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***PICTURING BENEVOLENCE:
THE PICTURESQUE AND RADICAL CHARITY***

Keywords: *eighteenth-century women's writing; charity; benevolence; political economy; the Picturesque; Elizabeth Inchbald; Frances Burney; Laurence Sterne; Henry Mackenzie*

Abstract: *During the final decades of the eighteenth century, when the dictates of Adam Smith's theory of political economy began to take hold, charity became deeply unfashionable. In consonance with Smith's dictates, though conceived independently of them, William Gilpin's theory of Picturesque beauty suggested protocols for representation that excluded the picturing of charitable acts along with other kinds of sentimental narrative. Against political economic hostility to acts of charity and Picturesque reluctance to picture such gestures of sympathy for and solidarity with the poor, some English women writers continued to perpetuate in fiction a mid-century tradition of charitable benevolence. The novels of Sarah Fielding and other women writers of the 1740s and 1750s continued to resonate between the 1770s and 1790s with such writers as Frances Burney and Elizabeth Inchbald. Inchbald's *Nature and Art* is particularly noteworthy and important in its radical combination of charitable benevolence with Picturesque dishevelment. In this fiction of charitable benevolence there is a hearkening back to seventeenth-century ideas of charity as the poor's rightful property and the body politic as properly a commonwealth. We might say that Inchbald, like Sarah Fielding before her, refused to relinquish the Enlightenment grand narrative of human emancipation in favour of the grand narrative of progress, defined ever more narrowly as the progress of capitalism.*