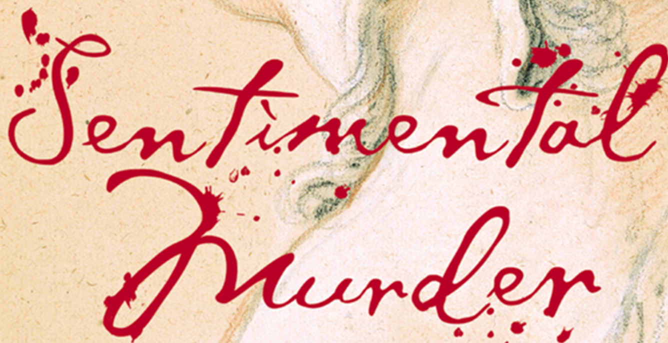
JOHN BREWER

'A clever, important book ... the Ray murder touched on everything that makes life interesting – sex, money, power' Kathryn Hughes, *Guardian*



LOVE AND MADNESS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

John Brewer
Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century

Аннотация

On an April evening in 1779, a woman is shot on the steps of Covent Garden. Her murderer is a young soldier and Church of England minister; her lover, the Earl of Sandwich, one of the most powerful policians of the day. This compelling account of murder, love and intrigue brings Georgian London to life in a spellbinding historical masterpiece.On an April evening in 1779, Martha Ray, mistress of the Earl of Sandwich, was shot on the steps of Covent Garden by James Hackman, a young soldier and minister of the Church of England. She died instantly, leaving behind a grief-stricken lover and five small children. Hackman, after trying to kill himself, was arrested, tried and hanged at Tyburn ten days later. The story was to become one of the scandals of the age.It seemed an open-and-shut case, but why had Hackman killed Ray? He claimed he suffered from 'love's madness' but his motives remained obscure. And as Martha Ray shared the bed of one of the most powerful and unpopular politicians of the day (and one of Georgian London's greatest libertines), the city buzzed with the story, as every hack journalist sharpened his pen.John Brewer

has written an account of this violent murder that is as thrilling and compelling as the best crime novel. Atmospheric, beautifully written, and alive with the characters and bustle of 18th-century London, the book examines in minute detail the events of a few crucial moments and gives an unforgettable account of the relationships between the three protagonists and their different places within society. However, the interest in Martha's murder did not end with the Georgians, and A Sentimental Murder ranges over two centuries, populated by journalists, biographers and historians who tried to make sense of the killing. And so it becomes an intriguing exploration of the relations between history and fiction, storytelling and fact, past and present. John Brewer has transformed a tragic tale of murder into an historical masterpiece.

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JOHN BREWER

SENTIMENTAL MURDER

Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century

WILLIAM
COLLINS

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PROLOGUE

Sentimental Murder began life as part of a review I wrote of G. J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* and has gone through several transformations before it found its present form. It started out as a more conventional historical account of James Hackman's murder of Martha Ray, the mistress of the 4th earl of Sandwich but, in large part because of questions raised in seminars and after lectures, I began to rethink how to tell the story. I'm especially grateful to Julie Peters for the remarks she made at a talk at Columbia University that brought out starkly (at least to me) the problems about how to handle this particular narrative. Thanks also to others at Harvard, Columbia, CalTech and Yale, for their help in shaping the book. I owe a special debt to my former colleagues at the University of Chicago, notably Jim Chandler, Katie Trumpener, Paul Hunter and Sandra Macpherson, all of whom probably heard the story more times than they cared to. Thanks to Donna Andrew, Claire L'Enfant, Max Novak, Roger Lonsdale, Peter Mandler, Helen Small, Kathleen Wilson, Angela Rosenthal, Martin Levy, Luisa Passerini, John Sutherland, John Wyner and Simon Schama for help, comments and support. Holger Hoock and Clare Griffith both provided invaluable research assistance, setting a high standard for me to follow.

The present Earl of Sandwich and Lady Sandwich generously

afforded me access to the 4th Earl's private papers, gave me lunch and even allowed me briefly to exhibit my more than rusty cricketing skills. I have also to acknowledge the help of the librarian at Dove Cottage, and the kind permission of the Wordsworth Trust to quote from the papers about Basil Montagu in their collections at Dove Cottage, Grasmere. The staff at the Bodleian and Huntingdon libraries, so far apart yet so close in the high quality of their service, have made the research for this book a pleasure. I was fortunate in having a Moore fellowship at the California Institute of Technology, which gave me time to complete the book. Gill Coleridge, my agent, Arabella Pike at HarperCollins and Elisabeth Sifton at Farrar, Straus and Giroux have helped make this a better book by their constant critical support and vigorous editing. Special thanks to Stella, Grace and Lori for their constant support, love and forbearance.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Roy Porter, friend and colleague, who died in 2002. My first conversation with Roy took place in 1967 in the gate-house of Christ's College Cambridge. (We talked about seventeenth-century religion, sleep and his efforts to be a soccer goalkeeper.) Over the next thirty years or more our paths crossed in Cambridge, California and London. When I began this book I naturally turned to him – no one writing about love and madness in the eighteenth century would not have wanted to consult Roy Porter. No man knew more about love and libertinage in both the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Characteristically, he plied me with references and

information, quite a lot of it from his own work. Little did I know, when I began the project, that one of its incarnations would be the first Roy Porter lecture, established to commemorate him. Roy's absence has made me realize just how important he was to so many of us, not just as an endless source of gossip – no conversation was complete without a Porter anecdote – but as someone whose dedication and single-mindedness, expansive commitment to open-minded intellectual inquiry and to the best eighteenth-century values was (a sometimes intimidating) example and inspiration. He is sorely missed.

PREFACE

Sentimental Murder investigates an eighteenth-century killing and attempted suicide. By tracing their changing interpretation over more than two hundred years, I want to explore the relations between history and fiction, storytelling and fact, past and present. I have adopted – and want to connect – two very different perspectives. On the one hand I examine in minute detail the events of a few crucial moments – it cannot have been more than a few seconds – between 11.30 p.m. and midnight on 7 April 1779, when, on the steps of the Covent Garden Theatre in London, a young clergyman, James Hackman, shot Martha Ray, the mistress of the Earl of Sandwich, and then tried to kill himself. On the other I consider a broad panorama that ranges over more than two centuries and is populated by journalists, doctors, novelists, poets, memoir writers, biographers, and historians who have tried to make sense (and sometimes art) out of the killing. My focus then is not just on what happened in 1779 but on the stories told about this event – who told them, how they were told, and what their tellers were up to in telling them.

Perhaps I have chosen this bifocal approach because, although I first came across the story of Hackman, Ray, and Sandwich when I was investigating the cultural life of eighteenth-century London, I learned about it from nineteenth-century sources: brief entries in the section on Covent Garden in histories of London,

wedged between tales of great actors and lives of notorious whores; snippets in neatly arranged scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings about the theatre and music, crime and low life in the previous century collected by Victorian ladies and gentlemen; and anecdotes in popular histories based on eighteenth-century memoirs which first appeared in print in the mid-nineteenth century.

At first I ignored Martha Ray's story because I saw it through Victorian eyes as a simple moral tale. Covent Garden, with its theatres, wholesale grocery and sex trade, and the brutal crime of passion committed in its main square offered a snapshot of an earlier age, clinching evidence that the Georgians were sexier but less civilized, more glamorous but much less moral than their Victorian heirs. The incident seemed high on sensation but low on historical content – just a graphic anecdote about the seamier side of Georgian night life. But the peculiar insistence of the Victorian version of the story, the repeated stress on the moral distance between the crime of 1779 and the probity of the 1840s – the Victorian commentators worried over the story like a dog over a bone – made me curious to find out more. Eventually I was led back to the newspaper reports, trial and bits of surviving evidence at the time of the crime.

These revealed a different story – not a tale governed by moral distance and high-minded censoriousness but an account of a crime whose perpetrator and victim were obvious, but whose meaning was obscure. Of course Hackman killed Ray – a crowd

of onlookers had seen him pull the trigger – but why? And who or what had led him to his crime? These were not just my questions; they were asked by many of Hackman's contemporaries.

Then, as now, crimes of passion, especially those committed by men against women, were not rare. But this particular killing attracted enormous attention and comment. No doubt this was because of the status and nature of the protagonists. A similar crime of passion committed by a drunken labourer who killed an impoverished girlfriend – the London courts handled many such cases – would have merited only a line or two, if that, in the London newspapers. But Hackman was a minister in the Church of England (albeit only recently ordained), and Martha Ray shared the bed of one of the most powerful and unpopular politicians of the day. Such a crime on the edges of high society was inevitably a good newspaper story, and a source of gossip and potential scandal, not least because the circumstances surrounding the murder were so obscure.

Few members of the public doubted that Hackman and Ray had become acquainted at Hinchingbrooke, Lord Sandwich's Huntingdonshire country seat, in 1775; no one doubted the killing (though some claimed it was not murder) four years later. But in the years between these two events almost nothing was known about Ray and Hackman's relations. Stories hate a hiatus. Unless it was filled, the tale of Hackman's crime would never be complete, much less understood. Into the empty space rushed all sorts of speculation: were they meeting secretly? Did they

have an affair? Did they want to get married? Did Hackman press his attentions on an unwilling Ray? Were they intriguing together against the Earl of Sandwich? With the exception of Wordsworth's account of Martha Ray (discussed in chapter 7), which deliberately places her out of the context of her death, almost every version of the events of 1779 written over the next two hundred years, whether newspaper story, poem, novel or biography, offers answers to these questions. And they all took the form of particular types of story – sentimental tales of suffering, romantic stories of heightened male sensibility, scurrilous stories of libertine desire and female manipulation, tales of criminal turpitude, medical tales of love's madness, stories of female romance, tales for moral reflection on the dilemmas of women or speculation on the nature of history.

The earliest press coverage of the killing not only gave details of Hackman's crime but fostered public debate about its perpetrator. Within a year of Ray's death and Hackman's execution a Grub Street author, Herbert Croft, wrote an epistolary work, *Love and Madness*, which claimed to contain the correspondence of the murderer and his victim. Before the century was out, and in part because of the tremendous success of Croft's work, Hackman passed into medical history and Martha Ray into one of William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. I'd already collected many fragmentary nineteenth-century accounts, but now discovered detailed discussion of the affair in such journals as the *Edinburgh Review*, provoked by

the publication of the memoirs of two famous contemporaries of Hackman and Ray, Horace Walpole and George Selwyn. The story also lived on in the Victorian obsession with gruesome crimes, both past and present. In the second half of the nineteenth century interest in the trial seemed to peter out, but revived in the 1890s. The reprinting of a doctored version of *Love and Madness* put the story back in the public demesne and was the source for two twentieth-century versions of the story, Constance Hagberg Wright's *The Chaste Mistress*, published in 1930 and Elizabeth Jenkins's essay on Martha Ray in her *Ten Fascinating Women*, which first appeared in 1955.

I could have approached this large and growing body of material by asking the traditional question: what was the true story of what actually happened in those years between Ray and Hackman's first and final meetings? This would have meant that I was trying to 'see through' subsequent versions of the story in order to recover the 'real history' of the event. I would have had to reject a great deal of the material I had accumulated as inaccurate, irrelevant and obfuscating. But when you treat a novel or a poem, or even a polemical tract or a biographical apologia as if its aim was to be a work of history, you certainly sell it short. You lose what is most distinctive, moving, powerful and illuminating about a work by seeing it in only one dimension. You fail to appreciate both its purposes and its effects.

I was loath to do this and so I took another tack. I set out to write a history of the accounts, narratives, stories – call them

what you will – that were built around James Hackman's killing of Martha Ray. The aim was to ask not 'is this story true' but 'what does this story mean, and why did it take a particular form at a particular time?' And, in order to answer these questions, I had to ask others: what does this story do? Or, to put it another way, what is the storyteller doing with this story?

Thus my account of the press reports of Hackman and Ray is as much about the nature of newspaper reporting as about murder and suicide; my analysis of the novel containing the so-called letters of Ray and Hackman is an investigation not of their veracity, but of the ways that fictional works played with different ideas of truth; the nineteenth-century version of Hackman and Ray is about Victorian ideas of morality and progress and their connection to a Victorian notion of real history; and the chapters on the twentieth century deal with the aims of women's writing and conservative politics in the inter-war period. Here history is not the history of a discrete set of past events, but a history of the changing ways in which past events have been understood. In this way history becomes not an anatomizing act, lifting the sheet to reveal the corpus of a distant and separate past, but an act of accumulation, in which the last historical account is seen (inevitably) to build upon its predecessors.

I want to stress that this does not mean that my interpretation is uncritical. On the contrary, a large part of my task has been to recover the aims, assumptions and prejudices (including my

own) that shaped the different versions of the story. In this way accounts of the past are not separated from the dynamics of history, to be discarded or sacrificed as the historian sees fit, but are seen as an intrinsic part of them.

Inevitably I found myself writing not just about the events of 1779 but about eighteenth-century, Romantic, Victorian and twentieth-century attitudes to the events of 1779. In any historical period there are normally several different ways of thinking about earlier epochs, but almost every account of the events of 1779, whether supposedly factual or actually fictional, was shaped by a dominant narrative that placed the eighteenth century in relation to the time of its telling. The first accounts of Hackman and Ray were fashioned according to the eighteenth century's version of itself as a modern age of sentiment and sensibility, in which human (mis)conduct was the object of sympathy rather than censoriousness. The Victorians, by contrast, placed the incident in the context of aristocratic depravity and profound inequality that they thought modern material progress to have ended. Every era had its own 'eighteenth century', and each 'eighteenth century' shaped the way in which the story was interpreted.

I also learned that it was very difficult to distinguish fact and fiction in the work of writers who explored 'the truth' about Hackman, Sandwich and Ray. The first accounts of the crime purported to be factual, but they drew on the narratives and insights of popular fiction to make sense of the crime, and treated

it as if it were the subject of a drama or a novel. It was only a short move for Herbert Croft in 1780 to turn the story of the crime into *Love and Madness*, a fiction, albeit one that claimed to be true. But the work of Croft's imagination was treated as fact in the medical literature on love's madness, even while Martha Ray's story was rewritten to place her in a literary tradition of lovelorn women. In the nineteenth century Hackman's killing of Ray became a factual anecdote, or a fictional tableau. In both cases the murder was intended to reveal a truth about an earlier age. In the 1890s, when *Love and Madness* was re-edited and reissued, it came to be seen not as a fiction but as a set of historical documents, a source for the historical reconstruction of a doomed love affair. As such it provided the material for two twentieth-century narratives, Wright's novel and Jenkins's biographical essay.

These many versions of Ray's killing showed that no story is innocent; all narratives involve plotting. To shape a set of events into a story is to exclude other possible narratives. This may sometimes be an unintended consequence, but in the case of the earliest versions of Ray's killing, it was deliberate. As we shall see, the Earl of Sandwich and his associates, together with the friends of James Hackman, agreed on a story about the crime that absolved the main participants of any blame. This was a whitewash, but it was also a cover-up designed to avert attention from stories about Sandwich and Ray that had been in circulation before her murder and that would have placed them in a poor

light. The cover-up was never entirely successful – the repressed stories were to resurface again and again, and they re-emerge in my narrative as the two chapters on the 'missing stories' of 1779.

If we (including historians) are all implicated in the stories we tell, then I, too, have an obligation to explain my own narrative. What am I up to in writing about more than two centuries of stories about a crime of passion which, though terrible for those immediately involved – James Hackman, Martha Ray, the Earl of Sandwich and their children – hardly seems the stuff of 'history'? The answer to this lies, I believe, in my response to the sometimes rather brutal debates that have taken place over the last twenty years or so between two very different notions of history: one that emphasizes that history is the recovery of what actually happened in the past; the other that history is made in the present, the plotted and imaginative construct of a modern historical narrator. I leave these questions to my epilogue in which I try – doubtless disingenuously – to put my narrative in its turn-of-the-millennium context.

CHAPTER 1 *Spring 1779*

JOHN MONTAGU, 4th Earl of Sandwich, was a tall gangling man with ‘strong legs and arms’ and a ruddy appearance that led the novelist Frances Burney, when she first met him in 1775, to compare him with a rough-hewn Jack Tar: ‘he is a tall, stout man & looks *weather-proof* as any sailor in the navy[1]’. Portraits by Gainsborough and Zoffany reveal a large, hooked nose, thin, sensual lips and a long torso that makes his head seem unaccountably small. They also fail to conceal the clumsiness that led Sandwich’s French dancing master to ask that ‘your Lordship would never tell any one of whom you learned to dance[2]’. ‘Awkward’ and ‘shambling’ were how his friends described him, one remarking to another as they spotted him from a distance ‘I am sure it is Lord Sandwich; for, if you observe, he is walking down both sides of the street at once[3]’.

Sandwich had energy that more than compensated for his clumsiness. Despite his lack of polish, he had a reputation as a ladies’ man. One anonymous female correspondent confided in him, ‘you have it in your power to gain the affections of almost any woman that you study to please’. Women found him charming, and he pursued them relentlessly from his youth into middle age. In his sixties he admitted, ‘I have never[4] pretended to be free from indiscretion, and those who know me have been

… long accustomed to forgive my weaknesses, when they do not interfere with my conduct as a public man.'

For a peer, Sandwich was not wealthy, and from 1739, when he took his seat in the House of Lords at the age of twenty-one, he sought political office to increase his income. During a long career in government he served as Secretary of State, Postmaster General and as a diplomat, but the post that he saw as his own and for which he is best remembered was First Lord of the Admiralty, an office he held between 1747 and 1751 and again after his appointment by Lord North in 1770.

Waking on the morning of 7 April 1779 in the ample apartments in the Admiralty building that were one of the perquisites of his post, Sandwich faced a busy day of government business. The Admiralty gates in the Robert Adam screen that separated the offices from the street opened at 9 a.m., when four of the office clerks arrived to receive their instructions, began transcribing documents to captains and admirals, suppliers and politicians, and made neat copperplate copies in official letter books and ledgers. The eleven-hour day was one of the longest in any government office: all the clerks were in attendance between eleven in the morning and four in the afternoon, but a part of the staff kept the Admiralty open between nine and eleven, and between six and ten in the evening.

Though Sandwich had many political enemies, he was generally acknowledged to be a conscientious and industrious official. He was, as one contemporary put it, 'Universally

admitted to possess eminent talents, great application to the duties of his office, and thorough acquaintance with public business … In all his official functions he displayed perspicuity as well as dispatch[5].' Normally his working day began even before the Admiralty opened: 'he rose at an early hour, and generally wrote all his letters before breakfast[6]', and he frequently had no respite before taking a late evening meal. On one occasion he complained, 'I am fatigued to death having been with my pen in my hand [for]…thirteen hours[7].' The snack that bears Sandwich's name, and that was first made by slipping a slice of naval salt beef between two pieces of bread, was made to allow not, as legend has it, for longer hours at the gaming table, but more time at the office.

Admiralty business, of course, was not always so onerous, and the First Lord left much of the detailed work to his reliable and experienced Secretary, Philip Stephens, an official with more than twenty-five years' service for the Admiralty Board. But when the nation was at war and when parliament was in session, as it was in the spring of 1779, the office required constant attention. The nation was embroiled with its American subjects; France and Spain had just joined the rebellious colonists. Because of the weight of business the Admiralty had hired four additional clerks in the last year. The most recent appointment, Mr Hollinworth, had begun work the previous morning.

Yet there were additional reasons why the Admiralty was so

frenetic on this warm spring day. For the Admiralty Board and especially Lord Sandwich were at the centre of a huge political row about the conduct of the American war. The parliamentary opposition, led by Charles James Fox in the Commons and the Duke of Richmond in the Lords, was determined to lay the blame for Britain's military failures at the door of the Admiralty, and had launched a determined attempt to drive Sandwich from office, if not to overthrow the government itself.

The squall had blown up more than a year earlier, when the war had been going particularly badly. Forced to maintain supply lines to Boston, New York and the Chesapeake, the navy was overstretched and undermanned. Encouraged by Britain's plight, and eager to revenge their previous defeats, France had pledged support to the Americans in the summer of 1778. One of Sandwich's spies, John Walker, had been sending him alarming reports for several years of a major French naval build-up. Despite Sandwich's warnings to his colleagues, too little was done too late. Better equipped, the French battle fleet threatened to outnumber the British and to make possible a French landing on the south coast of England.

Sandwich and his colleagues had been bitterly attacked for their conduct of the war and their lack of preparedness for its escalation. Their hopes (like those of most Britons) had been pinned on an early and decisive naval victory against France that would have seen off the threat to Britain's supply lines and trade, and dispelled the threat of invasion. But when the two

fleets met off Ushant on 27 July 1778, the French repelled the English attack and inflicted great damage before retreating to Brest. The threat of French superiority remained, and was soon compounded by the prospect of Spain's entry into the war on the colonists' side. On 15 October Sandwich wrote to the prime minister, Lord North, 'The situation of our affairs is at this time so critical and alarming that my mind will not rest, without I collect my thoughts and put on paper the ideas I have of the danger we are in, and what exertions we can use to guard against the storm that is hanging over us[8].'

On the same day an article appeared in the opposition newspaper, the *General Advertiser and Morning Post*, blaming Rear-Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser, a member of the Admiralty Board and a close ally of Sandwich's, for failing to follow an order of the fleet's leader, Admiral August Keppel, a political ally of the Foxite opposition, to engage the French more closely. The article provoked a huge row, which turned officers against one another and divided the navy into bitter factions (contemporaries talked of the Montagus and Capulets). Keppel and Palliser, both MPs, squabbled on the floor of the House of Commons; both were eventually court martialled. Throughout the winter and early spring of 1779 the Foxite opposition kept up the pressure on the government, proposing motion after motion attacking its policy in general and Sandwich in particular. In February it looked as if, for Sandwich at least, the game was up. King George III and Lord North decided to remove him

from the Admiralty as a way of appeasing government critics. Only the failure of negotiations for a replacement kept him in office. On 11 February a court martial acquitted Keppel and dismissed Palliser's charges against the admiral as 'malicious and unfounded'. That evening a crowd of opposition supporters smashed the windows of Sandwich's lodgings, frightening his mistress, Martha Ray, who was staying there. The crowd tore off the Admiralty gates, looted Palliser's house in Pall Mall and attacked the homes of other Admiralty officials.

The government was losing its grip. Lord North sank into a depression that made business difficult to transact – on one occasion Sandwich was sent by the king to cajole him out of bed – while government supporters, thinking the administration doomed, began to absent themselves from important debates in parliament. In April the opposition's demand for an inquiry into the state of the British and French navies and into the Admiralty's preparedness for war placed an additional burden on Sandwich's officials, who had to assemble documents and statistics to be used in his defence. In the following week a debate was scheduled in the House of Lords in which Lord Bristol, a leading spokesman of the opposition, was expected to call for Sandwich's dismissal. On the afternoon of 6 April Sandwich met with the king to discuss the government's strategy.

While Sandwich laboured in the Admiralty Board room, struggling to salvage his career, other events that were to have a profound effect on his future were unfolding in another part of

London. How much he knew of their background is difficult to tell, though he certainly did not know about the events that took place that day while he was at work.

Some time after the Admiralty gates had opened, a handsome young man knocked at the door of Signor Galli, in Jarvis Street, off London's Haymarket. The Reverend James Hackman, a tall, thin figure with a high forehead and fine, almost effeminate features, had only a week before been ordained as a priest in the Church of England and given the living of Wiveton, in Norfolk. But that morning he was not bent on clerical business. He demanded to see a letter that Galli had first shown him two days earlier. But the Italian turned him away, telling him that it 'was out of his power. The letter being no longer in his possession[9].' The letter had been written by Martha Ray, the thirty-five-year-old mistress of the Earl of Sandwich, and in it she pleaded with Hackman to 'desist from his pursuit' of her, refused to see him and told him she wished to cease all connection with him. Hackman left disappointed, unable to confirm what he did not wish to believe.

Martha Ray had been the mistress of the Earl of Sandwich for more than sixteen years and had borne him nine children, of whom five were living: Robert, born in 1763; Augusta, whose date of birth goes unrecorded; Basil, born in 1770; and two other brothers, William and John, whose birth dates were 1772 and 1773. With such a family it was obvious that Sandwich's relationship with Ray was no casual affair. She was

effectively his common law wife and was known as his public consort. A contemporary described Ray as 'not what we would call *elegant*, but which would pass under the denomination of *pretty*; her height was about five feet five inches; she was fresh-coloured, and had a perpetual smile on her countenance, which rendered her agreeable to every beholder'. Others, especially those who heard her sing, were more impressed. The young clergyman Richard Dennison Cumberland, who listened to Ray's performances at Hinchingbrooke, spoke of her 'personal accomplishments and engaging Manner', describing her as 'a second Cleopatra[10] – a Woman of thousands, and capable of producing those effects on the Heart which the Poets talk so much of and which we are apt to think Chimerical'. Her surviving portraits bear out this description showing a prepossessed and elegantly dressed woman with bright eyes, a slight smile and an expression that betrays considerable strength of character. Certainly James Hackman, who had met her at Hinchingbrooke, had been smitten with her since their first acquaintance in 1775. Nor did it seem likely, despite Ray's pleas, that the young man would desist in his pursuit of her.

Later that same afternoon Hackman dined with his sister, her husband, the attorney Frederick Booth, and a cousin at the Booths' house in Craven Street, off the Strand, a few doors down from Benjamin Franklin's lodgings; he left after eating, promising to return to the family for supper. Striding up Craven Street, he turned left into the Strand, walked through Charing

Cross and down Whitehall towards the Admiralty, where Ray and Sandwich had their lodgings. When he arrived he saw the Earl's coach at the Admiralty's door. He guessed (rightly, as it turned out) that Martha Ray was going out, and he walked the short distance back towards Craven Street, and stationed himself at the Cannon Coffee House at Charing Cross, so that he could watch the passing traffic. His wait was not in vain. Shortly before six o'clock, Sandwich's coach swept by, carrying Ray and her companion, Signora Caterina Galli, up the Strand and past its many fine shops, with their first-floor displays of luxuries, cloth and jewels, before turning north into Covent Garden. Hackman followed hastily on foot, watching the two women enter the Covent Garden Theatre at about a quarter past six.

On that Wednesday the theatre was crowded. The star attraction was Margaret Kennedy, a statuesque if somewhat clumsy actress with a fine voice, famed for 'breeches' roles in which she played male parts. The evening's receipts were to go to her benefit, and she was to sing the part of Colin in *Rose and Colin*, a short comic opera by Charles Dibdin, and the male lead – Meadows – in Thomas Arne's extremely popular opera, *Love in a Village*.

Caterina Galli and Martha Ray were more than casual theatre-goers. They might have chosen that evening to go to Drury Lane to see a much-acclaimed production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but they preferred comic opera and Mrs Kennedy because of their love of music. Caterina Galli was herself a famous singer

and music teacher. A pupil of Handel, she had starred in his operas and oratorios in the 1740s and 1750s, usually singing male roles. After a spell back in her native Italy, she returned to London for two seasons before retiring in 1776. Martha Ray, though she had never performed professionally, was also a singer of great accomplishment, with a passion, shared by Sandwich, for Handel. Ray had been tutored by a number of musicians at Sandwich's expense, and Galli, as well as being Ray's companion, had sung with her at private concerts arranged by the Earl. It seems likely[11] that Sandwich hoped to attend the performance at Covent Garden that evening – he had earlier cancelled a dinner with friends at the Admiralty – but was prevented from enjoying himself because of the press of Admiralty business.

Mrs Kennedy and *Love in a Village* were apt objects of Martha Ray's attention. Mrs Kennedy, like Martha Ray, had achieved success through the attentions of a male admirer: she had been spotted by Thomas Arne, singing songs in a pub near St Giles, one of the least salubrious parts of London. Ray, who had been a milliner's apprentice, owed her present station to the attentions of Lord Sandwich. And Isaac Bickerstaff's story, set to Arne's music, was about the perils of love and marriage, especially among social unequals, a topic that much concerned Ray, with her five illegitimate children by Sandwich.

Like most story-lines in comedy, the plot of *Love in a Village* enjoys a simplicity and happy resolution altogether unlike the unresolved complexities of relationships such as that between

Ray and Sandwich. A young gentleman and -woman, Meadows and Rosetta, separately flee from marriage partners chosen by their parents but whom they have never seen. Disguised as a gardener and female servant, working in the same house, they soon fall hopelessly in love.

The couple try to resist their feelings, thinking that marriage – the proper consequence of true love – will be impossible. How could they marry someone whom they believed to be their social inferior? But, by an improbable contrivance typical of such comedies, they prove to be the very people their parents wished them to marry. Freed of their disguise, Rosetta and Meadows are united – duty and desire are neatly reconciled. The barriers of class and wealth are neither circumvented nor confronted but expelled through a twist in the plot.

Ray and Galli watched the performance from seats close to the royal box, where they not only had one of the best views of the stage but were easily seen by the rest of the audience. Accounts differ about who else joined them in the box. One, by a friend of Sandwich, speaks of their being accompanied by three young men belonging to Sandwich's circle of naval protégés; another singles out Lord Coleraine, a notorious libertine, who had been the keeper of the famous courtesan Kitty Fisher and of Sophia Baddeley, a stage beauty and singer. Whoever their companions were, Ray and Galli clearly enjoyed the evening, exchanging pleasantries with male friends and admirers when not engaged in watching the performance. James Hackman, who had entered

the theatre, watched the two women across the pit.

Hastening to his lodgings in Duke's Court, St Martin's Lane, Hackman loaded two pistols, and wrote a suicide note to his brother-in-law:

My Dear Frederick12

When this reaches you I shall be no more, but do not let my unhappy fate distress you too much. I have strove against it as long as possible, but it now overpowers me. You know where my affections were placed; my having by some means or other lost hers, (an idea which I could not support) has driven me to madness. The world will condemn me, but your good heart will pity me. God bless you, my dear Fred, would I had a sum to leave you, to convince you of my great regard. You was my only friend … May heaven protect my beloved woman, and forgive this act which alone could relieve me from a world of misery I have long endured. Oh! if it should be in your power to do her any act of friendship, remember your faithful friend.

Stuffing the note in one pocket together with one of the pistols, he put another letter in his other pocket with the second weapon. This letter, which Hackman had sent to Martha Ray but which she had returned unopened, offered to marry her and take her youngest child, John, off to a life of rural felicity in his country parish. The note concluded: 'O! thou dearer to me[13] than life, because that life is thine! think of me and pity me. I have long been devoted to you; and your's, as I am, I hope either to die, or soon to be your's in marriage. For God's sake[26], let me hear

from you; and, as you love me, keep me no longer in suspense, since nothing can relieve me but death or you. – Adieu!'

His pockets full of sentiment and violence, Hackman returned to the Covent Garden Theatre. He seems to[14] have entered the theatre several times during the evening (a full night's entertainment lasted nearly five hours), retreating to the Bedford Coffee-house to strengthen his resolve with glasses of brandy and water. His friends claimed that he then tried to shoot himself on two occasions, first in the lobby – where he was prevented by the crowd from getting close enough to Ray to be sure that she would witness his death – and then on the steps of the theatre, where he was pushed by one of the Irish chairmen who carried the sedan chairs of the theatre's wealthy patrons.

At about a quarter past eleven Ray and Galli came out of the theatre, but the large crowd jostled them and prevented them from reaching their waiting carriage. John Macnamara, a young Irish attorney, saw the two women, 'who seemed somewhat distressed by the croud, whereupon he offered his service to conduct them to their carriage, which was accepted, and Miss Ray took hold of his arm[15]'. Threading their way through the swirl of parting spectators and down the steps of the theatre, Galli entered the carriage first. Ray followed, putting her foot on the carriage step as Macnamara held her hand. At that moment a figure in black dashed forward and pulled Ray by the sleeve; she turned to find herself face to face with Hackman. Before she could utter a word, he pulled the two pistols from his pockets,

shot Ray with the one in his right hand, and shot himself with the other.

As the crowd shrank back, Macnamara, unsure of what had happened, lifted Ray from the ground, and found himself drenched in blood. For years afterwards he would recall (somewhat hyperbolically) 'the sudden assault of the assassin, the instantaneous death of the victim, and the spattering of the poor girls brains over his own face[16]'. According to Horace Walpole, Hackman 'came round behind her [Ray], pulled her by the gown, and on her turning round, clapped the pistol to her forehead and shot her through the head. With another pistol he then attempted to shoot himself, but the ball grazing his brow, he tried to dash out his own brains with the pistol, and is more wounded by those blows than by the ball[17].' Martha Ray died instantly, leaving Hackman on the ground, 'beating himself about the head … crying, "o! kill me![18] … for God's sake kill me!"'

With the help of a link-boy, Macnamara, shocked but with great composure, carried Ray's bloody body across the Square and into the nearby Shakespeare Tavern, where the corpse was laid on a table in one of the rooms usually hired for private supper parties. (The tavern was a notorious place of sexual assignation: in 1763 James Boswell took 'two very pretty girls'[19] there and 'found them good subjects of amorous play'.) Hackman was arrested by Richard Blandy, a constable who had heard the shots as he was walking between the Drury Lane and Covent Garden

playhouses: ‘he came up and took Mr Hackman, who delivered two pistols to him … he was taking him away, when somebody called out to bring his Prisoner back; and then he took him to the Shakespeare Tavern, where he saw he was all bloody … he searched Mr Hackman’s pockets, and found two sealed letters, which he gave to Mr Campbell, the Master of the Tavern[20]’.

In the Shakespeare Macnamara angrily confronted Hackman, asking him, ‘What devil could induce you to commit such a deed?’ Hackman, ‘with great composure’, responded, ‘This is not a proper place to ask such a question’, and when asked what his name was and who knew him replied ‘that his name was Hackman, and that he was known to Mr Booth in Craven Street whom he had sent for[21]’.

Sir John Fielding, the blind magistrate and brother of the novelist Henry Fielding, was summoned and arrived at the Shakespeare at three o’clock in the morning. He examined the witnesses in the tavern and committed Hackman to the Tothills Bridewell, a gaol where prisoners were often held overnight. Before he was taken away Hackman asked to see Ray’s body and commented, ‘What a change has a few hours made in me – had her friends done as I wished them to do, this would never have happened.’ One report described him as gazing ‘upon the miserable[22] object with the most deep attention and calm composure, instead of that violent agitation of spirits which every beholder expected, and exclaiming, *that he now was happy!*’ In

the Bridewell, and much to the surprise of many commentators, he fell into a deep and untroubled sleep.

Sandwich knew nothing of these events until some time around midnight. He had waited at the Admiralty, expecting Martha Ray to return for supper after the theatre. As she was late and he was tired, he went to bed at about half past eleven, only to be woken by his black servant James, who told him that Ray had been shot. A distraught James described the scene to Sandwich's friend, Joseph Cradock, the following day. At first Sandwich did not understand or believe what had happened. He thought James was referring to one of the many scurrilous ballads sung under the windows of the Admiralty. 'You know that I forbade[23] you to plague me any more about those ballads, let them sing or say whatever they please about me!' 'Indeed, my Lord,' replied James, 'I am not speaking of any ballads; it is all too true.' Other members of the household then came in; 'all was a scene of the utmost horror and distress'. Sandwich 'stood, as it were, petrified; till suddenly seizing a candle, he ran upstairs, threw himself on the bed, and in agony exclaimed, "Leave me a while to myself – I could have borne anything but this".'

Whether James had been told the news by Caterina Galli or another messenger is not clear – 'all was confusion and astonishment[24]'. Galli had fainted[25] in the coach when Ray was killed and could not recall what happened thereafter, although we know she returned to the Admiralty in Sandwich's coach. Sandwich had enough presence of mind to dispatch a servant to

the Shakespeare Tavern to watch over Ray's body and exclude prurient visitors. At seven the following morning he scribbled a hasty note to his friend Robert Boyle Walsingham, an aristocratic young naval officer, 'For gods sake come to me immediately, in this moment I have much want of the comfort of a real friend; poor Miss Ray was inhumanly murthered last night as she was stepping into her coach at the playhouse door … The murtherer is taken and sent to prison.'

Two hours later, Hackman was brought before Sir John Fielding at Bow Street. Fielding led Hackman to a private room 'in order to prevent, as much as possible, the unhappy prisoner from being exposed to the view of wanton, idle curiosity[27]', and had the witnesses' testimony sworn before him. Hackman was no longer calm but visibly agitated: 'From the agonizing pangs which entirely discomposed and externally convulsed him, it was some time before the Magistrate could proceed[28].' Asked if he had anything to say Hackman replied that 'he wished for nothing but death; that nothing could be more welcome; that the sooner it came the better, for that alone would relieve him of the extreme Misery he laboured under[29]'. Fielding committed him to Newgate, where he asked that he be granted his own room, a request that Fielding accepted on condition that he did not stay alone, as the court feared that he might again seek to take his own life. He was scheduled to be tried at the next sessions at the Old Bailey, set for 16 April.

That same afternoon[30] the coroner's jury met at the Shakespeare Tavern in the room where Sandwich's servant still guarded Ray's body. The corpse was examined by two surgeons, Mr O'Brien and Mr Jarvis, who showed that the bullet had entered Ray's forehead on the right side, causing massive damage, and then exited near the left ear. Hackman who, at five foot nine, was several inches taller than Ray, must have been pointing his pistol downwards when he fired; this would also explain why Macnamara believed that the blow he felt to his arm was caused not by Ray's fall but by the spent bullet that had killed her. During the inquest, against the advice of Mr O'Brien and much to the distress of Sandwich, it was decided to open Ray's skull in order to trace the trajectory of the wound. The doctors 'owned that they never saw[31] so dismal and ghastly a fracture'; the inquest brought in a verdict of wilful murder.

That day all[32] of Lord Sandwich's servants 'out of livery' changed into mourning clothes. In the evening Sandwich had Ray's body removed to an undertaker's near Leicester Fields. One paper reported that she was wrapped in a sheet or shroud and that she would be buried wearing the valuable clothes and jewels she wore at the moment of her murder, 'so that property[33] to the amount of near £2000 will be deposited in her coffin'. On 14 April, Ray was interred in a vault in Elstree church, where her mother, who had died three years previously, was also buried.

Sandwich's grief did not stop him taking decisive action in

the days after Martha Ray's murder. He employed Walsingham and two lawyers, Mr Balding and Mr William Chetham, to take depositions and informations from Signor Galli, his wife Caterina and Macnamara; they also questioned Hackman and discussed the case with Sir John Fielding. Sandwich himself questioned Signor Galli on the day after Ray's death. He learnt that Hackman had contacted Ray about a week earlier. (A scribbled note from Ray to Caterina Galli of 30 March – 'My Dear Galli[34] I am in open distress I beg you come immediately to me' – possibly refers to the contact.) Ray gave the Gallis her letter to Hackman asking to be left alone, and they read it to Hackman on the evening of 5 April. Galli assured Sandwich that there had been no assignation or meeting between Ray and Hackman at his house, and that, though he had seen Hackman walking in St James's Park, he had avoided him.

The same day Sandwich sent a message via Walsingham to Hackman telling the murderer of his forgiveness, though the press reported that the Earl also claimed that Hackman 'has disturbed his peace of mind for ever[35]'. Hackman, on his part, told Walsingham 'upon his word[36] as a dying man, that he has never spoken to Miss Ray since the beginning of the year 1776, at which time he had proposed marriage and was rejected'. The murderer was pleased to be assured that his victim had no other special admirer: 'poor Miss Ray was innocent. He lays the whole on Galli' – and expressed his determination to die. 'He is desirous

to dye by the hand of the law … he wishes not to live himself, he told me today,' wrote Walsingham to Sandwich, 'he hoped to suffer as soon as possible[37].'

The agreement between Sandwich and Hackman that Martha Ray was innocent of any wrongdoing placed Caterina Galli in a difficult position. A day after the murder a story was already circulating that Hackman's decision to kill Ray, and not merely to end his own life, was explained by a stratagem of Galli's: to get Hackman to leave Ray alone, she had told Hackman that Ray had tired of him and had a new secret lover. Seeing Ray with male companions at the play, he had been driven into a frenzy of jealousy.

The papers reported that Sandwich offered to secure a pardon for Hackman if he were convicted. (As a member of the cabinet, which determined such matters, Sandwich would certainly have been able to exert great influence on Hackman's behalf, and he clearly did not relish the role of sitting in judgment on a person's life. Years earlier, commenting on this cabinet function, he had written to a friend, 'you can't think how it distresses me to be put to a momentary decision where a man's life is concerned[38]'.) But as early as two days after the murder Hackman seems to have rejected the Earl's aid, an act that was rightly interpreted as a determination on his part to die. For, as Fielding explained in a letter to Sandwich on 10 April, Hackman's conviction seemed inevitable:

I am clearly of opinion[39] that the evidence against Hackman is full and compleat to the last degree and that he can make no defense that would not aggravate his guilt and tend to his conviction; but will not neglect any hint your Lordship gives. As to Insanity it cannot be offered as an excuse as it appeared and can be proved that he was rational and sensible of his Wickedness at 4 in the morning, when I examined him, and has been so ever since.

At first Hackman said that he would plead guilty as charged of Ray's murder. But in the days after the crime, his sister, his brother-in-law, Booth, and the lawyer who was acting on his behalf, Manasseh Dawes, persuaded him 'to avail himself of the plausible plea of temporary insanity[40]'. The trial came on at 9.30 on the morning of 16 April. Hackman was defended by Davenport and Silvester, the prosecution conducted by Henry Howarth and Sir John Fielding. The courtroom was packed with fashionable society, the same sort of people who had witnessed the murder the week before. James Boswell, who had visited Hackman's brother-in-law on a number of occasions and seen Hackman himself in prison, was sitting at the table of defending counsel. John Wilkes, the radical libertine who was one of Sandwich's most bitter political enemies, was also present, as were a number of famous aristocratic beauties. (Boswell was shocked when Wilkes passed him a note during the trial that said, 'I always know where the greatest beauty in any place is when Mr Boswell is there, for he contrives to be near her, but does not

admire the first grace more than Mr Wilkes does[41].') Frederick Booth, who had worked so hard to help his brother-in-law, felt unable to watch the proceedings and awaited the verdict outside the court.

The trial opened with the prosecution, which called witnesses to prove the facts of the case. Macnamara's was the chief testimony. He was followed by 'Mary Anderson, a fruit girl' who had also seen the killing, and by an apothecary, Mr Mahon, who had seized one of the pistols from Hackman and helped the constable Blandy make his arrest. The final witness was Mr O'Brien, one of the surgeons who had given evidence at Ray's inquest. None of the facts were contested by the defence. Sir William Blackstone, who chaired the bench, invited Hackman to offer anything material in his defence. Reading from a prepared statement, the young man admitted the crime, professed himself ready to die, but explained his act as a brief moment of madness: 'I protest, with that regard for truth which becomes my situation, that the will to destroy her who was ever dearer to me than life, was never mine, until a momentary phrenzy overcame me, and induced me to commit the deed I deplore.' Hackman's counsel, Davenport, one of the most famous lawyers of the day, argued the case for insanity, maintaining that Hackman's suicide note, in which he had asked Booth to take care of Ray after his death, showed that he had not originally intended to kill her.

But the court was not persuaded of the defendant's case. Blackstone argued that the presence of two pistols showed

felonious intent. He added that 'the prisoner has rested his defense upon a sudden phrenzy of mind; but the judge said, that it was not every fit, or start of tumultuous passion, that would justify the killing of another; but it must be the total loss of reason in every part of life'. The jury was instructed to convict the accused, and Hackman was condemned to death. Boswell hurried from the courtroom to tell Booth, who received the news with '*mains serrees*'[42] (clenched fists).

Eighteenth-century justice was swift. Three days later Hackman woke a little after five in the morning, and spent two hours in private prayer, before taking communion in the chapel in Newgate prison. At nine 'he came into the press-yard, where a great croud of persons assembled to satisfy their curiosity, at the expense of one shilling each. That all might have an equal share of the sight, a lane was formed by the multitude on each side, through which Mr Hackman passed, dressed in black, leaning on the arm of his friend the Rev. Mr Porter, whose hand he squeezed as he muttered the solemn invocation to Heaven, not to forsake a sinner of so enormous a degree, in the trying hour of death[43].' Haltered with the rope with which he would be hanged, Hackman was reported as exclaiming, 'Oh! the sight of this shocks me more than the thought of its intended operation.' Driven in his mourning coach to Tyburn, jeered and cheered by a group of building workers in Holborn, he spent his final minutes praying for Martha Ray, the Earl of Sandwich and their children, before being 'launched into Eternity' at about ten minutes past

eleven. James Boswell, who witnessed the hanging, and asked the executioner if he had heard Hackman's last words ('No. I thought it a point of ill manners to listen on such occasions'), ended the day drunk: 'Claret h<urt>. Very ill[44].'

Hackman's body, like that of all murderers, was then sent to Surgeon's Hall for dissection. On the day after the execution the nineteen-year-old fencing master Henry Angelo went with a friend to Surgeon's Hall to view the corpse. 'Having been placed on a large table, an incision had been made on his stomach, and the flesh was spread over on each side[45].' Angelo's next stop was Dolly's Chop House, but the memory of Hackman's flesh was too much. He was unable to eat his pork chops and never touched the dish again.

The press reckoned that Hackman's execution attracted the largest crowd since the hanging of another clergyman, William Dodd, for forgery three years earlier. (Such was the press that two members of the crowd died, trampled after they fell.) But Dodd had been a public figure: the chaplain of the Magdalen Hospital for penitent prostitutes, author of a successful Shakespeare anthology, the friend of literati like Dr Johnson, and the client of a number of prominent aristocrats. Hackman was a nobody before he murdered Ray. Now he was an object of public fascination. When he had dropped his handkerchief to signal he was ready to die, the hangman got down from the cart and pocketed it; the souvenir was very valuable. On the day after his execution, a crowd pressed into the Surgeon's Hall to see the

body: 'Soon after the doors[46] were opened, so great a crowd was assembled that no genteel person attempted to gain admittance, as it was observed that caps, cardinals, gowns, wigs and hats, &c. were destroyed, without regard to age, sex or distinction.' In death, as in life, Hackman was able to cause mayhem.

After the first few days of frenzied activity that followed the murder, Sandwich left the Admiralty office and retreated to a friend's house in Richmond. From there he wrote an importunate note to Lord Bristol, asking him to postpone the opposition's motion in the House of Lords for his removal as First Lord of the Admiralty:

It is understood[47] that navy matters are to be discussed in the House of Lords on Thursday or Friday next. I am at present totally unfit for business of any kind and unable to collect any materials to support the side of the question that I must espouse. I perceive impropriety in putting off the business by a motion from anyone with whom I am politically connected; I have therefore recourse to your humanity, to request that you would contrive that this point is not brought on till after this day sevennight, by which time I hope to be fit for public business as I ever shall be.

Bristol promised to ask for a postponement, using the excuse that he was suffering from gout, and he ended his reply, 'No-one can be more concerned than I am for any interruption to your domestic felicity[48].'

Sandwich received many letters of advice and condolence.

Aristocratic friends like Lord Hardwicke praised Martha Ray and reassured the Earl of their faith in her virtue: 'From what I have heard[49] of her Conduct I never doubted but it had been entirely irreproachable.' Even the prudish George III, who had once argued that Sandwich should not hold political office because of his notorious private life, offered the Earl his sympathy, using a stilted formula that ensured that he did not have to mention Ray's name: 'I am sorry[50] Lord Sandwich has met with any severe blow of a private nature. I flatter myself this world scarcely contains a man so void of feeling as not to compassionate your situation.' One of his colleagues urged on Sandwich the stoicism he had shown in political adversity: 'You have suffered much and the utmost exertion of your fortitude is now required. Show yourself in this my Lord, as you have done in most other things equal if not superior to the rest of mankind[51].' Others took a less sympathetic view. As George Duke Taylor remarked, 'Enemies more inveterate than the rest make no scruple to affirm that they look upon these things are come down upon you as judgments, for your private and public conduct during these ten or twelve years past, which in their language have been both wicked and arbitrary.' Over the next few years Sandwich's opponents would occasionally refer to Martha Ray's murder, but on the whole they respected his privacy.

It did not take long for Sandwich's life to return to its old routines. He was back in the Admiralty office in the week after

Hackman's execution. He managed to survive the attempt to remove him from office, and was soon deeply involved in plans to thwart the French invasion and keep the government in power. He remained a key political figure until the British surrender at Yorktown effectively ended the American war and brought down Lord North's government; even after he left the Admiralty, he had a small group of followers in the House of Commons and took an active interest in politics.

Ray's death was clearly a great loss for Sandwich. His friend Joseph Cradock recalled the period after her murder in his *Memoirs*. He tells the story of his embarrassment when he first visited Sandwich after Ray's death. Entering the Earl's study 'where the portrait[52] of Miss Ray, a most exact resemblance, still remained over the chimney-piece', Cradock rather clumsily 'started on seeing it'. Sandwich 'instantly endeavored to speak of some unconnected subject; but he looked so ill, and I felt so much embarrassed, that as soon as I possibly could, I most respectfully took my leave'. A similar incident occurred some time later when Sandwich was invited to dine with a few friends at the house of 'our open-hearted friend Admiral Walsingham'. The evening went well, and Sandwich seemed to regain his spirits, until one of the guests put Sandwich in mind of Ray: 'one of the company requested that Mrs Bates would favour them with "Shepherds, I have lost my Love". This was unfortunately the very air that had been introduced by Miss Ray at Hinchingbrooke, and had been always called for by Lord Sandwich. Mr Bates immediately

endeavored to prevent its being sung, and by his anxiety increased the distress; but it was too late to pause.' Sandwich was mortified. He struggled to overcome his feelings, 'but they were so apparent, that at last he went up to Mrs Walsingham, and in a very confused manner said, he hoped she would excuse him not staying longer at that time, but that he had just recollected some pressing business which required his return to the Admiralty; and bowing to all the company, rather hastily left the room[53]'.

Yet, within a year, Sandwich had a new mistress, Nelly Gordon, who was to remain his consort until his death in 1792, and who also bore him children. (In his will he arranged an annuity of £100 a year for life for her – in addition to another he had given her in her lifetime for the same sum – and a further £25 a year for life for her child.) Nor was he a recluse. The end of the American war and his active political career enabled him to indulge his passion for music, and he was the key figure behind the enormously popular concerts held to celebrate Handel's Centenary in 1784.

Apart from Ray's children – young Basil was soon in all kinds of trouble at school – Ray's companion Caterina Galli suffered the consequences of her murder more than anyone else. Deprived of her position in Sandwich's household, she was ostracized from polite society, and could no longer make a living by teaching rich young girls to sing. The Duchess of Bedford wrote to her that she was 'sorry to inform Signor Galli that she made a determination, at the time the unfortunate affair happened in which she was

concerned, never to take notice more of her in any way[54]'. The Duchess did so because she was sure that 'whatever appearances being against her if she was blameless her good protector would never let her want a proper maintenance without applying to the public[55]'.

Galli wrote a succession of letters to Sandwich in her native Italian complaining of her plight. A month after the murder she told Sandwich, 'I am ill and afflicted to see myself exposed in a book and in the papers so unjustly wronged as well as my character ruined that I don't know how I can live in the world[56].' Nine months later her situation was even worse:

I cannot assist myself in my profession, being badly liked by everyone who believe me to be guilty; I have lost my reputation in the face of my protectors being sufficient to madden any person … Where can I look for assistance? They all tell me I should defend myself against the charges and that my silence makes me more culpable and that they will know that your excellency does not admit me and that you dislike me. Lord I believe I have given you sufficient proofs of my innocence at not having taken any part of deceit, I have taken in due time my oath. I have been by orders of your excellency to the court, did not hide myself or otherwise flee. I have always been prepared to go before any judge and prove my innocence. I have lost both my health and reputation as well as money through me not defending myself and punishing the culpables, and all this I did through the

certainty that your excellency will be my protector as you sent me information both by word and letter that you would always help me[57].

Impoverished, Galli was forced to return to the stage, though her voice had gone. She made a number of concert appearances in the 1790s, when she was deemed to cut a pathetic figure, and was given money by the Royal Society of Musicians. We know Sandwich donated twenty guineas to her and may have given her more. But she remained in sad circumstances, and when her husband died she had to borrow the money to bury him. As a result of Martha Ray's murder she had lost her employment and could no longer work in the job she knew best and loved.

These, as far as I can tell, are the 'facts' of the murder by James Hackman of Martha Ray. They make up the story that almost all commentators, both at the time and subsequently, agree on. But they leave much unanswered. No one doubted that Hackman killed Ray, that he was the black figure who came out of the crowd and shot her to death before a shocked public. But what lay behind the murder? Why did he kill her? What was their relationship like? Was Hackman demented, or did he have understandable reasons to shoot her? Such a brutal killing, like any act that temporarily tears the social fabric apart, called out for explanation. But the facts alone could not provide an answer. Evidence about motive was hard to come by, not least because, as we shall see, there were interested parties concerned to keep the case under wraps. The vacuum created by a lack of information

was, however, quickly filled by supposition, speculation and interpretation. For plenty of people, for many different reasons, wanted to publicize their own versions of the lives of Hackman, Ray and Sandwich.

The murder was, of course, a personal tragedy, but it was also a public event. Public, not only because it involved one of the most prominent households in the land and one of the nation's most important political figures, but because it received so much publicity. In the 1770s London boasted a thriving press with five daily and eight or nine triweekly papers that were widely circulated in London and in many provincial towns. By the time of Ray's death newspaper proprietors were paying the government an annual stamp duty for more than 12.5 million papers. The provinces also had their own papers – nearly forty by the 1770s – that shamelessly plundered news and information from the London press, adding vignettes of their own. Within days of Hackman's crime accounts of the murder, commentary on its significance and speculation about why it had happened flowed out from the newspaper printers' offices in the vicinity of St Paul's Cathedral and spread across the nation, as news and stories were duplicated in local papers, then in magazines and periodicals. Readers of the *Public Advertiser*, the *Gazetteer*, the *St James's Chronicle*, *Lloyd's Evening Post*, the *London Evening Post*, the *Norwich Mercury*, and the *Newcastle Chronicle* – in fact of every London paper and most of those in the provinces – were regaled with the unfolding story of Hackman's crime. The

flow of information[58] explains why in his Norfolk parish Parson Woodforde broke off his usual culinary catalogue – no diarist has devoted so much space to the joys of the table – to bewail the fate of Hackman, a fellow man of the cloth, while at Salisbury the gentleman musician and young lawyer John Marsh tut-tutted in his journal about the fate of a young man he had known at school.

The eighteenth-century press made Hackman's crime into a 'media event' both because it was a sensational crime and because the events of 7 April were so obviously connected to stories that the print media in general had been telling the public for the last twenty years. These were tales of political corruption and moral depravity in high places, of male aristocratic debauchery, and of the growing power and influence of beautiful and intelligent women who used their charms for their own ends. This culture of scandal, propagated by the press, thrived on supposition, rumour, and speculation. It took 'the facts' and wove them into a variety of seamless narratives that opened up all sorts of possible interpretation. Such stories were designed to sell newspapers and magazines, attack the government, traduce and shame individuals, and settle personal scores.

The press of the 1770s is not therefore a place we should go in pursuit of 'the truth' about Hackman and Ray's relationship, but it does show how the different versions of Hackman's crime were shaped and fashioned. The aftermath of Ray's death saw a struggle conducted in the press to form and even to determine

how the public viewed the affair.

CHAPTER 2 *The Press: A Case of Sentimental Murder*

THOUGH THERE WAS plenty of pressing news for the papers to cover in the spring of 1779 – the failing war with the American colonists and the internecine political battles in parliament – the newspapers devoted a great deal of space to the killing of the Earl of Sandwich's mistress and the subsequent conduct and execution of her murderer. Between the night of Martha Ray's murder and Hackman's execution on 19 April daily items about the case appeared in many London papers. At first these were dominated by detailed accounts of the events of 7 April, reconstructions that culminated in the evidence offered at Hackman's trial on 16 April. But there was also an obsessive interest in Hackman himself. Papers reported on his moods and comments, trying to understand what had led this handsome, respectable young man to commit a crime of such enormity. They published many tantalizing vignettes of Hackman, Ray, and Sandwich both before and after the crime. And many speculated about the circumstances that had led to the crime and offered comments on its moral import.

To the untutored eye these items can seem to be little more than the fumblings of an unsophisticated news media trying to piece together a story. But, as we shall see, the coverage of

the Hackman/ Ray affair was part of a more complex plot that involved attempts on the part of the Earl of Sandwich and the friends of James Hackman to shape and control public response to the sensational killing. This was possible only because of the peculiar state of the newspaper press at the time. Since the accession of George III in 1760 the rapid expansion of the press had produced a new kind of newspaper, more opinionated than ever before, fuller of comment and criticism, yet not governed by what today we would consider the professional protocols of impartial reporting and editorial control. As the press grew, so papers changed in size and content. A loophole in the 1757 duties on paper made it cheaper for printers to make their papers larger and increase the number of their pages. They needed more copy. Newspapers had always carried many advertisements (their key source of revenue) as well as official government information, commercial news, and items gathered from coffee-houses and interested readers. Though many had a political bias – like the notoriously anti-government *London Evening Post* – most were primarily advertisers and purveyors of information. Opinion – on matters political, commercial, social and cultural – was found in pamphlets or weekly papers, like *The Test* and *The Contest*, that were editorial rather than informational. But with the change in the law, newspapers began to publish political commentary and essays on subjects ranging from taste to science, theatrical, music and art reviews. And, in some cases, they printed lots of gossip and scandal.

Where did this news and commentary come from? Most papers were owned by consortia of businessmen – theatrical proprietors, booksellers, and auctioneers – who considered papers chiefly as advertising vehicles. They were put together by a printer, who may have had strong opinions but was not a journalist, and the few part-time news-gatherers whom the papers employed could hardly be described as reporters. What few experienced journalists there were, were employed to cover politics, reporting parliamentary debates or such sensational events as the court martial of Admiral Keppel, whose trial ended just a few months before Ray's murder. Henry 'Memory' Woodfall, whose amazing recall was vital, as note taking was prohibited during parliamentary debates, was the most celebrated of this small group of reporters. Papers therefore relied on the public for their information and commentary. Most of what appeared in the press was either unsolicited information and commentary from interested parties or news sold by peddlers for a profit. Above all, the paper relied on its correspondents, publishing huge numbers of letters submitted by its readers. *The Gazetteer*, one of the first papers to speculate on the causes of Hackman's crime, received no fewer than 861 letters in one four-month period, publishing 560 of them 'at length' and a further 262 in abbreviated form under the heading 'Observations of our Correspondents'. Long articles, masquerading as correspondence and signed by such figures as 'Honestus', 'A Friend to the Theatre', 'Cato', 'Old Slyboots', and, most notoriously, 'Junius'

fanned the flames of controversy, offering views on politics, religion, taste, novels, painting, the state of nation and the nature of crime. Anonymity and pseudonyms protected the authors, who included leading politicians, playwrights, artists, magistrates and doctors as well as opinionated readers.

James Boswell, who found his métier and his fame with his *Life of Samuel Johnson* published in 1791, was for much of his London life a typical newspaper correspondent. He wrote to the papers to puff his works, denigrate rivals, and comment on the issues of the day. On the afternoon of Hackman's trial on 16 April, for instance, he strolled into the office of Henry Woodfall, the publisher of the *Daily Advertiser*, offering him an account of the trial, only to discover that 'A blackguard being was writing a well-expressed account of the trial[59]'. Nothing daunted he went on to the managers of the *St James's Chronicle*, who inserted his anonymous piece in the paper of the following day. This essay contained a long quotation and a puff for an essay in *The Hypochondriack* on the nature of love that Boswell himself had written and published earlier. Boswell then wrote a highly personal account, which Woodfall printed in the *Public Advertiser* for 19 April, of Frederick Booth's reaction to his brother-in-law's conviction – '"Well", said Mr Booth, "I would rather have him found guilty with truth and honour than escape by a mean evasion".' 'A sentiment', Boswell commented, 'truly noble, bursting from a heart rent with anguish![60]' When a false[61] report appeared in *Lloyd's Evening Post* that Boswell was in the

coach that had taken Hackman to his death at Tyburn Tree, he rushed off to the offices of the *St James's Chronicle*, and the *Public Advertiser*, as well as *Lloyd's Evening Post* to get them to insert a paragraph to correct the story.

Boswell did not expect to be paid for his letters and paragraphs, but many who dealt with newspaper proprietors were in it for the money. A German visitor to London was surprised by the 'prodigious multitude of persons' engaged in collecting news. 'Among these', he wrote, 'may be reckoned the paragraph writers, who go to coffee houses and public places to pick up anecdotes and the news of the day, which they reduce to short sentences, and are paid in proportion to their number and authenticity[62].' Some papers had receiving stations for contributions. The *Gazetteer*, for instance, used J. Marks, a bookseller in St Martin's Lane, paying him sixpence 'for every letter or article of intelligence transmitted to the paper'.

This informal process of news-gathering supposed a very different relationship between the press and its readers than the print media have today. Those who read the papers – a broadly based group that extended well beyond the aristocracy, even if it did not include a great many of the poor – were also those who wrote them. The newspaper was not an authoritative organ, written by professionals to offer objective information to the public, but a place where public rumour, news, and intelligence could circulate as if it were printed conversation. Freedom of the press in this period meant not only freedom from government

control but freedom of access – not just to information, but to the pages of the press itself in order to transmute opinions into news. The producer of a paper was not so much an editor, shaping its opinions, as a technician, making available a new means of transmitting the disparate opinions of the public at large. The press was thus very open to manipulation.

Many commentators believed that the enormous growth in news, fuelled by the business interests of the newspaper proprietors and lacking any check on its veracity, created a climate of scandal and sensation. Collecting so-called news, which newspapers quickly took up, copied and stole from one another, was often indiscriminate. Paragraph writers created press stories that played fast and loose with the facts and were frequently embellished. As one critic complained:

The general run of readers have not seen the *paragraphical drudges*, hurrying over the town for malicious materials, and eves-dropping at every door of intelligence; while another *tribe of slaves*, sit *aloof*, at the task of improvement and invention … nor are they perhaps aware that other *inferior agents* are constantly employed in picking up invidious anecdotes of *domestic misfortune;* and *private imprudence*. These hint-catchers have no sooner filled the budget to the brim, than their labours are delivered to the *embellisher*, by whom they are finished and arranged, and sent into the world[63].

Commentators were especially concerned at how personal matters and private lives had become a staple of the press.

Some blamed this new fashion on the political journalism of the 1760s, first perfected by John Wilkes in his weekly paper *The North Briton*, which combined political criticism with highly personal attacks on such figures as the Princess Dowager, George III's mother, and the king's favourite, Lord Bute, who was accused of being the Princess's lover. Wilkes mixed sexual scandal with government policy. This was a familiar tactic in the histories of royal courts where women were often said to have had excessive influence because of their hold over male rulers. But Wilkes and his followers extended this tactic by attacking ministers and leading aristocrats for their private moral conduct, maintaining that this made them unfit for public office. This led to unprecedented exposure of the private lives of public figures. One critic of the 'new journalism' complained to the *Morning Post*:

> The Political Controversy at the beginning of the Present reign, taught printers to feel their Power: we then first find Personal Abuse, unrestrained, stalk abroad, and boldly attack by Name the most respectable Characters. Your brethren were not idle in taking the hint: from that Period we find a material change in the stile of every News-Paper; every Public Man became an object of their attention; and many a sixpence has a Patriot earned, by Paragraphs, which a few years before, would have brought the Printer unpitied to the Pillory[64].

The advent of the newspaper editor in the 1770s led to little change. The first major editor, the Reverend Henry Bate,

used his *Morning Post* simply to perfect existing journalistic practices. He extended the coverage of his paper to include boxing and cricket as well as theatrical and art reviews; most notoriously, he made a part of the paper into a satirical scandal sheet, attacking individual men and women of fashion, hectoring his theatrical opponents (Bate was a minor playwright), and peddling the latest gossip. He was one of the models for Snake, the purveyor of poisonous rumour who inserts anonymous paragraphs in the newspaper in the opening scene of *The School for Scandal* (1777), Richard Brinsley Sheridan's pointed satire of a society obsessed with 'inventing, adding and[65] misrepresenting everything they hear, or their rage, folly, malice or prolific brains can suggest'. Bate deliberately cultivated notoriety, and fought a number of duels with readers who believed themselves maligned or libelled by his publication. Eventually he was imprisoned for accusing the Duke of Richmond of consorting with the enemy during the American war. Bate was said to take fees for publishing some paragraphs and agreeing to suppress others. He was also a client of the government. He had a pension of £200 a year from the secret service funds in return for keeping his 'Newspaper open for all writings in favour of Government'. In 1781 he[66] was finally paid off with a gift of £3,250, so that he could purchase a handsome clerical living for himself.

Bate made little attempt to conceal the *Morning Post*'s connection with Lord North's administration, frequently beginning reports, 'As well as our government can judge', or

‘the government says’ or ‘we are authorized to say’. Bate knew Sandwich and seems to have dealt with him directly on a number of occasions. Lord Bristol, who led the attack on Sandwich in the House of Lords on 23 April, wrote on the following day to an opposition publisher, John Almon, asking him to insert his version of the debate in a number of newspapers ‘with[ou]t saying you had it from me’, to counter the influence of what he described as ‘Ld. SANDWICH’S Morning Post’. It is not surprising that the most sympathetic portrayal of Sandwich in the aftermath of the murder came from the pages of Bate’s paper. Conversely, the accounts of Hackman’s crime in the *Gazetteer*, the *London Evening Post* and the *London Chronicle* – all papers with which John Almon was connected and all associated with the parliamentary opposition – were markedly less sympathetic to Ray and Sandwich.

All the political parties tried to influence the press. Sandwich had been doing so for many years. In the 1760s he employed his chaplain, Dr James Scott, to write newspaper letters under the pseudonyms ‘Anti-Sejanus’ and ‘Old Slyboots’, that were some of the most successful political polemics of the decade. And he was not averse to planting paragraphs of news (as opposed to pieces of political commentary) in the newspapers, not as pieces of information but as ways of influencing opinion. Newspapers in the 1770s were halls of mirrors in which partial views and tendentious opinions were refracted so as to appear as transparent ‘facts’. As we enter them, we have to remember that nothing was

quite what it seemed.

On 20 April 1779 the *Gazetteer* interrupted its report on Hackman's final hours and execution to speculate on the nature of and motives for his crime. The author of this mélange of reporting and reflection was probably a Mr Newman of Guiltspur Street, who was paid occasional fees for items about trials and executions. 'There is evidently a *something*', he mused, 'hangs suspended in doubt, and remains unrevealed' about the case. Hackman's suicide note to his brother-in-law Booth, he remarked, 'pours the Blessings of heaven on the murdered lady, and avows an intention of the murderer to kill *himself only*'. Why, then, did he change his mind? 'Love could not be the impulse – that passion might have led him to act the hero before his mistress; but the fondness, which dictated the affectionate sentence in his letter, and breathed *preservation* to the lady, can never be supposed to turn into resentment without a cause, and operate to her *destruction*.' Perhaps the sight of Ray on Mr Macnamara's arm drove him into a jealous rage. 'But if so,' the article asked, 'why did he not confess it?' The evidence of the two pistols was ambiguous, since the unreliability of firearms meant that many suicides armed themselves with more than one weapon. 'There is certainly a part in his defense that requires explanation[67]', it concluded.

The *Gazetteer* then shifted from speculation to titillating gossip. 'Besides many other[68] cogent reasons, which it may not be proper to disclose, the talkative part of mankind say,

that a certain noble lord had his doubts of the true motives that actuated the perpetrator in this extraordinary transaction.' Perhaps, the paper surmised, Martha Ray had had enough of Sandwich and really wanted to leave him. The rumour was 'That Miss Ray was satiated with the vicious enjoyment of splendour, and desirous to enter the Temple of Hymen with a man who had given every proof of affection; but that there was some barrier started to prevent the union, and she absolutely refused to marry him, though in the hour of reciprocal tenderness she had promised[69]'. Even if this were untrue, the paper concluded, Sandwich had gone to great lengths to find out Hackman's motives: 'it is certain[70], that the Noble Lord himself, or one of his friends, questioned Mr Hackman in prison when the solemnity of the sentence was fresh on his mind, as to the inducement for committing the crime'. Yet much remained obscure. 'In short', the article ended, 'there is so much to be said on both sides of the question that arises on a review of the circumstances, that it might seem premature, as it is certainly difficult to form an opinion[71].'

Such difficulties certainly did not inhibit the press from reporting details of the murder, the interrogation, trial and execution of Hackman, or from speculating about the love triangle. As early as the following day the *St James's Chronicle* sketched in the background to the affair:

Upon Enquiry into[72] the Cause of this desperate Action, we

learn that it was occasioned by an unhappy Passion which the Prisoner had entertained for the Deceased. This Gentleman, whose name is Hackman, was formerly an Officer in the Army, and being upon a Recruiting Party at Huntingdon, in the summer of 1775, saw Miss Ray first at H————ke, to which he had been invited by his Lordship. After that he saw her several Times both in Town and Country, in one of which Visits, it is said, he proposed Marriage to her, which she very genteelly declined; and to prevent any disagreeable Consequences, never after admitted him to her Presence. This, it is supposed, driving him to Distraction, induced him to commit the bloody Act above-mentioned, which he meant also to have been fatal to himself.

Over the following weeks more and more detail was published about Hackman and his victim.

We can be sure that most of the items appearing in the press were planted either by Sandwich and his supporters or by the friends of James Hackman, notably his brother-in-law and the young lawyer Manasseh Dawes who took it upon himself to be the chief apologist in the press for the murderer. Many readers were aware that what they were reading was *parti pris*; indeed, the *Gazetteer* recognized this when it wrote of 'both sides of the question[73]'. The difficulty for readers was how to interpret the different accounts.

The *Gazetteer* had been right about the questioning of Hackman: Walsingham, acting on Sandwich's behalf, had spoken at length with him the day after the crime. But the fragments that

survive make the two men's conversation appear more like an attempt to agree on a story than an effort to investigate the truth of the matter. Both sides seem to have been seeking common ground, searching for a version of events they could agree upon. Their first concern was to establish Martha Ray's innocence. Hackman, wrote Walsingham, 'is desirous to dye by the hand of the law and says he is happy to know that Miss Ray was innocent … Her innocence being cleared up and your forgiveness as a Christian is all he wishes for.' But Hackman and Sandwich differed over what Ray's innocence consisted of. For Hackman it was that she had not taken a new lover, as he claimed Caterina Galli had told him; for Sandwich it was that she had not been carrying on an illicit affair with Hackman. Thus the Earl was relieved to report to his lawyer that 'Mr H has since declared to Captain Walsingham upon the word of a dying man, that he has never spoken to Miss Ray since the beginning of the year 1776, at which time he had proposed marriage and was rejected' and he told at least one newspaper, the *General Advertiser*, that he was sure that Hackman and Ray had not been with one another since their earlier meetings at Hinchingbrooke. Quite apart from their undoubted affection for Martha Ray, both men had strong reasons to assert her innocence. It meant that Hackman could place the blame for his actions on Galli – 'he lays the whole on Galli[74]' – and it stood to prevent Sandwich being ridiculed as an old roué cuckolded by a younger man.

With the help of Sandwich and Hackman's friends, the papers

gradually sketched in a story about the three protagonists, with both plot and characters. They told a tale of two attractive young people – a dashing young army officer and an aristocrat's mistress of great accomplishment – who meet by chance. The mistress has a keeper who is almost twice her age and with whom she has had five children. The young man falls in love, asks for the mistress's hand in marriage, but is forced to leave his loved one and join his regiment in Ireland. Eager to return to the object of his affections, he leaves the army, takes holy orders, and asks Ray once again for her hand in marriage. Rejected by her, he is driven first to plan suicide and then to commit murder.

This story opened with richly detailed (though sometimes contradictory) accounts of Hackman and Ray's first meeting. Several papers portrayed the two on romantic rides in the Huntingdonshire countryside: 'It was Miss Ray's custom, at that time, for the benefit of air and exercise, to ride out on horseback behind her servant. Undeniable it is, that Mr Hackman took frequent opportunities of riding out at the same time; and being a good horseman, and dexterous at a leap, was sure to afford no small diversion to the lady[75].' Others spoke of Hackman as 'being of a facetious, agreeable turn of conversation' which secured him a place at Sandwich's table and a place close to Martha Ray. Joseph Cradock later[76] recalled the first time that Hackman appeared at Hinchingbrooke, when he was asked to dinner and ended the evening unpacking a telescope, newly arrived from London, to look at the stars.

Sandwich's house parties in Huntingdonshire were jolly and roistering, attended by musicians and naval explorers, Admiralty officials and minor literati, as well as other aristocrats and rakes. John Cooke, Sandwich's chaplain, recalled that

The earl of Sandwich was one of the few noblemen, who spend a considerable portion of their time at their country-seats; where he usually resided whenever he could gain a vacation from the duties of his office, and attendance on parliament. His house was at all times open for the reception of his friends and neighbours; and distinguished for the generous, truly hospitable, and liberal entertainment which it afforded[77].

Another of Sandwich's friends put it more pithily: 'Few houses were more pleasant or instructive than his lordship's: it was filled with rank, beauty and talent, and every one was at ease[78].' Charles Burney[79], the music scholar and father of the novelist Frances Burney, found the parties so boisterous that they gave him a headache. There must have been many witnesses who noticed the handsome young man who paid Martha Ray such attention. The beginnings of Hackman and Ray's relationship were neither unknown nor obscure, for it had not been difficult for paragraph writers frequenting the fashionable coffee-houses of St James's to pick up details from former guests at Sandwich's country house.

Thereafter the story became more shadowy and suppositious. Attempts to find out what had occurred between Hackman's

departure from Hinchingbrooke and his presence on the steps of the Covent Garden Theatre four years later were met with silence and prevarication. 'The lady's [Ray's] friends do not know that there has been any intercourse whatever since[80]', reported the opposition *General Evening Post*. Lord Sandwich, as we have seen, took a similar line. The papers all agreed that Hackman had gone to Ireland, had exchanged his red coat for a clerical habit, and returned to London in the hope of persuading Ray to marry him. Many papers believed that Hackman's clerical preferment to the living of Wiveton in Norfolk was obtained with the help of Sandwich, probably because of Ray's solicitation for her friend. All of the press suggested a sudden change in Ray's attitude towards Hackman, whom she pointedly refused to see.

The papers were perplexed by the nature of Hackman and Ray's relationship – were they friends or lovers? Was their affection mutual or was Hackman enamoured of a woman who did not care for him? How often did they meet, and how intimate were they with one another? The *General Advertiser*, after reporting that 'Lord Sandwich says he does not know there has been any intercourse' since Hackman's visit to Hinchingbrooke, confidently asserted, 'We however hear that he [Hackman] renewed his addresses to her some time ago now at Huntingdon, and received some hopes, which her future conduct had entirely disappointed[81].' The *General Evening Post*, though it shifted the venue of the intrigue to London, was also sure that Ray had continued to meet Hackman: 'his visits became frequent to the

Admiralty … The Tables, however, afterwards turned in his disfavour; for, from whatever cause, he was certainly forbidden the house[82].' Whatever the papers said, they all agreed that the story ended tragically: Hackman was rejected and his final actions were prompted by terrible feelings of unrequited love.

In these versions of the drama, the characters were all portrayed sympathetically. Hackman was always an accomplished, handsome and admirable young man. On the day of his trial, he was described in the *General Advertiser* as 'The unfortunate Mr[83] Hackman', who 'was esteemed one of the most amiable of men. When in the army, his company was courted by all who knew him; his readiness to oblige, by every act of kindness in his power, endeared him to every body.' The *General Evening Post*, the *London Evening Post* and the *Gazetteer* each printed a report describing him as 'descended from a very reputable family; he is a person of a lively disposition, and was esteemed by his numerous acquaintance, and his character was never impeached until the unhappy catastrophe on Wednesday night[84]'. Hackman's respectable origins and his station in the middle ranks of society made his crime more extraordinary and his fate more sympathetic.

Much was made of the honourable nature of Hackman's obsession. A correspondent who called himself 'PHILANTHROPIST' in the *St James's Chronicle* of 10 April pointed out that 'Mr Hackman, so far from being an abandoned

and insensible profligate, was rather distinguished for taste and Delicacy of Sentiment[85]', while James Boswell wrote in the same paper a few days later:

As his manners were uncommonly amiable, his Mind and Heart seem to have been uncommonly pure and virtuous; for he never once attempted to have a licentious connection with Miss Ray. It may seem strange at first; but I can very well suppose, that had he been less virtuous, he would not have been so criminal. But his Passion was not to be diverted by inferior Gratifications. He loved Miss Ray with all his soul, and nothing could make him happy but having her all his own[86].

Writers thought it important to establish that Hackman was no sexual predator – a rake or libertine – who lashed out in anger because of thwarted desire, but merely a young man hopelessly in love.

Martha Ray, 'the lovely victim[87]' as she was described in the *London Chronicle*, was given a similarly good press. The PHILANTHROPIST who praised Hackman described her as 'irreproachable in her conduct, any otherwise than what perhaps was not well in her power to prevent, that she was unprotected by the legal Marriage ceremony[88]'. A poor girl who became a rich man's mistress was hardly culpable. The *General Evening Post* assured its readers that 'the memory of Miss Ray, with respect to Mr Hackman, stands clear, at present, of every imputation[89]'. He may have loved her, but she remained true to her keeper.

The *St James's Chronicle* saw her as a female paragon. It glossed over the potentially sordid origins of Ray's relationship with Sandwich, alluding only to her being 'under the protection of the noble Peer[90]'. It lauded her looks and accomplishments: 'Her person was very fine, her face agreeable, and she had every Accomplishment that could adorn a woman, particularly those of Singing, and Playing most exquisitely on the Harpsichord[91].' And it placed her in the bosom of the family: 'She was also highly respected by all those who knew her, especially all the Servants, and her death is most sincerely regretted in the Family[92].'

Several papers dwelt on Ray's virtues as a companion and parent. Her fidelity to Sandwich, the *General Evening Post* reported, 'was never suspected'. In return for his 'protection' Ray gave Sandwich a 'life of gratitude and strict fidelity[93]'. Her five surviving children were raised, according to the *London Chronicle*, with the 'strictness of motherly attention[94]'. Several papers reported on her concern for the financial well being of her much-loved but illegitimate children. 'Miss Ray made it a rule, on the birth of every child,' they wrote, 'to solicit her noble admirer for an immediate provision for it, which was invariably acquiesced in.' Her children were therefore provided for after her death: 'the issue of this lady will have nothing to lament from her sad fate … but the circumstance of having lost a tender mother[95]'.

In the eighteenth century charity came high among the

concerns of virtuous women, and Ray was seen as no exception. She was 'liberal in a high degree, and the bounty of her noble Lover enabled her to indulge benevolence, in becoming the patroness of the poor'. One of the objects of her charity, it was said, was her elderly and poor parents who lived in Elstree. She could not refuse them aid though, in line with her reputation for moral scrupulousness, she refused to see her father because of the way he had encouraged her to become a mistress or a courtesan.

Ray's most remarked upon quality was her having mastered the skills of an elegant lady. Sandwich, the papers said, had spent lavishly to refashion a milliner's apprentice as a lady. The *London Chronicle* waxed lyrical on her accomplishments:

There was scarce any polite art in which she was not adept, nor any part of female literature with which she was not conversant. All the world are acquainted with the unrivalled sweetness of her vocal powers, but it was the peculiar pleasure of a few only to know that her conversation, her feelings, and indeed her general deportment, all participated of an unparalleled delicacy, which had characterized her through life[96].

No doubt the shocking manner of Martha Ray's death prompted a surge of sympathy for her. The *General Advertiser* commented on how 'all ranks of people drop the tear of pity on her bier, while the sharp tooth of slander seems for a time to have lost its edge[97]'. Even the author of one of the most vicious attacks on Ray, a mock opera published in 1776 that had portrayed her as an unfaithful greedy harridan who twists a

besotted but impotent Sandwich round her finger, was heard 'to describe in the most pathetic terms, the amiable qualifications of her head and heart[98]'. Sympathy for Ray stemmed equally from admiration for a poor, fallen woman who had successfully transformed herself not into a flamboyant courtesan, but into a respectable mother who could pass for a lady.

Sandwich was the least likely of the three victims of Hackman's crime to be treated kindly in the press, but even he was accorded an unusually sympathetic reception. Naturally enough the government-subsidized *Morning Post* pleaded his case:

Is there any one so obdurate, however party may have warped or blunted his affections, as not to feel some little concern for a man, who, in the course of one month, has had a personal accusation adduced against his honesty as a man – several vague imputations, and the measure of a direct charge against his character, as a Minister – a daughter dead [his daughter-in-law had just died], and a beloved friend most bloodily assassinated?[99]

But even the opposition papers were willing to acknowledge Sandwich's dignity in his suffering. Several articles emphasized his benevolence towards Martha Ray – his willingness to pay for her education and to provide for their offspring. His performance as a good father and spouse matched the domestic virtues of his murdered lover. Others praised his remarkable action in being willing to forgive James Hackman for his terrible crime. 'We are assured from respectable authority, that a noble Lord, much

interested in the death of the late unfortunate Miss Ray, pitying the fate of the unhappy Hackman, sent a message to him after condemnation by the Honourable Captain W—— [Walsingham], informing him, "that he would endeavour to get him a pardon;" but that unhappy man replied, "he wished not to live, but to expatiate his offence, if possible, by his death[100]".'

Above all, reports of Sandwich's suffering at the news of Ray's death made the man who was regularly depicted in the opposition press as a political monster appear altogether more vulnerable and human. He was 'inconsolable'…'he wrung his hands and cried, exclaiming – "I could have borne anything but this; but this unmans me[102]".' The *General Advertiser* suggested that Sandwich was so stricken that his servants feared that he might kill himself, while the *Gazetteer* depicted his situation as 'deplorable' and portrayed him as withdrawn and wounded, seeing 'no one but his dearest friends[103]'. The *St James's Chronicle*, no special admirer of Sandwich as a politician, summarized the prevailing sentiment:

From [Ray's] having lived so long with his Lordship, there is no Doubt but his feelings on this Occasion must be such as the most lively Grief can inspire. Indeed, we are told, that his Lordship's Sensations expressed the greatest Agonies; and that whatever may be his sentiments on political Matters, in this affair he has shown a Tenderness which does the highest Credit to his Heart, and the warmth of his Friendship[104].

Thus all three of the main parties were victims, united in their common suffering. Ray and Hackman excited the most sympathy, because they both lost their lives, but even Sandwich was given his share. The press portrayed them all as suffering from forces beyond their control and for which they bore little or no responsibility. Hackman was driven to his crime by feelings that overpowered him; Ray was unable to escape his unwanted attentions; and Sandwich was suddenly and unexpectedly deprived of the woman he loved deeply. So the early newspaper reporting, strongly informed by the friends of Sandwich and Hackman, was remarkably free from acrimony and blame; it invited readers to sympathize with the victims, to understand their plight and, more generally, to interpret the sad events as a consequence of natural desires and feelings, 'the common passions of Humanity[105]'. As PHILANTHROPIST put it in the *St James's Chronicle*, 'let us endeavor therefore to trace this rash and desperate Action, from some cause in human Nature equal to the Phaenomenon[106]'.

Though the majority of newspaper reports encouraged readers' sympathy, a few were overtly censorious. Several news commentators (as well as writers of unpublished, anonymous letters to Sandwich) interpreted Ray's death as the result of the Earl's profligate and immoral life, and urged him to see the error of his ways and to reform. In the days just before Hackman's trial the *London Evening Post*[101] – an old enemy of Sandwich's –

published a number of items attacking the Earl. These included a long letter upbraiding the public for extending too much sympathy to Ray, Hackman and Sandwich and blaming the murder on the moral failings of all three of them. 'The public', it began, 'at present give way to a strange kind of sympathy, whilst they shed tears of condolence with one of the vilest of men, to alleviate his distresses for the loss of his mistress[107].' What about the victims of the American war, it asked its readers, people who had suffered because of the benighted political policies of Sandwich and his colleagues? Should we not be more concerned about 'the many thousand widows and orphans, who rend the continent of America with piercing lamentations for the loss of their husbands and fathers who were murdered in cold blood, or slaughtered in the field by the emissaries of despotism[108]'? After damning Sandwich as a 'man who, by his voice and counsel, had drenched whole provinces with murdered blood[109]', the author turned to Martha Ray. Unfortunate as she was, 'we should not forget what she was; we should not lament her as a spotless, or amiable character, but as a deluded woman cut off in the midst of her days, without any previous warning[110]'. Her fate should not obscure the moral lesson of her life: 'We should rather point out the impropriety and wickedness of such connections as she formed, which, through a variety of complicated circumstances, laid the foundation of her untimely death, and which frequently, almost always, in one way or another, terminate fatally.' 'Had

Miss R – been virtuous', the writer concluded, 'she had not fallen as she did[111].' Similarly, Hackman's fate was explained by his moral failings: 'had the wretched assassin cultivated that delicacy of sentiment which abhors impurity, and suffered no criminal passions to influence his conduct, he would never have found himself within the walls of Newgate, and might have attained an honourable old age, and gone down to the grave in peace[112]'.

But, on the whole, it was unusual for the three protagonists to be portrayed as so morally reprobate. Hackman was repeatedly characterized as 'unfortunate[113]' and as having 'delicacy of sentiment[114]', a quality he shared with Ray; even Sandwich was complimented for his tenderness. The press reporting of the case was designed to elicit sympathy not censoriousness. No doubt, as I have explained, this was partly because Sandwich's and Hackman's friends worked hard to shape the newspapers' response to the case. But it is worth asking why this was possible, and why there was so little attempt to offer an alternative version of the events of the spring of 1779. Why, to put it in modern terms, was Sandwich and Hackman's *spin* on the murder and its aftermath so successful?

The love triangle of Ray, Hackman and Sandwich was shaped as a *sentimental* story, designed to reveal the feelings of the protagonists and to excite the feelings of readers. Reporting and commentary were less concerned with what had happened, though trying to establish the facts of the case was important,

than about a mystery of the human heart, an effort to understand the motives and feelings of those involved. Did Ray really love Hackman? Was Hackman justified in feeling that Ray had led him on with false promises, or was he suffering from a sort of delusion, what contemporaries called 'love's madness'? Similarly, the aftermath of the crime was described indirectly through the feelings of Lord Sandwich, of Hackman and, perhaps most prominently, of the public. The responses to the bloody murder, affecting trial and the murderer's execution were covered as extensively as the crime itself. The newspapers pulled readers into a wide circle of sympathy. The press largely avoided the blood-and-gore variety of crime reporting, which had hitherto been common. Its accounts were neither sensational nor melodramatic. Readers were made to understand events through the emotive responses of participants by a form of indirect narration. They were invited to share in the distresses of the victims, to express their sympathy, to establish an emotional closeness rather than a moral distance.

This sort of complicity has to be understood in the light of prevailing ideas about human sympathy and sensibility. Eighteenth-century human sciences, which embraced physiology, psychology, sociability and morality, had created a new way of looking at, depicting and judging human conduct which was less concerned with its strict conformity to a universal moral law than with its social and psychological complexity. We cannot understand the story of Hackman and Ray unless we take

some time to explore the values and ways of seeing that informed how contemporaries understood those events.

Eighteenth-century sentimentalism, the understanding that people were first and foremost creatures of feeling, considered sympathy as the key human quality. As the philosopher David Hume put it, 'No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own[115].' Sympathy was the means by which sentiments were communicated; it was the psychological and emotive transaction that placed them at the heart of social life. Sensibility, in turn, was the ability to feel and exert sympathy; it was, according to *The Monthly Magazine*, 'that peculiar structure, or habitude of mind, which disposes a man to be easily moved, and powerfully affected, by surrounding objects and passing events[116]'.

But sensibility, though seen as a psychological phenomenon, was also viewed as an ethical response. Sentimental feeling, the exercise of sympathy, was a form of moral reflection, for which some people had a greater capacity than others. To be able to express sympathy was to be a better moral being. The key physical sign of sensibility – a spontaneous tearfulness – also became a sign of humanity. As *Man: a Paper for Ennobling the Species* (1755) commented: 'it may be[117] questioned whether

those are properly men, who never wept upon any occasion … What can be more nobly human than to have a tender sentimental feeling of our own and others' misfortunes?'

The periodical essayists, critics, doctors and natural philosophers who examined sensibility believed it was a general feature of man, and one that was especially encouraged by the conditions of modern life. As the physician Thomas Trotter put it, 'The *nervous system*[118], that organ of sensation, amidst the untutored and illiterate inhabitants of a forest, could receive none of those fine impressions, which, however they may polish the mind and enlarge its capacities, never fail to induce delicacy of feeling, that disposes alike to more acute pain, as to more exquisite pleasure.' Acute sensibility was the result of modern commerce, urban life and the manners they promoted – Montesquieu's *doux commerce* – which created new, peaceful forms of mutual dependence among strangers, led to the better treatment of and greater regard for women, and encouraged the arts of politeness and refinement. Commercial society, the argument went, encouraged greater sympathy and sensibility; this distinguished modern societies from both the ancients and the primitives. As Sandwich's friend and memorialist Joseph Cradock put it, 'How much soever[119] the ancients might abound in elegance of expression – their works are thinly spread with sentiment.'

Though the ability to sympathize with others was a sign of modern refinement and virtue, it was also, as many verses and

essays on sensibility commented, a source of distress, a sign of moral superiority but also of weakness. As a contributor to the *Lady's Magazine* in 1775 exclaimed: 'Sensibility[120] – thou source of human woes – thou aggrandiser of evils! – Had I not been possessed of thee – how calmly might my days have passed! – Yet would I not part with thee for worlds. We will abide together – both pleased and pained with each other. Thou shalt ever have a place in my heart – be the sovereign of my affections, and the friend of my virtue.'

Women, young people of both sexes, and those connected to the fine arts and literature were all believed to be especially susceptible to sensibility, prone to virtuous feeling and to excessive sentiment that made them melancholic (in the case of men) or hysteric (in the case of women). Expressions of sympathy, though praised as *the* great virtue of modern life, indeed as its defining social characteristic, could also be pathological and crippling.

Critics quickly recognized that sentimentalism supposed a different sort of writing and storytelling, one that in the words of the cleric and scholar Hugh Blair 'derives its efficacy not so much from what men are taught to know, as from what they are brought to feel[121]'. The sympathetic moral response that sentimental literature evoked in the reader depended on particularity, a sense of intimacy that engaged the reader rather than on moral lessons or grand abstractions that appealed only to their intellect. The interior feeling of characters had to be explored and not just their

external actions. Memoirs, biographies, collections of letters and verses, histories and, above all, novels portrayed the quotidian, ordinary, private and mundane because it was more likely to excite the reader's sympathy, being close to their own experience. In Blair's words, 'It is from private life, from familiar, domestic, and seemingly trivial occurrences, that we most often receive light into the real character[122].'

Sentimentalism was best staged in the intimate theatre of the home and family, and its most characteristic plots concerned the joys and misfortunes of everyday life – romantic and conjugal love, amatory disappointment, misfortunes brought on by intemperance and improvidence, the pleasures of familial companionship in a circle of virtue. A sentimental story was, in the words of the novelist William Guthrie, 'an *Epic* in lower Life[123]', a story, in other words, exactly like that of Sandwich, Ray and Hackman.

Sentimental writing spread with astonishing swiftness in the second half of the eighteenth century. Newspaper reporting, pamphlets advocating reform and improvement such as Jonas Hanway's *A Sentimental History of Chimney-sweepers* (1785); biographies and memoirs like Oliver Goldsmith's *Life of Richard {Beau} Nash* (1762) or Joseph Boruwlaski's *Memoirs of the Celebrated Dwarf* (1788) – 'I not only mean to describe my size and its proportions, I would likewise follow the unfolding of my sentiments, the affections of my soul[124]'; travel literature such

as John Hawksworth's account of Captain James Cook's voyage; histories such as those of David Hume; and sermons, of which the most popular were those of Hugh Blair; literary forgeries, advice literature, plays, periodical essays, as well as a raft of sentimental novels and verses – all these used the techniques of literary sentimentalism to capture the hearts of their readers.

The cult of sensibility reached a peak in the 1770s, around the time of Ray's murder. It was not therefore very difficult to present the tragedy of Hackman and Ray as a sentimental story and to expect that the terrible tale would provoke the sympathy of those who read about it. Sentimental literature, especially the sentimental novel, was filled with stories of virtue in distress, a description that was easily applied to all three figures in this love triangle. Hackman after all was a victim of his amatory passion, Ray was a fallen woman who had achieved some respectability only to be murdered, and Sandwich was a former rake whose domestic felicity had been shattered by Hackman's bullet. The lovelorn youth, the fallen woman who nevertheless retained some virtue, and the reformed rake were all familiar figures in the many sentimental novels that were commissioned, published, sold and loaned by publishers like the Noble brothers, who ran 'novel manufacturies' and circulating libraries to distribute this extremely popular form of fiction.

A sentimental account of the affair suited Sandwich and Hackman's followers because it depicted all three as blameless. But it fell on fertile soil because the case seemed such an obvious

one of life imitating art. Readers were likely to respond as if the story was a sentimental fiction, because to do so was an obvious way to make sense of the events surrounding the crime. It gave Sandwich, Hackman's friends and the public what they all wanted – closure, a way of making the case understandable by placing it in a familiar light. We all know the pleasures of recognizing the familiar – 'ah! It's one of that sort of story'. We can wrap it up and put it away and, in doing so, perhaps hide the parts of the story that are troubling or disturbing, or suppress other ways of telling it. In the spring of 1779 the protagonists' desire to end speculation and the public's desire for assurance were at one, but it proved rather more difficult than might at first have been supposed to keep the story under wraps.

CHAPTER 3 *The Killer as Victim: James Hackman*

IN THE SPRING OF 1779 Dr Johnson and his close friend Hester Thrale, whose own intimacy has long been a source of speculation, discussed relations between the sexes. Mrs Thrale was all for woman-power: 'It seems to me that no Man can live his Life thro', without being at some period of it under the Dominion of some Woman – Wife Mistress or Friend[125].' Nevertheless she found it hard to fathom Hackman's passion for Ray. It was, she said, 'the strangest thing that has appeared these hundred years'. Boswell had told her that his last words on the scaffold were '*Dear Dear* Miss Ray'. '*Here* was Passion for a Woman neither young nor handsome; whose eldest son was eighteen [sic] years old & a sea officer when she was shot by her Lover, & a woman not eminent as I can find for Allurements in the Eyes of any Man breathing but himself, & Lord Sandwich, who 'tis said had long been weary of her, though he knew not how to get free.' But Dr Johnson took a very different view. 'A woman', he said, 'has *such* power between the Ages of twenty five and forty five, that She may tye a Man to a post and whip him if she will.'

While Mrs Thrale pondered the powers of middle-aged women and Johnson surrendered to his masochistic fantasy, all over London people of fashion gossiped about the murder and its

motive. In the twelve days between the killing of Martha Ray and the execution of James Hackman, the crime was on everyone's lips. Sandwich's colleagues from the Admiralty chatted at court with Lord Hertford about the tragedy. Ladies and gentlemen exchanged notes and items of news. 'For the last week', Horace Walpole wrote to his friend in Florence, Sir Horace Mann, 'all our conversation has been engrossed by a shocking murder[126].' Lady Ossory concurred, writing to George Selwyn, 'I found Miss Ray, or at least her unfortunate admirer, occupied everybody[127].' But if Johnson and Thrale's discussion was one of many that took place in the few weeks after Martha Ray's murder, it had a rather unusual feature: it was about Martha Ray, and not about her murderer. Lady Ossory's mid-sentence switch from the victim to her 'unfortunate admirer' perfectly captured the public's changing preoccupations. Ray was dead, Sandwich had retired from the public eye first to a villa at Hampton and, 'when every thing there brought her to his remembrance', to a house in Blackheath. This left Hackman as the focus of public attention: the extensive newspaper reports of his interrogation by Sir John Fielding, his trial at the Old Bailey, and his execution on 19 April less than two weeks after the killing made him, as one news report put it, 'the topic of conversation[128]'.

Naturally enough, much of this gossip took the form of speculation about Hackman's motives for the crime. Many, like Mrs Thrale, were puzzled about the strange affair. As Horace

Walpole commented to a friend, 'Now, upon the whole … is not the story full as strange as ever it was? Miss Wray [sic] has six children, the eldest son is fifteen, and she was at least three times as much. To bear a hopeless passion for five years, and then murder one's mistress – I don't understand it[129].'

This curiosity about the love of a young man for an older kept woman manifested itself in a preoccupation with Hackman's conduct after the murder. It was as if the means of understanding him and his bloody crime lay not in a forensic investigation (which, as we have seen, Sandwich tried to stifle), but in evidence offered in the person of Hackman himself. The key to the crime lay in Hackman's character. What he said was less important – though this mattered – than his entire bodily comportment. True feeling, in any sentimental story, was often beyond words. It could be seen in involuntary (and therefore authentic) physical expression: shudders, blushes and blanching, and, above all, spontaneous tears. Such bodily signs were clues to character and evidence of refinement and sensibility. As Samuel Richardson put it, 'the man is to be honour'd who can weep for the distresses of others[130]'. Tears told observers about the person who wept but they also excited powerful sympathetic feelings in the viewer. Indeed, the response that a character's palpitations and weeping provoked was itself an indication of what the responder was like. Thus after the murder both press coverage and private correspondence were preoccupied with Hackman's public conduct, and with the powerful feelings aroused among

those who witnessed his trial and execution.

All the newspapers reported that when Hackman was questioned by Sir John Fielding the day after Ray's shooting, he found it hard to answer the questions. 'From the agonizing pangs which entirely discomposed, and externally convulsed him,' reported the *London Chronicle*, 'it was sometime before the magistrate could proceed[131].' Onlookers were moved by his distraught behaviour, the papers noted: 'His manifest[132] agitation, contrition, and poignant grief, too sensibly affected all present, to wish to add to such heart-felt misery by judicial interrogations during such keen distress of mind.' An unexpected delay in proceedings made him worse, and it took him a while to recover his composure and display 'the utmost steadiness'. During Fielding's questioning Hackman 'wept very much and was entirely convulsed each time the name of the deceased was mentioned. He did not palliate his offence, and said he eagerly wished to die.' The *London Evening Post* recorded that when Fielding presented him with evidence of the shooting, 'he sank into a grief which is impossible for the power of words to paint[133]'. But by the end of the proceedings, he had become 'quite composed, and at present appears perfectly resigned to meet his approaching fate with a becoming fortitude[134]'. 'His sighs and tears', the paper concluded, 'added to his genteel appearance, made most people give way to the finest feelings of human nature[135].'

The *General Advertiser* of 13 April drew a general moral lesson from this piece of sentimental theatre: 'The very humane behaviour of Sir John Fielding on a late melancholy occasion, and the tender constructions of a pitying audience on the conduct of the unhappy subject, does infinite honour to the laws of our country, and displays the humanity of our nature in the most beautiful and lively colours.' People may have been shocked by the crime, 'but who will say that the author of the shocking tragedy of Wednesday last is not amply punished? Who can picture to himself the misery that must penetrate and fill the deepest recesses of his mind, who has suffered himself to commit the horrid crime of murder, through the dire excess of a passion the most admirable that can fill the heart, while within the pale of reason?[136]' As another press item concluded, 'the tear of[137] compassion should not be withheld from him in the moment that *Justice* demands *an exemplary expiation of the deed*'.

A similarly powerful sympathetic response dominates the press accounts of Hackman's trial, which contrast strongly with the formal record of the court proceedings which was remarkably prosaic. Most of the proceedings were taken up with establishing the facts of the case, calling successive witnesses to satisfy the law by confirming what everyone already knew. Hackman's counsel did not dispute the facts, and asked witnesses very few questions. What would have been of most interest to modern legal scholars – Davenport's speech at the end of the trial

arguing that Hackman was innocent on the grounds of temporary insanity, or 'irresistible impulse' – was not even recorded by the shorthand writer. Given that one of the perquisites of the recorder's job included the profits from the publication and sale of the trial's transcript, it would seem that there was very little interest in the *legal* deliberations of the trial.

Blackstone, like most judges at the time, was strongly opposed to pleas of temporary insanity, and he made it clear that such a plea had no legal status (English law does not recognize anything like *crime passionnelle*) and that insanity pleas in general were admissible only if strong evidence of the defendant's history of madness were presented. But no one seems to have thought that Hackman would be acquitted. Commentators as diverse as Horace Walpole and Sir John Fielding concurred in Hackman's inevitable fate. There was little interest in the trial's outcome, in the possibility of a surprise verdict of innocent. What mattered was Hackman's performance in justifying his actions and contemplating his fate.

This is clear from responses to the trial. For Lady Ossory, Hackman's conduct in court 'was wonderfully touching[138]'. The news reports agreed. 'The prisoner by[139] his defence drew tears from all parts of the Court; so decently and properly he conducted himself.' 'The behaviour of this unfortunate criminal', ran another item, 'was in every respect descriptive of his feelings. When the evidence related the fatal act, his soul seemed to burst within him. His defence was intermixed with many sighs and

groans, and the trickling tear bespoke penitence … and remorse. The letter to his brother melted the most obdurate heart, and whilst the horror of the deed shocked the understanding of the audience, there was not a spectator who denied his pity[140].' 'However, we may[141] detest the *crime*,' wrote the *London Evening Post*, 'a tear of pity will fall from every humane eye on the fate of the unhappy *criminal*.' Witnesses, or – as it was more usually said – the *audience* was preoccupied with Hackman's performance. Boswell was pleased that the killer never tried to palliate his crime: 'He might have pleaded that he shot Miss Ray by accident, but he fairly told the truth: that in a moment of frenzy he did intend it.' When Boswell left the courtroom to tell Frederick Booth of the verdict, the first question Booth asked him was about his brother-in-law's behaviour. 'As well, Sir,' responded Boswell, 'as you or any of his friends could wish: with decency, propriety, and in such a manner as to interest every one present.' 'Well,' said Booth, 'I would rather have him found guilty with truth and honour than escape by a mean evasion.' Boswell thought Booth's reply 'a sentiment truly noble, bursting from a heart rent with anguish![142]'

Three days later, when Hackman went to the gallows, Lady Ossory described his conduct as 'glorious[143]'. One paper commented, 'He behaved with a most astonishing composure, with the greatest fortitude, and most perfect resignation[144].' In the chapel in Newgate prison his conduct reduced spectators to

tears. In his last hours, 'he collected his fortitude, he employed every moment of life to the worship of the Almighty, and prepared himself to meet the awful Judge of the World by prayers, and the overflowings of a contrite heart[145]'. He died, remarked several commentators, as he should have done. The *Gazetteer* wrote, 'He behaved as a man should in such a situation[146].'

In the eyes of most observers Hackman's conduct was redemptive. His spontaneous grief affirmed the authenticity of his love for Martha Ray. The press invariably interpreted his lachrymose conduct as being prompted by her death and not by thoughts of his impending execution. He wept not for himself but, more nobly, for his dead lover.

Hackman's stoicism before the law and on the gallows showed him to be a person in command of his faculties. Nearly all the papers characterized his conduct in the same way: it showed his contrition and grief about what he had done, and re-established a sense of himself as a sane man. 'He repeated that affecting acknowledgement of his guilt … and seemed in a state of composure, unruffled with the idea of punishment … His whole behaviour was manly, but not bold; his mind seemed to be quite calm, from a firm belief in the mercies of his Saviour[147].' Commentators spoke of Hackman's manliness, which they contrasted with his behaviour in killing Ray when, as they saw it, he suffered 'a momentary frenzy' that 'overpowered'

him. The rhetoric was one in which Hackman lost his masculine identity in committing the murder, but recovered it through his stoic conduct during the trial and at the execution. The murderer was now himself cast as a victim, constantly referred to as 'the unfortunate' Mr Hackman. Though Hackman's lawyers had failed to persuade Blackstone and his fellow judge of the defence's case, their client's speech and conduct were readily accommodated within a sentimental story in which the life of an otherwise virtuous young man was destroyed by a love affair that had gone catastrophically wrong. Ray's story ended with her murder, but Hackman's spectacle of suffering continued to the gallows.

Hackman's repeated enactment of his exquisite sensibility, the legibility of his feelings as they manifested themselves in his conduct, fashioned bonds of sympathy, despite the crime he had perpetrated. As Boswell had written in *The Hypochondriack*, a year before Hackman's execution, 'the curiosity which impels people to be present at such affecting scenes, is certainly a proof of sensibility not of callousness[148]'. Or as Adam Smith explained it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, 'We all desire … to feel how each other is affected, to penetrate into each other's bosoms, and to observe the sentiments and affections which really subsist there. The man who indulges us in this natural passion, who invites us into his heart, who, as it were, sets open the gates of his breast to us, seems to exercise a species of hospitality more delightful than any other … How weak and

imperfect soever the views of the open-hearted, we take pleasure to enter them.' Smith, in fact, had specifically cited a murderer as a person with whom one could not establish bonds of sympathy, whose actions could not be understood sympathetically. But Hackman was thought to be no ordinary killer. He was a man who slayed his lover and was himself destroyed not by his wickedness but by his overwhelming affection for Martha Ray. His conduct after Ray's death redeemed him. Like Martha Ray, he became a sacrifice to love.

The horror provoked by Hackman's crime combined with the sympathy excited by his obvious infatuation and contrition made him an object of public fascination. Many in libertine circles concurred with James Boswell's view – 'Natural to destroy what one cannot have[149]' or, as he later put it in conversation with the notorious roué Lord Pembroke, 'Natural to <shoo>t mistress'. Such views were unsurprising among the young bloods of St James's and the Strand, but even women like Lady Ossory, who had more sympathy for Martha Ray, were moved by Hackman's intensity of feeling. Though there was some talk of Hackman being insane in the first few days after the murder, it soon dwindled away. True, his action was frenzied, his mind temporarily disordered by jealousy, but it seemed understandable in a young man hopelessly infatuated with an unattainable woman. And the source of his crime was not malevolence or depravity but the positive impulse of love.

The Hackman case was used, particularly by young men like

James Boswell and the anonymous author of *The Case and Memoirs of James Hackman*, to explore their own feelings about romantic love and its perils, hazards that were understood not as a threat to women but as a challenge to a man's ability to govern his feelings. This was more than sympathy for Hackman; it was a positive identification with him. Boswell was particularly explicit about this. In a letter published in the *Public Advertiser* he wrote, 'Let those whose passions are keen and impetuous consider, with awful fear, the fate of Mr Hackman. How often have they infringed the laws of morality by indulgence! *He*, upon one check, was suddenly hurried to commit a dreadful act.' He elaborated on this theme in another letter, printed in the *St James's Chronicle*. 'Hackman's case', Boswell maintained, 'is by no means unnatural.' Citing an earlier essay he had written in *The Hypochondriack*, he pointed to the selfishness of romantic love; 'there is no mixture of disinterested kindness for the person who is the object of it'. 'The natural effect of disappointed love', he concluded, 'is to excite the most horrid resentment against its object, at least to make us prefer the destruction of our mistress to seeing her possessed by a rival.' Adopting a biblical tone, Boswell drew a moral from Hackman's story based on his close identification of all young men of feeling with the killer: 'Think ye that this unfortunate gentleman's general character is, in the eye of Heaven or of generous men in their private feelings, worse than yours? No it is not. And unless ye are upon your guard, ye may all likewise be in his melancholy situation[150].' Hackman had

shown that he was capable of manly composure, but it had come too late.

Hackman's conduct after the murder reinforced his claim that he had been tricked into believing that Ray had a new lover. Surely a man who behaved with such dignity after his crime could not have been crazed, nor could he have plotted or planned to kill his lover. (Boswell never even considered the possibility that Hackman might have set out on the night of 7 April to murder Martha Ray.) Some other, outside circumstance must have pushed him over the edge. As we have seen, Hackman told Walsingham that he blamed it all on Galli, and rumours to that effect were soon in circulation, though they did not feature much in the newspapers. Hackman did not press the point and did not mention it at his trial. He had strong reasons not to antagonize Sandwich. Blaming Galli would not have helped his defence at the trial – indeed, it would have supplied a stronger motive for premeditated murder – and any vindictiveness would not have sat well with his determination to die with dignity. But once Hackman's body had been sent to Surgeon's Hall his supporters and critics of Sandwich were free to attack the Earl and Martha Ray's chaperone.

Soon after Hackman's execution most London papers ran advertisements for a new pamphlet entitled *The Case and Memoirs of James Hackman* written by 'A PARTICULAR FRIEND' and published, it was claimed, in order to prevent other 'spurious publications'. *The Case and Memoirs* was an immediate

success. Within two weeks of its first appearance, the publisher was announcing its fifth edition, promising a large print run so that eager readers would not be disappointed. The tenth and[151] final edition appeared in early June.

The Case and Memoirs was certainly the most eloquent defence of James Hackman, an apology that used the sympathy that Hackman had excited during his trial and execution to place his conduct in the most favourable light. In many ways it trod familiar ground. It emphasized Hackman's 'manly and collected behaviour' and how 'his deportment was noble, and gained him the admiration of his judge and jury in the course of his trial'. It framed the entire story as one of Hackman's heroic, eventually successful struggle to tame his passions. It was a saga about how a man was able to recover from a momentary act of madness.

But the publication of *The Case and Memoirs* also marked the breakdown of the consensual view of the murder that had been shaped and shared by the friends of Hackman and Sandwich. The author of *The Case and Memoirs*, confronted by public scepticism of his interpretation of events, grew progressively more outspoken and altered the fourth edition in early May to make his picture of Hackman even more sympathetic. Eventually, in the seventh edition, he placed the blame for her death squarely on the shoulders of Martha Ray. He even tried to blackmail Caterina Galli into implicating the Earl of Sandwich, offering to absolve her from blame in the affair, if she would pin the blame on Ray's keeper.

The Case and Memoirs was published by George Kearsley, the former publisher of John Wilkes's *North Briton*, one of the men who had been arrested in 1763 when the government had tried to put a stop to Wilkes's acerbic and very popular periodical. Kearsley, threatened with prosecution by the Secretary of State's office, had reluctantly – and much to the disgust of Wilkes – revealed all he knew about the *North Briton* and its author's publishing activities. In 1764, possibly as a result of his difficulties during the Wilkes affair, he was declared bankrupt, though he was soon back in business. Embarrassed and humiliated, Kearsley was full of resentment against members of the government, including Lord Sandwich who had played a major part in his prosecution.

Kearsley was a general bookseller who had first started publishing books, pamphlets and papers in the late 1750s in Ludgate Street, moving to new premises in Fleet Street, opposite Fetter Lane, in 1773. Though he had no particular speciality, throughout the 1770s he published pamphlets and poems attacking the moral depravity of the aristocracy, as well as political tracts attacking the government and supporting the American colonists. He had close connections with John Almon, Wilkes's publisher and friend, who had been behind the attack on Sandwich and Martha Ray for corruption in 1773, and he was connected to the group of booksellers who took a consistently critical line on the government throughout the 1770s. He had no love for the Earl of Sandwich. So he was an obvious figure for

an author to approach if he were bent on publishing a defence of Hackman. But even if Kearsley had not had reasons to dislike Sandwich and Ray, he would have jumped at the chance of printing the life of such a notorious and controversial figure.

The anonymous author of *The Case and Memoirs* was in fact a young barrister of the Inner Temple, Manasseh Dawes, who had assisted in Hackman's defence. Though he occasionally makes a brief appearance in the press reports of 1779, very little is known about him apart from his fame for legal erudition and what can be gleaned from his published work. His preoccupations in print are revealing. His first books – *Miscellanies* and *Fugitive Essays* both of which Kearsley published in 1776 – mixed poems and stories of the trials of love with short political essays supporting the opposition, political reform and the American colonists. His subsequent writings tackled such issues as libel, crime and punishment, the extent of the supreme power, and the nature of political representation. His position, though sometimes eccentric, followed a consistently reformist line.

If we read Dawes's first writings – his poems and stories of romantic love – autobiographically, then it is not hard to see why he took up Hackman's cause. His verses are full of the irrational power of love. Love is a source of woe, a wound, a form of possession that takes hold of its victim: 'What tho' I once resolv'd and strove/To quell and spurn the force of love,/I then could not my mind controul,/ While such fond pangs were in my soul[152]'. In his stories Dawes was much exercised by the tension between

sexual passion and proper conduct, especially among young men. He seems to have accepted that sexual desire (and its fulfilment) was natural outside wedlock, but to have worried about how illicit sexual practice, the guilt and perplexity it produced, affected relationships. His first publications are full of youthful ardor and confusion, as well as a passionate adherence to political probity and the reform of the law.

Dawes claimed to[153] know Hackman and his brother-in-law Frederick Booth well, but in the controversy that blew up about the authenticity of his pamphlet he was forced to concede in the press that he had known neither of them before the notorious case. So Dawes chose to intrude himself into the story – to offer Hackman legal advice, to explain his turbulent feelings, and to act as his public apologist. Certainly he was Hackman's visible supporter. The *St James's Chronicle* reported that 'Mr Hackman was attended into and out of court by his friend, Mr Dawes, a Gentleman of the Bar, who has kindly attended him in his Confinement, and endeavoured to give him all the Counsel and Satisfaction in his power[154]'. (It is worth bearing in mind, however, that Dawes probably got this item inserted into the paper.)

Dawes went to great lengths to give his pamphlet the authority of being Hackman's version of why Ray had died. The advertisements for *The Case and Memoirs* claimed its swift publication was intended to pre-empt less reliable accounts that might place Hackman in an unfavourable light. And in the

pamphlet's dedication to the Earl of Sandwich Dawes makes the claim to be acting as Hackman's spokesman clear: 'the following pages … are authentic, because they are taken from the mouth of Mr Hackman while in confinement, and reduced to writing by a person who … knew him, and respected his very amiable and fair character[155]'.

But from the outset there were doubts about the authority of Dawes's apologia. The day before *The Case and Memoirs* was published Frederick Booth printed a notice in the newspapers reminding readers that only he had the documents to produce an authentic 'case': 'I think it necessary to be known, that no Materials for such a Publication are or can be in any Hands but my own; and that if ever it should seem to me proper to give any Account to the Public, it will be signed with my own name.' Later apologists for Martha Ray claimed that Booth denounced Dawes's writing as a self-interested fraud, but Booth may just have wanted to make clear that he was not, as many might suppose, the author of *The Case*.

Even though – or perhaps because – *The Case and Memoirs* was such an extraordinary success, Dawes was forced on the defensive. When the fifth edition was published in early May, he inserted a notice in the papers indignantly asserting his probity and veracity:

There being some doubts with the public of the truth of this publication, the Author of it declares, on his honour and veracity, (which he hopes are unimpeachable) that the facts contained in it

are genuine, he having presented it to the public for the purpose expressed in the dedication, and no other, which he is ready to testify, if necessary, on an application to him at Mr Kearsly's, who knows and believes him incapable of the mean artifice of obtruding on the public any thing with a view to catch the penny of curiosity[156].

In June, a verse appeared in the *Public Advertiser* mocking Dawes and identifying him as the author of *The Case*:

The Rope, the penalty of broken Laws,
Is not more shocking than the pen of D-ws.
Both to deserve no Crime can be so great;
Yet both to suffer was poor Hackman's fate[157].

What made Dawes's account so controversial? First and foremost he categorically asserted that Hackman and Ray had been not only friends but lovers. From the outset he described the two as 'revelling in all its [loves] rites by stealth', and enjoying 'stolen bliss[158]'. Because of 'the indulgencies she had … with him', Ray and Hackman had 'unlimited (though illicit) gratification[159]'. This contradicted everything the press had been told before Hackman's death. He also claimed that Sandwich had learned of the affair and confronted Ray, who had promised to end her relationship with Hackman. But, he claimed, her passion for him was too great and she even agreed to marry her young lover. Only his departure to Ireland delayed the ceremony, and while they were apart, 'they corresponded in

the most affectionate manner by every post[160]'. So Dawes depicted Hackman and Ray as being bound by mutual love and destined for conjugal felicity. Hackman's expectations of Ray were portrayed not as delusional but as eminently reasonable.

What, then, had gone wrong? In his dedication to Lord Sandwich and in the main body of his narrative Dawes placed the blame on Galli and Sandwich. Galli, according to him, had taken money from Hackman so that the couple could continue to meet without Sandwich's knowledge. But, after a while, Galli '(whether under the management and direction of his Lordship, who wished to break off the connexion at all events, or otherwise, we do not know) informed Mr Hackman that all future visits from Miss Reay would be dispensed with, for that Lord S—— was too well acquainted with their amour to bear with it longer[161]'. She is also reported as adding, 'That Miss Reay had tired of him, and had resolved to quit him for the sake of another gentleman, who was much more dear to her[162]'. Here was the full-blown version of Galli's betrayal.

In the early editions of *The Case and Memoirs* Dawes says nothing about Ray's own view of the matter. The reader is left to assume that she still loved Hackman, even when temporarily unable to see him. Perfidy perhaps lay with Sandwich and certainly blackened the character of Galli. But no matter where responsibility was placed, the act of warning off Hackman was the turning point in the plot. It triggered 'his despair and grief',

transforming his character: ‘he was an altered man … he was agreeable, sprightly and affable; but on a sudden he changed himself to a pensive and grave deportment’. He grew increasingly subject to a melancholy ‘originated on that occasion, which, by continually brooding over, encreased and inflamed his wretched mind[163]’.

Dawes included in his account a letter from Hackman to Ray which, ‘with one other, (a copy whereof is in the hands of his brother-in-law) is the only one he did not cancel[164]’. In it Hackman pleaded with Ray to relieve him of ‘his pleasing pain’. He mentions their meeting secretly ‘at Marylebone, and other places’. He calls on her to honour her promise of marriage, urging her to bring her youngest child with her to live a life of rural felicity as a cleric’s wife. ‘I know[165] you are not fond of the follies and vanities of the town. How tranquil and agreeably, and with what uninterrupted felicity, unlike to anything we have yet enjoyed, shall we then wear our time away together on my living.’ Full of despair, he threatens Ray with the prospect that if she does not marry him he will die: ‘For God’s sake let me hear from you; and as you love me, keep me no longer in suspense, since nothing can relieve me but death or you[166].’

The deception of others, continued Dawes, plunged Hackman into this melancholia, but only when he saw Martha Ray with another man in the playhouse on the night of the murder did he decide on suicide. ‘Gloomy, melancholy, and outrageous, at the

injuries he had conceived, which exceeded all human knowledge to explain', he determined to shoot himself 'in the presence of a woman, whose supposed infidelity had brought him to a misery and despair not to be described by words[167]'. And only when he looked into Ray's face as she tried to enter her coach did he think of killing her – 'he concluded it would be best for both to die together[168]'. This was no premeditated crime but an act of 'momentary phrenzy [sic][169]'.

The lawyer in Dawes wanted to acquit Hackman of murder, though he could not, of course, deny the killing. In his long 'Commentary on his Conviction', Dawes absolved Hackman of any felonious intent to kill Martha Ray. Murder, he reminded the reader, is distinguished as a crime by proof of prior intention and malice: 'It is the wickedness and malignity of the heart which raises the crime of murder, and not simply the act that kills[170].' Yet Hackman's suicide note, with its request to his brother-in-law that he care for Ray after Hackman's suicide, showed 'that he did not kill her with an *express* or previous intention, but from a momentary phrenzy, which overpowered him, after he had resolved to destroy himself *only*[171]'. His intent to do away with himself, Dawes conceded, was 'a felonious action and disposition of mind[172]' and it was on these grounds that Blackstone in his summary of the case pressed for Hackman's conviction. But Dawes argued that 'as he was found guilty of murder by malice implied and not expressed, he deserves not to be classed among

common assassins and murderers[173]'. He also pointed out that if Hackman had succeeded in killing himself, he would have been condemned for an act of lunacy. If he tried to kill himself in such a state, did not this condition apply as much to his killing of Ray, which was thus not a responsible act, and therefore not murder? In his conclusion, Dawes blamed the whole affair on Hackman's passion: what began as a virtue 'hurried him, when born down by disappointment, ingratitude and inconstancy, to the vice that concluded his unconquerable misery, while either himself or Miss Reay were living[174]'. Only after the crime was he able to recuperate, struggling successfully to control his feelings and face his fate.

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