

**Performing for the Reader: Dramatic Speech in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to those who supported me throughout my long, untraditional education. It would not have been possible without my parents, Roger and Cathy; my husband, Lee; my children, Wesley and Penelope; and my committee members, Clem, David, E.J. and Adela. I would like to express my fullest and most sincere gratitude to you all, but especially to my committee chair, Clem, whose profuse encouragement and unyielding patience enabled me to overcome numerous challenges to complete this project.

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## ABSTRACT

Eighteenth-century novelists borrowed formal features from many earlier genres—journals, travelogues, epic poetry, medieval romance, to name only a few—but perhaps the most influential source that contributed to the novel’s development, drama, has yet to receive the sustained recognition or systematic analysis it deserves. This study contributes to a recent critical discourse that recognizes the considerable formal and thematic overlap between drama and the novel by exploring speech representation and metafiction as two important areas of generic transference. I argue that many dramatic speech forms, particularly asides and soliloquies, and metafictional structures that solicit audience participation, such as prologues, amount to a mediating communication system between dramatist and audience. These conventions appear frequently in Restoration and eighteenth-century plays and were assimilated into the novel by authors who worked in both media, thereby contributing to the novel’s development into a recognizable genre. By examining the plays and novels of Aphra Behn, Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith, and Frances Burney, I identify and analyze dramatic methods of speech representation that early novelists incorporated into their novels, and also consider the ways in which these authors adapted dramatic metafictional devices to initiate conversations with readers.

The first chapter investigates the ways in which Aphra Behn dramatically stylized speech through modified prologues that deploy antagonism as a means of reader engagement within her novellas, and recreated the stylistic and thematic functions of a tragic chorus in *Oroonoko* by

using a technique I call mass undifferentiated speech. The second chapter explores the extensive use of metafiction in Restoration drama and argues that two common features of this period's dramatic metafiction, the rehearsal structure and internal literary criticism, were integrated into early novels, such as Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*. The third chapter demonstrates that Oliver Goldsmith imported speech forms from sentimental comedy into his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a means of benefiting from sentimentalism's popularity while critiquing its core values, and argues that his return to Restoration dramaturgy in his play *She Stoops to Conquer* positions two highly artificial dramatic speech forms, the aside and soliloquy, as ideal vehicles for the expression of authentic emotion. The final chapter argues that Frances Burney attempted to recreate the direct address and proleptic defense characteristic of dramatic prologues in *Evelina*'s preliminary paratexts, and maintains that much of the novel's character speech is dramatically presented. It also analyzes Burney's manuscripts for evidence of her methodological processes, and determines that the qualitative difference between character speech in her novels and plays is likely due to compositional methods. Ultimately, the formal adaptations I identify suggest that highly conventional dramatic techniques were foundational to the novel's development, which complicates our literary historical understanding of novelistic representational aims. By recognizing non-illusionistic techniques within early novels, we learn that literary realism was only one of the novel's many aesthetic goals, rather than its normative mode.

## INTRODUCTION

### Staging Speech and Performing Authorship

#### Drama in the Novel: An Emerging Subfield

A fair amount of scholarship explores the ways in which eighteenth-century authors incorporated dramatic themes and forms in their novels. Recent work by Ann Widmayer, Francesca Saggini, and Emily Hodgson Anderson has shown this to be a fertile and rewarding area of analysis. Widmayer is particularly invested in demonstrating that theatrical stagecraft influenced the proximal and spatial relations of characters in novels composed during the early eighteenth-century. Her study builds on the work of earlier scholars, such as Francesca Saggini and Emily Hodgson Anderson, who have identified formal overlaps between drama and later eighteenth-century novels. Saggini's extensive examination of Frances Burney's engagement with theater in her novels posits several compelling theories about broader literary trends of dramatic transference, and she goes so far as to contend that "the eighteenth-century novel was a hybrid genre...with strong dramatic characteristics, in which narrative mimesis is often coupled with (and just as often replaced by) theatrical display" (5). Concentrating on female authors, in particular, Hodgson Anderson has shown many ways in which authorship can be configured as dramatic performance in women's novelistic practice during the late eighteenth-century. Even before the recent spate of enthusiasm for the topic, though, critics had recognized trends in formal overlap. Ronald Paulson explored the manifestation of the *theatrum mundi*, or life-as-stage metaphor, in early novels and Kristiaan Aerek analyzed theatrical devices found in

seventeenth-century prose fiction. In the midst of this generative and illuminating body of work, however, the specific areas of cross-genre overlap remain to be identified and explored.

Building on these critics' work, in this study I will identify and examine two of these areas of generic transference: the representation of character speech and dramatic metafictional practices. This study has two major objectives: the first is to identify and analyze dramatic methods of speech representation that early novelists imported into their novels. I then consider the ways in which early novelists adapted metafictional devices from drama as a means to perform the social role of author and to initiate conversations with readers. From a macro-level perspective, I seek to situate these arguments historically as part of a more expansive phenomenon of the adaptation of theatrical forms within the nascent novel genre that contributed to its development as a recognizable literary genre.

To achieve these aims, I apply the vocabulary and approach supplied by narratology, the systematic study of narrative's formal structures that emerged from linguistic structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s. The narratological understanding of performativity, in particular, is foundational to this study. Conceived of as "modes of presenting or evoking actions," the two forms of performativity both originate in drama: performativity in the sense of the embodied performance of narrative, that is, dramatic performance (performativity I), and performativity as the illusion of the embodied performance of narrative in literature not designed for performance, either in its capacity to evoke the mental image of a performance, or through the reader's perception of narration *as* performance (performativity II). Narratologists further categorize performativity's appearance within narrative by presentation level; that is, whether the literary recipient's attention is guided to actions depicted in the intradiegetic story level or directed to the

extradiegetic discourse level<sup>1</sup> (Berns 370). Acknowledging the distinction between these two narrative levels allows for a more precise means of analyzing the ways in which the relationship between intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels can vary considerably between texts and genres.

In terms of literary history, the question that remains to be more adequately explored is: how did conventions from performativity I result in the representational strategies that create performativity II? In this study I aim to show that the clearest source of performativity at the intradiegetic level is the representation of dramatically stylized character speech, and performativity within the discourse level arises through dramatic forms of metafiction. The normative stance of drama is that the extradiegetic level is, or *should be*, undetectable to the audience, while narration is an expected component of novels. However, I seek to show that drama contains, and has always contained, a mediating communication system that appears through forms of speech representation, especially asides and soliloquies, and in metafictional structures that solicit audience participation, such as prologues. In the chapters that follow I show that dramatic structures that mediate between internal and external literary communication systems appear frequently in Restoration and eighteenth-century plays. These structures were then imported into the novel by authors who worked in both media.

Chapter I begins with an analysis of Aphra Behn's use of mediating speech in three plays: *The Rover* (1677), *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679), and *The Widdow Ranter* (1689). After establishing her penchant for these devices, I turn to the ways in which Behn incorporates dramatically stylized speech within her early prose fiction through introductory paragraphs that resemble prologues in their internal coherence and functions, and character speech that resembles soliloquy and asides. I then analyze character speech presentation in her most famous

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<sup>1</sup> Intradiegetic and extradiegetic are terms coined by Gerard Genette in his theory of narrative levels. Genette's narrative levels prove particularly fruitful for thinking of metafiction.

prose work, *Oroonoko* (1688), and identify a unique technique that condenses group speech into a single indirect report that elicits a directly presented response from the protagonist, approximating the use of a Greek tragic chorus—a technique I term mass undifferentiated speech.

Chapter II focuses on the ways in which dramatic formal structures led to a performative style of narration in the novel. I first establish that metafiction was commonly found in Restoration and eighteenth-century plays and then argue that it became a similarly frequent feature of eighteenth-century novels through the importation of dramatic structures. By analyzing Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), I provide evidence that metafiction was channeled into early novels through drama, specifically through the modification of the rehearsal structure, the incorporation of internal literary criticism, and dramatic forms such as soliloquies and interpolations.

Chapter III explores Oliver Goldsmith's multifaceted critique of literary sentimentalism within his plays and novels. I argue that Goldsmith attempted a two-pronged reformation of sentimental values in his novel by depicting a protagonist who endeavors to maintain a sentimental worldview in a world filled with imposture and disguise and by incorporating dramatically stylized speech from sentimental comedy, which I demonstrate through comparisons to Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). Goldsmith's approach resulted in moral ambivalence, though, so he returned to the topic in his drama. He first clarified his stance on benevolence in his play *The Good Natur'd Man* (1768) before finding the most forceful and effective means of articulating authentic emotion in a hostile environment through a prevalent use of dramatic mediating devices, specifically asides and soliloquy, in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773).

Chapter IV explores the ways in which Frances Burney uses dramatic speech forms to embed theatrical scenes within a novelistic mode that is primarily regarded as a vehicle for psychological realism, and proposes that the qualitative disparity between the dramatic speech found in her novels and that in her plays derives from differences in compositional method. This chapter also examines the ways in which Burney's selection of literary mode and genre enabled her to minimize authorial performance by reducing her visibility as author.

The important work being done on the cross-fertilization from drama to the novel has both enriched and broadened our awareness of the ways in which early novels took shape by borrowing from earlier forms. But in recognizing highly conventional dramatic forms as foundational to the novel, we also complicate our literary historical understanding of early novelistic representational practices. The familiar paradigm of the novel's teleological rise to predominantly more realist modes is challenged by an acknowledgment of the continued presence of non-illusionistic techniques within the novel during this period. Whatever combination of aims conditioned the novel's emergence and gradual rise to literary dominance, they were far more diverse than so-called realism.

### **Speech and Representation: A Background**

The study of speech representation within literary narrative begins with Plato's *Republic* (Book III, 392D-394E). During a discussion of Homer's *Iliad*, Plato's Socrates identifies and explicates narrative methods, carefully establishing a dichotomy between the instances in which Homer tells the story in his own guise, a method he terms *simple narrative*<sup>2</sup> (*diegesis*), and the instances when Homer "makes a speech as if he were another person" by imitating the speech of

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<sup>2</sup> This is the term used in the Loeb Classical Library translation; later in this edition Plato also refers to it as "plain narrative" and "straightforward narrative;" other translators prefer "pure narrative" (253). For a fuller account of the difficulties associated with translation, see Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Text and Modern Problems*.

others (*mimesis*) (251). Rather than beginning with the now current understanding of diegesis and mimesis as oppositional modes corresponding with telling and showing, the nuance of this formulation is that it posits diegesis as a single category of narrative story telling which may be achieved by “single –voiced” diegesis, that is, narrative told by a narrator, or “double-voiced” diegesis, as narrative told by a narrator who mimics his characters’ speech, which may be more properly considered “diegesis by means of mimesis” (Halliwell, “Diegesis – Mimesis”). Mimesis in this view, then, is one method of achieving diegesis. Speech is the sole distinguishing characteristic between narrative methods in this formulation; either the poet rephrases what was said using his own language or he impersonates the speaker while repeating his or her speech.

Although Plato expresses unease with imitation for its ontological inability to truly approximate original forms elsewhere in *The Republic*, his interest in speech representation arises from the ethical ramifications of imitation, specifically, or what Stephen Halliwell refers to as “the psychological complications of discursive multiplicity” (Halliwell, “Diegesis – Mimesis”). By imitating the speech and manner of another speaker, one risks becoming accustomed to behaving in a manner that does not correspond with his or her own ethics—a concern that Oliver Goldsmith later echoes in his critical writings about dramatic practice.<sup>3</sup>

This short section of *the Republic* has been enormously influential in multiple areas of literary theory and criticism, especially in its correlation of speech representation to genre. Plato explains that dramatic poetry “is done entirely by means of imitation [of others’ speech], i.e., tragedy and comedy,” as distinguished from “storytelling,” which is “the recital of the poet himself” found in the dithyramb, in particular, while epic poetry combines both imitation and storytelling (255). This resulted in the presentation of character speech being a critical

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<sup>3</sup> Plato’s concern seems to have applied exclusively to literary genres, as *The Republic* is composed as a philosophical dialogue representing the speech of Socrates and multiple interlocutors.

component in generic determination. Because most dramatic texts are designed for oral presentation, direct speech is often accepted as the genre's medium, though other speech forms may be present. Novels, in contrast, make use of multiple speech forms, though they are traditionally divided into three categories: *direct speech*,<sup>4</sup> speech usually enclosed within quotation marks that purports to convey a character's 'actual' words, often framed by speech tags and narration; *indirect speech*, a narrator's report of what was said; and *free indirect speech*, a "curious hybrid of quotation and narration," that blends character's and narrator's points of view, idioms, thoughts and voices (Ree 1048). The novel aligns most overtly with Plato's view of the epic, then, leading later authors who had strong neoclassical biases, such as Henry Fielding, to self-consciously envision the novel in these terms.<sup>5</sup>

This line of thought serves as the basis for later literary criticism that shores up the distinctions between genres by proposing that novelistic narrative "contains one more character than a dramatic presentation of the same story": the narrator (Ree 1054). Since the nineteenth-century literary critics have tended to equate narrative methods that minimize narration by privileging character speech with "showing" narrative due to the association of direct speech with drama, as contrasted to a narrator's "telling" it, which is also correlated with the articulation of the narrator's distinct, subjective point of view. Similarly, methods of characterization that depict characters speaking and acting without authorial assessment are likewise considered "dramatic." The standard equation thus became: the more a text is mediated the less dramatic it is.

The difference between narrative methods of showing and telling is also understood to signify the difference between mimesis and diegesis in the novel. However, this notion is based

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<sup>4</sup> A variation of this, *free direct speech*, refers to stretches of dialogue without accompanying speech tags or, less commonly, without quotation marks.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Fielding declared *Joseph Andrews* a "comic epic poem in prose" (3).

on a second understanding of mimesis derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, rather than Plato's more narrow definition of mimesis found in Book III of *The Republic* that is limited to the imitation of fictional character speech. Aristotle used the term *mimesis* to signify representation in a broader sense, defining poetry as imitation of human actions re-presented in a verbal medium. This envisions literary practices as recuperative in that they both represent and improve nature. Although Plato's and Aristotle's actual views on mimesis are much more complex than these or indeed most summaries of their positions indicate, as Stephen Halliwell has proven with considerable erudition, the traditional account of Aristotelian mimesis is the capacity to present a faithful reproduction of a fictional reality. A "fundamental confusion" exists between the understandings of mimesis as representational fidelity and mimicry by means of direct speech, and the two meanings are often conflated (McHale 816).

Direct character speech representation in the novel is considered more realistic because more illusionistic—characters "speak for themselves"—and indirect speech less realistic, and thus less "dramatic," by virtue of the narrator's mediation. Mistaking represented direct speech as a faithful simulation of a previously uttered conversation or utterance is referred to as the direct discourse fallacy. Because the novel features multiple forms of speech representation, direct character speech seems more realistic than summation or report by comparison. The co-presence of multiple speech forms conditions readers "to accept thin sprinklings of conventional or possibly arbitrary features as faithful representations of real-world speech behavior" (McHale 817). In literary theory, this tendency has led to evaluative conclusions about the value or merits of speech forms in the novel, with direct forms often being considered more reliable than indirect forms.

Given these tendencies, Meir Sternberg sought to untangle representational capacities

from speech forms in a detailed study of speech representation in fiction. Sternberg demonstrates that the *formal features* of literary speech, defined as “the relations between inset and frame within the quoting discourse,” which consist of the tripartite division of direct, indirect, and free indirect speech, have become associated with specific *representational* functions, defined as “the properties of the inset discourse as an image of reality” in what he terms “package deals” (111-112). He identifies five such package deals commonly found in literary criticism, including the equation of direct speech and mimesis and indirect speech and diegesis, and cautions against overreliance on such neatly paired terms, proposing instead a more comprehensive range of functions for speech forms. “Given the appropriate conditions in the frame” Sternberg crucially reminds us, “any form, whether polar or intermediate, may be made to go with any representational affect”; for instance, diegesis and indirect discourse may elicit a stronger empathetic response for a character than direct discourse (119).

Other scholars have similarly sought to refine the relationship between mimesis and diegesis and speech representation in the novel. Tzvetan Todorov demonstrates that direct character speech contributes to mimetic representation but is not its sole device—“the utterance of the narrator” can also mimetically reflect the novel’s internal action through other discursive modes such as general reflection or comparison (412-413). Using “narration” and “representation” to signify diegesis and mimesis, respectively, Todorov thus concludes it is necessary “to abandon the initial identification of the narration with the utterance of the narrator and the representation with that of the characters to seek a more profound basis” (413).

It is also essential to recall that all represented speech in literature is influenced by genre conventions and aesthetic stylization. “If direct discourse imitates anything,” Monika Fludernik maintains, “it is the (raw) manner of expression which one expects from real speech—there is

certainly no implication of an imitation of *actual* words or sentences” (30). And yet this manner of expression is often the reason readers accept direct speech forms as more authentic than indirect speech—direct speech seems to articulate individualized character difference through linguistic markers of social status, including clues about a particular character’s socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

However, even the notion that the expressive mannerisms represented within literary direct speech resemble real speech is fallacious. Gerard Genette’s observation about the use of idiolect in fictional character speech, that it “is always a *caricature* through accumulation and accentuation of specific characteristics” applies more broadly to all literary speech representation (184). Using as an example a Proustian character who “always give the impression of imitating . . . [or] caricaturing himself,” Genette demonstrates that even in nineteenth-century realist novels, when “mimetic effect is . . . at its height” it is more properly considered “at its limit: at the point where the extreme of ‘realism’ borders on pure unreality” (185). The direct representation of character speech results in an exaggerated distortion of real speech. Genette contends that this effect is caused by the “circularity” of represented speech—character speech that “sends one back to the text that ‘quotes’ it,” or discourse context. But the idiolect we find in novels seems so “extreme” not because it imitates actual direct speech recontextualized into narrative discourse, but because it imitates the expressive function of dramatic speech designed for stage performance. Represented speech in the novel imitates not the idiosyncratic quirks of actual speech but the mimesis of speech in dramatic tradition.

To correct the notion that “the characters’ direct discourse is the most reliable part of the fictional universe and in which the narrator’s or narrative’s mediation is by definition always

already a distortion” Fludernik posited a “schematic language theory” that reconceptualizes the relationship between frame discourse and represented speech. She theorizes

narrative *discourse* as a uniform one-levelled linguistic entity which by its deictic evocation of alterity—whether in the form of direct discourse, indirect discourse, free indirect discourse or *Ansteckung*—*projects* a level of language which is not actually *there* but is implied and manufactured by a kind of linguistic hallucination. Rather than the medium covering and drowning out all of the (mimetic) message, the schematic language theory allows the mimetic level to surge from the mediating language in a manner constitutive of the mimeticism which it produces (453).

This significantly advances the notion that all character speech representation in the novel is illusory; narration and character speech are not truly distinct, rather, one creates the illusion that the other exists.

Central to this illusion is contextual framing. Unlike dramatists, novelists are “at liberty to combine speech with narration, description and commentary in proportions that may constantly be varied; and this liberty involves the responsibility of selecting at many points the most appropriate mode or combination of modes for a particular passage, scene or episode” (Page 12). This results not only in expressive variety, which can enliven a novel’s pacing, but can also amount to perspectival shifts *à la* Kenneth Burke, in which an author alters readers’ perception of a speech act by emphasizing certain aspects of a speech situation over others, such as stressing environmental factors (scene) over, say, the role of the individual involved (agent).

Mikhail Bakhtin hailed the novel’s capacity for integrating multiple social idioms and languages, which he termed *dialogism*, as a unique and defining formal achievement. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, he explains that “the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style

and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls” including “direct authorial literary-artistic narration (in all its diverse variants)” and “the stylistically individualized speech of characters” (262). These “stylistic unities, upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole” (261-262). Bakhtin considered language as the verbal and ideological expressions of particular social groups, including various religious, professional, socio-economic classes that help encode each group’s identity. *Heteroglossia* occurs when languages interpenetrate; usually in the form of the narrator’s language coloring a character’s in reported speech.

Whether based in reality or fiction, all represented speech is subjected to recontextualization, as Genette observed, which entails modification through selection and reduction. Even in transcription of actual speech the sheer number of interruptions, speech breaks, and use of filler words such as “uh,” “um,” and “well” supplementing speech and language practices nearly force a writer to condense and clarify language to render it more intelligible in writing. Recalling that in both plays and novels, speech is first and foremost *literary* requires an acknowledgement that it originates not with verbal interchanges, but in writing, and serves narrative purposes. Literary speech is properly conceived of as “an effect produced by a combination of convention, selection, and contextualization” (McHale 817). Any act of speech representation, literary or otherwise always entails adaptation of an original within a new framework “informed by premises and designs of its own” and “dominated by a different network of relationships” (Sternberg 115). Representations of fictional discourse are shaded by the act of retelling; selection and compression occur both consciously and unconsciously, as do

modifications of emphasis and paralinguistic delivery, and consequently one must consider the relationship between narrative levels. This discourse context, the separation between quoter and quotees and the ties that holds them together, specifically, is nearly as important as the represented dialogue to a reader's understanding of the text.

Direct speech became the preferred method of representing speech in the novel during the nineteenth-century when it was celebrated as a means to produce literary realism, the period's reigning aesthetic. Nineteenth-century writers including Gustave Flaubert and Henry James declared "dramatic" methods of presentation technically superior to modes in which the narrator's discourse is more readily apparent. Consequently, both indirect speech forms and overt narrators who communicate individual, subjective points of view like those favored by Henry Fielding became negatively associated with meddlesome mediation, contamination, and unwanted unreliability.

Many literary historians maintain that the novel reached new technical and stylistic heights during the nineteenth century; and because realism was then the dominant style of the genre, literary critics accepted it as normative and continue to do so today. As Linda Hutcheon so eloquently explains, "the history of novel criticism demonstrates that, while the novel *form* developed further [from literary realism], its *theories* froze in time somewhere in the last century. What was a temporary stage in literature became a fixed definition" (38). Hutcheon maintains that this phenomenon stems from a critical tendency to conceptualize traditional realism as a "*mimesis* of product" that encourages readers to equate fictionally represented characters, actions, and environments, with those in reality as a measure of their literary merit. She contrasts this with a "*mimesis* of process" in which the reader is made "conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking" rather than only seeking to perceive the represented

order or meaning the work constructs (38). And yet the term mimesis is still widely equated with the mimesis of product, that is mimesis in its capacity to create a believable and life-like reality. This is why critics such as the Brownen Thomas have promoted a valuable corrective by proposing a conscious separation, *à la* Sternberg, between mimesis and realism. Following Jan Bruck's lead, Thomas proposes that scholars distinguish between realism as a historically recent style of representation and mimesis strictly in its strict sense of imitation, returning to the more narrow Platonic usage (17).

Similarly, the reason dramatic structures that mediate between author and literary receiver tend to be overlooked is because they are viewed as anti-illusionistic, and therefore anti-dramatic, a view enabled by the dominance of nineteenth-century dramatic realism. In *The Theory of Modern Drama* Peter Szondi maintained that "pure" or "absolute drama," in which the characters solely interact through dialogue purportedly without any "admixture of authorial intonation at all," was the predominant form of European drama until the end of the nineteenth century (Womack 99). But this elevation of an idealized mode that was popular during one historical period to the normative mode of the genre at large resulted in all others being considered divergent. Despite acknowledgment of this phenomenon by many critics, the tendency to consider the features of absolute/pure drama as normative has proven persistent and is evident even in accounts of drama that acknowledge that the wide variability in dramatic modes and practices historically, including Manfred Pfister's, discussed below.

The fact that Restoration plays regularly include mediating structures means that either Restoration dramatic practices diverged extremely from dramatic orthodoxy, or the literary historical narrative that mediating structures are divergent is inadequate. Instead, mediating structures should be viewed as a significant channel of dramatic expression, one that this study

seeks to show influenced the formal choices of early novelist. The popularity of the internal frame-breaking structures of asides and soliloquies waxes and wanes throughout history, as does the prevalence of metafiction, but the appearance of all of these forms within ancient drama, and frequent appearance in Restoration drama indicate that they have always been an important form of dramatic representation.

The prevalence of anti-illusionistic features in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama contributed to a more general tendency in theater history to consider this period's drama as transitional, an odd period "between the Shakespearean playhouse and the theater of realism" that did not produce much of lasting value or historical consequence (McMillin vii). The trajectory of the novel's rise to realism is correlated to drama's supposed qualitative decline in the eighteenth century, or as Emily Allen puts it "the novel's rise depends upon the theater's fall" (435).<sup>6</sup> There was no rise or decline for either genre, though, just a displacement of techniques from one form into the other, followed by a reciprocal exchange toward the end of the eighteenth century. If the novels I analyze here are representative of a broader deployment of dramaturgical techniques within early novels, then we should go back and challenge the accounts of the rise of the novel and its sense of realism.

### **Dramatic Speech in the Novel: Formal Integration**

Speech representation is a crucial formal link between eighteenth-century plays and novels. Early novelists who were also dramatists drew upon their experience in dramatic writing to import dramatic forms of speech into their prose. Character speech in many early novels was modeled after dramatic speech and was presented to the reader in a dramatically stylized manner.

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<sup>6</sup> Allen admits this generalization is "not perfectly correct, of course, since the novel never completely supplanted the theater" but still characterizes the relationship as one between "waxing and waning generic forms" (435).

That is, the speech represented in many early novels did not purport to replicate language as spoken or experienced outside of literature, but rather dramatic language and speech forms. This is achieved through the incorporation of both dialogic forms that often appear as discrete dramatic scenes or even scripts with a novel and monologic forms of dramatic speech, especially asides and soliloquies. Moreover, some authors acknowledged these affinities within their works.

The notion that character speech is drama's medium is repeated so often as to be a truism; characters speak in their capacity as autonomous individuals with dialogue serving as the primary form of onstage communication. This proves reductive in practice, however, as the physical performance of dramatic speech multiplies the potential for interpretative variation over which a dramatist has little to no control, and elides the formal functions by which dramatic speech operates within the narrative structure. Dramatic speech is typically presented as "single voiced" direct speech, as opposed to the Platonic double-voiced speech that is filtered by an author/narrator. On its face, then, dramatic language seems similar to non-literary language; hence, it is reasonable that many view it as a direct imitation. Both are contextually bound, responding to particular situations produced within specific environments, and both seem limited and regulated by the same temporal conditions. But dramatic language, unlike non-literary language, operates on the two communicative levels—each utterance is produced by both the author and the character for the benefit of other characters within the internal system and the literary recipient, and characters draw attention to the presence of the external communication system through asides and soliloquies, devices we find regularly in Restoration and eighteenth-century plays, especially comedies.

The oral delivery of stage dialogue obscures its origin in writing, thus giving the impression that it occurs organically. This aspect of stage speech is "writing's most frontal and

obvious attempt to escape from its own silence: the writer puts words in the mouths of physical speakers who really do talk, deploying a sophisticated technique to disguise the writtenness of the lines and making them sound like unpremeditated utterances,” which effectively minimizes the audience’s awareness of the dramatist’s role in most plays (Womack 4). Although the physical presence of the stage, set, and theatrical space all serve as unavoidable reminders that what happens on stage is a scripted show, performance serves to minimize both consideration of a play’s foundational text and its author.

Embodied performance contributes additional layers of representative and interpretative possibilities for dramatic presentation. The text’s embodiment creates the illusion of spontaneous speech, and the play’s blocking and performance contribute extra-linguistic layers of meaning. This allows for a near infinite amount of acoustic and visual representative and interpretive variability. Living actors contribute their own language and speech idiosyncrasies and actors’ contributions to a play’s successful staging cannot be underestimated. The dynamic interaction between characters as a source of dramatic presentation is essential,

What seals the connection between word and actor is not an individualized conception of appropriateness to character, or the psychologically imagined interiority a person’s utterances are supposed to express: it is the interactive to-and-fro of power and feeling and desire *between* the dramatis personae. They are each of them what they are because of their verbal interaction with the others: the characters are to that extent dialogically constructed. (Womack 98)

As anyone who has had the misfortune to witness a poorly acted play or a cold reading may tell you, even the most riveting dialogue can sound illogical and alienating when the actors fail to connect with each other or the characters they play. Once a text is in the actors’ hands, the author

cedes control, and performance choices, especially regarding line delivery, can fundamentally alter a text's meaning. Skilled actors are absolutely essential to a play's success, as both Aphra Behn and Frances Burney acknowledge in their respective complaints about underprepared actors ruining their plays, and in their absence one recalls that dramatic dialogue is speech *as* action.

Because of living actors' embodiment of characters, dramatic speech seems realistic in the sense that the audience observes actual utterances delivered by living, breathing, speakers. This leads to a naïve impression that even the most poetically stylized dramatic speech is realistic in the sense that it is delivered as actual utterances issuing from actual bodies. Dramatic speech's performative nature—that is, the way in which it functions as actions that amount to plot events, contributes to the sense that dramatic utterances are irretrievable, like non-literary speech. However, as Peter Womack observed, “making it seem that the characters are the origin of what they say. . . is the centerpiece of dramatic orthodoxy,” the words the characters speak are always first and foremost literary constructions and as such serve a multiplicity of narrative functions (98).

In *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (1977), Manfred Pfister attempted to establish a trans-historical theory of the formal structures of dramatic communication. In this detailed structuralist account of the formal categories and functions by which drama operates, Pfister tackles the theory of dramatic speech representation at length. Pfister identifies six functions of dramatic speech: the referential function, the expressive function, the appellative function, the phatic function, the metalingual function, and the poetic function. The primary purpose of referential speech is to convey information, usually relating to the plot, which can be more or less redundant to those within the internal communication system; it is best illustrated by the

dramatic messenger's report, in which a character arrives for a single scene and gives a detailed account of events that have transpired. The expressive function may be considered speech in its capacity as characterization; including both the idiosyncratic delivery of speech including idiolects and mannerisms, and the content of the speech from which character psychology may be derived. The appellative function is dialogue-dependent, and relates to the ways in which dramatic characters use speech to exert influence on others; according to Pfister this function is one of the most common, so much so that it is a "virtually obligatory component" of dramatic speech (111). The phatic function is concerned with establishing and maintaining a relationship between speaker and auditor in either the internal or external communication systems, it is one's "psychological willingness" to participate in communication (113). The metalingual function is the aesthetic verbal code that often thematizes dramatic speech (115). The poetic function is aesthetic stylization orientated towards the external communication and typically does not affect the internal communication system. Plays composed in specific poetic styles may adhere to poetic linguistic homogeneity, like that of a verse drama, or heterogeneous poetic styles may be deployed conscientiously to convey various aesthetic and thematic effects, such as giving aristocratic characters verse couplets while social inferiors speak in prose. Character speech may be further individualized within either approach, but idiolects are typically subordinate to higher-order linguistic registers.

In addition to identifying the functions of dramatic speech, Pfister formulates three criteria for a dramatic communication model: (1.) the multimedial nature of drama, stipulating that drama consist not just of a verbal presentation of an orthographically fixed source text, but also a scenic presentation;<sup>7</sup> (2.) performative speech—when an actor speaks on stage, he or she literally performs an act—an utterance has been made that cannot be recalled that affects both

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<sup>7</sup> A notable exception is closet dramas, those that are composed exclusively for print.

the play world and the theater that contains it,<sup>8</sup> and; (3.) the absence of a mediating communicating system (6-7). The third criterion is developed through explicit contrast with the novel's communication model, which consists of three semiotic levels between author and receiver: (1.) the external communication system between the actual author and actual receiver of the work<sup>9</sup> (2.) the mediating communication system consisting of the fictional narrator and fictional addressee; and (3.) the internal communication system consisting of the communications of the fictional characters.<sup>10</sup>

According to Pfister and others, the fundamental distinction between drama and the novel is the absence of a mediating communication system between fictional narrator and fictional addressee in drama. Most plays present the internal communication system directly to the audience by embedding the internal communication system in the external communication system, while most novels have a mediator, the narrator, whose discourse distances the internal discourse level from the external level of actual author and actual receiver. Taken together, the generally accepted notions that (1.) drama is unmediated and that (2.) speech is its sole medium obscure recognition of a more complex dramatic communication system that encompasses a broad range of representative possibilities. Because speech is drama's most apparent medium, it may seem like we do not have to attend closely to discourse context, but the notion of unmediated discourse within drama is just as fallacious as it is in novels. Narrative, whether conveyed through embodied performance or not, is always mediated, either by virtue of being penetrated by authorial aims and motivations or through the use of specific mediating speech structures expressive of content pertinent to the literary receiver and typically undetected within the intradiegetic world, specifically: prologues, asides, and soliloquies. Asides and soliloquies

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<sup>8</sup> In this sense it functions in a similar fashion as Austin's speech-act theory.

<sup>9</sup> There also may be an ideal author and an ideal reader, depending on the narrative text.

<sup>10</sup> Genette calls this the intradiegetic level.

function as mediation in that they are devices that break the internal frame, essentially pausing action to delivery character commentary and vary in range of expressive direction from direct to indirect.

Other forms of dramatic speech can function as mediation, as well, such as when characters participate in self-narration through description of the physical actions being performed, as when Bacon in Behn's *The Widdow Ranter* relates that "I trembling stand, unable to approach her" (2.1). Word-scenery that compensates for minimalist stage scenery similarly operates as expository narration when a character's descriptive language serves little function within the internal communication system, such as when Marcella in Behn's *The Feigned Courtesan* muses that: "The evening's soft and calm, as happy lovers' thoughts;/ And here are groves where the kind meeting trees/ Will hide us from the amorous gazing crowd" (2.1). The romantic import of Marcella's words not only informs the reader of her current frame of mind, but also describes the physical environment the audience is to imagine, all while conveying a pensive tone for her sister to abruptly check with a cynical response to great comic effect.<sup>11</sup>

Dramatists can also imbue dialogue with details that serve larger concerns of plot progression or thematic unity that function covertly as mediation. Conversations that seem trite to the characters may foreshadow consequential events or refer to a play's overarching themes. As Womack explains, "the dramatis personae are unaware; their words have no power to confer meaning on their experiences, but are observable symptoms of their more or less false or partial consciousness. The authoritative interpretation of events, on the other hand, comes in coded messages from the dramatist, which the dramatis personae cannot read even though they are the messengers" (Womack 89-90). This tendency suggests that very often in drama showing also entails telling.

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<sup>11</sup> This example also demonstrates the polyfunctionality of dramatic speech.

While drama's apparent speech form is the dialogue, it also features several types of monologic speech, many of which operate as narrative mediation. Technical definitions of "dramatic monologue" are ambiguous; they either refer to what is better known as soliloquy, a monologue that occurs without an on-stage addressee, or a single utterance that is lengthy and internally coherent. Due to these difficulties, Pfister advocates a fluid approach to distinguishing between monologic and dialogic speech based on 'semantic direction' that replaces the binary contrast with a "graded scale of values" that can identify greater or lesser degrees of 'monologicity' or 'dialogicity'. As he explains, "the more frequent and radical the semantic changes of direction are in a particular passage, the stronger its dialogicity becomes and vice versa" (128). Soliloquies exhibit dialogic tendencies when they incorporate apostrophes, express internal conflict, or address the audience, whereas stretches of dramatic dialogue in which multiple subjects express the same sentiments can be conceived as having monologic qualities.

Monologic speech in drama is particularly conventional. It can fulfill numerous functions within a given work, but it is one of the most recognizable ways in which dramatic speech diverges from non-literary speech. The *soliloquy*, in particular, is a dramatic convention that originates from a tendency in non-literary speech, namely speaking and thinking aloud to oneself, but so exaggerates it as to make it a practice that would seem extremely strange if experienced in the real world. A means for characters to comment upon their behavior and motives, soliloquies are usually reflective and thus serve a diegetic function similar to narration in the novel. This breaks the internal frame story from within, temporarily suspending narrative progress. This form of commentary upon dialogue is a primary example of how a dramatic technique for speech representation was adopted and altered in the novel form. Even Pfister admits that the soliloquy fulfills functions that "are generally the same as those served by the

mediating communication system in narrative texts” but he interprets this convention as one that allows drama to operate without a mediating system, rather than recognizing it as a form of mediation itself (132).

Similarly, the aside can range in degree of monologism and dialogism and vary in semantic direction. The traditional aside is a speech in which a character speaks his or her thoughts aloud and other on-stage characters remain oblivious of the utterance. Sometimes the aside is addressed to the audience directly, usually to engage the spectators as confidants, but even when direct address is not indicated in the secondary text, the effect is to establish a level of discourse distinct from that between characters on stage, essentially operating similar to narration. Asides vary in their frame-breaking capacity—some are intended to resemble spontaneous thought expressed aloud without an intended addressee, others are directed immediately to the audience, and some can be intercepted by other characters to great comic effect. Another variation, the dialogic aside, is a private conversation between characters discussing onstage events in the presence of others who cannot perceive their speech.

Given that a novel’s narrator functions by acting as overt mediator between the internal discourse of characters and the external literary receiver, these dramatic mediating structures should be unnecessary in the genre. And yet we encounter them frequently in early novels. Earlier theorists of speech representation including Brian McHale and Monika Fludernik have observed that novelistic speech representation varies tremendously in its approximation of non-literary speech. Literary speech often appears drastically dissimilar to language as it is experienced on a day-to-day basis, and is largely convention-laden. However the conventional nature of literary speech is often interpreted as an author’s deliberate attempt to achieve a stylistic or representational effect, rather than evidence of formal borrowings from drama.

Despite the long history of these types of dramatic devices, most critics of drama persist in considering them aberrational. Pfister catalogues the presence of “epic communication structures,”<sup>12</sup> but given his implicitly novel-centric framework, he maintains that “the creation of a mediating communication system in drama is always interpreted as a deviation from the normal model of dramatic presentation” (4). This critical tendency to see dramatic models that entail communication outside of the internal system as deviant not only inhibits our appreciation of the expressive variety of dramatic speech forms but also hinders recognition of the ways in which mediating speech forms were repurposed into other genres. We need an account of literary history that attends to the subtleties of this generic repurposing.

As the terms of Pfister’s dramatic communication model suggests, the emphasis on drama’s lack of mediation is derived through comparison to the novel—despite anachronism, the novel provides the standard formal model against which drama is measured and the limitations of this approach account for the persistent tendency to ignore its mediating structures. Mikhail Bakhtin declares drama a monologic genre in his theory of the dialogic nature of the novel and when Pfister addresses the absence of a mediating communication system in drama, he speaks in terms of a “‘loss’ of communicative potential” that dramatists must compensate for by transferring “aspects of the narrative function” to the internal communication system (4). This comparative orientation is sustained throughout his analysis and, despite couching terms like ‘loss’ in scare quotes, it skews our understanding of the historical relationship between forms. During a discussion of the ways in which dramatic soliloquy can achieve functions similar to those within the novel, Pfister describes the device as an attempt to “compensate for the absence of th[e] mediation communication system in drama” (132). This approach risks eliding the ways

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<sup>12</sup> Pfister uses ‘epic tendencies’ in the sense of “those that encourage the development of a mediating communication system,” especially those envisioned by Bertolt Brecht’s ‘epic theater.’ For a detailed list of the many uses of ‘epic’ as it pertains to drama, see Pfister, 69-71.

in which dramatic speech representation occasioned the available strategies for speech representation in the novel and was involved with the novel's development.

### **Drama through Conversation: A Novel Concept**

The authors whose works I examine in this project show that many early novelists not only imported dramatic speech into their novels, but also replicated the conversational and interactive aspects of Restoration drama using metafiction, particularly to perform the social role of author. In both the novel and plays authorial performance manifests as textual performance through surrogacy—in plays the two most apparent vehicles for authorial performance are prologues and metafiction within the main play. The prologue's status as a site for audience engagement, authorial self-definition, and literary criticism was then replicated in early novels through paratexts and playful forms of narration.

Refined, witty conversation was a distinguishing feature of Restoration culture. In "Defence of the Epilogue" (1672), Poet Laureate and renowned dramatist John Dryden argues this tendency elevates his age's literary productions from the previous, firmly declaring that "the last and greatest advantage of our writing" is that it "proceeds from conversation" (210). By 'conversation' Dryden does not simply refer to the basic communicative structure, but the social mannerisms and rules that govern decorous speech as practiced by the English aristocracy after the restoration of Charles II to the English throne. According to Dryden, Charles II's misfortunes "afforded him an opportunity" to travel and cultivate a sophisticated "gallant and generous education" while living in exile on the continent during the Interregnum. Upon his ascendancy to the English throne "the desire of imitating so great a pattern first awakened the dull and heavy spirits of the English from their native reservedness; loosened them from their stiff forms of

conversation, and made them easy and pliant to each other in discourse” (212). These polite, “pliant” conversations were then reflected in contemporary literature, including in “the discourse and raillery” of Restoration stage comedies. A standard comedy features volleys of rapid-fire witty repartee between characters. As Dryden explains: “it would be a wonder if the poets, whose work is imitation, should be the only persons in three kingdoms who should not receive advantage by it; or, if they should not more easily imitate the wit and conversation of the present age than of the past” (212). Thus, in his view, the witty and refined language characteristic of Restoration drama reflected contemporary linguistic practices and social mannerisms, and more importantly, that conversation was a ruling aesthetic of Restoration drama.

Dryden’s appreciation for conversation informed his genre choice for *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1688), as well, which he composed as “the relation of a dispute betwixt some of our wits,” or a conversation between four friends. The technical form is the philosophical dialogue, a genre initiated and copiously practiced by Plato, who composed approximately thirty examples. Philosophical dialogues have been composed in every period in the history of philosophy, cementing the genre’s exalted status as a preferred method for intellectual inquiry (Hosle xvi). While writers such as Dryden have adopted the form to analyze literary theory and practices, it differs from specifically literary forms, in that it posits a “specific kind of truth claim...which is more direct and oriented toward verification through argumentative analysis” than literary works (Hosle 2).

It is perhaps unsurprising that philosophical dialogues should be composed by some of the most renowned authors working in period known for the revival of classical literary forms, but Restoration and eighteenth-century writers modified the dialogue to better reflect the values of their age. Dryden’s genre choice implies the topic merits the same level of concern and

treatment as those scrutinized within classical dialogues—a strategic move for an essay defending drama as a legitimate literary art. In a prefatory letter, Dryden also intimates another advantage of the form: readers have the opportunity to determine the merit of multiple perspectives on a topic. He promises not “to reconcile, but to relate” the differing opinions “without passion or interest” (Dryden, *Essay* 73). Yet rather than composing a dynamic and systematic series of questions and answers represented as direct speech between speakers as practiced in antiquity, Dryden’s variation more closely approximates prose narrative. The dialogue is framed by exposition situating the conversation spatially and temporally through a participatory focalizing character who frequently reports his interlocutors’ speech indirectly.

Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, used dialogue as a mode of philosophical discourse, as well, most famously in *The Moralists*, published in his *Characteristicks* (1714). Composed as direct speech between speakers, *The Moralists* more closely resembles the Platonic dialogue than Dryden’s variation, but the length of the represented utterances renders it more of a series of extended monologues than the traditional model. Moreover, Shaftesbury employs reiterative speech extensively. He also introduced a notable variation to the traditional philosophical dialogue genre in “Soliloquy: or Advice to an Author” by depicting an internal debate within the subject’s mind. Shaftesbury felt it was important to visually distinguish between the two voices in print and instructed his printer to condense the spacing within the utterance of each speaker and to expand it between voices (Harris 371-2). Shaftesbury’s epistolary rendering of the genre, in particular, contributed to the emphasis on conversation found in some early novels. Using paratexts, some eighteenth-century novelists recast epistolary correspondence between audience and authorial persona as a confederacy, with fictional editor and reader simultaneously bearing witness to the narrative events as they unfold,

as in Samuel Richardson's in *Pamela* (1740).

In addition to the cultural emphasis on refined and energetic forms of conversation and the influence of philosophical dialogue, the social-spatial dimensions of the Restoration theatre also occasioned an interactive approach to drama. Direct engagement with the audience in drama was partially inspired by the proximity of stage to audience. Spatially, Restoration audiences and performers were engaged in intimate contact. The stages used by the two approved theatre companies jutted directly into the audience, allowing theatergoers to flank three sides. The thematic content of many Restoration comedies capitalizes on this proximity by satirically depicting the behavior of those who attended. The audience was primarily aristocratic, so plays “mostly addressed aristocratic problems: mercantile encroachment, town country division, marital infidelity, courtship troubles” (Pfister 37). Moreover, theater-going was considered a social event, and it was not unusual for performances to be interrupted by boisterous audience responses.

The immediate juxtaposition of fictional and actual worlds illuminated the inherent similarities between the uses of illusion in literary and social performances occasioning a great deal of metafictional play, discussed in detail in chapter II. Metafictional structures that acknowledge drama as fiction, such as the rehearsal structure, operate as mediation and were prevalent in Restoration plays. Polish scholar Slawomir Swiontek schematizes the relationship between drama's internal and external communication systems as two axes of communication present within character speech, one that traverses the stage and a second from stage to audience, which he considers the hallmark of the “theatrical situation” (Stephenson 8). Metatheater occurs when both communicational axes are made apparent to the audience through the use of specific devices, such as Greek choruses, medieval allegorical characters who explicitly interpret their

roles to the audience, characters who address the audience directly, usually as confidants; and in prologues and epilogues. The tendency to comment upon internal action that these devices entail operates as mediation similar to the type of narratorial commentary we encounter in many early novels.

The prologue, in particular, emerged as a discursive space for playwrights or their surrogates to engage with the audience, define and defend their aesthetic principles, comment upon popular taste, and establish a professional persona—all common topics of metafiction in the novel. The form reached its stylistic and functional pinnacle during the English Restoration. Many scholars dismiss prologues as peripheral paratexts worthy of only cursory examination,<sup>13</sup> but they often served valuable definitional and contextual functions, and as they were designed to be scenically enacted along with the mainpiece play, they are properly viewed as an important component of the total dramatic enterprise.<sup>14</sup>

Dramatic prologues originate in ancient Greek and Roman drama and reach “their apotheosis” during the Restoration—Diana Solomon has identified 1,750 examples composed between 1660 and 1714, years also corresponding with the period during which early authors such as Aphra Behn were actively experimenting with extended prose forms (2). Magda Romanska sees “the fact that Restoration playwrights felt the need to write prefaces to almost every play, explaining and justifying their dramatic choices” as a consequence of Puritan rule (x). Described as “poetic bids for the audience’s attention,” prologues and epilogues were not always composed by the dramatist. They function as mediation between audience and internal dramatic world by addressing the audience directly, usually to introduce the play’s topic, offer

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<sup>13</sup> The editors of “The London Stage Database” maintain that prologues may be dismissed because they were not uniformly performed in every instance of a play’s production.

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Diana Solomon has shown that Restoration audiences considered them an integral component of the total dramatic enterprise.

anticipatory explanations to alleviate points of potential interpretive or critical confusion, and to present a case for why the drama should be received favorably. In some instances these strategies amount to *metalepsis* by producing a destabilizing effect (Solomon 7). Typically presented to the audience by an actor wearing the costume of the character he or she was about to perform or has just finished performing, they illustrate the medial position of the actor as a fellow member of the actual world of the audience and fictional member of the play world, demonstrating the flexibility of this boundary.

The prologue was formally integrated into early novels not only through paratexts such as the preface, but also through introductory narration that is formally unified with the primary narrative action but thematically distinct, such as that found in Behn's short prose works. One of its most valuable formal contributions to the novel is in its status as a site of authorial self-definition and performance. As Wayne Booth reminds us, when an author writes he "creates not simply an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works. To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote" (71). "The authorship of fictional texts becomes an act of performance" as Emily Hodgson Anderson has noted, "and, simultaneously, a potential locus for self-expression" (12). Authors negotiated terms between the reader and historical person, authorial persona, and/or narrators who may or may not participate in the narrative action in modified prologues.

The eighteenth century was not only the century during which the novel took shape as a cohesive genre, but it was also the period in which authorship became a cohesive professional and legal designation. Authors gained material rights legally during this period and "the term *author* became a value-free collective name to which professional designations," such as *writer*,

and evaluative appellations like *poet* could be applied (Schonert 6). Along with the greater prominence of authorial status, came the opportunity for professional self-definition, which many writers achieved through metafiction, following the example of the rehearsal format popularized in Restoration drama.

Authors used surrogates and metafiction to initiate conversations with readers, or more abstractly between narrative levels. Metafiction enabled authors to insert themselves into their works to achieve a number of aims, including professional self-definition, reflection on social practices achieved through the juxtaposition of social and theatrical/literary facades, and to interrogate the state of current taste in literary craft and an argument about its ideal form and function. Early novelists replicated this sense of intimacy through various modes and techniques, including direct reader address within paratexts and narration. As the novel took shape, authors experimented with proxemic relations with the reader. In many eighteenth century novels, the narrator is explicitly concerned with engaging the reader in dialogue, and in the case of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) the focus on this relationship is privileged over the story being told.

Authorial performance also emerges from a larger context of social performativity. In *The Making of the Modern Self*, Dror Wahrman suggests readers understood identity as expressed through performance and demonstrates both the prevalence and significance of identity play in this period. Disguise and cross-dressing are a common and distinguishing feature of Restoration comedies, and this trend continued within early novels, either overtly as in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1724), in which the heroine adopts multiple disguises outright, or in more subtle forms of performance such as in Richardson's *Pamela*, in which the heroine performs her innate value textually within her letters. Some early novelists then similarly adopted performative forms of narration. Social performance, especially the type as depicted in

Restoration comedies, thus feeds into authorial textual performance as it developed within the novel.

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## CHAPTER I

### **Performing in Prologues and Narration: Dramatic Features in Aphra Behn's Prose Fiction**

Aphra Behn was both one of the most prolific and accomplished dramatists of the Restoration and the author of several works of prose fiction, two of which, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687) and *Oroonoko* (1688), are frequently regarded as early novels. In her plays Behn demonstrates a penchant for audience engagement through prologues and mediating speech devices, particularly asides and soliloquies, which vary considerably in range of semantic address and function. Three of Behn's plays, *The Rover* (1677), *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679), and *The Widdow Ranter* (1689), are representative of her use of such forms, all of which she repurposed into her prose fiction. Dramatic prologues appear in her prose as digressive introductions or personal mini-narratives, both of which engage the reader as participant in the narrative situation; asides are modulated into narratorial interventions that pause internal action; and the preference for group scenes displayed in her comedies is recreated in her most famous and influential novella, *Oroonoko*, resulting in a unique form of speech representation in which assemblies speak collectively as a Greek chorus and thereby elicit the language of heroic drama from the protagonist.

One of the first female professional playwrights, Behn composed at least nineteen plays—a prodigious number both during the Restoration and now—and she enjoyed considerable praise for her dramatic writing during her lifetime. Her prose was less well known, but evidence of its influence appears in the works of the early novelists Delarivier Manley and

Eliza Haywood (Todd, *Critical Fortunes* 20). *Oroonoko*, in particular, became quite popular after her death in 1689 thanks in part to Thomas Southerne's 1695 stage adaptation, which was so successful that it continued to be staged for over a century (Todd, *Critical Fortunes* 24). The initial popularity of Southerne's play inspired others to capitalize on the resurgence of interest in Behn's work and a collection of her prose was published in 1696 (Todd, *Critical Fortunes* 26). But when a cultural reformation of manners and literature took hold around the turn of the eighteenth century, Behn's reputation fell along with that of the Restoration values her works espoused. Eighteenth-century authors including Henry Fielding and Saumuel Richardson "vilified her as unwomanly" (Todd, *Secret Life* 2). However, the continuing popularity of Southerne's play prevented *Oroonoko* from vanishing entirely from public interest, and the novella appeared in serialized form in 1753 and in a collection of novels in 1777 (Todd, *Critical Fortunes* 115). Behn's writing therefore remained in the eighteenth-century cultural consciousness long after her death, and thanks in part to the surge of critical interest in her work that began in the 1970s, today scholars consider *Oroonoko* "a crucial text in the development of the novel" (Hutner i).

The relationship between Behn's plays and novels has proven a fertile topic in modern literary criticism. Kristiaan Aерcke persuasively argues in "Theatrical Background in English Novels of the Seventeenth Century" that settings in Behn's prose fiction "correspond closely to the situation on the Restoration stage of the 1660s and 1670s" (124). Recently Joanna Fowler conducted an analysis of dramatic features in three of Behn's prose works, *The History of the Nun* (1689), *The Fair Jilt* (1688), and *The Lucky Mistake* (1689), that demonstrates interplay between dramatic *mimesis* and novelistic *diegesis*. This is part of a broader academic focus on Behn's use of the *theatrum mundi* topoi enacted through the depiction of spectacle in her prose.

According to Janet Todd, Behn's "narrators present love, religion and law in terms of drama. The law court, the altar and the scaffold all become places of spectacle and show" (Todd, "Introduction" 20). Scholars are particularly interested in the use of spectacle in *Oroonoko*. Ramesh Mallipeddi demonstrated the affinities between Behn's representation of Oroonoko's martial exploits and heroic drama, and argues that Behn "elevates the black body to an admirable spectacle via the conventions of Restoration drama" before showing its commodification (476). Ann Widmayer and Marta Figlerowicz interpret the protagonist's frequent appearance before crowds as recreating the proximal relations of the theater in novelistic scenes. Widmayer suggested that the spatial relations of Behn's characters in *Oroonoko* emphasize the public, theatrical nature of the novella's scenes. Similarly, Figlerowicz argues that Behn replicates dramatic spectatorship by aligning her reader's perspective with that of the various collectives. Figlerowicz posited a more general "structural affinity" between Behn's prose in *Oroonoko* and dramatic writing, as well, even describing the novella as "a highly creative, consistent attempt at recreating in the medium of prose fiction the dramatic effects generated by the interactions between an actor and his audience," which she argues Behn achieves by signifying the protagonist's emotional states by witnesses' responses rather than through character introspection (322). These arguments are compelling, but they also overlook the most conspicuous manner in which Behn's use of mass spectatorship is dramatic: each of these groups communicates with Oroonoko using undifferentiated language and the structure and tenor of their communications strongly resemble that of a Greek tragic chorus. This mass speech in turn elicits the language of heroic drama from Oroonoko, and together their choral interaction establishes some of the most overt and uniquely stylized instances of dramatic speech within an early novel form.

## **Engaging the Audience and Mediating Speech**

During her lifetime Behn was best known as a successful dramatist. She was widely admired by her contemporaries and is now cited as the first female professional author (Lewcock 2). As such her personal exigencies and the shifting political climate both impacted her literary endeavors. Behn wrote during a period of great political tumult and uncertainty. A staunch and life-long Stuart loyalist, she was arrested in 1682 for composing an epilogue attacking Charles II's rebellious son, the Duke of Monmouth. The same year one of the Restoration's two licensed theatre companies, The King's Company, was absorbed by the other, The Duke's Company, resulting in diminished theatrical output in the years that followed (Spencer x). It was during this period that Behn turned to other literary genres, including poetry and prose.

Among her many talents, Behn was particularly adept at maximizing the representational potential of the physical dimensions of the Restoration playhouses used by the companies for which she wrote. Each of the two licensed theater companies during the Restoration had a preferred playhouse<sup>15</sup> where they produced seasonal repertoires. Both theaters were fully enclosed and lit by candlelight and the entire audience was seated, in contrast to the open-air playhouses that were used before the Interregnum (Lewcock 197). Dramatists, Behn included, typically considered the physical characteristics of the playhouse in which they hoped their play would be produced. Behn composed all of her plays for the Duke's Company, until it merged with the King's Company, which primarily used Dorset Garden theater (Hughes 12). The Dorset Garden had a long forestage that jutted out into the audience; a proscenium arch that included several doors with balconies above demarcated the transition from forestage to scenic stage, and scenery was painted on sliding shutters (Spencer xi; Lewcock 197). Behn exploited the

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<sup>15</sup> The specific playhouses used by each company varied throughout this period, though.

possibilities the space enabled, especially the potential for presenting simultaneous speech and action by occupying forestage and scenic stage with multiple characters concurrently. Characters had ample space to plausibly hide in plain view of the audience, and to overhear others' conversations while unobserved. Many of her plays include elaborate group scenes in which characters enter and exit at multiple locations, occasioning complicated clusters of distinct character dialogues within a single scene. *The Feigned Courtesans*, in particular, also demonstrates that Restoration stagecraft likely influenced Behn's choice of plot. Multiple characters misidentify the proscenium doors and their presence is central to the misunderstandings and cases of mistaken identity upon which the plot hinges.

Because Behn wrote to fill the Dorset Garden's large stage, her plays frequently contain several group scenes. In general, a Behn scene is a busy scene, filled with multiple characters on stage simultaneously. *The Rover*, *The Feigned Courtesans*, and *The Widdow Ranter* each depict three sets of lovers whose plots interrelate, in addition to farcical characters, blocking characters, and attendants. *The Rover*'s second scene is representative of the way in which Behn populates many of her scenes. It begins with Belvile, Blunt, and Frederick with Willmore soon joining. After a short exchange "several men in masking habits" and "women dressed like courtesans" enter to establish the carnival ambiance, only to leave after briefly engaging the men. Their departure is followed by "two men dressed all over with horns" who enter "from the far end of the scenes" and shortly after Florinda, Hellena, Valeria, Callis, Stephano, Lucetta, Philippo, and Sancho arrive in masquerade attire (Behn, *The Rover* I.2). The scene is set in "a long street," which stretches the entirety of the stage, which allows the heroines to escape from repressive social structures "into the carnival," as Derek Hughes observed (94).

Similarly many of the romantic scenes call for more than two individuals onstage, such as that between Willmore and Angellica in *The Rover*, which also features Angellica's attendant Moretta. The forbidden nature of several central pairs' amours necessitates them to communicate privately while in others' presence, which Behn achieves through disguise and mediating speech forms, especially aside and soliloquy. The aside, in particular, appears frequently in Behn's drama.<sup>16</sup> She uses seventy asides in *The Rover*, one hundred and sixty-four in *The Feigned Courtesans*, and eighteen in *The Widdow Ranter*. Behn employs a broad range of semantic addresses, functions, and levels of "frame-breaking" in her asides. Dawn Lewcock has shown that asides serve many purposes: "in these deliberate artifices an actor (or actress) may speak directly to the audience as the character giving the thoughts and reactions of that character; or may speak as a choric commentator on human nature, its frailties, and strengths; or come out of character and speak as the actor himself; or change from one to other in a single speech" and Behn's adopts most of these strategies (170). While the secondary texts never explicitly indicate that a given aside should be addressed directly to the audience in the three plays I analyze here, in most instances the nature of the commentary is clearly designed solely for the benefit of the audience and undetected by others within the internal communication system, so the device may be properly conceived as serving as mediating communication.

*The Rover* was Behn's breakout drama and remains her best-known and most performed play. Originally performed in 1677, it was revived in 1680s and 1689s and then annually from 1703-1743, with the exception of 1719 (Spencer xx). Although it is based on Sir Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, or the Wanderer*, Behn's substantial alterations modify the original

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<sup>16</sup> Janet Todd declares Behn's use of asides "old-fashioned" (*Secret Life* 465).

enough that we may appreciate it as her own work.<sup>17</sup> Behn alters the play's setting from Madrid to Naples during Carnival season, which conveniently occasions ample masquerading and role-playing. The plot revolves around the romantic intrigues of a group of exiled cavaliers during the interregnum. Willmore, the Rover of the plot's title and a renowned rake, must weigh his lust for the courtesan Angellica against his desire for Hellena, a virginal female wit; and a secondary plot features the romantic trials of the English colonel Belvile and Florinda, who is betrothed to another man. The romantic intrigues of the intertwined primary and secondary plots are tempered by a farcical underplot that depicts the deception of a gullible English country gentleman, Blunt, and a budding romance between the minor characters Valeria and Frederick is also depicted.

Because Behn's first two plays were the subject of considerable criticism, she initially chose to remain anonymous for *The Rover*'s publication. Her past plays' mixed reception also encouraged her to employ an introductory strategy of engaging critics and audience through direct antagonism in the play's prologue.<sup>18</sup> Purportedly "written by a person of quality," the prologue's author may not have been Behn, but her selection of the text certainly conveys the futility of attempting to satisfy contemporary playwrights as a relatively little-known dramatist.<sup>19</sup> The prologue first rails at potential critics for hypocrisy, maintaining "If a young poet hit your humour right, / you judge him then out of revenge and spite:" (Behn, *The Rover* 3). It then acknowledges the inherent difficulty of dramatic composition, specifically the challenges of composing plausible dramatic speech: "what to you does easy seem, and plain,/ is the hard issue of their labouring brain. / And some th' effects of all their pains we see, / Is but to mimic good extempore" (Behn, *The Rover* 3). This comment both exposes literary labor, a common topic in

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<sup>17</sup> Defending herself against charges of plagiarism in a postscript, Behn significantly understates the extent of her borrowings from Killigrew claiming that she has "stolen some hints" from his play but "the plot and business... is my own."

<sup>18</sup> Behn only allowed her name to appear on its third issue.

<sup>19</sup> Despite the difficulties of attribution, Behn's prologues, as well as her first-person narration, are often interpreted as signs of her autobiography in the absence of concrete historical records (Todd, *Secret Life* 2).

contemporary metafiction, and acknowledges the imitation of contemporary speech habits as an aesthetic aim of drama in general. “In short,” the prologue continues, “the only wit that’s now in fashion, / Is but the gleanings of good conversation,” echoing Dryden’s assertion that the emulation of clever repartee is a distinctive feature of Restoration literature.

After attacking playwrights as hypocrites and demonstrating the difficulty of dramatic composition, the focus shifts to playfully upbraid the audience:

As for the author of this coming play,  
I asked him<sup>20</sup> what he thought fit I should say,  
In thanks for your good company today:  
He called me a fool, and said it was well known,  
You came not here for our sakes, but your own.  
New plays are stuffed with wits, and with debauches,  
That crowd and sweat like cits, in May-Day coaches. (Behn, *The Rover* 3)

The purported dialogue between the prologue speaker and dramatist is represented indirectly, and indicates the reciprocal nature of the relationship between Restoration playwright and audience—the playwright’s expected obeisance to the audience is here rejected in favor of playful antagonism that captures the audience’s attention and initiates a more comprehensive method of sustained engagement. The speaker adopts second person “you” to taunt the spectators directly before insultingly comparing them to their perceived social inferiors. The effect replicates that practiced with great success by children from time immemorial: tease the person you wish to court, and continue interaction by motivating a response.

Behn makes ample use of asides and soliloquies in the play; the secondary text identifies seventy asides in total, not including dialogic asides and those unidentified in the text. While

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<sup>20</sup> The “him” of the first line is clearly designed to keep Behn’s identity a secret.

most verbalize character thought in some manner, the asides' dramatic functions vary considerably. Because characters are frequently masked in the play, Behn indicates the multiple instances of mistaken identity through asides, with characters expressing their best guesses at each others' identities and explaining rationales for misidentification in this form. The presence of multiple characters onstage engaged in complex romantic entanglements is another environmental reason for the presence of so many instances of oblique speech.

The frequent incorporation and variability of aside function in this play is best illustrated in Act IV, scene ii, which alone boasts thirty asides. The scene opens with a polylogue between Florinda, her Governess Callis, and a family servant, Stephano. Florinda delivers the scene's initial line as an aside: "I'm dying with my fears, Belvile's not coming as I expected under my window, / Makes me believe that all those fears are true," that both expresses her emotional state and supplies the audience with necessary referential information (Behn, *The Rover* 4.2). She then turns to ask Stephano: "—Canst thou not tell me with whom my brother fights?" Because the audience is aware that Don Pedro is about to fight Belvile disguised as Antonio, the containment of the aside and direct question within a single unit of dramatic speech also produces comic irony (Behn, *The Rover* 4.2).

The scene culminates in the climax of the romantic plot between Willmore and his two love-interests, Angellica and Hellena. Here we find asides primarily used to convey character motivation, such as when Hellena, dressed as a man, expresses her irritation at finding Willmore conversing with Angellica: "well, something I'll do to vex him for this" before intruding on the lovers' conversation. Referential asides that convey crucial plot points that the audience may be otherwise unaware of are used as well. Willmore explains the source of his frustration when Angellica detains him in the scene in this manner:

WILLMORE. Oh you destroy me with this endearment. (*impatient to be gone.*)

—Death! How shall I get away (*Aside*) —Madam, 'twill not be fit I should be seen with you—besides, it will not be convenient—and I've a friend—that's dangerously sick

ANGELLICA. I see you're impatient—yet you shall stay.

WILLMORE. And miss my assignation with my gipsy. (*Aside, and walks about impatiently*) (Behn, *The Rover* 4.2)

Through stage convention, the audience is led to believe that Angellica observes Willmore pace impatiently, but silently, after her line. Behn's use of asides during this conversation represents her most common and effective application of the device. She often uses asides during polylogues to convey a sharp distinction between the civility of her characters' speech and their actual thoughts, with the resultant discrepancy generating a comic effect. This itself is not novel, but Behn's asides are so frequent that they become a primary method of dramatic communication. The number of asides in this scene approaches the number of lines directly delivered within the internal communication system, and the asides are equally necessary for narrative advancement.

Behn uses both reflective and action soliloquies in this play, as well. The character most prone to express himself through soliloquy is Blunt, the foolish English country gentleman who is easily and humorously duped by an Italian courtesan whom he believes is enamored of him. After his inevitable robbery at her hands, Blunt bemoans his gullibility in a rather long reflective soliloquy. The device is most often found at the end or beginning of a scene, when either all characters exit except for one or a single character arrives onstage to deliver a soliloquy before being joined by others. The placement of these soliloquies allows them to function as transitions to either provide a sense of closure to a concluding scene, as in Blunt's case, or to establish

exposition and build suspense at a scene's outset, as in the scene that follows Blunt's, which opens with Florinda briefly alone on stage:

FLORINDA. Well, thus far I'm in my way to happiness, I have got myself free from Callis; my brother too, I find by yonder light, is got into his cabinet, and thinks not of me; I have, by good fortune, got the key of the garden back door.—I'll open it to prevent Belvile's knocking—a little noise will now alarm my brother. Now am I as fearful as a young thief. (*Unlocks the door.*)

—hark—what noise is that—oh, 'twas the wind that played amongst the boughs—Belvile stays long, methinks—it's time—stay—for fear of a surprise—I'll hide these jewels in yonder Jessamine. (*She goes to lay down the box*) (Behn, *The Rover* 3.2)

This soliloquy is polyfunctional. It referentially clarifies Florinda's stage action, and even supplements the basic scenery through the description of her brother's light, which the audience is to believe she observes from the window. It also allows Florinda to express her psychological response to her actions as she executes them, reducing ambiguity.

Likely motivated by the popularity of *The Rover*, Behn produced and published another comedy involving disguises, courtesans, and multiple instances of mistaken identity in 1679 entitled *The Feigned Courtesans*. This time, though, the play was entirely original and in it Behn incorporated multiple devices that may be construed as mediation, including an astounding one hundred and sixty-four asides. It opens with a prologue written for actress Elizabeth Currer, who played Marcella in the play's initial production. Produced during the period of turmoil caused by the Popish Plot, the prologue situates the play in its contemporary political climate, lamenting that a play set in Rome would be unlikely to prosper during a time of increased anti-Catholic sentiment. The prologue complains that political tensions of "this cursed plotting age" have

“ruined all our plots upon the stage”; due to actual current events eclipsing those represented in contemporary fiction rendering “our honest calling...useless” (Behn, *Feigned* 93). It returns to the tactic of chastising the audience as a way to draw them into participation, by explaining that “each fool turns politician now” before taunting that “wit, as if ‘twere Jesuitical / Is an abomination to ye all” (Behn, *Feigned* 93). Changing track, the prologue then employs self-reference by making Curren metonymically representative of the theater: “Who says this age a reformation wants, / When Betty Curren’s lovers all turn saints?” (Behn, *Feigned* 93). Recent events have deprived her of both lovers and their material tokens of value, specifically the fine clothes she was accustomed to receive as gifts, leaving her accoutered in “tattered ensigns” that publicize her diminished value (Behn, *Feigned* 94).

The play’s epilogue similarly focuses on the inauspicious circumstances for theatrical production. Spoken by the actor who played Fillamour in the original production, William Smith, he asks “when we fail, what will the poets do? / They live by us as we are kept by you” and then turns the tables on the audience, suggesting the dire personal consequences of a diminished theatre:

When we disband, they no more plays will write,  
But make lampoons, and libel ye in spite;  
Discover each false heart that lies within,  
Nor man nor woman shall in private sin; (Behn, *Feigned* 181)

The “we” here refers to the actors, which exposes and accentuates the reciprocal relations between audience, actors, and playwrights. The epilogue then enumerates various scandals in which the speaker assumes the audience members may be privately engaged, which idle

playwrights may expose when not otherwise employed writing for the stage. This amounts to a playful threat of audience blackmail.

Similar to *The Rover*, the play depicts the romantic entanglements of Englishmen living in Italy; the three central female leads are aristocratic Italian women who disguise themselves as courtesans to pursue romantic partners of their choosing. Laura Lucretia is engaged to fellow Italian Julio, whom she has never met, but aims to attract Galliard; Marcella seeks to test the devotion of her lover, Fillamour, while her sister Cornelia also pursues Galliard. Unbeknownst to them, the sisters and Laura Lucretia have rented adjacent lodgings to serve as ostensible brothels and their doors are often confused, as is the assumed courtesan name of Silvianetta that is coincidentally used by both Laura Lucretia and Cornelia.

Even more than in *The Rover*, Behn uses asides to derive a comic effect from the simultaneous presence of characters onstage. Given stage conditions, Behn often depicts characters verbalizing their responses to overheard conversations. When Julio notices his uncle, Morosini and Octavio enter the scene just as he is to depart, he stays and “goes aside” where the audience is to believe he is undetected by the two gentlemen. Julio explains his actions and motivation through monologue, asking, “Ha, does the light deceive me, or is that indeed my uncle, in earnest conference with a cavalier? ‘Tis he; I’ll step aside till he’s past, lest he hinders this night’s devotions” (Behn, *Feigned* 3.1). The reference to the light signals to the audience that they are to suppose impaired visibility between characters, and therefore a plausible reason for Julio to remain unobserved by Morosini and Octavio despite being within earshot. In this position, Julio then responds to the overheard conversation as it transpires, through asides:

OCTAVIO. I need not ask; my reason has informed me, and I’m convinced, where’er he has concealed her, that she is fled with Fillamour.

JULIO. "Who is't they speak of?" (*Aside*)

MOROSINI. Well, well, sure my ancestors committed some horrid crime against nature, that she sent this pest of womankind into our horrid family. Two nieces for my share: by heaven, a proportion sufficient to undo six generations.

JULIO. Ha! Two nieces, what of them? (*Aside*)

MOROSINI. I am like to give a blessed account of 'em to their brother Julio, my nephew, at his return; there's a new plague now; but my comfort is, I shall be mad, and there's an end on't.

JULIO. My curiosity must be satisfied (*Aside*) Have patience, noble sir. (Behn, *Feigned* 3.1)

In a play that relies on mistaken identity and disguise, asides are the primary method of communicating recognitions and misrecognitions to the audience. These asides often appear in rapid succession, literally suspending the progress of the intervening conversations which the audience is to presume continue unimpeded, such as when the play's comic relief, the foolish young Englishman Sir Signal and his Puritanical tutor, Tickletext, discover each other at a supposed brothel, along with the pimp who was rendering services to both. All three characters on stage speak in asides immediately following the discovery:

TICKLETEXT. Sir Signal!

SIR SIGNAL. My governor!

PETRO. (*Aside*) The fools met! A pox of ill luck. Now shall I lose my credit with both my wise patrons; my knight I could have put off with a small harlot of my own, but my levite having seen my lady Cornelia, that is la Sivianetta, none but that Susanna would

satisfy his eldership; but now they have both saved me the labour of a farther invention to dispatch 'em.

SIR SIGNAL. (*Aside*) I perceived my governor's as much confounded as my self; I'll take advantage by the forelock, be very impudent, and put it upon him, faith.—Ah, governor, will you never leave your whoring; never be staid, sober and discreet, as I am?

TICKELTEXT. (*Aside*) So, so; undone, undone; just my documents to him. (Behn, *Feigned* 4.1)

The asides communicate each character's internal response to the discovery, but while the delivery of the asides makes it seem as if each has time to process their astonishment and formulate a strategic response, the audience is to believe the conversation skips from Sir Signal's "My governor!" directly to his line "Ah, governor, will you never leave your whoring..." (Behn, *Feigned* 4.1).

The sheer number of asides in the play undermines any expectation we may have that Behn attempted to achieve the dramatic realism considered normative of the genre. The volleys of asides reach a pinnacle in the first two scenes of the fifth act, when almost every other line is an aside; there are forty total in the first scene, and thirty-three in the second. The intense frequency of asides creates the sense of ongoing commentary on other characters' actions. When Laura Lucretia overhears Galliard relate his encounter with Silvianietta, by whom he means Cornelia, she responds in asides to almost every line to demonstrate to the audience her unawareness that Galliard refers to someone other than herself. Cornelia then enters disguised as her sister's page and comically has the same experience as Laura Lucretia, as she overhears her brother Julio describe his own interaction with Silvianetta, by whom he means Laura Lucretia. During Julio's recitation of his encounter with the supposed courtesan, all the other characters on

stage express their astonishment at his tale using a rapid succession of asides. Laura Lucretia realizes that she has seduced Julio and not Galliard, Galliard thinks Julio refers to Cornelia and expresses outrage at her inconstancy, and Cornelia furiously believes Julio has invented the story to damage Silvianetta's reputation with Galliard:

LAURA LUCRETIA. (*Aside*) 'Tis plain, the things I uttered! Oh, my heart!

GALLIARD. (*Aside*) Curse on the public jilt; the very flattery she would have passed on me.

CORNELIA. (*Aside*) Pox take him, I must draw on him, I cannot hold!

GALLIARD. (*Aside*) Was ever such a whore? (Behn, *Feigned* 5.1)

Due to the convention, the audience is to believe that Julio remains entirely oblivious to the chain of realizations he has initiated. The predominant means of plot advancement in this scene and in that following is achieved through asides, and the same is true in the following scene during a conversation between Laura Lucretia, Galliard, and Cornelia, with each character expressing dismay, confusion, and explaining motives in asides as they converse as a group.

Behn's crowded scenes also provide the occasion for frequent use of dialogic asides, in which two characters have unobserved private conversations in the presence of others whom the audience is to believe are oblivious to their speech. Because they interrupt the flow of other on-stage conversations it is impossible to maintain that Behn sought to minimize mediating communication structures. Instead, she is quite obviously reliant on such structures.

Behn's final play, *The Widdow Ranter*, is another of her most original dramas, with no clear borrowings from earlier works (Todd, ed. *Widdow* 307). A tragicomedy posthumously produced in 1689, Dryden supplied the prologue and epilogue for the play. "Spoken by a woman," the prologue introduces the topic through the use of metaphor:

Plays you will have; and to supply your store,  
Our poets trade to every foreign shore:  
This is the product of Virginian ground,  
And to the Port of Covent-Garden bound (Dryden, "Prologue" 251)

It then teasingly addresses the audience directly: "Bless us from you damn pirates of the pit" upbraiding the men for supposedly frequenting the prostitutes who market their wares in the vicinity of the theater. Name-calling is used to capture the audience's attention and presumably to provoke a response. The female speaker refers to the young men of the audience as "you sparks," or sarcastically as "you civil beaux" (Dryden, "Prologue" 251). The primacy of this banter is designed to captivate the audience and set a playful and interactive tone for the performance. Dryden's references to the play itself offer only faint praise. The speaker tells the spectators to "expect no polished scenes of love should rise / From rude growth of Indian colonies," although there are romantic scenes of sincere devotion between Bacon and the Indian Queen (Dryden 251). The prologue concludes with ambivalence:

You would not think a country girl the worse,  
If clean and wholesome, though her linen's course  
Such are our scenes; and I dare boldly say,  
You may laugh less at a far better play. (Dryden, "Prologue" 252)

Given the lukewarm assessment of the play's merits offered in the prologue, it is surprising that Dryden's epilogue offers a more celebratory view of the play's quality. Again "spoken by woman," the epilogue adopts a more overtly metafictional orientation, beginning:

By this time you have liked, or damned our plot;  
Which though I know, my Epilogue does not:

For if it could foretell, I should not fail,

In decent wise, to thank you, or to rail.

But he who sent me here, is positive,

This farce of government is sure to thrive; (Dryden, "Epilogue" 325)

As the epilogue is designed to be delivered immediately upon the play's conclusion the actor can indicate the way in which the play was received through her paralinguistic delivery choices. The epilogue goes on to request mercy for the play, to honor Behn's memory, and to liken it to an orphaned child.

Set in Virginia, *The Widdow Ranter* is loosely based on the events Nathaniel Bacon's failed rebellion of 1676. Like Behn's other plays, it contains numerous instances of mediating character speech. The first act, in particular, features multiple asides used to convey opening exposition, introduce and individualize characters, and to initiate the plot. The play opens with Hazard, an English gentleman, making his initial arrival to the colony at a Jamestown tavern, which creates the opportunity for introductions and explanations that simultaneously benefit characters and audience. Hazard's past acquaintance, Friendly, arrives and despite an absence of only three years fails to recognize Hazard, instead commenting, "Hah! Who's that stranger? He seems to be a gentleman" (Behn, *Widdow* 1.1). Although the secondary text does not identify this remark as an aside, the context suggests it is not directed to Hazard and there are no other characters yet on stage. Hazard then delivers his own unidentified aside, saying "If I should give credit to mine eyes, that should be Friendly" (Behn, *Widdow* 1.1). After this recognition the men commence a dialogue that orients the play's action.

Behn uses asides during characters' initial interactions to present their impressions to the audience in this play. When Hazard meets Surelove he declares "she's extremely handsome" and

when he later observes some of the colonial councilmen assemble at the inn he opines “I’d sooner take them for hogherds” (Behn, *Widdow* 1.3; 1.1). While the device seemed necessary for communicating the comic misunderstandings caused by the prolific use of disguise in *The Rover* and *The Fair Courtesans*, it is equally necessary in this play as a means to reveal character motivations that may be otherwise difficult to ascertain given its excessive amount of political plotting, shifting alliances, and complicated romantic entanglements. Due to the volatile nature of the depicted political climate, asides allow characters to verbalize what may not be expressed otherwise without risk. Dialogic asides, in which pairs or small groups of characters privately discuss events while in the presence of others who cannot hear their speech, are also a primary driver of the play’s comic elements. Characters opportunistically alter political allegiances in immediate response to simultaneous events occurring onstage to ensure being on the side of the victor.

In addition to political scheming, characters’ romantic inclinations are revealed through asides. This tendency becomes most apparent in a romantic scene between Bacon and the Indian Queen, in which the married Indian Queen recognizes and confesses her attachment:

BACON. ‘Tis a restless fire, that’s kindled thus—(Takes her by the hand and gazes on her.) At every gaze we take from fine eyes, from such bashful looks, and such soft touches—it makes us sigh—and pant as I do now, and stops the breath when e’er we speak of pain.

QUEEN. Alas for me if this should be love! (*Aside*)

BACON. It makes us tremble, when we touch the fair one, and all the blood runs shivering through the veins, the heart’s surrounded with a feeble languishment, the eyes are dying, an the cheeks are pale, the tongue is faltering, and the body fainting.

QUEEN. Then I'm undone, and all I feel is love. (*Aside*)

If love be catching, sir, by looks and touches, let us at distance parley—or rather let me fly, for within view, is too near— (*Aside*) (Behn, *Widdow* 2.1)

For one of the few scenes in which only two characters are onstage, the rate at which the Indian Queen's speech is not directed towards her partner is remarkable. However, the asides allow her to communicate her reactions to Bacon's speech in real time. Moreover, she alternates from aside to directly address back to aside in a single conversational turn. Vacillation between aside and direct participation in character dialogue is a technique Behn adopts frequently. If the Indian Queen turns away from Bacon while delivering the asides, the staging of these lines can thus physically as well as audibly convey the conflicting emotions she reports.

These three plays reveal several trends in Behn's dramaturgy. Her prologues tease her audience into attention and provoke their active engagement. She has a penchant for busy group scenes that occasion the frequent use of both individual and dialogic asides. Asides cluster, often appearing in rapid volleys and frequently appear along with—and can even be enclosed between—lines directly addressed to others in a single conversational turn. This technique can be used to mimic the psychological process of thought responding to speech, such as when Petro says to Tickletext in *The Feigned Courtesan*: “Lord, signor, what so wise a man as you cannot perceive her meaning—(*Aside*) for the devil take me if I can.—Why this is done to take off all suspicion from you, and lay it on him; don't you conceive it, signor?” (Behn, *Courtesan* 4.1). She also uses abrupt shifts between aside and direct character communication for comic effect, such as when Cornelia tells Sir Signal that he is “The man of all the world I've chosen out, from all the wits and beauties I have seen—(*Aside*) to have most finely beaten,” in *The Feigned Courtesan*; clearly Sir Signal is only to hear and respond to the first part of the sentence while

the audience can enjoy her intended continuation (Behn, *Courtesan* 4.1). In these instances, the shifts function like parentheticals, a common feature she employs within represented character speech in her prose fiction.

### **From Drama to Prose Fiction**

When Behn expanded her focus from drama to other genres around 1683, it was only natural that she would draw from her considerable experience as a dramatic writer. Behn's most famous work of prose fiction, *Oroonoko* (1688), is widely considered an early example of the novel, but may be more properly considered a novella due to its brief length. Behn also wrote several other works of prose fiction, as well, most notably the epistolary narrative *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), which is also considered an early novel, and the novellas *The Fair Jilt* (1688), and *The History of the Nun; or, The Fair Vow-Breaker* (1689). When considered together, these works demonstrate that she transferred her penchant for dramatic mediating devices into her extended prose fiction. Dramatic prologues are integrated into her narratives as digressive introductions or personal mini-narratives, both of which are designed to engage the reader as participant in the narrative; asides are modulated into narratorial interventions and digressions that pause internal action to express a single perspective; and her continued preference for group scenes prompts dramatic methods of speech representation, particularly in her most famous and influential novella, *Oroonoko*, in which the various assemblies often speak collectively, functioning as a Greek chorus.

Certain trends unify Behn's narrative approach in her best-known prose works. Her narrators employ a conversational tone reminiscent of an oral storytelling tradition by using phrases such as "as I said," "I had forgot to tell you," and "you are to understand." She employs

first-person narration in all, including in the epistolary work, which actually employs multiple methods of narration that vary by volume. Similar to the authors of many other prose works published during the period, Behn claims her works are authentic accounts of historical circumstances. Most of these titles are indeed loosely based on actual circumstances; *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* is an epistolary *roman-à-clef* depicting a contemporary political scandal; *The Fair Jilt* is an imaginative rendering of an unusual event that she may have been told while in the Netherlands; and Behn's brief stay in Surinam is widely believed to have influenced the events depicted in *Oroonoko*. However, to take Behn's narrator at her word that "every circumstance, to a tittle, is truth" as she claims in *The Fair Jilt*, would be to naively and inaccurately conflate author and narrator (Behn, *Fair Jilt* 9). Many of the notable features of Behn's fiction are derived from French Romance. Ros Ballaster believes Behn strategically appropriated a romance form that allied femininity with control of culture in order to exploit a Tory individualism that seemed to promise public validity for private female subjectivity.

As with the speakers in her plays' prologues, Behn's narrators frequently use second-person pronouns to address their readers directly and establish a familiar, conversational tone. "You may assure yourself," she begins in one such intervention in *The History of the Nun*, "this news was not so welcome to Isabella" (Behn, *The Nun* 231). *The Fair Jilt*'s narrator similarly asserts, "'Twere needless to tell you how great a noise the fame of this young beauty, with so considerable a fortune, made in the world," justifying her principles of selection by claiming that it is unnecessary to explain an aspect of the narrative that is nevertheless shared—another tendency present in her other prose works (Behn, *Fair Jilt* 11). Even without the pronoun, Behn's prose fiction is peppered with remarks addressed to the reader, which emphasizes the

reader's presence as literary receiver. After recounting how Oroonoko was plied with alcohol and then abruptly imprisoned by an English captain, she interjects: "Some have commended this act, as brave in the captain; but I will spare my sense of it, and leave it to my reader to judge as he pleases" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 102). In its direct reader address and frankness, this sentence approximates an aside, but it also contributes to a larger network of reader engagement. She even reminds the reader that he or she is being entertained in *Oroonoko*, justifying a digression because "it may not be unpleasant to relate to you the diversions we entertained him with" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 115). By appealing to the reader in this way throughout the texts, Behn acknowledges the reader as equally present participant in the narrative endeavor along with the narrator, approximating the proximity of a theatergoer to the dramatic action.

The narrator attempts to guide the reader's interpretation of the narrative action through the incorporation of commentary that resembles dramatic asides. The high frequency with which Behn's narrators offer opinions or clarify points recreates the same effect as that created by her prolific use of asides in her plays. Narratorial interventions temporarily pause narrative action, just as when a character turns aside from the internal conversations to verbalize a thought or clarify a motivation in drama. These comments appear both within parentheticals and without, and similar to her use of dramatic asides they vary considerably in function.<sup>21</sup> In *The History of the Nun* she offers an explanatory analogy for the reader when recounting Isabella's visit to the Toor "(that is, the Hyde Park there)" (Behn, *The Nun* 215). Other comments are more evaluative, as when the narrator in *Oroonoko* describes how the hero's fate was ultimately decided, "they all concluded, that (damn them) it might be their own cases;" the narrator's commentary

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<sup>21</sup> Two of Joanna Fowler's insights in her essay anticipate my own: the resemblances between initial paragraphs and prologues and the narrative commentary and asides, but we arrived at these conclusions independently and are using them in different contexts. Fowler is primarily concerned with the interplay between dramatic mimesis and diegesis in only three of Behn's prose works: *The History of the Nun* (1689), *The Fair Jilt* (1688), and *The Lucky Mistake* (1689) while my focus is identifying evidence of dramatic speech representation as part of a larger argument about formal influence in the novel.

momentarily suspends the progress of the utterance to express her subjective response to the narrated speech, a technique that replicates the vacillation between aside and direct participation in dialogue shown above (Behn, *Oroonoko* 134). The narrator similarly interrupts her utterance when she describes Onahal as “one of the cast mistresses of the old king; and ‘twas these (now past their beauty) that were made guardians, or governants to the new,” again replicating her penchant for the embedded aside to blend the introductory response function we saw in *The Widdow Ranter* with the dramatic referential function of clarification (Behn, *Oroonoko* 89).

*Love Letters from a Nobleman to his Sister* was Behn’s first attempt at long-format fiction, and the popularity of its first volume inspired her to compose two additional volumes that each had a distinct narrative structure. While its first volume is primarily epistolary, as the title suggests, a narrator introduces the letters and becomes increasingly prominent in the second volume, which balances letters and narration, before narration becomes the predominant narrative method in the third volume. A recent analysis has shown that it is “a remarkable example of generic hybridity,” which incorporates pastoral romance, the female complaint, and the novel of infidelity, but its indebtedness to drama remains to be explored (Villegas Lopez 69).

Due to its epistolary form, *Love-Letters* has the most dramatically scripted speech of the titles examined here. Behn was likely influenced by Claude Barbin’s *Lettres Portugaises* (1699) and *La Princesse de Clèves* (1679) and the work’s intertwining themes of passion and political intrigue provided ample material for her to stretch into three volumes over more than a thousand pages (Todd, “Textual Introduction” ix). Published anonymously, the work enjoyed contemporary popularity and six editions were published before 1765 but its authorship was not well known (Todd, “Textual Introduction” xi). The epistolary sections of the narrative allow the characters’ supposed writing to predominate. However, Behn opens the first volume with an

“Argument” preceding the letters featuring first-person narration. In its segregation from the main text, the argument structurally resembles a prologue but its style of delivery more closely resembles a hybrid of narration and dramatic speech. Dramatic asides intrude upon the narration via parentheticals, almost as if Behn cannot resist allowing her narrator subjective assessments of the narrative action, a tendency she retains in her other works of prose fiction. It begins as follows:

In the time of the rebellion of the true Protestant Huguenot in Paris, under the conduct of the Prince of Condé (whom we will call Cesario) many illustrious persons were drawn into the association, amongst which there was one, whose quality and fortune (joined with his youth and beauty) rendered him more elevated in the esteem of the gay part of the world than most of that age. In his tender years (unhappily enough) he chanced to fall in love with a lady . . . (Behn, *Love-Letters* 9)

Although the argument very succinctly shares the initial exposition, it contains six parentheticals in total that both convey necessary information, such as character names, and imply subjective evaluation as in the “unhappily enough” above. Presumably designed to acquaint the reader with the central characters and premise—she claims that the ensuing letters were found in a cottage and arranged sequentially for the reader—this exposition also allows the epistolary dialogue to commence without the burden of pretense to reiterate the couple’s entire history within the correspondence, as would be the case with actual dramatic speech. Yet the narrator explicitly omits a description of Sylvia, the heroine, so Philander, the hero, may provide his own. She explains, “I will spare her picture here, Philander in the following epistles will often enough present it to your view,” privileging character speech over narration for both a narrative function,

ostensibly to avoid repetition, and to prioritize direct discourse over indirect as a preliminary representational strategy (Behn, *Love-Letters* 10).

Despite the initial exposition presented in the argument, though, Sylvia and Philander still reiterate information for the reader's benefit that would be unnecessary for intimate correspondents to relate, as when Philander describes Cesario's appearance to Sylvia and the disguises he used to court her. Both characters are intimately acquainted with the particulars of their history so although the communication of this information may resemble internal diegetic communication, the communicative vector that is being activated is from author to reader, not from character to character thereby resembling dramatic speech.

The letters' rhetoric is also dramatically stylized—Sylvia and Philander use literary and rhetorical tropes to convey the intensity of their emotions for one another, which contrasts with the narrator's more conversational tone in the argument and in later volumes. Epistolary novels were “composed of discontinuous rhetorical blocks,” as Robert Adams Day observed, and Behn uses this feature to structure her characters' letters into a series of soliloquies, often that lament their own necessity through reference to the lover's absence (192). In one, Sylvia even acknowledges that she imaginatively evokes Philander as she composes her letters:

while I write, methinks I am talking to thee; I tell thee thus my soul, while thou, methinks, art all the while smiling and listening by; this is much easier than silent thought, and my soul is never weary of this converse; and thus I would speak a thousand things, but that still, methinks, words do not enough express my soul; to understand that right, there requires looks; there is a rhetoric in looks; in sighs and silent touches that surpasses all; there is an accent in the sound of words too, that gives a sense and soft meaning to little things, which of themselves are of trivial value, and insignificant; and by

the cadence of the utterance may express a tenderness which their own meaning does not bear; by this I wou'd insinuate, that the story of the heart cannot be so well told by this way, as by presence and conversation. (Behn, *Love-Letters* 37-38)

Even in Sylvia's imagination, then, Philander remains silent as she prattles on continuously. However, despite Sylvia's assertions, the letters allow each writer to more coherently self-fashion their language as that of dramatic lovers than actual presence would allow, as shown with mortifying intensity in the failure of their actual assignation that terminated in impotence. Letters "are performances of self" as Karen Gevirtz has observed, "performances undertaken by male and female correspondents deploying rhetoric" to shape each correspondent's perceptions and activate the phatic function of dramatic language Pfister identifies more strategically than in actual conversation (87).

In her novella, *The Fair Jilt*, Behn similarly adopts the dramatic strategy of preparing the audience for the narrative in introductory paragraphs that resemble a dramatic prologue. Joanna Fowler recently recognized this similarity as well, describing the prologue-like material as "pre-exposition" and likewise interpreting its incorporation as a form of dramatic *metalepsis* incorporated into prose fiction, but Fowler neglects to explore this as the first technique in a more comprehensive narrative strategy of sustained reader engagement<sup>22</sup> (97). Rather, just as in the dramatic prologues cited above, Behn uses playful antagonism to capture her readers' attention and initiate interaction that will be sustained through her reader-directed commentary resembling asides. The dramatic method of introducing a work's central topic in a discrete paratext before delving into the narrative proper here transforms into an opening platitude in

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<sup>22</sup> Two of Fowler's insights in her essay anticipate my own, that regarding the initial paragraphs' resemblance to prologues and the narrative commentary's function as asides, but we arrived at these conclusions independently and are using it in a different set of contexts—she is primarily concerned with the interplay between dramatic mimesis and diegesis in three of Behn's works while my focus is dramatic speech representation.

which the narrator declares “love is the most noble and driving passion of the soul” followed by several paragraphs mocking “the hardened incorrigible fop” for his seeming insensibility to the emotion (Behn, *Fair Jilt* 7). Based on this diatribe one might expect that the primary narrative somehow relates to fops, but these paragraphs prove to be tangential. Fowler posits the argument that Miranda, the fair jilt, is somewhat reminiscent of a fop, but the analogy is tenuous at best. Rather, it is more likely that this introductory attack on fops is a tactic similar to that found in the prologues to *The Rover* and *The Feigned Courtesan*: Behn anticipates a potentially hostile faction in her readership and attempts to tease it into engagement.

The narrator transitions from a general complaint against the insensibility of fops to an explicit declaration of narrative aims, exclaiming “How far distant passions may be from one another, I shall be able to make appear in these following rules. I’ll prove to you the strong effects of love in some unguarded and ungoverned hearts...” (Behn, *Fair Jilt* 9). These statements incorporate overt metafiction into the text and also mark a transition from the modified prologue to a more recognizably novelistic claim to autobiographical authenticity: “I do not pretend here to entertain you with a feigned story, or anything pieced together with romantic accidents; but every circumstance, to a tittle, is truth” before explaining that she was an “eye-witness” to “a great part of the main” (Behn, *Fair Jilt* 9).

Behn adopts a similar method again in *The History of the Nun; Or, The Fair Vow-Breaker* when she again replicates the technique of incorporating introductory paragraphs that resemble a dramatic prologue. The structure and movements mirror those she made in *The Fair Jilt*, beginning first by introducing the work’s topic and central theme, violated vows, with a long meditation on its nature delivered in three paragraphs. These are then formally distinguished from the narrative proper by a purportedly autobiographical digression, reminiscent of the claim

to verisimilitude she made in *The Fair Jilt*. The narrator confesses that she “once was design’d an humble votary in the house of devotion” but “I rather chose to deny my self that content” due to her extreme young age (Behn, *The Nun* 212). She then compares the foolishness of taking orders while a youth that of taking marriage vows, finally quipping that “since I cannot alter custom . . . I must leave the young nuns inclos’d to their best endeavors, of making a virtue of necessity; and the young wives, to make the best of a bad market,” introducing the major events of her narrative and hinting at their outcomes (Behn, *The Nun* 213).

In both *The Fair Jilt* and *The History of the Nun*, Behn introduces the topic using a general platitude, followed by extended meditations on themes related to the principal subject matters of her works. Coherent subjective opinions prepare the reader for ensuing narratives follow, just as they do in dramatic prologues. In *The History of the Nun*, the narrator’s use of first-person pronouns is most heightened during these introductory paragraphs, and although related to the subject matter of the text as a whole, they stand distinct from the intradiegetic world. Behn eases the transition from topical musings to narrative with the narrators’ claims to authenticity—the narrator of *The Fair Jilt* claims authority as witness and the narrator of *The History of the Nun* implies as much. The use of homodiegetic narration in both also approximates the effect achieved by the delivery of a dramatic prologue by an actor who performs in the mainpiece who approaches the audience while in costume to prepare them for what follows.

Compared to *The Fair Jilt* and *Oroonoko*, in which character speech occurs infrequently and primarily through indirect representation, *The History of Nun* has an abundance of represented speech, much of it presented directly. The lovers’ conversations are primarily represented through direct speech, as are many of those between Henault’s sister, Katteriena and Isabella. These conversations display Behn’s reluctance to interrupt character speech with speech

tags, a tendency that appears as the copious use of parentheticals that designate speakers, such as when Isabella and Kattereina discuss Isabella's illicit desire:

No more, no more, (reply'd Isabella, throwing her Arms again about the Neck of the transported Katteriena) thou blow'st my Flame by thy soft Words, and mak'st me know my Weakness, and my Shame: I love! I love! and feel those differing Passions!---Then pausing a moment, she proceeded, Yet so didst thou, but hast surmounted it. Now thou hast found the Nature of my Pain, oh! tell me thy saving Remedy? Alas! (reply'd Katteriena) tho' there's but one Disease, there's many Remedies . . . And is it a Disease, (reply'd Isabella) that People often recover? Most frequently, (said Katteriena) and yet some dye of the Disease, but very rarely. Nay then, (said Isabella) I fear, you will find me one of these Martyrs . . . (*The Nun* 223-224)

Dialogue tags are enclosed in parentheticals, almost as if Behn laments having to include them at all, as are stage directions describing the character actions accompanying the speech. Behn also initiates a dramatic speech representation strategy that she will later perfect in *Oroonoko*; that of conveying a conversation between an individual and a group who speaks through mass undifferentiated speech. Here she conveys both mass speech and Isabella's response indirectly, unlike in *Oroonoko*, where this technique generates an affect similar to the convention of conversing with a Greek tragic chorus.

### **Dramatic Speech in Oroonoko**

*Oroonoko* is widely considered to be an early example of a novel, albeit a "generically unstable" one due to its admixture of romance and travelogue features (Todd, *Critical Fortunes* 120). It tells the story of an African prince and first relates his courtship of a beautiful woman,

Imoinda, followed by the pair's separate enslavement and transport to Surinam, where they are unexpectedly reunited but face the indignities of slavery. When Thomas Southerne adapted the work for the stage in 1696, he included a dedicatory epistle praising Behn's "great command of the stage" and wondering "that she would bury her favourite hero in a novel, when she might have reviv'd him in the scene" (Todd, *Critical Fortunes* 24). Southerne's remark and adaptation together imply that Behn's character may have been better suited for the stage than the page. This impression is largely derived from the dramatic nature of Oroonoko's speech in the novel. Behn carefully reserves direct speech for instances of heightened and largely represents character speech indirectly. By limiting the amount of direct speech she also foregrounds the significance of its plot function, which is to emphasize the most crucial moments of action.

Behn's skill at "staging" scenes in *Oroonoko* as spectacles in which the protagonist performs in front of large assemblies that resemble theatrical spectators has been explored as a dramatic feature of the text. Most recently Megan Griffin views the final scene of Oroonoko's gruesome death as tantamount to a Foucauldian scaffold spectacle (Griffin 124). Marta Figlerowicz interprets Behn's "reliance on mass sensory experience and spectatorship" as a means to achieve two ends: it allows her to "dramatize the historicity and high tragic nature of Oroonoko's life," and "to underscore the cultural opacity of Oroonoko without causing us to lose our empathy for him" (322). The theatrical spatial and proximal relations enabled by Behn's use of mass spectatorship are then leveraged to stage dramatic speech, specifically that of tragedy. Each of these groups communicates with Oroonoko using unified language that resembles that of a Greek tragic chorus. This indirectly represented mass speech typically inspires Oroonoko to respond using the language of heroic drama using direct speech, and together their interactions

serve the larger thematic end of pitting the extraordinary individual against the will of the community.

Behn uses homodiegetic retrospective narration in *Oronoko*, but she is particularly invested in creating the impression that the narrated events actually happened. In her opening lines the narrator explains she was “an eye-witness, to a great part, of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be witness of, I received from the chief actor in this history, the hero himself” (Behn, *Oronoko* 75). Beginning the novel in this manner clearly conveys an intention of generating verisimilitude, but her choice of language, specifically the appellations actor and hero, also indicate a dramatic framework for the narrative that prepares the reader to expect tropes derived from the stage.

Because much of the narrative is based upon second-hand retrospection, reported speech is the novella’s predominant speech form. One may even interpret the entire first half of the narrative as reported speech, as the narrator’s frequent interjections identifying the sources of her information—“as he told me afterwards,” “to use his own words” and similar attributions—remind the reader that all of the speech in the novella’s first half has been told twice, first by the narrator’s source and then recontextualized into the larger narrative (Behn, *Oronoko* 135, 82). To maintain verisimilitude, the narrator mostly speculates on her characters’ thoughts or asserts that she was later told of their psychological motivations.

Because Behn is so invested in maintaining the authenticity of this novella, she is circumspect about direct speech presentation, especially as the narrative conceit maintains the homodiegetic narrator was not present until after Oroonoko’s arrival in Surinam. However, when she does incorporate direct speech, even in the novella’s first half, she is not only conscientious about attribution, but also maximizes its affective impact by modeling it after dramatic speech. In

the novella's first half, direct speech appears primarily through Oroonoko's interaction with groups of individuals whose speech is unified into a single utterance. This indirectly represented mass undifferentiated speech then evokes the language of heroic drama from Oroonoko. Pairing individualized direct speech with compressed mass speech signals its comparative importance. Behn continues this technique in the second half of the novella as well, which features more directly represented character speech due to the narrator's supposed presence in the recorded action.

Behn's technique of aligning her reader's perspective with that of various collectives of spectators within the narrative lends a sense of verifiability to the related episodes by demonstrating there were witnesses to the narrated action in addition to the narrator, and amplifies the protagonists' emotional expressions through reflection by the crowd (Figlerowicz 322). The various assemblies speak collectively, functioning as a Greek tragic chorus, a group of masked individuals who comment on the dramatic action as it unfolds. Choral speech is often presented collectively to represent the perspective of a particular community in tragedy, a technique that Behn emulates in the novel. When Oroonoko learns that his grandfather, the King, has sent Imoinda the royal veil symbolizing her selection as a concubine he is in the presence of others who observe his response. The narrator explains that his witnesses:

had much ado to save him from laying violent hands on himself. Force prevailed, and then reason. They urged all to him that might opposed his rage... 'Twas not enough to appease him, to tell him, his grandfather was old, and could not that way injure him, while he retained that awful duty which the young men are used there to pay to their grave relations. He could not be convinced he had no cause to sigh and mourn... (Behn, *Oroonoko* 86)

The speech of multiple individuals is compressed into a unified indirectly reported utterance. Not only are individual speakers unidentified, the group identity of the speakers is omitted—the narrator refers only to “they” without specifying to whom this precisely refers, only in Oroonoko’s response are they termed “friends.” The use of passive voice keeps focus on the import of what the group urged to Oroonoko, rather than the precise language used or the speakers’ identities. Even though the narrator did not observe this event, it remains plausible that it could have been related to her by one of the witnesses who was later enslaved and brought to Surinam, and therefore the representation of direct speech is possible within the premise’s bounds. Instead, though, she represents Oroonoko’s interlocutors’ speech *en mass* effectively transforming them into a Greek tragic chorus. Oroonoko then responds with a long, dramatically rendered direct speech:

Oh, my Friends! were she in wall’d Cities, or confin’d from me in Fortifications of the greatest Strength; did Inchantments or Monsters detain her from me; I would venture thro’ any Hazard to free her; But here, in the Arms of a feeble old Man, my Youth, my violent Love, my Trade in Arms, and all my vast Desire of Glory, avail me nothing. *Imoinda* is as irrecoverably lost to me, as if she were snatch’d by the cold Arms of Death: Oh! she is never to be retrieved. If I would wait tedious Years; till Fate should bow the old King to his Grave, even that would not leave me *Imoinda* free; but still that Custom that makes it so vile a Crime for a Son to marry his Father’s Wives or Mistresses, would hinder my Happiness; unless I would either ignobly set an ill Precedent to my Successors, or abandon my Country, and fly with her to some unknown World who never heard our Story. (Behn, *Oroonoko* 86)

Behn's technique here recalls ancient tragedies in which the chorus and tragic protagonist converse. Through this interaction, the chorus functions within the internal the dramatic communication system, and through more general narrative assessment the chorus operates as mediation by supplying utterances designed to overtly activate the external communication system without affecting the participants within. Oroonoko's direct speech is made more poignant and affectively stimulating through contrast with the compressed reported speech, and the extended scope, internal coherence, and rhetorical stylization of this speech strongly resemble that of monologue in heroic drama. The chorus responds in turn again through condensed group speech completing the frame that encloses Oroonoko's heroic monologue. A pattern of undifferentiated indirect group speech leading to dramatic direct speech followed by more undifferentiated indirect group speech reappears throughout the novella, which modifies her dramaturgical preference for large group scenes. Instead of maximizing the amount of conversation and plot complications possible through asides, though, in the novel she reduces interaction between multiple individuals into dialogue, and given the nature of the speech one could even argue that this strategy only bears a surface-level resemblance to dialogue, but is actually a dialogically structured series of monologic speech.

Oroonoko is often favorably compared to the protagonists of heroic dramas in vogue during the period of composition—Aercke maintains more broadly that the work “combines the ‘stuff’ of gallant romance and that of heroic tragedy” and his speech resembles that of a tragic hero (125). Another instance of this occurs when the king's guards catch Oroonoko with Imoinda at the King's otan. Hearing them at the door, Oroonoko threatens, “Whoever ye are that have the Boldness to attempt to approach this Apartment thus rudely; know, that I, the Prince *Oroonoko*, will revenge it with the certain Death of him that first enters: Therefore stand back, and know,

this Place is sacred to Love and Me this Night; To-morrow 'tis the King's" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 95). The guards relent, "but cried, 'Tis by the king's command we are come; and being satisfied by the voice, O Prince, as much as if we had entered, we can report to the king the truth of all his fears, and leave thee to provide for thy own safety, as thou art advised by thy friends'" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 95). By depicting this conversation as that between an entire group, rather than a single guard, and Oroonoko, Behn not only signals the precariousness of Oroonoko's situation, but also the extent to which he is respected by others within even his grandfather's court. In this regard mass undifferentiated speech represents the community viewpoint, as it frequently does in a Greek chorus, which serves as an indication of Oroonoko's reputation throughout the novella.

Undifferentiated mass speech is a common tool in the novel. It is used when Oroonoko's officers urge him to fight after he has received a report of Imoinda's fate when on the brink of battle in Africa, and in Surinam when Oroonoko incites the slave to revolt. The slaves, after hearing a long speech cataloging their mistreatment, "all replied, with one accord, "No, no, no; Caesar has spoke like a great captain, like a great king" (126). It appears to its greatest advantage at the novel's climax when a party of the colonial Englishmen "of about 40" discover Oroonoko with Imoinda's corpse:

The English taking advantage by his weakness, cried 'Let us take him alive by all means.' He heard them; and, as if he had revived from a fainting, or a dream, he cried out, 'No, gentlemen, you are deceived, you will find no more Caesars to be whipped, no more find a faith in me. Feeble as you think me, I have strength yet left to secure me from a second indignity.' They swore all anew, and he only shook his head, and beheld them with scorn. They cried out, 'Who will venture on this single man? Will nobody?' They stood all silent... (Behn, *Oroonoko* 138)

Eventually a single “bold English” responds using individualized direct speech, but his voice only breaks free from the group in response to Oroonoko’s gruesome self-disembowelment that follows the exchange above, with Tuscan, a fellow slave, shortly following suit. This technique powerfully pits the extraordinary individual, represented by Oroonoko, against society, represented by the chorus; a theme that is central to the novel.

Indeed as the previous examples indicate, direct speech is most frequently represented when Oroonoko expresses indignation at mistreatment, and then it often structured as dramatic monologue.<sup>23</sup> After he is tricked into slavery by a duplicitous English captain, the captain implores Oroonoko to command his men end a hunger strike, using religious principles to uphold his word. Incensed at the Captain’s lack of honor, Oroonoko tells the emissary who delivers the captain’s request to:

Let him know, I swear by my Honour; which to violate, would not only render me contemptible and despised by all brave and honest Men, and so give my self perpetual Pain, but it would be eternally offending and displeasing all Mankind; harming, betraying, circumventing, and outraging all Men. But Punishments hereafter are suffer’d by one’s self; and the World takes no Cognizance whether this GOD has reveng’d ’em or not, ’tis done so secretly, and deferr’d so long; while the Man of no Honour suffers every Moment the Scorn and Contempt of the honest World, and dies every Day ignominiously in his Fame, which is more valuable than Life. I speak not this to move Belief, but to shew you how you mistake, when you imagine, that he who will violate his Honour, will keep his Word with his *Gods*. (Behn, *Oroonoko* 104)

Although pronounced in the presence of others, this is the only instance of direct speech among pages of narration and reported speech. Its isolation recalls not only monologue but soliloquy.

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<sup>23</sup> Violetta Trofimova has noted that Oroonoko’s direct speech often resembles monologue, as well (384).

Many additional instances of extended rhetorically complex expressions of protest are present in the text, and after Imoinda's death, there is a short true soliloquy when Oroonoko, alone, calls out "No, since I have sacrificed Imoinda to my revenge, shall I lose that glory which I have purchased so dear, as the price of the fairest, dearest, softest creature that ever nature made? No, no!" (136). Presumably Oroonoko related this sorrowful expression to the narrator upon his return to the colony, as she recalls "his discourse was sad" but as with the majority of speech in *Oroonoko*, most of the romantic dialogue between Behn's central lovers is not usually depicted.

Indeed she carefully avoids representing the expression of her characters' most tender sentiments, opting instead for detailed descriptions of body language, the trope of inexpressibility, or terse summary. During Oroonoko and Imoinda's initial courtship, they communicate using body language, Oroonoko "told her with his eyes he was not insensible of her charms; while Imoinda, who wished for nothing more than so glorious a conquest, was pleased to believe she understood that silent language of new-born love" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 82). This facility proves essential to the pair's communication while under surveillance. When Imoinda and Oroonoko are in the presence of the king,

she had the time to tell the prince with her angry, but love-darting eyes, that she resented his coldness, and bemoaned her own miserable captivity. Nor were his eyes silent, but answered hers again, as much as eyes could do, instructed by the most tender, and most passionate heart that ever loved. And they spoke so well, and so effectually, as Imoinda no longer doubted, but she was the only delight, and the darling of that soul she found pleading in them its right of love, which none was more willing to resign than she. And 'twas this powerful language alone that in an instant conveyed all the thoughts of their souls to each other. (Behn, *Oroonoko* 88)

Communication through body language is necessary to circumvent detection, but the narrator also implies that verbal expression is not customary within native courtship rituals. During an exchange between Oroonoko's friend Aboan and Onahal, a senior member of the king's consorts, Aboan explains "But, madam, words are used to be so small apart of our country courtship" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 92). This is consistent with the narrator's tendency to avoid representing direct speech when narrating private conversations, especially when describing the most consequential romantic scenes.

When Oroonoko is reunited with Imoinda in Surinam, she relates that they were initially struck dumb with astonishment: "When they recovered their speech, 'tis not to be imagined what tender things they expressed to each other, wondering what strange fate had brought them again together" (Behn, *Oroonoko* 111). The narrator overcomes her initial reluctance to report "tender things," and explains that:

they soon informed each other of their fortunes, and equally bewailed their fate; but, at the same time, they mutually protested, that even fetters and slavery were soft and easy, and would be supported with joy and pleasure, while they could be so happy to possess each other, and to be able to make good their vows. (Behn, *Oroonoko* 111-112)

Similar to her presentation of group speech, Behn condenses Oroonoko and Imoinda's speech into a change of unified utterances, implying not only a total accord between partners but that the purport of the conversation is of greater consequence than the words used to convey it. It similarly implies that at this point in the narrative Oroonoko's individual heroism extends to Imoinda—their fortunes are so intertwined they may be considered an inseparable unit. Behn then shifts representational tactic to reported dialogue. The narrator describes that:

Caesar swore he disdained the empire of the world, while he could behold his Imoinda, and she despised grandeur and pomp, those vanities of her sex, when she could gaze on Oroonoko. He adored the very cottage where she resided, and said, that little inch of the world would give him more happiness than all the universe could do, and she vowed, it was a palace, while adorned with the presence of Oronooko. (Behn, *Oroonoko* 112)

The progression from inexpressible speech, to undifferentiated dialogue, to differentiated reported dialogue featuring rapid declarations of sincere devotion generates momentum suggestive of the emotional intensity of the reunion. Behn is famous for frank amatory language and was accused of indecency both during her lifetime and now, so it is remarkable that she opts for briefly related reported speech to convey language of romance in her most famous novella. Indeed, she even indirectly recounts the lovers' language at their final parting when recounting Imoinda's death, arguably one of the best scenes for dramatically inspired depiction. The narrator simply relates that the pair expressed "all that love could say in such cases" before Imoinda's brutal sacrifice, leaving the actual speech content untold (Behn, *Oroonoko* 136). Yet by declining to represent most of the romantic scenes directly, Behn intensifies the impact of the impact of direct speech, and because it is primarily reserved for Oroonoko's trenchant protestations at injustice, this indicates the thematic primacy of this facet of the novel.

### **Conclusion**

Although during her lifetime Aphra Behn was predominantly known as a dramatist, today her prose receives greater attention due in large part to her complex and multifaceted handling of race and empire in *Oroonoko*. While these aspects of her most famous novella are undoubtedly important, this chapter suggests that her works should also be considered as contributing to the

novel's formal development through her adaptation of dramatic speech into prose. Behn's narrators approximate the strategy of antagonistic engagement found in her play's prologues and their commentary often resembles dramatic asides, and her adaptation of the tragic chorus in prose is an especially innovative example of the ways in which early novelists altered dramatic speech for novelistic narrative.

Behn also demonstrated the creative potential of straddling the generic divide between plays and prose fiction in her epistle for the 1673 publication of the fourth print edition of her play, *The Dutch Lover*. In this letter to the reader, she displays the wit characteristic of her comedic dramatis personae and the direct address of her prologues, but modified for a reader rather than a stage audience. While she uses the appellative "Reader" throughout, her initial address is more cloyingly flattering: "Good, Sweet, Honey, Sugar-Candied Reader," she begins:

Which I think is more than anyone has called you yet, I must have a word or two with you before you do advance into the Treatise; but 'tis not to beg your pardon for diverting you from your affairs, by such an idle Pamphlet as this is, for I presume you have not much to do and therefore are to be obliged by me for keeping you from worse employment, and if you have a better you may get you gone about your business.

Behn's playful but firm sentiments regarding her play, or "treatise" as she calls it here and literary composition more generally are conveyed through the type of direct reader address and manner that would become strongly associated with Henry Fielding's novels decades later, solidifying Behn's penchant for blending the two forms, as Fielding would later do to similar acclaim.

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## CHAPTER II

### Performing through Metafiction in Restoration and Eighteenth-century Plays and Novels

Book III, Chapter IV of *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding's his first novel, begins with a poetic rendering of the morning: "That beautiful young Lady, the *Morning*, now rose from her bed, and with a countenance blooming with fresh youth and sprightliness, like Miss \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>1</sup> with soft dews hanging on her pouting lips, began to take her early walk over the western hills . . ."

(196). Two hallmarks of elevated literary technique, extended simile and anthropomorphism, harken back to epic applications of similar techniques in all of their literary legitimizing glory. The footnote appended to the teasing omission of Miss \_\_\_\_\_'s name playfully invites the reader to supply the name of "whoever the reader pleases." Through this gesture Fielding returns to an approach he employed with skill and acclaim in his theatrical career, the incorporation of metafiction, and he uses it to encourage his readers to envision their role in the narrative action as co-present participants rather than passive recipients.

### Critical Background

Considered broadly, metafiction refers to any open acknowledgment of the literary work as an artificial construct. As such, it can appear in individual instances through particular metafictional devices or through more subtle moments of diegetic frame breaking within particular texts. In her seminal work, *Metafiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh observes that by "drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, metafiction recasts human experience

in terms of role-playing,” adding that “if, as individuals, we now occupy ‘roles’ rather than ‘selves’, then the study of characters in novels may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside of novels” (3). This trope, though, predates the novel. It is an adaptation of the *theatrum mundi*, or “world as stage” metaphor, which is as ancient as written drama, making the performative subjectivity to which Waugh alludes operative far before the novel’s inception and rise to literary dominance. Waugh’s formulation points to a wider tendency in both the history of the novel and theater history to envision metafiction as a distinctly modern phenomenon.

William Gass first introduced the term *metafiction* in the 1960s, in an article addressing the works of Borges and other twentieth-century authors (Christensen 9). Literary critics who specialize in modernism often characterize it as an expression of a uniquely modern subjectivity and consequently represent metafictional texts that predate this period as notable but isolated antecedents to the metafiction found in modernist works.<sup>24</sup> Patricia Waugh does acknowledge that “the practice is as old (if not older) than the novel itself,” maintaining further that “metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in all novels” but her focus, and the focus of criticism of metafiction more generally, remains squarely on twentieth-century fiction and the ways in which metafiction captures a particularly modern acknowledgment that reality is mediated through language (Waugh 434, “What is” 42-43).

Metafiction’s place in theater history follows a similar trajectory, despite numerous studies showing that drama has included metafictional elements since its earliest inception in Greece.<sup>25</sup> Self-reference, choral commentary on the represented dramatic action, and direct

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<sup>24</sup> Like, Mark Currie does of Sterne, for instance.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Dobrov explains that “Far from being a fin-de-siecle symptom of decadence of the sort claimed for the metafictional novel by Roland Barthes, self-awareness in Greek drama arises from the dynamics of the festival agon in the context of a democratic polis” in fifteenth-century dramaturgy (6).

audience address are just three of the metafictional devices identified in ancient drama by scholars such as Gregor Dubrov, Niall Slater, Mark Ringer, and Federica Troisi. Metafiction may be thus considered foundational to dramatic composition and practice but the technical term “metatheater,” used to distinguish metafictional practices within drama, specifically, was not coined until 1963, when Lionel Abel introduced it in his exploration of the mode, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*.<sup>26</sup> In Abel’s view, metatheater began with *Hamlet*, in which, “for the first time in the history of drama, the problem of the protagonist is that he has a playwright’s consciousness” (57). He defines the term as “theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized,” explaining “the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them” (60). While most scholars of metatheater generally allow for a more inclusive definition of the term, many accept Abel’s identification of the English Renaissance as its origin point and the Modernist era as its revival.<sup>27</sup> These two roughly defined literary periods dominate discussions of metafiction as times when metafictional techniques were both popularized and advanced stylistically. Taking Abel’s lead, scholarship on metafictional practices in early modern drama is particularly concerned with the play-within-a-play structure, focusing on *Hamlet* as the most popular and culturally significant example.

Given these concentrations, instances of metafiction in English Restoration and eighteenth-century plays and novels are often treated as anomalous footnotes in literary history. Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759) is frequently mentioned in studies of metafiction in

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<sup>26</sup> In recent scholarship, the term ‘metatheater’ is used as an inclusive term encompassing the broad array of literary techniques practiced by playwrights both in composition and performance. Distinguishing it from Metadrama within a printed text serves little if any practical purpose.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Ann Frese Witt prefers the terms “baroque” and “neobaroque” to classify these periods in literary history.

novels, but as a notable outlier in his contemporary literary milieu, a writer who belongs to a later age. Inger Christensen pairs this novel with the works of Nabokov, Barth, and Beckett, as “the most weighty specimen of metafiction” in its time (11). Metafiction’s role in the novel’s emergence as a genre has been explored in such studies such as *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-conscious Genre*, in which Robert Alter offers a substantial examination of metafiction’s participation in the novel’s development, but the scope of his project remains on “the role played by the self-conscious tradition in the unfolding of the genre” rather than delineating one point of origin for metafictional techniques (xv). Linda Hutcheon also persuasively argues that “there would seem to be considerable evidence to suggest that the parodic, self-reflective nature of many . . . early narrative works is paradigmatic” in *Narcissistic Narrative: the The Metafictional Paradox*, asserting parody as key to early author’s ability to “unmask” early literary conventions in a bid to repurpose them for different ends (38).

Studies concerned with metatheater, specifically, tend to simply ignore this period, glossing it over as an uneventful bridge between the robust metatheater of the English Renaissance and a twentieth-century metatheatrical revival, as when Richard Hornby in *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* claims that the 1640s mark “the end of the play within a play for centuries” (39). One of the few critics to specialize in eighteenth-century metatheater, Dane Farnsworth Smith, identified and analyzed numerous plays about the theater. However, while Smith’s project has consequentially demonstrated that great volume of metafiction to be found in the period’s drama, he is primarily concerned with elucidating the topical nature of the plays’ referents—many of the metatheatrical plays composed during the seventeenth and eighteenth century address and respond to contemporary politics, both theatrical and governmental. In his focus on excavating relevant historical contexts, Smith overlooks more general commentary on

the nature of dramatic writing and theatrical production. It is this aspect of metatheater, in particular, that was imported into early English novels and fueled innovation.

The dominance of fourth-wall realism in the nineteenth-century theater can at least partially explain the oversight I have outlined here. Most fully theorized in eighteenth-century France by Denis Diderot, this dramatic mode aims to make the audience feel as if they invisibly witness the characters' reality as it occurs. As developed through the works of such playwrights as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov, whose plays are frequently produced today, it has so conditioned our experience of drama as to make explicit instances of metatheater seem aberrational. Consequently, modern plays incorporating conspicuous metafictional techniques or features such as direct audience address or the play-within-a-play structure seem startling innovative and are often characterized by critics as attempts to achieve a sense of heightened audience engagement or alienation (Pfister 5).

However, metafiction appears in Restoration and eighteenth-century plays with surprising frequency, as Smith shows. Between 1740 and 1800 alone at least 139 plays were either published or produced that feature the theater as subject (13).<sup>28</sup> Metafiction also appears frequently in early novels, which elicits the question: how exactly did metafiction enter the novel? In this chapter I use Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* to argue metafiction was channeled into early novels from early modern drama, specifically through the adaptation of the rehearsal structure, the incorporation of internal literary criticism, and dramatically stylized speech forms.

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<sup>28</sup> Smith speculates that the Licensing Act caused playwrights to turn from political satire to "the theater as a less inflammatory object of topical drama," and thus "encouraged the stage to look at itself" (17).

I also seek to demonstrate that dialogue structurally unifies the broad array of metafictional techniques and practices we encounter in both plays and novels: a narrator's address to the reader, a character confiding in the audience, and fictional characters discussing an interior literary feature, to name the most apparent examples, are all forms of conversation. In both plays and novels metafiction was used for several purposes during this period, notably: to experiment with the use of illusion in creating or masking levels of fiction and reality; to expose authorial performance and labor to the audience or reader, which served as a valuable vehicle for professional self-definition; to experiment with generic conventions; and to critique current trends in audience and reader taste. The copious use of metafictional techniques by playwrights during the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, and the especially innovative application by the period's most famous practitioner of metatheater, Buckingham, make glossing over the contributions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century playwrights a myopic choice. Overlooking metafiction during this period inhibits our full recognition an important area of cross-genre fertilization between plays and novels.

### **Metafiction on the Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Stage**

Operating as a liminal site where the boundaries between fictional and real worlds are visible, the physical dimensions of Restoration theaters encouraged performers to not only communicate to the audience, but with them as well. Converted from a tennis court in 1661, Davenant's playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields featured a forestage that jutted into the auditorium and was flanked by side boxes. The close proximity between performers and spectators facilitated and encouraged interaction through metatheatrical techniques like asides and other forms of direct audience address. The clearly demarcated performance space simultaneously

sharpens and blurs distinctions between “real” and fictional worlds, heightening awareness of the creative potential offered by metafiction. Real and fictional worlds visibly intersect within the physical theater, with the stage serving as boundary between the two planes. Slamowir Swiontek illuminates the discursive potential of this site, conceptualizing dramatic dialogue as two dynamic communicative axes: one between characters within the fictional world that traverses the stage, and one from the stage to the audience. Yet the threshold proves provisional when actors and spectators freely transgress. Actors playing fictional characters speak fictional dialogue to both achieve narrative-based goals related to aesthetic style and cohesion within the play world, and an actual act of communication to the audience. In this sense, theatrical dialogue is both “communication ‘to’ someone, that is, one character to another contained within the fictional world of the play,” and “‘for’ someone, that is, for the audience excluded from the situation of enunciation,” as Jenn Stephenson observes (Stephenson 117). Dramatic dialogue thus simultaneously communicates *about* the play world while performatively manufacturing it, and in this way a second conceptual dialogue between epistemological levels of reality and fiction is embedded within the theatrical situation itself.

For social comedies, the audience’s accessibility maximized a playwright’s ability to draw parallels between the character’s behaviors and those on whom they were modeled. Social and theatrical mannerisms were juxtaposed through physical proximity and topically within the plays, thus allowing the audience to better recognize their own influential status. This is coupled with the notion of theater attendance as a social event, where audience members displayed elaborate dress and interacted during the performances. The theater as site of sociability is one that will later be depicted within novels, such as in Burney’s *Evelina*. Overall, metafictional play

during the period emerged in a discernible way from the context of performativity as it was experienced within the theater, both on and off-stage.

Metatheatrical practices during this period frequently appear as dramatic criticism. In particular, four levels of metatheater related to dramatic composition and reception recur. The first follows Restoration comic playwrights' tendency to chastise their audiences' social foibles. Many Restoration and eighteenth-century playwrights used metatheater to critique their audience's aesthetic taste, specifically in public entertainments. The many frustrating and disheartening challenges facing aspiring playwrights comprise a second metatheatrical theme. Plays like Fielding's *The Author's Farce* and Sheridan's *The Critic* feature the inherent difficulties in professional dramatic composition and production. Any aspect of the process from inspiration to reception could be addressed, with the authors' impoverishment and the impossibility of satisfying the contradictory demands of theater managers, book sellers, opinionated actors, audiences, and critics all providing ample material for metatheatrical commentary and complaint. A third metatheatrical theme is found in the use of character surrogates to lampoon individuals' foibles. A playwright could satirize contemporary playwrights, as Buckingham does, or one's own idiosyncrasies or personal failings, like Fielding's depiction of his own weakness for women and financial profligacy within several of his metatheatrical plays, or Goldsmith's benevolence in *The Good Natur'd Man*. Finally, specific dramatic conventions were often exposed and ridiculed in metatheater.

These themes appear most frequently in depictions of the dramatic rehearsal process, a structure initiated on English stage by George Villiers, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Buckingham<sup>29</sup> in his play *The Rehearsal*. First produced at the Theatre Royal in 1671, *The Rehearsal* establishes a highly

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<sup>29</sup> Although Buckingham is often credited with the play, Martin Clifford, Samuel Butler, Thomas Sprat, Abraham Cowley, and Edmund Waller have all been named as contributors to its composition (see Womersley 142, Farnsworth Smith I, 11, and Hume, *Editing a Nebulous Author: The Case of the Duke of Buckingham*).

influential dramatic format reminiscent of Moliere's *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (1663). Hailed by Sheridan Baker as "a prototype for a kind of farcical burlesque that none of its many imitations has ever quite matched or sustained," it depicts preparations for an upcoming dramatic production and the structure was adopted by playwrights well into the twentieth century (160).<sup>30</sup>

*The Rehearsal* depicts the stage as a bounded space that facilitates conversations between the three primary parties involved with theatrical production: performers, playwrights, and audience, represented onstage by critics. The finished products, the performance and the play script published post-performance, are depicted as emerging from the interactions that occur during this rehearsal phase. More significantly, the types of dialogues found in the rehearsal format, both as an aesthetic structure and an approximation of real interactions, mirror those that occur during the actual performance and thereby emphasizing the collaborative genesis and maintenance of the theatrical enterprise as a whole.

Featuring a playwright who has allowed critics to observe his play's rehearsal, the framework functions as a device for characters to discuss both the content of the rehearsed plays specifically and the nature of theatrical production generally. The standard rehearsal system of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries varied considerably from that of today and provided ample material for scrutiny. The author of a new play would introduce it to the cast directly and provide guidance and feedback on the play's performance; plays were minimally rehearsed, usually only six to nine times before opening (Thomson 214-215; M. Booth 331). Without a dedicated "director," actors relied on stock performance conventions to play their roles and maintained a great deal of creative and interpretative freedom over their parts.

Buckingham engaged the play-within-a-play structure to simultaneously critique multiple aspects of contemporary dramaturgy, including the practices of contemporary

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dramatists and what he saw as degraded audience taste. Popular dramatic conventions, the idealization of the poet as an anointed literary creator, and specific contemporary playwrights, John Dryden and Sir Robert Howard especially, are all taken to task. The playwright character, Bayes, caricatures Dryden's personal foibles and preferred approach to heroic drama.<sup>31</sup> These aspects of *The Rehearsal* are often addressed in modern scholarship about the play, but while the most conspicuous satirical targets are playwrights' hubris in general and Dryden's foibles in particular, underneath this veneer the play offers a more sympathetic view of authorship. In the process of ridiculing a playwright's attempts to control every aspect of his play, Buckingham exposes the inherent difficulties a playwright faces when mounting a production, depicting the frustration that arises when one must relinquish creative control in order to transform a play from a manuscript text into a commercial product through collaboration.

This view of authorship is largely developed through the play's metafiction, buried beneath its surface-level topical satire. In addition to the play-within-a-play structure, Buckingham leverages direct audience address made through dramatic prologue and epilogue. Usually delivered as monologues to the audience, prologues and epilogues activate both the dialogic and monologic potential of theatrical performance. Seen by contemporary audiences as extensions of the play, prologues and epilogues were expected communication from the playwright (Solomon 9). Most prologues composed during the Restoration traditionally present a case for the play's favorable reception but also often address its substance and style, and set audience expectations. An actor, sometimes in character and sometimes *in propria persona*, acknowledges the audience's presence through direct address. The plea for favor suggests that favorable audience reception is necessary for the ensuing performance's success, both immediate

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<sup>31</sup> Remarkably, Dryden's theater company, The King's Company, performed the show. Dryden later retaliated by basing the character of Zimri after Buckingham in his satirical poem, "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681).

and long-term, thus implicating the audience members as participants in the theatrical endeavor. This conversational approach to dramatic prologues is a seventeenth-century innovation, according to George Spencer Bower, who identifies an evolution in the rhetorical moves made by Restoration playwrights in their prologues. In Bower's view, by this time the playwright has come out of his "shy seclusion" to make "coy, and then bolder, advances to his patrons; at first modestly hoping for success and applause from their hands, then proclaiming to them his own position, difficulties or claims to admiration; and finally, hectoring it over them, bullying them, denouncing them, and deriding their taste, or the rival aspirants to their good opinion" (37). It is not uncommon, though to find a prologue that combines bold assertions of authority with desperate pleas for audience favor.

Restoration prologues and epilogues frequently convey a slippage between actor, character, and author. In her comprehensive study of Restoration and Eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues, Diana Solomon notes "theatrical paratexts also offer up elusive, though no less mediated, glimpses of the author. Their language can be seen to channel an author's point of view, whether monologically, with the author's voice apparently speaking through the actor's body, or dialogically, with the actor, speaking in his or her own voice, either promoting or protesting the author" often with the performer seemingly usurping authority from a play's author vying for status as literary creator (13). This is the case in *The Rehearsal*. Originally pronounced by actor John Lacy, the prologue initiates a complicated multidirectional conversation. The stage convention of an actor delivering the prologue in costume in front of the closed curtain lends intimacy to the address. To the audience, the performer has transgressed the confines of the play-world to personally deliver a message, initiating a bond by acknowledging their presence as an integral component of the theatrical enterprise. *The Rehearsal's* prologue

and play's subject heighten this sense of intimacy. In accordance with the prologue's generic intent to garner a favorable reception, Lacy issues a bold assertion to any "Critiques" present:

If you approve; I shall assume the state  
Of those high-flyers whome I imitate:  
And justly too, for I will teach you more  
Than ever they would let you know before:  
I will not only shew the feats they do,  
But give you all their reasons for 'em too" (Buckingham 143)

"Than ever they would let you" joins audience and actor in confederacy against playwrights whom he represents as jealous to maintain their control over dramatic illusion. The actor seeks to reveal and explain playwrights' methods and choices to the audience. Presumably attempting to gain their trust through candor, Lacy lays bare his objective: "Some honour may to me from hence arise" (Buckingham 143). But Lacy did not compose the drama, he played the leading character, compromising his final triumphant assertion that: "if, by my endeavours, you grow wise,/And what you once so prais'd, shall now despise;/ Then I'll cry out, swell'd with Poetic rage,/Tis I, John Lacy, have reform'd your stage" (Buckingham 143). Although delivered as a monologue, the prologue seeks to elicit a rejoinder, and thus start a conversation. It would be impractical to expect an extended back and forth between audience members and audience, given the era's cultural conventions, but it is plausible that the actor may have even anticipated audience members bold enough to hazard an immediate response.

The conversation initiated between actor and audience in the prologue may be viewed as enlisting the audience in joint enterprise with actors against the dramatist, in particular, and playwrights in general. However, the prologue's authorship is ambiguous. Restoration prologues

and epilogues were not always penned by the same author as the main piece, so while it is possible that Lacy is the author, it is equally possible that he was serving as Buckingham's mouthpiece, redirecting the conversational axis from performer to audience, to playwright to audience filtered through performer, just as in the bulk of theatrical writing (Solomon 14). This would, of course, undercut the prologue's ostensible intent by maintaining the authorial control that it purports to expose while subtly manipulating the audience.

The prologue generates enthusiasm for the play by recruiting the audience to work in tandem with performers to expose authors while also adroitly introducing the play's central themes. Lacy's bombastic boasting presents authorial hubris as a prominent satirical target, and his delivery initiates the tension the play stages between playwrights on one side and performers and audience on the other. During the play, Bayes' vanity heightens his frustrations with the logistical necessities of dramatic production as he struggles to maintain creative control of his production. His choices are challenged or altered at almost every step by actors or critics, enacting a struggle between authorial autonomy and artistic production and consumption. While the audience is busy laughing at Bayes' many absurdities, they are also learning that by the time of a play's initial performance, the original script has likely undergone substantial changes as the result of collaboration with multiple participants in the production process. A conventional interpretation of *The Rehearsal* is that it is derisive of playwrights, Dryden in particular, but by depicting the many challenges experienced by a dramatist in the process of transforming text to performance and showing Bayes' great reluctance to relinquish creative control, the play also presents a sympathetic view of the profession.

Of course, as the play is about theatrical production, Buckingham addresses prologue composition within the main piece, too. Bayes explains his novel approach to prologues to Smith

and Johnson, maintaining there are “but two ways of making very good Prologues. The one is by civility, by insinuation, good language, and all that, to—a—in a manner, steal your plaudit from the courtesie of the Auditors: the other, by making use of some certain personal things, which may keep a hank upon such censuring persons, as cannot otherways, A gad, in nature, be hindered from being too free with their tongues” (Buckingham 1.2). Seeking to maximize his chances to win audience approval, Bayes composed two interchangeable prologues; the first, he intends to personally deliver dressed “in a long black Veil, and a great Huge Hang-man behind me, with a Furr’d-cap, and his Sword drawn,” amounting to a threat of self sacrifice. He intends to tell the audience “plainly, that if, out of good nature, they will not like my Play, I gad, I’l e’en kneel down, and he shall cut my head off” (Buckingham 1.2). Given the extreme nature of the proposal, Bayes is wise enough to pack the Pit with “two or three dozen of my friends” as ringers to ensure the necessary applause to avoid his threat’s fulfillment. Beyond an amusingly suggestive anecdote that develops Bayes as a character, his choice to enlist ringers in the audience belies a very real anxiety about audience response, and depicts a playwright who relies on an immediate audible response from the audience in response to a prologue that has significant consequences for the playwright, both in terms of his ego’s gratification but more importantly in terms of initiating a supportive or hostile atmosphere that will affect the quality of the actors’ performance.

Bayes’ second prologue is written in dialogue form, an approach that he hails as a “*non pareillo*,” despite its formal resemblance to Sir Robert Howard’s dialogue as prologue in *The Great Favourite, or The Duke of Lerma*. He explains: “in my first, you see I strive to oblige the Auditors by civility, by good nature, good language, and all that; so, in this, by the other way, *in Terrorem*, I chuse for the persons *Thunder* and *Lightning*” (Buckingham 1.2). William

Cartwright, a member of Killigrew's company, plays Thunder. Referencing Cartwright by name lends an additional metafictional layer; Buckingham clearly designed the part for him specifically, thereby granting the historical individual a new fictionalized existence as character in both the actual play, *The Rehearsal*, and Bayes' play-within-a-play. This constitutes a dialogic back and forth between fiction and reality demonstrating how a historical individual may be given a new fictionalized life with the potential to outlive the original. As the work ages the significance of contemporary references fades transforming a poignant topical reference into a fictional version of the historical antecedent. Cartwright may be the actor who played "Thunder" in the original production of *The Rehearsal*, but through the power of literary transference, to a modern reader he is now Cartwright the character, a bit part in a period comedy. "'Tis but a flash of a Prologue: a Droll," Bayes concludes, with Smith retorting: "Yes, 'Tis short indeed; but very terrible" (Buckingham 1.2).

When the Restoration's most renowned comic author, William Wycherley, uses metafiction to initiate a conversation with the audience in *The Plain Dealer* (1676/7), he focused on contemporary morality and aesthetic tastes rather than theatrical practices. Similar to *The Rehearsal*, the approach is to establish a relationship between performer and audience through the prologue, but here the speaker challenges, rather than enlists, the audience. According to the published script, the prologue is "spoken by the plain dealer," an ambiguous designation that initiates the play's effect of deliberate disorientation. It begins: "I the plain dealer am to act to day/ And my rough part begins before the play;" but despite being performed by the actor playing Manly, the lead character, the loose use of the appellation "the plain dealer," which variously refers to the playwright, character, and title, and more generally to signify a forthright and ingenuous person, makes it unclear whether the actor is performing in character (Wycherley

227). Critics such as David Gelineau accept Manly as the prologue's speaker, but a careful analysis of the ways in which the speaker identifies supports a more complicated form of address that blurs the voice of playwright, actor, and character.<sup>32</sup> After identifying as "I the plain dealer," the speaker chastises rival writers, saying "'Tis a good play (we know) you can't forgive"—the shift from "I" to "we" here implying an accord with the playwright, made more explicit two lines later: "Our Scribler . . . bluntly bid me say/He wou'd not have the wits pleas'd here to day" (Wycherley 227). It remains unclear how far this conceit is carried, though; that is, whether the audience is to believe the entire prologue is a message from the playwright, the actor, or the lead character.

What is clear, though, is the author's intent on "plain dealing" from the outset, as the prologue then takes the audience to task for their perceived propensities and anticipated responses. Comparing "plain-dealing" in dramatic writing to a painter capturing one's imperfections, the prologue then transitions to Wycherley's aesthetic objectives and choices:

. . . the coarse Dauber of the coming scenes,  
To follow life, and nature only means;  
Displays you, as you are: makes his fine woman  
A mercenary jilt, and true to no man;  
His men of wit, and pleasure of the age,  
Are as dull rogues, as ever cumber'd stage:  
He draws a friend, only to custom just;  
And makes him naturally break his trust.  
  
I, only, act a part like none of you;

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<sup>32</sup> see David Gelineau, "Wycherley's The Plain Dealer: The Whorehouse of Language" in *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, Volume 41, Number 1, Spring 2017, pp. 29-58

And yet, you'll say, it is a fool's part too:

An honest man; who, like you, never winks

At faults; but, unlike you, speaks what he thinks: (Wycherley 227)

Both the playwright and Manly are plain dealers, then, and the urgency of conveying this message apparently outweighs any ill effects from prematurely revealing major plot points. The speaker continues: "And where else, but on stages, do we see/Truth pleasing; or rewarded honesty?/Which our bold poet does this day in me" (Wycherley 227). The "our" here attempts a shift in the alliance from confederacy between performer and poet to one between performer and audience in reference to the "bold poet" and his craft.

When the play was published in 1677, Wycherley appended a dedicatory epistle to an infamous London bawd to both play and prologue. The letter is again signed by "the plain dealer," but as the substance of the letter refers more specifically to authorship it is reasonable to assume that Wycherley uses the appellation self-referentially, making the prologue "spoken by the plain dealer" almost transactional; the writer having composed a play in which he deals plainly now expects the actor to adopt this persona in both his duties as performer and as the character of Manly.

Using the dialogically structured epistle format, Wycherley ostensibly writes to Mother Bennett, but makes ample use of metafiction to activate the communicative axis between author and audience through this address, disguising many of his metafictional critiques about writing as digressions, just as Fielding will later do in his signature narrative style. Taking "the confidence of an Author" to compose the madam a "Billiet doux," Wycherley explains that this practice "is no new thing, for by most dedications it appears, that authors, though they praise their patrons from top to toe, and seem to turn 'em inside out, know 'em as little, as sometimes

their patrons their books” (Wycherley 224) Following this barb at the expense of his fellow “poetical daubers,” he uses bathetic praise of the madam as a pretext to launch an extended complaint against “the ladies of stricter lives” who complain of the play’s indecency.

Similarly, after incorporating a Latin phrase to bolster a point about hypocrisy, Wycherley again digresses: “Pardon, Madam, the quotation, for a dedication can no more be without ends of Latine, than Flattery; and ‘tis no matter whom it is writ to; for an author can as easily (I hope) suppose people to have more understanding and languages than they have, as well as more vertues” (Wycherley 225). In addition to serving as commentary on generic conventions, these lines are included for the benefit of his actual audience, the many readers of the dedication, as they may question why he quotes Latin to the madam of a brothel. This becomes explicit after a second Latin quotation:

There’s Latin for you again, Madam; I protest to you, as I am an Author, I cannot help it; nay, I can hardly keep my self from quoting Aristotle and Horace, and talking to you of the rules of writing, (like the French authors), to shew you and my Readers I understand ‘em, in my Epistle, lest neither of you should find it out by the play; and, according to the rules of dedications, ‘tis no matter whether you understand or no, what I quote or say to you, of writing; for an author can as easily make any one a judge or critick, in an epistle, as an hero in his play. (Wycherley 226)

This commentary marks a shift in tone; Wycherly seems to tire of the dedicator’s pose and leverages metafiction to make a larger point: what appears at first glance to be authorial self-consciousness proving his competence is actually audience manipulation. Not only is the dedicatee flattered, he suggests, but also the reader, whom the author leads to overestimate their own powers of discernment through subtle rhetorical strategies. As the dedicatory epistle was

appended to the play and prologue upon its publication, it marks the transition from performance text to literary text, and establishes a precedent for dialogic audience engagement within paratexts for early novelists. More importantly, it develops the digression as a powerful communicative tool that allows Wycherley to initiate a double dialogue; within the confines of his epistolary address to Mother Bennett, he engages the audience directly through incidental commentary. Early novelists like Samuel Richardson and Frances Burney would later adopt the epistolary mode for their most successful novels, while Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne would both develop styles notable for ample use of digression.

Produced nearly half a century after *The Plain Dealer*, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) establishes a variation on past methods of metafictional audience engagement. Instead of addressing the audience in a prologue, Gay begins his ballad opera with a dialogue between an author-figure, the Beggar of the title, and a Player about to perform in the show. The conversation approximates the traditional function of a prologue by introducing the play's aims and themes, but like Wycherley's dedication, the metafiction operates by activating the communicative axis between author and audience indirectly. The pair discusses the play's design, acquainting the audience with its status as a burlesque of Italian operas then in vogue. The primary purpose of this metafictional device, and those similar, is to exploit the reiterative function of dramatic dialogue to address the audience indirectly rather than to further other narrative elements like character development, plot advancement, or scene setting.

After this brief introductory scene, these characters disappear only to return in the third act to interrupt the play's conclusion. Just after Macheath announces he is ready to be hanged, the Player and beggar join the other characters on stage. "I hope you don't intend that Macheath shall be really executed," the player objects, prompting the beggar to retort: "Most certainly, sir.

To make the piece perfect, I was for doing strict poetical justice” (Gay 3.16). The Player then explains that he risks defying generic conventions “for an opera must end happily.” The objection and change happen in real time, just as in a rehearsal play. The Beggar relents and intervenes in the play’s action, telling the characters onstage to “run and cry a reprieve” for Macheath. The tone then abruptly changes with the Player conceding the change was “to comply with the taste of the town,” thus activating the metatheatrical function of critiquing current theatrical/literary taste, followed by the Beggar somberly reciting his purpose:

Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentleman of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained, as I first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral.

‘Twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich: and that they are punished for them. (Gay 3.16)

Gay here uses metafiction to fulfill several aims. He makes a point about how his satire operates; expresses a desire to conclude the play according to neoclassical convention, thus showing his authorial proficiency; and delivers a satiric critique of current aesthetic taste in popular entertainments by complying with the demands of the genre “no matter how absurdly things are brought about” (Gay 3.16). Once again metafiction operates as a reaction against artistic restriction and outside influence, but despite the play’s title these characters seem to exist solely to add a discursive layer to the work that opens a dialogue between author and audience. Early novelists later approximate this convention through the use of fictional editors, narrators, and other author-surrogates.

## Henry Fielding, Dramatist

Of the many eighteenth-century authors who composed both plays and novels, the one who most conspicuously straddles the generic divide is also renowned for his copious use of metafiction in both genres: Henry Fielding. Although primarily known as a novelist, Fielding's dramatic output was extensive and varied. Spanning the years 1728-1743, Fielding composed twenty-eight plays in total and experimented prolifically with dramatic genres (Lockwood xvii). By the time he began composing extended prose forms, Fielding was an accomplished dramatist, and consequently he imported dramatic principles and forms into his prose, in part by adapting the metafictional techniques he used in his plays to initiate dialogues with the audience for readers. Fielding took the *theatrum mundi* seriously. As A. Norman Jeffries maintains, Fielding's play *Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) "might have marked the beginning of a movement to interpret the realities of life in theatrical terms" had the licensing act of 1737 not diverted his talents away from play writing to novel writing (9). Fielding's dramatic writing is marked by a penchant for blurring distinctions between performance and reality. He also had a strong preference for inserting himself in his plays through the use of personae.

Topically, much of the metafiction found in eighteenth-century plays, Fielding's included, may be viewed as a return to the style of social critique found in Restoration comedies in that it overtly chastises the members of its own audience. Differences in general focus exist, however. The authors of Restoration comedies were more culturally oriented, ridiculing their audience's manners and pretensions, while eighteenth-century playwrights were more aesthetically oriented, ridiculing their audience's fickle or degraded taste in public entertainments. The shift reflects a change in audience demographic away from the relatively

small social class that comprised the Restoration stage's primary audience to a larger and more diverse eighteenth-century audience.

Fielding made his dramatic debut in 1728 with *Love in Several Masques* but his first major theatrical success was the prominently metafictional *The Author's Farce* in 1730. Formally, the play was a pastiche; Thomas Lockwood calls it "a hybrid idiom of realistic self-reflexive comedy joined to rehearsal-play silliness" (186). This combination proved successful and set "the fashion for seven years of satirical farce," according to Farnsworth Smith (Farnsworth Smith i, xiii). Like *The Rehearsal*, the play addresses theatrical production, specifically, and features contemporary theater figures as satiric targets. In the 1730 version of the play Fielding modeled Marplay and Sparkish on Colley Cibber and Robert Wilks, then managing-actors at Drury Lane, satirizing "their inconsiderate attitude toward authors" before revising the 1734 version to critique Theophilus Cibber, Colley Cibber's son, as Marplay Junior (Smith 141).<sup>33</sup> In addition to *The Rehearsal*, the play also borrows features from *The Beggar's Opera*, by incorporating music and songs, and even Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*, through puppetry.<sup>34</sup>

While Fielding would later be known for the conversational narrative tone of novels, he took a much more formal and distant approach to the prologue for *The Author's Farce*. Written in poetry, it announces the play as an antidote to tragedy's dominance on the English stage, promoting a view that the audience has been conditioned into uncritically approving all that appears by that name: "Like tame Animals designed for show, / you have your cues to clap, as they to bowe? / Taught to commend, your Judgments have no share; / By chance you guess aright, by Chance you err" (Fielding, *AF* 222). Thus condemning the discernment of the English

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<sup>33</sup> Scholars prefer the 1734 version of the play.

<sup>34</sup> It is likely that Fielding's incorporation of puppetry was also informed by the Ben Jonson play, *Bartholomew Fair*.

theatergoer, after devoting the majority of the prologue to complaining about tragedy, the speaker announces that “to-night we mean to laugh, and not to chide” before introducing Fielding as a playwright of a different stamp, one who is “Bred in Demoncritus his laughing Schools” and aims “but to make you laugh”. Returning to the aggravated tone, the prologue’s next lines maintain that: “Beneath the tragick or the comick name, / Farces and Puppet-shows ne’er miss of Fame, / Since then, in borrow’d dress, they’ve pleased the Town; / Condemn them not, appearing in their own” (Fielding, *AF* 223). Fielding’s concern with unmasking thus explicitly stated, he likewise suggests one of the targets of his first satirical play: “Smiles we expect, from the Good-natur’d few; / As ye are done by, ye Malicious, do; / And kindly laugh at him, who laughs at you” (Fielding, *AF* 223). The audience then is prepared to expect a show in which both playwright and theatergoer alike will be ridiculed, and Fielding does not fail to deliver.

Metafiction again operates on several levels. First is the thematic engagement of the theater as the play’s subject in two loosely connected sections—the initial two acts feature the tribulations of Luckless, an impoverished playwright (and Fielding surrogate) seeking to successfully mount a production, and the third act is a production of his satirical puppet show entitled *The Pleasure’s of the Town*. The second metafictional level is this theme’s reflection within the puppet show, which satirizes the public’s debased taste in public entertainments, effectively the source of Luckless’ difficulties in the first two acts. Metafiction is again used to scrutinize the collaborative nature of theatrical production. Both the bookseller and theatre managers insist on exerting creative input. Marplay Junior, the Theophilus Cibber figure, assures Luckless that he will not only provide his opinion of the young playwright’s latest tragedy, but also contribute to it:

MARPLAY. "...if I can make any Alterations in it that will be for its Advantage, I will do it freely"

WITMORE. "Alterations, Sir?"

MARPLAY JUNIOR. "Yes, Sir, Alterations—I will maintain it, let a Play be never so good, without Alteration it will do nothing. (Fielding, *AF* 1.6)

By using Witmore to question this comment, rather than Luckless, Fielding suggests the playwright's awareness that alterations are the inevitable result of submitting a play for production, as Marplay junior's response makes all too abundantly clear. Bragging that he has even "alter'd Shakespear" Marplay junior that complains to Witmore that

Was you to see the plays when they are brought to us, a parcel of crude, undigested stuff. We are the persons, sir, who lick them into form, that mould them into shape—the poet make the play indeed! The Colour-man might be as well said to make the Picture, or the Weaver the coat: My father and I, sir, are a couple of poetical tailors; when a play is brought us, we consider it as a tailor does his coat, we cut it, sir, we cut it: And let me tell you, we have exact measure of the town, we know how to fit their taste. The poets between you and me, are a pack of ignorant— (Fielding, *AF* 1.6)

Perceived contempt for the playwrights' craft is evident in the comparison to the Colour-man and Weaver, implying they are simple craftsmen. The cuts he brags about resemble those made by the actors in Buckingham's *Rehearsal*, but precede the play's acceptance for production, suggesting another layer of collaboration and dilution to the playwright's work. While feedback and alterations seem unavoidable and potentially beneficial to playwrights, the playwrights we have examined here suggest that managers and booksellers overstep their roles and encroach upon an author's liberties.

In addition to providing a format for authors to lament current trends in public taste and competing forms of popular entertainments, in both plays and novels, metafiction allows authors to expose the labor and professional challenges that literary production entails. This sometimes includes distinguishing drama from the novel. Marplot Junior brags that his play was “all over plot. It would have made a dozen novels: Nor was it cram’d with a pack of wit-traps like Congreve, and Wycherley, where everyone knows when the joke was coming...The dialogue was plain, easy, and natural, and not one single joke in it from the beginning to the end” (Fielding, *AF* 1.6). Fielding also differentiates between the difficulties inherent in submitting a play for theatrical production and submitting it for publication. Bookweight the publisher maintains that “there are your acting plays, and your reading plays” (Fielding, *AF* 1.6). Witmore again proves eager for a clarification and Bookweight explains:

Why, Sir, your acting play is entirely supported by the merit of the actor, without any regard to the author at all: —In this case, it signifies very little whether there be any sense in it or no. Now your reading play is of a different stamp, and must have wit and meaning in it—These latter I call your substantive, as being able to support themselves. The former are your adjective, as what require the buffoonery and gestures of an actor to be joined to them, to shew their signification. (Fielding, *AF* 1.6)

Formally, he balances criticism between publishing and performance with complementary scenes depicting the aggravations Luckless faces from both.

As all of the previous examples indicate, metafiction in drama frequently appears in service of satiric aims and its capacity to undermine authority must have proven a compelling inducement for writers to adopt similar metafictional themes in novels. Moreover, in both plays and novels, satire’s emphasis on exposure for moral ends justifies breaking from earlier narrative

traditions. This justification could easily extend to aesthetic concerns, as well, like exposing specific techniques espoused by supposedly inferior or faulty writers when crafting new fiction. The ostensible aim of satire, reformation, also provides a convenient pretense for exploring human behavior in detail (Paulson 18). Restoration playwrights used metafictional techniques to satirically scrutinize current trends in dramatic writing, as discussed above, and to castigate the social mannerisms of playgoers who were prominently the middle class and aristocracy at the time. Early novelists then similarly adopted metafiction to explore the condition of the common man, even going so far as to incorporate more subtle forms metafiction, like the metacommentary found in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), discussed below.

Moreover, as “the satirist customarily regards reality as something the ordinary person can see only if he takes off the glasses of convention,” many satiric techniques serve to interrogate the distinction between appearance and reality, and the ways in which the veil of illusion can, and often in the satirist's view *must*, be lifted to expose the truth as the satirist sees it (Paulson 18). It is essential to note that the subjective nature of satire magnifies when it is presented in the first-person voice, such as in a formal verse satire, amounting to an individual perspective pronounced as a general truth. The satirist's version of reality predominates, much as when a first-person narrator presents a single perspective of the narrated action. This dynamic creates a dialogic back and forth between the intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrative levels within a work.

In broader terms, satire also participated in the novel's emergence as a distinct form, in many instances delivered through dramatic speech. In *Satire and the Novel*, Ronald Paulson persuasively demonstrates ways in which novelists were influenced by satires and incorporated satiric techniques. Paulson maintains that some early examples of the genre were at least

partially conceived as satiric responses to earlier forms, often expressed using metafictional commentary using first-person narration to indicate how new methods relate to extant narrative traditions. This goes hand in hand with the satiric practice of critiquing the conventions of older literary models, the romance genre in particular, both brought to prominence in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605).

Hailed by many as the first recognizable European novel, *Don Quixote* introduces many of the genre's hallmarks, including extended size, concentration on a non-aristocratic character, and copious use of satiric techniques, including metafiction. Cervantes' legacy was profound and many early novelists, including Henry Fielding, are acknowledged acolytes who modeled their novels after this work. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes employs one of the most fecund strands of metafiction for eighteenth-century novelists, running narrative commentary. Arising from the Greek *satyra* tradition, which features a speaker who stands distinct from the narrative action passing judgment, in the novel commentary appears when the author, editor-figure, or narrator assumes a paternalistic posture, interjecting to guide the appropriate response to a work as it unfolds. The satirist becomes a narrator-figure who comments on the novel's action, often as it unfolds. The storyteller or author-surrogate serves to not only editorialize, but also to directly address the reader, thus establishing a dialogic rapport. Fielding adopts this narrative style in major prose works including *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Jonathan Wild* (1743), *Tom Jones* (1749), and *Amelia* (1751).

An attenuated form of satire also appears in the novel through typological characters representative of a class of often-humorous human foibles. Concerned less with castigating specific individuals, this milder form of satire manifests through the incorporation of boilerplate composites of generalized personality types. Popularized by *The Spectator*, the character types

include innocent ingénues, overeducated masculine single women, ignorant country squires, and rakish but good-natured protagonists. The exposure of the vicious natures of specific individuals found in the works of authors such as Alexander Pope, who defended the practice as necessary to satire's success, modulates into a more mild ridicule of general human weaknesses. Fielding's satiric plays predominantly feature caricatures of specific individuals, as well, which he modifies into more broadly applicable satire against generalized character types within his novels.

### **Henry Fielding, Novelist**

According to traditional accounts of the rise of the novel, like those of Ian Watt or Michael McKeon, early English novels followed two major narrative trajectories: one primarily interested in presenting the psychological complexity of the individual subject, represented by the works of Samuel Richardson and Daniel DeFoe, and one interested in narrative description, or the act of storytelling as art, represented by the novels of Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne.

In the first trajectory, novelists represent individual consciousness by creating the illusion that their characters relate their own narratives through epistolary or journalistic formats, two “dramatic” modes of narrative presentation. Since the nineteenth century, many authors and critics maintained that compositional methods that minimize the narrator's management of the narrative are technically superior. These are often referred to as “dramatic” modes of narration, as they create the illusion that the characters speak for themselves. In literary criticism the term “dramatic” has been associated with an “impersonal” or “objective” method of narration that seeks to minimize the author's or narrator's visibility in “telling” the story as it unfolds.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For an in-depth examination of the ways in which “showing” and “telling” have been used as terms to distinguish types of narration, see Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth demonstrates that “the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one” and the author's voice is as present in “dramatic” modes of narration as in texts with more overtly “obtrusive” narrative voices (20).

With narration minimized, a different aspect of dramatic speech representation occurs through the incorporation of subtle forms of metafiction. Novels related in the first person by a character who participates in the action, like those by Richardson and DeFoe, rely on adaptations of soliloquies and asides, stage devices that allow characters to disclose their thoughts to the audience, both of which are often metafictional in their frame-breaking capacities.

These devices can appear subtly in novels not immediately recognized as metafictional. Samuel Richardson, in particular, is notable for his inconspicuous incorporation of metafiction that resembles both theatrical techniques in his immensely popular novel, *Pamela*, widely hailed as one of the most significant and influential early examples of the genre. In it the individual ruminations of the soliloquy, in which the audience is situated as eavesdropper to a character's verbalized thoughts, are protracted using epistolary and journalistic structures.<sup>36</sup> The influence of the aside, a device in which a character confides in the audience, is also present in direct address to the reader. The editor's preface appears to be a straightforward apologia outlining the novel's didactic aims relating that any materials that may appear lewd are presented wholly for the purpose of edification. Because there is nothing truly remarkable about the preface, it is easily accepted as a standard editorial paratext that encourages the reader's favorable reception of the novel. Later, though, the editor interrupts the epistolary exchanges that comprise the first quarter of the novel, to provide exposition. When informing the reader that "Here it is necessary to observe, that fair Pamela's tryals were not yet over; but the worse were yet to come," the editor's "here" defines the interjection's importance to the plot and signals the distinction between discourse and story, piercing the temporal illusion that the narrative as told up to this point occurs in real time. The jarring break in narrative prompts one to reevaluate the editor's ontological status: is he fictional too? Does he exist outside of the text? This in turn may trigger

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<sup>36</sup> I address the epistolary format at greater length in the chapter on Frances Burney.

reassessment of the preface's message. As the text's frontispiece strongly suggests it is fiction, the realization that the editor is also fiction resituates the preface as a text that originates from within *Pamela*'s fictional world.

The three brief paragraphs of the editor's interjection bear great functional weight to the text as a whole; the perspective shifts from the primary character's to a narrative guide, one that resembles those we associate more commonly with Fielding and Sterne, and the device provides the necessary exposition for narrative advancement, punctuating a crucial moment in the plot to communicate that the novel's antagonist, Mr. B, has intercepted and read all of Pamela's letters to this point and has abducted and imprisoned her at his Lincolnshire estate. This aligns Mr. B and the reader as consumers of Pamela's writing and provides a plot point that would have been difficult to convey in the epistolary format. Here metafiction also allows the editor to fulfill the didactic aims promised in the preface by explicitly delineating the novel's moral up to this point: "the whole will shew the base Arts of designing men to gain their wicked ends; and how much it behoves the fair sex to stand upon their guard against their artful contrivances" before shifting to a journalistic format for the remainder of the novel.

The second strand of novelistic development prominently features a narrator, or implied author, as a distinct personality within the story's structure. This form of narrative presentation is often overtly metafictional and more evidently structured as dialogue. In literary criticism, the novels of Henry Fielding are frequently cited as representative of this presentational mode. When the Licensing Act of 1737 was enacted, it put an abrupt stop to Fielding's flourishing theatrical career. The Licensing Act was at least partially in response to the political content of his plays and it successfully pressured him to seek new professional outlets for his creative energies.

Novel theorists unanimously agree that Fielding's novels play a significant role in the

form's development. His many contributions are examined at length in the most authoritative accounts of the novel's rise, including those by Watt and McKeon. Watt extensively analyzes the ways in which Fielding engages a neo-classical literary tradition within his novels, and hails his control over a complex literary structure as one of his greatest achievements, albeit one made at the expense of characterization. McKeon sees Fielding's novels as central to a dialectical process in which competing strands of epistemological and ideological expression within the novels contribute to an eventual cohesive expression of the generic principals that make it distinct; associating Fielding's works with an "extreme skepticism" of formal claims of historical authenticity and a return to "conservative ideology."

Fielding's first attempt at composing extended prose fiction, *Shamela* (1741), is a biting satire on Richardson's *Pamela* that exposes the heroine's perceived hypocrisy—laying bare Pamela's true mercenary motives as Fielding envisions them and reversing the central power dynamic by making the titular character a predator rather than a victim. Because Fielding sought to satirize the form of Richardson's work, as well as its content, *Shamela* was composed in the epistolary format of its subject. No doubt inspired by *Shamela*'s rapid success, Fielding undertook a more comprehensive and carefully planned prose project that similarly capitalized on the notoriety of Richardson's debut novel the following year in *Joseph Andrews*. Rather than reimagining Pamela's true hidden motives by closely parodying Richardson's style, though, in *Joseph Andrews* Fielding continues the Pamela story through a depiction of the heroine's imagined brother, Joseph, crafting a plot impetus that loosely resembles Pamela's and initiating his signature prose style by incorporating a narrator.

Fielding returned to the rehearsal structure in this novel, by modifying the playwright character into an authorial persona. Using first-person address, he initiates an ongoing

conversation about the narrative as it progresses in a reconfiguration of the rehearsal structure's defining interventions. This resulting erudite, often ironic, and digressive narrative voice, which he employs in his later novels as well, is often the subject of admiration and scrutiny. Bakhtin hails Fielding as one of the founders of the English comic novel, noting his "parodic stylization of various levels and genres of literary language" in *Discourse in the Novel* (308). This ability to stylistically merge multiple discourses into a unified form is a signature of the genre, but Fielding's unique style of narration is especially innovative. The notion that Fielding's novels were "designed to indicate authorial management rather than induce an illusion of unmediated reality" is a critical commonplace, one often depicted as deliberately crafted in opposition to "the vulgar particularity and illusionistic immediacy of the Richardson novel" (Rawson 122, Richetti 121). John Richetti characterizes Fielding's narration as "discursive and argumentative," noting that in all of his novels his narration "encourages a form of dialogue and exchange between the narrator and a knowing reader" (123, 125). Fielding's masterful combination of literary, oral, and written languages is undeniable, but much of what makes fielding's narrative voice so distinctive is its affinities to conversational speech, particularly in its digressive quality. Fielding's preferred narrative mode is clearly informed by his experience with dramatic writing. He leveraged metafictional techniques from the rehearsal structure, specifically, to engage the audience in dialogue and then dramatically presents character speech.<sup>37</sup> But because his narration does not conform to a modern notion of a "dramatic" mode of presentation, it is often depicted as antithetical to the novel's aesthetic aims, ironically making the works of one of the most dramatic early novelists a prominent example of non-dramatic narrative technique (Booth 8).

Fielding capitalized on the opportunities afforded by shifting from drama to novels and

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<sup>37</sup> This feature of the novel predominates, but the narrator also self-consciously communicates using literary idioms, usually in the context/service of appropriating ancient tropes, especially from epic poetry.

successfully merged features from both. Compared to drama, the novel offered more complete control over his work and an expanded representational capacity. Fielding seemed to relish the ability to determine the visual and oral aspects of his narrative: one of Joseph's most distinguishing features is his voice and the narrator often shares elaborate descriptions of characters' appearances. He also found new freedom in the expanded range of temporal manipulation, and his treatment of time within the novel has its foundation in his experience with the rehearsal format. Many of Fielding's dramatic works were modeled after Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, a popular standard in the theatrical repertoire of the 1730s. In addition to in *The Author's Farce*, Fielding leveraged the structure in *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register* (1737). In drama, the rehearsal play has three nested narrative levels that structure interactions between performers. The first is the frame-play world corresponding to Genette's intradiegetic level, featuring the characters in their capacity as theater professionals, actors, playwrights, etc., who are in the process of producing a play; this interior play comprises the second level corresponding to Genette's metadiegetic level, which has its own discrete narrative and timeline populated by the actors of the frame play performing as the characters of the nested play; the final level consists of interactions between any of the on-stage performers and the audience observing the play in the theater, corresponding to Genette's extradiegetic level. In the original structure there is potential for communication and temporal disruption, or *metalepsis*, between multiple narrative levels—the interior play's time and action may be disrupted from within by the actors, occurring most frequently when an actor voices an objection to the playwright character prompting a dialogue regarding aesthetic aims or principals, and without by the other individuals involved in its rehearsal; the live nature of the performance may also be interrupted at any point by audience members and their participation is encouraged, at least rhetorically,

using prologues, epilogues, and asides.

Beginning with *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding approximates the rehearsal structure using narration in many of his novels. In controlling the extradiegetic narrative discourse the narrator assumes the function of the playwright character in the frame play by guiding, commenting on, and intervening in the intradiegetic discourse, which functions as the interior play. The narrator serves as an author-surrogate, just as the playwright does in the rehearsal format, and stops and starts the narrative at will sometimes to comment on literary principles and often to explicitly encourage a specific reader response. However, unlike in a rehearsal play, in a novel the internal characters are not granted agency to suspend their own action. This basic structure is expanded further through the use of interpolated tales, which are either told or read by the characters, who, in a *mis en abyme*, assume the function of narrators who provide their own interruptions and commentary on the sub-narrative.

Fielding initiates this structure through his elaboration of aesthetic aims for *Joseph Andrews* in the formal preface. Continuing the practice from published plays, prefaces were a mainstay of early novels and were often crucial to a reader's experience of the novel as a whole, rather than disposable front matter. The most prolific modern theorist of prefaces, Gerard Genette, characterizes prefaces as an author's attempt to shape his or her readers' experience of the text. But he also acknowledges that they are vehicles for direct communication with the public (261). The preface allows Fielding to present his artistic principles in the most direct manner possible, but his tone in the preface suggests he writes using the authorial persona employed in the narrative that follows. A forcefully erudite voice predominates, and Fielding demonstrates authority by establishing a dialogue between his novel, which he maintains is a "kind of writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our Language" and

other forms—seeking to align himself with classical authors and to distance himself from modern authors “romance writers” and “burlesque writers” in particular. “In our language” also acknowledges his work’s debt to Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.

While the narrator presents character speech using dramatic modes examined below, his own discursive mode approximates the approach of the playwright considering features of his play during its rehearsal. The narrative digressions in *Joseph Andrews* are often configured as editorial commentary on the action as it unfolds or remarks on the aesthetics of writing, two common features of the rehearsal structure. These interruptions temporarily pause the extradiegetic action, just as Bayes’ interruptions suspend his play’s action. In modern criticism, this feature of his writing is often depicted as intrusive and disruptive to dramatic illusion. Digressions replicate an organic quality of both speaking and thinking, though, and thus share affinities with the oral genre. Also, given the amount of dramatic structures that function similarly, specifically asides and monologues, the digression aligns with drama rather than serves as its antithesis. In a recent essay, “From Digressions to Intrusions: Authorial Commentary in the Novel,” Paul Dawson tracks a historical shift in critical evaluation of authorial commentary in the genre, maintaining “what counts as intrusive is both subjective and dependent on prevailing aesthetic assumptions” (162). Dawson contends that eighteenth-century authors and audiences would not have found digressions intrusive, so long as they did not compromise the probability of a narrative’s plot. He also claims that authorial digressions in the eighteenth-century novel were “first used to self-consciously distinguish the realist novel” as depicting a specific kind of fictional referent, that is, one that signifies fictional characters with whom readers may identify, but not actual historical individuals.

The modification of the rehearsal structure is only one of the ways drama permeates *Joseph Andrews*, though. Fielding delights in exploiting the novel's capacity to exercise his wit on virtually any topic, and the frequent appearance of subjects related to drama decisively establishes the depth of his engagement with that medium. The novel contains references to specific plays and play-going, and features characters who are poets, playwrights, or actors.<sup>38</sup> An entire chapter featuring "A Discourse between the Poet and Player; of no other Use in this History, but to Divert the Reader" is only the most apparent and extended vehicle for Fielding to address issues relating to the theater that sometimes just barely relate to the novel's action. Drama not only populates the novel topically, but formally, as well. Traces of multiple dramatic modes, including farce, comedy, tragedy, melodrama appear in the novel and almost every chapter contains elements of the theatre either topically or formally. The *theatrum mundi* topos appears frequently, sometimes in explicit terms when the narrator refers to the book as a "performance," describes a character entering "the stage," or alludes to "the human stage" more generally (Fielding, *JA* 41, 242, 164). Theatrical performance is a guiding metaphor for life generally, but also an analogue for his narrative progression. The initial exposition in the Poet and Player chapter begins with the narrator claiming to "imitate the wise conductors of the stage; who in the midst of a grave action entertain you with some excellent piece of satire or humor called a dance" and demonstrates that Fielding applied dramatic conventions intentionally (Fielding, *JA* 226).

Of Fielding's myriad engagements with dramatic topics and forms in the novel, one of the most consequential to his contribution to the novel's development is his handling of dialogue and represented speech. Fielding's chapter headings teem with descriptions of the types of

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<sup>38</sup> For a more in-depth exploration of the theatrical qualities of *Joseph Andrews*, see William Warner's, "Joseph Andrews as Performative Event" in *Licensing Entertainment The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750*.

speech contained within: discourses, dialogues, disputations, interviews, among other descriptors, all appear as frequent labels for a chapter's content, suggesting the primacy of represented speech to the novel as whole. But even the heavy emphasis on speech found within the headings does not accurately convey the volume of represented speech found within *Joseph Andrews*. The most memorable aspect of Fielding's prose style may be his ironic and digressive narration, but represented speech is actually the predominant form of discourse within the novel, with the voluble narration working in conjunction and expertly navigating between indirect and direct forms of character speech.

Not only does speech representation comprise a great proportion of the novel, but the forms it takes are often dramatic, and even explicitly so. Both monologic and dialogic character speech is often represented dramatically. Monologues appear as long speeches, like Adams' "dissertation" on bravery and politics in Book II, chapter VIII or Joseph's "moral reflections" in Book III, chapter vi. Both are presented as extended first-person speeches with few interruptions. Fielding frequently compartmentalizes speech using chapter divisions and headings; allowing represented speech to appear with only minimal narration, isolating the speech scene by introducing its occasion in the conclusion of the preceding chapter, or in a brief introduction in the open of the following, before allowing the character speech to be the primary focus of entire chapter.

Soliloquy, in particular, is frequently employed in *Joseph Andrews*. In drama mediating speech often seems a necessary device for dramatic narrative development—a tool that allows a playwright to share what often goes unexpressed verbally, like a character's thoughts or a deeply held secret, without straining the audience's acceptance in the plausibility of the represented speech. But in a novel, authors have many available means of representing the unspeakable, like

epistolary or explicit narrative description, signaling that these conventions serve other purposes in the genre. Despite the narrator's capacity for relating character thought and motivations, Fielding includes several instances of novelistic soliloquy and sometimes identifies it as such. While convalescing at Inn, Barnabas overhears Joseph "talking to himself in the following manner: 'O most adorable Pamela! most virtuous Sister, whose example could alone enable me to withstand all the temptations of riches and beauty . . .'" much like in a play, this monologue is designed to be overheard, and Barnabas concludes Joseph must be "very light-headed, and had uttered nothing but a rhapsody of nonsense" (Fielding, *JA* 51). Lady Booby is especially prone to express herself using soliloquy, especially when her sexual overtures are rebuffed. After Joseph's initial rejection, "she burst forth into the following exclamation: 'Whither doth this violent passion hurry us? What meanness do we submit to from its impulse?'" (Fielding, *JA* 36). Again in one of her final scenes in the novel, Lady Booby "began to arraign her own conduct" aloud while alone after a brief conversation with Slipslop (Fielding, *JA* 287). The narrator then acknowledges the form as an approximation of the stage device, after Lady Booby was interrupted with the news of a change in Joseph's affairs and immediately forgot "all the purport of her soliloquy" (Fielding, *JA* 288). Similarly, when agonizing over Fanny's abduction, an imprisoned Joseph "burst out into the following soliloquy" reciting lines from Macbeth to vent his anguish (Fielding, *JA* 232). The recurrence of the term "burst forth" suggests that the device is a preferred means of emotionally charged expression.

Character speech appears in both directly and indirectly, but there are a few instances of irregularities in distinguishing between the two. Direct speech is usually presented as transcription, with narratorial interjections occurring outside of the quotation marks. In a few instances, though, reported speech is indicated by quotation marks with the first person pronoun

modified to better integrate it into the narration, such as in Book I, Chapter XV when Parson Adams offers to alleviate Joseph's financial distress after finding him penniless and ill at an inn:

This goodness of Parson Adams brought tears into Joseph's eyes; he declared 'he had now a second reason to desire life, that he might shew his gratitude to such a friend.'

Adams bad him 'be chearful, for that he plainly saw the Surgeon, besides his ignorance, desired to make a merit of curing him . . .'" (Fielding, *JA* 58-59)

Although this occurs infrequently, it suggests a desire to prioritize direct speech. The homodiegetic narrator is only revealed as such once the narrative is well under way, the narrator often purports to be repeating speeches verbatim, as they were related to him directly. After a long speech in a chapter bearing the inscription: "Moral Reflections by Joseph Andrews . . ." the narrator relates that "this was all of Mr. Joseph Andrew's speech which could get him to recollect, which I have delivered as near as was possible in his own words, with a very small embellishment" (Fielding, *JA* 204). The narrator's assertion that he is a part of his narrated world, despite his near-omniscience rendering this impossible, is a unique characteristic of Fielding's narrative style. Later, the narrator appends a footnote to a ridiculous dialogue between Lady Booby and Beau Didapper to explain that "Lest this [dialogue] should appear unnatural to some Readers, we think proper to acquaint them, that it is taken verbatim from very polite conversation" (Fielding, *JA* 275). At other points in the text the narrator similarly relates that has omitted conversations that he deems dull or repetitive.

The presence of three interpolated tales that substantially digress from the primary plot: "The History of Leonora, or the Unfortunate Jilt;" Mr. Wilson's autobiography, and the inset story of Leonard and Paul read by Parson Adams' son also have strong antecedents in drama. Of these three tales only one, Wilson's autobiography, later comes to bear on the primary plot, while

the others have more complicated relationships to the narrative action. In contemporary drama usually main piece plays were often accompanied by other forms of theatrical entertainment—puppet shows, farces, songs, etc, one-act plays, etc., much in the same way. Additionally, the third interpolation is a actually another book being read aloud by a character, eliciting an obvious parallel in the play-within-a-play structure Fielding uses to such advantage. Even more consequential, though, is that Fielding embeds narrative commentary and direct character speech even within the interpolated tales. A traveller relates Leonora’s story to her coach companions using third-person narration and represents direct speech within the narrated story, which is occasionally interrupted by her auditors. Quotation marks are also used to indicate Leonara’s interior monologue, which again resembles soliloquy. Mr. Wilson includes supposedly direct dialogues within his autobiography, which Parson Adams often interrupts with his own commentary. The third and final tale, that of Leonard and Paul, is a story read aloud by Parson Adams’ son, Dick, to Lady Booby from an unidentified book. As with other instances of extended scenes of speech representation, the tale receives its own dedicated chapter, preceded by the narrator’s introduction “Dick began as in the following Chapter” in the concluding line in the preceding chapter. Parson Adams occasionally interrupts Dick’s performance to correct his pronunciation or to object to a point in the source text, but for the most part the chapter is a dedicated oral recitation of an inset published work of fiction. In an instance of metafictional doubling, this book then features a narrative style that mirrors that of *Joseph Andrews*. After a description of Paul and Leonard’s joyful reunion, the embedded narrator adds the line, “not to detain the reader with minute circumstances,” before furthering the plot’s action.

## **Conclusion**

Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* was only one of the most overt examples of the ways in which authors adapted *The Rehearsal's* meddling playwright figure into a form of performative narration within the novel. Even subtle narratorial interjections, those brief appeals from novelists to their "dear readers," are directly descended from the type of interventions into the intradiegetic world that Buckingham's play depicts. The abundance of metafictional techniques adumbrated in this chapter's first half were regularly channeled into early novels through performative narration, the incorporation of internal literary criticism, and dramatically stylized speech forms, demonstrating a fruitful lineage from plays to novels.

When we return to the quotation regarding the inexpressibly lovely "Miss \_\_\_\_\_" that begins this chapter, we sense why metafictional techniques were appealing to early novelists. By importing dramatic methods of speech representation into the novel, metafiction not only extends our enjoyment of dramatic forms by offering them in the privacy of our own homes, but it also nurtures a broader human desire to participate in our favorite pastimes—to be entertained by a virtual reality while also interacting with it. Today this desire takes the form of interactive entertainment media like "choose your adventure" books, appisodes, or, more relevant to Fielding's "Miss \_\_\_\_\_", *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*, a Netflix movie that allowed viewers to make decisions for a character that determined which of the multiple versions of the conclusion they could view. The longevity and continued popularity of metafictional techniques, modulated overtime for new media, exposes and capitalizes on the desire to interact with fiction.

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### CHAPTER III

#### Performing Sentiment in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *She Stoops to Conquer*

The emergence of eighteenth-century literary sentimentalism coincided with two contemporary cultural phenomena: a reformation of licentious Restoration manners through codified forms of politeness, and a performative understanding of social identity. Oliver Goldsmith explores sentimentalism within the context of these two often-conflicting facets of mid-eighteenth century society in his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and his play *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), working through the ways in which a literary mode that celebrates authentic emotional responsiveness to others can be reconciled with social discourses that emphasize artifice and role-playing. Through a shared focus on acting and social performance in these works, Goldsmith presents a series of questions to his audience and reader: how does one meaningfully connect with others when we all merely act parts? And is the type of authentic human connection celebrated in most sentimental works even possible in a society dominated by hierarchical and stultifying customs and deception? For his first attempt to work through the intricacies these questions entail, he depicts a protagonist who endeavors to maintain a sentimental worldview in a world filled with imposture and disguise in his novel. He pursues this in part by incorporating dramatic speech from sentimental comedy—a form he later repudiated. The result was morally ambiguous, though, so Goldsmith next turned to dramatic composition to crystalize his stance on sentiment's value in *The Good Natur'd Man* (1768) before advocating a

return to Restoration modes of expression as the most forceful and effective means of articulating authentic emotion in *She Stoops to Conquer*. Dramatic speech thus emerges as a versatile tool that allows Goldsmith to deploy multiple lines of sentimental critique; he demonstrates the inefficacy of sentimental comedy's language through its incorporation into the novel, and in *She Stoops to Conquer* he reveals that the artificial monologic speech forms of Restoration drama are better suited for expressing authentic emotion than those traditionally found within sentimental fiction.

In this chapter, I first aim to contextualize sentimentalism's emergence from two intersecting cultural trends, which I argue occasions Goldsmith's ambiguous stance toward sentiment in the novel. Through a comparison with language from Sir Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), I then show the ways in which Goldsmith attempted to neutralize or reform the language of sentimental comedy by incorporating it within his novel—an attempt that failed. Finally, I argue Goldsmith sought an antidote to the type of inauthenticity occasioned by an overreliance on politeness and social identity play by incorporating speech forms from Restoration comedy that actually allow his characters to express genuine emotions.

### **Critical Backgrounds**

*The Vicar of Wakefield* is a puzzling text. The primary problem that has persistently plagued Goldsmith scholars is whether the text is a sentimental novel or a satire of sentimental novels. Critical divisions have been sharp. Some scholars read the text as a straightforward example of sentimentalism, including G.J. Barker-Benfield, who hails the novel as a satire on “the unfitness of the over sensitized man for ‘the world’,” while others argue that it is an ironic send up of the mode, such as Robert H. Hopkins (Barker-Benfield 142). Middle ground exists,

though; Robert L. Mack has suggested the possibility that Goldsmith may have “in fact set out actually to write a satire on the vogue for sentimental fiction or ‘sensibility’ in general...yet allowed his narrative in this instance to spin so wildly out of control as to lose all authority over his own plot and characters” (xxxiii). Michael Griffin similarly contends that the novel is “a satire on the futility of unworldly sentiment, while at the same time partially a vehicle for it” (73). George Haggerty sought to nuance the satire or sentiment controversy by declaring the dichotomy false, and arguing that the plot’s vacillation between happiness and misery actually demolishes the distinction (25).

This issue continues to dominate recent work on Goldsmith as well. In 2018 Mark Loveridge and James Kim both weighed in on the satire or sentiment debate. Loveridge identifies what he sees as “patterns of rhetorical play and absurdity” that allow for multiple instances of doubling and result in the in the novel’s ambiguous stance towards sentiment and Kim argues that its “notorious generic instability merely symptomatizes a more fundamental gender instability” (Loveridge 23; Kim 22). In contrast, Goldsmith’s use of dramatic themes and forms within the novel have been infrequently explored.

Because Goldsmith so clearly expounded his preferred dramaturgy in *An Essay on the Theater*, it seems that theater historians would more easily reach consensus about his place in theater history. One, though, Robert Hume, has so strenuously argued that sentimental comedy’s historical popularity is a myth invented in by Goldsmith that his argument must now be acknowledged in any works addressing the issue. Hume argued that Goldsmith grossly overstates sentimental comedy’s popularity as a straw man to destroy in order to promote his own dramaturgy. Arthur Friedman, in contrast, believes that by publishing the essay anonymously in a unpopular publication, Goldsmith could not realistically expect it to have much effect on

potential audiences. Despite Hume's persistence, most theater historians have acknowledged that while Goldsmith's characterization of sentimental comedy's contemporary popularity may have been overstated, sentimental comedy was indeed a popular subgenre for most of the eighteenth century, which inspired Goldsmith to leverage its conventions as part of a more comprehensive critique of literary sentimentalism.

### **Politely Stepping Off the Restoration Stage**

Sentimentalism emerged during the early eighteenth century as a literary mode that espoused a "belief in the innate benevolence of man, a credo which had the literary corollary that the depiction of such benevolence engaged in philanthropic action or generous tears was a laudable aim" (Watt 174). While a useful and economical distillation, Ian Watt's definition elides the definitional ambiguity that plagues the term and corresponding concept. More accurately conceived of as a "refractory term," sentimentalism encompasses "a spectrum of attitudes reaching from pity for a non-existing object at one extreme to pity for all humanity at the other" (Ellis 4-5). Despite the inadequacy of precise attempts to define sentimentalism, both in lexical and varying academic disciplinary contexts, the consensus is that it entails a focus on innate human benevolence and a celebration of intense, authentic displays of emotion, especially empathy and sympathy, that starkly contrasts with the seventeenth-century Hobbesian view of man as primarily self-interested and power hungry.

Laura Brown traces a formal evolution from Restoration drama to sentimental drama that emphasizes changes in socially defined standards of merit as represented on stage. According to Brown, plays during the Restoration, both comedic and heroic, determined individual value by a "standard of assessment, enacted either in the niceties of the platonic honor code or in the witty

decorum of contemporary aristocratic manners,” that is, through a character’s adherence to social conventions (xv-xvi). However, by the turn of the eighteenth century the standard shifts from conformance to group identity norms to a more individualized basis of merit—one’s “moral worth” could be gauged by emotional responsiveness to others’ misfortunes. A spectator of a sentimental play or reader of sentimental fiction may assess a character’s moral worth by the appropriateness of his or her responses to pathetic scenes, and his or her own responsiveness to the literary depiction was in turn an indication of moral values.

The mode also emerged from a cultural reformation of Restoration manners. This too can be interpreted as a reaction against Restoration drama, specifically the type of witty, ribald, conversation found in stage comedies. Refinement replaced clever repartee as the reigning aesthetic, thanks in large part to the discourse of politeness propounded most explicitly by Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury. Lawrence Klein defines politeness as “the art of pleasing in company,” or, citing a contemporary definition, “a dexterous management of our Words and Actions, whereby we make other People have better Opinions of us and themselves,” suggesting the extent to which politeness was performance based (3-4). The language of politeness became “a major idiom” and prominent feature of eighteenth-century social and cultural practices (Klein 2). Referring to an individual’s comportment when interacting socially, one was considered ‘polite’ only if he or she behaved according to prevailing social customs and expectations. This emphasis on politeness was audience focused, but unlike the antagonist style of audience engagement favored by Restoration playwrights, this politeness was centered on conciliation.

Both the culture of politeness and its moral inflection, while contributing to the appearance and popularity of sentimental literature, also implanted the seeds of its critique.

Regulating behavior to please one's interlocutors necessitates identifying others' needs and desires, which entails a heightened scrutiny of others' appearance and perceived affective states. Moreover, Shaftesbury developed a notion of an "innate human faculty that determines right and wrong by allowing one to experience another's pains and pleasures through sympathetic identification," which he refers to as a "moral sense" (Noble 63). Many found it difficult to believe altruistic impulses are genuinely motivated by concern for others rather than the self. Both politeness and the sentimental attitudes it facilitated orient "individuals towards each other's needs and wishes" but this "polite concern for others might be a secondary effect of a far more basic self-concern. Thus, the altruistic or charitable appearance of politeness might conceal opportunistic egoism," as Klein observes (4).

Solipsism thinly veiled as benevolence for others was one of the most notable charges leveled at sentimental characters and plots, both in contemporary and modern criticism, as well, and this is precisely what Goldsmith demonstrates in his many depictions of immoderate benevolence. Likely inspired by his own penchant for improvident generosity, time and again Goldsmith creates characters whose indiscriminate benevolence imperils their own fortune, including in the essays "On Justice and Generosity" (1759) and "The Proceedings of Providence Vindicated" (1759), in his fiction: *The Life of Nash* (1762), *The Citizen of the World* (1762) and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and in his play, *The Good Natur'd Man*.<sup>39</sup> These works expose the razor-thin distinction between a sincere desire to help others and a narcissistic drive for praise, and express a broader skepticism of the ability to accurately gauge motives from actions.<sup>40</sup>

Despite these charges, literary sentimentalism's proponents recognized in it serious potential for social change. Sentimental novelists depicted lower-class characters exhibiting the

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<sup>39</sup> see Friedman, pg. 3 for a more comprehensive exploration of these titles.

<sup>40</sup> see Goldsmith's letter describing this tendency (pg. 61, collected letters)

same refined emotional and moral responsiveness as their social betters, whereas earlier genres, such as epic poetry and romance, predominantly featured aristocratic superiors (Todd 13).

Indeed, some texts demonstrate that innate goodness was to be found in the lower classes as often or even more than in the upper classes, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), in which a servant girl valiantly protects her virginity from her unscrupulous aristocratic employer.

At the same time that social rules governing politeness encouraged one to study externals as signifiers of affective states, identity was established and maintained through performance. Dror Wahrman has persuasively demonstrated that during the majority of the eighteenth-century, identity was seen as mutable—one identity could be relatively easily be substituted or changed with another, similar to a masquerade costume. He refers to this historically contingent understanding of identity as the *ancien régime of identity*. In the absence of a stable 'self' from which to turn is a social identity, which can be approximated because it is understood as the way in which one is socially situated; it is a role that is performed rather than an essential set of controlling impulses influencing behavior and thought like Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*. Categories of personal identity were primarily collective, relational, and socially constructed during this period. One means of achieving the *ancien régime of identity's* fluidity was by indicating social identity through dress. Adopting the clothing that corresponds to a recognizable social group allows others to recognize an individual as a social object and to cast a preliminary identity. It also suggests a rubric by which one can speculate about an individuals past and future behavior (Stone 142). This facet of early modern social life was likewise reflected in literature. Disguise and masquerade are two common features of Restoration comedy, a subgenre Goldsmith much admired, and the plots of his two most famous works rely on the copious use of disguise and identity play.

The prevalence of identity play logically led to some apprehension of appearance as a reliable index of social status and moral values, though, which was then reflected in contemporary literature. The potential of politeness to promote sociability was contingent upon the *appearance* of sincerity. Because one of sentimentalism's core beliefs is that humans are innately good, it similarly advanced a notion that behavior should be motivated by moral impulses and an innate inclination to virtue rather than obligation. In this sense, then, outright deception, even in the name of social conformity, is at odds with sentimental values. *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *She Stoops to Conquer* extensively expose the dangers of an overreliance on appearances as indicators of either moral or social values through depictions of disguise and social performance. In the novel, Goldsmith demonstrates the ways in which the combination of a naïve reliance on appearance as a signifier of value and a sentimental value system that assumes universal goodness can result in catastrophe. Similarly, the source of Marlow's excessive timidity in *She Stoops to Conquer* is the intimidating appearances and ritualized behavior of women of his own social class, thus instantiating Klein's observation that "when politeness declined into mere formality or ceremoniousness, it could be portrayed as hostile to true sociability" (4). Disguise then regains the liberating function it serves in Restoration comedy by allowing the central romantic couple to converse unhindered by the restraints of custom.

### **The Need for Sentimental Containment**

The shifts in attitudes and popular taste that I have been tracking above occasioned the appearance of a new dramatic form initiated by Sir Richard Steele, sentimental comedy. Spurred by Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) early eighteenth-century "writers reassessed the moral function of comedy in an increasing

egalitarian and individualistic world” by advocating for “ideals of politeness and sentiment” in drama (Romanska and Ackerman 98-99). Frank H. Ellis defines sentimental comedy as “comedy on the stage that arouses sentimental reactions,” and identifies “a sprinkling of melancholy conversation,” “reckless, self-sacrificing virtue,” “undeserved distress,” and “overt moralizing” as four secondary characteristics (19). Dramatists employed rhetoric designed to elicit the strongest possible emotional response from the audience, and sentimental comedy always concluded with a happy ending, no matter how implausible.

Although sentimentalism was present as a broader literary trend much earlier in works such as Colley Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift* (1696), Steele set out to self-consciously establish the model for sentiment in stage comedies in *The Conscious Lovers* in 1722. In the play’s preface he asserts that “the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the fourth act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the quarrel with his friend” (Steele 220). The “quarrel with a friend” Steele alludes to is actually a critical scene that occurs after Myrtle, incensed that Bevil has received a letter from Lucinda, challenges Bevil to a duel. In a moment of indignation Bevil momentarily assents to the challenge before regaining his composure and declining. Steele’s choice of phrase here thus initiates a campaign to conceal gritty reality through elegant language. He continues by expressing a hope that Bevil’s self-restraint “may have some effect upon the Goths and Vandals that frequent the theaters,” or, he threatens, “a more polite audience may supply their absence” (Steele 220).

Because Steele designed his dramatic speech in *The Conscious Lovers* in direct opposition to that found in Restoration comedies he selected speech forms that starkly contrast with the previous era’s (and later Goldsmith’s) preferred dramaturgy. Steele objected to criticism that his play is not actually humorous by arguing that “anything that has its foundation in

happiness and success must be allowed to be the object of comedy, and sure it must be an improvement to introduce a joy too exquisite for laughter” (221). Goldsmith, it seems, had ample reasons to advocate for laughter’s proper authority in comedy in his later essay. In *The Conscious Lovers*’ prologue Leonard Welsted explains that Steele would rather “please by wit that scorns the aids of vice” than follow the strain of his bawdy predecessors. “No more let ribaldry, with license writ / Usurp the name of eloquence or wit” he pleads, “‘Tis yours with breeding to refine the age, / To chasten wit, and moralize the stage” (Steele 222). Ellis identifies overt moralization as “the first characteristic of the new drama” and this often took the form of trite platitudes tacked on to a soliloquy or aside (21). Steele also replaces the rapid-fire volleys of sharp-witted, often sexually charged dialogue characteristic of Restoration comedy with “entire scenes [that] are in effect monologues punctuated by the occasional enabling ‘phatic’ interjection from a supposed interlocutor,” as Peter Hynes observed (151-152).

While sentimental comedy proved a popular and long lasting subgenre, it was not without its critics, and chief among those was Oliver Goldsmith. Sentimental comedy remained a popular form when Goldsmith wrote *An Essay on the Theater; Or, A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy* (1773), although over fifty years had elapsed since Steele’s play. Hugh Kelly’s *False Delicacy* (1768) and Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian* (1771) were only two examples that immediately preceded Goldsmith’s attempt to weaken the contemporary appeal of “this species of bastard tragedy” as he condescendingly calls it. He defines the subgenre as a dramatic composition in which “the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses, rather than the faults of mankind, make our interest in the piece” (Goldsmith, *ET* 212). Goldsmith draws a distinction between laughing comedy and sentimental comedy that rests upon seemingly tidy but unstable oppositional binaries directly related to

characters' social class. Adhering to the Aristotelian distinction between tragedy and comedy, he explains that tragedy should feature "the exhibition of human distress" resulting from "the misfortunes of the great" while comedy should feature "the exhibition of human absurdity" resulting from "the frailties of the lower part of mankind" (Goldsmith, *ET* 210). After establishing the low as comedy's proper subject, he dives into the heart of the matter, maintaining:

The principal question therefore is, whether in describing low or middle life, an exhibition of its follies be not preferable to a detail of its calamities? Or, in other words, which deserves the preference? The weeping sentimental comedy, so much in fashion at present, or the laughing and even low comedy, which seems to have been last exhibited by Vanburgh [sic] and Cibber? (Goldsmith, *ET* 210)

A primary source of his irritation with sentimental comedy is that it depicts the misfortunes of middle and low life rather than ridiculing its foibles, and thus inappropriately appropriates tragic dramatic conventions. The novel, in contrast, had been established as an appropriate vehicle for depicting the challenges faced by those at the middle or bottom of the social hierarchy during the first half of the eighteenth century, and before he railed against sentimental comedy on stage Goldsmith had attempted to restrain its excesses by embedding its speech forms within *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

### **Sentimentally Dramatic Ambivalence in the Novel**

*The Vicar of Wakefield* was Goldsmith's first attempt to work through the contradictions and ambiguities that emerged from his desire to celebrate the generous impulses promoted by literary sentimentalism and his equally ardent distrust of their underlying motivations. Goldsmith

launches a multifaceted campaign to reform sentimentalism in his novel. His first approach is thematic: he both problematizes the assumption that benevolence is an unqualified virtue and illustrates the instability of appearance as an index of innate values to demonstrate the danger of a sentimental worldview. The second approach is formal: he fosters skepticism of the authenticity of sentimental language by using an unreliable narrative mode and embedding speech structures from sentimental comedy within the novel, which results in a destabilization of literary sentimentalism rather than a full repudiation.

Goldsmith was an established professional writer by the time he wrote *The Vicar of Wakefield* in 1762.<sup>41</sup> The novel's colorful history rivals that of its protagonist, according to James Boswell in *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. Goldsmith asked Samuel Johnson to sell the manuscript while he was detained by his landlady for rental arrears. Recognizing the work's merit, Johnson found a bookseller and procured the advance sum of 60 pounds, thereby securing Goldsmith's freedom (Boswell 220). The novel was published four years later on March 27, 1766, after Goldsmith's reputation was bolstered by the publication of his poem *The Traveller*, and it enjoyed modest success during Goldsmith's lifetime followed by considerable acclaim in ensuing generations (Mack xi). In fact, since its initial publication *The Vicar of Wakefield* has never been out of print.

Goldsmith's thematic treatment of benevolence in *The Vicar of Wakefield* casts doubt on its status as a merit by suggesting its often-selfish motivations. Primrose introduces his family in the first chapter as having "but one character, that of being all equally generous, credulous, simple, and inoffensive," proudly prioritizing generosity as their most significant distinguishing feature (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 12). But Primrose's generosity also serves as a convenient means of signifying his class status. Class-consciousness permeates Primrose's narrative through multiple

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<sup>41</sup> Although it is hard precisely verify, this is the date cited by most Goldsmith scholars (Mack x)

references to his family's gentility as well as their place in the social hierarchy. As the narrator, Primrose represents himself as both a sensible clergyman who is the preserver of the poor and as a well-bred gentleman with wealthy friends. Subtle hints about his class status interrupt his initial description of rural simplicity and bucolic ease through casual references, often tantamount to a modern 'humble brag'. A large portion of the family's time is spent "visiting with our rich neighbours and relieving such as were poor" who were much improved not only from the family's charity but also by virtue of their company (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 18):

Our cousins too, even to the fortieth remove, all remembered their affinity, without any help from the Herald's office, and came very frequently to see us. Some of them did us no great honour by these claims of kindred; as we had the blind, the maimed, and the halt amongst the number. However, my wife always insisted that as they were the same flesh and blood, they should sit with us at the same table. So that if we had not, very rich, we generally had very happy friends about us; for this remark will hold good thro' life, that the poorer the guest, the better pleased he ever is with being treated. (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 19)

That a country clergyman should be popular amongst relatives is unsurprising, but the admission that he deems "the blind, the maimed, and the halt" as those who "did us no great honor" and only includes them at his family's table at his wife's behest prompts skepticism of the true purpose of Primrose's magnanimity. Primrose's intent in sharing this anecdote becomes evident with the concluding aphorism "the poorer the guest, the better pleased he ever is with being treated," which implies he derives self satisfaction from social condescension and praise rather than the act of largesse.

However self-serving, though, Primrose's initial generous impulses at least seem sincere. When the family stops to rest at an inn on the way to their new home, he overhears a conversation between the landlord and his wife about a guest who was unable to pay his bill after donating his money to save a condemned soldier. Overhearing this account, Primrose demands to meet the man, Burchell, and despite his current financial distress relieves his debt. Indeed, Primrose uses generosity as a touchstone for measuring one's character, only to discover it an unreliable gauge because of the impossibility of ascertaining motives that inspire any particular instance of generosity.

Primrose even has difficulty ascribing his own past motives; he frequently questions those that pertain to his behavior towards Burchell, in particular. Instances in which he admits this uncertainty amount to reverse asides in that they signal that he is either concealing or cannot identify his prior motivations. Primrose recalls delivering a rather harsh assessment of Burchell's history to his family in which he concluded that Burchell "is poor, and perhaps deserves poverty; for he has neither the ambition to be independent, nor skill to be useful'. The narrator, however, then confesses: "prompted, perhaps, by some secret reasons, I delivered this observation with too much acrimony" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 29). This technique reappears when he later observes that he "began, for certain reasons, to be displeased by the frequency" of Burchell's visits (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 34). The implication is that he disapproves of the budding romance between Burchell and Sophia and retrospectively suspects his past behavior was motivated by self interest in some instances, but as narrator he is unable or unwilling to commit to a definitive interpretation.

A second facet of Goldsmith's thematic critique of sentimentalism appears through the novel's presentation of deception, social imposture, and disguise, a feature frequently found in the Restoration comedies he so admires. "Fortune prevented him from knowing that there were

rascals,” Burchell explained of Sir William Thornhill’s early troubles, and the Primrose family suffers from the same delusion. The family’s sentimental attitudes and social aspirations blind them to a deceptive and hostile reality, which manifests in the text through the copious number of disguised characters seeking to take advantage of the family. The most notable disguised character is Sir William Thornhill, but the Primroses are so beset by disguised individuals that it is hard to imagine how they could ever again trust appearances by the story’s end. Squire Thornhill encourages two prostitutes to disguise themselves as society women in order to lure the naïve and impressionable Primrose daughters to London, Primrose is conned out of a horse by Jenkinson, who also dupes his son Moses, and he also encounters a butler disguised as his master when searching for Olivia.

A misplaced trust in the goodness of anyone whose appearance or behavior resemble his own, in particular, leads Primrose into trouble. When he first meets Jenkinson, he recalls that “I never in my life saw a figure that prepossessed me more favourably. His locks of silver grey venerably shaded his temples, and his green old age seemed to be the result of health and benevolence” (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 72). Because the venerable man’s appearance reminds Primrose of his own, and so he assumes that the man is similarly inclined to benevolence. This hunch is then seemingly confirmed when he observes a sentimental scene in which the elderly man donates money to a youth while saying aloud “to do good is a duty we owe to all our fellow creatures: take this, I wish it were more; but five pounds will relieve your distress, and you are welcome” (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 61). Primrose describes his response to the scene: “the modest youth shed tears of gratitude, and yet his gratitude was scarce equal to mine. I could have hugged the good old man in my arms, his benevolence pleased me so” (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 73). Primrose here models an ideal spectator of sentimental comedy—he is easily moved to tears by a touching

scene that causes him to be favorably disposed to Jenkinson, who swiftly cheats him out of a horse.

Primrose's "lack of savoir faire is meant to be, and can on occasion be felt as, part of an endearing simplicity of nature, but his innocence of the world can move close to dangerous ignorance," observes Macdonald Emslie (26). Rather than a narrative flaw, though, this appears to be an intentional choice that allows Goldsmith to show how adherence to a sentimental value system can function as self-deception. Those inclined to sentimental tendencies are overeager to identify them in others, and too apt to accept external marks of goodness without verifying the fitness of their objects of pity.

Although Goldsmith saw the dangers of sentimental naiveté, he also appreciated its underlying principles and the novel's elastic length and lack of rigidly defined aesthetic principles allowed him to experiment with ways to reconcile these conflicting positions. Formally, Goldsmith harnessed the novel's versatility to integrate a structure associated with Augustan story telling with the emotional urgency characteristic of sentimental fiction. The Augustan authors who came before Goldsmith wrote with "a strong sense of literature as finished product" and their prose features an easily identifiable plot with a clear beginning, middle, and end (Frye 8). In contrast, prose fiction written during the "age of sensibility" is less concerned with plot and more with "literature as process," concentrating on eliciting moods that psychologically bind text and reader (Frye 10). Goldsmith also blends features from multiple literary antecedents in this novel, including ample use of pastoral motifs, a plot resembling the biblical story of Job, a long dialogue on current political affairs, and interpolated genres within the novel including a ballad, an elegy, and a sermon. Goldsmith teasingly alludes to other novelistic modes, as well, such as when he bathetically announces "I profess with the veracity of

a historian” that no one ever found fault with his family’s gooseberry wine—both mimicking and mocking the type of novelistic truth claim of which Behn and others were so fond (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 9).

Much of the support for an ironic treatment of sentimentalism derives from analyses of Primrose’s homodiegetic narration. In order to read the text as fully sentimental, one must accept Primrose as a reliable narrator. Primrose functions on two textual levels, within the extradiegetic level as narrator who editorializes and reflects on the narrative action and within the intradiegetic level as the protagonist, which limits the extent to which the reader can fully trust the narrator’s recollection of events and estimation of his own character. During the novel’s first half, Primrose the narrator explicitly attempts to influence the reader’s impression of all of the characters he introduces, himself included, and as MacDonald Emslie observes, “in the Vicar’s mouth . . . explicitness disconcerts” (12). The homodiegetic narration creates a gulf between Goldsmith’s intentions and techniques and those of his fictional narrator/protagonist, allowing considerable space for contrasting interpretations of the text. The theory that “the novel’s seeming artlessness is in fact nothing more than a self-conscious pose that has been assumed by the author—part of a disingenuous attempt deliberately to trick his readers and to raise false generic and narrative expectations” only to subvert or parody the conventions of sentimental fiction extends the fundamental distrust of appearances within the novel to its narrative situation—we should not trust that the narrator is who he says he is any more than Primrose should trust the strangers he encounters within the novel (Mack xxxii). The difficulties that arise from this narrative method are mitigated by moments of self-doubt when the narrator retrospectively admits to shortcomings or blunders, but Primrose’s sustained effusion of opinions maintains reader awareness that the narrative is filtered through a single subjective viewpoint.

Primrose's sustained commentary also minimizes the distance between diegetic levels, in contrast to homodiegetic narrators who only occasionally editorialize on the intradiegetic action. Consequently, moments of metaleptic frame breaking seem like idiosyncratic displays of folksy charm rather than startling epistemological incursions. In one such instance Primrose uses direct reader address to aver "we had two romantic names in the family, but I solemnly protest I had no hand in it" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 11). He again later breaks frame to explain "as every reader, however beggarly himself, is fond of high-lived dialogues, with anecdotes of Lords, Ladies, and Knights of the Garter, I must beg leave to give him the concluding part of the present conversation" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 50). Shortly thereafter he maintains the sense of ongoing interaction with the reader by commenting "but previously I should have mentioned the very impolite behavior of Mr. Burchell" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 50). These moments acknowledge Primrose's authorial performance, even if he attempts to refrain from digressing too far from narrative action as he claims during the final chapter, when he catches himself in a digression and states "but to return, for I am not apt to digress" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 169). Metafiction also appears indirectly through discussions of matters related to literary composition. Olivia claims to have "read a great deal of controversy" citing as evidence her familiarity with disputes in DeFoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Her brother George later recounts his own failed attempts at professional authorship, describing various seedy aspects of the trade in detail.

Goldsmith's choice of narrative method also enables him to incorporate sentimental language while simultaneously showing its impropriety. Primrose adopts two methods of representing speech from sentimental comedy, in particular: aphoristic overt moralizing and overwrought rhetorical flourishes during moments of despair. When Primrose expresses himself

using speech borrowed from sentimental comedy, though, members of his family swiftly rebuke him, thereby generating another line of sentimental critique.

Goldsmith imported multiple thematic and formal features from drama into his novel, in addition to those recognizable from sentimental comedy. The novel's structure could be divided neatly into the two dramatic subgenres, with the lighthearted first half approximating a cheerful domestic comedy and the second half replicating the emotional intensity and rapid vicissitudes of fortune characteristic of sentimental comedy. This transition also corresponds with an increased rate of direct presentation of character speech in the novel's second half. Initially Primrose primarily uses reported speech as a means to prompt his own sermon-like responses represented directly, a technique borrowed from sentimental comedy, but as the Primrose's family fortunes become increasingly imperiled and their responses to catastrophes intensify, the rate of direct discourse increases until it becomes the predominant representational method for character speech. This increase also coincides with the rate of dramatic structural devices that together lead to a climax in chapter twenty-seven that is rife with multiple instances of *peripeteia*, or dramatic reversals of fortune and *anagnorisis*, the discovery of previously unknown information—devices used elsewhere, as well—before the family's final salvation arrives via *deus ex machina*. Other dramatic structures and devices were modified from sentimental comedy, as well, including two autobiographies that are delivered as dramatic monologues.

For the majority of the novel's first half Primrose sustains focus on his act of narration by reserving direct speech for his own past utterances that take the form of the overt moralizing Ellis identifies as a distinguishing feature of sentimental comedy. In the novel's initial chapters Primrose primarily uses reported speech as a means to prompt his own sermon-like response represented directly. The first instance of direct speech appears at the end of the second chapter,

when a relative informs Primrose of his financial ruin. He represents this conversation directly but only as a pretense to relate his response in the most forceful manner possible. He responds to the calamitous news by saying “if what you tell me be true, and if I am to be a beggar, it shall never make me a rascal, or induce me to disavow my principles” (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 15). This also sets the tone and introduces the central theme of the ensuing narrative. Goldsmith’s choice of a clergyman protagonist thus serves as handy pretext to simulate sentimental comedy’s penchant for sermonistic speech. The second chapter has no less than three short speeches resembling sermons in which he exhorts his family to remain morally upright in the face of adversity, and each concludes with a tidy aphorism for ease of remembrance, including “the nakedness of the indigent world may be clothed from the trimmings of the vain”<sup>42</sup> and “disproportioned friendships ever terminate in disgust” (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 24, 27). However sincere may be his principles, though, the more Primrose’s speech resembles performance, the less the reader trusts his narration.

Primrose’s moralizing and tendency to express himself through handy maxims strongly resembles language found in *The Conscious Lovers*. Bevil is similarly inclined to sermonize in his soliloquies and he likewise has a penchant for aphoristic phrasing, including “we must often in this life, go on in our good offices even under the displeasure of those to whom we do them, in compassion to their weaknesses and mistakes” or “but the best condition of human life is but a gentler misery” (Steele 2.1). Bevil’s language is not confined to the immediate dramatic situation, but may be broadly applied as well. He is not alone in this habit, either. Isabella is similarly inclined to pontificate, as is Myrtle, who delivers a speech that would do as well for a pulpit as a stage: “there is nothing manly but what is conducted by reason and agreeable to the

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<sup>42</sup> Hardcastle repeats this maxim in *She Stoops to Conquer*, as well: “I could never teach the fools of this age, that the indigent world could be clothed out of the trimmings of the vain” (1.1).

practice of virtue and justice. And yet, how many have been sacrificed to that idol, the unreasonable opinion of men!” (Steele 4.2). Overt moralizing by a Vicar is both more contextually appropriate and more palatable than similar sentiments conveyed by young lovers in Steele’s play, but while Goldsmith may have approved the spirit of these values, he demonstrates the inefficacy of dramatic moralizing through the Primrose family’s subsequent inability to attend to his exhortations, signaling a larger failure of sentimental language to affect meaningful change.

Goldsmith also borrows dramatic monologue from drama. While Primrose’s generous impulses are sincere but often self-serving, Goldsmith provides a different formulation for Sir William Thornhill disguised as Burchell. After Primrose relieves Burchell’s immediate distress at the inn, he joins the family on their journey to their new home and delivers Sir William Thornhill’s history as an extended uninterrupted direct speech. A distinguished baronet whose nephew, Squire Thornhill, is the Primroses’ new landlord and the story’s antagonist, Sir William’s backstory amounts to a sentimental mini-narrative of its own. Burchell explains that:

the slightest distress, whether real or fictitious, touched him to the quick, and his soul laboured under a sickly sensibility of the miseries of others. Thus disposed to relieve, it will be easily conjectured, he found numbers disposed to solicit: his profusions began to impair his fortune, but not his good-nature; that, indeed, was seen to encrease as the other seemed to decay: he grew improvident as he grew poor; and though he talked like a man of sense, his actions were those of a fool. Still, however, being surrounded with importunity, and no longer able to satisfy every request that was made him, instead of money he gave promises. They were all he had to bestow, and he had not resolution enough to give any man pain by a denial. By this he drew round him crowds of

dependents, whom he was sure to disappoint; yet wished to relieve. These hung upon him for a time, and left him with merited reproaches and contempt. (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 29-30)

Sir William's story is a cautionary tale; he is only able to repair his fortune and reputation by extricating himself from society and becoming a peripatetic wanderer in Europe. With these experiences behind him, Sir William returned to England in the disguise of Burchell, who explains to the Primrose family that Sir William has learned to dispense his charity in a "rational and moderate" manner (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 30).

Burchell's recitation of Sir William's biography also achieves a sophisticated narrative maneuver that loosely resembles a dialogic aside. "My attention was so much taken up by Mr. Burchell's account," Primrose recalls, "that I scarce looked forward" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 20). While Primrose raptly listens to Burchell's narration, Sophia is thrown from her horse into a violent river, which occasions Burchell's rescue, allowing him to demonstrate his worth and initiating the pair's romantic interest. Thus, the narrative action transpiring around the depicted conversation continues, just as it would if it were presented onstage through dialogic aside.

Direct speech overtakes reported speech forms in the novel's second half, and even narration as it serves as the predominant narrative method in some sections. Several chapters consist almost exclusively of direct speech, including George's autobiography and a long sermon Primrose delivered during his imprisonment. This corresponds with both an elevation in emotional intensity and an increase in the amount of conventional dramatic thematic content. Multiple instances of *peripeteia* occur and this portion of the narrative is so crowded with action, coincidences, and reversals it could fill an entire novel (or several plays) of its own. After the family's financial ruin sets the plot in action, the second major calamity the Primrose's suffer occurs in chapter seventeen through a lightning fast reversal. During a celebration of Olivia's

forthcoming marriage to a local farmer, the family cheerfully discusses the upcoming wedding while enjoying their famous gooseberry wine, conversation on matrimony, and songs. Primrose joyfully proclaims: “I think myself happier now than the greatest monarch upon earth...we shall leave a good and virtuous race of children behind us. While we live they will be our support and our pleasure here, and when we die they will transmit our honour untainted to posterity” (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 78). This speech is then immediately interrupted by the arrival of Primrose’s son Dick who bears the news of Olivia’s elopement with Thornhill. Devastated, Primrose completely reverses track by proclaiming:

My children, go and be miserable; for we shall never enjoy one hour more. And O may heaven’s everlasting fury light upon him and his! Thus to rob me of my child! And sure it will, for taking back my sweet innocent that I was leading up to heaven. Such sincerity as my child was possess of. But all our earthly happiness is now over! Go, my children go, and be miserable and infamous; for my heart is broken within me! (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 79)

The abruptness of the shift borders on ludicrous but replicates the swift reversals characteristic of drama, similar to Bevil’s about-face in the near duel scene in *The Conscious Lovers*. But because Primrose’s speech reads as if it were borrowed from a sentimental comedy, Moses quickly remonstrates his father for expressing outrage and despondence in this form, expostulating “is this your fortitude? . . . Your rage is too violent and unbecoming.” While the provocation is surely sufficient for an intense reaction, the unrestrained language of Primrose’s overreaction is shown to be inappropriate.

The most overtly sentimental scenes are predominantly conveyed through direct speech that resembles dramatic counterparts from sentimental comedy. Olivia and Primrose’s unexpected reunion is representative of the way in which speech overtakes narration as the

primary method of depicting heightened affect. Elated to discover Olivia by chance at a roadside inn, Primrose exclaims:

‘Welcome, any way welcome, my dearest lost one, my treasure, to your poor old father’s bosom. Tho’ the vicious forsake thee, there is yet one in the world that will never forsake thee; tho’ thou hadst ten thousand crimes to answer for, he will forget them all.’—‘O my own dear’—for minutes she could no more—‘my own dearest good papa! Could angels be kinder! How do I deserve so much! The villain, I hate him and myself, to be a reproach to such goodness. You can’t forgive me. I know you cannot.’—‘Yes, my child, from my heart I do forgive thee! Only repent, and we both shall yet be happy. We shall see many pleasant days yet, my Olivia!’ (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 108)

Primrose’s narration only intrudes to share that Olivia was speechless “for minutes,” presumably because she was overcome with emotion. More significant, though, is the language’s strong resemblance to a similar reunion scene in *The Conscious Lovers*, in which Mr. Sealand discovers Indiana is his missing daughter. Mr. Sealand first questions the reality of the situation, asking, “And do I hold thee—these passions are too strong for utterance—rise, rise my child, and give my tears their way” before he gives fuller vent to his emotions, by exclaiming,

MR. SEALAND. Oh my child! How are our sorrows past o’erpaid by such a meeting! Though I have lost so many years of soft paternal dalliance with thee, yet in one day, to find thee thus, and thus bestow thee in such perfect happiness is ample, ample reparation! And yet again the merit of thy lover—

INDIANA. Oh! Had I spirits left to tell you of his actions, how strongly filial duty has suppressed his love, and how concealment still has doubled all his obligations, the pride, the joy, of his alliance, sir, would warm your heart as he has conquered mine.

MR. SEALAND. How laudable is love when born of virtue! I burn to embrace him—  
(Steele 5.3)

Both Primrose and Mr. Sealand convey their characters' initial shock through repetition—Primrose's "welcome, any way welcome" echoes Mr. Sealand's "rise, rise my child." The trope of inexpressibility appears in both as well—for the father in one instance and the daughter in the other. Both fathers recall the past using a "though" structure: Primrose's "Tho' the vicious forsake thee" and "tho' thou hadst ten thousand crimes to answer for" mirror Mr. Sealand's "Though I have lost so many years..." The sentimental staple "Oh!" and ample use of exclamations resound in both as well.

The discipline of this type of sentimental speech recurs in chapter twenty-seven, which is arguably the most dramatic of the novel. While imprisoned for debt to Thornhill, Primrose learns of his eldest daughter's death, which he mournfully laments, before he is told of Sophia's kidnapping. Primrose recalls responding in the following manner:

'Now,' cried I, 'the sum of my misery is made up, nor is it in the power of any thing on earth to give me another pang. What! Not one left! not to leave me one! the monster! the child that was next my heart! she had the beauty of an angel, and almost the wisdom of an angel. But support that woman, nor let her fall. Not to leave me one! (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 139)

Deborah interrupts his grief by commenting "Alas! my husband,' said my wife, 'you seem to want comfort even more than I" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 139). Given the nature of eighteenth-century gender norms, Deborah's remark is loaded, implying that his response exceeds masculine bounds of reason and propriety. Moses then allays the family's grief by presenting a letter from George that tells of his prosperity, only to be immediately interrupted by George's arrival as a battered

fellow prisoner, instantiating Michael Griffin's suggestion that "the high intensity, the claustrophobic relentlessness of dramatic events" in the novel's second half causes "absurdities of plot" (74). George's reappearance prompts another sentimentally rendered outburst from Primrose: "My George! My George! and do I behold thee thus. Wounded! Fettered! Is this thy happiness! Is this the manner you return to me! O that this sight could break my heart at once and let me die!" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 142). Repetition, a proliferation of exclamation points, and the sentimental O again appear, prompting a swift rebuke from George, who chastises his father for another exaggerated display of despondence, "'Where, Sir, is your fortitude,'" he demands (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 142). Primrose responds by regaling his son with his sorrows and again curses the source of his misfortunes, leading to another attempt at restraint: "'Hold, Sir,' replied my son, 'or I shall blush for thee. How, Sir, forgetful of your age, your holy calling'" (Goldsmith, *Vicar* 142).

This scene's language resembles the dramatic climax of Steele's play, when Indiana bewails her fate to an oblivious Mr. Sealand, who ineffectually attempts to check her sorrow. Indiana exclaims:

INDIANA: "What have I to do but sigh, and weep, to rave, run wild, a lunatic in broken chains, or, hid in darkness, mutter in distracted starts and broken accents my strange, strange story!"

MR. SEALAND. Take comfort, madam.

INDIANA. All my comfort must be to expostulate in madness, to relieve with frenzy my despair, and, shrieking, to demand of fate why—why was I born to such a variety of sorrows?"

MR. SEALAND. If I have been the least occasion—

INDIANA. No, 'twas Heaven's high will I should be such—to be plundered in my cradle! Tossed on the sea! And even there, an infant captive! To lose my mother, hear but of my father! To be adopted! Lose my adopter! Then plunged again in worse calamities! (Steele 5.3)

Indeed as a matter of plot the endings of Steele's play and *The Vicar of Wakefield* bear a striking resemblance, as well, confirming the novel's affinities with sentimental comedy. In *The Conscious Lovers*, Mr. Sealand's recognition of a bracelet sparks the realization that Indiana is his long-lost daughter. This discovery removes all impediments to the happy union of all of the principle young lovers—Indiana and Bevil may wed with the blessing of their parents, as may Lucinda and Myrtle.

George's recognition of Burchell's true identity similarly amounts to dramatic *anagnorisis*. The novel's final dramatic turn is achieved via *deus ex machina* when Olivia is triumphantly brought back from the dead, as it were, by Jenkinson who confesses to fabricating the story of her death as an expedient to make Primrose reconcile with Thornhill. Jenkinson then supplies the desperately needed proof of Thornhill's extensive villainy, including a real marriage license proving the sham marriage valid and miraculously setting all to right. The torrent of dramatic reversals and recognitions thus concluded, the novel's final chapter then returns to narration as the primary narrative method.

It seems that when Goldsmith quipped that “those abilities that can hammer out a novel, are fully sufficient for the production of a Sentimental Comedy” in *An Essay on the Theater* over a decade after composing *The Vicar of Wakefield*, he spoke from a position of authority (Goldsmith, *Essay* 213). No less than one half of the novel is devoted to the middle-class Primrose family's misfortunes, and numerous scenes display their foibles. The novel's dizzying

fluctuations between comic and tragic episodes flies in the face of his contention that sentimental comedy's unnatural mixing of tragedy and comedy results in "a *mulish* production, with all the defects of its opposite parents, and marked with sterility" (Goldsmith, *ET* 213). Goldsmith clearly found it unnecessary to hold a novel to the same standards as a play, but the total result of his attempt to reform sentimental comedy by containing it within a new genre was moral ambivalence.

### Clarity Through Theater

Because the novel's capaciousness proved to foster ambiguity in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, confounding generations of literary critics to come, Goldsmith turned to drama for his next literary production. And when he did, he found the most direct means to articulate his denunciation of indiscriminate benevolence in *The Good Natur'd Man* and the most effective methods of pronouncing the 'truth' behind appearances in *She Stoops to Conquer* through a return to the dramatic principles of Restoration comedy and its corresponding speech forms.

While the novel allowed Goldsmith to incorporate sentimental traits into his writing while critiquing them, his devotion to traditional dramatic principles compelled him to take more straightforward approaches in his plays. Years before beginning work on *The Good Natur'd Man*, he expounded his opinion of contemporary English plays in the essay "An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning" (1759). Goldsmith found playwriting a daunting undertaking, which perhaps explains why he tried his hand at a plethora of literary genres before writing for the stage. Likening playwriting to alchemy, he explains:

Our poet's performance must undergo a process truly chymical before it is presented to the public. It must be tried in the manager's fire, strained through a licenser, and purified

in the Review, or the news-paper of the day. At this rate, before it can come to a private table, it may probably be a mere *caput mortuum*. (Goldsmith, *Present State* 246)

Composing a worthwhile play is as difficult and potentially fruitless as attempting to transform base metals into gold. For a professional author financially dependent on the fruits of his literary labors, the stakes were especially high. The reference to “*caput mortuum*,” or worthless remains, reveals a serious pessimism about the enterprise, largely due to the numerous levels of external review it must undergo before ever reaching an audience.

Surprisingly, Goldsmith identifies “the private table,” rather than the stage, as the proper final destination of a play, representing the play’s performance on stage as but a brief preliminary stop (*Present State* 246). Though a stage performance may please, he maintains, a play is more instructive when read in the privacy of one’s home. Actors are only necessary to introduce the play to an audience, and indeed, a play’s moral risks dilution in performance. “It would be more for the interests of virtue,” he maintains, “if such performances were read, not acted; made rather our companions in the closet, than on the theater” (*Present State* 246). When a text is performed it becomes liable to a myriad of aesthetic and interpretive approaches. A work is “intentionally unsettled” during the performance process, and Goldsmith was concerned that this aspect of theatrical production might undermine a playwright’s moral aims (Schechner 6). External input from managers like George Colman or David Garrick, and the aesthetic stylization that sets and staging entailed were concerning enough, but what most threatened Goldsmith were the actors themselves. In his view, vice receives an “additional lustre” on stage when “the parts of dull morality, as they are called, are thrown to some mouthing machine, who puts even virtue out of countenance, by his wretched imitation” (*Present State* 246). This harsh view of the difficulties inherent in dramatic composition echoes those dramatized in *The*

*Rehearsal* nearly a century earlier, and *The Author's Farce* more recently, may suggest why Goldsmith began his literary career with more elastic forms that minimized the intermediaries between author and consumer.

But the gravity of his concerns makes his decision to write for the stage all the more significant. If Goldsmith truly thought plays are primarily intended for moral improvement, then it is easy to see why he adopted the form to clarify and strengthen his stance against indiscriminate benevolence. Beyond this focus, there are many parallels between *The Vicar of Wakefield* and his first play, *The Good Natur'd Man*. The play begins *in media res*, when the principal character, Honeywood, has depleted his fortune by charitably donating to anyone who applies for his aid. His wealthy uncle Sir William, whose fortune Honeywood is to receive, sets out to cure Honeywood of his improvident generosity by having him imprisoned for a debt and thereby successfully teaches Honeywood to be more moderate of his beneficence. Sir William Honeywood represents the voice of reason throughout the play, just as the reformed Sir William Thornhill does at the end of the novel. Honeywood's behavior also mirrors that of young Sir William Thornhill, and the play's plot is set in action by deception when Sir William plans to improve Honeywood by involving him in "a fictitious distress" (Goldsmith, *Good Natur'd* 20). Similarly any time the sentimental character, Honeywood, attempts to deceive others by disguising the bum baileys and concealing Leontine and Olivia's elopement, he fails. These glaring similarities suggest that Goldsmith was dissatisfied with his execution of the didactic message in novel and sought to clarify it in a new medium. Drama's formal restrictions and moral focus allowed him to isolate the aspects of the novel that relate to benevolence and bring them into sharper relief. *The Good Natur'd Man's* overtly moral ending indicates that Goldsmith wanted to make his feelings about benevolence indisputable. The final scene features Sir William

resolutely delivering a tidy, Primrosesque aphorism to the audience: “He who only seeks applause from without, has all his happiness in another’s keeping,” leaving no question as to the lesson Goldsmith hopes they learned. A newly reclaimed Honeywood then proclaims that “henceforth, therefore, it shall be my study to reserve my pity for real distress; my friendship for true merit, and my love for her, who first taught me what it is to be happy” (Goldsmith, *Good Natur’d* 81). Generosity is therefore explicitly presented as a problematic moral ideal; one that should deserve only qualified praise.

*The Good Natur’d Man* is a moral play, but it is also a comedy, and Goldsmith strongly felt that meant it should be humorous. An ardent traditionalist, Goldsmith also believed that a comedy should expose the follies of the lower orders so the audience could laugh at and condemn their foolish behavior in adherence to the classical notion of *castigat ridendo mores*. Accordingly, he included a comical scene featuring two creditors, or “bum baileys,” pressing Honeywood for his debts. The audience at the play’s premiere and several critics took offense to the scene. One, William Cooke, recalls the initial audience’s exuberantly negative response to the scene: “the predominant cry of the prejudiced and illiterate part of the pit was, ‘it was low—it was d—mn’d *wulgar*, &c.’ and this *barbarous judgment* had very nearly damned this comedy the very first night” (Rousseau 5). Bowing to pressure, Goldsmith responded by removing the scene from the following performances but restored it in the printed play when it was published a month later. He also included a preface justifying his choice, maintaining that his artistic aim was to imitate “the poets of the last age,” or Restoration and early-eighteenth century playwrights, by portraying “nature and humour in whatever walks of life they were most conspicuous” (Goldsmith, *Good Natur’d* 14). In a direct challenge to his critics, he also argued that “those who know anything of composition, are sensible, that in pursuing humour, it will

sometimes lead us into the recess of the mean” (Goldsmith, *Good Natur’d* 13). This response reflected a critical preference he had previously complained of in “An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning,” when he maintained that “by the power of one single monosyllable, our critics have almost got the victory over humour amongst us. Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar; then he is *low*: does he exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous, he is then very *low*.”

### **Authentic Expression in *She Stoops to Conquer***

Goldsmith’s second attempt at playwriting proved more successful than the first. *She Stoops to Conquer* premiered at the end of the theatrical season on March 15, 1773 at Covent Garden. Hampered by multiple discouragements, Goldsmith expected a poor reception. His preferred performers turned down the central roles, both Garrick and Colman were slow to review the play before Colman’s eventual acceptance, and due to its late-season appearance there were insufficient funds for new costumes (Wood xxvi). However, the play proved successful, running for twelve nights during its initial season and reappearing in the next (Wood xxvi). Goldsmith’s “laughing comedy” was so well received that *She Stoops to Conquer* was performed not only twenty-five times in London during 1773, but also in Paris, Dublin, and even New York.

Goldsmith explicitly distances *She Stoops to Conquer* from sentimental comedy in *An Essay on the Theater* and in his dedication to Samuel Johnson appended to the play’s publication. “Undertaking a comedy, not merely sentimental, was very dangerous,” he writes, but his decision to “trust it to the public” proved felicitous (Rousseau 101). While the public indeed enjoyed the show, some critics took Goldsmith’s play to task. One, William Woodfall,

lectured that a comedy should represent “the prevailing manners of people not in very high or very low life” and avers that, by the date of play’s production “a general correspondence arising from trade, and the progress of the arts, has brought the nation, as it were, together, and worn off those prepossessions and habits which made every little neighborhood a separate community” (Rousseau 116). In Woodfall’s view, this homogenization of the social classes’ distinguishing characteristics resulted in “a general politeness” that “has given a sameness to our external appearances; and great degrees of knowledge are every where diffused.” Consequently “an author has not that variety of character, and that simplicity and ignorance to describe, which were the capital ingredients in the old Comedy” (Rousseau 116). Besides smacking of a misplaced teleological notion of social and cultural progress, this view offers a definition of comedy that contrasts with Goldsmith’s. In addition, Woodfall accuses Goldsmith of writing dialogue designed to divert the galleries, or those occupying the less expensive seats, rather than the pit, despite assertions about a prevailing sameness of manners and appearances between classes.

Others, however, praised Goldsmith’s attempt to knock sentimental comedy off its pedestal. An anonymous critic suggested “a general pardon for the author” on the grounds that Goldsmith was attempting to take “the field against that monster called Sentimental Comedy” (Rousseau 122). In an anonymous letter “To the Printer of the *St. James’s Chronicle*,” another critic avers that “the goddess of dullness has almost entirely buried the livelier passions under her leaden wing: her soporific poppies (frequent as sentiments in a modern comedy) have spread their influence everywhere” and wishes “immortality to every pen that opposes the pestiferous infection!,” including Goldsmith’s.

While the daily newspaper critics praised the play during its initial run, after it was published on March 25<sup>th</sup>, several negative reviews appeared in monthly publications. Focused on Goldsmith's technical and stylistic choices, rather than its overall successful comedic effect, some critics decried the play's plot as improbable. Woodfall, in particular, believed most of the play's "incidents are offences against nature and probability," and another critic complained that "the fable . . . is twisted into incidents not naturally arising from the subject, in order to *make things meet*; and consistency is repeatedly violated for the sake of humour" (Rousseau 122). This made some critics question whether the play was actually a farce. In a letter to a friend, Horace Walpole objected to labeling the play a comedy, correcting himself after initially doing so by averring "—no, it is the lowest of all farces" and clarifying that "it is not the subject I condemn, but the execution" (Rousseau 118). Tony Lumpkin's antics are indeed farcical, but they are intertwined with Hastings and Miss Neville's more traditional romantic subplot. One of Goldsmith's major achievements in this work is a productive balance between sentiment and farce. And striking this accord seems to have superseded an overt moral as Goldsmith's dramatic aim in his second play.

Goldsmith explicitly championed a return to the literary principles of Restoration comedy and by extension the cultural values it expressed—back to the old form of drama that celebrated witty, not polite, conversation. One means of achieving this aim was to revive his exploration of social performance in *She Stoops to Conquer* and in so doing he demonstrates the extent to which ritualized politeness had descended into mere ceremoniousness that obfuscates actual communication. In contrast to *The Vicar of Wakefield*, though, Goldsmith positions disguise and overt acting as liberating—they are ironically shown here to be the most effective means of bypassing repressive social structures, similar to its use in Restoration comedies.

The play's central plot revolves around the instability of appearances to signify value. Marlow and his friend Hastings travel from London to the country estate of Old Marlow's friend, Hardcastle, in order to court Hardcastle's daughter, Kate. Lost on the way, the men encounter Kate's mischievous stepbrother, Tony Lumpkin, who misleads them into believing that the stately but old-fashioned Hardcastle estate is merely an inn. The play's premise is only plausible insofar as the characters never seem to scrutinize exteriors. Specifically, *She Stoops to Conquer's* plot hinges upon two registers of comic misrecognition: characters either fail to appear in a manner appropriate for their social standing, or they fail to behave in a manner appropriate for their social standing, presenting social performance as an unreliable means of maintaining class distinction. Marlow does not recognize Hardcastle as a country gentleman, despite Hardcastle's best attempts to appear and behave in a manner that demonstrates his rank. Marlow behaves as one might reasonably imagine a young man of the upper classes might when interacting with an innkeeper, especially with one who behaves "all upon the high ropes," or better than his condition, as he believes Hardcastle does (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1).

Likewise Kate's dress is presented as an overdetermined signifier of rank and value. She dresses in her "own manner," that is according to prevailing fashion, for her morning visits and then puts on a "housewife's dress to please" her father in the evening (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 1.1). Marlow is so overwhelmed by a fear of communicating with women of his own social standing that he only feels comfortable expressing his natural disposition while interacting with those he believes to be socially inferior, and he relies on dress to identify rank in the social hierarchy. "A modest woman," he contends, "drest out in all her finery, is the most tremendous object of the whole creation" (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1). To Marlow, an ostentatiously adorned

exterior signifies a modest interior, which occasions an overwhelming respect exaggerated to the extent that he is rendered incapable of even looking at Kate's face during their introduction.

In contrast to Marlow, though, Kate is free from performance anxiety, and she “flawlessly distinguishes playing and reality, being such a mistress of herself that she can act any role with conviction, knowing it only to be that” (Kiberd 129). Because Kate recognizes the performative nature of social relations, that she has several roles to fill dependent on audience expectations, she easily manipulates conventions to her advantage. She earns her father's trust, and consequently the opportunity for self-expression, by fulfilling his desire for a plainly-dressed, modest daughter. When Hardcastle warns his daughter that he “shall have occasion to try [her] obedience” by introducing her to a proposed suitor, Kate asks herself “how should I behave?,” indicating the extent to which her identity is performance based. But before her father provides any further details of the proposed meeting, she preemptively objects to the anticipated scene, protesting that “our meeting will be so formal, and so like a thing of business” providing “no room for friendship or esteem” (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 1.1). Ultimately she decides to adopt the gravely “sentimental lover” role she believes Marlow expects her to play, but only as a means to ascertain what strategy would be most effective to assess his fitness as a romantic partner. This versatility and willingness to adopt whatever persona may prove most socially advantageous makes her appear by far the most clever, and frankly powerful, character in the play.

Because Kate is depicted as an overt performer from the play's outset, when Marlow mistakes her as a barmaid when he encounters her in plain dress, her improvisational opportunism is within character. Observing that her modified dress enables both his gaze and

sociability, Kate encourages Marlow to persist in his misidentification of her as a barmaid justifying it to her maid, by saying:

in the first place, I shall be *seen*, and that is no small advantage to a girl who bring her face to market. Then I shall perhaps make an acquaintance and that's no small victory gained over own who never addresses any but the wildest of her sex. But my chief aim is to take my gentleman off his guard, and like an invisible champion of romance examine the giant's force before I offer to combat. (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 3.1)

Kate adopts the martial metaphor that a Marlow and Hastings previously used to discuss courtship strategies for her own advantage. Marlow's prejudice gives Kate the competitive advantage, and allows her to more accurately assess his desirability as a husband before deciding whether or not to pursue the match. Kate's role playing releases her from the obligation to adhere to social norms—when she drops the “sentimental lover act,” a role as inauthentic as any of her others, and assumes the part of a barmaid, she no longer has to worry about the predetermined social script. Comparing herself to Cherry in the *Beaux Stratagem*, she also disguises her voice by emulating a “true bar cant,” signaling that she is assuming a theatrical, rather than social, identity (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 3.1).

Later, when Marlow begins to suspect that the Hardcastle home is not an inn, Kate slyly changes her character from bar maid to “poor relation of the family.” The attendant shift in status prompts Marlow to reassess their past interactions and he apologizes for his forwardness, admitting that “my stupidity saw everything the wrong way. I mistook your assiduity for assurance, and your simplicity for allurements” (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 4.1). Because Kate's social standing never actually changes, only Marlow's perception of it, this scene crucially demonstrates that social identities operate in tandem with interpretative frameworks. Now that he

believes he is attracted to a dependent relation rather than a barmaid, Kate's pretended tears sincerely move Marlow, and he interprets them in an aside as "the first mark of tenderness I ever had from a modest woman" (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 4.1).

The dissimulation in *She Stoops To Conquer* is distinguished from that found in *The Vicar of Wakefield* in that it is not represented as hypocrisy. Hardcastle merely attempts to fulfill expectations rather than deliberately deceive, as does Kate when she initially meets Marlow, and her later impostures are presented as crimes of opportunity rather than premeditated deceptions. Marlow's bashfulness around women of his class is as much part of his personality as his brashness around those he deems socially inferior. Indeed, in contrast to Hardcastle and Kate, his inability to approximate his socially defined role is presented as his primary social handicap. This bifurcation of his personality provides ample room for comedic set pieces, most clearly illustrated in act III scene i:

KATE HARDCASTLE. . . . He met me with a respectful bow, a stammering voice, and a look fixed on the ground.

HARDCASTLE. He met me with a loud voice, a lordly air, and a familiarity that made my blood freeze again.

KATE HARDCASTLE. He treated me with diffidence and respect. Censured the manners of the age. Admired the prudence of girls that never laughed. Tired me with apologies for being tiresome. Then left the room with a bow, and, 'Madam, I would not for the world detain you.'

HARDCASTLE. He spoke to me as if he knew me all his life before. Asked twenty questions, and never waited for an answer. Interrupted my best remarks with some silly pun, and, when I was in my best story the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene, he

asked if I had not a good hand at making punch. Yes, Kate, he asked your father if he was a maker of punch! (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 3.1)

To Hardcastle, Marlow is the epitome of swaggering impudence, but to Kate he is a gravely restrained suitor. Declan Kiberd traces these polarities to a “new crisis in manhood: a desire to be at once singular and representative. Dependent upon others for a sense of identity, Marlow fears that others have the capacity to destroy it, either by exposing flaws in his underlying self or by spurning to know him at all” (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 131). The “English Malady” Marlow claims to suffer from, then, is not actually caused by a fear of women of his own social class, but by the division of identity into ‘self’ and social mask. And as one’s ‘self’ is always fluid, always contingent upon both external and internal circumstances rather than anything stable, Marlow’s social anxiety can be viewed as the manifestation of a widespread phenomenon. When we consider Marlow and Primrose together, we learn that cultural values and customs can be internalized as *habitus*, “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways” (Bourdieu 72). The consequence of which is that neither is capable of successfully navigating eighteenth-century society. While this may suggest skepticism regarding both the valorization of sentiment and the value of role-playing, Goldsmith demonstrates there are places for both in his world; Primrose’s deeply-held belief in man’s innate goodness is ultimately rewarded, however improbably, while overt performance facilitates the happy union of both couples in *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Goldsmith also finds a corrective for ineffective, rhetorically stilted sentimental speech and the latent unreliability of homodiegetic narration in dramatic mediating speech forms. A frequent use of asides and soliloquy in particular, serve as means to definitively pronounce the

type of character motives Primrose struggled to convey in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The discrepancy between character speech in asides, and that delivered to others on stage also produces the uproarious comedy that made the play so successful. Social ritual becomes performance within the performance in this play, and asides and soliloquy allow dramatists to express characters' true sentiments and motivations—that is, the truth that lies beneath appearances. Thus Goldsmith's incorporation of forty-five asides in *She Stoops to Conquer* allows him to imply the extent to which the customs of politeness and sentiment mask authentic expression.

When Hastings and Marlow first meet Hardcastle, they express their astonishment at their supposed innkeeper's outlandish behavior using dialogic asides, a device in which two characters converse privately unbeknownst to the others on stage. Hardcastle, unaware of that he is victim of mistaken identity proposes a toast, asking:

HARDCASTLE. ...Will you, be so good as to pledge me, sir? Here, Mr. Marlow, here is to our better acquaintance. (*Drinks*)

MARLOW. (*Aside*) A very impudent fellow, this! But he's a character, and I'll humour him a little. Sir, my service to you. (*Drinks*)

HASTINGS. (*Aside*) I see this fellow wants to give us his company, and forget that he's an innkeeper, before he has learned to be a gentleman. (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1)

Marlow's admission that he will condescend to humor Hardcastle supplies the pretense to extend the foundational scenario upon which all of the play's ensuing comedic action depends. Asides prove absolutely critical to maintaining the plot's razor-thin plausibility that was so assailed by contemporary critics. Marlow and Hastings continually interrupt Hardcastle's attempts at conversation and they rudely request punch shortly after their arrival. It would be shocking if

Marlow behaved in the same manner to a recognized member of his own social class, and especially to a potential father-in-law, and Hardcastle indicates this response through multiple asides. “This is the most unaccountable kind of modesty I have ever met with” he initially wonders in disbelief (2.1). As the young men’s behavior becomes more audacious Hardcastle perseveres in the forms of polite hospitality, sharing his astonishment through aside in the first line of his conversational turn and then acquiescing to unreasonable demands in the second, such as when Marlow and Hastings insult the proposed dinner menu and request changes. Losing patience with their misconduct, Hardcastle exclaims, “their impudence confounds me” in an aside that is paired with a directly conveyed line: “Gentleman, you are my guests, make what alterations you please” (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1). Goldsmith’s juxtaposition of two lines representing what a character actually wants to say with what he or she is compelled to say, emerges as one of his most compelling tools for social critique in the play.

This scene precedes Goldsmith’s most skilled and effective use of asides in the play, which occurs during Marlow and Kate’s introduction. While Marlow and Kate exchange “the most correct clichés of refined sentiment” deemed appropriate for their formal introduction, Hastings effusively cheers on his friend through asides (Kiberd 130). After Kate expresses concern that Marlow experienced accidents on his journey, the supposedly diffident young man stammers in response:

MARLOW. Only a few madam. Yet, we had some. Yes, madam, a good many accidents, but should be sorry—madam—or rather glad of any accidents—that are so agreeably concluded. Hem!

HASTINGS. (*To him*) You never spoke better in your whole life. Keep it up, and I’ll ensure you the victory.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I'm afraid you flatter, sir. You that have seen so much of the finest company can find little entertainment in an obscure corner of the country.

MARLOW. (*gathering courage*) I have lived, indeed in the world, madam, but I have kept very little company. I have been but an observer upon life, madam, while others were enjoying it.

HASTINGS. (*To him*) Cicero never spoke better. Once more, and you are confirmed in assurance for ever.

MARLOW. (*To him*) Hem! Stand by me then, and when I'm down, throw in a word or two to set me up again. (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1)

The awkwardness of Marlow and Kate's conversation may have been mildly amusing on its own, but Hastings's interventions transform the cold, formal recitation of insincere pleasantries from a merely uncomfortable exchange to one with great comic force. After a few more expressions of lusty encouragement Hastings then abruptly leaves to privately pursue his own romantic interest. Kate, who by convention remains oblivious to Hastings' jesting encouragement, keeps up her half of the dull conversation by casting herself in the role she believes her potential mate will find most attractive. After Hastings' departure, though, she becomes responsible for maintaining the comic momentum, which she achieves through asides that express her actual impressions of Marlow's listless conversation. "(Aside) Who could ever suppose this fellow impudent upon some occasions" she wonders aloud, before encouraging him to continue in their conversation, "(*To him*) You were going to observe, sir—" (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1). As with Hastings' asides, the contrast between Kate's actual impression and what the audience is to believe Marlow hears, or between actual sentiment and social mask, generates the laughter Goldsmith so craved.

Marlow's incapacity to overcome his shyness, or to play the complementary part of an upper-class beau, renders their introduction a romantic failure. Indeed, the initial scene between Marlow and Kate reads as a play rehearsal in which an actor has forgot his lines. Marlow stammers and struggles to finish a sentence while Kate magnanimously completes his inchoate thoughts with the standard fare of upper-class English courtship conversation. Of course the audience knows both characters are misleading each other. Marlow, "among females of another class" is "impudent enough of all conscience" and Kate has demonstrated her lively and capricious nature in all of the preceding scenes (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1). At the scene's conclusion, Marlow finds a cure for his articulation problems within his own aside, in which he shares his assessment of the interview: "this pretty smooth dialogue has done for me" (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1). This initiates a trend in which Marlow conveys his most tender, sympathetic sentiments through aside, such as when he says "by heaven, she weeps. This is the first mark of tenderness I ever had from a modest woman, and it touches me" during a later exchange with Kate dressed in simple attire (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 4.1).

After Marlow's exit from the interview above, Kate delivers her own evaluation of the situation through another monologic speech form, reflective soliloquy that serves as the scene's conclusion:

MISS HARDCASTLE. Ha! Ha! Ha! Was there ever such a sober sentimental interview? I'm certain he scarce looked in my face the whole time. Yet the fellow, but for his unaccountable bashfulness, is pretty well too. He has good sense, but then so buried in his fears, that it fatigues one more than ignorance. If I could teach him a little confidence, it would be doing somebody that I know a piece of service. But who is that somebody? That, faith, is a question I can scarce answer. (Goldsmith, *She Stoops* 2.1)

Kate's soliloquy is polyfunctional. She not only shares her own conflicting feelings regarding her proposed beau, but also establishes a crucial plot point—she observed that Marlow never even looked at her during this exchange—information that must be accentuated to the audience to ensure the plausibility of her later imposture as a servant.

Structurally, Goldsmith uses soliloquies to transition between scenes or action within scenes, as he does above. The device most frequently appears after the departure of one dialogue partner and before the appearance of the next. In some instances this functions as a means of character introduction, such as when Hardcastle shares his estimation of his daughter by comparing her to his son-in-law after Tony's departure and before Kate's arrival. Soliloquies of reflection are another frequent form, often used proleptically to supply motives for imminent future action, as when Tony Lumpkin expresses his frustration with father-in-law's treatment immediately before Marlow and Hastings enter the public house to ask for directions to Hardcastle's home, or when Hardcastle shares his astonishment at Marlow's treatment of him and expresses a desire to know Kate's estimation of her new suitor's shocking behavior immediately before Kate enters to discuss her new suitor's diffidence.

In this play, then, Goldsmith demonstrates that highly conventionalized speech forms prove the best vehicles for expressing the type of authentic emotion proponents of sentimentalism so revered. In this sense, Goldsmith's use of mediating dramatic speech serves as a corrective to the stultifying effect of a compulsory overreliance on the prescribed forms of conversation that emerged out of the culture of politeness as well as its concomitant emphasis on appearance as a reliable indicator of values.

## **Conclusion**

In total, Goldsmith's sustained engagement with sentiment using multiple literary genres shows a determination to find a strategy that would allow him to restrain the negative aspects of sentimentalism while benefiting from its popularity. The novel's flexibility allowed him to benefit from the popularity of sentimental speech while simultaneously critiquing it. This approach proved too subtle, as the continued debate about his orientation to sentiment indicates, but his most unambiguous expression of his assessment of sentiment's merits in *The Good Natur'd Man* was less commercially successful.

After multiple applications of the mode, Goldsmith finally finds the most effective means of accomplishing his goals through the abundant use of dramatic speech forms that enabled both authentic emotional expression and the return of laughter on stage. In Goldsmith's oeuvre, unconstrained, sincere sentiments are possible only through speech structures that most overtly signify their own artificiality to the audience, whereas within *The Vicar of Wakefield* his characters respond to the dramatically stylized speech of others' as inappropriate and absurdly artificial. *She Stoops to Conquer*'s configuration of overt deception through performance and anti-illusionistic, overtly conventional dramatic speech forms as a *more* authentic means of expression than novelistic speech thus flies in the face of modern conceptions of the relationship between novelistic representation, speech, and realism.

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## CHAPTER IV

### Performing Behind the Curtain: Frances Burney's *Evelina* and Dramatic Works

Frances Burney's devotion to dramatic writing was established early and sustained over a lifetime. Some of her earliest compositions were dramas; when describing the now-infamous immolation of her juvenile writings, she recalls not only burning the precursor and inspiration for her most famous novel, *Evelina* (1778), but also "farces and tragedies" (Doody 72). Burney composed four comedies, three complete tragedies, and one unfinished tragedy, and she painstakingly edited this sizeable dramatic oeuvre well into advanced age. Burney's mature dramas fared little better than their juvenile predecessors, though—the only one produced during her lifetime, *Edwy and Elgiva*, was categorically panned, and the few contemporaries whom she allowed to read her plays offered mixed to tepid reviews. These responses were largely influenced by a comparison between Burney's plays and novels. Burney's talent for dramatic writing first came to light in *Evelina*, and her brilliant handling of character speech in her debut novel set expectations high.

When Joyce Hemlow brought her plays to light by summarizing the still unprinted manuscript dramas in her 1950 article, "Fanny Burney: Playwright" she maintained that "the situations, characters, and plots are of absorbing interest as corollaries to her novels, though the first and most pertinent question must be, are they or are they not good plays?" Hemlow implies that answer is no, but Margaret Anne Doody recuperated Burney's reputation as a dramatist in her detailed and immensely influential 1988 study *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*.

Doody celebrated Burney's many accomplishments in her dramas and supplied much-needed contextualization grounded in part by careful analyses of the mountain of Burney documents housed in the New York Public Library's Berg Collection. Publication of three of Burney's plays, *The Witlings*, *A Busy Day*, and *Edwy and Elgiva* followed before Peter Sabor painstakingly compiled and edited her entire known dramatic corpus in 1995. As editor for *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, Sabor also lent legitimizing force to the topic by including Tara Goshal Wallace's essay, "Burney as Dramatist" in the authoritative collection.

Several studies analyzing the relationship between Burney's plays and novels have followed, including those by Marcie Frank, Emily Allen, and Emily Hodgson Anderson. Frank has shown that Burney's techniques for modulating narrative distance grew "out of the configuration of theater, shame, and narration in her oeuvre," arguing that the shame-inducing theatricality of *Evelina*'s embarrassments occasions proto free indirect discourse, and that in more general terms the work contributed to a "migration of the comedy of manners from the stage to the novel" (616). *Evelina* encodes an allegory of generic "struggle between the novelistic and the theatrical," in Emily Allen's view, with *Evelina* personifying textuality and an "appropriate inwardness" through her rejection of the "overt exteriority" of characters like Madam Duval and Captain Mirvan, who allegorically represent the theater. Emily Hodgson Anderson explored the way in which *Evelina*'s actions in the novel reflect Burney's own "love-hate relationship to spectacle" (47).

As an independent topic, though, Burney's dramatic writing remains strangely understudied. In the only book exclusively dedicated to the topic, *Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late Eighteenth-Century Stage*, Barbara Darby reads Burney's plays through a feminist lens, analyzing the ways in which they depict oppressive male-

dominated social structures. Gillian Skinner provided useful contextual background for Burney's theatrical aspirations through analyses of her life writings in a 2011 journal article. Scholarship on her specific plays has yielded even fewer titles. *The Wifings* has attracted the most attention, although it is still relatively scant: Sandra Sherman and Deidre Lynch separately explored its cultural contexts, while J. Karen Ray identified and analyzed its numerous satirical targets and argued that Burney identified with the Bluestockings. Burney's other titles are even less frequently addressed.

Of those who concentrate on the relationship between Burney's novels and drama more generally, though, no one has more thoroughly and fruitfully explored the topic than Francesca Saggini. In her book-length study, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theatre Arts* (2012) Saggini comprehensively and systematically illustrates the ways in which Burney deploys drama in her novels. Concentrating primarily on *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, Saggini identifies four types of transtextual relations between the theatre and Burney's novels: formal, in which narrative is dramatized through narrative technique; intertextual, which includes explicit and implicit references to specific plays and the theatre; and metatextual, which is the metaphoric application of a specific dramatic source text to the narrative in which it is referenced (77-80). Saggini's discussion of formal relations in *Evelina* is primarily addresses its structure and narrative mode. She envisions the novel as modeled on the traditional five-act play, with three acts set in the city separated by two entr'actes set in the country, each of which is respectively dominated by four "types" of dramatic action: comedy of manners, sentimental comedy, domestic drama, and farce. She also extensively addresses the dramatic nature of Burney's use of epistolary narration.

When Saggini explores Burney's dramatic speech it is to acknowledge the high frequency

with which Burney presents it directly and to analyze the ways it collapses time between action and representation. However, the specific mechanisms by which Burney encloses dramatic speech within her novel have yet to be explored at length. I maintain that it is primarily through Burney's handling of speech that she transforms narrative into performance; Burney's choice of narrative mode in *Evelina* allows her to perform her preferred authorial role, dramatist, by using her heroine as a surrogate who develops a uniquely dramatic method of dialogue composition, most evident in group conversations that read as if they were lifted directly out of a play script.

Furthermore, as Burney's representation of sparkling character speech in *Evelina* is one of the novel's greatest technical achievements, one would expect this skill would be displayed to its best advantage in her plays. However, Burney's plays were received poorly during her lifetime and remain undervalued now. Hemlow implies they are simply inferior, and Doody rightfully praises their merits while trying to explain away their imperfections. A primary source of the complaints made against them is the quality of the characters, and because character is presented through speech in drama, one may extend the character critiques to her handling of speech. Burney's dramatic speech suffers especially through comparison to that found in her novels, which raises the question—why was Burney's dramatic speech so successful in her novels, but less so in her plays?

By returning to the documentary evidence housed in the Berg Collection that initiated interest in her full dramatic corpus, we learn that the variation in the quality of Burney's representation of speech may correspond to compositional method. Counterintuitively, Burney's manuscripts suggest she began character development for her novels with mimesis of speech in the form of unformatted dialogues that resemble mini-dramas, while she began work for her plays with diegesis and typographical character sketches. These methodological approaches

contributed to the peculiarities of speech found in her plays, including an overreliance on mediating speech forms to convey character thoughts and motivations.

### **Retreating behind the Curtain: The Benefits of a Dramatic Approach**

Burney's ambivalence towards authorship has been fruitfully explored by scholars including Catherine Gallagher, Kristina Straub, and Cassandra Ulph, often with a focus on the ways in which gender influenced and complicated her conception of it.<sup>43</sup> But critics have yet to consider how Burney's unease with performing the public role of author influenced her choice of genre and mode, or motivated her attraction to dramatic writing, in particular. When Burney made the choice to pen an epistolary novel as her literary debut, she selected a mode that allowed her to efface her position as author and thereby minimize her professional obligations to the public. She still sought to affirm her writing's value, though, by adopting an authorial persona in prefatory materials that resemble dramatic prologues.

The daughter of a prominent musicologist who filled his home with professional artists, Burney witnessed first-hand the public scrutiny professional artists faced. Consequently, when embarking on her career she carefully considered her available means to maintain control of her literary-professional persona and sought strategies to distance her personal and professional identities. As Cassandra Ulph explains:

The equivocal social position of her family meant that Burney's own social status was absolutely dependent on performing just such a bourgeois, gendered identity, in which the female body is visible in the *right* way. Crucially, Burney also had to avoid exposing herself: that is, becoming visible in the *wrong* way. Thus publication risked the creation

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<sup>43</sup> Straub identified contradictions in Burney's works, which she sees as stemming from a "desire to achieve two different kinds of mutually contradictory value—as woman and artist" (6). Gallagher maintains that Burney wrote from the point of view of "Nobody" to a readership she came to envision as large and insubstantial.

of a grotesque professional persona for her. . . Burney's early experience of this, through the lens of her father's dual pursuit of musical performance and lettered professionalism, would serve to emphasise the necessity of carefully maintaining a separate authorial persona in order to prevent her private self becoming, like her book, available to the scrutiny of an unregulated public. (380)

Charles Burney's double status as both writer and performer may have also made his daughter acutely aware of the performative nature of professional authorship and influenced her decision to publish her first novel anonymously.

Shielded by publishing "incognita," as her father termed it, Burney tentatively dons the mantle of professional author in the paratext entitled "To the Authors of the Monthly and Critical Reviews" that she appended to *Evelina*. Ostensibly a dedication, the letter actually functions as a dramatic prologue in which she presents a case for critical leniency and suggests her work's merits as a bid to garner a favorable reception. The letter form allows her to employ first-person address similar to that found in most prologues. Instead of writing to any one individual critic, or even naming the most prominent, she addresses a collective, a move that she excuses in her dedication's final paragraph. Collective address allows her to rhetorically include general readers—she is careful not to identify or flatter any individuals—only a general class, 'critics,' which includes the many dilettantes who considered themselves experts in drama. The dedication's inclusion with the rest of the novel also suggests significant apprehension of the public's response.

Burney employs numerous rhetorical strategies to influence her readers' perception of the novel. Addressing future critics directly within a prologue is a common dramatic strategy, as seen in Behn's prologue for *The Rover*, but instead of preempting attacks by undermining her

critics' authority as Behn does, Burney employs understatement, *prolepsis*, and *apophasis*, the technique of bring up a subject through its denial. She minimizes its scope and sophistication by describing it as "the trifling production of a few idle hours" published merely to gratify a whim. At the same time she downplays her personal labors and the novel's merits through understatement, she also establishes rhetorical parity with her supposed addressees by referring to both the critics and herself as "authors." She also muses that:

the language of adulation, and the incense of flattery, though the natural inheritance, and constant resource, from time immemorial, of the Dedicator, to me offer nothing but the wistful regret that I dare not invoke their aid. Sinister views would be imputed to all I could say; since, thus situated, to extol your judgment, would seem the effect of art, and to celebrate your impartiality, be attributed to suspecting it. (Burney, *Evelina* 4)

In declining to extol her critics' judgment or celebrate their impartiality, Burney implies that both actions would be appropriate. She continues in this lofty strain, claiming that:

to appeal for your MERCY, were to solicit your dishonour; and therefore, —though 'tis sweeter than frankincense, —more grateful to the senses than all the odorous perfumes of Arabia, —and though

It dropeth like the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath, —

I court it not! (Burney, *Evelina* 4-5)

Despite this assertion, Burney clearly courts both her critics' and her general readers' mercy. She also demonstrates her extensive learning and familiarity with drama through her allusion to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, shortly followed by a quotation from Alexander Pope's

Epistle to *Dr. Arbuthnot*.<sup>44</sup> Her appeal is for the critics' "justice," instead of their mercy, which she claims the "candid public" deserves. She then deftly engages in overt image crafting by informing her readers that she is "no hackneyed writer, inured to abuse" or "a half-starved garreter" (Burney, *Evelina* 5). In contrast, Burney characterizes herself as a fearful novice, beseeching the critics to magnanimously excuse the "anxious solicitude with which I recommend myself," but this is a mere pose belied by her sophisticated rhetorical maneuvers and literary allusions.

Shifting tone from pleading for an impartial assessment of her works' merits, to politely but diligently reminding her critics that they were once first-time writers, too, Burney argues her critics should not be too contemptuous of the terrors she feels on the occasion of her initial publication. "It is the peculiar privilege of an author," she maintains, "to rob terror of contempt, and pusillanimity of reproach" (Burney, *Evelina* 5). The conversational nature of her first-person address anticipates her skill at dialogue composition in that it resembles a single conversational turn. Burney abruptly interrupts her dedication after this claim, declaring: "*Here let me rest, — and snatch myself, while I yet am able, from the fascination of EGOTISM*" terminating her preliminary attempt at professional self-definition with a melodramatic and metafictional pause (Burney, *Evelina* 5). The epistolary convention of writing "to the moment," borrowed from Richardson, allows her to create the temporal illusion that the discourse takes place in real time and thus the speaker, overcome by emotion, must halt the discourse to regain composure before she can resume.

Behind the guise of fearful anxiety that dominates this initial authorial performance is Burney's signature dramatic compositional style, which serves the same function in self-

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<sup>44</sup> Burney's choice of allusions also comically anticipate Lady Smatter's frequent (mis)quotations of Shakespeare and Pope in *The Witlings* and *The Woman-Hater*.

definition as it does in the novel it precedes: Burney leverages dramatic conventions and adapts them for novelistic ends. The prologue's formal structure and first-person address, along with its typical supplications and posturing allow her potent tools for characterization. Despite her anonymity, the character is of Frances Burney, author—a learned and confidant writer who cloaks the knowledge of both the value of her work and her own literary powers under a veil of seeming self-consciousness.

Burney continues image crafting in the novel's preface, shifting focus to another topic often addressed in Restoration prologues: the current state of popular taste in literature. She acknowledges the genre's general disrepute and offers a lineage of respectable authors whose styles she admires. She also indirectly addresses her reader by candidly admitting her enjoyment of the security offered by anonymous publication—she “fears not being involved in [the novel's] disgrace, while happily wrapped up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity”. Burney ends her preface in a similarly self-abnegating vein found in the dedication. After explaining that she has endeavored to avoid recreating the styles of novelists she most highly regards, because “imitation cannot be shunned too sedulously,” she again exhibits an intense anxiety about her reader's response, which she allays through an appeal to her readers:

The candour of my readers I have not the impertinence to doubt, and to their indulgence I am sensible I have no claim; I have, therefore, only to intreat, that my own words may not pronounce my condemnation; and that what I have here ventured to say in regard to imitation, may be understood as it is meant, in a general sense, and not be imputed to an opinion of my own originality, which I have not the vanity, the folly, or the blindness, to entertain. (Burney, *Evelina* 6)

Within both dedication and preface, then, Burney modifies the intent and some formal characteristics of prologues to engage her reader in her favor and develop a professional persona.

Burney's solicitude for her novel's success may have emboldened her to plead its case in her prefatory paratexts, but her selection of the epistolary mode allowed her to perform her preferred authorial role, dramatist, wherein the characters bear the weight of the reader's scrutiny rather than herself. The narrative convention dictates that the bulk of the novel is composed not by Frances Burney, the daughter of the successful and reputation-obsessed Dr. Charles Burney, but by the title character. When coupled with her decision to publish the novel anonymously, these choices exhibit a desire to avoid fully assuming the social role of author, opting instead to exert influence safely concealed behind the curtains, as the aspiring dramatist she was.

Burney leverages the epistolary mode's psychological realism to frame within the letters distinct scenes of dramatic speech that are decidedly un-mimetic. She also uses the agency enabled by epistolary narration to stage, dramatically farcical versions of some characters filtered through Evelina's perspective. Burney's ingenuity with speech representation transcends her use of idiolect to her most significant contribution to the novel's formal development: her incorporation of dramatic speech. Dramatic scenes "surge" forth from Evelina's letters, to borrow Fludernik's concept, occasioning extended periods of absence of the protagonist's narratorial voice in a first-person narrative form.

On the surface, the novel is a genre associated with interiority while the theater overtly traffics in exteriority, as Emily Allen suggested. Epistolary novels, in particular, are often credited for enabling the novel's "inward turn" by chronicling a character's psychology and fostering a sense of privileged access to his or her subjective experience of the related actions. Readers of earlier epistolary novels such as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748)

were conditioned to view the form as mimetic, that is, to assume that “there is no distance between the letter writer’s motivations, feelings, and character and their representation in the letters” and thus tended to accept the first-person narrative voice as a reliable, although subjective, source of narrative information (Morrison 36). Conceptually, nested layers of dialogue formally structure *Evelina*. A letter in an epistolary novel may be properly conceived as “a ‘preserved’ speech act”—one side of a prolonged conversation between correspondents engaged in dialogue, with the narratorial diegesis presented as mimesis of speech, in turn representing the speech of others (Adams Day 190). The perceived interiority of the mode results from the fact that only half of the correspondence is shared at a time, allowing the dialogic nature of the letters to fade while the text retains an intimate and conversational tone.

However, while the epistolary mode is known best for its capacity to represent character psychology, several scholars have also observed that the mode has theatrical qualities, as well. Epistolary narrative technique and dramatic writing both employ the present tense and attempt to reconcile a character’s immediate thoughts with his or her presentation to a reader or audience. As a presentation of character consciousness it resembles a dramatic speech form, too—the first-person format often resembles a transcription of a character’s inner monologue, reminiscent of dramatic soliloquy.<sup>45</sup> Both are structured as a single extended, cohesive utterance within “a series of monologues, many of them springing from an immediate dramatic situation,” as Norman Page observed (47). These often appear as “self-revealing passages,” that “define the letter-writer’s internal state” (Konigsberg 117). Although letters have an addressee, often the acknowledgment of the correspondent fades, especially in the portions of letters that most closely resemble soliloquy. As Ira Konigsberg explains, “in many of these self-revealing sections the

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<sup>45</sup> Joe Bray, however, argues that the representation of consciousness in the epistolary novel is not as transparent and unmediated as transcribed stream of consciousness. Rather, the “constant push and pull” between author as narrator and author as experiencer “creates anxieties of self and identity” (20).

correspondent loses awareness of the recipient of the letter,” especially when a long uninterrupted chain of successive letters composed by a single individual creates the illusion of a memoir or journal (117).

Ironically, the epistolary mode’s theatricality is what allows Burney to minimize authorship’s inherent theatricality. As David Marshall observes, “if not open and avowedly then at least implicitly, the very act of writing—in its seemingly inevitable public destination, its solicitation, appeal, and application, its dependence on the imagined presence of a witness, its necessary address which posits an audience before the text—this act itself creates a theatrical situation” (28). Burney’s choice of the mode allowed her to “partly camouflage[e] her literary authority” by directing readers’ attention to her characters’ writing (Saggini 69). Burney escapes the “theatrical situation” Marshall references by casting characters in the roles of author and reader; Evelina and Rev. Villars author the bulk of the letters and the reader is positioned as a voyeuristic spectator perusing their correspondence. “The reader is not their intended audience” of an epistolary novel’s letters, as Robert Adams Day explains, “he merely eavesdrops, and the author is not the speaker” (194). This approach serves as proto-dramatic realism; the reader is displaced by the letter’s addressee and allowed into the fiction’s fourth wall, with the present-tense narration giving the illusion that the heroine’s reflections on the events she transcribes occur in real time, like a play, annihilating the author’s presence in the text and disguising the relationship between writer and reader. Burney does not even avail herself of the common editorial pose of the epistolary author—instead of pretending she compiled and published “found” letters, she opts to acknowledge authorship through her dramatically rendered prefatory writings.

Establishing control over one's identity and reputation is one of *Evelina's* central themes, as well. Evelina is the child of Lord John Belmont, a baronet, and Lady Caroline Belmont, the daughter of a wealthy gentleman. However, Lord Belmont left his young wife when her parents withheld Caroline's fortune after the couple eloped. Caroline died in childbirth shortly afterward, leaving Evelina in the care of her childhood guardian, the Reverend Villars. Although Evelina received a comprehensive education suited to her true class standing, Villars raised her in a modest lifestyle, and obscured her parentage through the use of the pseudonym Anville. This causes Evelina to be in a rather delicate social position. By birth, she is a member of the aristocracy and entitled to two fortunes; however, her father's disavowal of his marriage to her mother effectively renders her illegitimate, and her mother's death leaves her without any respectable living family.

When Evelina arrives in London with the Mirvan family, the combination of her ambiguous social status, her ignorance of the customs governing London high society, and her conspicuous beauty force her into a precarious position. Evelina's proclivity for honesty and native sensibility make her prefer to eschew the more overt forms of social acting, such as affectation, and when she does attempt to comply with customs, or stoops to dishonesty, she fails with mortifying consequences. As her background is unknown to the general public, her new admirers are uncertain which social mores should guide their interactions. Evelina's reserve and frequent embarrassments mislead her interlocutors into thinking that her identity is malleable, and many attempt to define her.

Like Burney, as a young woman in late eighteenth-century English society, Evelina has very limited control over her own social identity. Her attempts to exert influence over it are complicated by the shifts in social expectations that accompany the frequent alterations in the

company she keeps; the novel shuttles Evelina between various social groups of different classes and environments, often using these changes to highlight the similarities and prejudices harbored by members of each. When Evelina attempts to actively assert her independence and resist others' wishes or dictates, her successes are often short lived, as when she re-establishes her reputation to Lord Orville by candidly explaining how she came to be found in the company of prostitutes, only to have her cousins the Branghtons again jeopardize it by using her name to request the nobleman's carriage the next day. Indeed, Evelina's multiple attempts to conceal her relationship to the Branghtons and her grandmother Madam Duval suggest her desperation and determination to manage the part she plays.

Unfortunately, though, time and again Evelina's efforts to actively control her public image meet with calamity. Consequently, while she has little agency over the external components of her identity, such as her parentage and financial worth, she seizes the opportunity to actively assert her values and opinions through her writing. The novel's emphasis on the performative underpinnings of class relations advances the notion that identity is partially determined through behavioral and rhetorical performance, and Evelina's primary outlet for defining her own identity is the letters themselves. Evelina's letters do not "reflect a preexisting subjectivity" but rather produce one; she uses them as a means to craft a counter-discourse in which she plays the central role, just as Burney crafts her own authorial identity by allowing her heroine to bear the bulk of the reader's scrutiny (Heckendorn Cook 7).

But if the narrative premise anticipates dramatic realism, Evelina's preferred forms of speech presentation are decidedly anti-realist. By recounting her experiences dramatically, Evelina proves she is not only a talented writer, but also a skilled dramatist. This is not merely an escape from the intimidating and demanding public surveillance she encounters, but rather a

recasting of her experiences in terms she can control. She also presents situations dramatically, proving the validity of Norman Page's assertion that "in epistolary fiction, the speech-element is not restricted to the dialogue quoted in the course of the letters, but is apt to permeate much of the writing which appears at first sight to be narrative or descriptive" (49). The reader first hears from Evelina herself in letter VIII, and her informal, open, and free-associative style starkly contrasts with the letters written by Lady Howard and Reverend Villars. Instead of the cold, formal addresses that open her elders' letters, she begins hers with lively exposition, enthusiastically sharing with Villars that "this house seems to be the house of joy" before elaborating how "every face wears a smile" as the inhabitants of Howard Grove "fly room to room" giving and then retracting orders. In addition to character development, this brief initial depiction introduces a typical dramatic formula commonly found in her letters: Evelina begins by designating the scene's "setting," the house at Howard Grove, and then the "at rise" action, servants bustling about the house in frantic preparation for an unknown event, building the reader's suspense and establishing a mood of excitement. This aids the reader in imagining the events taking place visually, and the epistolary convention of present-tense narration creates the illusion that the animated scene occurs in real time. When she then interrupts her first scene with a request for permission to accompany Mrs. Mirvan and her daughter to London, the directness of the appeal highlights the dialogic nature of her epistle to Rev. Villars. And while she expresses a reluctance to impose upon her guardian, her language betrays her enthusiasm to visit the capitol. Dashes separate the names of the city's most enticing public entertainments suggesting the tumult with which they tumble into her mind until she ultimately confesses her earnest desire for permission.

The sharp-witted and exuberant relation of unguarded opinions representative of Evelina's letter writing style only serves to heighten a sense of the character's repression in the incidents she narrates. Female social constraint often compels her silence and occasions many of her distresses, but her letters reveal a very active inner life bristling against social obligations. When the Branghtons discuss the ring Macartney gave them as collateral for his rent, she records her sentiments at the time: "What principles! I could hardly stay in the room" (153). Stay in the room, however, is precisely what she does, and one cannot help imagining the scene as it supposedly happened, with Evelina standing by looking vexed while remaining resolutely silent. The epistolary format's distinction between self as subject and self as object allows her to retrospectively articulate her voice in scenes of powerlessness, thereby mirroring Burney's method of self-determination through writing. It also recalls the way in which dramatic asides allow a character to express thoughts and motivations that stand in direct contrast to the speech actually delivered to other characters.

Authoring letters allows Evelina to seize agency over others' identities, as well. Because the narrative conceit dictates that Evelina authors the bulk of the novel's letters, the rhetorical and narrative choices may be read as her own. If Madam Duval and Captain Mirvan seem as if they have stepped off the stage of a playhouse, this is because she has presented them, or *characterized* them, that way. Rather than providing physical descriptions, she primarily introduces her characters through dialogue. Lacking the "spirits to give an account of [Captain Mirvan's] introduction," Evelina simply shares that he "seems to be surly, vulgar, and disagreeable," and then allows her transcription of his brashly unpleasant language to disclose the rest of his character traits. "Because the letter-writer's imagination is involved in the translation of experience into language," Ruth Perry maintains, "a fiction told through letters

becomes a story about events in consciousness, whatever else it may be about"—thus characters' distinguishing speech patterns reflect Evelina's psychological tendency to recast the individuals in her social scene in recognizable dramatic parts (119). The authenticity the Evelina derives from the epistolary form is leveraged as a means to launch the character's own farcical versions of minor characters filtered through the main characters perspective and language; in essence, she demonstrates how one transforms purportedly quotidian language into literary language.

She rhetorically distinguishes herself from those of whom she disapproves by phonetically transcribing interlocutors' speech using idiolect and vernacular, which reinforces her own identity and controls others'. Emphasizing idiosyncratic speech habits contributes to dramatic illusion created by her incorporation of character speech by creating a sense that the discourse is unmediated. Critics frequently celebrate the diversity of character voices as one of the novel's greatest achievements and analyze it as a form of characterization. Burney signals character traits—especially vulgarity and affectation—through the use of dialect and character catchphrases, such as Madam Duval's favorite exclamation, "Mon Dieu!" or Lady Louisa Larpent's overuse of "monstrous."<sup>46</sup> Specific uses of language, such as Mrs. Selwyn's propensity for sarcasm, also make characters' speech easily identifiable, which reduces the need for dialogue tags and authorial intervention. Evelina's handling of idiolect serves an editorial function, though, as the epistolary frame allows her to articulately differentiate her own command of language from that of characters with lower social backgrounds, such as Madam Duval and the Branghtons, or those who behave inappropriately, such as Captain Mirvan. Because Evelina could have easily and silently corrected these characters' speech and grammar,

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<sup>46</sup> Similar to Lady Louisa, Miss Watts' frequent use of this term in *A Busy Day* similarly signals that the character is prone to affectation.

her decision to write in dialect clearly “theatricalizes” them by shifting the focus from the recorded speech’s content to its manner of delivery.

Similarly, when Evelina first introduces Sir Clement Willoughby she withholds his name until after the conclusion of her transcribed dialogue recounting their meeting, which is also one of the most dramatically presented in the novel. Describing him as a “a very fashionable gay looking man,” Evelina explains that she declined the young man’s dance request by claiming she was “already engaged” to a fictional partner. Sensing her lie, Sir Clement hounds Evelina for her partner’s name until she consents to dance. He then torments her throughout the duration, and she records their conversation in a dramatically stylized scene, quoted at length here to demonstrate its scope and internal coherence:

“I wish you would say no more to me, Sir,” (cried I peevishly,) “you have already destroyed all my happiness for this evening.”

“Good Heaven! What is it I have done?-How have I merited this scorn?”

“You have tormented me to death; you have forced me from my friends, and intruded yourself upon me, against my will, for a partner.”

“Surely, my dear Madam, we ought to be better friends, since there seems to be something of sympathy in the frankness of our dispositions.-And yet, were you not an angel-how do you think I could brooke such contempt?”

“If I have offended you,” cried I, “you have but to leave me-and O how I wish you would!”

“My dear creature,” (said he, half laughing,) “why where could you be educated?”

“Where I most sincerely wish I now was!”

“How conscious you must be, all beautiful that you are, that those charming airs serve only to heighten the bloom of your complexion!”

“Your freedom, Sir, where you are more acquainted, may perhaps be less disagreeable; but to me -”

“You do me justice,” (cried he, interrupting me,) “yes, I do indeed improve upon acquaintance; you will hereafter be quite charmed with me.”

“Hereafter, Sir, I hope I shall never-”

“O hush!-hush!-have you forgot the situation in which I found you?-Have you forgot, that when deserted, I pursued you,-when betrayed, I adored you?-but for me-”

“But for you, Sir, I might perhaps have been happy.”

“What then, am I to conclude that, but for me, your partner would have appeared?-poor fellow!-and did my presence awe him?”

“I wish his presence, Sir, could awe you!”

“His presence!-perhaps then you see him?”

“Perhaps, Sir, I do,” cried I, quite wearied of his raillery.

“Where? Where?-for Heaven’s sake show me the wretch!”

“Wretch, Sir!”

“O, a very savage!-a sneaking, shame-faced, despicable puppy!” (Burney, *Evelina* 36-37)

This long dialogue is one of the most entertaining in the novel and is representative of her tendency to incorporate dramatic scenes within the letters. Evelina’s irritation builds to a crescendo as she maintains suspense by omitting dialogue tags and calling him only “the man” during the scene’s limited exposition, despite composing the letter after learning his name. Evelina’s tendency to render her framing commentary as stage directions is apparent here, as

well. The technique replicates for the reader the awkwardness of actually meeting Sir Clement and experiencing his brash persistence as it manifests within the recorded dialogue. Within the novel's narrative frame, then, Evelina theatricalizes her experiences and the individuals that populate her story; interlocutors become characters, and the events she experiences become dramatic scenes that not only convey the particulars of the narrated action, but are easy for her readers to visualize imaginatively.

Evelina's speech presentation is not just dramatic because she represents long blocks of direct quotes, though; she also employs dramatic speech conventions, including asides. Shortly after Evelina arrives in Bristol Hotwells with her bellicose guardian, Mrs. Selwyn, Lord Merton, an aristocratic rake, accosts them. Evelina presents the scene in her typical dramatically-inspired fashion:

"What do you do with yourself this evening?" said his Lordship, turning to me.

"I shall be at home, my Lord."

"O, *-apropos-*, where are you?"

"Young ladies, my Lord," said Mrs. Selwyn, "are no where."

"Prithee," whispered his Lordship, "is that queer woman your mother?"

Good Heavens, Sir, what words for such a question!

"No, my Lord."

"Your maiden aunt then?"

"No."

"Whoever she is, I wish she would mind her own affairs: I don't know what the devil a woman lives for after thirty: she is only in other folk's way. Shall you be at the assembly?"

“I believe not, my Lord.”

“No!-why then, how in the world can you contrive to pass your time?”

“In a manner which your Lordship will think very extraordinary,” cried Mrs. Selwyn,  
“for the young lady reads.” (Burney, *Evelina* 226)

Evelina’s incredulous exclamation, “Good Heavens, Sir, what words for such a question!” almost blends in with the rest of the dialogue, but the lack of quotation marks coupled with the line of direct speech that immediately follows indicate it is a mediating narratorial interjection. Growing weary of Mrs. Selwyn’s surveillance, Lord Merton then attempts to bypass her in a dialogic aside to his friend Mr. Coverly: “‘The devil a word can I speak for that woman,’ said he, in a low voice; ‘do, prithee, Jack, take her in hand’” (Burney, *Evelina* 227). When Mr. Coverly begs to be excused from the task, Lord Merton ignores the rebuff and continues his attempted conversation with Evelina.

As these scenes suggest, the extended stretches of quoted speech visually clusters into distinct dramatic scenes within the letter. The epistolary form’s “language of immediacy,” use of the present tense, and “vocabulary of vision and speech,” make it particularly amenable to the incorporation of dramatic scenes, as well (Dalton 5). The fluctuation of the “relationship between the narrating self and the experiencing self” in epistolary fiction allows the discursive space for these scenes and the specifically dramatic structure of the represented speech Burney uses transforms them into mini-dramas of their own (Bray 20).

This is especially apparent in polylogues, or group conversations—a relatively rare speech form within the novel, but found frequently in *Evelina* (Thomas 85). Evelina’s rendering of extended group conversations creates the illusion of unmediated discourse merely introduced by a literary narrator, as Figure 1 illustrates. Representative of her technique, in Volume I Letter

XXI Evelina describes how preparations to attend an opera with the Mirvans were abruptly interrupted by a surprise visit from her cousins, the Branghtons. As with her first letter, Evelina first designates the setting, “our chamber” and describes the at rise action: “what was our surprise to see our chamber door was flung open, and the two Miss Branghtons enter the room!” By including her characters’ manner upon entry, that the door was “flung” open and the women “advanced with *great familiarity*,” she provides a visual image of the scene before it unfolds. Next she designates the first line of speech with only an ambiguous “they,” making it unclear which Branghton sister initiates the conversation, or whether the lines were spoken by one sister or by both alternately: “How do you do, Cousin? –so we’ve caught you at the glass! –well, I’m determined I’ll tell my brother of that!.” Although the character designation remains unclear these lines effectively convey a sense of immediacy and intrusion. Evelina then provides only one additional line of direct narration recording her friend Maria Mirvan’s response to her cousins before letting the drama unfold with minimal editorial intrusion. Each line of dialogue leads unannounced, allowing the represented speech primacy. Characters are only identified by dialogue tag when there is a speaker change, amounting to exactly half of the lines, which only appears in a clause after the first phrase. Four of the seven dialogue tags are the generic “said X,” while “answered I” offers variation but bears little descriptive weight, leaving only “cried the youngest” and “demanded the abrupt Miss Branghton” as reflections on the manner in which a line was delivered. These last two tags supply information that amounts to stage directions, as well. On the whole, though, this approach privileges dialogue over narration and allows the reader to imaginatively supply the bulk of the dialogue’s paralinguistic features.

Volume III’s third letter, in which Evelina recounts a visit to Clifton, is another example of Burney’s dramatic approach to group dialogue. Figure 2 provides an excerpt from the novel

on the left and a stage adaptation of the scene on the right to demonstrate the resemblance between Burney's writing style and play writing. Evelina again begins by setting the scene, in this case by explaining that the party, or cast, was assembled around a table, and then follows with the "at rise" action, delivered in the same pointed manner as stage directions: "Mr. Coverley came into the room." Next, Evelina summarizes the conversation's introductory speech: "he made a thousand apologies in a breath for being so late, but said he had been retarded by a little accident, for that he had overturned his phaeton, and broke it all to pieces. Lady Louisa screamed at this intelligence, and, looking at Lord Merton, declared she would never go into a phaeton again." By beginning with a brief narrative summary rather than direct quotes, Evelina ensures her reader can visually imagine the scene's setting which allows the most engaging portion of the dialogue to commence without intrusion, and establishes motivation for the ensuing conversation. Including the paralinguistic detail that Lady Louisa's first line was delivered while "looking at Lord Merton" in her initial diegesis, rather than within the ensuing group dialogue, also allows Evelina to direct her reader's attention. Lady Louisa's overreaction is less important than her intended audience—with the simple inclusion of the detail that she was "looking at Lord Merton" while speaking, Evelina suggests that the scream and histrionic response were both designed to elicit a response from Lord Merton.

After the initial exposition establishes a visual image, the dialogue commences with limited interruption. As we saw in the scene in Volume I above, Evelina again begins each line with dialogue and then interjects with a clause identifying the speaker only after the first phrase, with the single exception of one of Lady Louisa's lines near the end, where the reader is left to identify the speaker by inference. As this scene features frequent speaker changes, there are more dialogue tags in total, but they are similarly generic. Again, half of the ten tags are simply "said

X,” while of the remaining five, one is a variation, “returned the other,” with the last four “cried X,” suggesting the manner of delivery in repetitive uniformity. Leading with dialogue again foregrounds speech over narration and almost erases Evelina’s mediation for the duration of the scene. Instead, she reserves her reflections for before and after, which allows the dialogue to stand out as an almost-independent scene. Evelina employs this narrative technique frequently, including when she recalls Madam Duval’s account of the attack suffered at the hands of Captain Mirvan and Mrs. Selwyn’s description of Mrs. Beaumont.

The dramatic nature of Burney’s rendering of group dialogue in *Evelina* is confirmed in a side-by-side comparison between an adapted scene from *Evelina* to one from her play, *A Busy Day* (1800-02). Considered by many critics to be her most successful stage comedy, *A Busy Day* shares *Evelina*’s satiric focus on the discord created by overlapping social spheres and class prejudices. As in *Evelina*, we meet the heroine, Eliza, after a refined elderly gentleman raises the heroine in isolation from her vulgar relatives. The daughter of a “city” merchant, Eliza spent her formative years with a successful and reportedly upstanding gentleman in India, where she met and became betrothed to the upper-class Mr. Cleveland. The play’s actions, and the bulk of its comic material, arise from the difficulties resulting from her reunion with her family upon her return to England. Indeed, the scenes between Eliza and her family are strongly reminiscent of those between Evelina and the Branghtons, and in many ways *A Busy Day* reads as *Evelina* trapped with the Branghtons, only Eliza’s relations are immediate and thus she must balance her filial duty and native inclination for familial piety with her instinctive disgust with their behavior.

In Figure 3 we see that Burney developed many of the behavioral resemblances through dialogue. For the most part, simply moving the identifying “said Character X or Y” dialogue tag

in the novel from the second clause to the beginning of the line was the only step necessary to adapt the scene into a script. The only other change required was adapting the notation “abruptly” into an explicit stage direction. The comparison also shows Burney’s preference for coupling together lines with repetition—in the novel, Polly responds to Evelina’s news that she “is engaged already” with “Engaged! Lord, Miss, never mind that” just as Eliza responds to Miss Watts’ question “Wa’nt you monstrous frightened at first?” with “Frightened? The native Gentoos are the mildest and gentlest of all human beings.” The dialogues feature similar back and forth rhythms between individuals and a preference for a sentence structure that begins with an exclamation followed by the addressee’s name and a response: “Well, Miss, that is not so very good-natured in you” in *Evelina*, and “La, Pa’, why didn’t you ask them to stay?” in *A Busy Day*. These, along with a marked proclivity for such colorful remarks as “La,” or “Lord,” and “Pray” exhibit overlap in technique between genres and highlight similarities between the Branghton and the Watts families’.

### **From Novelist to Playwright**

As the previous pages demonstrate, *Evelina* proves without a doubt that Burney was capable of writing entertaining, stage-ready dialogue. Esteemed contemporaries in the literary and theater worlds also came to the same conclusion. Many of Burney’s friends and acquaintances warmly encouraged her to turn her talents next to writing a comedy and she even received offers of assistance from some of the most successful writers of her age. Arthur Murphy offered to advise Burney on style and construction, Samuel Johnson was slated to write the prologue, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, then the manager of the Drury Lane theatre, committed to producing her play before it was even written (Doody, 70).

Energized by *Evelina*'s popularity and her friends' enthusiasm, Burney decided to renew her theatrical ambitions by composing a comedy. In addition to the potential for substantial remuneration and the ample encouragement she received, Burney was greatly attracted to dramatic writing because the collaborative structure of theatrical production offered her the opportunity to maintain her preferred style of authorship—one in which the author's role can be effectively minimized. While authors such as Fielding and Goldsmith lamented the necessity of collaboration and railed against the multiple levels of mediation the dramatic production process entailed, Burney found it liberating.

Burney's identity was revealed shortly after *Evelina* was a confirmed success. When Charles Burney learned that his daughter authored a popular novel, he did not hesitate to publicize her identity and leverage her popularity for his own aggrandizement. The revelation brought with it attention, praise, and new social expectations for the young Burney. As she anticipated, the role of "Authoress" came with pressures and expectations independent of literary production. In an oft-quoted line from her 1778 journal, she describes her happiness at having a visitor, Mr. Lort, who does *not* mention her literary success:

He sat about a quarter of an Hour,--& left me well pleased with his Visit, because he never mentioned Evelina, --& I cannot bear to be palavered upon that subject; --the flattery I met with at Streatham, would, indeed, have spoilt me for almost all other, by the delicacy of it's texture, had I been ever so greedy of it naturally: but Mr. Lort saw my *Father* the Day before, & to *him* was less scrupulous, but expressed great wonder *where* & *how* I could have picked up such materials, --& the more so, as I seemed so silent & so quiet.

Thus it is, that an *Authoress* must always be supposed to be flippant, assuming & loquacious! – And, indeed, the dread of these kind of censures have been my principal motives for wishing *snugship*. (Burney, *Early Journals* 135)

Burney's distaste for "palavering" about her novel is partially derived from satiety— her need for professional validation was satisfied by praise from the literati that populated Hester Lynch Thrale's Streatham circle, and not "naturally greedy" of flattery, flippant comments about preconceived notions of authorship only further motivated her to eschew the role of "*Authoress*." After describing how the secret of her authorship has spread, she then laments:

Heigh ho!—I part with this my dear, long loved, long cherished *snugship* with more regret than any body will believe, except my dear sisters who Live *with* me, & know me too well & too closely to doubt me: but yet, I am neither insensible to the *Honours* which have wrested my secret from my Friends, nor Cold to the *pleasures* attending a success so unhopd for: yet my fears for the *future*--& my dread of getting into *Print*, and thence into *Public Notice*,-- -- -- I neither now can, --or believe I ever shall, wholly Conquer! (Burney, *Early Journals* 134-135)

Burney's literary ambition, then, is for professional success divested from the performance of authorship as a social role and she sought means to mitigate public attention.

Moreover, as Kristina Straub observes, witnessing Charles Burney's experiences as a professional writer may have led her to "unromantic ideals about that the relationship between writers and audiences" (41). After basking in the praise of those whose opinions she admired and respected, including Samuel Johnson, Hester Thrale, and Edmund Burke, she admitted anxiety about her ability to maintain literary success (Straub 42). Straub characterizes this in bleak terms: "Burney found herself in the ironic position of having written herself into a new kind of

powerlessness; what began as control over the imaginative materials of fiction became a form of powerlessness that must have felt depressingly familiar to her” (42). In this sense, playwriting was a means to regain power by adopting a different form of authorship. Catherine Gallagher extends a claim Burney made in her early journal that she writes to “Nobody” to include *Evelina*’s readership, which effectively “clears a space . . . for the unknown and unknowable reader, who must be kept a cipher if the author is to preserve her integrity” (210). Envisioning her reader in the dual sense of either a non-entity or a person of no consequence, or both, thus allows Burney “to escape the censure of carrying on a flirtatious correspondence” with her reader—a pressure partially derived and certainly intensified by Burney’s gender and associated expectations of propriety. Burney’s choice of epistolary fiction allowed her to achieve this aim, and writing for the stage similarly offered an opportunity to control her level of audience engagement. “Paradoxically,” Gallagher continues, “the larger and more impersonal the audience became, the more writing for it could be conceived in the same innocent terms as writing only for oneself, that is, as writing for nobody;” strange as it may seem, entertaining a whole theater full of visible, embodied individuals may have felt more secure to Burney than directly addressing her audience using an authorial or narratorial persona in a novel that was to be privately read in a home (210).

Playwriting thus allowed Burney to confirm her status as an accomplished writer while remaining safely concealed behind the scenes, both literally and figuratively. Burney finished the preliminary draft of her comedy in 1779, just one year after *Evelina*’s resounding success. Her father and surrogate father, Samuel Crisp, strongly discouraged her from actually producing the play, however. Misogynistic notions of propriety, and possibly even envy are cited as two possible motivations, but it seems more likely that the men recognized that the play could

grievously offend the powerful Elizabeth Montague and her Bluestocking circle, which the play lampoons. For characters and plot, Burney was indebted to several literary antecedents including earlier pseudo-intellectual characters found in English and French plays, most notably Moliere's *Les femmes savantes*, though she denied having ever read the play to Samuel Crisp and her father.<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of influence, Burney's creative instincts and the external pressures to adhere to restrictive notions of female authorship led to a fresh take on comic drama. Writing at a time when it was deemed indecorous for a woman to write for the stage, Burney overcame the restraints occasioned by contemporary notions of female propriety by strategically altering the traditional comic focus on the sexual-tension laden theme of the difficulties separating a young couple to a satirical send up of societal or familial issues, in this case pseudo-intellectual women, relegating the romantic plot to a secondary position. In so doing, she borrows heavily from farce through her use of low characters, multiple settings, and by deliberately eschewing an aphoristically clear moral, opting instead for the pointed *castigat ridendo mores* aim favored by Augustan satirists. In terms of stagecraft, too, it is evident that Burney crafted her play with visual effect in mind, and she succeeded in designating scenes and actions that would conceivably play well on stage. Opening the play in a milliner's shop allows for a great deal of stage business, as Margaret Doody notes, with the milliners physically working on their wares and the shop's display cases teeming with their handiwork for the characters to handle as they deliver their lines.

Although Burney's father and Crisp pressured her into suppressing *The Witlings*, she persevered in her efforts to prepare the comedy for production, revising the fourth act in 1780 and planning further revisions with the aim of presenting it for professional review before

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<sup>47</sup> see Doody, pg. 81, for a comprehensive list of titles that may have inspired *The Witlings*

ultimately abandoning hope (Sabor 4). This discouragement failed to deter her dramaturgical ambitions, though. After publishing another successful novel in 1782, *Cecilia*, Burney reluctantly accepted a position in the court of King George III as Second Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte in 1786, where she remained in service for five years. During this period Burney composed three full tragedies, *Edwy and Elgiva*, *Hubert De Vere*, and *The Siege of Pevensey*, and began another that remained unfinished, *Elberta* (Ghoshal Wallace 58). After leaving service, Burney submitted *Hubert De Vere*, her most gothic tragedy, to John Philip Kemble of the Drury Lane Theatre for production consideration; the play was accepted but Burney later withdrew it in and supplied *Edwy and Elgiva* in its stead. *Edwy and Elgiva* premiered at the Drury Lane Theatre on March 21, 1795, but the play's production proved disastrous. Ironically, Burney learned that the collaborative production apparatus would release her from a personal obligation to perform textually, but also divest her of control of others' performances. The play was beset with production issues from the start—the cast walked out during the initial reading led by Burney's brother, Charles, and Burney was unable to make revisions after this initial setback because she was recovering from childbirth. Additionally, *Edwy and Elgiva* was only rehearsed nine times before opening night, leaving the cast woefully underprepared.<sup>48</sup> Even the performances of two of the most renowned contemporary actors, Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble, were not enough to counterbalance the damnably poor performance given by the lesser-known actors, who failed to memorize their parts. The audience clearly heard the prompter feeding lines to the actors, who attempted to compensate for their failures by improvisation. Burney complained that one “had but 2 lines of his part by Heart!. he made all the rest at random—& such nonsense as put all the other actors out as much as himself”

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Sabor usefully contrasts this to the fifty-four rehearsals of James D'Egville's *Alexander the Great; or, The Conquest of Persia*, the popular afterpiece that followed Burney's play (xiii).

(qtd. in Sabor, “General Intro” xiv). Burney’s carefully composed blank-verse proved particularly unsuitable for improvisation.

The bungled production later proved a source of solace to Burney, however. Though she blushed to have the actors’ “blunders pass for mine” and concluded that “a more wretched performance . . . could not be exhibited in a barn,” she consoled herself with the thought that the audience had not actually damned *her* play, but the actors’ handling of it (qtd. in Sabor, “General Intro” xiv). Burney was so confident in her tragedy’s merits that she interpreted the applause that met theatre manager John Philip Kemble’s announcement at the play’s conclusion that it would be “withdrawn for alterations” for the season as a sign that the audience was *eager* for its return after revisions (Sabor, “General Intro” xv). Burney remained open to revising and re-staging the play, but she did not follow through, nor did she publish it in compliance with her father’s wishes.

This response is critical to determining Burney’s notion of authorship as performance—with a play, the production apparatus can effectively insulate the playwright—if the audience does not like the performance there is a plausible chance that the negative response resulted from production or performers’ inadequacies, not the work itself. Also, assuming the play remains unpublished until it has proven successful onstage, the ephemeral nature of the performance makes the most of the public’s short attention span—the memory of a disastrous production can be quickly supplanted. Burney was not only self-protective of her personal and literary reputations, but she had a father who jealously guarded the family name; therefore, any public venture maintained a risk. Rather than conceiving of a theatrical venture as a loss of artistic control over her work, her response to her initial production’s failure indicates that she derived great comfort from the process of theatrical production and her composition of several more

plays after this initial misstep proves the strength of her attraction to this form of authorship. In addition, Burney's continued attempts to produce her plays, especially given her father's repeated and open objections, imply confidence that they stood a fair chance at success.

Burney's reputation was not entirely unscathed, however. Production errors aside, *Edwy and Elgiva* suffered from Burney's ignorance of stagecraft and play writing and some reviewers noted as much. Still, Burney remained undeterred. She admitted that the play "was not written with any idea of the stage" and suffered from "so many undramatic effects, from my inexperience of Theatrical requisites & demands, that when I saw it, I perceived myself a thousand things I wished to change" (qtd. in Sabor, "General Intro" xiv). And change it she did; a few short months after its production Burney revised the play with her husband's assistance, only to once again bow to her father's pressure to set the play aside, determining to instead focus on cultivating a subscription list for her third novel, *Camilla*, before returning to her dramatic endeavors in 1797.

### **Conversational Characters**

Despite Burney's unceasing cultivation of her dramatic oeuvre—the documentary record shows that she devotedly edited and revisited her plays well into her eighties, her career as a dramatist never prospered (Sabor, "Introduction to Love and Fashion" 107). Because Burney clearly excelled at crafting lively conversations that simultaneously advanced plot, developed character, and encouraged sympathetic responses from her audience, one could assume her dramas would prove as successful as her novels, as her friends and acquaintances expected.<sup>49</sup> But both during her lifetime and in recent years, responses have been mixed. Although personal motives certainly must have contributed to critical reservations, Burney's contemporaries were

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, Hester Thrale encouraged her to write a comedy specifically because *Evelina*'s dialogues were so well executed.

hesitant to commit positive reviews. Even Samuel Johnson, as Hemlow reminds us, politely declined passing judgment on *The Witlings* after reading it, instead delegating the task to Arthur Murphy (171). After *Edwy and Elgiva*'s ill-fated production reviewers "complained repeatedly that something better had been expected from the author of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*" (Sabor, Introduction to "Love and Fashion" 106). Modern responses have been similarly ambivalent. Although Margaret Ann Doody made a strong case for the plays' many merits, others have not been as celebratory. Tara Ghoshal Wallace initially described Burney's dramatic language in *A Busy Day* "stilted" and called its action contrived, although she later offered a retraction in her general summary of Burney's dramatic corpus (59).

Despite Burney's many strengths as a dramatist, and she indeed demonstrates significant technical and creative talent, her plays strike most as lacking in the same captivating qualities of her novels, suggesting a failure to realize her full potential. In both her novels and comedies, one of Burney's greatest strengths as an author is her ability to skillfully complement psychologically complex major characters with farcical secondary characters, with the ensuing disparity generating momentum for both plot and humor. In *Evelina*, she balances the Richardsonian ideal of an intimate and detailed portrayal of a young woman's innermost thoughts and desires with the boisterous antics of characters derived from traditional stage character types such as Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan, just as in her play *The Witlings* she relieves the trials of Beaufort and Cecilia's serious romantic plot with the ridiculous behavior and conversation of Lady Smatter, Mrs. Voluble, and Mrs. Sapient.

Despite the consistency of this trend, though, when Joyce Hemlow introduced modern readers to Burney's dramatic works in "Fanny Burney: Playwright," she negatively compared the quality of Burney's dramatic characters in *The Witlings* to those in *Evelina*. In *Evelina*, Hemlow

maintains, “the manners thus delineated were faithful photographs of *mores* of the time” and “the comic characters were transcripts from life” especially when contrasted to Burney’s dramatic characters, who were crafted using “a method quite different from the realistic procedure” she utilized in her first novel. Hemlow cites the numerous generalized character sketches found in the Berg collection as evidence that Burney created dramatic characters from “aggregates of qualities, foibles, or humours” and that, for those in *The Witlings* at least, “they seem never to have passed this embryonic stage” (172). Although Hemlow’s assertion about Evelina’s comic characters prompts one to wonder how many prototypes for characters such as Madam Duval and Captain Mirvan actually populated late eighteenth-century England, the general premise that Burney’s dramatic characters appear vitiated when compared to those in her plays is apt, and as character speech is the most apparent medium of dramatic expression, Burney’s methods for speech composition deserve closer analysis.

The variation in speech quality between Burney’s plays and novels may correspond to differences in compositional method. For her novels, Burney composed independent dialogues that bear a striking resemblance to dramatic scripts. In contrast, the preponderance of notes for her dramas is character sketches. There is strong evidence that these sketches are used as starting points for more complex methods of character development, as well, but it seems that, counterintuitively, Burney often conceived of drama as diegesis and novels as mimesis of dramatic speech, which may at least partly account for the discrepancy in quality.

Page after page of rich, compelling dialogue—much of it jotted down in such haste that Burney barely succeeds in separating speakers by colons—are found in the preliminary notes for her novels. Frequently excluding novelistic dialogue tags, Burney opts instead for theatrically unmediated speech, mirroring play scripts. Some for *Camilla* flow so seamlessly that Burney

often neglected to even designate speakers, with one line of dialogue spilling into the next uninterrupted. And when she does use colons to separate speakers, Burney frequently omits character names, thus replicating the unimpeded rhythm of natural speech and developing personality through imagined interaction. Burney's novelistic speech was thus developed independently as mini dramatic scripts on some occasions. The missing dialogue tags and exposition in most of her draft dialogues<sup>50</sup> indicates Burney envisioned many of her novelistic scenes as dramatic dialogues before embedding them into more recognizably novelistic prose. General dialogues that omit speaker names signal that she possibly crafted dialogue *before* envisioning specific characters in some instances.

Given Burney's copious use of unmediated dialogue in her novels, perhaps it should come as little surprise that a large proportion of her preliminary notes feature independent dialogues, but the extensive novelistic exposition found in preparation for her dramas is unexpected. Burney's manuscripts indicate she favored a compartmentalized approach to her plays' initial development, primarily organized under three headings: "characters," "narrative," and "incidents," that roughly correspond to character development, plot, and action. More significantly, though, Burney compresses a remarkable amount of significant material into short sketches that develop more than the narrative component designated, and frequently act as starting points for more comprehensive methods of development.

Burney's manuscript notes include many of the typological sketches Hemlow references, but this approach to dramatic writing was typical of late-eighteenth century dramaturgy. In order to magnify a play's moral aims, Margaret Ann Doody explains:

dramatists smooth out ambiguities, minimizing ironic pleasure to make sure we get the point. No character should stray too far from his description (e.g. 'faithful, noble-hearted

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<sup>50</sup> There are some exceptions, especially within the "Cliona" dialogues.

creature,’ or ‘Money is the spring of all his actions’). The characters must also display their particular foibles incessantly, and be ready to utter a ‘sentiment’ when one is wanted. As a result the characters do not seem truly relaxed, truly themselves. (74)

Typological characters abound in late eighteenth-century plays; dramatists frequently populated their plays with easily recognizable type characters, often alongside more nuanced, complex characters. This strengthened a play’s didactic aims by allowing the audience to immediately recognize which characters were to be derided, and which characters were exemplary, and actors specialized within specific character types (Booth 330).

But Burney only began character development for her dramas with typographical sketches that then served as the basis for more complex story lines and character networks. One farcical character called Mrs. Migrim or Mrs. Megrim, reappears throughout several of Burney’s notes and serves as evidence of a multi-staged developmental process. A scrap entitled both “Characters” and “Narrative” introduces Mrs. Migrim with a short description. She is “a woman who sacrifices all forms, all appearances, all considerations, to present sport, whim, & fantastic humour: careless what is thought of her, & never so charmed as when the occasion of confusion & embarrassment”—an auspicious start for an amusing character, to be sure. A different scrap entitled “incidents” then offers a brief comic scene involving our new friend:

Miss Migrim calls upon a group of ordinary people, breaks in upon them, & disturbs them by comments upon their dress, which she advises them to improve; tells them she shall stay & dine with them; they run out, one after another, making preparations, & whisper each other eternally some hint. She sees a goose pass the window, & overhears them plan a rich plumb pudding: soon after, when they are a little quiet, she [asks] them to hasten dinner, as she is hungry; they move about again, & make [illegible] for giving

her nothing but hot-lunch; she declares she can eat anything in the world, except Goose & plumb pudding. They [stand] aghast. Again, in utter distress, they run about at last [dinner] is ready. She goes in, looks . . . & says she recollects a sudden engagement, & then hastily takes leave.

This droll scene would doubtless prove successful on stage, especially given that it relies heavily on physical action providing ample comic stage business. But Burney was not yet done developing Mrs. Migrim; her essential qualities established, she required a suitable protégé. In a scrap entitled “Mr. Dry,” Burney considers her options for supplying a proper complementary character:

Mr. Dry, very fond of Mrs. Migrim either as an admirer caught by her attractions, & amored by her sprightly vagrancies or a relation, partially blind to her defects or an old humourest, who thinks her trained by himself & opinions & asperitions of his own suggesting—hears her cut up- enraged defends her- hears of her airs asserts them all graces- hears of her insolent disdains- rejoices in her spirit- of her lasting censures applauds her superior judgement . . .

Mr. Dry is an entirely relational figure; every aspect Burney considers relates to Mrs. Migrim in some way- there is no corresponding general aggregate list of his own personal qualities independent from his interaction with her. Burney must have settled upon one of her options, because a character list including both Mrs. Migrim and Mr. Dry appears within the manuscript collection, and a second list even includes Burney’s preferred casting of “Mrs. Jordan” in the role of Mrs. Migrim.

In total, the method Burney used for Mrs. Migrim may be properly classified as a multi-step compositional process. She first crafted a preliminary list of general character traits,

followed by a scene showcasing those traits, and finally a complementary character. Clearly, then, the initial aggregate of foibles and humours Burney began with were incorporated into more detailed and complex method of characterization, developed through proximal and relational interaction with other characters. These relationships take precedence over character psychology—Burney was less concerned with the motivations underlying her farcical characters’ behavior than their affect on others, and the character work on Mr. Dry suggests she may have created some characters for the sole purpose of accentuating another’s comic foibles.<sup>51</sup> This corresponds with her use of similar characters in her novels. The most overtly farcical characters are valued for their interactions with and affect upon others rather than eliciting any interest in their own backgrounds or psychology. Character speech, though, is conspicuously missing.

Burney’s multiple approaches for her initial character development seem to vary by character type, as well. The brief description of an individual’s most distinctive personality features, and episodic mini-narratives like that above were most often used for farcical characters. Other manuscripts explore how a single major life event affect a range of different character personality types, and biographical summaries that chronicle the influential events that contributed to individual personality formation seem to be preferred for more complex characters. “Potenius” the author, serves as an example of this last approach. After “struggling with hardships” Potenius “at length fell to writing, & composed a work that by its merit made its own way in the world, the Bookseller was applied to for the author- & Potenius became known- a great man became his Patron, and Potenius became popular; the smiles of the world delighted him first and then filled him with vanity” but once his popularity “among the great” waned and the “Eclat of his tome abided, & other[s] succeeded to his place, mortification ensued, he grew a

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<sup>51</sup> Also, perhaps Hemlow’s observation that her dramatic characters are “somewhat inadequately clothed with human flesh and spirit” derives from Burney’s intention of actually seeing these characters embodied (172).

prey to envy...commenced critic of all works but his own & consequently all writers waged war with him” before eventually “hating and hated [he] became all malevolence.” Burney’s concern with a dramatic character’s extended biography is especially intriguing as most of her plays depict only a short period of time, and therefore indicates that she was concerned with motivations and history that could only be expressed by a character through oblique speech forms, or mentioned by others. This rather dismal vignette also contains illuminating insights regarding professional authorship that recall Burney’s career trajectory. Writing is initially presented as a means of escape from struggle and hardship, but the dark turn poor Potenius’ tale takes, ending in mortification and possible misanthropy, unveils Burney’s pessimism about the enterprise. It is hard not to read this sketch as a cautionary tale that justifies Burney’s attempts to shun public scrutiny, but even more notable is that it still does not present character speech.

Another initial character sketch depicting “Miss Hasty” includes the rudiments of speech, used to indicate thought. Found amongst notes designated for “Dram.” or “Drama,” the sketch is entitled “Narrative,” and contains a rather short biography, but simplicity suggested by Miss Hasty’s emblematic proves misleading:

A pretty, thoughtless, good humoured girl at 17, thinks, talks, raves, of nothing but marrying: with no particular offer in view, she looks up to it with eager impatience. – “when I am married,” then, -“When I have a house of my own” “When I am my own mistress” with all this in her little head, she accepts the very first proposal,...she marries—she then—

Finds her own House—the House of which she must take charge...being her own mistress, having the burthen of a whole family upon her- Being married, becoming the

property of a Person to whom she makes over a legal power of treating her precisely as he pleases.

And, as she has chosen neither for character nor disposition, neither from sympathy nor Respect, she finds it hard to submit, where she meant to become independent, & difficult to take the caress, where she has made no provision for the solaces, of domestic life

The sketch is remarkably comprehensive for its compressed length. The brief three-paragraph structure accomplishes two developmental functions: it delineates the character's process of maturation with each paragraph summarizing a stage in Miss Hasty's life, and establishes her temperament. The first paragraph designates the character's most noteworthy personality attribute, hastiness, and the next two explore the consequences of indulging this penchant. Line breaks and paragraphs suggest major changes, perhaps proposed act changes, before disclosing the consequences of the actions described in the previous paragraphs, and build to the final paragraph's disclosure of her discontent: not only is it hard for Miss Hasty "to submit" to her husband, but she must also "take the caress"—the narrator intimating that sexual obligations accompany her misguided choice. It is remarkable that Burney, whose novels are quite long, could concentrate so much detail, plot, and psychological complexity into three concise paragraphs. The most pared-down typological character description possible, "Miss Hasty," the "pretty, thoughtless, good humoured girl at 17," blossoms into an engaging narrative, providing enough material to ripen into a full drama.

The narrative method of this dramatic sketch is primarily diegesis with the brief comment "in her little head" contributing a somewhat sardonic third-person narrative voice. Unlike her other methods of dramatic character development, though, this fragment includes represented

speech. However, it is speech represented as thought that tracks the rapidity of Miss Hasty's imaginative progression from marriage, to lady of the house, to her ultimate goal of being her "own mistress." Because this speech provides access to the young woman's thoughts and implies her motivations—primarily her desire for independence—the best corresponding forms for translating these thoughts to dramatic speech would be soliloquy or asides.

Given the presence of preparatory work in which she explored the motivations and thoughts of her dramatic characters, it is unsurprising to find that Burney had a penchant for the dramatic mediating speech forms that could best convey that information to an audience, specifically asides and soliloquies. These devices appear most conspicuously in her tragicomedy, *The Woman-Hater*, composed from roughly 1800-02.<sup>52</sup> Burney incorporates ninety-three asides and twenty-six instances of characters speaking alone onstage, including several long soliloquies, exhibiting a tendency for monologic dramatic speech that stand in contrast to the many dramatically presented polylogues found in *Evelina*.

Burney draws from her previous works for *The Woman-Hater*'s plot. She seems to have taken a conciliatory suggestion from her father that she salvage pieces of *The Wittlings* for future use to heart, because she revives the character of Lady Smatter in *The Woman-Hater*, replete with her ridiculous literary pretensions. Ostensibly within the same fictional realm as her first play, Lady Smatter appears apart from her coterie and we learn of her romantic past—she was once betrothed to Sir Roderick, who was deeply in love with her, until a romantic poem enticed her to abruptly leave him for the superior fortune and title of Lord Smatter. Sir Roderick thus becomes an inveterate misogynist. She also renews a significant plot point from *Evelina*. Joyce, a Brangtonesque character, is initially presented as the daughter of Lady Smatter's brother,

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<sup>52</sup> The exact date of composition is unknown, but Peter Sabor estimates this range based on documentary evidence (Sabor, "Introduction to *The Woman-Hater*," 192).

Wilmot, but later revealed to be an oblivious imposter who was passed off as Wilmot's natural child by her mother, his actual daughter's nursemaid, after Wilmot's wife Elenora fled with their daughter. This renews the major revelation in *Evelina*, as Sir John Belmont mistakenly believes the "Miss Belmont" he has raised is actually Evelina, when in fact she is the daughter of her nursemaid. The reappearance of the changeling plot in *The Woman-Hater* is definitive evidence of its status as dramatic *peripeteia* in her novel.

There are numerous soliloquies in *The Woman Hater*. Multiple scenes consist exclusively of a single soliloquy and she adopts the form most productively to convey the inner turmoil of the estranged tragic characters, Lady Smatter's brother Wilmot and Sir Rodrick's sister Eleonora. Through various conversations throughout the play we learn the couple's calamitous history- the pair moved to the West Indies shortly after their marriage, which was disavowed by Sir Roderick, where they had a daughter. During the child's infancy Wilmot's irrational jealousy drove him to wrongfully accuse Eleonora of infidelity, and the intensity of his rage caused her to flee, taking along with her their daughter against his commands. By the beginning of the play Wilmot has discovered his suspicions of Eleonora were unfounded and he lives in pensive regret with Joyce, the child Nurse presented as his own. Eleonora has recently rented a cottage with her daughter, Sophia, near Sir Roderick's home in the hopes of appealing to his mercy for support. Act III, scene i, is representative of Burney's use of soliloquy to convey inner monologue. It depicts Eleonora's return to her cottage after learning from Lady Smatter that her estranged husband will return from abroad. After "hastily shutting the door" she exclaims:

ELEONORA. So! I am safe! Safe? –From whom? My husband? –And is it I who fly him? I, who scarcely knew the use of sight, but to seek his Eyes—of hearing, but to listen to his voice? O Wilmot! –in what temper of mind com'st thou at last? Is it utterly to

demolish me, by snatching away my child? or to call back my lost happiness, by restoring me myself?—Where is Sophia?—? (calling up a small stair case) Sophia! She is not returned. Should she meet him—but he would not know her. My Child! (Burney, *Woman-Hater*, 3.1)

Eleonora's chain of abrupt questions and answers resemble the process of free association and their terse halting expression conveys Eleonora's frantic distress. In a sophisticated structural strategy, Burney then mirrors this soliloquy through one delivered by Wilmot when he learns of Eleonora's near presence:

WILMOT. She cannot forgive me! —perhaps she ought not! —Her fair Fame blighted—O heinous precipitance of iniquitous jealousy!—no! she cannot forgive me! There are injuries which we can only cease to resent, by ceasing to remember; and what to my memory is cemented by remorse, to her's must be glued by indignation. Art thou, then, sovereign over evils, O time! only because sovereign over life? —No!—I will not seek her pardon! —The pardon of the lips! to which the heart cannot beat responsive! —The pardon...of pity! —not the pity of tender feelings, but of feeling which have worn out their own energy, —of...contempt! Horrible! —I revolt from such pardon. The fiercest resentment were preferable. I will see her, however. Lowly to the earth will I bend the proud spirit that wronged her, reinstate her in all her violated rights, make over to her the sole dominion of her unfortunate daughter, and then, in a last farewell—I will not seek her habitation till midnight. Our interview must have no witnesses, no interruption.— Whither—whither—when it is over, shall I guide my desperate steps? (Burney, *Woman-Hater*, 4.9)

This soliloquy is designated in its own scene, and as a complex series of thoughts that leads to consequential actions that will affect the plot, the structural separation is warranted. Eleonora and Wilmot's soliloquies mirror each other, they both convey remorse, anxiety, and lingering attachment, and their parallels telegraph an eventual joyous reunion. Soliloquies are the primary vehicle for emotional content in the play.

In addition to several soliloquies, Burney utilizes an astounding number of asides in *The Woman-Hater*. Even more striking than their frequency, though, is that entire conversations are delivered through asides, leading one to wonder how these scenes would appear onstage or if it is even possible to compose them using less oblique speech forms. One such scene, that in which Old Waverley meets Sophia, Eleonora and Wilmot's daughter, applies the conventional use of asides to indicate instances of mistaken identity and misunderstandings—Sophia thinks Old Waverley is Sir Roderick, which causes Old Waverley to misconstrue as sexual overtures her timid request for support and invitation to her cottage. The most glaring example, however, is when Old Waverley, bewitched by Sophia's supposed flirtations, appears at the cottage. Old Waverley assumes Eleonora is her daughter's bawd, while Eleonora believes Old Waverley is her estranged brother Sir Roderick:

OLD WAVERLEY. I must not wait at the door, for fear Jack should come by, and catch me. Where's the little girl, now? —Bless me! I suppose that's the mother!

ELEONORA. (*Aside*) I dare not look at him!

OLD WAVERLEY. (*Aside*) This is lucky enough. I'll ransom the poor girl out of her hands without loss of time; —a vile hag!

ELEONORA. (*Aside*) O, could I soften him!

OLD WAVERLEY. (*Aside*) I don't know how I shall command myself to speak to her without saying something affronting—a naughty jade!

ELEONORA. (*Aside*) How I dread the first instant!

OLD WAVERLEY. (*Aside*) I'll put the poor thing out to some honest trade, two hundred miles off from her!

ELEONORA. (*Aside*) I must conquer my terror!

OLD WAVERLEY. (*Aside*) She's ashamed, now, to show her face to an honest man, with all her impudence!

(ELEONORA *turns slowly round, clasps her hands with an air of distress, and bows, but without raising her eyes.*)

OLD WAVERLEY. (*starting back, Aside*) Bless my heart! Who'd have thought to have seen such a fine looking woman as that?

ELEONORA. (*Aside*) He does not recollect me!—By every one—and every way forgotten!

OLD WAVERLEY. (*Aside*) She has no more the look of a woman of that sort—

ELEONORA. (*raising her eyes, Aside*) How? A stranger!—who can he be? and why has he asked for Sophia? (Burney, *Woman-Hater* 4.13)

Despite the extended length of this excerpt, by convention we are to believe that Eleonora and Wilmot have not heard a single line uttered by the other individual. Burney's stage direction indicates that Eleonora is supposed to initially face away from Old Waverley, which allows the time for her to express the extreme apprehension she feels upon being reunited with her brother in such a dire circumstance, while Old Waverley's asides disclose his intentions in the interview. After Eleonora recognizes her mistake she becomes fearful that Old Waverley is Wilmot's agent

come to recover Sophia, again expressing this guess through an aside, and the scene continues by supplementing the conversation directed to each other with asides disclosing their thoughts and misinterpretations.

This extensive reliance on dramatic mediating speech forms reflects the way Burney's tendency to develop dramatic character and narrative through exposition rather dialogue manifested within the plays. Asides and soliloquy were the most efficient means to share the detailed and complex content that she initially envisioned for some of her characters. Burney's dramatic notes do contain some dialogues, but most are neatly formatted draft scenes that closely resemble their final versions. Perhaps because speech is the genre's most apparent medium she saw her preliminary work as the only opportunity to use exposition and description, but her methodological approach came to bear on the actual forms her dramatic speech took, as *The Woman-Hater* shows. It seems, then, that Burney's tendency to use dramatic dialogue in preparation for her novel resulted in its most successful expression in her novels, rather than her plays. Her extensive use of diegesis in preparation for plays, in contrast, led to the prolific use of mediating speech forms that serve functions similar to novelistic narration. Burney's dramatic speech began with diegesis, signaling that for her at least, drama was not necessarily mimetic. As most modern critics are conditioned to view mediating speech forms in drama as stylistically inferior to more distinctly realist forms of dramatic expression, this may have occasioned the general sense that Burney's plays are inferior to her novels.

### **Conclusion**

It is ironic that we celebrate Burney's integration of dramatic features and themes within her novels, and even hail them as some of her novels' most distinguishing and influential

elements, while her frequent use of devices that approximate novelistic mediation in her plays renders them liable to critique. Broadly considered, though, both tendencies signal reciprocal relations between novels and plays by the end of the eighteenth-century. Characters in Burney's plays are as likely to speak their thoughts aloud for the benefit of the audience as they are to speak to each other, signaling that prose fiction had reached a point where its own techniques were recognizable and transportable.

While Burney never realized her aspiration of a career as successful dramatist during her lifetime, unbeknownst to her she achieved this aim within her novels, and in the process contributed one of the most effective instances of literary generic integration of her time. Her skillful incorporation of dramatic speech within the novel amounts to a significant technical development, one which would directly influence later authors including Jane Austen, whose novels are some of the most popular examples of the genre at large.

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## CONCLUSION

### From Drama to Novels, or Vice Versa

When we read together the works of the four primary authors I engage in this study, a few trends emerge. All of the prose fiction employs first-person narration at least at some point in the narrative, and three out of four of the eighteenth-century novels use homodiegetic narration, indicating that these methods are the best suited for the incorporation of dramatic techniques. This is likely because first-person address lends itself to the type of performativity I also explored in my second focus—where there is an *I*, there is a *you*, and the intimacy with the reader first-person narration facilitates never allows the reader's presence in the literary endeavor to recede, just as an actor never fully forgets the audience's presence.

These techniques and structures also supplement frequent intertextual and thematic references to drama participating in a more comprehensive network of theatrical exchange. References to drama appear as in all of the eighteenth-century novels found in this study. In *Joseph Andrews* there is a dialogue between a poet and player “*of no other use in this history but to divert the reader,*” in which the poet complains about the difficulties of play writing, followed by a comical exchange about a failed production in which the player performed (Fielding 226). This chapter has little to no bearing on the plot other than to briefly lighten the mood with animated comedy, and in this respect functionally approximates a dramatic *entr'acte*. In *The Vicar of Wakefield* Primrose accompanies a troupe of strolling players while on his search for Olivia and participates in a conversation about contemporary taste in drama, only to discover

shortly after that his son George is a novice professional actor. Evelina attends performances of *The Suspicious Husband*, *King Lear*, and *Love for Love* and similarly discusses current dramatic taste and theatergoing practices. All of these texts represent characters engaged in conversations about the state of popular taste in drama—a subtle means of incorporating a common topic of Restoration dramatic metafiction, as shown in Chapter II.

In addition, thematic continuities between the plays and novels of all four primary authors are observable. Mistaken identity, broken vows, and inconstancy reappear throughout Behn's works; Fielding's works show he favors the episodic adventures of maltreated men of merit; Goldsmith could not resist grappling with his ambivalence towards sentimental benevolence in numerous genres; and Burney borrows plot points and adapts characters between works, like the Branghtonesque characters in *A Busy Day*, *Evelina*'s changeling plot's appearance in *The Woman-Hater*, and Lady Smatter's presence in both *The Witlings* and *The Woman-Hater*. By revisiting the same themes they these authors establish relations between ostensibly isolated works across disparate genres, suggesting larger literary enterprises. Exploring artists' entire oeuvres, though not always feasible, may consequently allow for more nuanced interpretations of individual works.

The fact that dramatic speech appears with considerable frequency in novels also calls for a more explicit acknowledgment of the ways in which genres emerge by borrowing and adapting features from older forms. In a form as expansive and protean as the novel, in particular, we must be vigilant to look for traces of earlier forms that contribute to distinct literary historical trends. Evidence of structural influence can be present, in addition to overt intertextual references like dramatic interpolations, thematic concerns, and direct allusions. Next is to explore to what ends these interpolations were put—Behn made Oroonoko, an African prince, a tragic hero on the

scale of Oedipus through choral interaction, Fielding defied the Licensing Act by continuing to stage dramatic speech in an unregulated form, Goldsmith experimented with ways to come to terms with conflicting feelings about a topic he cared deeply about, and Burney found a way to stage dramatic scenes without the troublesome aspects of production that prevented her actual drama from succeeding. It seems, then, that dramatic speech served varied and multifaceted ends.

As the works I examine here span a century, the continued presence of recognizable dramatic speech within the novel suggests that it is not an isolated phenomenon. Dramatic speech occurs as polylogue, dialogue, and monologue in the novel, but it seems to best facilitate group conversations, as shown in *Oroonoko* and *Evelina*, or in contrast, monologue, as shown in all works analyzed, specifically through forms resembling asides and soliloquy. More than any of the other devices here, the aside seems to be crucial for novelistic speech development and narratorial play. The aside's generic versatility has been observed before; Anne Widmayer recently claimed that narratorial incursions amount to dramatic *parabasis* similar to that which occurs in an aside, and Marcie Frank contends that the aside became novelistic in Burney's plays, as it shares "with free indirect discourse the capacity to give audiences or readers epistemic privilege by expressing thoughts or wishes characters do not know they have,"<sup>53</sup> although this argument may be more broadly applied to asides in general (624). These views are on opposite ends of the representational spectrum—the narratorial *parabasis* aligning more closely with metafiction and the proto free-indirect discourse claim aligning with realism. On the one hand, the aside can pause internal action to provide commentary that bears no effect on internal communication or action, so Widmayer's claim regarding the similarity this bears with, say, Fielding's voluble digressions is persuasive. On the other hand, the aside was just as likely

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<sup>53</sup> This assertion is evidence of the critical tendency of anachronistically conceiving of dramatic structures in terms of the novel.

to convey interiority in a sustained and rhetorically complex manner, so it certainly inspired vehicles for portraying character psychology.

Similar conflicts arise regarding the impact of these differences on the aside's relation to metafiction, that is, how it transferred performativity from drama into performative narration. Instances of commentary clearly designed for the sole purpose of engaging the audience as confidant, regardless of whether or not direct address is used, are metafictional, but an aside in which a character turns away from others to express inner anguish or similar sentiments resembling interiority are more ambiguous. Is this type of aside also metafictional because it is easily recognizable as a convention that mediates between story and audience? The unspoken understanding amongst all the characters that only the speaker can hear what is said certainly implies implicit awareness of the structural artifice. While it is not possible to fully commit to designating this form of aside as metafiction, then, we can confidently declare that it is overt mediation and easily recognized as such by the audience. More significantly, along with soliloquy, the aside influenced novelistic features that have since been identified as realist, particularly those concerned with expressing interior states. Mediating speech forms may not necessarily entail metafiction, but they are flexible enough to be absorbed into the novel for service in both mimesis of produce and mimesis of process; for instance, soliloquy can facilitate the expression of interiority or represent overtly artificial theatricality, as in Lady Booby's soliloquy quoted in chapter II.

The aside is just as ready a vehicle for realism as it is for metafiction, and the volume and expressive variety of asides or aside-like structures found in both genres in this study indicates it may have played a part in the development of both of the twin trajectories that Ian Watt identified in *The Rise of the Novel*: one concerned with depicting credible and complex character

psychology, and one interested in foregrounding narration as art, discussed more fully in chapter II. This suggests that narrative strategies for both have strong dramatic structural origins, likely tied to the aside in particular. In terms of literary history, it also indicates that a historical study devoted exclusively to identifying and analyzing the use of specific devices or groups of devices, in this instance the aside or monologic speech, may produce illuminating insights that could enrich our understanding of both the varieties and polyfunctionality of the conventions under scrutiny, as well as how and where they manifest in different genres.

Such analyses would be narrow in focus but expansive in scope and depth, supplementing typology with textual analyses and interpretations, as well as critical and historical contexts. Beginning with synchronic studies of the forms and functions of a device would naturally lead to a diachronic overview, with the potential to reap ample gains for a more comprehensive understanding of literary history and multiple areas of scholarship. Ashley Marshall has shown the benefits of a similar approach in her exhaustive approach to satire *The Practice of Satire in England, 1658-1770*, which categorizes a more expansive topic, satire, into a comprehensive typology that enriches and complicates previous notions about satire's aims, range of targets, and available techniques during one historical period.

In drama, Pfister seems to have taken the first steps toward a systematic typology of dramatic devices in *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, but while he supplies a preliminary typology of soliloquy that is varied and moderately detailed, his preliminary typology for the aside only features two forms: conventional and motivated, that align with metafictional and realist principles respectively, and then further distinguishes between dialogic asides and aside *ad spectatores*, that is, delivered directly to the audience. A significantly more detailed examination, say, à la Marshall would likely yield a much fuller understanding of this device, its

varieties, and the ways in which its uses vary historically, thereby both adding to our knowledge of drama's history and available representational means, and allowing for a better recognition of the ways in which asides were modified into novels. Given the results of this study, polylogue may merit a similarly exhaustive approach as well.

This study also corroborates Linda Hutcheon's assertion that there are two forms of mimesis in early novels: mimesis of product and mimesis of process. The tendencies I have been exploring in both strands of my argument emphasize the conventionality of both drama and the novel. Metafiction often explicitly addresses the ways in which a particular work is constructed or simply reminds the reader or audience of its status as art through *metalepsis*, while specific dramatic speech devices signal their artificiality through recognizable dramatic stylization, even if subtle. And as I have drawn from prose fiction written as early as 1684 and as late as 1778, one could argue that the persistent presence of techniques that emphasize the novel's artificiality complicate the notion that both the novel and drama became increasingly more realistic until reaching an apex in nineteenth century, followed by a surge in anti-illusionistic practices in the twentieth. Instead, both genres have *always* fostered a broad spectrum of representational possibilities, and a wider recognition of this allows for a fuller understanding of literary history as one that consists of multiple continuities and discontinuities, subgenre appearance and disappearance, modes and trends, and finally, rises and falls of representational practices. Art's ability to reflect life as we experience it is merely one means of assessing literary merit, another equally important and credible gauge of value is the ways in which art addresses its own existence and contexts.

The tendencies I explore here correspond to Hutcheon's mimesis of process and suggest literary historical lineages that lead to these representational strategies in the novel. Drama has

always included mediating speech that varies in its metafictional orientation. When dramatic speech forms were enveloped in early novels, they similarly varied in representational orientation, but often include metafictional elements. Hutcheon goes so far as to propose that the “parodic self-reflective nature of many . . . early narrative works is paradigmatic” of the novel as genre (38). This contention certainly merits greater investigation. The presence of voluble, flexible, narrative voices even within the nineteenth century, like some used by Dickens for instance, suggests that at a minimum self-reflexive narrators who perform for and sometimes engage readers explicitly were never fully displaced. This means that instances of subtly metafictional narratorial play described as “radical” or “disruptive” by scholars such as Sally Ledger are not radical at all, but rather a continuation of a much longer narrative tradition (Bristow and McDonagh 10). The continued presence of these types of narrators, along with a burst in popularity of more explicitly metafictional practices in the twentieth century, indicates mimesis of process is certainly a path of novelistic development at least equal to mimesis of product.

And for drama studies, the critical tendency to translate all literary features into the terms developed for the novel as the dominant literary (or literary critical) genre may lead to myopia that inhibits our perception of the ways in which dramatic forms function within their own genre. This would in turn inhibit our ability to recognize dramatic elements in other genres. In this instance, copious use of direct speech that minimizes narration, one of the most frequently acknowledged realist writing practice in the novel, is shown to have at least its foundations in highly conventionalized monologic and polylogic speech structures adapted from drama for much different ends than to create a realism-effect.

Although I have been exploring generic transference as it occurred from drama to the novels here, there is also evidence of reverse pollination, as early as Fielding's tenure as dramatist. By the time Fielding's playwriting career began in 1730 other English authors had seen success as authors of long-format prose, including Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift, although the novel as genre remained ambiguously defined. Consequently, Fielding's plays show affinities with some of the extended prose forms popular during the early eighteenth century. According to Winfield Rogers, much of the farcical elements in Fielding's best-known plays were attempts to recreate the types of elaborate allegorical satires popularized by Alexander Pope and Swift. Similarly, there is evidence of novelistic transference of some sort in all of the eighteenth-century novels I have explored in this study. Oliver Goldsmith's dramaturgy clearly built on the themes found in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and *She Stoops to Conquer* even shares a line with the novel, as I have shown. Marcie Frank also posits a brief theory of "reciprocal impact" between the novel and drama at the end of the eighteenth century, specifically through "the migration of the comedy of manners from the stage to the novel" (Frank 616). Of course, the most evident example of the novel's impact on drama remains Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Declan Kiberd calls the play "quite novelistic" and notes that it "revolves a great degree around questions of reading and of the new sentimental literature of the middle class" (140). Indeed Kiberd interprets the inclusion of a heroine whose obsession with sentimental novels prompts her to risk her fortune may indicate that Sheridan was "seeking to forestall the spread of private reading" (141). Scholars have thus initiated the important process of exploring formal and thematic overlaps between genres and show there is much to learn from a comparative approach.

Finally, I hope the initial findings of these studies and my own make clear that cross-genre transference remains a promising line of inquiry in literary history. An unfortunate

outcome of literary specialization is that cross-genre resonances tend to be overlooked. This project draws from and extends work in four literary specializations—novel history, drama history, narratology, and metafiction—and its findings have the potential to complement and enrich our available body of knowledge in each subfield. With further analysis, cross-genre formal transference from drama to the novel may enrich earlier origin stories for the novel, or perhaps even constitute its own independent historical trajectory.

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## APPENDIX

### VOLUME I Letter XXI.

... what was our surprise to see our chamber door flung open, and the two Miss Branghtons enter the room! They advanced to me with great familiarity, saying, "How do you do, Cousin?-so we've caught you at the glass!-well, I'm determined I'll tell my brother of that!"

Miss Mirvan, who had never before seen them, and could not at first imagine who they were, looked so much astonished, that I was ready to laugh myself, till the eldest said, "We're come to take you to the opera, Miss; papa and my brother are below, and we are to call for your grand-mama as we go along."

"I am very sorry," answered I, "that you should have taken so much trouble, as I am engaged already."

"Engaged! Lord, Miss, never mind that," cried the youngest; "this young lady will make your excuses I dare say; it's only doing as one would be done by, you know."

"Indeed Ma'am," said Miss Mirvan, "I shall myself be very sorry to be deprived of Miss Anville's company this evening."

"Well, Miss, that is not so very good-natured in you," said Miss Branghton, "considering we only come to give our cousin pleasure; it's no good to us; it's all upon her account; for we came, I don't know how much round about to take her up."

"I am extremely obliged to you," said I, "and very sorry you have lost so much time; but I cannot possibly help it, for I engaged myself without knowing you would call."

"Lord, what signifies that?" said Miss Polly, "you're no old maid, and so you needn't be so very formal: besides I dare say those you are engaged to a'n't half so near related to you as we are."

"I must beg you not to press me any further, for I assure you it is not in my power to attend you."

"Why, we came all out of the city on purpose: besides, your grand-mama expects you;-and, pray, what are we to say to her?"

"Tell her, if you please, that I am much concerned,-but that I am pre-engaged."

"And who to?" demanded the abrupt Miss Branghton.

"To Mrs. Mirvan,-and a large party."

"And, pray, what are you all going to do, that it would be such a mighty matter for you to come along with us?"

"We are all going to-to the opera."

"O dear, if that be all, why can't we go altogether?"

I was extremely disconcerted at this forward and ignorant behaviour, and yet their rudeness very much lessened my concern at refusing them. Indeed, their dress was such as would have rendered their scheme of accompanying our party impracticable, even if I had desired it; and this, as they did not themselves find it out, I was obliged, in terms the least mortifying I could think of, to tell them.

... what was our surprise to see our chamber door flung open, and the two Miss Branghtons enter the room! They advanced to me with great familiarity, saying,

THE BRANGHTON SISTERS. How do you do, Cousin?-so we've caught you at the glass!-well, I'm determined I'll tell my brother of that!

Miss Mirvan, who had never before seen them, and could not at first imagine who they were, looked so much astonished, that I was ready to laugh myself, till the eldest said,

MISS BRANGHTON. We're come to take you to the opera, Miss; papa and my brother are below, and we are to call for your grand-mama as we go along.

EVELINA. I am very sorry that you should have taken so much trouble, as I am engaged already.

POLLY BRANGHTON. Engaged! Lord, Miss, never mind that; this young lady will make your excuse; I dare say; it's only doing as one would be done by, you know.

MISS MIRVAN. Indeed Ma'am, I shall myself be very sorry to be deprived of Miss Anville's company this evening.

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EVELINA. Tell her, if you please, that I am much concerned,-but that I am pre-engaged.

MISS BRANGHTON. (*abruptly*) And who to?"

EVELINA. To Mrs. Mirvan,-and a large party.

MISS BRANGHTON. And, pray, what are you all going to do, that it would be such a mighty matter for you to come along with us?"

EVELINA. We are all going to-to the opera.

MISS BRANGHTON. O dear, if that be all, why can't we go altogether?"

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Figure 1: Scene from *Evelina* (left), adapted for the stage (right)

. . . what was our surprise to see our chamber door flung open, and the two Miss Branghtons enter the room! They advanced to me with great familiarity, saying,

THE BRANGHTON SISTERS. How do you do, Cousin?-so we've caught you at the glass!-well, I'm determined I'll tell my brother of that! (*Miss Mirvan looks astonished, Evelina stifles a laugh*)

MISS BRANGHTON. We're come to take you to the opera, Miss; papa and my brother are below, and we are to call for your grand-mama as we go along.

EVELINA. I am very sorry that you should have taken so much trouble, as I am engaged already.

POLLY BRANGHTON. Engaged! Lord, Miss, never mind that; this young lady will make your excuses I dare say; it's only doing as one would be done by, you know.

MISS MIRVAN. Indeed Ma'am, I shall myself be very sorry to be deprived of Miss Anville's company this evening.

MISS BRANGHTON. Well, Miss, that is not so very good-natured in you, considering we only come to give our cousin pleasure; it's no good to us; it's all upon her account; for we came, I don't know how much round about to take her up.

EVELINA. I am extremely obliged to you, and very sorry you have lost so much time; but I cannot possibly help it, for I engaged myself without knowing you would call.

POLLY BRANGHTON. Lord, what signifies that?, you're no old maid, and so you needn't be so very formal: besides I dare say those you are engaged to a'n't half so near related to you as we are.\*

EVELINA. I must beg you not to press me any further, for I assure you it is not in my power to attend you.

POLLY BRANGHTON. Why, we came all out of the city on purpose: besides, your grand-mama expects you;-and, pray, what are we to say to her?

EVELINA. Tell her, if you please, that I am much concerned,-but that I am pre-engaged.

MISS BRANGHTON. (*abruptly*) And who to?

EVELINA. To Mrs. Mirvan,-and a large party.

MISS BRANGHTON. And, pray, what are you all going to do, that it would be such a mighty matter for you to come along with us?

EVELINA. We are all going to-to the opera.

MISS BRANGHTON. O dear, if that be all, why can't we go altogether?

I was extremely disconcerted at this forward and ignorant behaviour, and yet their rudeness very much lessened my concern at refusing them. Indeed, their dress was such as would have rendered their scheme of accompanying our party impracticable, even if I had desired it; and this, as they did not themselves find it out, I was obliged, in terms the least mortifying I could think of, to tell them.

ELIZA, MR., MRS. and MISS WATTS

MISS WATTS. La, Pa', why didn't you ask 'em to stay? You're always so monstrous stupid!

MRS. WATTS. Yes, indeed Tommy, you're always very stupid: I must say that for you.

MISS WATTS. Pray, Sister Eliziana, where did you get that pretty travelling dress?

ELIZA. It was made in Calcutta.

MISS WATTS. La! Can they make things there? I thought they'd been all savages.

MR. WATTS. Yes, yes, they can make pretty good things there, I promise you! I suppose there's more hundred thousands made in Calcutta than in all the known world besides.

MISS WATTS. What kind of look have they? Do they let 'em run about wild? Wa'nt you monstrous frightened at first?

ELIZA. Frightened? the native Gentoos are the mildest and gentlest of human beings.

MISS WATTS. La, nasty black things! I can't abide the Indins. I'm sure I should do nothing but squeal if I was among 'em.

MR. WATTS. There's no need for you to go among 'em now, my dear, for I can give you as handsome I war'nt me, as the Nabob gave your Sister.

MRS. WATTS. It's surprising, my dear Darter Elizzeny, that you didn't get a rich husband yourself: there: for I'm told the men in Indy all want wives.

MR. WATTS. I'm sure I wish we could send 'em some. (*half aside*) I'd spare 'em mine!

MRS. WATTS. What's that you say Tommy?

Figure 2: Adapted scene from *Evelina* (left) and scene I.i from *A Busy Day* (right)

VOLUME III  
Letter III.

... As we were seating ourselves at the table, Mr. Coverley came into the room; he made a thousand apologies in a breath for being so late, but said he had been retarded by a little accident, for that he had overturned his phaeton, and broke it all to pieces. Lady Louisa screamed at this intelligence, and, looking at Lord Merton, declared she would never go into a phaeton again.

"O," cried he, "never mind Jack Coverley; for he does not know how to drive."

"My Lord," cried Mr. Coverley, "I'll drive against you for a thousand pounds."

"Done!" returned the other; "name your day, and we'll each choose a judge."

"The sooner the better," cried Mr. Coverley; "to-morrow, if the carriage can be repaired."

"These enterprises," said Mrs. Selwyn, "are very proper for men of rank, since 'tis a million to one but both parties will be incapacitated for any better employment."

"For Heaven's sake," cried Lady Louisa, changing colour, "don't talk so shockingly! Pray, my Lord, pray, Mr. Coverley, don't alarm me in this manner."

"Compose yourself, Lady Louisa," said Mrs. Beaumont, "the gentlemen will think better of the scheme; they are neither of them in earnest."

"The very mention of such a scheme," said Lady Louisa, taking out her salts, "makes me tremble all over! Indeed, my Lord, you have frightened me to death! I sha'n't eat a morsel of dinner."

"Permit me," said Lord Orville, "to propose some other subject for the present, and we will discuss this matter another time."

"Pray, brother, excuse me; my Lord must give me his word to drop the project,-for I declare it has made me sick as death."

"To compromise the matter," said Lord Orville, "suppose, if both parties are unwilling to give up the bet, that, to make the ladies easy, we change its object to something less dangerous?"

SCENE: A dining table at Clifton Wells.

As the characters seat themselves at the table, MR. COVERLEY enters the room

COVERLEY. A thousand apologies for being so late, but I was retarded by a little accident.—I overturned my phaeton, and broke it all to pieces.

LADY LOUISA. (*screams and looks at Lord Merton*) I will never go into a phaeton again!

LORD MERTON. O, never mind Jack Coverley; for he does not know how to drive.

MR. COVERLEY. My Lord, I'll drive against you for a thousand pounds.

LORD MERTON. Done! name your day, and we'll each choose a judge.

MR. COVERLEY. The sooner the better; to-morrow, if the carriage can be repaired.

MRS. SELWYN. These enterprises are very proper for men of rank, since 'tis a million to one but both parties will be incapacitated for any better employment.

LADY LOUISA. (*changing colour*) For Heaven's sake, don't talk so shockingly! Pray, my Lord, pray, Mr. Coverley, don't alarm me in this manner.

MRS. BEAUMONT. Compose yourself, Lady Louisa, the gentlemen will think better of the scheme; they are neither of them in earnest.

LADY LOUISA. (*taking out her salts*) The very mention of such a scheme makes me tremble all over! Indeed, my Lord, you have frightened me to death! I sha'n't eat a morsel of dinner.

LORD ORVILLE. Permit me to propose some other subject for the present, and we will discuss this matter another time.

LADY LOUISA. Pray, brother, excuse me; my Lord must give me his word to drop the project,-for I declare it has made me sick as death.

LORD ORVILLE. To compromise the matter, suppose, if both parties are unwilling to give up the bet, that, to make the ladies easy, we change its object to something less dangerous?

Figure 3: Scene from *Evelina* (left) adapted for the stage (right)