

An Introduction to *The Stage-Coach* from the Chawton House Library Collection.

References to the work of Miss Susan Smythies rarely appear in modern criticism of the eighteenth-century book trade. Simon Dickie highlights ‘the critical silence about one of the most popular and prolific mid-century novelists, Susan Smythies of Colchester’, emphasising the illogicality of her disappearance from print, and blaming this on critics.¹ In reading the relatively obscure Smythies, we find ourselves removed from the scholarly support upon which we often rely, placing her work distinctly outside of the literary canon. This introduction tackles the question of where her first novel, *The Stage-Coach: Containing the Character of Mr. Manly, and the History of his Fellow Travellers*, should be placed in relation to the emerging eighteenth-century novel.

Jerry Beasley prudently states that it is useful ‘to investigate the climate in which great bursts of artistic energy take place, for by so doing we can heighten our understanding of the works of art themselves’.² As Dickie asserts the importance of all authors who claimed prominence in their respective time periods, including those who no longer hold comparable claims upon the literary marketplace, Beasley underlines the necessity of placing these authors within the wider tapestry of their literary climate. This introduction to *The Stage-Coach* endeavours to play its part in the wider contextualisation of the eighteenth-century literary marketplace. Initially, a consideration of the physical book itself, its publishing history, and critical reception as a manifestation of the value that both the printer and purchaser placed upon it is necessitated, as these aspects indicate a work’s contemporary literary status and original readership. This facilitates a later examination of the literary techniques and social influences at work within and upon the novel as a whole.

¹ Simon Dickie, ‘The Forgotten Best-Sellers of Early English Fiction’ in *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2011), p. 366.

² Jerry C. Beasley, ‘Romance and the ‘New’ Novels of Richardson, Fielding and Smollett’, *Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900*, 16.3 (Summer, 1976), p. 437.

The *London Evening Post* describes the first edition of *The Stage-Coach* as, ‘Beautifully printed in Two neat Pocket Volumes, Price Six Shillings bound’.³ The quality of paper and the absence of printing errors in the copy of the novel in the Chawton House Library substantiates the advertisement’s assertion that the volumes are ‘Beautifully printed’. This suggests that the publisher thought the novel marketable to a readership which could afford a high standard of printing. The claim that the purchaser will find a bound edition in the bookseller’s shop brings into question whether the marbled cover of the Chawton House Library’s copy is the original binding. Bernard Middleton states that ‘many [gentlemen] had favourite styles of binding’, which suggests that the distinctive, though not rare, marbled cover of the Chawton Library’s copy may have been a later addition.⁴ On the other hand, as this decorative feature does not extend to the spine, the gentlemen need not have feared disunity in their collection. Therefore, either original or altered, this marbled detail also implies that the novel was marketed to affluent owners; the copy at Chawton was certainly valued enough to have an armorial bookplate inserted in the front cover, suggesting a prosperous owner.⁵

The duodecimo format and the advertisement’s description of the ‘neat Pocket Volumes’ highlight this novel’s position in a changing literary marketplace. Barbara Benedict states that ‘literary publishing moved away from limited, fine editions and towards [...] works for a wide readership’.⁶ Books became smaller, more accessible across class boundaries, and noticeably more portable. In light of this statement, one can place Smythies’s novel within the ranks of the latter form described by Benedict, suggesting that *The Stage-Coach* was part of the book trade which aimed for a mass readership. Therefore, one can presume that

³ Anonymous, *London Evening Post*, 4053 (London: England, November 1, 1753 - November 3, 1753) .

⁴ Bernard C. Middleton, ‘Summary’, in *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique* (London, Hafner Publishing Company, 1963), p. 287.

⁵ See Appendix.

⁶ Barbara M. Benedict, ‘Readers, writers, reviewers, and the professionalization of literature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740-1830*, ed. Tom Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 10.

eighteenth-century readers may have considered *The Stage-Coach* light reading. Indeed, the size suggests an individually indulgent activity rather than the respectful, intensive reading of significantly influential works such as the heavier, grander Bible.

The advertisement states the price of the novel as six shillings, a price that correlates with many similar works of the time. Indeed, all three of Smythies's works were in the duodecimo, two-volume format, costing six shillings.⁷ This places *The Stage-Coach* as one of the many light novels circulating at the time, a genre which Smythies herself describes in her Advertisement to her third novel, *The Brothers*, as intended to 'amuse an idle hour of the writer and of the reader', adding, 'it is little wonder there are so many [novels]'.⁸ She highlights the expansion of the book trade and suggests a targeted middle- and upper-class readership which has free day-time hours. This places *The Stage Coach* within the ranks of the many new works of fiction that lined the bookseller's shelves and vied for attention in the marketplace.

The bookseller for *The Stage Coach*, one T. Osborne, was a notable, if eccentric, figure in the mid-century printing market. Thomas Osborne appears in many modern works on eighteenth-century print culture and, according to James Raven, is remembered primarily for 'his heavy-handed salesmanship'.⁹ Indeed, Raven notes there was 'a common story then circulating, that Dr. Johnson had attacked Osborne with a large folio', reportedly for his impertinence.¹⁰ While this story is amusing, it highlights Osborne's connection with prominent figures in eighteenth-century print culture, which is underlined by the story's extensive circulation. Despite Osborne's idiosyncrasies, Henry Plomer notes he was certainly competent in his trade; his remarkable acquisition of 'the valuable library of Edward Harley,

⁷ See: Anonymous, 'III. *The Stage-Coach*', *Monthly Review*, 9 (November, 1753), p. 394; Anonymous, 'XIX. *The History of Lucy Wellers*', *Monthly Review*, 10 (January, 1754), p. 75; Anonymous, 'Article 9. *The Brothers*', *Monthly Review*, 20 (January 1759), p. 81; Anonymous, 'Article 13. *The Brothers*', *Critical Review*, 7 (January, 1759), p. 79.

⁸ Miss Smythies, *The Brothers* (London, R. and J. Dodsley: 1758), p. i.

⁹ James Raven, *The Business of Books : Booksellers and the English Booktrade 1450-1840* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 284.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Earl of Oxford, in 1742' is cited as the source of his fortune.¹¹ Therefore, while a notable figure for his absurdities, Osborne of Gray's-Inn seems to have also been a proficient bookseller. For Smythies to have secured such a publisher in a competitive market was quite a feat. There was also a Dublin edition printed by one Henry Saunders in 1763. His choice to condense the work into one volume, coupled with a notable printing error, suggests a hasty production, in turn suggesting a great demand for new copies. The absence of any reference to this edition under Saunders's name in Pollard's *Dictionary of The Dublin Book Trade* suggests foul play, which, if true, can only serve to show that demand for *The Stage Coach* was high enough to warrant a piracy.¹²

Although reading practices in the eighteenth century can be hard to gauge, it is crucial to attempt an analysis of the original reception a novel received into order to determine its influence in the marketplace. However, the eighteenth century featured the birth of the periodical press as well as the growth of the book trade, giving the scholar an insight into reading practices.¹³ Writing for the *Monthly Review*, an anonymous reviewer condemns *The Stage-Coach* as having 'yielded us but small entertainment'.¹⁴ This is certainly not an encouraging review for Smythies. What the reader should not overlook, however, is the notable length of the review. Smythies's other novels could not boast the notice that *The Stage Coach* receives; her second novel, *Lucy Wellers*, received only three lines, which simply compares it to other novelists' work.¹⁵ This implies that *The Stage-Coach* was a popular book in the marketplace, a suggestion substantiated by the number of editions it ran through; as Dickie states, the novel 'went through four editions' within the century.¹⁶

¹¹ Henry Plomer et al, *Dictionary of Booksellers and Printers 1726-1775* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 186.

¹² M Pollard, *A Dictionary of The Dublin Book Trade: 1530-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 509.

¹³ See J.A. Downie and Thomas N. Corns, eds, *Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth-Century Periodicals from The Review to The Rambler* (London: Frank Cass, 1993).

¹⁴ Anonymous, 'III. *The Stage-Coach*', *Monthly Review*, 9 (November, 1753), p. 394.

¹⁵ Anonymous, 'XIX. *The History of Lucy Wellers*', *Monthly Review*, 10 (January, 1754), p. 75.

¹⁶ Dickie, p. 366.

Outside of the official press, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, renowned for the brief reviews of many eighteenth-century works in her correspondence, read and enjoyed *The Stage-Coach*. She states in a letter to her daughter that the novel ‘has some grotesque figures that amuse’, indirectly opposing the *Monthly Review*’s assertion that ‘the characters are most of them feebly drawn’.¹⁷ Although this is not the highest praise, her comments show that some enjoyment could be derived from reading the novel after all, in contrast to the *Monthly Review*’s assertion. Thus, whilst one could hardly contend that there was a fierce critical debate centred on *The Stage-Coach*, it nonetheless drew notice from various corners of the literary sphere, suggesting its prominence in its contemporary literary marketplace.

However, Smythies cannot be said to draw such attention today. Aside from glancing references, such as Dickie’s brief allusion to her work, there has been little in-depth study into this once prominent novelist. While such internet resources as the *Orlando Project* and the *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography* boast some coverage of Smythies as a literary figure, there are few extensive modern critical works to be found.¹⁸ In the 1930s, one Frank Gees Black researched Smythies to a considerable degree, standing as an exception to the critical climate. Black states that he uncovered ‘a persistent tradition assigning the work [*The Stage Coach*] to Smythies’ and undertook further research to substantiate this authorial claim.¹⁹ It is he, then, who officially removed the veil of anonymity with which Smythies published *The Stage-Coach*. He does not, however, linger on the literary value of her work, nor assign a place for it in the eighteenth-century book trade. Aside from Black, there are no

¹⁷ *Letters from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: 1709-1762*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1914), p. 460; Anonymous, ‘III. *The Stage-Coach*’, *Monthly Review*, p. 394.

¹⁸ See Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds. ‘SUSAN SMYTHIES entry’, *Orlando: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006), <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>, [accessed 8th December 2010]; Arthur Sherbo, “Smythies, Susan (b. 1720)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72236>>, [accessed 8th December 2010].

¹⁹ Black, F. G., ‘Miss Smythies’, *TLS* (26 Sept 1935), p. 596.

other substantial modern explorations of Smythies's life or works, only short references to this figure who is briefly present in a prominent Lady's correspondence about other issues.²⁰

Consequently, this paper constitutes an overdue modern critical appraisal of Smythies's novel *The Stage-Coach*. Given that the original reviewers of her works were eager to identify the influence of other, more prominent authors in the novel, it seems fitting to continue this discourse. Both the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* label *The Brothers*, Smythies's third novel, as imitative of Richardson, due in no small part to her admission of the same in the novel's 'Advertisement'.²¹ These reviews serve as evidence of the growing trend of assessing an author's work in relation to earlier novelists, substantiating Thomas Keymer's argument that '*The Critical* was especially free in invoking the precedent of Richardson and Fielding to damn a new production'.²² It would seem that eighteenth-century writers could not avoid the impact that these two novelists had already made upon the book trade; writing in their shadow was inevitable.

Jane Spencer asserts that Richardson and Fielding's 'successors tended to divide along sexual lines', following one or the other's literary example, Richardson's writing being viewed as essentially feminine due to his focus on female characters' psychological complexity, while Fielding's style was classed as masculine in its emphasis on satire.²³ Therefore, one would assume that Smythies would orient herself towards the idealised feminine style of Richardson. Certainly, Alan D. McKillop describes the writer of *The Stage-Coach* as 'a disciple of Richardson's', and T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel highlight

²⁰ There is more work on Miss Smythies by F. G. Black, however the University of Southampton library facilities (both physical and online) afford no access to it. See: F. G. Black, 'A lady novelist of Colchester', *Essex Review*, 44 (1935), pp. 180–85.

²¹ Anonymous, 'Article 9. *The Brothers*', *Monthly Review*, 20 (January 1759), p. 81; Anonymous, 'Article 13. *The Brothers*', *Critical Review*, 7 (January, 1759), p. 79; Miss Smythies, *The Brothers*, p. iv.

²² Thomas Keymer, 'Novels, Print and Meaning', in *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 54.

²³ Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell: 1986), p. 90.

Richardson's involvement with the publication of Smythies's later work, signifying a literary relationship.²⁴

In order to gauge whether *The Stage-Coach* is "Richardsonian" or "Fielding-esque", the problematic but generally accepted assumption being that any mid-eighteenth-century novel must be one or the other, one must return to the very text itself. But first, the modern obscurity of *The Stage-Coach* necessitates a short synopsis of the main characters and plot lines: the novel opens with Smythies's third person narrative voice describing Mr. Manly, a widower and Sir Charles Grandison figure of grace, gentility and generosity, travelling in the stagecoach from Scarborough to London, from whence the action moves between town and the countryside. We meet the farcical Mr. Moody, who wishes his daughter were a son, and Miss Murrells whose well-born family have died destitute, leaving her to seek a servant's role in London, accompanied by her former nurse. Many characters, including the aspiring rake Captain Cannon, orbit around these central three groupings of characters and the histories of all are narrated in true Chaucerian style. Although Manly does not have a prominent story arc himself, he is the central figure, drawing all the other characters together. He wisely manipulates the circumstances around him in order to create the perfect conclusion, multiple marriages. Miss Moody, oppressed by her blustering father, is finally permitted to marry her Mr. Lee after her father's preferred suitor conveniently marries her friend and Miss Murrells marries her long absent Mr. Truelove when he returns to England. Miss Murrell's plot line takes precedence, the reader following her through her service, the repeated attempts made upon her virtue, and her discovery of a surviving (and incredibly wealthy) relative. Manly's own remarriage is not narrated, and dealt with hastily towards the end as an amusing plot twist to benefit the other characters. Overall, true poetic justice is achieved, inevitably, by the concluding pages.

²⁴ Alan D. McKillop, 'IV. Reputation and Influence', in *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (Beeston: Shoestring Press, 1960), p. 230; T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 464.

Throughout *The Stage-Coach*, Smythies pays homage to all three of Richardson's novels, suggesting this author had the most influence on her writing. The reader finds an imitation of Pamela in the character of Miss Murrells as she continually strives to 'avoid Lord Courtall's presence', as his intention to make her his mistress one way or another is ominously clear.²⁵ This is palpably reminiscent of Pamela's struggle against Mr. B., including the amusing scenes of his creative disguises. This inevitably entails a similar criticism of the peerage, showing that Smythies did not baulk from passing comment on contemporary social issues. Smythies elevates Miss Murrell's virtue in the mind of the reader as she refuses Lord Courtall's many offers. This solidifies Miss Murrells as a character worthy of imitation, just as Richardson had asserted on the title page to *Pamela* that he intended his protagonist to be.²⁶

If Miss Murrells is reminiscent of Pamela Andrews, then Miss Moody is surely Smythies's version of Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe. Anthony Kearney describes Clarissa as 'a passive victim' in both her family's struggle for prominence and Lovelace's war against womankind; her one assertive decision puts her in even greater danger.²⁷ Miss Moody is similarly trapped by her familial duties and unable to act decisively; yet, she is fortunate in that, unlike Clarissa, she is an only child with no scheming siblings to conspire against her. Instead, her only obstacles are her ill-mannered father and the unwitting suitor he has prepared for her, Mr. Timothy Hardy, who is an imitation of Clarissa's Mr. Solmes. At his entrance, Smythies gives Tim, who is rarely honoured with his full title, an intentionally humorous description, with 'a red silk handkerchief tied around his neck, with the ends sticking out on each side his cheeks, as if to vie with them in colour', redolent of the

²⁵ *The Stage-Coach: Containing the Character of Mr. Manly and the History of his Fellow Travellers* (Dublin: Henry Saunders, 1762), p. 95. I will cite this later edition as the one volume format makes for ease of reference.

²⁶ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 1.

²⁷ Anthony Kearney, *Samuel Richardson: Clarissa* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), p. 9.

‘squatting’ Solmes described by Richardson.²⁸ In Richardson’s novel, Clarissa narrates Solmes’s awkwardness: ‘He took the removed chair and drew it so near mine[...] that he pressed upon my hoop’.²⁹ The sheer proximity of Solmes mirrors his symbolic invasion, and his social awkwardness emphasises his deficiency as a suitor to the refined Clarissa. Smythies employs and extends this scene as she narrates:

[Tim] then drew a chair and said to [Miss Moody], “If you please, miss, I’ll keep a long side of you.”[...] He had not sat next to her many minutes, before he threw his arm around her waist, in a very familiar manner, saying, “miss! You are strait as a main-mast, and a good tight little frigate”.³⁰

Here, we see a recognisable rewriting of Solmes’s inelegance in the innocent and humorously bumbling Tim. Whereas Solmes is repugnant in his ugly corpulence, Tim is distinctly childlike and laughable; yet, both are certainly not the apt suitors the fathers think them. Smythies alludes to this episode in *Clarissa*, as she wishes to emphasise Richardson’s moral lesson, ‘To caution Parents against the undue exercise of their natural authority over their Children’, especially daughters.³¹ She utilises Richardson’s moral, but attempts to make it her own, the success of which is unfortunately limited, the allusion showing too much dependence on Richardson’s model. Nevertheless, this shows sensitivity in her writing as she balances references to influential narrative models while separately creating her own characterisations.

²⁸ Miss Smythies, *The Stage-Coach*, p. 149; Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (London: Penguin, 2004), L16, p. 87.

²⁹ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, L16, p. 87.

³⁰ Miss Smythies, *The Stage-Coach*, p. 165.

³¹ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (London: J. Osborn, 1751), pp. vi-vii.

Sylvia Marks argues that Richardson treats ‘the intangible quality essential to a true gentleman’ in his third and final novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*.³² Mr. Manly, then, is Smythies’s attempt at the same. The opening lines of the novel describe ‘Mr. Manly, an elderly gentleman, possessed of a large portion of wealth, sense, and humanity’.³³ Immediately, Smythies shows him to be a man in whom the reader can expect great moral worth and wisdom, a character whose judgement we will trust and whose misfortunes we will lament. When Moody asks his name, the reply ‘My name is Manly, sir’, holds an amusing double meaning; Mr. Manly is to be an exemplar of the righteous and honourable aspects of his sex, just as Grandison is a paragon of masculine virtue.³⁴ Perhaps an example is needed here. The opening of chapter forty relates Mr Manly’s grief at his housekeeper’s death, and the generosity with which he arranged her affairs: ‘[he] ordered her the same solemnity of funeral pomp, which he had bestowed upon his own mother[...] and never quitted the house, or saw company, ’till he had attended her remains’.³⁵ This outstanding instance of his compassion and generosity, augmented by his gift of £500 to her relatives, makes Mr. Manly perhaps *too* perfect a figure in this novel. Yet, the solemnity of this passage shows that he is certainly not a satirical interpretation of Grandison. In this manner, one must assume that Smythies sought to emulate Richardson’s characterisations, the wholly virtuous character being a common figure in her day, according to Ian Watt. He states that although ‘modern readers’ find his characters ‘too good... this was not the view of Richardson’s contemporaries’, clearing Smythies’s name of an unsophisticated writing style by default.³⁶

³² Sylvia K. Marks, ‘The Compleat Gentleman’, in *Sir Charles Grandison: The Compleat Conduct Book* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1986), p. 73.

³³ Miss Smythies, *The Stage-Coach*, p. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁶ Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), p. 212.

However, Beasley claims that in *Joseph Andrews*, ‘Fielding was reacting to what he seems to have regarded as *Pamela*’s undue glorification of an unrepresentative heroine’.³⁷ If *Pamela* is too virtuous to be considered realistic, rendering her inimitable and therefore undercutting Richardson’s encouragement to readers to emulate her, then *Grandison* surely constitutes the same problems. Therefore, Mr Manly’s over-perfect characterisation is also flawed. Richardson redeems these problematic ‘unrepresentative’ characterisations by his in-depth examination of his characters’ mental states. Kearney asserts that ‘Richardson himself was the master of psychological analysis’, which is partially substantiated in how Richardson’s epistolary narrative style facilitates a personal and individual voice for each main character.³⁸ While Kearney’s assertion is over-enthusiastic, Richardson’s command of his characters’ psyche is certainly unrivalled by Smythies. *The Stage-Coach* is related by an omniscient third person narrator who does not give the reader a comparable insight into the consciousness of the novel’s characters as Richardson’s epistolary style does. In this manner, our author falls short of Richardson’s example.

Instead of attempting Richardson’s style in its entirety, Smythies also seeks to emulate certain aspects of Fielding’s writing. Susan Auty states that it was primarily ‘the humour’ of his writing that ‘distinguished Fielding’s novels from the abundant romances of the day’.³⁹ The truth of this assertion is found simply in the reading of *Joseph Andrews*. Spencer states that while Richardson is occupied by the internal narrative of his characters, Fielding represents his “‘from the outside”, with detached and ironic narration’; this is where Fielding’s and Smythies’s writing aligns.⁴⁰

While such characters as Mr. Manly are exemplars of virtue for the reader to imitate, others such as Captain Cannon seem to be inserted for the readers’ general amusement. The

³⁷ Beasley, p. 447.

³⁸ Kearney, p. 63.

³⁹ Susan G. Auty, *The Comic Spirit of Eighteenth Century Novels* (London: National University Publications, 1975), p. 34.

⁴⁰ Spencer, p. 89.

Captain is one of the original passengers of the stage coach, and relates to the others his tales of attempted seductions. One such example of his propensity to the ridiculous is his assumption that the constable who has imprisoned him in a stable for attempting to elope with his cousin must be employed by a rich lady he spotted in the market: ‘it was natural to conclude, that she [...] took this method to preserve me from throwing away myself’.⁴¹ The humour of his narration breaks upon the reader, wave after wave, until he cannot be taken seriously any longer. For the original audience, however, the familiarity of the scene and characterisation would have extended their mirth. Perhaps Lady Mary Wortley Montagu referred to Captain Cannon when she described Smythies’s characters as amusingly ‘grotesque’, in the sense of absurdity.

The fact that Captain Cannon represents a familiar comic figure to the eighteenth-century reader is significant when considered alongside Fielding’s statement in *Joseph Andrews* that ‘in most of our particular Characters we mean not to lash Individuals, but all of the like sort’.⁴² Both Smythies and Fielding seem to utilise well-known figures that the eighteenth-century reader would be familiar with, in order to emphasise their particular argument. Indeed, one of Fielding’s examples closely aligns the two author’s intentions: ‘I question not but several of my Readers will know the Lawyer in the Stage-Coach’.⁴³ Published in 1742, this quotation cannot be a reference to *The Stage-Coach*, which succeeded *Joseph Andrews* in the following decade; however, one could adventurously assume that Smythies was experimenting with Fielding’s suggestion, as Moody is a Justice and certainly a comical figure through whose chauvinism Smythies launches her examination of the woman’s place in society.

⁴¹ Miss Smythies, *The Stage Coach*, p. 16.

⁴² Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 165.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Moody's statements are problematic to the extent that one cannot overlook Smythies's thematic intentions, showing that his one-dimensionality is deliberate. For example, when talking with Manly he states, 'I would give a thousand pound that she [his daughter] was a boy'.⁴⁴ Given the extreme instance of prejudice illustrated and the fact that this is written by a female author, one must approach this sentence as a statement of social criticism. Smythies's intention that this be a challenge to her readers, rather than a rational assertion, is shown by Moody's perpetual unreasonableness. In the same conversation he states, 'women are all deceitful, all of them are Eve's daughters', revealing the violence of his prejudice and therefore showing that Smythies must surely be contending against his views in making him ridiculous.⁴⁵ His contentious statements are repeatedly, but gently, refuted by Manly, whose 'sentiments differ' significantly.⁴⁶

This characterisation makes the reader consider the representation of women and their rights in this novel. Moody's statement that his sister-in-law, Mrs. Severn, 'has too much understanding for a woman', is proved to be ridiculous in her later characterisation as a wise adviser to Miss Murrells.⁴⁷ Indeed, Manly later marries her, and as Smythies has constructed the reader's respect for him with such zeal, one cannot avoid trusting his judgment, therefore overturning Moody's earlier assertions. Consequently, it is clear that Smythies is questioning the patriarchal nature of her society. In dealing with Moody in this manner, Smythies is representing some men to be conspicuously intimidated by female autonomy, though one cannot go so far as to argue all, or even most are represented in this manner.

This is suggestive of Smythies's consciousness of her status as a female writer in the market-place. Spencer states that the view that 'ladies and novels belong together [...] was a common belief', which suggests that issues of women's position in society was continually in

⁴⁴ Miss Smythies, *The Stage-Coach*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

the background of the writing and reading of the eighteenth-century novel.⁴⁸ Returning to the question of female education, the respectable Mrs Severn makes the remarkable statement that ‘an unreasonable restraint upon the mind and inclinations, is a slavery more hard to be endured than [hard work]’.⁴⁹ Given that Miss Smythies cultivates admiration for Mrs. Severn, this statement must be assigned due consideration.

As a female author, Miss Smythies considers herself progressive. In her ‘Advertisement’ to *The Brothers* she states that ‘even *women* set out to write [novels...] And why should not *women* write them?’⁵⁰ This defensive position indicates the opposition that women sometimes faced in entering the public sphere so prominently through the act of writing; Spencer states that the low opinion men held of women’s intellectual abilities meant that often ‘the very act of writing [seemed] to be challenging received notions of womanhood’.⁵¹ In writing three novels, then, Smythies is making a statement against the ‘received notions’ in society and agreeing with Mrs. Severn’s comments. Indeed, the female characters of *The Stage-Coach* constitute such exemplars of grace and virtue, except to the extent that men have corrupted them, that one cannot overlook Smythies’s social criticism. Given the lack of one central, overarching didactic message, although there are many lesser ones interweaved into the narrative, this social commentary instead takes precedence.

Where, then, can we place *The Stage-Coach* in its literary and social context? McKillop states that ‘Immediately after the publication of *Sir Charles Grandison*, relatively light imitations of Richardson began to be written’.⁵² Can *The Stage-Coach* convincingly be classed as such? Mr Manly is certainly an imitation of Sir Charles Grandison, but Smythies’s novel is not a mere duplication. Significantly, she does not examine the human heart as

⁴⁸ Spencer, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Miss Smythies, *The Stage-Coach*, p. 208.

⁵⁰ Miss Smythies, *The Brothers*, p. ii. Emphasis her own.

⁵¹ Spencer, p. x.

⁵² McKillop, p. 243.

Richardson does, nor does she attempt the epistolary style that he adopts. Instead, Smythies selects certain aspects of Richardson's work that are pleasantly familiar to the reader, but reworks them for her own intentions. Similarly, Fielding is present in her writing, but Smythies's novel is not simply derivative; Smythies's wit, though perhaps inferior to Fielding's in its execution, draws from this new emphasis on nature and truth in the novel form. Her characterisations differ in this way from Richardson, and adhere more to Fielding's style of writing. Therefore, one can propose that although Smythies is more strongly aligned with Richardson in her later works, she is experimenting with both divisions of the new novel form in her first.

As an experimental first novel, Smythies's social criticism is limited. Although some astonishingly bold statements are made concerning women's rights, Smythies does not challenge patriarchal structures with any authority of tone. She offers no alternatives through plot development and the characters from whom progressive statements emerge fulfil their social roles impeccably. In this manner, we see the infancy of her writing style, yet still note the significance of her effort to critique the society in which she lives. For these reasons, whilst I hardly contend for the elevation of *The Stage-Coach* to the literary canon, I will remark that Smythies demonstrates a promising sophistication of style and sensitivity to her literary and social surroundings, which declare that she is a novelist who does not deserve her modern obscurity.

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Appendix - Bibliographical Description

<p>Author</p> <p>(and attribution as it appears on title page, or note of pseudonym or anonymity)</p>	None given.
<p>Title</p> <p>(as it appears on title page)</p>	The Stage-Coach: Containing the Character of Mr. Manly, and the History of his Fellow-Travellers.
<p>Imprint</p> <p>(Place of publication: publisher, year of publication as they appear on title page)</p>	London: Printed for T. Osborne in Gray's-Inn. 1753.
<p>Physical description</p> <p>(details relating to all copies, e.g. number of vols., number of pgs, size, price – sometimes shown on title page, quality of paper and printing, illustrations, etc.)</p>	<p>Two volumes, 265 and 303 pages respectively.</p> <p>Duodecimo. The paper and printing is of a good quality; there are no notable misprints or mistakes.</p> <p>There is no note of price, but other sources place this at 6s. There are no illustrations.</p>
<p>Physical description</p> <p>(details relating only to this specific copy, e.g. binding & decoration, binding anomalies, annotations etc.)</p>	<p>The Advertisement in the <i>London Evening Post</i> states the book was sold bound. The Chawton copy has marbled decoration, which may or may not have been added later by the owner. The spine is segmented by gold fillets and features gold lettering – ‘The Stage Coach’, each word on a separate line .</p>
<p>Provenance</p> <p>(e.g. bookplates, inscriptions)</p>	<p>There is a book plate featuring a coat of arms on the inside front cover, bearing the inscription ‘<i>Frangas</i></p>

	<i>non flectes' and claiming the book as of the library of Earl Gower, a prominent peer.</i>
<p>Details of advertisements</p> <p>(you can summarise if there is a long list e.g. genre, price range, a few characteristic or notable titles)</p>	<p>The second volume features three pages of advertisements for the publisher's other offers, including works on 'Natural History', some 'Tales and Fables' and a histories of Edinburgh and a military figure, all preceded by the quoted price of 'Two Shillings and Six Pence'.</p>
<p>Paratext</p> <p>(title page epigraph, subscription list, dedication, preface, introduction, etc. noted or summarised)</p>	<p>The only paratextual content is the epigraph on the title page consisting of a quotation from 'Prior's <i>Henry and Emma</i>.':</p> <p>'Our outward act is prompted from within; And from the sinner's mind proceeds the sin: By her own choice free virtue is approv'd; Nor by the force of outward objects mov'd: Who has assay'd no danger, gains no praise; In a small isle amidst the widest seas, Triumphant constancy has fix'd her seat: In vain the Syrens sing, the tempests beat: Their Flatt'ry she rejects, nor fears their threat.'</p>