

Part II Gildon as Creative Writer

Chapter V

FICTION

The previous chapters have discussed the various tasks which Gildon undertook primarily to make a living, but they have also made the point that he aspired to literary reputation. Since most of the young wits of his day wrote verse and since the stage offered both profit and reputation, Gildon naturally turned towards poetry and drama, in both of which he was to display minor talent. But first he had some success with collections of fiction, a form then rather suspect as somewhat less than literature. For Gildon these were an intermediate stage between hack work and activity in more reputable genres, and hence their treatment here despite the fact that his later collections extended well into the more creative and critical phases of his career.

In the early 1690's a young writer with a living to make would naturally consider fiction because of its recent emergence as a popular form appealing to a wide audience. Cultivated English readers knew the lofty French romances of D'Urfé, Combarville, Mlle de Scudéry, and La Calprenède either in their native tongue or through their several English translations made between 1652 and 1667; English imitations of them had followed¹;

1. George Sherburn, The Restoration and Eighteenth Century (New York, 1948), p. 793.

Bunyan's story-telling powers were fascinating the middle and lower classes; and other forms of fiction were either already popular or rapidly developing. The short story, which after the continental fashion the English called the novel, came onto the literary scene in James Mabbe's English translation of the Spanish Novelas Exemplares in 1640, in a reissue of 1654, and in Sir Roger L'Estrange's translations of five more from the same group and five others from Solorzano in a volume titled The Spanish Decameron (1687). English writers soon followed. Dunton's Athenian Mercury expanded many of its queries, answers, and "situations" until they were almost stories, and Peter Motteux's Gentleman's Journal (1692-94) contained numerous stories. Mrs. Aphra Behn's best-known stories were published as Three Histories in 1688, Gildon himself first published some of her earliest written tales as Histories and Novels in 1697, and in 1700 appeared the popular two-volume A Collection of Pleasant Novels, which included Congreve's Incognita.²

Rogue and picaresque literature was known by Gildon's day in such forms as Francis Kirkman's The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled. Being a Full Account of the Birth, Life, Most Remarkable Actions, and Untimely Death of that Famous Cheat Mary Carleton, Known by the Name of the German Princess (1673), the same author's collaboration with Richard Head on The English Rogue Described, in the Life of Meriton Latroon, and Head's Life and Death of Mother Shipton (1667).³ The imaginary voyage was known in Richard Head's Floating Island (1673) and Henry Neville's Isle of Pines (1668).⁴ Epistolary Fiction was

2. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, pp. 803-04.

3. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, pp. 796-97.

4. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 797.

popularized in love letters by Sir Roger L'Estrange's translation of Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier (1678), Aphra Behn's Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister (1684), and Mrs. Mary Manley's Letters (1696)⁵ and in travel letters by the translation from Italian of G. P. Marana's Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy (1687) and the translation from French of Mme d'Aulnoy's Ingenious and Diverting Letters of the Lady _____'s Travels into Spain (1691-92).⁶ Hence in undertaking fiction of a sort in his The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail and other, later collections Gildon could draw upon the examples of many predecessors, and the journalistic work which he was doing concurrently would make him aware of many tricks to catch the ever-growing popular audience for fiction, an audience of which women were becoming a substantial part.

Probably Gildon's first attempt at fiction was Nuncius Infernalis: or, a New Account from Below, which appeared sometime during January or February of 1692.⁷ It was a minor addition to the already long list of satiric or amusing dialogues of the dead which stretched all the way from Lucian through Fontenelle to Gildon's day. Professor Benjamin Boyce has shown that ninety-three of these had appeared in England between 1590 and Gildon's small attempt in 1692 and that by the time of Tom Brown's Letters from the Dead to the Living (1702, 1703) the total had mounted to one hundred and eleven.⁸

5. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 795.

6. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 795.

7. I am indebted to Professor George Anderson of the University of Maryland for the statement that the Athenian Mercury of February 23, 1692, included some corrections to this work.

8. Benjamin Boyce, "News from Hell," EMIA, LVIII (June, 1943), 428-432.

In Gildon's slim pamphlet a negligible signed dedicatory epistle to an unidentified William Bathshiel of the Middle Temple is followed by Tom D'Urfeys "Preface to the Reader." Gildon had earlier written a long letter in praise of The Marriage-Hater Match'd which D'Urfeys had used for a preface to his play, and in return he said a good word for Gildon.

The modesty of my friend being such, that he would not venture into the world above, and doing me the favour to think me worthy to usher him into a critical and censorious age, whose good nature he had no reason to expect more than his predecessors; I believing the following piece will please the judicious and moderate reader, and he bashfully unwilling to have his genius expos'd, have at last so far influenced him as to commit these sheets to the Press, with an opinion, that they may give diversion equal to, if not exceeding what has been written before on the same kind. (ix)

The first dialogue on friendship follows Lucian only as "it was Lucian himself that first gave me the hint of introducing the Dead as interlocutors; and in that only have I imitated him." (vii) Gildon utilizes the Pythagorean notion of the transmigration of souls to present Timon of Athens, "once again freed from that sordid carcass of Mortality, in which he was just now coop'd up," discoursing to Laelius on the state of friendship in England. Under Laelius's probing questioning Timon describes the world as far worse/^{than} in the days of the Greeks' injustice to him: religion has become a mere name and a show, "a farce and a cheat"; even the Turks practice more moral precepts than the Christians; friendship has become betrayal, and all appearance of friendship is only self-interest, especially among close relatives. The dialogue is little more than a fashionable youthful denunciation of the world, but in spots the writing is neat and sharp. Although the style is obviously forced, too rhetorical, and weakened by excessive balance and antithesis, the device of having Laelius first state the ideal so intensifies Timon's picture of base English reality that the dialogue is

frequently forceful and disturbing.

The second dialogue, quite different from the first, records the raucous "Sessions of Cuckolds" in Hell. D'Urfe's preface states that it "is grounded on that celebrated novel of Machiaville which has hitherto, tho' a bare narrative, given so much Delight and Satisfaction to all the Learned," by which he probably refers to Machiavelli's novella, Selfagor Ancidianolo. In this second dialogue Lucifer is appalled at the great amount of work confronting him because of the number of souls to be tried. Despite the temporary absence of war, famine, and plague from the earth, his domains overflow. Under questioning his ghosts explain that their large numbers are caused by wives and cuckoldry. The Italian ghosts claim precedence over the English for the title of best known cuckolds and confess their frequent vengeance by poison and dagger, whereupon their sentence is to be cast down "into cuckolds cave, Ten Thousand Fathom deeper than the Whore-Masters, and next the keeping Cullys, and let each have two wives to torment him." The Spaniards confess that "Thirst of Honour and Wealth made us cheat the King, that drew down the Judgment of Wedlock, and that brought us to this long Horn and Fiend of Matrimony." Although the Frenchman forgave his wife her amours, the pox she had contracted killed him. The Germans and Dutch also confess their stupidity, drunkenness, and cuckoldry. But the English are the most flagrant offenders: the beaux, with their swearing, duelling, marrying for money, extravagance, gaming, exaggerated pretences of honor, and scandalous conduct at plays; the citizens, with their pursuit of wealth, their second marriages, their bringing up their children in luxury without teaching them to make their own way; and the lawyers, who even in Hell attempt to quibble in hair-splitting technical intricacies. Thereafter several such groups as Irish and Scots and such individuals as parsons:

and Quakers confess the causes of their cuckoldry. Coarse, frequently crude, and full of suggestive plays upon words, this second dialogue is much livelier than the first, for its witty descriptions of the beaux and its travesty of the lawyers' jargon are well done. In fact the differing tone of the dialogues and the occasional acid, penetrating wit of the second have caused some scholars to assert that perhaps Tom Brown had a hand in it. Both dialogues appear in the fourth volume of the 1711 edition of Brown's works; however, an earlier edition lacked these dialogues, and since the 1711 editions of Brown came from Curll's shop during a year when he was employing Gildon, the inclusion of the dialogues is not necessarily conclusive evidence of Brown's authorship. Gildon was vain and would go to almost any lengths to see his own writing in print; Curll already possessed Gildon's pamphlet and could have used it to swell the Brown edition. No one has challenged Gildon's authorship of the first dialogue despite its presence in this edition of Brown's works, and there seems to be no proof of Brown's help with the second. Readers of Gildon's heavier critical works might conclude that he was incapable of the wit of this second dialogue, but the volumes of his Post-boy robb'd frequently match it, until positive contrary evidence appears, we may tentatively regard the second dialogue as Gildon's.

Except for this study Gildon's pamphlet will justly continue to be unremarked in the history of fiction, but here it must be noted as a beginning of his attempts. In it he displays no particular narrative gift, no skill in situation or characterization, but he does show some grasp of the serious and satirical possibilities of fictional dialogue, a form he continued to use throughout his career.

In another attempt at fiction, The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail: or,

The Paquet Broke Open, Gildon was more successful. Printed for John Dunton, these "Five Hundred Letters to Persons of several Qualities and Conditions, with observations upon each letter" were not allowed to spring full-blown upon an unprepared public, for Dunton used his journals to provoke interest in his other forthcoming publications. Although it was not licensed until September 1, 1692, the work was highly praised in a two-page review in Dunton's The Compleat Library for July, 1692.⁹ It was entered in the Stationer's Register September 28, 1692, but Dunton's Athenian Mercury for September 27 announced that "next Thursday will be Published The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail" and the number for Saturday, October 1, announced it as "now published." Then the next number contained this planted question to advertise a forthcoming Dunton work: "I find in the Book entitled, The Post rob'd of his Mail . . . A Letter of Platonick Love, it gives me so fair an Idea of that Romantick Fancy, that I would almost wish there were such a thing, . . . I desire your opinion whether there be or no, and also your Judgment of that Book, and whether you think it a fiction or not." The answer cites the long and extravagant review which had appeared in Dunton's July Compleat Library" and urges that

the Letters are so natural, nothing we've seen publish'd of late (we'll scarce except the Turkish Spy) equals them; the comments are always both pleasant and witty, never tedious, but full of various and surprising observations. In short, if it be not Truth as to Matter of Fact, (tho we are apt to believe 'tis) yet 'tis so like Truth, that it satisfies the Mind as well as Nature in 'em, being so well drawn, that it seems not an Imitation of Nature, but Nature it self."¹⁰

9. H. P. McCutcheon, "John Dunton's connection with Book Reviewing," SP, XXV (1928), 353.

10. "John Dunton's Connection. . .," pp. 346-54.

The title page bears no other indication of authorship than "publish'd by a Gentleman concern'd in the Frolick" and the appearance of anonymity is deliberately continued by John Dunton's signed "The Bookseller's Advertisement to the Reader," which offers all the old dodges to provoke curiosity and incite interest in a succeeding volume. Dunton straightfacedly disclaims any responsibility for the contents and protests too much that readers should not try to identify the writers of the letters or the gentlemen "concerned in the frolick" by the names or the initials used in the volume. He explains that the club "selected only the letters proper to entertain the age" and sent the letters of business to their addressees; and if the letters printed be "too gay or airy," the blame must, after all, rest upon the original writers. He also sought to prepare the way for a second volume by promising that a key had been found to an enigmatic letter and that it would be published in a second volume; this would include "all news letters and accounts of later intrigues" as well as "any interesting or instructive letters" which readers of this volume might care to submit. Following Dunton's advertisement comes "The Epistle Dedicatory" to George Porter signed "C. C." This explains the general plan of the comments, but states that since the letters in the "Second Book of this Volume" were written "by Foreigners" he will not answer for the reflections on them because they were "The performance only of a part of our Company, and they pretty well enter'd in good Liquor."

Immediately following a prominently placed and printed "Volume I" the first letter sketches the club framework into which all the letters are fitted. One member tells how he had received by accident a letter intended for another person of the same name, and upon reading it discovered that an elderly man of good reputation was at once attempting to seduce his ward

and cheat her of the property for which her parents had trustingly named him executor. After another member tells what he has learned through accidental reading of mail, the club decide to have a summer's sport by robbing the post-boy, reading the mail, writing their comments upon it to scare the recipients into virtue, and sending it on to the proper persons. After several robberies they gather at the summer home of a member to read the purloined letters.

The letters themselves are addressed to the same audiences Dunton had reached with his queries and "cases" in the Athenian Mercury and with his more serious Compleat Library. The majority of them frankly follow the time-tested formula of sensationalism and sex; a great many are clearly fashioned for the growing audience of women readers to whom Dunton appealed in the Mercury and The Ladies Dictionary; and a substantial number deal with topics of timely interest. But the volume is a rather strange combination, for cheek-by-jowl with thinly-veiled indecency are many letters showing awareness of serious ideas, letters dealing seriously with literature, and several in which heavy didacticism is the main concern. Apparently Gildon early here practiced the trick he frequently later used—inserting his own serious ideas into collections of deliberately light, even salacious matter.

Titles like the following illustrate the lowest appeal of the volume. "From a Whore to a young Spark that was forsaking her, on pretence of living soberly"; "From a married man to a young Lady, to persuade her to yield her self up to his Embraces; directed under a false cover"; "From a younger Brother to his Mistress in Town, that had sent him word, she was with child by him, to advise her to lay it to another"; "From a Dwarf to a tall Lady, with whom she was in Love"; "From a Young Lady that had been betray'd by Love, to the Embraces of a young Gallant, who had got her with child,

desiring him to send her something that may cause abortion"; "From Mrs. Brittain, to her correspondent in the Country" (a witty request from a thriving London madame for a new stock of fresh country girls for the next season); "From a City Wife to her Prentice, inviting him to Epsom in his Master's absence"; "From a young Spark, discovering the Debaucheries of the Town"; "From a Black to a fair Woman, with whom he is in Love"; "From one that had stolen a Marriage, giving an account of Honey-moon, etc"; "From an Hermaphrodite to a Female Lover"; and "From a Sawd to a Justice's Clerk."

Then titles like the following illustrate the volume's bid for women readers. "From a young Lady to her She-Friend, disclosing her whole Breast as to Marriage, clothes, and the characters of several pretty Gentlemen, who had discovered some tender affection for her"; "From a barren Woman to a Dr. to desire his advice, what to do to conceive"; "From a jealous Wife to her Husband"; "From a Lady in the country to another in London"; "From an old Woman in Love with a young Man"; "From a Widow to a Lady, who advised her against second Marriage"; "From a Young Lady, who resolv'd ever to continue a Maid, with her Reasons for it"; "From a Lady in the country, to another in Town, about the Fashions"; "From a Lady to know the meaning of a Prophecie she had found in a Parchment"; "From a young Lady to her Gallant, to whom she yielded, and who was still constant"; "From a Lady that dissuades her Friend from the Love of Men"; and "Of a Mother that gives Documents to her Daughter."

Such letters as these would gain readers by the timeliness of their topics: "From a Pluralist to his Patron, being a flatt'ring Insinuation to gain . . . a third Living in his gift"; "From a prisoner almost starv'd, to his cruel Creditor"; "From a News-Monger to his correspondent in Holland"; "From one beyond Sea, expressing his desire of returning to his own native

country"; "From a Gentleman in Town to his Friend in the Country, complaining of the Spungers that thrust themselves into his company"; "To a Member of the Athenian Society"; and "Instructions how to drive a good Trade."

Many letters take religion and philosophy fairly seriously. Such are "From an Atheist, or Modern Wit, laughing at all Religion"; "From a Fellow, who speaks ill of all mankind, and of every thing"; "From a Father, on the death of his Son"; "From a Jew to a Christian, recriminating upon him"; "From a severe melancholy Philosopher"; "From a Philosopher broaching new notions. That Birds and Beasts may be more excellent creatures than Man"; "From a vain-glorious Man boasting of some of his Good actions"; "Of consolation, to one that grieved very much for the Death of his Wife"; "From a Jesuit, who confesses the Errors of his own order"; and "Against the nuns." However, even in these the approach is popular and the discussions verge upon the sensational wherever possible.

Finally, many of the letters deal with learning and literary topics. Unlike the others, they contain no sensationalism, and the ideas and arguments are much the same as those Gildon later urged in greater detail in his more serious works. Such letters are: "From a mighty affecter of Similes to his Mistress"; "From a Young Son of the Muses at the University"; "From an author to his Friend, that had condemned some of his performances"; "From a conceited Fellow, that affects fine Language"; "From a Poetaster that would foolishly rhyme on every thing Directed to the Mæcenas of the Age"; "From a Gentleman, giving an account of the Enmity and Disagreement of Poets with one another"; "From a poor Scholar, in answer to one that invited him to London, complaining of the small regard that's had to learning there"; and "An Information of Parnassus against the modern Men of Learning."

Thus there is considerable variety among the letters; and although the volume is chiefly an attempt to exploit a sub-literary market which Bunton had already successfully tapped with sections of his Athenian Mercury, Gildon's work has some merit. The club device, the mild exchanges of opinion among the members, and the occasional returns to their movements loosely unify the letters and lend the illusion of reality to the escapade. Many of the individual letters are good short narratives fashioned with considerable attention to form and possess both verisimilitude and interest. In a few instances successive letters or letter-and-reply combinations present more complex situations and successfully arouse and sustain interest through a mild climax. The comments upon the letters are generally sensible, frequently discerning, often penetrating, and occasionally witty; sometimes, however, they veer into flippancy or heaviness. They also establish the individualities of the club members by regard for appropriate distinguishing ideas, speech, and style; hence Gildon succeeds in at least rudimentary characterization.

The volume is also interesting for its place in literary history. In tracing the development of English fiction Professor Sherburn has noticed that "in Charles Gildon's Post-boy rob'd letters . . . gossiping episodes are found, and in Tom Brown's Adventures of Lindamira this use of letters is full-fledged."¹¹ The Letters Written by Mrs. Manley in 1696 are also in this gossiping vein, but they lack the liveliness and the occasional smart phrase of Gildon's volume. And of course there is the obvious point that this volume looks forward to the epistolary novel.

11. The Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 795.

But in literary history the chief significance of Gildon's volume is its early and successful use of the club device. R. J. Allen, whose authoritative The Clubs of Augustan London carefully traces the rise of this device, rightfully attaches considerable historical importance to Gildon's volume and calls it "one of the first experiments tried with the fictitious club . . . making it responsible for the authorship of a publication"¹² and later comments that Gildon's "development of a fictitious society of gentlemen credited with authorship is more complete than any attempt of this sort before the device reached its highest form in the essay periodicals."¹³ Professor Allen also claims that "such early successes as The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail taught the device to journalists as different as Ward and Addison"¹⁴ and states that it influenced Steele's Tatler and Mrs. Crackenthorpe's The Female Tatler. In praising Steele's "intimacy of portraiture" and "authentic and genuine characters" Professor Allen argues that

the Trumpet Club is hardly foreshadowed anywhere except in Gildon's Post-boy rob'd of his Mail, of which, it will be remembered, there was a new edition in 1706, three years before Steele began The Tatler. Gildon's society of gentlemen was much more a means to an end than Steele's, and his characterization was noticeably less complete. But he gave names to his clubmen, showed them in actual conversation, and built up an intrinsic interest in his imaginary group in a way strikingly parallel to Steele's."¹⁵

Professor Allen also makes the point that The Female Tatler's society of ladies "is used in a manner which makes it resemble more closely the society of gentlemen in The Post-boy rob'd of his Mail than either Defoe's club or the Spectator group."¹⁶ Finally, one might also argue that Gildon's volume

12. R. J. Allen, The Clubs of Augustan London (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), p. 153.

13. Clubs . . . Augustan London, p. 155.

14. Clubs . . . Augustan London, p. 188.

15. Clubs . . . Augustan London, p. 203.

16. Clubs . . . Augustan London, p. 205, n. 3.

anticipated Steele and Addison in its combination of short narrative and instructional comment; for although the Tatler and Spectator papers were more discursive, more pleasantly satirical, and more highly instructive, their form—especially in Addison's papers—was an expansion of Gildon's formula. One might also tentatively suggest that Gildon's topics—matters of current interest, the fashionable ideas of the moment, literary criticism, lightly didactic stories—roughly parallel those of the Spectator. Gildon's collection, therefore, has some intrinsic merit as light fiction, considerable importance in the history of fiction, and possibly significance in the development of the later well-known collections of periodical essays.

Scholarship abounds in references to a second volume of these letters bearing the same title and dated 1693. The "Bookseller's Advertisement to the Reader" at the beginning of the 1692 collection had promised a second volume if demand were forthcoming; it had tried to provoke enough public curiosity to arouse that demand; and the 1692 volume closed with a prominently placed, ostentatiously printed "The End of the First Volume" to remind readers of that promise. Dunton apparently intended to keep that promise, for "The news of Learning" in his Compleat Library for February, 1693, announced the imminent appearance of a second volume¹⁷ and his Athenian Mercury for March 18, 1693, contained this letter:

I have read the Second Volume of the Post-boy robb'd of his Mail, and approve of the Character given of it. All the letters are really good, that is Witty and Diverting, the Moral Reflections true, and uncommon, the airy

17. "John Dunton's Connection . . .," p. 348.

18. "John Dunton's Connection . . .," pp. 349-50.

flights surprising, and I confess I know not which to prefer. I read the Secret History with some pleasure, and wish you could inform me whether it be real, or a Fiction I desire to know whether we may expect a prosecution of that History in the next Volume. I am also in pain for Lysander and Belvidera in the next Book, and want to know the Catastrophe of their Amour."

To which the Mercury writer replies, "We are glad a Gentleman of your Sense and Learning concurs with us in our Judgment of this Book, and to Satisfie your Curiosity, we are inform'd, that the Secret History is of some Neighboring Country; and that you may expect the Conclusion of it in the next Volume, as well as the Amour of Belvidera and Lysander."¹⁸ This exchange was actually an attempt to whet public curiosity regarding a forthcoming book, for the volume was not announced until June, 1693.¹⁹ But there is no evidence that the second volume was ever separately published either in 1693 or later.²⁰ It seems never to have appeared separately but instead became a part of a combined volume dated 1706.

The title page of this 1706 collection, "Printed by B. Mills for John Sprint," not for Dunton, describes this publication as "Both Volumes in one. The Second Edition. With the Addition of many New and Ingenious Letters, never before published." But there was no first edition; Gildon was trying to attract readers by suggesting popularity. The title, The Post-Boy Robb'd of his Mail, is the same as that of the 1692 volume except for changes in

18. "John Dunton's Connection . . .," pp. 349-50.

19. Arber, II, 166.

20. Although CBEL (II, 575) lists a second volume for 1693 and several scholars speak of it, Edward Arber's Transcript of the Stationers Register shows no volume two for 1692, 1693, or 1694; and neither the catalogue of the British Museum nor the Wing catalogue records a separate second volume.

capitalization and spelling, and the subtitle clearly indicates the true contents: "Consisting of Letters of Love and Gallantry, and all Miscellaneous Subjects: in which are Discover'd The Vertues, Vices, Follies, Humours and Intrigues of Mankind. With Remarks on Each Letter." The dedication to Henry Cartwright, Esq.; Captain in the Honourable Col. Godfrey's Regiment" labors Gildon's favorite thesis that England so starves her men of learning and literature that they "are forc'd to drag out a wretched Life betwixt a servile Dependance, and grinding want . . . while Poets, whose works one would not wrap up a wholesome Drug in . . . have got large Preferments."

Gildon then explains that "This Book is built on the Foundation of the Ingenious Pallaciad" and hopes that "it may afford leisure hours and Amusement not altogether unentertaining, since it gives a view of the various Manners, Follies, and Vices, of the active part of Mankind." In what seems to be a deliberately ambiguous statement which neither affirms nor denies an actual publication of the promised 1693 second volume he states, "The first Impression had such Success, as encourag'd the Booksellers to venture on a second; in which I have cast out many of the least entertaining Letters; and would more, had I been at my Liberty, and have added several new ones, which I hope will make amends for those which remain." Gildon's preface further explains yet conceals the background of this combined 1706 volume: "It consists of two parts, which were very well receiv'd on their first impression, and being much and long enquir'd after, the present Publishers thought fit to undertake it." When one remembers that the 1692 volume had been divided into two "Books" (the division coming at p. 277), Gildon's reference here to "two parts" sounds like deliberate equivocation. He also explains that the letters in the first volume of 1692 "were inserted chiefly to furnish the Reflections and Discourse upon Them, and therefore the Reader

is not to expect the fine turns of Wit, or politeness of Language, which may be found in Letters written by Men of the best Sense." Gildon stretches the bow here, for the sensational letters themselves were clearly the chief attraction of the 1692 volume. But between 1692 and 1706 Gildon's bent had become more serious, he had achieved some reputation, and he had become increasingly interested in literary criticism. Hence instead of playing up the amorous letters of the "Second Volume" as Dunton had done in his Athenian Mercury and Compleat Library advertisements in 1693, Gildon offers this picture of its literary offerings: "There are in these Letters frequent Metaphors and Allegories, and an abundance of Exclamations, and Interrogations, which give a surprizing Life, and Variety to the Stile." He then gives a heavy, extended definition of Metaphor and defends the prominence of "Morals and Reflections" in his "Second Volume."

This 1706 volume gives a quick description of the group, the theft of the letters, and the reading of the letters. It carries out the same framework, with most of the letters being read at the same estate until an interruption forces them to adjourn to town to complete the reading, and at the end of the second volume another interruption occurs. The 1692 first volume has been here shortened from almost five hundred pages to 223 pages by omitting the short, scrappy letters which presented very little situation or substance. Two longer ones have been added, "From a Lady to her confidant, giving an account of her Marriage and Amour, in Prose and Verse" (p. 119) and "From a French Man at Nottingham, to his Friend in Paris; describing England in its Happy State of Plenty, Wealth, and Liberty." (p. 219)

The "Second Volume" is far more serious and much better done than the first. It still contains a body of love letters which do not belie their provocative titles, but the preponderant bulk consists of letters on topics of current interest and matters literary, or of series of much longer, interrelated letters. Those on topics of current interest are really short informatory essays on rather serious topics and often exhibit both form and point. Such are "A Letter for Travelling" (an argument against the broadening influence of travel which Dr. Johnson later echoed); "against the Fear of Death"; "A cabalistical opinion of Tilphs and Salamanders"; "About the Soul"; "An Account of all the Religions of Asia and Europe"; "For Retirement"; "An account of the Factions and Parties now in England"; "Shewing the Abuses of the Admiralty"; "An Exact, tho' Short, and Impartial account of the several Sects of Christianity in the World, especially those in England"; "A History of Beggars"; "A Discourse of the Ancient Oracles"; "Of the Existence of a Deity"; and "The Vanity of Philosophy."

But the largest and most important group are series of consecutive letters which seem significant for the student of the development of fiction. The least of these is a rather conventional and stilted exchange of letters between "the charming Clarinda" and "Lindamor" in which he protests his love for her and she doubts if his intentions are honorable. These are little more than alternating light raillery, but the situation is sustained fairly well throughout. The second series of letters between Lysander and Belvidera is stiffened by a good deal of affected elegance of expression, yet the series achieves an elementary sort of plotting, but the third, more ambitious series is decidedly successful. Extending over twenty-three pages of fine print these letters present an almost complete short story which develops from a gallant speaking to a masked lady at the playhouse. He obtains her name,

He obtains her name, writes her, and she answers. After two exchanges she confesses she is married but nevertheless provokes a further lengthy exchange of discussions complicated by her husband's jealous and watchful nature. Although there is no concluding letter to verify their success, the reader is left with the certainty that lust has found a way. Of course the action here is no more remarkable than that of the 1692 first volume, but the unusual device of presenting all the lady's letters first has the dramatic value of building a preparatory interest for his, which are frequently barbed and witty. By one clever letter after another he flatteringly breaks down her pretences and reprimands her coyness until she ardently writes that she waits only upon occasion, which she is confident she can contrive. These letters are Gildon's best efforts to date, and in his management of the entire series he displays such control and development of situation that taken altogether the letters comprise a well plotted epistolary short story built upon two cleverly characterized figures. These letters therefore show great progress from the simple he-she dialogues of Gildon's earlier letters and are a long step towards the epistolary novel, for despite the nice dovetailing of event the letters of either the man or the woman would clearly present a complete, climactically plotted version of the entire affair.

Taken as a whole this volume thus reflects far more credit upon Gildon than did the 1692 one. He has relied less upon sensationalism and more upon art for the appeal of his letters. He has had the good sense to omit from the first volume the short, undeveloped episodes, and in the second his letters upon current topics or ideas are frequently creditable brief essays possessing both form and point. More important, his varied and extended contrivance of solicitation-to-capitulation series of letters shows skill in characterization, plotting, sustaining interest, and narration. Historically

the volume is important because its device of gradually building characterization over a series of interrelated letters anticipates Addison's Spectator method. And since the comments in Gildon's second volume are less stiffly didactic, more tempered, more graciously conceived and gracefully executed than those of the first, his pleasant episodes smoothly narrated and capped with gently instructive comment also anticipate the method of the Spectator. Finally, like the 1692 volume, its general choice of topics roughly parallels that of the Spectator.

Gildon's next attempt at fiction seems to have been The New Metamorphosis, published sometime in 1708.²¹ In the preface Gildon explains that "The famous Lucian furnished the first Hint (for so I must call his ass, in comparison of what has since been done on it) and Apuleius enlarg'd it into eleven Books," and after an eighteen-page biographical sketch of Apuleius Gildon presents his "Novels, altered and Improv'd to the Modern Times and Manners." Although the title page of this little volume states that it was first "Written in Italian. By Carlo Monte Socio, Fellow of the Academy of Musorists in Rome, and Translated from the Vatican Manuscripts," search reveals no such Italian writer; apparently Gildon successfully gulled both his own public and later scholarship, for no one has challenged his statement.²²

21. There is no entry for it in that portion of 1708 covered by the transcript of the Stationers Register nor in the term catalogues. This date therefore must rest solely upon the CBEL (II, 575) entry, for only the Harvard 1724 "Second Edition" is available; but it includes Gildon's The Golden Spy, a work first published separately in 1709.

22. The following reference works mention no Carlo Monte Socio: J. S. Hammond's A Literary History of the Italian People, Ernesto Grillo's Early Italian Literature, the Scrittori D'Italia series, W. Maunett's Littérature Italienns, J. B. Fletcher's Literature of the Italian Renaissance, the Enciclopedia Italiana, La Grande encyclopédie, Nouvelle Biographie Général, Rippincott's Biographical Dictionary, and the Biographie Universelle.

In this collection a lapdog who has been given the power of speech recounts in detail the amorous goings-on in monasteries, nunneries, and other religious establishments. The following titles show the nature and appeal of the volume: "An account of the Pleasures, and Luxuries of the Cardinal's House, and the Agreeable Prospect of Success to his Fortune, till Love interven'd, and lost him in a Passion for the Beautiful Theresa"; "The adventures of the Bath, how he got Possession of his Mistress Theresa"; and the Sequel of that Success"; "An account of the Amours of the Fryars and Nuns, and several of their profane Verses to their recluse Mistresses, and of the lewd Freedoms they took with them . . ."; "Of the Marriage of Fryar Pietro to Sister Clara, the unlucky adventure of the Consummation, which was repair'd by Conveying the Fryar to her Cell to pass the whole Night"; and "An Account of the Books the Fryars furnish'd the Nuns with."

The whole collection is quite skilfully unified by the framework of the lapdog, and the adventures of the separate stories are worked into a loose overall narrative. Like Boccaccio's Decameron, each episode is a unified story in itself, but in Gildon's volume each leads into the other. Finally, Gildon's narration, although lacking Boccaccio's finished art, is competent and vigorous.

Having attempted these longer stories of The New Metamorphosis with some success, Gildon in 1709 followed with a similarly conceived, better executed, and generally superior collection titled The Golden Spy: or a Political Journal of the British Rights Entertainments of War and Peace, and Love and Politics.²³ The sub-title, however, "wherein are laid open, The Secret

23. In 1724 a "Second Edition. In Two Volumes." of The New Metamorphosis included The Golden Spy (with a few stories dropped and four new ones added) as the second volume.

"Miraculous Power and Progress of Gold, in the Courts of Europe" more accurately describes the contents; for despite the title page's promise of "Delightful Intrigues, memoirs, Tales, and Adventures, Serious and Comical" the central purpose of the volume is to attack Gildon's old enemy, the "mean Private Spirit" of the age. Early in the prefatory material he promises that in these stories readers will "find Wonders indeed performed by Gold, such as wou'd surprise even a Priest or a Courtier; who are generally so well acquainted with its Value and Force." For reasons of popular appeal the stories pander to popular prejudices against France and Catholicism and amorous intrigue appears in almost all, but the real intent is satire upon avarice.

The volume is built upon the same device as that of A New Metamorphosis, but here Gildon uses the interesting notion of presenting talking coins which narrate the weaknesses and hypocrisies of humans. The first and largest group of stories shows how gold rules courts and governments; the second illustrates the power of gold in aiding the lover to gain the otherwise inaccessible bed of his mistress; a third group attempts to show that money is the real occasion for the zeal of dissenting preachers; and the fourth maintains that corruptive gold, not military force, is the real source of French conquests in Europe. Between these third and fourth groupings are a few narratives which at first glance seem to loosen the unity established by the framework and the central theme, for they deal with the reformers' attempt to prosecute the London streetwalkers. But even these brief bits illustrate Gildon's thesis, for he attributes the zeal of reformers, constables, and magistrates to self-interest. However, in his vehemence against the hypocrisy of the reformers he temporarily strays from his stated purpose.

Gildon's coins mince no words as they explain the secret nature of their power: "we are admitted to those Secrets which are industriously concealed from his [the sun's] eye," and "Whether we go in Bribes to tame the troublesome Zeal of the Patriot; to betray the Statesman's Trust; or purchase the Honour and Chastity of the Matron or Virgin; we, like the sage Ulysses, accomplish most of our greatest Exploits in the Dark." (p. 7) The English coin frankly declares it will "show you . . . whole Parliaments selling their Native Liberty for Gold and Favour with the Prince." (p. 7a) They show scant regard for the professedly good;

I have been in the Hands of the Godly, and been Witness of their Artful Hypocrisie. . . But I wonder that these mighty reformers of Manners extend their care only to Whoring, Drinking and Swearing, all Vices bad enough it is confess'd, yet all retain some certain sort of Human Frailty abstracted from Malice, which is a View one would think peculiar to the Devil; and that is perhaps the reason the Godly leave it untouch'd. Backbiting, Detracting, Calumny, Censuring our Neighbour, over-reaching him in our Dealings, Extortion, Oppression of the Poor and the Needy; is a task worthy of true Reformers; these do a Thousand times the Mischief in the World which the others ever did. (p. 253.)

The coin then concludes, "So in every age Noblemen, Usurers, Traders, and Soldiers have desir'd money more than Fame; some few Wise Men have valued Honesty, while the greatest Knaves praise it; and those who most cry it up, do least for it in Distress." (p. 276) Occasionally, however, Gildon makes his points by deliberately having his coins protest too much; although he lacks Swift's beautiful control of irony and his low-pitched, devastatingly quiet monotone when he ironically concludes a scathing passage, Gildon frequently attempts the same technique with some success. For example, after the guinea has revealed corruptions "which are not to be expos'd to unhallow'd Eyes, for fear the Sense of Things should destroy all confidence betwixt Man and Man, and so put an end to Humane Society" it pretends to withdraw its sting by adding, tongue-in-cheek, "tho' the Plety, Publick

Spirit, Generosity, Learning, and good Sense of the Present Court must ever exempt it from all parallel in this account." (p. 116)

This collection is Gildon's best attempt to date in the art of Fiction. In the separate stories his customary talent for enticing narration d'amour is heightened by a livelier narrative pace than that of his previous works. The stories move much more swiftly than most of his earlier ones, for Gildon gets into his action more deftly and progresses faster towards the climax despite the more numerous but artfully managed preparatory incidents. Better still, his handling of his moral is more artistically done; whereas in earlier narratives the moral sometimes seemed super-imposed and excessively belabored, here it is usually implicit in the action. But the volume also deserves praise in toto, for Gildon makes his stories rise quite convincingly from his idea of talking coins, and despite the range and variety of the stories they convincingly illustrate his central thesis that the mean private spirit of avarice is dangerously abroad in his England. Finally, in presenting a series of fictitious narratives involving close critical scrutiny of a society whose original was clearly England yet ironically protesting too much that it was not England, Gildon anticipated a bit of the plan and technique of Gulliver's Travels. He also showed a trace of Swift's ability to synthesize plot, satire, and style into seemingly genuine straightforward factual narrative. But like so many others, he lacked Swift's beautiful precision.

In 1714 Gildon followed The Golden Spy with a poorer collection of stories, Trojan Tales, Related by Ulysses, Achilles, Helenus, Hector, and Priam. The work is dedicated to "The Right Honourable Thomas Holles Pelham, Lord Pelham of Laughton," because the author believes Pelham is "an Englishman, a true Briton, a Patriot . . . a Man of Sense with a Taste for

"books" who can surpass even his present distinction as a soldier by becoming a patron of letters; for there he will shine alone in an England bereft of "men wise enough to recognize and encourage men of merit without regard to person." The work to follow is then described as "little more than a Paraphrastic Translation . . . a Polite Piece of Morality, which conveys to the mind agreeable and useful lessons; Pleasure with Profit." Although the title page gives no author and the dedication is unsigned, scholarship is correct in attributing this work to Gildon. The dedication clearly indicates its author's responsibility for the stories, and it is crammed with Gildon's old familiar ideas in Gildon's old familiar phrases: there are in England no true patrons; English public men show no signs of becoming discriminating patrons; England needs a Richelieu to form an academy to improve English letters; only farce, whiney, and bombast are presently successful; and the true patron must be a man of knowledge, taste, and generosity.²⁴

Here again Gildon uses a framework for his tales: the Trojans make a social visit to the Greek camp during the siege of Troy, the next day the visit is returned, and both days the great names associated with the famous siege discuss the qualities which comprise the perfect soldier. Achilles, Hector, Paris, Ulysses, and others propound their ideas and relate a story (or in a few cases more than one story) proving their points. After a little lively wrangling they agree that the perfect soldier is devoted to knowledge, is brave, is liberal, and serves religion. This conclusion so neatly fits both the dedication to Pelham and Gildon's own most cherished convictions²⁵ that the whole thing is far too pat to be anything except Gildon's own fiction. Despite the statements in the dedication that the work is a

²⁴. See all the chapters of Part III of this study.

²⁵. See the Chapters of Part III of this study.

"paraphrastic Translation" (a phrase which then implied a wider freedom than it does now) and his comment, "as old as the original is," Gildon nowhere mentions the name nor the age of the original.

As fiction this volume is inferior to The Golden Boy, yet it is certainly not negligible. The frame-work for the tales is effective in its description of the visits, the curiosity of the ladies to see the famous men of the enemy, the noble character of the chief participants, and the impression of venerability in Priam. The tales themselves—rightly called because of their loose structure—move rapidly and are related in a simple, direct style which suits their occasion and narrators. The tales also well serve their stated purpose, for they convincingly illustrate the importance of knowledge, bravery, liberality, and religion. However, their moral is never implicit but is always stated so patly as to weaken the artistic value of the tales. As a whole the volume is at best mediocre.

In 1719 Gildon assembled another post-boy robb'd volume, with the title somewhat altered to The Post-Man Robb'd of his Mail: or, The Packet broke open. Its subtitle, "A Collection of Miscellaneous Letters, Serious and Comical, Amorous and Gallant . . . By the best Wits of the present Age" seems to promise more of the popular fare of the 1692 and 1706 volumes, and after a dedication to Sir Samuel Garth—"a Person that has all the Merits of a great Physician and Poet, and a good Man, who is daily giving Proofs of his Philanthropy"—in a preface Gildon promises "such a variety, that it should please all, and surpass the earlier collection, called The Post-boy robb'd of his Mail"

Actually, however, this volume differs markedly from its predecessors. Its framework is not that of the earlier volumes, for this time three men pick up two boxes of letters on the way to one's house and decide to read them for amusement. They are "Jack Downright the Baron de L'Esprit and the

thevalier Du Bongout, who having been absent a great while in their Ramble about Europe, were now directly going for England, which country though not the Soil of their Nativity was very much valued by them." Before they begin to read they are joined by a fourth, Sir Roger de Whinsey. This change in the framework suits the character of the volume, for instead of the sensational letters promised the contents are almost completely short essays urging Gildon's favorite ideas, and the current whimsies which Sir Roger advocates are all old familiar Gildon enemies, practically the same ones he earlier identified with Sir Indolent Basis in A New Rehearsal. However, the framework includes only about a fourth of the volume, and even the Sir Roger letters soon abandon all narration in favor of direct exposition of ideas. Hence the volume almost immediately becomes a collection of essays, and as such deserves no further mention here. It is, however, often quoted in the later chapters on Gildon's criticism.

Gildon had used stories to carry his theses in both The Golden Boy and Trojan Tales. In 1720 he seized upon the recent furor attending the charges of malpractice against the directors of the South Sea Company again to attack avarice, which he believed was ruining England. In an interesting little collection of short narratives, All for the Better; or, The World Turn'd Upside Down, he offered "The History of the Head-Longs and the Long-Heads" in "Six Novels" titled "The fruitless Scandal," "The Dutiful Son," "The Penitent Miser," "Chastity Rewarded," "Avarice Punished," and "The Fantastic Ambition." The thesis of these is that widespread avarice has caused the recent great economic dislocations. Gildon's medium is a group of travelers in a stage coach who fall to discussing the South Sea Bubble. Each one tells a story in which a great change is brought about by purchases of South Sea Stock, with the virtuous profiting and the avaricious

suffering. They conclude that the whole affair has been God's judgment upon the people of England for widespread avarice and that just reward or punishment has befallen virtuous or avaricious people. The individual narratives are coherent, quick-moving little tales neatly designed to exemplify the thesis, and the whole framework is carried out well. Although slight in bulk Gildon's work here is skillful and convincing as another evidence of his ability to use fiction as a satiric instrument to present his ideas.

The past pages have shown Gildon attempting several varieties of fiction with varying success. What should be said as final judgment? First, he demonstrated considerable skill in epistolary narration: within the bounds of the individual letter; within question-and-answer letters; within a series of exchanges of letters; within a series of successive letters written by the same person; and within the rare arrangement of successive letters all written by one person followed by successive letters all written by the recipient, yet with either series presenting a fairly complete version of the total situation. Second, he early recognized the unifying possibilities of the club device in epistolary fiction and used it both to justify his comments upon the letters and to differentiate the characters of the club members. Third, he anticipated both the general choice of topics and the combination of pleasant narrative and gentle instruction later found in the Spectator. Fourth, in plotting he began with fairly good presentation of short episodes, progressed to stories in which cleverly managed preparatory incidents moved swiftly to a logical climax, and finally achieved a series of such stories carefully interrelated within an inclusive framework. Better still, he so contrived both framework and interrelated separate stories as to exemplify an artistically implicit moral in at least one collection, The Golden Boy. Fifth, he early recognized the satiric possibilities of allegorical

narrative thinly disguised by transparent irony. And finally, from an early heavy, wordy narrative style he eventually fashioned a direct, fairly simple, rather quick-moving one which unfortunately became cumbersome when Gildon came to the instructional matter of his narrations. Far below Swift, well below Defoe at his best but sometimes above his poorer efforts, duller than Tom Brown, slower than Congreve, colder than Steele, looser than Addison, and less vigorous than Ned Ward, Gildon nevertheless deserves a secure minor place in any account of Augustan fiction.