Pope and his circle. See Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding*, 197–98.

¹⁰ Pope's *Essay on Man* later was deemed to be Spinozist, and we know that Fielding owned copies of Spinoza's works. Lockwood, introduction, 228.

political corruption—that emboldened Walpole to act against the unlicensed theatres.¹¹ After all, generalized political satires were commonplace in the 1730s, but censoring *Pasquin*'s irreligion and theatrical excess per se offered Walpole an easy way to appease those suspicious of his administration, especially the High Church party, without affronting his Dissenting support.

All this being said, what marked *Pasquin* out as a particular object of controversy and a trigger for censorship, I'd argue, was the way in which its satire critically *connected* the various elements of the Hanoverian settlement—religious, commercial, cultural, and political—so as to present them as a conjoint structure that belonged to a regime that limited and threatened enlightened practical reason, or common sense. The Licensing Act was itself an expression of this regime, which literally silenced Fielding as a dramatic author. Indeed, there is a certain irony in *Pasquin*'s trigger status since the play dramatizes theatrical silence itself rather pointedly. Trapwit, the author and director of the play's comedy under rehearsal, includes in his production "the best Scene of Silence that ever was pen'd by Man,"¹² partly, no doubt, in satirical imitation of the speechless pantomimes that were the period's most popular theatrical attractions. Trapwit's silent scene is a marriage proposal, albeit between two lovers—Miss Mayoress and Colonel Promise—who have never before spoken to each other. The radically undermotivated nature of the resulting betrothal is, of course, a self-conscious wink at contemporary comedy's supposedly loose ways with narration, as well as at its dependence on the marriage plot.

Yet, as a "Scene of Silence," the proposal has a more far-reaching charge. First, it is designed to cause an explosion of noise: Trapwit expects it "to catch the Admiration of every one like a Trap, and raise an Applause like Thunder, till it makes the whole House like a Hurricane."¹³ It may also implicitly refer to the reason why theatrical weddings were in fact silent. Strictly speaking, up until Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, all that was required to contract a marriage was a simple speech act—that is, a mutual exchange of vows uttered in the present tense and before witnesses. That was why, for some decades after the Restoration, staged or "mock marriages" as they were called, were enacted silently or offstage; it was supposed (not necessarily correctly) that the law took no account of fictionality. In this regard, the mock-marriage device marked the very limits of mimesis on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage.¹⁴ Accordingly, neither Trapwit nor, of course, Fielding takes the risk of allowing his couple to exchange vows audibly. Indeed, in a further twist on the joke of their expeditious courtship, Miss Mayoress and Colonel Promise are married instantaneously and "behind the scenes" by a fleet parson.¹⁵ Just moments before the wedding, when the heroine promises to marry her suitor and, in addition, to make a "good wife," Trapwit offers the following commentary:

¹¹ Coley observes that while the comedy's attack on electoral corruption was familiar enough, the tragedy's relentlessly negative characterization of Firebrand caused particular offense. W. B. Coley, introduction to *Henry Fielding: Contributions to "The Champion" and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xxvi–xxvii. Lockwood (introduction, 228) also notes that "nobody thought this part of *Pasquin* was anything other than an attack on clerical power and institutions."

¹² Fielding, *Pasquin*, 281.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lisa O'Connell, "Marriage Acts: Stages in the Transformation of Modern Nuptial Culture," *differences* 11, no. 1 (1999): 80–86.

¹⁵ Fielding, *Pasquin*, 282–83.

That single Promise, Sir, is more than any of my Brother Authors had ever the Grace to put into the Mouth of any of their fine Ladies yet; so that the Heroe of a Comedy is left in a much worse Condition than the Villain of a Tragedy, and I would chuse rather to be hang'd with the one, than married with the other.¹⁶

This remark cuts deep: most obviously it is a joke on the comedy genre's neglect of domestic virtue. But it also draws attention to the way in which the lovers' exchange of promises breaks the "Scene of Silence" with a performative, quasi-liturgical act that anticipates marriage (i.e., a betrothal). In this regard, Trapwit's play within a play almost voices the unvoiceable and enacts a version of the audibility that characterizes *Pasquin* itself. That is, it signals the way the production presents audibly, which is to say explicitly, the structures that join politics to religion and culture at this moment.



Once he was banished from the theater, Fielding turned to journalism and printed fictions, making regular contributions to the *Champion* from 1739 on and publishing his *Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* pseudonymously in 1741. Yet he wrote explicitly from out of his earlier enforced silence at least once: in a May 1738 letter to the Patriot periodical *Common Sense*, or *the Englishman's Journal*, which was sponsored by Oppositional Whigs, Lord Chesterfield and George Lyttelton, and titled partly in *Pasquin*'s honor. Fielding's letter was signed "Mum Budget," perhaps in reference to "The Mum Club," mentioned in the ninth issue of the *Spectator* as a refuge for those who were enemies of noise.¹⁷

Mum Budget begins his letter straightforwardly by referring to his own recent silence:

I believe you may have wondered at not hearing from me in so long Time, and will, perhaps, be more surprized at the Reason I am going to give you.—In short, Sir, I am at length thoroughly convinced, that the utmost Perfection which human Wisdom is capable of attaining to is, Silence; and that, when a Man hath learn'd to hold his Tongue, he may be properly said to have arrived at the highest Pitch of Philosophy.¹⁸

This celebration of silence is ironical, of course, in the heavily recursive manner we associate especially with Swift. The author goes on to cite a list of historical notables, starting with Solomon and ending with Mr. Spectator, who have written in praise of Silence.¹⁹ He then turns to the use of

¹⁶ Ibid., 282.

¹⁷ Joseph Addison, "No. 9, Saturday, March 10, 1711," in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:41. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers some clarification of the possible meaning of "Mum Budget" as a composite term (i.e., "Mum," the inarticulate sound indicating an inability or unwillingness to speak; and "Budget," a pouch, bag, or wallet), conjecturing that the expression was originally the name of a game in which silence was required. Cf. "to open one's budget," meaning "to speak one's mind" (ca. 1681). It notes, too, a verb form, "to come Mumbudgeting," meaning "to fuss and bustle."

¹⁸ Henry Fielding, "The 'Mum Budget' Letter," in Coley, *Contributions to "The Champion,"* 7.

¹⁹ Coley lists the following relevant extracts from the *Spectator*: no. 550 (December 1, 1712): "As a Monosyllable is my Delight, I have made very few Excursions in the conversation which I have related beyond a Yes or a No"; no. 407 (June 17, 1712): "I have all along acknowledged myself to be a Dumb Man"; and again from no. 550 (December 1, 1712): "I design upon the first Meeting of the said Club to have my Mouth opened in Form, intending to regulate myself in this Particular by a certain Ritual practiced at the opening the Mouth of a Cardinal." See Coley, *Contributions to "The Champion,"* 9n2.

silence by a "Coffee-House Politician [i.e., Walpole], who, ... [in his] great ... Fondness for Silence," "would bribe People to hold their Tongues," before noting that in the so-called Coffee-House itself (i.e., Parliament), "SILENCE GIVES CONSENT."²⁰ It is where the less one says, the wiser one is thought to be, and where it is only by talking much that one's full ignorance is revealed.

Irony vanishes, however, in the final stages of the letter, when Mum Budget alludes to Walpole's insufficient response to Spanish naval aggression:

There was a great Noise some Time ago concerning *Spanish* Depredations, which we did not like.—I do assure you, Sir, as great an enemy as I am to Noise, I should not be displeased at the Musick of a few Broad-Sides: Methinks, I could hear you with Pleasure on that Head; for if we are quite silent at Home, it is probable we may hear on both Sides our Ears from Abroad.²¹

Presumably, irony evaporates here because of the situation's urgency. Those "Ears from Abroad" refer quite literally to the ear of British merchant captain Robert Jenkins, which had been brutally severed from his head by the Spanish. Jenkins's ear was later exhibited before Parliament as a means of intensifying popular demands for military action by Walpole's administration in the early stages of what was to become the war between Great Britain and Spain over the Austrian succession (1739–48), a conflict popularly known in Britain as the War of Jenkins' Ear.²² With Mum Budget's abrupt change of tone from irony to topicality, the categories of the audible—noise, music, and silence—acquire figurative force. The clamor for war with Spain is, at first, a "great Noise," but the sound of gunfire would be "Musick," and silence is now cowardice or neglect. And once again, in a move that echoes *Pasquin's* flirtation with thresholds of audibility, Mum Budget suggests that silence's ambiguous virtue will return only once the government stops enforcing it—that is, when, as Fielding puts it, no "silent Steps are to be apprehended."²³

It is worth noting that Fielding's complex deployment of audibility's metaphors in his Mum Budget letter was soon drawn upon by others, if in a more simplified form. In 1740, for instance, a popular Patriot-Oppositional song circulated under the name "Mum: A Political Ballad," further extending Fielding's ironized praise of silence across twenty-six stanzas:

I.
Brave *Bacchus* by all is adored,
And Roast-Beef is praised by some,
But none that I know of, before yet
Have sung of the Virtues of MUM.

II.
Parnassus so plag'd is with Critics
The Muses of late are struck dumb.
Common Sense, with all its Politics,
May be forc'd in a Jail to cry MUM.

.....

²⁰ Coley, *Contributions to "The Champion,"* 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

²² The conflict was known as the Guerra del Asiento in Spain.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

VIII.

Peace or War *never made, ever making*,
 Has cost us a damnable Sum,
 High Taxes, low Trade, and Ships taking,
 Will force us at last to cry MUM.

.....

XIX.

All Plays for the Stage are debarred,
 Till licensed by you know whom;
 So what will you give us hence-forward,
 But a sweet Repetition of MUM.²⁴

The point of the song's numbing repetition is, of course, that every English utterance—be it a battle cry, complaint, harangue, command, salvo, promise, or, indeed, theatrical entertainment—amounts to “Mum,” which, after Fielding, serves as a watchword for the silence, complicity, inarticulacy, and tacit consent that characterize Walpole's regime.

Indeed, Fielding's silent presence was once again evoked in a 1741 advertisement by the showmen Fawkes and Pinchbeck for their “GREAT THEATRICAL BOOTH” at Bartholomew Fair, where

the [audience] will be agreeably diverted with the true and exact Siege of CARTAGENA.

In which will be represented the Taking of the Forts, Castles . . . with the Sinking the Spanish Ships and Galloons, cutting the Boom-Chain; the Bombarding of the Bocachia-Castle . . . and the English landing under the Five Gun Battery with several other brave Actions done by them. . . .

... To which will be added, and given Gratis, also

(*By the Great Mogul's Company of Comedians, for the Theater in the Hay-Market*) a Comedy of three Acts, call'd

BARONET BIT;

Or, *The Noble Englishman Rewarded*

*With the Comical Humors of Sir Mannerly Shallow and his Man Booby.*²⁵

The siege of Cartagena was a key moment in the War of Jenkins' Ear. Fawkes and Pinchbeck offer their audience a kind of news service here, one that signaled their oppositional patriotism by noting that “the Booth will be distinguish'd from the rest by bearing English Colors.” Yet they suggested something more again by parenthetically announcing their connection to Fielding's

²⁴ *Mum. An Excellent New Ballad. To Its Own Proper Tune* (London: Thomas Robins, 1740), 3–4, 7. The annotated and extended version, titled *Mum. A Political Ballad, for the Present Times: With Annotations Political, Critical, and Historical*, quotes *Pasquin* at some length. It is often wrongly attributed to the nonjuring clergyman Charles Leslie. See Lockwood, introduction, 240n2.

²⁵ Scrapbook 3, Harry Price Library, Senate House, University of London.

erstwhile theater company—"the Great Mogul's Company of Comedians"—followed by this truly strange injunction to silence:

A profound Profundity of the profoundest Silence is desir'd to be observ'd during the Time of Action, that the Performance may excell the most excelling Excelency that ever acquir'd the Title of Excellency, and the Audience have their Cogitive Faculties struck with a Cogibundity of Cogitation, that it may be impossible to excogitate by any Means of Excogitation, those whose attentive Faculties are the most involv'd in an Involution of Attention.

Gentlemen and Ladies are desir'd to come Early, for it is imagin'd that it will be past Imagination to imagine how imaginary and vain those People's Hopes will be, that imagine to get any Places after the Booth is full, for none can then be admitted on any Account whatsoever.²⁶

The precise rhetorical force or intention of this passage is difficult to gauge. It is, of course, a blatant and conventionally exaggerated puff, but at the same time it seems to refer, once again if obliquely, to the silenced Fielding. Fielding himself is unlikely to have been involved in the production, but given Bartholomew Fair's well-deserved reputation for noisiness, it may be that the advertisement's convoluted and exaggerated request for silence is a knowing reference to the contemporary lineage of ironical and oppositional figurations of keeping Mum, which was initiated and personified by Fielding.



I have argued that in the Walpolian period audibility contains a suite of subcategories which are objects of social control but which also can work as ethical figures for a set of complex rhetoric moves which, in the case of Fielding's use of silence, point quite directly at how the religious, the political, the social, and the literary are bound together. After Fielding, however, figures that explicitly connect these domains to one another become rare. In particular, the literary and the political become more independent of each other, which is not to say, of course, that literary writers ceased to make political interventions. But it is to say, in general terms, that after Sterne's popular sentimentalism, after the development of new commercial genres like gothic fiction, and after the emergence of that broad movement we call Romanticism, the literary field became increasingly autonomous. In this process, I suggest, audibility lost some of its suggestiveness. "Noise," for instance, began to figure less as a generalized regime of chaos than as a feature of particular sites and situations, very often urban.

In this context, too, "sound" acquired a different significance, one that was no longer political and, indeed, can be understood as avoiding the political. As James Chandler has noted, this change, which must be material to any sketch of how audibility worked in the period, is most clearly evident in Wordsworth, who uses sound to reinforce his sense of poetry's cultural place.²⁷ In particular, his poem "On the Power of Sound" (1835) describes audibility's various subcategories as if they were motivated by what he calls a "spirit aerial." Here sound becomes, in effect, the vehicle of our spiritual inhabitation of the world. All sounds—sobs, prayers, lions' roars, claps of

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ James Chandler, "The 'Power of Sound' and the Great Scheme of Things: Wordsworth Listens to Wordsworth," in "Soundings of Things Done: The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era," ed. Susan J. Wolfson, *Romantic Circles Praxis*, April 2008, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/sounding/>.

thunder, music, gunshot—and silence, too, are affirmed as both an expression and a celebration of a divinity:

Break forth into thanksgiving,
 Ye banded instruments of wind and chords
 Unite, to magnify the Ever-living,
 Your inarticulate notes with the voice of words!
 Nor hushed be service from the lowing mead,
 Nor mute the forest hum of noon;
 Thou too be heard, lone eagle! freed
 From snowy peak and cloud, attune
 Thy hungry barkings to the hymn
 Of joy...

.....

...As Deep to Deep
 Shouting through one valley calls,
 All worlds, all natures, mood and measure keep
 For praise and ceaseless gratulation, poured
 Into the ear of God, their Lord!

This understanding of sound as an expression of life-force that hovers between the transcendental and the immanent also allows Wordsworth to overcome the intimate relation between silence and noise that was apparent in Fielding's case.

O Silence! are Man's noisy years
 No more than moments of thy life?

.....

... No! though earth be dust
 And vanish, though the heavens dissolve, her stay
 Is in the WORD, that shall not pass away.²⁸

Here sound as such—the whole regime of the audible—is figured as Logos, so as to sideline the political frictions, the threat of irreligion, and the rhetoric of irony that we have seen at work in Fielding. It is as if, in Wordsworth, the complex politics of audibility are being transfigured into a universal category of sound whose potential is less social than spiritual and aesthetic. And Wordsworth's spiritualization of sound is implicitly positioned not just against practical politics but also against the theater and theatricalization. It happens precisely in print, in a form of cultural silence, then, that contradicts, just as it perhaps enables, the celebration of a transfigured audibility. A

²⁸ William Wordsworth, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth: Together With a Description of the Country of the Lakes in the North of England, Now First Published With His Works*, ed. Henry Reed (Philadelphia: James Kay, Jun. and Brother, 1837), 179.