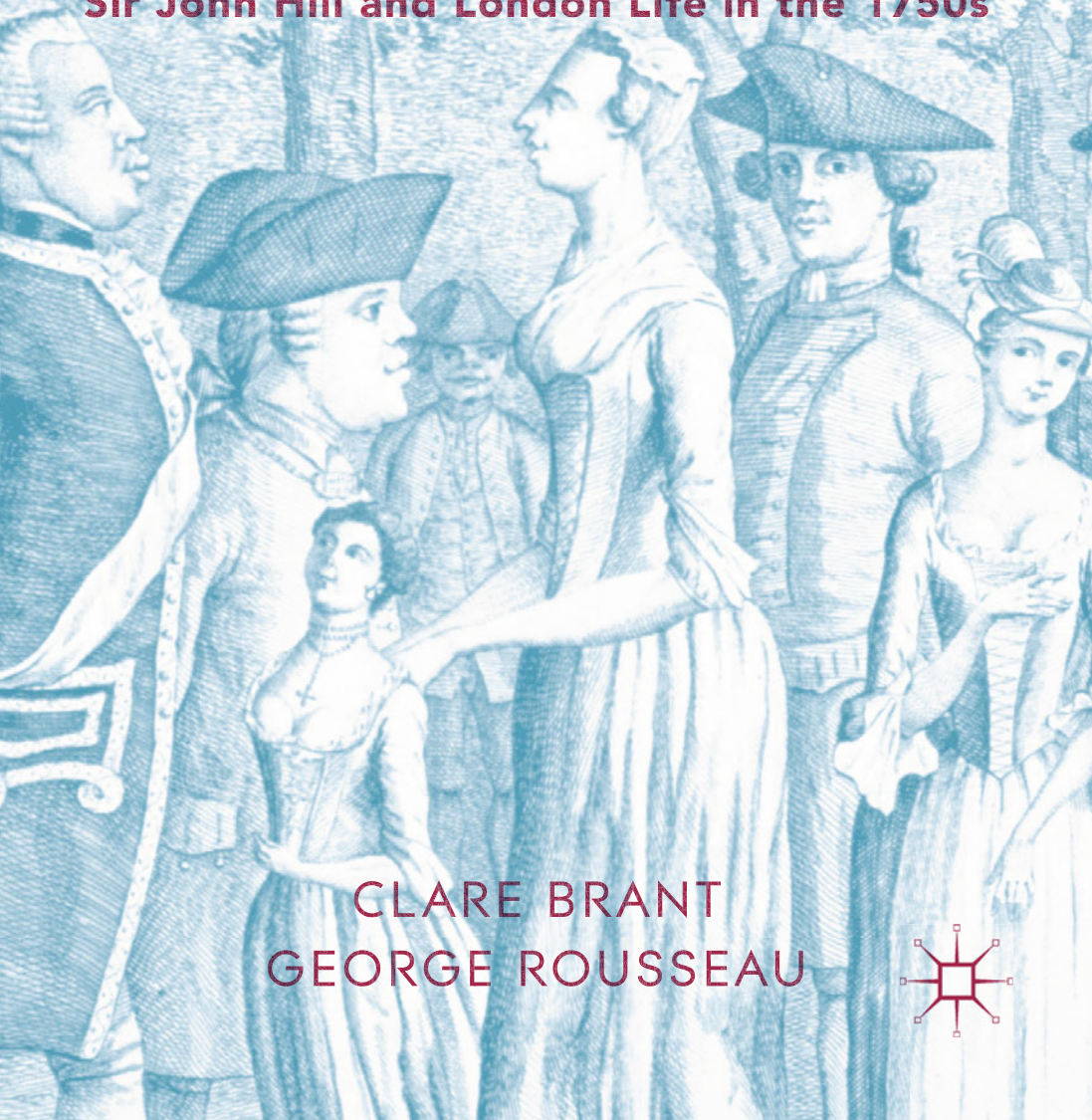
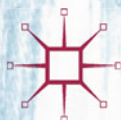


# FAME & FORTUNE

Sir John Hill and London Life in the 1750s



CLARE BRANT  
GEORGE ROUSSEAU



# Fame and Fortune

Clare Brant · George Rousseau  
Editors

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palgrave  
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*To our fathers*

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# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> Clare Brant and George Rousseau	1
<b>Part I Hill and Lives</b>	
<b>The Biographer's Tale: Second Thoughts About 'Filter Hill'</b> George Rousseau	33
<b>The Propagation of Lives: Sir John Who?</b> Clare Brant	63
<b>Sir John Hill and Friendship</b> Emrys D. Jones	85
<b>Part II Hill and Literature</b>	
<b>John Hill and Mary Cooper: A Case Study in Eighteenth-Century Publishing</b> Beverly Schneller	107

**‘The Ravished Organs of the Attentive Audience’:**  
**John Hill and Christopher Smart** 121  
Min Wild

**‘Unassisted Hill’: Churchill’s Satire and the  
Fate of the Virtuoso** 137  
Adam Rounce

**John Hill and His Erotic Satires** 153  
Julie Peakman

**Part III Hill and Public Places**

**The Doctor as Man of Letters: Mid-Georgian  
Transformations** 173  
George Rousseau

**Coffeehouse Sociability, Science and Public Life in  
John Hill’s ‘The Inspector’** 195  
Markman Ellis

**The Inspector at Large: Investigating the Spaces  
of London** 219  
Chris Ewers

**Part IV Hill and Sciences**

**A Dwarf on Giant’s Shoulders: Sir John Hill and Geology** 243  
Christopher J. Duffin

**Sir John Hill as Botanist: *The Vegetable System*** 267  
Brent Elliott



<b>John Hill, <i>Exotic Botany</i> and the Competitive World of Eighteenth-Century Horticulture</b>	291
Sarah Easterby-Smith	
<b>Bibliography</b>	315
<b>Index</b>	341

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## ABBREVIATIONS

FRS	Fellow of the Royal Society
LDA	<i>London Daily Advertiser and Literary Gazette</i>
LPH	<i>The Letters and Papers of Sir John Hill</i> ed. G. S. Rousseau (New York: AMS Press, 1982)
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
Phil. Trans.	<i>Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society</i>

# LIST OF FIGURES

## Introduction

- Fig. 1 'Lusus Naturae, or Carracaturas of the Present Age', 1752.  
Etching by John June after J. L'Agneau 8
- Fig. 2 'A Night Scene at Ranelagh on Wednesday 6th of May 1752'.  
Engraving by Leumuth [?] after Clody 14

## The Biographer's Tale: Second Thoughts About 'Filter Hill'

- Fig. 1 'The Bedford Coffee House, Covent Garden, in the early 1760s' 37
- Fig. 2 'A General Prospect of Vaux Hall Gardens, Shewing at one  
View the disposition of the whole Gardens'. Engraving  
by Johann Sebastian Müller after Samuel Wale, 1751 40
- Fig. 3 'View of St. James's Square', c. 1752, by J. Bowles, from  
*Survey of London*: Volumes 29 and 30, St. James Westminster,  
Part 1, ed. F.H.W. Sheppard (London, 1960), Plate 130 41

## The Propagation of Lives: Sir John Who?

- Fig. 1 'Portrait of Sir John Hill'. Mezzotint by Richard Houston  
after Francis Cotes, 1757 66

## Sir John Hill and Friendship

- Fig. 1 'The Temple of Friendship at Stowe' from *The Beauties  
of Stow: or a Description of the Pleasant Seat, and Noble  
Gardens, of the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Cobham*,  
1750. Engraving by George Bickham 87
- Fig. 2 'Tullus Aufidius: My rage is gone and I am struck with sorrow'.  
Engraving by Henry Singleton, supervised by C. Taylor, 1793 93

**John Hill and His Erotic Satires**

- Fig. 1 Title page of *Lucina sine Concubitu* (London: M. Cooper, 1750) 158
- Fig. 2 Spermatozoon. Homunculus in *Essay de dioptrique* by Nicolas Hartsoetker (J. Anisson: Paris, 1694). Woodcut 161
- Fig. 3 Poultry egg incubators, Plate 1 from *Pratique de l'Art de Faire Eclorre et d'Elever en Toute Saison des Oiseaux Domestiques de Toutes Especies, Soit par le moyen de la chaleur du fumier, soit par le moyen de celle du feu ordinaire*, by René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1751) 163

**The Doctor as Man of Letters: Mid-Georgian Transformations**

- Fig. 1 'The Author [John Hill] in the Character of a foreign Empiric.' Anonymous etching, c. 1742 179

**Coffeehouse Sociability, Science and Public Life in John Hill's 'The Inspector'**

- Fig. 1 'John's Coffee House', 1745. Etching by Callender (active mid-century) 206

**The Inspector at Large: Investigating the Spaces of London**

- Fig. 1 'Mrs Midnight's Animal Comedians', satirical print (etching) by John June, 1753 225
- Fig. 2 'London viewed from the north by Antonio Canaletto' (pen and brown ink and grey wash over black chalk), 1746–1768 227
- Fig. 3 'A View of the Mall in St. James's Park, &c/Vue du Mail dans le Park de St. Jacques', print (etching and engraving) made by Thomas Bowles after J. Maurer, published by Henry Overton and Robert Sayer, 1753 232
- Fig. 4 'Stand Coachman, or the Haughty Lady Well Fitted', anonymous satirical print published by J. Wakelin. Etching, 1750 236

**A Dwarf on Giant's Shoulders: Sir John Hill and Geology**

- Fig. 1 Blowpipe kit (made by W. A. Taylor of Penzance) and reproductions of three mouth blowpipes which belonged to the English chemists William Hyde Wollaston (1766–1828), Smithson Tennant (1761–1815) and the Swedish chemist Tobern Olaf Bergman (1735–1784), nineteenth-century 250
- Fig. 2 Title page, Sir John Hill, *Theophrastus's History of Stones*. Second edition (London: 1774) 252
- Fig. 3 'The cuff compound microscope', by John Cuff (1708–1772) 255

**Sir John Hill as Botanist: *The Vegetable System***

- |        |  |     |
|--------|--|-----|
| Fig. 1 | Incomplete colouring in a plate from John Hill,<br><i>The Vegetable System</i> [1759–1775], vol. 15, plate 30:<br>‘Dyeweeds, or Crotons’ | 270 |
| Fig. 2 | ‘Asters’, <i>The Vegetable System</i> , vol. 2, plate 54   | 271 |
| Fig. 3 | ‘Thorn weed’, <i>The Vegetable System</i> , vol. 5, plate 21   | 272 |
| Fig. 4 | ‘Feverwort’, <i>The Vegetable System</i> , vol. 5, plate 7   | 273 |
| Fig. 5 | ‘Proliferous Pineapple’, <i>The Vegetable System</i> , vol. 1, plate 13  | 281 |
| Fig. 6 | ‘Sections of Pineapples’, <i>The Vegetable System</i> , vol. 1, plate 14   | 282 |

**John Hill, *Exotic Botany* and the Competitive World of Eighteenth-Century Horticulture**

- |        |   |     |
|--------|---|-----|
| Fig. 1 | ‘Bohea Tea’ from John Hill, <i>Exotic Botany</i> (1759)   | 299 |
| Fig. 2 | Portrait of James Lee, from <i>An Introduction to the Science of Botany, fourth edition, corrected and enlarged, by James Lee, son and successor to the author</i> (London, 1810) | 302 |
| Fig. 3 | ‘Lepia’ from John Hill, <i>Exotic Botany</i> (1759)   | 306 |
| Fig. 4 | ‘Poinciana’ from John Hill, <i>Exotic Botany</i> (1759)   | 308 |

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Sir John Hill as Botanist: <i>The Vegetable System</i></b>		
Table 1	Sir John Hill's classification of plants	277
Table 2	The publishers of <i>The Vegetable System</i>	286

## A NOTE ON DATES

New Style dates are used throughout this book: when the Calendar Act came into effect in 1752, the New Year began on 1 January and England adopted the Gregorian calendar, skipping eleven days. So, Wednesday 2 September 1752 was followed by Thursday 14 September 1752.



# Introduction

*Clare Brant and George Rousseau*

## ORIGINS OF THE BOOK

This book grew out of a biography and an international conference held by the Centre for Life-Writing Research at King's College London to coincide with the tercentenary of Hill's birthday on 14 November 2014. Hill's tercentenary was also commemorated by the Linnaean Society and Geological Society in London and at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies in the USA. However, the KCL conference provided the spur for this book; it was catalysed by George Rousseau's biography of Hill, *Notorious* (2012), which was favourably reviewed,<sup>1</sup> shortlisted for book prizes in the USA, and put Sir John Hill back on the map of eighteenth-century studies. A distinguished scholar of natural history, Dr D.E. Allen, wondered whether Hill's career typified a 'moment of madness' in mid-Georgian London:

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... of these curious outbreaks (of an impish delight in mockery and lampooning) probably none has been more enduring than that of the eighteenth-century's middle years, when even learned pursuits such as natural history were not immune altogether. [All were] mere passing aberrations compared to the prolonged embracing of such distractions as John Hill succumbed to.<sup>2</sup>

Allen does not comment further on the 'moment of madness' represented by metropolitan London during the 1750s; this book attempts to supply some of its contexts, and to explain more of the 'distractions' and learned pursuits of Hill and his contemporaries.

Nonetheless, despite the appearance of *Notorious*, Hill lingered in the shadows: even eighteenth-century specialists lost no sleep over (as Clare Brant titles her chapter) 'Sir John Who?' A few reviewers expressed their amazement at the number of fields Hill cultivated but there ended their curiosity. Rousseau's biography contextualized Hill's polymathy and explained that, while he was a household name in his own day, he plummeted into obscurity afterwards. But Rousseau also established Hill as a controversial figure of early celebrity, a perspective this book develops further.<sup>3</sup>

The London conference held promise for Hill by dint of multi-disciplinary recuperation of Hill's interests. We therefore include chapters on Hill's botanical, geological, literary and public activities, and his character considered from the perspective of his own generation as well as our present one. An emergent theme of the conference was that mid-Georgian metropolitan London was overdue for reevaluation.<sup>4</sup> This was a step forward from Rousseau's goals in the biography. Whereas *Notorious* is the first full life of a neglected figure, the conference pushed biographical and chronological boundaries further, as reflected in our title: *Fame and Fortune*. Contributors to this volume share themes of ambition, competition and tribalism, patronage and preferment, the expanding metropolis, the growth of commerce, communication, networks, motion and movement, road traffic and other forms of interaction, all exploring the types of public space London was becoming. A tercentenary conference devoted to a single figure metamorphosed into a study of that figure in his cultural place.<sup>5</sup>

Hill's meteoric rise to notoriety during the 1750s remains central to the plan of *Fame and Fortune*, especially in relation to the expanding city and investments in new forms of print culture, celebrity and

self-promotion. A second objective for the book is exploration of the changing world of knowledge and science, extending beyond Hill to his audiences and contemporaries. Presenting Hill's activities in coffee-houses, learned societies and institutions, pleasure gardens, markets, theatres, bagnios, and other meeting places frequented by the devotees of fashionable (and not-so-fashionable) society, our contributors also probe such sites for what they were *becoming* during the 1750s. And we situate these endeavours in the broader contexts of a society pushing beyond the very different 1740s. That decade has been assessed primarily in the light of collective subjectivities in new literary genres;<sup>6</sup> the 1750s responded to these outlets of communication—particularly in expanded print culture but also in new social and commercial developments we adumbrate later. We are aware of the limitations of decadal thinking but, when carefully handled, thinking in decades can help pinpoint ways mid-Georgian metropolitan culture was altering.

The 1750s was the decade of the Calendar Act (1751), which introduced the Gregorian calendar and made 1 January New Year's Day; Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753); the Jew Bill (also of 1753 but repealed in 1754), which permitted the naturalization of Jews; early in 1750, the first reported earthquakes recorded since 1601, obscured by the later and better-known Lisbon earthquakes of 1755 which contributed local shockwaves to moralizing;<sup>7</sup> the first burletta performed and premiered in Ranelagh in 1754 (a burletta is a short comic opera); the completion of Westminster Bridge in 1750 (for the first time, opening a new crossing over the Thames to rival London Bridge and accommodate numbers of new stage coaches crossing the City); the operation of London's first professional police force, all of six men, the Bow Street Runners, founded by Hill's antagonist, the magistrate Henry Fielding. In 1753 the British Museum was established, funded by the state. The decade also includes the landmark publication of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755, after which the English language had a magisterial and stabilizing reference book. Other important advances of the decade include Joseph Black's identification of carbon dioxide, or 'fixed air', and John Harrison's No.1 sea watch, the best marine chronometer to date.

Cultural history through landmarks, however, can mask complexities. For instance, in architecture the 1750s saw the beginnings of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill Gothic and Robert Adams' neoclassicism. A comparable polarity appears in 1757 in the publication of

Edmund Burke's *Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, and the first appearance of Harris's *List of Covent Garden Ladies*, a pornographic directory. Although the decade began with London socially affected by demobilization in particular, it ended on a high for Britain: the Seven Years War (1756–1763)—from which Britain emerged as a dominant world power, producing the nation's so-called *Annus Mirabilis* of 1759—in which victories over the French kept London busily jubilant. The 1750s in Britain were neither simply the end of the first half of the eighteenth century nor the beginning of the second, nor even both, but a decade in which tumult had its own distinct specificities.

With London energized in new ways, it is therefore no wonder that print magnate Ralph Griffiths decided to fund a new column in 1750 in the *London Daily Advertiser* called 'The Inspector', gathering news from diverse parts of the metropolis and commenting on a city in hectic motion. Griffiths chose an 'Inspector' to present it—John Hill, a man seemingly always in motion. Intellectual developments did not lag behind the growth of these public spaces, even if new empirical knowledge could not rival earlier leaps of the Scientific Revolution from Boyle and Hobbes to Locke and Newton. Even so, the 1750s demonstrated how acutely retrieval of the past (antiquarianism and archaeology) was co-existing with new theories in natural history (Linnaeus), geology (the mid-Georgian birth of this science in Britain),<sup>8</sup> medicine (especially the consequences of public awareness that people had nerves),<sup>9</sup> herbology (the first commercialization of herbal remedies), and psychology (the prescription of all sorts of panaceas selling vigorously to quell what we today consider anxiety and depression), to name a few.<sup>10</sup>

*Fame and Fortune* aims to demonstrate how understanding of new social arrangements was changing and how Hill, uncannily, unwittingly, and often intuitively, was a type of filter, or strainer, embodying their transformations. George Rousseau explains in his first essay what he thinks a filter does:

A filter clarifies, purifies, and reveals what has been dirty and impure; it strains through the purified liquid or physical material and leaves the rest as waste. A filter is a common physical object as well as metaphor ... and it functions as both in this chapter: the *purification* from the filter resulting in the modern scholar's sense of a mid-Georgian world now almost three centuries removed, and the *waste* remaining inside the filter forming the

image of Hill among his contemporaries as *persona non grata*, upstart, parvenu, all of which I aim to account for in the evidence for an autistic Hill. The image of the filter further applies to Hill because he illuminates the excesses of the 1750s; his frenzied paper wars and coffeehouse controversies reveal how dizzying and extreme those excesses had become.<sup>11</sup>

A filter in this sense encompasses an historical figure who suggests how scholars can explore the texture of that decade. ‘Filter Hill’, as Rousseau calls his subject, serves as an individual who is a visible figure of mid-Georgian London, yet also a type and anti-type who helps us better understand the people and places of mid-Georgian London—its daily life and cultural practices. Our work in *Fame and Fortune* admittedly requires deft passage in navigating among those figures who traversed the streets, squares, theatres and pleasure gardens, and the taxonomies of understanding they imagined. If the 1740s was indeed a watershed in the eighteenth century—viewed as an end or a beginning, as many scholars have sought to demonstrate—then what framed it and what followed?<sup>12</sup> Hence our inquiry into the 1750s, a decade that has gathered no similar defining marker.

## HISTORIES OF LONDON AND HISTORIES OF LITERATURE

Separate studies of London and literature have been prolific and many comment on the 1750s. Yet if Hill was the ‘filter’ we are claiming, why has he been overlooked and, more crucially for our argument, what difference does his inclusion make? This is a salient question this book poses. We do not say the decade has been understudied—far from it, or that its literary history is defective or inchoate. Rather, that inclusion of unusual figures such as Hill, culled from the margins and perimeters of the currently imaginable, proffer a new sense of the era. One could have pronounced similarly for Oliver Goldsmith, another pivotal figure in the 1750s who has similarly been sidelined, although not to the extent of polymathic Hill. One reason there has been no panoptic approach to Goldsmith in the decade in which he mostly flourished is that he defies so many of the pieties and conventions.<sup>13</sup> Hill augments this challenge. Not only did he sabotage convention and challenge authority, he tested patronage more aggressively than his contemporaries and broke the boundaries that were forming between fields of knowledge. His contemporaries severely punished him for these violations, more than he ought to have been.

Histories of literature rarely trace the history of print at that time, a further reason Hill is of interest. Hill not only colluded with print rogues such as Mary Cooper; conventional printers and publishers such as Robert Baldwin, the producer of orthodox science books, also made contracts with him (or Hill with them) and it would be hard to name anyone else in the decade who aimed to deflate aspiring literary careers (Smollett, Fielding, Smart and Kenrick represent only the prominent names) more efficaciously than Hill did.<sup>14</sup> This is what Hill's cabal of 'Malevolios' at the Bedford coffeehouse sought to achieve in their nocturnal activities. It is of course a history of very masculine-focused aggression, taking attention away from writers such as Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding and Charlotte Lennox, all of whom produced several significant novels throughout the 1750s, but whose achievements were evidently not thought by Hill to be worth wrecking.<sup>15</sup> And it raises the question as to why Hill's gender orbit simply ignored women. With Cooper's press, Hill could be prolific; with Baldwin, he could make money, through ample royalties with which he afforded his ostentatious lifestyle. Baldwin was the type of printer accustomed to amass multi-volume works and reproduce them, quickly and cheaply, for profit. Hill's 'Botanical Tracts' offer good specimens: they included all his short botanical writings to 1762 and sold at a hefty price.<sup>16</sup>

Most histories of Georgian London are eloquent about its changing landscapes and burgeoning buildings but taciturn about its textures and intricate social arrangements, especially on the relations between places and people, and the complex ways in which social stratification played out in specific places. Consider, for instance, the Mall, a gravel walk on the north side of St James's Park, laid out by Le Nôtre for Charles II, which had become by the 1750s part of the interlacing paths on which Londoners of all kinds circulated. César de Saussure (1705–1783), a Swiss travel writer who came to London and fell in love with it (so much so that he returned for long periods), described it this way:

Society comes to walk here [along the Mall] on fine, warm days, from seven to ten in the evening, and in winter from one to three o'clock ... the park is so crowded at times that you cannot help touching your neighbour. Some people come to see, some to be seen, and others to seek their fortunes; for many priestesses of Venus are abroad ... all on the look out for adventures.<sup>17</sup>

Although favoured by the fashionable the Mall was open to everyone, as its appearances in the works of Goldsmith attest: ‘let a man’s character, sentiments, or complexion, be what they will, he can find company in London to match them. If he be splenetic, he may every day meet companions on the seats in St James’s Park, with whose groans he may mix his own, and pathetically talk of the weather.’<sup>18</sup> The Mall was a popular location for chance encounters on and off the page, especially ones in which actions and reactions created problematic interactions, like this one:

It happened about six weeks ago that VENTOSUS, as he was walking in the Mall with an officer of distinction, met AMELIA in company with several ladies and a gentleman. He thought fit to bow to AMELIA with a supercilious respect, which had greatly the air of an insult: of this compliment AMELIA, though she looked him in the face, took no notice: by this calm disdain he was at once disappointed and confused; he was stung by an effort of his own malignity, and his breast swelled with passion which he could not vent.<sup>19</sup>

The all-important novel of the 1750s was perfecting this sociology of personal interchange, particularly its cognitive and democratic subtleties,<sup>20</sup> but its underpinnings lay in daily human exchanges, verbal and silent in a real historical place. Something of this complicated relay of looks and looking is caught by a print of 1752 that is our cover image for *Fame and Fortune*: the figures are all choreographically related yet most have different sightlines. This multiplicity of points of view makes a strong metaphor for our recuperation of both Hill and his times. The strangeness of the print’s style exemplifies the difficulties of recovering exact textures of the 1750s. Elusivity extends to the artist: J. L’Agneau may be a pseudonym, thinks Sheila O’Connell, curator of an exhibition entitled *London 1753* (at the British Museum in 2003).<sup>21</sup> L’Agneau is known to have produced two other prints in 1752. One depicts a scene of secret flagellation; the other, ‘*Lusus Naturae, or Carracturas of the Present Age*’ (Fig. 1), features Hill on the left foreground in company with a woman, probably Elizabeth Canning, in a similarly peculiar and strangely stylised line-up of luminaries.<sup>22</sup> Identifications here are no easier than in *Lusus Naturae*: as O’Connell observes, ‘Features, though exaggerated, clearly belong to individuals and remain to be identified.’ These figures include Lord Chesterfield (statesman, wit and writer; his 1750 Calendar Act



**Fig. 1** ‘Lusus Naturae, or Carracaturas of the Present Age’, 1752. Etching by John June after J. L’Agneau. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

established the Gregorian calendar in Britain) and Sir Samuel Prime (looking straight out at us, he was mocked for marrying his cook, as per the paper in front of him). The print’s title suggests people can be wonders of nature; like cabinets of curiosities, a group also provokes curiosity. Under Hill’s feet a paper reads ‘not to know me argues thyself unknown’. George Rousseau has observed that the *Lusus Naturae* public cluster is situated in a political space,<sup>23</sup> in *View of the Mall*, the figures are interwoven rather than grouped, in public space and even less ‘knowable’.

More curiously yet, in *View of the Mall* L’Agneau’s figures fold into a typology of the ordinary: a military man, prostitutes, beaux. Bodies—thin, fat, dressed according to station or occupation, accoutred—take on mercurial movements—spry, supplicating, provocative—which speak to interactions, also strange and elusive. Who are these people? We don’t know. And what are they doing on the Mall? We can only guess. Sheila describes the print as ‘suggestive of how leisured promenading in St James’s Park might have been seen by those at the workaday end of town’



and she may be right.<sup>24</sup> Yet L'Agneau's figures are strange, their silences eloquent, their stiff silhouettes and exaggerated faces full of presence and purpose. Disproportions startle: outsize heads and elongated faces co-exist with normal perspective. This admixture of odd and conventional provides an apposite metaphor for representing Hill and London life in the 1750s. It thrives on the blend—people in their contexts, one unusual man and his times—as well as recognition that metaphors for the age are intrinsic to deep-layer reconstructions of a society transforming itself.

### THE NEW CITY AND ITS PUBLIC SPACES

Hill's London at mid-century is also an intriguing imbrication of urban and green places. He sought out nature there as well as its populated spaces of culture—theatres, assemblies, clubs and coffeehouses, fairs and markets, and above all its pleasure gardens at Ranelagh and Vauxhall. A writer celebrating summer entertainments in London in 1750 recorded, 'who has not frequently heard [among the gay and polite], "How many trades were thereby encourag'd; of what advantages such places of resort were to the government; how much they advanc'd politeness and society; that fair weather invited company to Vauxhall; and that a cloudy evening made well for Ranelagh"'.<sup>25</sup> The 'Inspector', as Hill became known for his daily editorials in the *London and Daily Advertiser*, relished these places of resort, especially their fashionable activities—fireworks at Cuper's Gardens, an auction in the Minories, coffeehouses for conversation—and conjoined his own choice of place and bustle in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens where he habitually carried a pocket microscope to discover more about London's smallest inhabitants. He sallied out to London's green penumbra, the verdant fields and common places as much in London as around it, even allowing for a much smaller city than today. An anonymous writer of the 1750s gives fascinating details of hedgerow food and field fare, such as the French gathering dandelions for salads in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and describes how Londoners of all classes re-provisioned themselves on Sundays from the surrounding country.<sup>26</sup> Hill could afford to have an inedible interest in plants and animals, though as an herbalist he was attentive to their uses and promoted simples. When he writes of microscopic life, London disappears, levels into a realm of discovery or turns to watery reflection. Hill alludes to the great smoke of London and his relief at escaping its hurry and fatigue; he also relished its opportunities.

One figure, now iconic, consistently connected writers and painters: Hogarth, held up as a model by Henry Fielding, the anonymous author of *Low-Life* and many others. Hogarth supplied humour, types and moods. The idea of ‘Hogarthian’ London still has currency, as Martin Rowson—a graphic artist who often uses Hogarth—explains:

[Hogarthian] is an interesting adjective too. In his book *The Fatal Shore*,<sup>27</sup> describing the city from which the first white Australians were transported, Robert Hughes summed it up rather well: ‘Modern squalor is squalid yet Georgian squalor is “Hogarthian”, an art form in itself.’ Without quite knowing why, we all recognize what it implies: an earthy, vicious yet also rather jolly rumbustiousness, neatly summing up all we think we understand by the 18th century. For instance, we instantly recognize the difference between what is meant by ‘Hogarthian’ and ‘Dickensian’ London. The latter is filthy, crime-ridden, sentimental, pitiful but also, once we’ve recognized its hideous nature, reformable and consequently redeemable; the former, on the other hand, while being filthy and crime-ridden and occasionally sentimental, is depicted without pity, without hope of redemption, and is therefore, in its cynical slapstick, much, much funnier. That this isn’t quite what Hogarth intended is very much beside the point.<sup>28</sup>

Gin is hugely important here: it supplied indifference to irredeemtion, for one thing. As biographer and historian Frank McLynn puts it, ‘In 1759 England was still a rigidly stratified society, with the oligarchy enjoying the best of everything in terms of conspicuous consumption while the masses suffered wartime dearth, warding off the misery with a per capita consumption of spirits 25% higher than at the beginning of the century.’<sup>29</sup> Discussing the Gin Craze, Nicholas Rogers identifies a golden age of gin drinking: ‘Spirit production did not fall appreciably until the late 1750s, making the period 1723 to 1757 the golden age of gin drinking, when output was consistently above 3.5 million gallons annually and in half of these years over 5 million.’<sup>30</sup> Hill was included as a presence in Hogarth’s *Beer Street*, an engraving of London sobriety, for his *Review of the Works of the Royal Society* (1751). Hill was apparently displeased. It is the only satire of him in Hogarth’s works.<sup>31</sup>

In the rich scholarship on eighteenth-century London there is much to satisfy the Hogarthian tendency, especially in Vic Gatrell’s history of artistic and debauched Covent Garden.<sup>32</sup> The famously London-fixed Johnson becomes a touchstone of a roughly politer taste in Lisa Picard’s

*Dr Johnson's London* (2001), although his famous aphorism tends to be more remembered for its first than its second half: 'When a man is tired of London he is tired of life, for there is in London all that life can afford.' Hill's London, like Johnson's, is a chronotope of time and space and a bustling, noisy one. In Johnson's 1738 poem *London*, an imitation of Juvenal's third satire, 'th' affrighted Crowd's tumultuous Cries/Roll thro' the Streets, and thunder to the Skies'.<sup>33</sup> It is through these streets that the 'Inspector' roves, as George Rousseau observed in *Notorious*: 'It presented Hill as "walking the city" and "roving in his chariot," at a time when London's newly curious, and often fawning, inhabitants, were also compulsively strolling.'<sup>34</sup> One might think that Johnson's bi-weekly periodical *The Rambler* (1750–1752) evinced a commitment to urban walking, but not at all: the name (which Boswell didn't think much of) was chosen, Johnson told Reynolds, so he could stop thinking about it and go to bed. Far more than Johnson, Hill's *Inspector* promoted ambulation, though, as Rousseau observed, 'it soon became apparent in the columns themselves that he himself was the centre of attention far more than the expanding city.'<sup>35</sup> Hill's frequently aural London enables the 'Inspector' to listen to conversations, supposedly real, many concerning himself. Hill's London is richer, faster, lighter than Johnson's: he explicitly aspired to fame and fortune, and to the elegancies of life which could be bought.

Then as now, London has a curious double existence as a unifying signifier and a multifarious topography: an assemblage of distinct locales that combine into a general urban entity. In the mid-eighteenth century, such distinctions were stronger than now. 'To talk of London as if it were a unity is to forget the intense localism of the lives lived there', says Vic Gatrell, devoting his study to 'the Town':

What contemporaries called 'the Town' had developed between the City of London and the City of Westminster in the seventeenth century. With the Piazza at its centre, it stretched from Soho and Leicester Fields (now Square) to Drury Lane in the east, and from St Giles's and Long Acre in the north to Charing Cross and the Strand in the south. It had important outreaches eastwards along Fleet Street and into the booksellers' quarter of St. Paul's Churchyard, but you could walk across its core in ten or fifteen minutes.<sup>36</sup>

An anonymous author of the 1750s presented the city hour by hour on a summer Sunday in *Low-Life: Or One Half of the World, Knows not how the Other Half Live*.<sup>37</sup> It is as immersive as Henry Mayhew's account of London life in the 1840s, and provides a valuable extension of ideas about the mid-century metropolis. 'Low-lifer', let us call him, puts the poor at the centre of his stage and layers of occupational groups between them and the rich, who appear as a source of help in money and broken victuals. The lowest of hack writers, legal scribes, are mentioned in passing among those who stay home because their clothes are not decent enough to go abroad: no wonder John Hill indulged in silks and ruffles. Fine clothes were not idle costumes but literally a material part of social mobility; they enabled entrance to finer places. Carolyn Steedman has discussed *Low-Life* at length, with an analysis of what she notes are the 'very peculiar acoustic properties of *Low-life* as a text'.<sup>38</sup> One of the many striking features of 'Low-lifer's' account is just how much walking Londoners did. On a Sunday half the townspeople walked out to the country to socialise, take in the air or a prospect, eat and drink. Steedman opines that 'no one has a body in this text',<sup>39</sup> and she argues persuasively.

But there is also a case for there being many bodies in *Low-Life* in that state of liminal embodiment, drunkenness. 'Low-lifer's' citizenry is continuously drunk, or sleeping off one bout before starting another, or eyeing up a mug or a bottle in anticipation of the next drink. Steedman discusses the author's unusual style in terms of his preference for 'free existential clauses', and there is a philosophical liberty for the text's subjects (not its more moralizing author) in drinking to get drunk. Hill was most unusual in not caring for drink.<sup>40</sup> 'Low-lifer' includes a paean of praise to Hogarth whose depictions of Gin Street seem wildly innocent in comparison to 'Low-lifer's' London, which is curiously written in gerundive sentences as if other parts of speech had simply passed out drunk. All the doing, saying and telling of *Low-Life* circles round being drunk, hungover, thirsty and getting drunk, a process intersecting with another process, latent with violence, of cheating, lying, slandering, stealing and fighting. Not all of this loop, however, is confined to the poor, and on London streets much of it was visible and audible.

*Low-Life* is also attentive to the circulation of money in London and the dodges and feints around debt. Joining the beau monde, Hill appeared to earn fantastic sums: he earned £1500 from journalism in 1751, according to Horace Walpole, who was outraged again in 1759

when he learnt ‘this journeyman [Hill] is one of the first men preferred in the new reign: he is made gardener of Kensington, a place worth £2000 a year.’<sup>41</sup> It was in such ways that Hill’s ambition was well-served by the public and, eventually, by patronage centred in London.

But ambition could also partake of its obliquities, as represented in ‘A Night Scene at Ranelagh’, showing Hill being caned and brutally attacked by a man and his accomplices (Fig. 2). Betty Rizzo identified the assailant as the swash-buckling and money-hungry Mountefort Browne.<sup>42</sup> Hill had cast Browne in an ‘Inspector’ column as ‘empty-headed Clody’, a witless fop who strolls about London with sawdust in his head. Browne demanded an apology; Hill refused it, and the caning at Ranelagh was the upshot.<sup>43</sup> Then ‘Clody’ asked Henry Fielding, in his capacity as a magistrate, for help. Hill drew the conclusion Browne was put up to the job by his enemies. Given the incident’s date, 6 May 1752, at the very height of the paper wars, Fielding’s ‘Junto’ may have played some part, although Rizzo never discovered any evidence for it.

The point for ‘public spaces’ is not Browne’s biographical enigma, or the incident’s further details; histories of Ranelagh and Vauxhall in the eighteenth century reveal no other similar incident.<sup>44</sup> Hill vexed whole segments of his contemporaries in ways no other mid-Georgian had or would. The public’s response as reported in newspapers (and by Hill’s lawyers too) was a new sense of crime in relatively respectable places—after all, Ranelagh was no Covent Garden or Pimp Lane. The new Bow Street brigade was too small and far away for their ‘runners’ to be useful. The spectators at Ranelagh that night feared pandemonium would ensue though once Hill lay prostrate Browne and his cohorts fled. The cost to the public’s perception of security was considerable. It generated a sense of no longer being safe to ‘stir abroad as once one had’, in the words of one commentator writing a few days after Hill was beaten.<sup>45</sup>

## JOHN HILL AND HIS INTELLECTUAL CONTEXTS: MAVERICK CONFORMIST?

To approach Hill-the-man in biographical isolation or solitude, without context, sans broad socioeconomic and political backdrop is risky business, even though Hill’s works are notably silent about contemporary politics. It is one reason we have soft-pedalled the politics of the 1750s in this book, despite the claim of some political historians that the decade



Fig. 2 'A Night Scene at Ranelagh on Wednesday 6th of May 1752'. Engraving by Leumuth [?] after Clody. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London