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Henry Fielding's Epistolary Voices: Polyphony and the Embedded Letter in *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*

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Henry Fielding's Epistolary Voices: Polyphony and the Embedded Letter in *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*

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This study explores the polyphonic nature of Henry Fielding's writing by analyzing the relationship between narrative voice and the embedded letter in his three major novels: *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*. More specifically, it establishes that the voices of the narrators, who have traditionally been considered Fielding's spokesmen, are not the only authoritative voices present in his works. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories for its discussion of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, this dissertation demonstrates how the embedded letter, because of its inherent structural independence, not only allows other voices to enter the novels, it also grants these voices an authority equal to the narrator's. Fielding adopts a radically different narrative persona in his final novel, *Amelia*, and this change affects his use of the embedded letter. In *Amelia*, the most overtly polyphonic of the three novels, Fielding replaces the controlling narrator of the previous novels with an inconsistently-drawn figure who offers the reader little commentary or guidance. Consequently, the letter is no longer used as a way to give voice to opposing ideologies without undermining the consistency and authority of the narrator; instead, in the absence of a stable, moral guide, it becomes a forum through which the author's own voice and ideology enters the text. This study's exploration of the polyphonic nature of Fielding's novels brings to light previously unacknowledged complexities in the novels and refutes traditionally held beliefs that Fielding's works contain only a single narrow and clearly defined fictional universe.

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## Introduction

*I cannot offer or hope to make a hero of Harry Fielding. Why hide his faults? Why conceal his weaknesses in a cloud of periphrases [sic]? Why not show him, like him as he is, not robed in a marble toga, and draped and polished in an heroic attitude, but with inked ruffles, and claret stains on his tarnished laced coat, and on his manly face the marks of good fellowship, of illness, of kindness, of care and wine? Stained as you see him, and worn by care and dissipation, that man retains some of the most precious and splendid human qualities and endowments. . . . He may have low tastes, but not a mean mind; he admires with all his heart good and virtuous men, stoops to no flattery, bears no rancour, disdains all disloyal arts, does his public duty uprightly, is fondly loved by his family, and dies at his work . . . William Makepeace Thackeray*

As William Makepeace Thackeray eloquently explains, playwright, journalist, novelist, magistrate, and libertine Henry Fielding was a man of contradictions, a man who in his personal and public lives took on a “host of disguises and transformations,” many of which appeared to be diametrically opposed to one another (Bell 8). One could describe Fielding as a man whose writings demonstrated the value of “the prudential virtues of will-power and rational judgment,” who devoted the later years of his life to tirelessly enforcing the laws of his country through his work as a magistrate, and who fearlessly spoke out against what he believed to be his contemporaries’ shortcomings (Battestin *Life* 6). However, one could also describe him as a libertine whose lifelong “improvident delight in living, fully and recklessly for the moment” saw him sued for debt numerous times and even confined in a sponging house, and as a man who was perhaps not above accepting bribes from political enemies to suppress his own controversial writings (Battestin, *Life* 6, 282).

It is not only the inconsistencies in Fielding’s personal life that confound those who try to get a firm grasp on exactly who Fielding was and what he believed; his

political and literary writings and even his own literary aesthetic were also quite complex and sometimes contradictory. He rose to literary prominence because of his uniquely playfully and digressive comic fiction, but by the end of his career, Fielding had completely repudiated “the pleasantries and indirections of mere literature” (Battestin *Life* 589). At the beginning of his career in 1741, he judged Samuel Richardson’s novel *Pamela* to be so abhorrent both artistically and morally that he was driven to respond to the text with a devastatingly scathing parody in his work *Shamela*. Yet only seven years later, Fielding was so moved by Richardson’s second novel *Clarissa*, in which Richardson uses a similar style to that which Fielding criticized in *Pamela*, that he wrote a letter to Richardson describing the “tumultuous passions” and “raptures of admiration and astonishment” he felt when reading the work, the very same kinds of emotional reactions he so ridiculed readers of *Pamela* for having (Battestin, *Life* 443).

Given the complexities of Henry Fielding, the man, it is surprising that so many modern literary critics have sought for and “found” in Fielding’s novels a narrative voice that offers readers a defined and unambiguous moral perspective, worldview and clearly delineated literary aesthetic, a fixed set of beliefs which critics have quite easily and confidently categorized as Fielding’s own. In a discussion of *Tom Jones* in his seminal work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, for example, Wayne C. Booth uses the term “Fielding-as-narrator,” and describes the narrator as “a dramatic version” of Fielding, “an ironic version of the real author” and as “a rich and provocative chorus” whose “wisdom and learning and benevolence [permeates] the world of the book” (216-217). As Ian Bell explains, Booth, in a “search for unity and stability” presents Fielding’s narrator as “a

standard of judgment within a novel, and a repository of values, consistent and fully realized,” thereby implying that the novels each contains a “single totalising authorial reading” which is communicated to readers by the narrator (Bell 29, 51).

Many, if not most, Fielding scholars have followed in Booth’s footsteps by presenting Fielding’s novels as what Mikhail Bakhtin would call monologic works: works containing “a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6). As Ian Bell explains in his description of modern critics’ work on narrative voice in Fielding, influential critics after Booth, such as John Preston and even Wolfgang Iser, even though they complicate Booth’s conception of the reading process by giving readers more interpretive control than Booth does, still present Fielding’s work as having a centralized authoritative voice that determines meaning. In his discussion of *Tom Jones*, John Preston claims that readers of Fielding’s novels are given some freedom to interpret the text, but his argument, which at first seems to depart from Booth’s vision of all-powerful narrator, “ends up rather tamely, with the incontestable text still seen as the sole repository of authority, supervising and governing its readership” (Bell 32-33). Wolfgang Iser also sees Fielding’s readers as having some interpretive power, particularly during the places in text, which he calls “gaps,” that allow readers to create meaning. However, ultimately Iser too presents the reader as merely a “participant held under strict authorial supervision” (Bell 33). Even Iser, one of the fathers of reader-response criticism, is reluctant to diminish the power Fielding wields over his readers through his narrator.

Booth, Iser, and Preston, while highly influential figures in narrative studies, reader-response criticism, and Fielding studies, certainly do not offer the last word on this issue, nor do they, in their desire for fixed meaning and order, represent overall current trends in literary criticism. However, I am using them as a starting point because the ideas of Booth, Iser, and Preston still seem to influence heavily contemporary criticism dealing with Fielding's narrative voice. Much of Fielding studies has not moved beyond structuralist and early reader-response models of interpretation, particularly when dealing with narrative voice, and has been remarkably resistant to the ideas of critics such as Mikhail Bakhtin,<sup>1</sup> who condemn monologic literature and who maintain that inconsistencies and contradictions are actually the hallmarks of superior literature. Even critics writing in the last thirty years, after Bakhtin's ideas had gained wide acceptance in the larger literary community, tend to continue the vision of Fielding's works as texts whose central meaning is articulated and embodied by a narrator who represents Fielding's own morals and values.

James Lynch, for example, contends that in reading *Tom Jones* "we are ... programmed as critics not only to allow the rules which the narrator indites as the founder of a 'new Province of Writing' but also to place our critical response in the context of a coherent ethical system" (600). Eric Rothstein also believes that the narrator controls meaning in the text and that the text largely reflects a static worldview. Yet another influential critic, John Richetti, describes Fielding's "controlling unitary

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<sup>1</sup> Although much of Bakhtin's work that is of relevance to this study was written in the early twentieth century, his works were not studied by American and British critics until the 1980s, making them very much a part of contemporary literary discussion.

discourse” and believes that the introductory essays of *Tom Jones* “legislate new narrative rules and manifest the authority of the legislator [Fielding]” (“Old Order” 196, 191). Even Charles Knight, who claims that there is a “failure of authority” in *Joseph Andrews* because of “the instability of its genre, the unreliability of its narrator, and the ironies of its ending,” ultimately grants the narrator final control and power over meaning when he rather inexplicably claims that the narrator’s authority “derives from his openness to the multiple meanings that undermine the conclusiveness of the ending itself. Ultimately the narrator’s authority derives from his failure to be authoritative” (123). Another recent critic, Lothar Cerny, writing just ten years ago, seems to bring the debate full-circle back to Booth’s conceptions by refusing to even allow for the gaps that Iser “discovered” in Fielding’s works. Cerny claims that even when the narrator urges readers to think for themselves, he is actually speaking ironically. Cerny believes that the gaps Iser identifies are merely “the illusion of freedom to fill something in” and that Fielding “does not invite the reader to participate (or rather intrude), quite the contrary” (141). Collectively, these critics present Fielding’s narrator as a powerful mouthpiece for Fielding who controls the text and ensures that readers correctly identify and agree with the author’s point of view.

Ian Bell’s summary of modern critics’ treatment of Fielding offers an interesting explanation for this insistence on finding order and regularity in what really are often formally disjointed and tension-filled works of a highly complex writer: Bell believes that many critics wish to refashion the conflicting and inconsistent picture of Henry Fielding the man created by his contemporaries and writers in the nineteenth century by

regularizing and simplifying the themes and voices of his works. Underlying many of these attempts is the fear that critics and readers alike, if faced with complexity and contradictions in Fielding's works, will view the novels as reflective of personal and moral indecisiveness and the lack of a fully-developed conception of the novel leading to a diminished appreciation.

While Ian Bell's explanation is compelling, an even simpler reason may exist to explain why critics have been reluctant to look at Fielding's two most popular novels, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, as anything other than monologic: each contains strong narrators who seem to operate as Fielding's stand-ins and provide a moral framework. Certainly, there is no denying that the narrators of these two works are authoritative and even domineering figures who can be easily mistaken as Fielding's spokesmen and whose voices seem to dominate and control the voices of the characters. However, it does not follow that the narrators' point of view can be taken as Fielding's own, that there are no other voices in these texts, or that Fielding does not allow these other voices equal weight and importance.

If we are to analyze the polyphonic qualities of Fielding's novels, particularly *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, we must first separate Fielding the writer from the narrator, a task that may be easier said than done. Even Ian Bell, who clearly believes the work of earlier critics is misguided, asks, "But is it really legitimate to put Fielding's fiction alongside Dostoyevsky's as dialogic or heteroglot?" (52). Concern about affixing the label "polyphonic" to "writing so strictly commandeered and apparently held under narratorial control as Fielding's" is certainly legitimate (Bell 52). However, it is possible

to see Fielding's texts as polyphonic if we are willing to entertain the possibility that the narrator does not represent the totality of his vision, and if we are willing to look to other elements of the text for evidence of voices that ring out as strongly as the narrator's own. This study aims to do just that. In order to explore polyphony in Fielding's novels, it will examine the relationship between a previously unanalyzed element of Fielding's writing—the imbedded letter— and narrative voice in Fielding's three major works: *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*.<sup>2</sup>

As discussed above, much work has been done on narrative voice in Fielding's novels, although few works have looked at the limits of the narrators' control over readers or sought alternative voices in the works. However, the other main aspect of this study—Fielding's use of the embedded letter—has received virtually no attention at all by modern critics. Only one dissertation, by Sarah Davis, discusses in any level of detail the role of letters in Fielding's works. Davis's dissertation, however, differs substantially from this one in that her discussion of letters in Fielding is restricted to the novel *Amelia*

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<sup>2</sup> For this study, I will be following the lead of many scholars who exclude *Jonathan Wild* from discussions of Fielding's novels on the grounds that the work is not a fully-developed novel. Paula McDowell in "Narrative Authority, Critical Complicity: The Case of *Jonathan Wild*" provides the following list of "notable studies of Fielding's fiction" that exclude *Wild*: Robert Alter, *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel* (1968); J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (1976); Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding* (1964); and John J. Richetti "Representing an Under Class: Servants and Proletarians in Fielding and Smollett," "The Old Order and the New Novel of the Mid-Eighteenth Century: Narrative Authority in Fielding and Smollett," "Class Struggle Without Class: Novelists and Magistrates," and "The Public Sphere and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Social Criticism and Narrative Enactment." For a compelling argument about why *Jonathan Wild* should be treated as a satire and not a novel see Robert H. Hopkin's "Language and Comic Play in Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*."

and focuses more on the characters' discussions of letters than the embedded letters themselves.

The lack of critical attention to the use of embedded letters in Fielding's novels does not indicate, though, that this is a topic unworthy of study. Instead, it is a reflection of a general trend in eighteenth-century studies to dismiss the importance of the embedded letter to late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century fiction. "Pure" epistolary fiction has received a considerable amount of critical attention because of the overwhelming popularity of the epistolary works of Samuel Richardson and because of literary critics' attempts in the 1980s to broaden the canon to include the works of early writers such as Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, and Aphra Behn, all of whom wrote epistolary fiction. However, most critics have ignored the existence of embedded letters altogether or have presented the letters as Robert Day did in one of the earliest full-length studies of the epistolary novel, *Told in Letters: Fiction before Richardson*, as "mutations [of early forms of the novel] which flourished for a time but gradually died out when a new variety [the pure epistolary novel] more adaptable . . . appeared on the scene" (116). This vision of embedded letters as a left-over technique eventually discarded in favor of a better use of the letter, the pure epistolary novel, is accurate in some sense—the heavy use of the embedded letter in fiction does lessen considerably once the pure epistolary novel is "developed." However, it would be a mistake to view the letters as little more than a device unskilled writers turned to because of habit or because of a lack of skill, particularly when discussing embedded letters in Fielding's works. This argument simply cannot be applied to Fielding for two reasons: he is a highly skilled writer, adept at

writing dialogue, who did not need to turn to letters to incorporate the ideas of his characters, and he deliberately severed any ties to his literary predecessors, so he would be unlikely to embrace inexplicably only this particular aspect of earlier British fiction, while ignoring all others. Even with the lack of attention paid to embedded letters in earlier fiction, it is surprising that such a frequently and meaningfully-used element in a author as frequently written about as Fielding has not been explored.

This study aims to address the lack of critical attention that has been paid both to the polyphonic elements of Fielding's novels and the use of the embedded letter in his works. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Peter Rabonwitz, this study will demonstrate how the imbedded letter in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the two most seemingly monologic of Fielding's novels, allows different voices and ideologies to enter the works on a plane equal to the voice of Fielding's narrator, making his novels polyphonic. We will also examine how in *Amelia*, Fielding's most seemingly polyphonic novel, the embedded letter works to bring the author's voice into the text in the absence of an authoritative narrator. It is my contention that by their very design, the embedded letters, outside the purview of the narrator, retain their own structure and integrity even when they are made part of a larger whole; therefore, the content of the letters and the voices they contain remain independent in the texts.

I will begin by exploring the role of embedded letters and epistolary novels in the British novel tradition of the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century and the relationship between letters and narrative voice in these works. This first chapter details the literary environment in which Fielding wrote, explains what the epistle meant

to both readers and writers of the period, and discusses how Fielding responds to the epistolary novel in *Shamela*, his own ironic reworking of the form. Chapter two looks at how the embedded letter functions in *Joseph Andrews* by exploring how the decidedly unromantic, rather controlling narrative persona of the novel limits the amount of sentiment that can be expressed in the novel and also distances readers from the characters of the novel. But also how the embedded letters offer a different, but equally valid conception of Joseph's character, which allows readers to view Joseph as individual with a voice independent of the author; moreover, the letters bring into the text the voice of sentimental fiction. Chapter three will explore the use of the embedded letter in *Tom Jones*. As with the second chapter, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the restrictions placed on readers by the intrusive and sometimes oppressive narrator. We will then look at how the embedded letters again create polyphony by allowing into the text the voices of two different genres—the epistolary novel and letter-writing manuals—the voices of different socio-economic groups, and the voices of ideologies other than the narrator's. Lastly, the fourth chapter will look at how the embedded letter plays a different role in Fielding's final novel, *Amelia*, the most polyphonic of the three novels. In *Amelia*, the ever-present narrator who controls readers' emotions and interpretations is replaced by an inconsistently drawn figure who has very little authority. The letters then become a vehicle for the author's perspective and serve as a moral guide for the reader

## **Chapter One**

### **Creating Authenticity and Polyphony: The Use of Letters in the Early Novel**

The birth of the Post Office, an increase in literacy, and a proliferation of writing manuals all contributed to the rising importance and extensive use of the letter in eighteenth-century British society.<sup>3</sup> It seems only natural then that the letter also became an important part of popular literature of the time, particularly the novel. Both novels containing embedded letters and “pure” epistolary novels (novels that used only letters to convey stories) surged in popularity immediately before, during, and after Henry Fielding’s lifetime. Writers as diverse as Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Tobias Smollett, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen all found the letter to be a useful device in their quest to reflect the experiences of individuals, and their work created a natural and lasting connection between epistles and novels. While literary critics have extensively analyzed the use of letters in the aforementioned authors’ works, the use of letters in Henry Fielding’s fiction has remained largely ignored.

In some respects it is not surprising that Fielding’s use of embedded letters has received so little attention given the image that persists in literary studies of Fielding as a reactionary writer who summarily dismissed most of his contemporaries’ ideas about the form, tone, method of characterization, and narrative voice that were appropriate for the novel. From the moment Fielding published *Shamela*, in which he satirically rejects the

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the popularity and influence of letter-writing manuals, see Eve Taylor Bannet’s *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (2005) and Chapter 3 of this study; for a comprehensive discussion of the Post Office’s effects on epistolary practices see James How’s *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson’s Clarissa* (2003) and Sara K. Davis’s dissertation “Going Postal: Epistolarity in Eighteenth-and Early Nineteenth-Century Fiction” (2008).

epistolary novel, the author-as-editor stance taken by Samuel Richardson and others, and subjective, first-person narratives, Fielding has been viewed as working in opposition to his contemporaries as he created a new conception of the novel. Because Fielding chose to enter the world of narrative fiction with an unabashed attack on Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela*, Richardson, in particular, became and to a large extent remains Fielding's literary foil, and both Richardson's and Fielding's writings have long been discussed and judged in opposition to each another. In their analysis of these authors' works, literary critics have conventionally emphasized the following fundamental differences between the two authors' approaches: Richardson focused on the particular and Fielding, the universal; Richardson took on the guise of editor in order to lend verisimilitude to his writing, while Fielding flaunted the artificiality of his narratives; Richardson faded into the background of his novels as he gave voice to his characters' stories through first-person letters, while Fielding remained always at the reader's side through an intrusive and dominating third-person narrator.

It is certainly true that these differences exist and that Fielding did reject much of what his contemporaries, particularly Richardson, embraced; however, critics have often let these differences direct their analysis of the two men's works, and consequently, in order to maintain this tidy dichotomy, the presence of some "Richardsonian" elements or devices such as letters in Fielding's novels have been overlooked. Because the use of letters is inextricably linked to Richardson and subjective, domestic fiction, it may at first seem odd to be discussing the role of letters in Fielding's fiction, but Fielding did, in fact, use the epistle extensively in each of his three major novels: *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*,

and *Amelia*. Literary critics' failure to recognize in Fielding's works the literary epistle as it was conceived of and used by writers like Richardson and even Daniel Defoe is understandable, however, because Fielding did not employ the epistle in the same way or to the same effects as either of these writers. Defoe, Richardson, and other early epistolary novelists used letters primarily for the purposes of establishing the verisimilitude of the first-person narratives that they claimed were nonfictional writings. In these works, letters served as "documentary evidence" that supported an author's contentions that the story he was presenting was "genuine" and "true" and that he was the editor, not the author of the work. Letters went a long way in helping to sustain and legitimize the "single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness" that these novelists presented to readers through their first-person narrators (Bakhtin *Problems* 6).

Fielding, with the publication of *Shamela*, on the other hand, clearly rejected the idea that literature needed to appear to be nonfictional or that it was advisable for authors to present themselves as mere editors of autobiographical works to ensure that their works seemed authentic. He decided instead to revel in the artificiality of fiction by creating an intrusive third-person narrator who openly acknowledges his role as the "author" of a fictional text. Because of his different ideas about the author/narrator's role in the novel, Fielding's use of epistles and the impact they have on the authority and strength of his narrative voice have little in common with Defoe's and Richardson's use of letters. Interestingly enough, despite his almost rabid dislike of romances and his desire to distinguish his writings from continental romances and their British imitators,

Fielding's use of the embedded letter is actually very similar to the way letters were used in non-epistolary amatory fiction written by authors such as Eliza Haywood and Aphra Behn. Amatory novelists did not often try to present their work as nonfictional, as epistolary novelists did, so they did not use letters to create authenticity; instead they used letters to add much-needed subjectivity to the oftentimes dry narratives provided by the third-person narrative personas they developed. Fielding, following in their footsteps, albeit unknowingly or subconsciously, also used the embedded letter as a way of supplementing and even complicating the picture of the fictional world created by his narrators. In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding uses the embedded letter to infuse his work with sentiment and to present characters in a way that challenges the narrator's presentation, and in *Tom Jones*, Fielding uses the letters to include in his work contrasting ideologies and voices.

*Letters as Evidence in the Works of Daniel Defoe*

In the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, two main factors pushed many narrative fiction writers to claim, at least rhetorically, that their works were nonfiction: the British reading public made "authenticity" an "almost universal requirement" of narrative fiction and many critics and readers expressed uneasiness about the corruptive powers of realistic fiction (Day 86). The "constant protestations that novels [were] not novels, but 'true histories'" that can be found in the prefaces and advertisements of fictional works by authors such as Defoe and Richardson reflect the seriousness with which writers attempted to satisfy their audiences' desire for stories that echoed their own lives and moral concerns (Day 85). The public's insatiable demand for

realistic fiction “promoted a search for mechanical devices to make a story *seem* true rather than a reliance on the mere announcement that it was” (Day 86). Letters, which in the eighteenth century were a part of virtually everyone’s daily life and were seen as reflective of a writer’s true self, became an invaluable device for infusing authenticity into fiction works. As Ian Watt points out, “letters are the most direct material evidence for the inner life of their writers that exist . . . and their reality is one which reveals the subjective and private orientations of the writer both towards the recipient and the people discussed, as well as the writer’s own inner being” (191). In short, letters seemed “real” and “authentic,” and they proved to be easily adaptable to fiction. Letters could be used, as they were in Daniel Defoe’s novels, as one of the many devices that could be inserted in a text to support the validity of the narrator’s claims or as the sole medium of expression as they were in epistolary novels such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*.

Daniel Defoe was the first major novelist to make a concerted effort to persuade readers to view his fictional works as nonfictional, autobiographical stories that he had merely edited for publication, not written. However, As Robert Day points out, Defoe’s complex relationship with truth telling and his reliance on letters to legitimize his claims of authenticity begin even before he started to write novels. In 1704, Defoe published *The Storm*, what is now regarded as a partly fictional and partly factual account of a great storm that hit England in November 1703. In this piece, Defoe promises to “no where Trespass upon Fact” and to provide a documentary account of the storm’s impact on the city. One of his primary means of providing readers with an “authentic” documentary account of the storm is the inclusion of letters written allegedly by eyewitnesses. Despite

his claim to veracity, however, most modern critics believe that at least some of the letters were written by Defoe himself, even though they may have been based on interviews he conducted with actual witnesses (Day 90). The identity of the “real” authors of the letters is inconsequential here, but it is important to understand that Defoe believed that imbedded letters could be used to convince readers of the legitimacy of his writing: “such an extensive use of the letter, authentic or fabricated, by the first acknowledged English expert in literary verisimilitude, can only indicate that he considered [the letter] a sovereign device for his purposes” (Day 90).

When Defoe turned to novel writing, he decided to continue his disingenuous claims of authenticity by eschewing the title of author and adopting the role of an “editor.” Defoe, perhaps because of his background in journalism or perhaps in an attempt to shield himself from accusations of writing worthless “lies” (i.e. fiction), went to great lengths to construct and maintain the reader’s image of him as an editor. The prefaces to his novels, in particular, became a space in which he made a case for his novels’ authenticity and repeatedly distanced himself from the texts. In the preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, Defoe claims that the book is “a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in It” (1). In his preface to *Moll Flanders*, a tale Defoe claimed on the title page to have adapted from Moll’s “own Memorandums,” he clearly distinguishes between his writings and novels by scornfully and calculatingly complaining that “the World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances” that it will be difficult for a “private History” such as his “to be taken for Genuine, where the Names and other Circumstances of the Person are concealed” (3). He graciously leaves it up to

the reader to “pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets,” but clearly wants the reader to believe that the work is true and real, unlike the “Novels and Romances” written by some of his contemporaries (3). Although Defoe does acknowledge having to excise “some of the vicious part of her Life” from Moll’s original story in order to avoid “leud Ideas” and “immodest Turns” and admits to putting Moll’s own words into “a Dress fit to be seen,” he maintains that his reworking of Moll’s story stays true to her own account (4; 3). Defoe even goes so far as to anticipate readers’ objections to some of the more scandalous elements of the novel by claiming that “to give the History of a wicked Life repented of, necessarily requires that the wick’d Part should be made as wicked as the real History of it will bear” (4). The claims of veracity made in the preface are only one part of Defoe’s attempts to make his work seem authentic: he also carefully constructs his novels to give readers the sense that they are reading a true account of a historical person.

One of the ways Defoe sustains the impression of authenticity throughout his novels is by using “details . . . that give us an illusion of reality of life lived in the world as we know it” (Rivero, Introduction ix). These “details” sometimes come in the form of descriptions of the often mundane details of his characters’ lives and sometimes come in the form of incorporated genres—diaries, letters, business documents, etc.—which once inserted into the main narrative serve as documentary “proof” of the accuracy and validity of the narrator’s claims. In *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, Defoe includes Robinson’s journal, which details his everyday activities on the island, as “evidence” of the realism of the story. The journal is clearly designed to create legitimacy as it adds little to the plot of the story because it simply retells many of the same events that have

already been previously narrated. In *Colonel Jack*, Defoe includes items like bills and ship invoices to lend realism to the story. In *Roxanne*, he often uses charts and tabulations, and in *Moll Flanders*, he uses monetary tabulations and the embedded letter.

In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe uses embedded letters to add credibility to Moll's rather outrageous life story. Interestingly, none of Moll's own letters is included in the text even though Defoe describes Moll writing countless letters. Because *Moll Flanders* is "based" on Moll's own memorandums, it would not make sense for Defoe, as an editor, to be privy to letters she sent away to people, some of whom she never saw again, as Moll would never have needed to keep copies of the letters she wrote, an unrealistic scenario. More importantly, Defoe did not embed letters "written" by Moll into the novel because letters by Moll simply would not have fulfilled the purpose of the embedded letter: lending credibility to the highly subjective main narrative. Instead, Defoe embeds letters from other characters written to Moll in an effort to bolster Moll's first-person account of her life, which given the inherent subjectivity of an autobiographical story does not always strike readers as honest or truthful. The embedded letters in *Moll Flanders* add little of importance to the story and Defoe could easily have had Moll summarize the contents of the letters in the main narrative; however, they do serve as documentation of Moll's claims and provide the narrative with a sense of historicity. They also serve as corroboration of Defoe's claims that *Moll Flanders* is a faithful accounting of the "real" Moll's life, as the letters appear to readers as third-party documentary evidence that supports Defoe's version of Moll's life. Defoe's claim of being an editor who merely "dresses up" the writings of another rather than an author who fabricates stories

“displaces [Defoe] from the central, creative role, and by doing so denies his connection to the work. This act of disavowment shifts the focus of the narrative to the being of the protagonist, to the authenticity of the document, to the verisimilar human life itself” (L. Davis 16). Letters become the “evidence” and documentation of the novel’s authenticity, and as the writer/editor slips into the background, the main character, as author/narrator of her own story becomes more pronounced.

At first glance, the disappearance of the “author’s” voice, the adoption of a first-person narrator who does not appear to be a direct stand-in for the author (he/she is from a different educational background, social class, or even of a different gender than the author), and the inclusion of letters expressing the voices of other characters would all seem to contribute to creating a polyphonic text, a text in which the voices of the characters are not drowned out by the author’s voice or used solely to support a single authorial vision of the world. However, upon closer inspection of Defoe’s writings, it becomes clear that the disappearance of Defoe’s “voice” is really just an illusion, as Defoe’s characters are quite clearly more ideological puppets than fully actualized individuals with their own voices. In place of authorial narration or commentary, Defoe has simply made his protagonists obvious spokespeople for the religious and moral messages he wished to impart to his audience. As Alex Townsend points out, “the voices of Defoe’s characters are all unmistakably the voice of their author” (21). In Townsend’s comparison of the narrators in *A Journal of the Plague Year*, *Roxana*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, he concludes the following:

all three narrators begin from the same point; all try to 'squeeze' into each of their sentences as much factual detail as possible. The sentence structure, or what we might refer to as the speech pattern, of all three is remarkably similar; each speaks in long sentences punctuated by short subordinated clauses. In fact, Defoe establishes the same kind of idiolect for all his characters and, in turn, they begin to share the same kind of temperament so that the actual distinctions between separate personalities become blurred. (21)

Despite Defoe's best efforts to create realistic, authentic stories, his own voice and his own ideas expressed through his first-person narrators come to so dominate the text that all other voices and ideas are subsumed by his totalizing vision and do not achieve freedom of expression.

Even the embedded letters in *Moll Flanders* and other incorporated genres used in his novels, while ostensibly giving characters a voice in the text, do not end up significantly creating polyphony in the text because they only serve to add validity and authenticity to Defoe's authorial vision. Because the letters are being used as evidence of the authenticity of the single, subjective perspective of the narrator, a perspective under the complete control of the author, the voices they contain do not enter the novel on an equal plane to Defoe/Moll's voice. The letters serve simply as illustrations of Moll's account of life rather than the vocalization of other characters' perspectives. In Defoe's novels, like other monologic works, "the authorial voice is the ultimately single authoritative and controlling voice in the text to which character voices are subjugated" (Townsend 14).

*Authors/Editors, Fiction/Nonfiction: The Blurring of Lines in Early Epistolary Novels*

The letter's potential to add authenticity to a fictional text, as evidenced by Defoe's use of the embedded letter, is further developed in the purely epistolary works that gained mass popularity in the long eighteenth century. Pure epistolary works, whether they be collections of letters for writing instructions, the correspondence of a historical person, journalistic letters describing a foreign land, or epistolary novels, sated the reading public's voyeuristic desire for works that reflected the emotions, experiences, and thoughts of "real" people. For the novelist who wished to present his or her fiction as "real," constructing a work entirely of letters allowed him or her to develop further the illusion of nonfiction by entirely supplanting the author and narrator's view of a fictional world with the "private" thoughts and feelings of a "real person" expressed in his or her own voice.

As an "editor," Defoe acknowledged rewriting or adapting his characters' writings, admitting to authorship of at least some elements of the text; epistolary novelists, however, took claims to authenticity one step further and often claimed to have made no substantial alterations to the letters they were presenting. Consequently, their "authorial" voice appears to be entirely absent from the text. The epistolary form allowed writers to create "distance . . . between themselves and their novels" and give their stories a "legitimate autonomy of its own, the author being merely the editor of a manuscript trove" (L. Davis 177). After all, what could be more "authentic" than a collection of "real" letters not written for publication but for private communication between lovers and family members, letters that are presented to readers in an unadulterated state? Given

that “letters . . . had long been conventionally regarded as especially intimate revelations of a person’s true nature,” the author is able to provide readers with the voyeuristic pleasure of taking a journey into the minds of “real” people and getting an authentic sense of their lives (Day 90). In order for this sense of authenticity to be established and maintained, however, readers had to believe, at least momentarily, that they were reading letters written by the “characters” featured in the story, not the author. Writers of epistolary novels, consequently, went to great lengths as Defoe did to convince their readers that they really were merely editors of authentic, found materials. To do this, writers and their publishers frequently relied on both advertisements and prefaces as vehicles for their claims of verisimilitude.

Advertisements featured in newspapers and in the front and back of novels in the first half of the eighteenth century were used to “stress the intimacy of revelations presented in letters as adding to the value of the work[s]” booksellers were marketing (Day 95). The advertisement sections of contemporary newspapers, such as the *Daily Post*, the *London Post*, and *Athenian Gazette*, with their countless advertisements for epistolary works claiming to tell authentic stories of different varieties, are a testament to booksellers efforts to “satisfy the public’s demand for ‘true’ stories” and also “[letter writing’s] peculiar advantages in this respect” (Day 98). Advertisers were so thorough in their attempts to capitalize on the popularity of realistic literature that it is often very difficult to definitively classify some of the works being advertised as “factual” or “fictional.” For one thing, the advertisement pages of newspapers did not distinguish between or separately advertise fictional and nonfictional works, so readers really did

have to rely on the bookseller's description of a work to determine authenticity. The claims of the booksellers did not often provide much clarity, however, because their claims were often deliberately ambiguous or even downright spurious. For example, one could find all the following titles listed side by side in a single day's advertisement page: *Advice to Clergy. In Six Sermons; A Mathematical Compendium; Contemplations Moral and Divine; Familiar Letters from the late famous Mrs. Phillips to the late Sir Charles Cottrell, under the name of Orinda to Polyarchus; and A Letter to a Friend, giving some Account of the Proceedings in her Majesty's court of Queen's Bench* (*Daily Courant* April 12, 1705). While it is readily apparent that the *Advice to Clergy in Six Sermons*, *Mathematical Compendium* and *Contemplations Moral and Divine* are nonfictional, the categorization of the other works is a bit more problematic. Are the letter recounting court proceedings and the letters of a famous author "real," complete fiction, or somewhere in between?

A close inspection of the advertisement for *Familiar Letters from the late famous Mrs. Phillips* (April 12, 1705) perfectly illustrates how blurred the line is between fact and fiction in literature of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, the book presented in the advertisement appears to be a novel because of the use of the unrealistic/romantic names in the title and the advertisement's seemingly improbable claim that this edition has been "printed from the originals found in Sir Charles's Cabinet since his Death," a claim that sounds familiarly like the "discovered letter trope" employed by "editors" of epistolary novels to explain how they came into possession of the collections they were publishing (L. Davis 117). On the other hand, the advertisement claims that it is not a

fictional work, as perhaps the title implies, but that it is actually the “familiar letters from the late famous Mrs. Phillips to the late Sir Charles Cottrel”—two “real” historical people with whom many readers may have been familiar—simply written “under the Name or Orinda to Polyarchus.” The actual “truth” about the authenticity of the work is as unclear as the advertisement; as Ellen Moody explains, although poet and playwright Katherine Philips’s letters “are generally accepted as authentic, they have been tampered with by polishing, pruning, and, perhaps, sensationalizing.” As this advertisement demonstrates, the line between fact and fiction in eighteenth-century literature was very unclear, as even “real” letters of historical personages were not published in their original, “authentic” state.

Epistolary novelists took advantage of and contributed to the blurring of fact and fiction in advertisements, but the degree of obfuscation in advertisements varied greatly. Sometimes the booksellers advertising fictional works merely implied authenticity as is the case in the advertisement for *Letters from a Lady at Paris to a Lady at Avignon* found in the *Daily Courant* (June 16, 1716) and sometimes, as in the case of *Post Boy Rob’d of his Packet*, the bookseller’s advertisements contain blatant fabrications and falsehoods about the work’s origin. The advertisement for *Letters from a Lady at Paris to a Lady at Avignon* merely implies that the text is not a novel: the advertisement does not make mention of an author, and it claims that the work contains “a particular account of that city, the Politicks, Intrigues, Gallantry, and Secret-History of Persons of the high Quality in France” and a “true copy of [Lewis the XIV, late King of France’s] will,” giving the impression that these letters are the authentic correspondence of two women residing in

France. However, the work is indeed a novel, a fact that would only be revealed if one looked at the title page of the actual printed text which identifies Mme DuNoyer as the author, not editor, of the work.

Advertisements for Charles Gildon's extremely popular *Post Boy Rob'd of his Mail* leave ambiguity far behind and their specious claims of authenticity demonstrate the "elaborate devices of verisimilitude" many booksellers and authors "thought appropriate and necessary in an epistolary collection" (Day 91). In the "Booksellers Advertisement to the Reader" the publisher claims that "there can be no doubt of the Truth of the Matter of Fact, or at least of a Probability of Truth" to the claims about the book's veracity because the "Post has too often here in England . . . been rob'd" (qtd in Day 91).<sup>4</sup> The publisher also proactively refutes potential problems readers may have with the collection improbably containing no letters of news by writing, "It may be wondered that in all these Mails pretended to be robb'd, there should in such a time of Action be no Letters of News, or any Account of the late Intreagues. But I desire these Gentlemen to have Patience till they see the Second Volume" (qtd in Day 91). Here, the advertiser both cleverly diffuses suspicions about the authenticity of his work and tantalizes readers with the promise of a more letters to come. Despite the publisher's claim to the contrary, *Post Boy Rob'd of his Mail* is simply a fictional work that capitalized on readers' desire for glimpses into the lives of real people. Although the claims made in these advertisements

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<sup>4</sup> The authorship of this advertisement is unknown, but Day believes it was probably written by the novel's publisher John Dunton (91).

may seem outrageous to modern readers, the ambiguity and outright deception found in advertisements like these were not anomalous.

In addition to using advertising to assure readers of the validity of their work, epistolary novelists also used the prefaces of their novels. Such claims of authenticity can be found in the preface of works such as the anonymously authored *The Adventures of Lindamira, A Lady of Quality Written by her own Hand, to her Friend in the Country*. The author of this novel is not content merely to proclaim the text's authenticity in the title; in the preface, he promises readers that the only thing he has done to the letters created by the "artless Pen" of Lindamira is to "correct the Style, where the rules of Grammar and humour of the English language requir'd an alteration."<sup>5</sup> He is also quick to point out that none of the writer's "natural passion" was lost in the revisions and to assure readers that the text in no way "depart[s] from the natural softness of the Female Pen." This author-disguised-as-editor even goes so far as to claim that his work is superior to the "feign'd Adventures of a fabulous Knight Errantry" found in "histories of foreign Amours," which have met with the approbation of English readers, on the grounds that the work he is publishing has "the weight of truth" behind it. Similar claims can be found in countless other epistolary novels of the period, such as the also anonymously authored *The Jilted Bridegroom*. This novel begins with a letter to readers in which the "editor" claims:

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<sup>5</sup> The author of this novel remains unknown, although William Graves, editor of the 1972 facsimile copy of the novel, speculates that the preface could have been written by the publisher Thomas Brown.

the following Letter was sent to me, 14<sup>th</sup> of December last, and the Characters and Accidents therein are not made up of fictitious and fabulous Tales, but they are composed of clear Matter of Fact, transacted not in a distant Age, but an Intreague of the last Year.

The “editor”/lucky recipient of the letter goes on to claim that “above an Hundred Gentleman and ladies have seen Floria’s Original Letters” that further proves his contention that the work is nonfictional. While it is impossible to gauge how seriously writers wanted their readers to take their claims, the countless advertisements and prefaces devoted to claims of veracity clearly reflect the eighteenth-century belief that letters were a credible vehicle for realistic story telling.

In a discussion of denials of authorship and claims of authenticity made in the prefaces of eighteenth-century novels, one can not forget, of course, one of the most famous prefaces in which an author claimed to be merely an editor of a nonfictional text: the preface Samuel Richardson attached to his novel *Pamela*, one of the most popular novels of the eighteenth century. Much like his other fellow epistolary novelists, Richardson cultivated the persona of editor when publishing *Pamela* and subsequent novels, although his efforts to establish the veracity of his works went even further than most of his contemporaries.<sup>6</sup> Using advertisements, editor’s prefaces, introductions, and “puff pieces” in the form of letters included at the beginning of the novel, Richardson and

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<sup>6</sup> Because the purpose of this chapter is simply to give context for Fielding’s early reaction to his contemporaries’ use of the letter, as seen in *Shamela* and his preface to his Sarah Fielding’s *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple* (1747), I will focus only on Richardson’s first novel, *Pamela*, because it is the novel that most directly influenced the opinions Fielding expressed in these two works.

his publishers went to great lengths to convince readers that *Pamela* was indeed the authentic, first-person account of a servant girl who preserved her chastity under great duress.

The first advertisements for *Pamela* presented the work as “a series of familiar letters from a Beautiful Young Damsel to her Parents” and made no mention of Richardson as author, or even editor, implying that the letters contained in the work were real. As we have seen above, these claims were fairly standard for the epistolary novel, and it is true that Richardson, Charles Rivington, and John Osborn did not initially do more than an average amount of advertising for the first edition of *Pamela* (Keymer, *Pamela Controversy* xl).<sup>7</sup> However, after the first edition sparked challenges to the novel’s authenticity and morality and inspired unauthorized sequels, the three decided to step up their promotional efforts to counteract negative sentiment. Soon London newspapers were “flooded with belligerent advertising” for the novel (Keymer, *Pamela Controversy* xl). Richardson and his editors’ promotional efforts in the years that followed the publication of the first edition of *Pamela* became “almost as controversial as *Pamela* itself” and the subject of great ridicule at the hands of Fielding and other “anti-Pamelists” (Keymer, *Pamela Controversy* xxxix).

In the second and many subsequent editions of *Pamela* and in his two-volume continuation of *Pamela*, Richardson went to great lengths to control the image he created of *Pamela* as an author and himself as an editor. An advertisement attached to Volumes Three and Four of *Pamela*, which included *Pamela*’s letters that had been written

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Rivington and John Osborn were the publishers and “co-proprietors” of *Pamela*.

*Afterwards, In her Exalted Condition, Between Her, and Persons of Figure and Quality, upon the most Important and Entertaining Subjects*, is just one such effort that reflects this new publicity campaign. In this advertisement, Richardson condemned other writers who had presented Pamela as a fictional character and who in treating her as such dared to continue her story by writing sequels to his novel:

There being Reason to apprehend, from the former Attempts of some Imitators, who, supposing the Story of Pamela a Fiction, have murder'd that excellent Lady, and mistaken and misrepresented other (suppos'd imaginary) Characters, that Persons may not be wanting, who will impose new Continuations upon the Publick. It is with this View to some Designs of this Nature, that the Editor . . . gives this publick Assurance, by way of Prevention, That all Copies of Mrs. B's Observations and Writings . . . are now in One Hand Only (130).

While this part of the advertisement can be viewed very practically as Richardson trying to protect the copyright of his work and consequently preventing other writers from profiting from unauthorized continuations of Pamela's story and/or as an attempt to end the public humiliation of the continued publication of anti-Pamela writings, it also demonstrates that at least, rhetorically, if not realistically, Richardson wished to continue to downplay his role as an author and emphasize the authenticity of the "documents" that make up Pamela's story.

Richardson's efforts to establish and maintain the verisimilitude of his epistolary novel were not limited simply to advertisements; he also used a preface, an introduction, and several "letters to the editor" to bolster his claims. In the preface to the first edition of

*Pamela*, he claims that as the editor of the work he can assure readers that the letters in *Pamela* have “their foundation both in Truth and Nature,” not fiction (*Pamela* 31). He also claims disingenuously that his own recommendation of the book is particularly credible because as an editor, “[he] can judge with an impartiality which is rarely found in an Author” (31). In the prefaces to the sixth edition of *Pamela* and to his two-volume sequel to *Pamela*, we can also see his continued efforts to present Pamela as a historical person. In the sixth edition, Richardson adds to the original preface a short paragraph that is intended to address the public’s interest in finding out the identity of the real Pamela. Here, Richardson confirms the existence of a “real” Pamela while cleverly avoiding having to produce any concrete details about her whereabouts. Richardson acknowledges that he has been “been much press’d with Importunities and Conjectures in relation to the Person and Family of the incomparable Lady, who is the Subject of these Volumes,” but he regretfully concludes that he only feels “at Liberty to say . . . that the Story has its Foundation in Truth: And that there was a necessity, for obvious Reasons, to vary and disguise some Facts and Circumstances, as also the Names of Persons, Places &c” (Preface 138).

The sequel to *Pamela* also contains this preface but with the addition of specific dates for the actions contained in *Pamela*. Richardson tells readers that “the most material incidents [in the text] happen’d between the Years 1717 and 1730” (126). As the continual addition of more specific and concrete details to the “real” Pamela’s biography illustrates, Richardson was deeply invested in having readers believe, or at least pretend

to believe, that *Pamela* was not in fact a fictional product created by an author, but a authentic reflection of a servant girl's real life experiences.

Richardson's desire to focus readers' and critics' attention away from himself as a writer and onto Pamela as a young epistolarian has to do in large part with the transgressive nature of his novel. Richardson presented himself as a morally upright editor who generously passed onto the public the true writings of a young girl in an effort to "cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion on the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes" (*Pamela* 28). This stance was designed to protect him, at least in theory, from criticism of the sometimes provocative scenes of seduction and from criticism of the text's challenges to the contemporary social hierarchy. As Michael McKeon explains, if readers believe that Pamela is real and that Richardson is merely an editor of her own words, then *Pamela* becomes a "documentary history," not a "romance" and is "singularly qualified thereby for moral instruction and improvement" (*Origins* 357). Nonfictional (i.e. "truthful") works were considered intrinsically more morally instructive than realistic fiction, and realistic fiction was widely considered little more than immoral "lies" that possessed great potential for corrupting young, impressionable readers. If readers believe *Pamela* is nonfiction, then the scenes of seduction would not be viewed as titillating, as perhaps they would be in a fictional text; instead, they would be viewed as instructive vignettes because they are "real" events and are included in the story only to preserve the "truth" and consequently to serve as vivid warnings of the real dangers a young girl might face in the world. Richardson's editorial stance allows him to include risqué and controversial scenes without having to face truly accusations of immorality.

Similar to Defoe's efforts, Richardson's attempt to supplant the figure of the author, "who, with a single voice, is prone to sound far too directly didactic," with a first-person epistolary narrative first appears to be a decision that should lead to increased polyphony in his novel (Townsend 63). However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that Richardson, much like Defoe, simply opted to make his first-person narrator the embodiment of his own ideology and morality, a character who does not possess a fully realized voice that is independent of the author. Because Pamela's story is told from a single, subjective perspective, the letters in the novel provide no more polyvocality than a narrative with an acknowledged author and a controlling third-person narrator. Pamela becomes a pawn, and too many times in the novel it becomes clear that we are hearing the voice of Richardson the moralist, not Pamela the serving girl. As Alex Townsend points out, "the strain caused by the single focus epistolary form, not only undermines Richardson's didactic intent, but also the authenticity of Pamela. We see, exposed behind the scenes, the author trying frantically to make the lesson and the illusion work" (68). In the end, *Pamela* proves to be little more polyphonic than Defoe's novels were.<sup>8</sup>

*Henry Fielding's Shamela: Reimagining the Epistolary Novel*

With the publication of *Shamela*, his scathing parody of *Pamela*, Henry Fielding entered the world of novel writing with what can only be classified as a direct attack on his contemporaries' conceptions of the novel. In his satiric reworking of Richardson's

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<sup>8</sup> It must be acknowledged that Richardson was aware of the limitations created by a single epistolary narrator and his next novel, *Clarissa*, is more polyphonic than *Pamela* because of his choice to include multiple correspondents, thereby giving the reader more than a single perspective on events.

novel, Fielding questioned both Richardson's claims of authenticity and his choice of the epistolary form. Fielding's particular antipathy for the epistolary novel can be seen not only through this mock epistolary novel but also through the harsh opinions he expressed in the preface of his sister Sarah Fielding's epistolary novel *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple* (1747). In these two works, Fielding makes it clear that he believes the epistolary form is far from the most appropriate method for narration in a novel.

Although Fielding wrote several letters included in his sister's novel and wrote what can largely be considered a complimentary preface to the work, the preface of *Familiar Letters* marks one of the few places where Fielding explicitly discusses his disdain for the epistolary form:

The taste of the public, with regard to epistolary writing, having been much vitiated by some modern authors, it may not be amiss to premise some short matter concerning it in this place, that the reader may not expect another kind of entertainment than he will meet with in the following papers, nor impute the author's designed deviation from the common road, to any mistake or error. (421)

Fielding goes on to make it clear that he would consider himself one of the modern authors who "vitiates" epistolary fiction and that he admires his sister's novel precisely because it is not a not a "typical" epistolary novel. The implication here is, of course, that the standard epistolary novel is not a form worthy of praise. In order to explain how Sarah's novel is unlike many of its contemporaries and therefore praiseworthy, Fielding

spends a good deal of the preface classifying the different types of letters that have captivated the attention of critics and the reading public.

In his explanation of the various subgenres of the letter, Fielding does acknowledge that letters are a means through which a person can and often does reveal his or her true self, but he ultimately calls into question his contemporaries' use of letters in literature. The first subgenre of letters that Fielding discusses consists of letters both "ancient [and] modern, which have been written by men who have filled up the principal characters on the stage of life, upon great and memorable occasions" (421). Of these letters, Fielding approves, calling them "the most authentic memorials of facts" and arguing that they "serve greatly to illustrate the true character of the writer" (421). Fielding then goes on to discuss letters that "may be styled short romances" and letters "which passed between men of eminence in the republic of literature" (421, 422). These two subgenres of letters also have, according to Fielding, "their several merits" (422). Fielding is not, however, as generous with his praise when it comes to two other types of letters "with which the moderns have very plentifully supplied the world" and for which he says he will "not be very profuse in [his] encomiums": love letters and letters of conversation (422). Fielding dismisses these letters because they "[contain] the private affairs of persons of no consequence to the public, either in a political or learned consideration, or indeed in any considerations whatever" (422). With his claims to see no value in reading the letters of ordinary people, Fielding clearly rejects the very foundations of the epistolary novel, which claimed to explore the lives of everyday people through their own writing.

In the ensuing discussion of letters of conversation, Fielding argues that the “familiar easy style” that is favored in letters of conversation is only appropriate for the familiar letter, which was meant to be exchanged and read privately, and “is not at all requisite, either to letters of business . . . or to those on the subject of literature and criticism” (422, 423). Again Fielding is rejecting exactly what the epistolary novel, particularly Richardson’s, celebrated: authentic-sounding letters with a familiar, easy style, letters that might conceivably have been sent between real people in their daily lives. Fielding claims it is not his “purpose here to write a large dissertation on style in general, nor to assign what is proper to the historian, what to the romance, and what to the novel writer,” but he essentially does just that. In his most openly damning commentary on the epistolary novel he writes, “much less is [the familiar easy style] adapted to the novel or story-writer; . . . And sure no one will contend, that the epistolary style is in general the most proper to a novelist, or that it hath been used by the best writers of this kind” (423). Fielding not only says that the epistolary form is inappropriate for the novel, he also offers a less than flattering explanation for why a writer might choose this genre: he claims that the only “advantage” he sees in using letters to construct a novel is that “by making use of the letters the writer is freed from the regular beginnings and conclusions of stories, with some other formalities, in which the reader of taste finds no less ease and advantage than the author himself” (424). With great ease, Fielding essentially reduces the epistolary novel to a mere method of convenience that is employed by the lazy or unsophisticated writer.

Fielding's opinions about the epistolary novel are also quite evident in *Shamela*, his biting satiric response to Richardson's *Pamela* and to its immense popularity.<sup>9</sup> Fielding's saw the reading public's "frenzy over *Pamela* [as] only the most recent and salient symptom of what [he] regarded as a general social disorder manifest in virtually every area of public life, whether in letters or in politics or religion" (Battestin, *Life* 303). Like many "anti-Pamelists," Fielding simply could not understand why readers would so enthusiastically embrace what he believed to be a dissolute story that, under the guise of moral instruction, provided readers with an immoral and voyeuristic tale of seduction. In addition to objecting to the seemingly mixed moral messages of the text, Fielding also objected to the implications of the novel's plot, as he felt that a servant girl marrying her master upset the natural order of things and sent the wrong message to young, easily influenced readers. Through the character of Parson Oliver, who many view as Fielding's second self in the novel, Fielding explained what he thought the actual moral message of *Pamela* was:

The instruction it conveys to servant-maids, is, I think, very plainly this, to look to their masters as sharp as they can. The consequences of which will be, beside their neglect of their business, and the using of all manner of means to come at ornaments of their persons, that if the master is not a fool, they will be debauched by him and if he is a fool, they will marry him. (12)

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<sup>9</sup> Although it is clear that Fielding most likely did not know Richardson was the author of *Pamela* when he wrote *Shamela*, for the sake of clarity and consistency, I will use Richardson's name rather than the generic term "the author" when discussing Fielding's criticisms of *Pamela*.

One might classify these comments and even the whole of *Shamela* as simply “a nervous patrician defence of established hierarchies that refuses to admit inter-class marriage as anything other than a devious contrivance and the prelude to social collapse” (Keymer, Introduction xv). Fielding’s objections to *Pamela*, however, were not strictly based on the subversive message of the text; what is of perhaps more interest to this study are the objections Fielding raised about Richardson’s selection and execution of the epistolary form. In *Shamela*, Fielding took aim at four particular aspects of the pure epistolary novel and Richardson’s use of them in *Pamela* in particular: the author’s stance as editor, the elaborate efforts the author went to in order to maintain this illusion, the unreliability of the “self-interested” narrators of epistolary novels, and Richardson’s “writing to the moment” technique.

As discussed earlier, Richardson, as did many other writers of pure epistolary fiction, took on the role of editor instead of author in *Pamela*, and it was this stance that became the primary target of Fielding’s satire in *Shamela*. Fielding seemed determined to “break the illusion of authenticity” created by Richardson’s authorial disavowal and to “[bring] attention to Richardson as the author, place[ing] him squarely to blame” for the artistic ineptitudes and questionable morality of *Pamela* (Richetti *English Novel* 124). As Albert Rivero points out, “Fielding’s target . . . is not so much the self-serving story told by Pamela, because as the author of *Shamela* insinuates, there is no Pamela. His real target is the author of *Pamela*, who, by covering himself in the mantle of Pamela’s virtue, makes a profit while pretending to retail moral instruction (212-3). Fielding’s desire to draw Richardson into the spotlight and expose his claims of authenticity as fraudulent is

evident in many aspects of the text, but none more so than the very premise of his novel, which promises in its title to “expose and refute . . . the many notorious Falshoods and Misrepresentations of a Book called *Pamela*” (4).

In Fielding’s burlesque of Richardson’s tale, it is revealed that Pamela, whose real name is “Shamela,” was not a modest maid who resisted the unfair advances of her employer and maintained her virtue in the face of great pressure, as *Pamela*’s “editor” claimed. Instead, readers are told that Shamela/Pamela was only pretending to be offended by Mr. Booby’s advances, and that in fact, she was manipulating him into falling in love with her so she could gain financial stability as his mistress. Shamela eventually pushes for marriage, not because her “vartue” demands it, but because she believes it is a more profitable and lasting financial arrangement. In this new version of Pamela’s story, “Fielding undermines the authority of one fiction by creating a counterfiction, by fashioning a text that, while fictional, claims to get at the ‘truth’ by revealing the ‘real’ events misrepresented in a previous text” (Rivero 213). Richardson’s version of the story is exposed as inauthentic, and the premise of *Shamela* makes the editor appear at best a fool who was duped by the scheming Shamela, and at worst, someone who was complicit in Shamela’s lies.

Fielding does not leave readers in the dark about how Shamela’s life came to be misrepresented in *Pamela*. Instead, he incorporates into the novel an explanation for the existence of the *Pamela* manuscript that further vilifies the author of *Pamela*, and in Fielding’s explanation of how *Pamela* came to be, he makes his most pointed attack on Richardson. In one of her letters, Shamela reveals that Mr. Booby has decided that he

wants a “Book made about him and [her]” (40). The duplicitous Parson Williams assures the two that he knows of a person who “does that sort of Business for Folks” and who could make them “all great People,” although Shamela will have to have her name changed because “the first Syllable hath too comical a Sound” (40). Shamela is reluctant to engage in this endeavor because she does not want to confess any of her secrets, but Williams assures her that that the gentleman writer he knows “never asked more than a few Names of his Customers, and that he made all the rest out of his Head” (41). Williams goes on to tell Shamela that she is mistaken if she “apprehend[s] any Truths are to be delivered” in a book of this type (41). In his explanations of how Shamela’s life came to be falsely represented to the public in *Pamela*, Fielding presents Richardson as a figure of ridicule: a hack writer who crafts misleading and fake autobiographies for money.

It is not just Richardson’s claim to authenticity that Fielding mocks; he also satirizes the great lengths to which Richardson went to maintain the illusion. Fielding’s first attack on this front can be seen on the title page of *Shamela* on which Fielding claims, tongue-in-cheek, that *Shamela* is entirely made up of “exact Copies of authentick Papers delivered to the Editor,” mocking Richardson’s continued assurances to readers that he possessed the only authentic papers that contained Pamela’s story (4). Fielding also includes in *Shamela* several prefatory letters that satirize the complimentary letters that Richardson and his editor affixed to the second and subsequent editions of *Pamela*. One letter in particular—Fielding’s “letter to the editor” from the “editor himself”—can be seen as an open attack on Richardson’s claims of verisimilitude (7). This self-

congratulatory letter, which asks the editor to reveal how he came to have Shamela's writings, highlights the falsity of Richardson's letter to readers in which he claims to be objectively analyzing and recommending the work as a disinterested editor.

Fielding not only objected to the dishonesty and egoism of Richardson pretending to be an editor so that he could insulate himself from criticism and surreptitiously promote his own writing, he was also bothered by Richardson's clumsy execution of Pamela's story. In particular, Fielding objected to the incongruity of Richardson using a first-person, epistolary narrative to tell the story of a modest and chaste maidservant. Quite naturally, Fielding saw that Richardson's choice of a first-person narrative for this story 'place[d] a strain on the credibility of Pamela's character,' as Pamela must "present herself as modest yet at the same time busily record all the praise that comes her way" (Hawley xiii). Because of Richardson's choice to present himself as an editor of the text and Pamela as the "author of the text" instead of creating a third-person narrator to tell Pamela's story, readers must rely on only Pamela's obviously subjective presentation of her own superior virtues. Naturally, the question of Pamela's bias arises in the minds of readers as they read Pamela's seemingly endless descriptions of the good things people say about her, and it is this inconsistency that provides Fielding with the basis for much of the satire in *Shamela*. As Keymer suggests, "subjecting *Pamela* to a subversive yet plausible reinterpretation . . . exposes the indeterminacy of meaning inherent in epistolary narrative, reliant as it is on the reader's willingness to accept the veracity of a self-interested narrator" ("Introduction" xiv). It is quite obvious, even to the most accepting readers, that Pamela has a vested interest in appearing virtuous and modest because she

would not wish to be seen as complicit in anyway in Mr. B's seduction. In *Shamela*, Fielding plays on readers' suspicions of Pamela's motives and obvious self-interest by claiming to reveal just how skewed her presentation of events was.

The actual events of *Shamela* closely mirror those of *Pamela* but with Fielding revealing to readers what Pamela had "really" been thinking and feeling during these episodes. In Fielding's reworking of the story, readers find out that the letters that made up *Pamela* were a "Misrepresentation of the Facts" and a "Perversion of the Truth," and that Pamela is not actually a simple, chaste chambermaid, but a "little Jade" who sets out to seduce her master and trick him into supporting her (Fielding 12). Fielding satirizes the unreliability of Richardson's narrative technique by providing several correspondents to tell the "true story" of Pamela/Shamela, and "the variety of letter writers in *Shamela* works directly and explicitly to challenge the authenticity of any one writer's presentation of events" (Campbell 118). Instead of having to rely on just one person's vision of the story, a person whose objectivity is questionable, readers are now privy to Shamela's, her mother's, Parson Williams's, and Mrs. Jervis's version of events. With the addition of multiple correspondents, *Shamela* implies that it is only because readers are now able to see the events through more than one perspective that they will be able to understand the "true" story of Pamela/Shamela.

One of the most pointed satires of Pamela's unreliability as a narrator is the scene in which Shamela reveals the truth behind Mr. B/Booby's attempted rape of her. In *Pamela*, the scene in which Mr. B sneaks into Pamela's room and attempts to rape her is one of the most terror-inducing moments of the whole novel. Readers hold their breath as

Pamela struggles to get away from Mr. B and then anxiously waits to see if Pamela will recover from the two-hour swoon she falls into after being frightened nearly to death. In Shamela's version of the story, Shamela deliberately leaves her door unlocked and "sham[s] a Sleep" to allow Booby access to her room. She waits until Booby "steals his Hand into [her] Bosom" before she pretends to awaken and be overcome with terror (18). In "reality," Shamela has difficulty controlling her "Countenance" during the phony rape because she is trying desperately not to let a "violent Laugh . . . burst forth" (18). A scene such as this, which offers a plausible reinterpretation of the exact events described in *Pamela*, reminds readers that one person's subjective account on her own life could very well be dishonest or misleading, and the single-focus epistolary letter form, which relies on a person describing her own life with no possibility of verification, offers a less authentic portrayal of events than a dispassionate observer (like a third-person narrator) might.

In this scene, Fielding also explicitly addresses one of his other main criticisms of Richardson's epistolary writing style, the artificiality of his "writing-to-the-moment" technique. In his reworking of the attempted rape, not only does Fielding reveal that Shamela was faking her resistance, he paints a ludicrous picture of a conniving Shamela scribbling out a letter *while* lying in bed waiting for Mr. B to attempt to rape her. Shamela writes: "Mrs. Jervis and I are just in Bed, and the Door unlocked; if my Master should come—Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the Door. You see I write in the present Tense, as Parson Williams says" (18). While the writing-to-the-moment technique's reliance on present tense in *Pamela's* letters created a sense of authenticity

and immediacy, in *Shamela* it becomes farcical. When reading *Shamela*, readers cannot help but be struck by the artificiality of having a character write in present tense in a narrative that stresses the veracity of the character/writer's account of events. Obviously, its use is disingenuous because Pamela would have indeed had to be scribbling off a letter at the exact moment Mr. B was attempting to rape her, if she was really "writing to the moment."

With *Shamela*, Fielding made it clear that he did not share his contemporaries' love of the epistolary novel or highly subjective narration. Fielding was not content, however, to merely criticize the novels of others. Instead he offered to the public his own conception of the novel with the publication of what is considered his first independent novel: *Joseph Andrews*. With this novel, his rejection of Richardson's methodology and the epistolary novel is seemingly complete. Instead of telling Joseph's story through a collection of letters, Fielding recounts Joseph's adventures through a third-person narrator whose distinctive voice would become one of Fielding's trademarks. In his choice of a third-person narrator, Fielding refuses to bow to the reading public's desire for an "authentic" story, and he even flaunts and revels in the artificiality of his narrative by including in the novel metafictional discussions about the writing process and by having the narrator constantly disrupt the illusion of reality by directly addressing readers. As Judith Hawley explains:

Fielding, suspicious of *Pamela*'s role as an ideal standard, suspicious too of Richardson's subjective narrative technique which encourages the reader to identify with his example of injured innocence, deliberately sets the reader at a

distance from his characters and the action by means of the ironic narration. He forces the readers to think about, not identify with the character. (xxiv)

In *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding purposely creates a narrative voice that embodies everything Richardson's did not: transparency, playfulness, irony, and distance.

In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding famously and openly declared his literary independence by claiming to have written a "comic Epic-Poem in Prose"—a "kind of Writing" that he did not "remember to have been hitherto attempted" in English (49). Clearly he was eager to distance his work from that of his contemporaries, not only British epistolary novels but also continental romances. *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding proclaimed, was a novel that had more in common with the writing of the ancients and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* than it did with the writing of his immediate literary predecessors and contemporaries.

Modern literary critics agree that Fielding did, indeed, establish a new way to think about narrative voice and the novel. In his biography of Fielding, Martin Battestin writes:

As a novel, *Joseph Andrews* departs radically from its British predecessors—most notably from the tradition of Defoe and Richardson, whose work is distinguished by a circumstantial realism and fully individualized characters. Fielding here established two other distinctive literary traditions of the modern novel . . . the tradition of ironic social commentary [and] the "self-reflexive" or "architectonic" novel. (Battestin, *Life* 327-8)

Indeed, Fielding's works, starting with *Joseph Andrews*, do offer a different conception of the novel, but his work is not, of course, wholly original. Interestingly enough, although Fielding quite clearly rejected the epistolary novel as a genre, he did not dismiss the letter altogether as a useful device in the novel, as his repeated use of the embedded letters in his novels attests. Nevertheless, Fielding does not use letters in his novels to establish authenticity or verisimilitude as Defoe and Richardson did; rather his use of the embedded letter in a third-person narrative is more akin to the way letters were used in the non-epistolary amatory fiction of writers such as Delarivier Manley, Aphra Behn, Mary Davys, and Eliza Haywood. Although Fielding certainly wished to disavow any connection to what he surely viewed as the romantic excesses of this genre, his decision to use a third-person narrator and supplement and complicate his own narrative voice with the voices of his characters through embedded letters echoes decisions made by early amatory writers. Much like in Fielding's novels, letters in early amatory fiction connected readers with the characters without an intermediary and provided a venue for the expression of sentiments and subjectivity that the narrator could not/would not express, creating a kind of polyphony that did not exist in Defoe and Richardson's authorially-controlled, first-person narratives.

*Creating Subjectivity and Polyphony: The Embedded Letter in Non-Epistolary Amatory Fiction*

Even before the epistolary novel became immensely popular in the middle of the eighteenth century, letters had become a regular feature of early non-epistolary

narratives, particularly amatory fiction.<sup>10</sup> In the novels of Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, and Mary Davys, in particular, letters played an integral role in both plot construction and narration. Embedded letters provided a convenient and even necessary device in constructing stories about separated lovers, a recurrent theme in amatory fiction, and gave readers the kind of insight into the characters' emotions and thoughts that could not be, or simply was not being, expressed through a third-person narrator.

Although there is a good deal of variety in the storylines of amatory fiction, the plots of most amatory novels involve romantic couples being forced to deal with separation due to such factors as “virtual or actual imprisonment by harsh parents and rascally abductors” (Day 117). A reliance on this kind of “separation plot” demanded that authors contrive some way to sustain the relationship between lovers when they were apart if the novels were to avoid being static, one-sided laments. In accomplishing this goal, the embedded letter proved to be a natural, and even necessary, device, and embedded letters were consequently used quite extensively to facilitate plot development. Eliza Haywood used letters in her popular novel *Love in Excess*, for example, to allow one of the main characters, Amena, to communicate secretly with her lover D'elmont when the couple is forced apart by Amena's father and when she ultimately retreats from the world to take orders in a convent. In this novel, the embedded letter allows Haywood

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<sup>10</sup> Although influential critics such as Ian Watt discount these early writers and claim that they are not writing “real” novels, I have chosen to focus particularly on amatory fiction as representative of early fiction of the time because it is the most skillfully-written and widely read of the original prose narratives in Britain and the most obvious predecessors of the “more developed” novels written by Richardson and Fielding.

to continue to develop multiple storylines and to continue the romantic relationship between D'elmont and Amena even when they are physically separated and when D'elmont marries Amena's rival Alovisa. In another of Haywood's novels, *Philodore and Placentia*, letters are also used to help connect separated lovers: they allow Arithea, a member of a Persian harem, to communicate with her husband's slave, even though they are forbidden from having any physical contact. Mary Davys, yet another successful novelist of the period, also used embedded letters in works such as *The Reform'd Coquet*. In this novel, the lovers are not physically separated in much of the story; however, the male suitor Formator uses letters to speak with Altemira because he wishes to communicate with her without revealing his true identity. Finally, Aphra Behn also makes good use of the embedded letter in novels such as *The Lucky Mistake*: in this novel, the lovers Rinaldo and Alante are forced to exchange letters when their parents decide they are unsuitable for one another and force them apart. In all of these novels, embedded letters are invaluable in facilitating the continuation of romantic relationships between parted lovers.

It was not just the demands of the plot, however, that made the letter so useful in non-epistolary amatory fiction. Letters were also particularly helpful for adding depth, pathos, and subjectivity to the novels because, as Robert Day points out, the writers of early narratives seemed to be incapable of or disinterested in creating "artistically useful dialogue and realistic, significant action" (121) In fact, in amatory fiction there is "an absence of real dialogue. . . . [and]; conversational exchange scarcely exists. Instead one finds a surprising amount of indirect discourse." (Day 120). There is nothing inherently

wrong with a reliance on indirect discourse such as authorial narration, but the authorial narration of these early novels often left much to be desired because the narrators presented events in rather flat, declarative prose that did not offer much insight into or description of the characters' thoughts and feelings.

Behn, Manley, Haywood, and Davys all employed third-person narrative personas that could be described as less-skillfully drawn, less prominent versions of the narrators one finds in the later works of Fielding and Austen. Unlike the narrators in Fielding and Austen, however, the role of the narrator as commentator or analyst is fairly limited, as he/she was used primarily to express "objective or purely functional narrative" (Day 120). These narrators did not have distinct voices nor were they authority figures who provided the readers with guidance as Fielding's narrators did. As John Richetti points out, Haywood's narrative voice, for example, uses an almost "purely declamatory manner," and her prose "is entirely and deliberately formulaic, a breathless rush of erotic/pathetic clichés that is in a real sense unreadable," and that "is designed to be scanned hastily, not to be pondered as language" (*English Novel* 42; "Voice and Gender" 266).

In lieu of developed dialogue or an analytical narrative persona, writers of amatory fiction relied on "set pieces", such as "descriptions, soliloquies, poems, letters, and harangues," in their works to add subjectivity and depth (Day 120). Of all of the "set pieces," it was in the embedded letter in particular, however, "that subjective narrative found its most effective fulfillment" (Day 121). As Robert Day explains,

[Letters] became an almost inevitable device in novels in which the authors felt it necessary to deal with the feelings of the characters. Letters even took the place of dialogue when dialogue was not only possible but logical. The novel of writers like Mrs. Haywood, unless it were purely epistolary, was the euphuistic novel modernized, with its subjective elements furnished chiefly by numerous interpolated letters. (121).

Because amatory writers were not particularly interested in (or even capable of, given the rather melodramatic unrealistic stories they told) presenting their works as “true” or “realistic,” the letters were not intended to create authenticity or verisimilitude in the texts; instead they were intended to express what was seemingly inexpressible through an objective narrator and formulaic prose.

Amatory novelists took advantage of eighteenth-century perceptions of the letter as an appropriate vehicle for the expression of private thoughts and emotions. The letter’s inherent promise of emotional safety and distance made it the perfect vehicle through which readers could gain the best understanding of a character’s true feelings and thoughts, particularly when it came to love. Letters allowed for characters to express feelings and thoughts that they might not have otherwise expressed in less private settings, given the restrictions placed particularly on women about expressing romantic feelings to men. Letters, particularly if they were hand-delivered as many of them are in these novels, provided female lovers with the privacy they needed to transgress social mores and express themselves openly. Their open expressions of romantic attachment were especially empowering in a time when “custom required a woman to attract and

marry an eligible man, but the same custom forbade her to show her interest in a man until he had formally declared love for her” (Oakleaf 15). Even the most virtuous characters such as Amena in *Love in Excess* and Placentia in *Philidore and Placentia* take up their pens and write letters to their male suitors, expressing their feelings for them before their lovers had made a formal declaration of their intentions.

Often the real heart of these novels, the characters’ expressions of love, loss, and anguish, lay in the embedded letters. However, letters were not used only to explore significant or secret emotions; letters were also used to explore even the seemingly mundane thoughts of the characters just for the purpose of creating a sense of subjectivity that was lacking because of little dialogue and narrator commentary. For example, as Day accurately explains about Eliza Haywood’s novels:

a Haywoodian novel may present the most important events, or plot reversals, in a hurried paragraph or so without color or interest, while in its letters fleeting emotional states or even the most trivial events are dwelt upon, amplified, and intensified with the utmost resources of the author. (127)

This observation holds true of other amatory writers as well. In Mary Davys’s *The Accomplished Rake*, for example, the narrator mentions only vaguely in a mere two sentences Sir John’s rape of Miss Friendly, a central event in the story:

The time came, the lady asleep in one bed, her maid in another, and Sir John had all the opportunity he expected. As soon as he heard the least stirring in the house he got up, called for his horse, gave Sarah [the maid] her reward, and away he rode to London as fast as his horse could carry him. (296)

Yet, in the same novel the author also chooses to include letters whose relatively unimportant content could have been easily relayed by the narrator in passing, but are instead explored fully in embedded letters: Lady Galliard's letter to her former servant Tom to tell him of an open position in her house, a letter from Belinda's sister telling her that Belinda's child is ill, and a letter between Galliard and his mistress's husband. While the subject matter of the letters may be trivial, the effect produced by having characters express themselves in their own words is significant: through letters the characters come alive and gain their own voice in the novels.

One also finds in these novels not just an implicit lack of subjective description but an explicit refusal on the part of the narrators to describe characters' feelings in intensely emotional scenes. Again and again, narrators of early fiction will lament their inability to articulate their characters' strong emotions and the general inadequacy of language to capture intense sentiments. There are several possible reasons why authors, through their narrators, left readers to imagine what a character might be feeling at a pivotal moment of the text. It is possible that the authors truly felt that a third-party would be incapable of describing the emotions someone else might feel in an intensely emotional scene, or as John Richetti asserts, it is possible that the author's refusal to articulate these feelings may have been a more deliberate and strategic move. Richetti, drawing on the work of Elaine Showalter, contends that a narrator's claim of linguistic inadequacy was actually not a reflection of the descriptive capabilities of the author, but rather a cleverly positive spin on the popular belief that women writers, because of their sex's exclusion from higher education and participation in the public sphere of life, had

only “limited access” to the “full resources of language” (“Voice and Gender” 263). Richetti claims that female writers co-opted this “disability,” and women’s limited access to the language necessary to fully express their experiences became an important and pervasive theme in their novels. One way this theme manifests itself is through the narrators’ and female characters’ frequent claims that they are unable to communicate what they are thinking or feeling because they know no words adequate to do so. Richetti believes that many women writers made “a defining voice and virtue out of female deprivation” and that it produces in Haywood’s work, at least, a narrator and characters who “dramatize the inadequacy of their writing in the face of female experience at its most intense, extreme, and therefore inarticulate” (“Voice and Gender” 264; 266).

Whatever the reason behind it, early writers’ need/decision to keep their narrative voices objective prompted them to use other devices to give their characters psychological depth and to allow the readers to gain better insight into the characters’ private thoughts and motivations. Amatory novelists chose to employ the embedded letter as a method for filling the void created by the narrators’ refusals to express emotions. The letters “served in lieu of long descriptions of a subjective sort . . . and by means of the letters, the reader was able to define the personality of the writer [of the embedded letter] for himself” (Singer 83). One scene in Haywood’s *Philidore and Placentia*, in particular, perfectly illustrates how the narrator’s reluctance to describe emotions is compensated for by the inclusion of very intense and emotion-filled letters. In this particular scene, Placentia, in love with Philidore—who, under the alias of Jacobin, has insinuated himself into her life by becoming her servant—begs him to reveal the “secret” of his birth, as she

is convinced that such a noble and handsome man could not belong to the servant class. Philidore wants to tell her that he is in fact a gentleman, but because he lacks a fortune and is therefore unworthy of her, he claims that he is nothing more than a servant in order to discourage her romantic feelings for him. His refusal to claim a higher station in life and her forwardness in asserting herself makes Placentia so ashamed that she can no longer bear to face Jacobin. Instead, she sends him out of the room and writes him a letter to express her feelings. She then insists that he respond to her only in letter-form, despite the fact that they live in the same house and could much more easily communicate face-to-face.

Interestingly, in this scene, the narrator declines to describe the feelings of both characters in any real detail, so readers really must rely on the letters for insight into the true feelings of the two lovers. In her summary of Philidore's reactions, for example, the narrator says that Philidore felt "an inward confusion which is not to be described" and she then goes on to describe (or decline to describe), Placentia's reaction to Philidore's letter (177):

but with what words shall I represent the wild distraction of Placentia's soul when she received his letter! Here the reader's imagination must help me out; nor can any imagination but that of a woman who loves as she did and has been, like her, deprived of all her soul holds dear, do justice to the agonies with which she was possessed (179)

In place of a narrator's description or dialogue between the two, readers have the two letters composed by the pair.

In her letter, Placentia is able to do what she could not do in person: reveal her love for Philidore. She writes, “I love you with a passion which will suffer itself no longer to be concealed. All my endeavors to vanquish it have been ineffectual” (177). Philidore responds to her letter with a matching outpouring of love: “Long have I been an adorer of your perfections, but with so pure and disinterested a zeal that I have Heaven to witness, I never had a wish but such as your guardian angel might inspire” (179). He also goes on to reveal in the letter something he could not in person: his true identity as a gentleman. The insertion of letters into this scene seems a bit contrived; however, the letters do allow Haywood to provide readers with a scene of heightened emotion without relying on the removed description of the narrator. Readers do not have to imagine the feelings of Philidore and Placentia for themselves or hear them described by a third party; they can hear the expression of these emotions in the characters’ own words. Additionally, as the narrator is often seen as the author’s stand-in or second self, this displacement also protects Haywood from accusations of writing melodramatic, immodest prose. The letters, in essence, are written by “someone else” and constitute a separate space, a space outside the purview of the writer or narrator.

Although amatory fiction’s amorphous, patchwork form and underdeveloped narrative voice are often seen as deficiencies and used as reasons why these works should not be truly considered “novels,” the lack of an strong, authoritative narrative voice dominating the text expounding a “totalizing authorial point of view” and the presence of the embedded letters that allow the voices of the characters to enter the novel on a plane equal to the narrator make these works much more polyphonic than the novels of Defoe

and early epistolary novelists such as Richardson. In amatory fiction, one does not see the characters as simply mouthpieces of the author/narrator, in large part because the narrator's limited role does not allow the author's point of view to dominate the text. Instead, through the embedded letters, polyphony is created and to put it in Bakhtin's terms, the voices of the characters "[possess] extraordinary independence in the structure of the work," and readers are able to see the characters' opinions and emotions as independent of the author's (Bakhtin *Problems* 7).

As we will see in the coming chapters, although Fielding developed in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, in particular, a narrative voice that is far more authoritative and dominant than those found in amatory fiction, he similarly created polyphony in his novels with the use of the embedded letter. The letters he embeds in the novels provide readers with alternative perspectives to the authorial vision of the world presented by his narrator. The letters bring alive the subjectivity of Fielding's characters, and because of the inherent independence of the embedded letter form, their inclusion in the text creates a dialogic relationship between his authorial vision of the world and his characters' vision of the world, establishing a surprising polyphony in texts that have traditionally viewed as containing only a "single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness" (Bakhtin *Problems* 6).

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Embedded Letter and Polyvocality in *Joseph Andrews***

Despite extensive efforts to supplant the voice of the author with the voices of first-person characters, to destroy any traces of fiction in their texts, and to delve into the psychological inner-workings of characters in a convincing and immediate way, early novelists like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson failed to create polyphonic texts in which the voices of individualized characters stood independent from or even in dialogue with the authors' own voices. Although these authors went to great lengths to try to convince readers of the authenticity of their novels and the validity of their first-person narrators' perspectives, ultimately the voices of these characters are, like other the voices of other characters in monologic texts, simply a part of the author's "finalizing artistic vision" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 5). If these authors, despite their desire to shift the focus of the novel from the author's perspective to the characters', produced monologic works, it certainly should come as no surprise that Henry Fielding's works, which seemingly embody a diametrically opposed philosophy of the novel, can be and often are considered some of the most monologic works of the eighteenth century.

In his first independent novel *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding chose not to write a first-person, subjective narrative in which the author remains silently in the background as an editor, unlike many of his peers who did this in an attempt to "disclaim the fictional nature of their work under the guise of documents and history" (Brown 27). Instead, he chose to create an external, dramatized narrator who is intrusive, self-reflexive, and authoritative, a figure who plays an undeniably important and prominent role in the text.

The voices and ideas in *Joseph Andrews* are all filtered through the consciousness of this dramatized narrator who identifies himself not just as the teller of a tale but also as the author of the novel. The narrator creates and controls the themes, tone, events, and characters of the text and exerts his authority to ensure that readers see the fictional world through his comic, ironic gaze. His authoritative presence in the novel keeps much of the focus of the novel squarely on the narrator and his ideology and the novel *appears* monologic as it presents through the narrator a “single objective world” that is “illuminated by a single authorial consciousness,” to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms (*Problems* 6).

Although it is true that the narrator’s voice does control and suppress other voices and competing ideologies in the text, it is my contention that his is not the only consciousness given a valid, authoritative voice in the novel and that his view does not represent the totality of *Fielding’s* vision for the novel. This chapter explores how *Fielding’s* use of the embedded letter in *Joseph Andrews* allows voices and perspectives other than the narrator’s to enter the world of the novel in a way that grants these perspectives equal validity as the narrator’s and produces surprising polyphony. The embedded letters complicate the seemingly monologic world of the narrator and allow for a dialectic exchange of ideas that enriches and complicates the narrator’s limited, ironic view of the world.

### ***Seeing the World through Fielding’s Narrator***

There is no denying that the narrator’s voice plays an prominent role in *Joseph Andrews*: through direct addresses to readers, digressions, lectures, and metafictional

musings, the narrator stays in the forefront of the text and takes an active and sometimes even bullying role in shaping and controlling readers' perceptions of the fictional world he is relating. Fielding's narrator is an urbane and aloof observer who maintains an "arch detachment" through his ironic commentary and comedic treatment of the characters and events of the story (Hawley xix). The narrator sets the tone for readers' engagement with the text with his disinterested, ironic stance: he demands that his readers maintain an ironic detachment similar to his own by discouraging readers from viewing the characters of the novel, particularly Joseph, as autonomous beings with their own independent voices and by suppressing ideological values, such as a sincere appreciation of romance and sentiment, that conflict with or undermine his own.

Even before the close of the first chapter of *Joseph Andrews*, readers begin to understand the prominent role the narrator is going to play in their own understanding of the text, and they recognize that the narrator is not going to be a distant figure who neutrally presents Joseph's story in a sincere, straightforward way. Perceptive readers, if aware of Fielding's contempt for Colley Cibber and Richardson's *Pamela*, immediately pause when the narrator praises in this first chapter "two Books lately published, which represent an admirable Pattern of the Amiable in either Sex": Colley Cibber's autobiography and Richardson's *Pamela* (62). If one is aware that Fielding is the author of *Shamela*, it is clear that the narrator's claim that Cibber's autobiography "teach[es] us a Contempt of worldly Grandeur" and "an absolute Submission to our Superiors," although presented in a seemingly sincere way, is not to be taken at face value (62). Correctly interpreting that this seemingly insignificant bit of commentary is meant to be

taken ironically is important because it serves as an early alert to readers that they must assess the narrator's comments carefully, constantly being on the lookout for ironic/satiric overtones. Readers must come to understand the narrator's values and beliefs—in this instance that Cibber's book and Richardson's *Pamela* are actually morally corruptive, not instructive—if they are to understand the novel fully.

As readers move along in the story, they start to piece together an understanding of the narrator's ideology, and naturally, they attempt to mold their own responses to the text to fit in with this perspective. As Peter Rabinowitz explains, authors “design their books rhetorically for some more or less hypothetical audience”: the “authorial audience” (21). The authorial audience is a set of readers to whom the writer will direct his ideas with the understanding that the readers will “accept the author's invitation to read in a particularly socially constituted way that is shared by the author and his or her expected readers” (Rabinowitz 22). In turn, the actual readers of a text attempt to determine what a writer wants his or her readers to think and feel and then attempt to read “as they believe the author wishes them to. They attempt to read as the authorial audience” (30). In Fielding's novel, readers must identify and accept the narrator's sardonic, distant, and comic view of the world and attempt to view the characters and events of the story in a similar way if they are to engage with the text successfully.

At times, the narrator's irony knows no bounds, as he satirizes almost everything from religion, politics, and literary conventions to romance and the affectations of the “lower class.” Nevertheless, it is the narrator's ironic and aloof treatment of the characters of the novel, in particular, that is of most interest to this study. That the

narrator is not going to take the characters about whom he is writing too seriously is obvious, never more so than in his introduction of one of the main protagonists of the novel, Joseph Andrews. Joseph, the “hero” of the story, is introduced amid an ironic panegyric to “the Memoirs of Mrs. Adams” (62). In this introduction, the narrator explains that Joseph is the brother of the infamous Pamela, and that “it was by keeping the excellent Pattern of his Sister’s Virtues before his Eyes that, Mr. Joseph Andrews was chiefly enabled to preserve his Purity in the midst of such great Temptations” (62). Knowing that Fielding has previously written a novel in which “the many notorious Falshoods and Misrepresentations of a book called *Pamela* are exposed and refuted” and Pamela/Shamela is exposed as an immoral opportunist, readers immediately link Joseph to the farcical world of *Shamela* and creates expectations about him based on the burlesque nature of that text (*Shamela* 4). Because Joseph’s “ancestry has been described in ludicrous terms . . . it is not surprising that we expect the young man to take part in comic adventures and are prepared even for the ‘burlesque’”(Sacks 78).

The narrator sets readers up to view Joseph as a kind of caricature, not as someone who is “ideologically authoritative and independent” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 5). In thinking of Joseph as character akin to Shamela, a one-dimensional character who is created by Fielding for the purpose of satirizing Richardson, readers are discouraged from thinking of Joseph as an autonomous individual with a consciousness and voice separate from the narrator’s. In fact, Judith Hawley contends, “Fielding sets [Joseph] up as the butt of a joke in these early chapters. . . . For at least the first ten chapters, Joseph is little more than a rhetorical object of the narrator, a figure used to demonstrate his

values” (xvii). Essentially, the narrator creates a character who, again to use a Bakhtinian term, is a “voiceless slave” to the narrator’s own ideology (*Problems* 6).

It is not only the narrator’s ironic treatment of the characters that ensures that readers do not view them as autonomous individuals; it is also the fact that the narrator openly identifies himself as the “author” of the novel and repeatedly engages in metafictional discussions that make it impossible for readers to immerse themselves in the text and to experience the “psychological realities,” of the novel’s characters (Kraft 65). Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* is, as Martin Battestin explains:

a ‘self-reflexive’ or ‘architectonic novel’—a kind of narrative deliberately flaunting its artificiality, in which the author is immanent in his creation, not aloof and paring his fingernails, . . . but obtrusive in his contrivances, . . . reminding us that the text we are reading cannot be a photograph of what really exists, but is instead a thing made and fabricated by the author. (*Life* 328)

Over the course of the novel, the narrator frequently takes readers “behind the scenes” of the novel, demystifying the writing process by explaining the art of fiction. In one such discussion, the narrator explicitly draws attention to the artificiality of the characters in his novel when he castigates the “Authors of immense Romances, or the modern Novel” who “without any Assistance from Nature or History record Persons who never were, or will be, and facts which never did nor possibly can happen. Whose heroes are of their own Creation, and their Brains the Chaos whence all their Materials are collected” (202). The narrator proudly proclaims, that he, unlike romance writers, belongs to a class of writers he calls “biographers” who “are contented to copy Nature, instead of forming

Originals from the confused heap of Matter in their own Brains” (202). The narrator goes on to explain that in his own works he “describe[s] not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species” (203). Comments such as these explicitly remind readers that it would be a mistake to lose themselves in the fictional world of the novel and to view the characters of the novel as “real” individuals. Instead readers are supposed to consider each character a “type” that is representative of a certain section of the populace. This quite obviously makes it difficult for readers to view the characters as independent beings with their own voices.

The narrator also draws back the curtain to explain to readers certain “tricks of the trade” writers use such as the inclusion of unnecessary material simply to “lengthen out a short Chapter,” as *Joseph Andrews*’ narrator does in one chapter by including a panegyric to vanity (103). Additionally, he reveals to readers one of the “Mysteries or Secrets” in the art of “Authoring”: the reason behind the division of novels into books and chapters (119). The narrator humorously claims to be sharing this information because he wishes to dispel the misconception that many readers have that the author wishes to divide his work simply to “swell [the] Works to a much larger Bulk than they would otherwise extend to” (119). He tells readers that “in Reality the Case is otherwise, and in this, as well as other Instances, we consult the Advantage of our Reader, not our own” as the breaks in the narrative

may be looked upon as an Inn or Resting-Place where, [the reader] may stop and take a Glass. . . . As to those vacant Pages which are placed between our Books, they are to be regarded as those Stages, where, in long Journeys, the Traveller

stays some time to repose himself, and consider of what he hath seen in the Parts he hath already passed through. (119)

Seemingly insignificant comments like this, which are perhaps just meant as playful asides, actually have a big impact on readers' perceptions of the text. With each metafictional comment, the narrator draws readers further away from the characters and asserts his role as the ultimate authority in the text.

*Joseph Andrews* appears to be a monologic text not only because the narrator discourages readers from viewing the characters of the novel as individuals with their own voices, but also because the narrator actively works to suppress and control any ideological values that may compete with or undermine the values he is trying to promote. Essentially, *Joseph Andrews* is a comedic exploration of the moral failings of Fielding's own society. Fielding's novel, although comic in nature, tackles some rather weighty moral issues—hypocrisy, lack of charity, man's cruelty to his fellow man—and presents some potentially pathos-inducing events—Fanny and Joseph's separation, Joseph's dismissal, the attempted rape of Fanny, and Joseph's injury. In order to maintain the comic strain of the novel, the narrator must carefully ensure that readers approach the themes and events in the story with the same ironic detachment that he does. The narrator is in a precarious position when he presents events and characters that might naturally evoke in readers something other than detached amusement because there is "always a danger that [his] original comic detachment may give way, temporarily, to tragicomic feelings of fear, pity, indignation" or even tenderness (Crane 132). If this happens, the text starts to deconstruct and the narrator's ironic detachment and casual treatment of

these events appears almost cruel and reflective of society's indifference, perhaps making the narrator as morally corrupt as the villains in the story. The narrator then must "[force] his readers to think about, not identify with the character"; he must discourage the kind of emotional, invested reading of novels that so many of Fielding's peers encouraged (Hawley xxiv-xxv). Sentimentality, emotional attachment, and pathos, values that are prized in other eighteenth-century novels, are diminished in Fielding's novel as the narrator actively works to quash them in *Joseph Andrews*.

The narrator strives to ensure that readers of his novel do not approach his text the same way that they might a romantic novel like *Pamela* by satirizing the way readers, particularly of sentimental novels, become very emotionally invested in the plights of fictional characters. Lest his readers ignore the carefully crafted comic distance he establishes and begin to feel too deeply for his characters, the narrator is quick to discourage such reactions by shaming those readers who feel too much. In one such example—the scene in which the narrator describes Lady Booby's final decision to strip Joseph of his livery and unjustly fire him—it is natural for one to feel sympathy for Joseph for the unfair termination and concern about what he will do now that he has lost his sole means of employment. The narrator does nothing immediately to alleviate readers' concern, as he quickly moves from this scene to the next chapter that focuses on a conversation between Slipslop and Lady Booby, leaving readers in suspense about Joseph's fate.

However, at the end of this chapter, the narrator, appearing to be sensitive to the reader's anxiety, ends his discussion of Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop's conversation

with the following: “we shall therefore see a little after our Hero, for whom the Reader is doubtlessly in some pain” (84). Despite the narrator’s apparent shared sympathy, the reader’s concern for Joseph are soon made ridiculous when they find Joseph in the next scene, not destitute and fearful about his future, but “enter[ing] himself into an Ejaculation on the numberless Calamities which attended Beauty, and the Misfortune it was to be handsomer than one’s Neighbors” (84). Effectively, the narrator ends any real feelings of alarm or sympathy readers have by presenting the hero of the novel as a comic and somewhat feminine figure. Here readers move from feeling sympathy for Joseph to laughing at the ridiculousness of his “sufferings.” Readers are being subtly reminded that they should not read this novel as they would a sentimental romance—always in pain for the protagonist, always waiting with bated breath to see what will happen, anxious for the characters’ safety and well being. In this novel, the characters’ plights are not grave, so they are to be laughed at, and readers who are “pained” by the experiences of the characters are reading in a way not sanctioned by the narrator.

Readers are also discouraged from becoming too invested in the less cerebral, more “emotional” aspects of the novel, such as the relationships between characters. Romantic entanglements feature prominently in *Joseph Andrews*, but the narrator’s tendency to present them in a comical rather than tender light prevent readers from becoming too concerned about either the success or failure of the relationships. Because of the narrator, readers tend to *think* more about the characters, rather than *feel* for them. The descriptions of Mrs. Slipslop’s, Lady Booby’s, and Betty’s feelings for Joseph, for example, are pointed parodies of the romantic excess that is found in other eighteenth-

century novels. In Fielding's novel, the seriousness with which women's often painful and powerful passion is depicted in amatory fiction written by Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood is exchanged for a humorous portrayal of women who become attached to the almost helpless, beautiful, and chaste footman. Situations that in a typical eighteenth-century novel would give rise to pity or even terror in readers—a virtuous and penniless person at the mercy of an older, unscrupulous person in a position of authority—instead provoke laughter in *Joseph Andrews* and maybe even derision because the innocent “victim” is a young man and the aggressor is an aging widow.

Mrs. Slipslop, Lady Booby's maid, a comical figure who constantly uses malapropisms and who affects the mannerisms of her “betters,” is one such female admirer of Joseph's. Mrs. Slipslop, who has “arrived at an Age when she thought she might indulge herself in any Liberties with a Man, without the danger of bringing a third Person into the World to betray them” sets her sights on Joseph (73). Described as “a hungry Tygress . . . who long had traversed the Woods in fruitless search,” Mrs. Slipslop lies in wait for Joseph and one day when she “sees within the reach of her claws a lamb, she prepare[s] to leap on her Prey” (74). Joseph escapes from Mrs. Slipslop's “amorous Hands” only when the fortuitous ring of Lady Booby's bell “delivered the intended Martyr from [Slipslop's] Clutches” (74). Slipslop's advances are nothing but comical and inspire laughter and maybe even contempt, not sympathy, in readers.

Mrs. Slipslop is not the only woman who wishes to possess Joseph. In Fielding's farcical world, women of the highest station, such as Lady Booby, and women of the lowest station, such as Betty the chambermaid, simply cannot control their passion for

Joseph, which results in many humorous scenes. An enraged Lady Booby is forced at last to dismiss Joseph when he refuses her advances. An equally disappointed Betty feels great emotional turmoil after Joseph refuses her advances, as “Rage and Lust pulled her Heart, as with two Strings, two different Ways; one Moment she thought of stabbing Joseph, the next, of taking him in her Arms, and devouring him with Kisses” (117). Readers cannot help but laugh at the wildly exaggerated passions of these women. In Fielding’s rendering, unrequited love does not produce tragic outcomes as it does in the sentimental novels of his contemporaries; instead, it is used as a humorous vehicle through which the narrator can reveal the many flaws and failings of characters.

Even the “true romance” of the novel is presented in a less than serious manner. A love relationship between Joseph and Fanny is at the center of the novel, and the novel ends as a typical romance in some ways—the couple surmounts all obstacles and ends up married and living happily ever after. However, the narrator takes great pains to present even this courtship in such a humorous way that readers are never really able to appreciate Joseph and Fanny’s feelings for each other or become emotionally invested in their struggles. Fielding discourages such a connection between the characters and the readers by having the narrator insert sarcasm or irony into almost every potentially tender scene.

When introducing the relationship between Joseph and Fanny, the narrator infuses what should be a touching story of lovers being separated with comedic commentary to ensure that readers do not become overly concerned about their enforced separation. The

description of the couple's courtship and reluctant parting evokes more laughter than tears when the narrator proclaims:

nothing can be imagined more tender than was the parting between these two Lovers . . . she often pulled him to her Breast and with a soft pressure, which, tho' perhaps it would not have squeezed an Insect to death, caused more Emotion in the Heart of Joseph, than the closest Cornish Hug could have done.<sup>11</sup> (86-7)

The mention of an insect and the insertion of the comment about wrestling, of course, undermine the romance of the scene, and readers are again forced to see the couple as comedic rather than tragic. The tender sentiment of the lovers' reunion is also undermined by the narrator's commentary. The romantic picture he paints of Fanny sitting contemplatively by the fire of an alehouse, only to recognize the voice of her beloved Joseph singing in the next room and then their joyful meeting is certainly tempered by the narrator's comic description of a happy Parson Adams "dancing about the Room in a Rapture of Joy" and accidentally flinging his book into the fire (175). As the novel draws to an end, readers are not even allowed to savor the happy ending that is sure to come with Fanny and Joseph's wedding when it is revealed that the two might actually be related. Between the mention of insects, the buffoonery of Parson Adams and the horror of a possibly incestuous relationship, readers have no opportunity to view the couple's relationship as a serious one and therefore become truly concerned about its outcome.

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<sup>11</sup> Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* offers the following explanation of the Cornish hug: "the Cornishmen were famous wrestlers, and tried to throttle their antagonist with a particular lock, called the Cornish Hug" (qtd in Hawley 353)

Overall, the voice of the narrator in *Joseph Andrews* stands in the foreground of the novel and his ironic, anti-romantic persona shapes the way readers engage with the text. Because of his treatment of character and sentiment, readers are discouraged from seeing the characters of the novel as fully-realized characters with perspectives as equally valid as the narrator's, and readers are encouraged to think about rather than feel for the characters of the novel. The voices of the characters in the text are not the only "voices" or "consciousnesses" that seem to be suppressed by the narrator; the "voice" of romance and sentiment is also actively subdued by the narrator, as readers are constantly discouraged by the narrator from reacting to any emotional aspects of the text.

***Creating Polyphony with the Embedded Letter***

From its earliest conception, the novel proved to be an elastic form that easily allowed for the incorporation of many other genres into its own, and early novelists certainly capitalized on its malleability. Amatory novelists included songs, soliloquies, poems, and letters in their works to add subjectivity and depth (Day 120-1). Daniel Defoe included diaries, letters, and bills in his novels to create authenticity, and countless epistolary novelists popularized an entire subgenre of the novel based on the blending of the novel and an outside genre, the letter. Incorporated genres are an interesting area of study because they play a unique role in the novel: while they certainly are part of the larger narratives in which they are imbedded and are ultimately an expression of authorial intention, they also remain independent from the main narrative in many ways.

Because these genres exist independently of the novel and were shaped by conventions and aesthetics that are separate from the conventions of the novel,

incorporated genres “usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 321). As Caryl Emerson explains, “when incorporated into secondary genres, primary genres may retain much of their characteristic tone or definition of experience” (294). These “self-sufficient” additions bring to the novel their own particular “verbal and semantic forms for assimilating various aspects of reality” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 321). They raise in the reader a set of outside expectations based on his or her understanding of the genres’ conventions, and these expectations greatly influence how readers interpret the inserted works. Readers’ expectations about and understanding of the conventions of the inserted genre even have the potential to cause them to interpret the inserted work in a way that is radically different from how they interpret the rest of the text.

The embedded letter was one of the most frequently-used incorporated genres in the eighteenth-century novel. Like other incorporated genres, the embedded letter brings to the novel a distinct “definition of experience” that affects readers’ interpretations of both the letters themselves and the novel as a whole. Letters, particularly in the eighteenth century, were perceived as a direct reflection of a writer’s innermost thoughts and feelings. Familiar letters, the type of letter most frequently incorporated into the novel, offer direct insight into a person’s psyche. Because inserted genres like the letter “remember” the contexts in which they have been established and adapted” and evoke these contexts for readers, helping to guide their interpretation of the inserted material, readers expect to find in the inserted letters self-revelations, psychological insight, and intimacy (Emerson 294). These expectations are largely met by the writers in the

eighteenth century regardless of the different tone, style, genre (comic, sentimental, etc.) of the novels, as the embedded letter preserves its identity as a subjective, revelatory form in virtually every novel into which it is inserted.

In *Joseph Andrews*, a text that is dominated by the perspective of the intrusive, ironic, and aloof narrator, the impact of including a genre that offers an intimate and unfiltered glimpse into the minds and hearts of the characters cannot be overestimated. The embedded letter brings into Fielding's novel perspectives other than the narrator's; it creates a forum for the voices of the characters and even competing ideologies and breaks up the monologism of the text created by the dominating, authoritative narrative voice. The letters offer readers something they can find nowhere else in the text: ideas that have not been filtered through the ironic perspective of the narrator, ideas that appear to be a direct reflection of the inner lives of characters.

The letters serve as a direct conduit between the readers and the characters who have "written" the letters. Even if it is only momentary, one is able, while reading the letters, to hear the voices of characters openly, without their being refracted by the narrator. Just as Fielding claims that chapter breaks in the novel may be viewed by readers as an "Inn or Resting-Place" for reflection, the letters also provide readers with a respite from having to read the text with the ironic distance and anti-sentimentalism demanded of them by the narrator (119). Because the letter is separate from the rest of the narrative and the "product" of a character not the narrator, readers do not have to be vigilantly on alert for subtle ironies or comedic elements; they are free to appreciate any sentiment or pathos they find in the letters at face value. They do not have to view the

material through a satiric lens because the letters express the direct language of the character, not the ideology of the narrator.

Inserted letters maintain their own “structural integrity and independence” in *Joseph Andrews* not only because of the genre’s inherent properties, but also because of internal cues provided by the text that encourage the readers to view the letters as something outside the narrator’s range of authority and consequently separate from the rest of the narrative. Most obviously, the letters themselves are physically set apart from the narrator’s words on the page as they appear typographically like real letters would; they are not simply summarized within the main narrative. Traditionally, letters in epistolary and non-epistolary fiction were used to create a sense of authenticity, so they are presented as outside documents, incorporated in the text as evidence of the validity of the narrator’s account of events. Although Fielding does not pretend that his characters are real as many writers of epistolary novels did, it is interesting that he still gives the letters the appearance of separate, historical documents that have been inserted into the text to support or illustrate the narrator’s perspective.

On eight occasions in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding chooses to let a character speak for himself through letters rather than have his narrator summarize and filter the ideas. Interestingly, even when a character in the novel is relating the content of letters he or she has memorized but does not possess, the letters are presented not as a summary in the dialogue, but as an actual letter within the text. Including the information in letter form instead of as a narrative summary serves to emphasize further that the letters reflect a character’s own unfiltered voice. Additionally, it is worth noting that the narrator

uncharacteristically makes only passing comments, if any at all, about the content of the letters. Unlike the rest of the novel, where virtually all the characters, their thoughts, words, and actions are scrutinized and satirized, the narrator ignores the ideas contained in the letters, again creating the impression that the letters are somehow separate from his own narration and not subject to his authority.

Because the letters retain their independence in the novel, the characters' voices and the ideology being expressed are not subsumed by the consciousness of the narrator, which pervades nearly every other aspect of the novel. The voices then enter with their own inherent authority, an authority derived from the generic conventions of the letter that promises an intimate revelation of a person's "true" self/voice, an authority that rivals the narrator's. Because the voices being expressed in the letters are entering the novel independently of the narrator's voice they help to create polyphony in the text. These independent voices found in the letters can "[stand] *alongside* their creator" and are "capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him," rather than being dominated or refracted by him (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6).

Of course, it must be acknowledged that because most of the novel is filtered through the consciousness of the narrator and because every character in *Joseph Andrews* is not given a voice through a letter, the novel certainly cannot be classified as truly "polyphonic" if one uses a strict Bakhtinian definition of the term. The text does not achieve a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" nor is each character in the novel "treated as ideologically authoritative and independent" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6, 5). However, the letters do create the opportunity for the

expression of ideas that are separate from and perhaps even contradictory to the narrator's, which adds polyvocality to the text. This inclusion of the letters also complicates the idea that the narrator represents the totality of Fielding's vision and that Fielding was completely intolerant of sentimentality and subjectivity in his novels.

Two letters are written by Joseph himself and five letters written by "characters" who appear in two of the novel's interpolated tales. The two groups of letters serve different purposes although they achieve similar effects. The letters written by Joseph allow readers to get an unfiltered view of Joseph's personality—a view that is free from the irony and satire of the narrator—giving Joseph a voice in the text that represents a viewpoint that is very different from the narrator's. The letters written by "characters" in two different interpolated tales infuse the novel with sentimentality and romance, the kind of emotion that readers found so appealing in the works of writers such as Richardson but that is largely absent from Fielding's novel. These letters also give a voice to an ideology that is very different from the narrator's. Both sets of letters allow readers to experience and "hear" sentiments that cannot be articulated elsewhere in the novel without compromising the integrity or reliability of the anti-romantic and detached persona of the narrator.

### ***Creating a Disconnect between Reader and Hero: The Narrator's View of Joseph***

As mentioned earlier, the narrator discourages readers from connecting with the characters of the novel and from viewing them as independent, realistic characters by presenting his subjects as comedic characters whose foibles and character flaws are meant to amuse and entertain. Fielding's comedic sensibilities were shaped by many

factors, but many of the comedic episodes and much of characterization in *Joseph Andrews* owe a large debt to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a fact that Fielding openly acknowledges in the full title of his work: *Joseph Andrews: The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams. Written in the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote*. In discussions of the characters of *Joseph Andrews* critics have routinely argued that Parson Adams, as a reincarnation of Cervantes' hero, similarly and foolishly pursues impractical ideals. Parson Adams is not, however, the only quixotic character in the text. While some critics, in an effort to see direct parallels between the two texts, view Parson Adams as a Quixote figure and consequently, Joseph as a Sancho figure, it seems more fitting to say, as J. A. G. Ardila does, that "Fielding drew two different quixotic figures: Joseph and Adams," or to modify Ardila's claim a bit, the *narrator* presents Joseph as a quixotic figure who is naïve and comically virtuous in corrupt world (129).

The most humorous aspects of Joseph's character are his innocence and his chastity, two attributes that seem highly improbable, and therefore funny, in a handsome, young footman. In the opening chapters of the novel, readers' opinions of Joseph are largely shaped by the narrator's description of him, particularly his description of Joseph's looks and demeanor. In his depiction of Joseph, the narrator reverses gender conventions and ascribes to Joseph (in a mocking way) a kind of physical beauty that is typically reserved for heroines of the chivalric romances and epistolary novels Cervantes and Fielding respectively satirize. Although the narrator does make a few passing remarks about Joseph's intelligence—he says that at the age of ten, Joseph's "education

was advanced in Writing and Reading”—Joseph’s physical perfection and beauty receive much more of the narrator’s attention (64). The narrator takes the opportunity to describe Joseph’s appearance when he is explaining the attraction Lady Booby and Mrs. Slipslop feel for Joseph:

Mr. Joseph Andrews was now in one and twentieth Year of his Age. He was of the highest Degree of middle Stature. His Limbs were put together with great Elegance and no less Strength. His Legs and Thighs were formed in the exactest Proportion. . . . His Hair was of a nut-brown Colour, and was displayed in wanton Ringlets down his Back. His Forehead was high, his Eyes dark, and as full of Sweetness as Fire. His Nose a little inclined to the Roman. His Teeth white and even. His Lips full, red, and soft. His Beard was only rough on his Chin and upper Lip; but his Cheeks, in which his Blood glowed, were overspread with a thick Down. His Countenance had a Tenderness joined with a Sensibility inexpressible. (78)

Joseph is also described as being so sweet and possessing a voice “so extremely musical” that he is unfit for the first two jobs he is assigned to as an apprentice to Sir Thomas Booby (64). He is unable to keep the birds from the fields because his voice “allured the Birds [rather] than terrified them,” and he is unable to be a huntsman’s assistant because “the Dogs prefer[ed] the Melody of his chiding to all the alluring Notes of the Huntsman” (64). The only job left for poor, beautiful Joseph is that of footman.

In a humorous take on the chivalric Don Quixote, Fielding ascribes to Joseph the physical attributes of the female protagonist of a romance, not the male protagonist.

Joseph is beautiful and sweet tempered, and because the narrator makes his physical perfection feminine—he possess full, soft lips; wanton ringlets; and an alluring voice—Joseph becomes a source of amusement for readers, not admiration. Because of his exaggerated beauty and absurdly sweet temper, Joseph simply cannot be viewed by readers as a realistic, nuanced character with his own distinct personality and voice. By attributing feminine, romantic characteristics to Joseph in a decidedly anti-romantic and somewhat cynical text, the narrator encourages us to laugh at Joseph and to view him as quixotic character. In order to appreciate the comedic elements of his character, readers must recognize that Joseph is, at least at this stage of the novel, little more than an object being used to parody romance.

Joseph's physical perfection is not the only aspect of his personality that is mocked in the beginning of the novel. Male chastity, described as Joseph's chief attribute, is also a source of great ridicule. The narrator derisively tells us in the opening chapter that it is Joseph's chastity that makes him a worthy subject of the "biography." Much hilarity ensues when the innocent Joseph tries to resist the sexual advances of the newly-widowed Lady Booby. Although Lady Booby lies naked in her bed when she questions Joseph about his love life and openly suggests that she would not be opposed to his advances, Joseph does not even think about entering into an affair because he wishes to preserve his innocence.

In eighteenth-century England, chastity was certainly a highly valued attribute for women, and an eighteenth-century audience, Sheldon Sacks contends, would not even have viewed a young man's desire to remain chaste as "innately funny" or "ludicrous"

(72). However, the narrator actively encourages us to view Joseph's decision as foolish or silly by indentifying Joseph as the brother of the infamous Pamela/Shamela and by attributing Joseph's desire to remain chaste to his sister's "exemplary" behavior:

We do not necessarily laugh *because* a man named Joseph Andrews is maintaining his purity against odds; we are inclined to laugh, even before we meet him, at Joseph Andrews' attempt to maintain his purity because a narrator acting in a subtly defined role as ironic commentator has already affected our attitude toward the pattern [his sister Pamela/Shamela] on which the as yet uncharacterized young man has molded himself. (Sacks 72)

The narrator urges readers to see Joseph's choice as silly and misguided, and perhaps even disingenuous, as Pamela/Shamela's claims to virtue were.

By presenting Joseph as physically beautiful, impossibly sweet tempered, and sexually naïve, the narrator encourages us to see him as a kind of quixotic figure/character type, rather than a fully developed character. His physical and moral perfection are wholly unrealistic and clearly out of place in the corrupt world in which he lives. The narrator's encouragement to find Joseph's morality amusing reveals a rather pessimistic view of a world in which virtue is a source of laughter, albeit gentle laughter, and in which only the naïve and foolish are virtuous.

The two embedded letters penned by Joseph, however, present him as more of a worldly, intelligent figure, making him seem more like a character with a fully developed voice. Through his letters, readers find out he was actually sexually tempted by Lady Booby and that he wasn't completely naïve in his dealings with her. The letters also

demonstrate that Joseph's chastity is rooted in something more serious than naiveté or quixotic idealism. Through Joseph's voice in the letters, readers are also presented with a more optimistic viewpoint—the possibility that it is not only fools who try to maintain their virtue and high ideals in a corrupt world and that lofty virtues can be seen as admirable, not comic.

Joseph writes the first embedded letter of the novel to his sister "Pamela." In some ways, the letter continues the satire of Pamela's character begun in Fielding's earlier work *Shamela*, as Joseph tells his sister what has transpired at the house since his master has died and his "poor Lady has certainly gone distracted" (71). While the letter may be intended to carry on the satire of Pamela's behavior in Richardson's novel, it also allows readers to get a rare glimpse inside Joseph's mind, and to see him as less of a simpleton than the narrator has portrayed him to be.

Firstly, the letter reveals that Joseph is not as hopelessly naïve about Lady Booby's sexual desire for him as it seems. Before this letter, readers are given only the narrator's description of the bedroom conversation between Joseph and Lady Booby, a conversation that offers no hint about what Joseph is *thinking* during the exchange. As usual, the narrator does not offer the reader a glimpse inside his character's head; instead, he merely summarizes the conversation between the two. In this conversation, Joseph seems oblivious to Lady Booby's attempts to get him to proposition her. In response to Lady Booby's open invitation, Joseph, seemingly confused and misunderstanding her intentions, rushes to assure Lady Booby that he "would never imagine the least wicked thing against her, and that he had rather die a thousand Deaths than give her any Reason

to suspect him” (70-1). By the end of the conversation, Lady Booby becomes so frustrated by Joseph’s apparent lack of understanding that she tells him that he is either “a Fool or pretend[ing] to be so” (71). After reading Joseph’s own words in his letter, when he tells his sister that he believes his mistress “had had a mind to [him],” it becomes clear to readers though that Joseph was “pretending” to misunderstand Lady Booby and that he is not a fool after all (72). Joseph astutely observes in his letter that his mistress seems to have gone “mad,” and he correctly predicts that a discharge from service is in his near future, so he wisely decides to make plans for the future by asking his sister to secure a position for him with the Squire or some other neighbor.

Additionally, we find out in the letter that Joseph does not enjoy London and its attendant vices because he recognizes that London “is a bad Place, and there is so little good fellowship, that next-door neighbors don’t know one another” (72). This observation counters and challenges the vision of Joseph painted by the narrator as a newly dandified Londoner, who is easily influenced by the corrupt society around him.<sup>12</sup> When confronted with Joseph’s appraisal of London, readers must revise their opinion of Joseph as naïve, as he accurately articulates one of the novel’s chief criticisms of contemporary society, the indifference with which man treats his fellow man.

The second embedded letter, also written by Joseph to his sister Pamela, directly tackles the topic of male chastity. In the context of the letter, Joseph’s chastity seems less

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<sup>12</sup> When Joseph moves to London to become Lady Booby’s footman, the narrator describes Joseph as having gained all the outward trappings of a town fop. He has his hair cut “after the newest fashion, and [it] became his chief care,” he led “the opinion of all the other footman in opera,” and he was “outwardly a pretty fellow” (68).

comical and hopelessly idealistic than it does when the narrator describes it. In the main text of the novel, it is difficult not to view Joseph's protestations of virtue and chastity as comical in the context of his conversations with the desperate Lady Booby. We laugh as Lady Booby becomes enraged at Joseph's insistence on keeping his "virtue." Lady Booby expresses her frustration when she says, "Did ever Mortal hear of a Man's Virtue! Did ever the greatest, or the gravest Men pretend to any of this Kind. . . . And can a Boy, a Stripling, have the Confidence to talk of his virtue?" (80). One cannot help but see the situation as highly improbable and ridiculous, especially when Joseph claims that it is his sister's example that he is following and that he "would be ashamed, that the Chastity of his Family, which is preserved in her, should be stained in him" (80). Readers who are familiar with *Shamela*, of course, know that Pamela has no such virtue and that she has already ruined the "family reputation."

Through the second letter, though, readers learn a bit more about Joseph's desire for chastity. The letter reveals two key things: Joseph's desire for chastity is not the result of trying to uphold impossible ideals, but the product of religious instruction, and Joseph is not unrealistically or idealistically immune to sexual temptation. In the letter, Joseph reveals that his desire to maintain his chastity comes in part from his conversations with the respectable and moral Parson Adams. Joseph discloses that Adams has told him that "Chastity is as great a Virtue in a Man as in a Woman" (84). Knowing that Joseph is preserving his chastity because of religious instruction and not because of some misguided and idealistic romantic notions, makes his resolution admirable and understandable. Readers are reminded here that chastity is a reflection of moral character

and religious training, two things that are not laughing matters, particularly for the eighteenth-century audience.

In this letter, we also find out that although Joseph does want to preserve his virtue, he is not “a chaste prig” as one might think (Hawley xvii). Joseph confesses that he was glad Lady Booby “turned [him] out of the Chamber as she did: for [he] had once almost forgotten every Word Parson Adams” ever told him (84). This confession serves to humanize Joseph and makes him seem less like a caricature or tool simply being used in the narrator’s satire of literature and his society. Joseph is not unrealistically idealistic; he is, in fact, human and tempted by the same things that tempt other men.

These two letters transform Joseph from an object into a subject and give his character depth and a voice of its own. We come to understand Joseph’s perspective and our perception of him changes, as he seems less like a foolish, impractical character trying to maintain impossible ideals in a corrupt world and more like a virtuous man who is able to maintain his integrity despite worldly temptations. It is easier then to see him as a character who is something more than an “object” of the author’s “finalizing artistic vision” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 5). Joseph’s letters also subtly offer a different, less pessimistic view of the world than the narrator does. So thoroughly cynical is the narrator that, as Hawley points out in a discussion of Parson Adams that is equally applicable to our discussion of Joseph, “the suspicion that Fielding ridicules virtue is hard to shake off entirely” because “even though he insists on the dignity of [Adams] and the virtue of his words and deeds, he seems to delight in humiliating him” (xxii-xxiii). Even if the narrator is not encouraging readers to laugh truly at virtue, he is still presenting a world in which

only fools or madmen are virtuous. Joseph's letters offer an alternative vision: a world in which a person who is not perfect, a person who feels temptation and whose values, although they are perhaps more idealistic than the average person's are not rooted in foolish idealism, can be admirable and remain virtuous.

***Giving Romance a Voice: Interpolated Tales and Embedded Letters***

The remaining embedded letters in the novel are part of two of the three interpolated tales included in *Joseph Andrews*. While the letters themselves have received very little critical attention, the interpolated tales have received a great deal of attention and remain one of the most debated aspects of the novel. Jeffrey Williams explains that early in the debate “commentary on the tales pivot[ed] on the poles of dismissal and justification” (1). While many early critics viewed the tales of Leonora, Wilson, and the two friends as “irrecuperable flaws that mar the course of the otherwise continuous travel-narrative” and “disrupt the plot of Joseph's adventures, therefore, ‘break[ing] the spell of the imaginary world represented in the novel,’” critics after the 1960s started to view the tales as important thematic and/or structural elements (Williams 1; Watt quoted in Williams). One such critic, Robert Alter, contends

Fielding is interested in the possibilities of repeating the design of the whole novel in the interpolated tales, and readers of the novel have tended to agree, arguing variously that the inset tales contain important thematic parallels or contrasts to the characters and ideas of the main plot, that they serve as clever structural devices which provide ironic commentary on adjacent chapters, that

they have an intertextual or allusive function, or that they throw into relief the novel's status as art and our presence as readers. (108-9)

In an attempt to refute the claim that the tales are thematically and stylistically inconsistent with the rest of the novel, many critics, such as Alter, finally conclude that the tales are meant to be taken ironically, even though there is really no textual evidence to support this reading.

Two of the interpolated tales, in particular, have troubled critics and readers because of their romantic and sentimental nature: the tale of the "Unfortunate Jilt" and the tale of Mr. Wilson's early debauchery. Given the clearly anti-romantic tone of the narrator and the fact that sentiment and romantic love are greatly satirized in the novel, these two interpolated tales, which contain many of the elements of seventeenth century French romances and eighteenth-century British amatory and epistolary fiction, seem very much out of place in the novel. What is particularly puzzling is that readers are not given a clear indication of how they should assess the tales.

The seemingly incongruent juxtaposition of the romance of the interpolated tales and the anti-romantic stance of the narrator is further underscored by the decidedly negative comments Fielding makes in the preface to this very novel. Fielding claims that romances written by the likes of Madeleine de Scudéry, Gauthier de Costes de la Calprénde, and Honoré d'Urfé lack both entertainment and instruction. Furthermore, Fielding takes great pains to distinguish his novel from these romances that so captured the attention of popular audiences and influenced some of his contemporaries (49). This disdain for romance and its attendant literary devices—improbable plots, excessive

emotion, and lack of realism—is seen throughout *Joseph Andrews* and therefore makes the inclusion of the interpolated tales quite disconcerting.

Interestingly enough, Fielding himself was sensitive to the possibility of inconsistency when utilizing the interpolated tale form. As mentioned earlier, Fielding patterned his story of Joseph after Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and readers and critics of Cervantes' work have long struggled with the paradox created by “a collection of stories generically related to romance . . . inserted into a novel whose repeatedly proclaimed objective is precisely to debunk romance” (Williamson 43). In fact, in a review of Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*, Fielding labels some of interpolated tales in *Don Quixote* “extravagant and incredible” and complains that Cervantes “approaches very near to the romances which he ridicules” in these tales (Fielding, *Covent* 281). This very same “criticism” may be applied to Fielding's own use of the interpolated tale, particularly because there is nothing in the tales that would make readers label them as parodies. They are not comically exaggerated versions of romances; instead they are imitations of romances, or Fielding's own attempts at writing romance. In fact, each interpolated tale allows into the novel “a perspective that has been banished from the body of the novel” and “allows the inclusion of other genres suppressed or mocked by the rest of the text” (Kenney). Readers and critics simply chose to view them as satire because the alternative explanation—that Fielding willingly incorporated ideology into the novel that would undermine his own, as expressed by the narrator—seems untenable.

This “inconsistency” is not as troubling as it first appears. If one looks at the text carefully, he/she will realize that Fielding actually takes great pains to ensure that readers

view the interpolated tales as separate narratives, stories that are neither authored by nor authorized by the narrator, thereby diffusing the contradictions. Because the romantic content of the tales has been taken out of the “mouth” of the narrator and inserted into that of a character and because the narrator assiduously avoids commenting on the tales, it is possible for Fielding to express an opposing set of values while keeping the narrative persona stable and consistent. The narrator is able to remain consistent because he is not “telling” the stories and is therefore not “required” to make his typical satirical comments.

Locating romance within the separate space of the interpolated tales prevents the deconstruction of the text and the failure of the narrator’s authority. This makes the text more polyvocal by allowing the “voice” of romance and pathos into the text unsatirized, unrefracted by the narrator’s cynical views. Because the interpolated tales are stories told by someone other than the narrator and because the narrator does not intrude in the telling of the story, readers are able to appreciate without irony “Sentimental pathos,” Bakhtin’s term for the language of novels like *Pamela* (*Dialogic* 396). The letters, which appear in the interpolated tales, then are an even better vehicle for the expression of opposing viewpoints because they are actually two steps removed from the narrator, as they are the creation, not of the narrator, not even of the character in *Joseph Andrews* telling the interpolated tale, but of the character inside the tale.

“The Unfortunate Jilt,” the tale told by the “perfectly well bred” lady on the coach, is the story of Leonora and her unfortunate decision to forsake the worthy Horatio for the seemingly richer Bellarmine, who abandons her when he finds that she will not be

receiving a substantial dowry from her miser of a father (129). The story, told as the coach happens to pass Lenora's house, becomes a pleasant diversion for the coach travelers and in many ways, a pleasant diversion for the readers of *Joseph Andrews*. The readers are able, for a short time, to let their guard down and emotionally respond to the story without being concerned about discerning what aspects of the story are meant to be understood ironically or being condemned for reacting emotionally to the story. In the rest of the novel, the audience feels a great deal of pressure to read the way the narrator wants him to, and this is no easy task. One constantly has to assess the "worth" of characters to understand if a character's actions and words should be treated seriously or not. In the interpolated tale of Leonora and in the letters that contain the real emotional heart of the tale, readers are able to read without these restrictions.

The tale of Leonora is similar to the amatory fiction written by Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, and Eliza Haywood. Women who choose their romantic partners unwisely feature prominently in the fiction of the "fair Triumvirate," with the three often varying the culpability of the innocent young women who are seduced. The intended purpose of most of amatory fiction is to warn readers about the frivolity of trusting a man unwisely and giving up her virtue before the relationship can be consummated in marriage. As Toni Bowers explains, amatory fiction assumes that

love almost always brings fleeting pleasure to self-centered, fickle men and lasting misery to the women who trust them. In amatory writing's most typical plot, an innocent young girl is seduced by an experienced, older man who promises her everlasting love but abandons her. (51)

The tale of the “Unfortunate Jilt” shares this same message as it warns women against choosing a mate for frivolous reasons, such as the beauty of his coach and six and warns them against trusting the wrong men. The tale is also similar to other amatory fiction in its depiction of intense love and the moral decline of the heroine.

Some critics have viewed this tale as a “lesson” for readers about the inferiority of romance.<sup>13</sup> They believe that the juxtaposition of the anti-romantic and satiric tale of Joseph and the traditionally romantic tale of Leonora automatically leads readers to conclude that the tale of Leonora is inferior to Joseph’s tale and that they should view the interpolated tale with wariness or disdain. However, the textual clues provided for readers simply do not support this idea. Parson Adams and Lady Grave-airs are the two most vocal audience members of Leonora’s tale, and each reacts quite differently to the tales. Their differing reactions offer the readers clues about how the stories are to be thought of. While Lady Grave-airs objects to all the “fulsome stuff in [the] story” and adamantly objects to hearing the letters between the lovers (which contain the most romantic sentiments of the tale), Parson Adams eagerly asks for more details about things as seemingly mundane as the type of clothing worn by Bellarmine and reacts with great passion, and even pain, to the tale of Leonora’s unfortunate decision (132). Just as Parson Adams, a member of the coach audience, becomes emotionally involved in the story—causing him to emit at one point a “deep Groan . . . for the folly of Leonora”—Lady

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<sup>13</sup> See Elizabeth Kenney’s dissertation “The Inside Story: The Interpolated Narrative in Fielding’s Novels,” (1990), Homer Goldberg’s “The Interpolated Stories in *Joseph Andrews* or the History of the World in General Satirically Revised,” and Douglas Brooks’ “The Interpolated Tales in *Joseph Andrews* Again.”

Grave-airs has no patience with extraneous romantic “nonsense” and she does not become emotionally involved in the telling of the tale (136). In many ways, Lady Grave-airs represents the ideal member of the authorial audience of *Joseph Andrews*. The narrator encourages readers to stay distant from the characters and not be interested in extraneous information. On the other hand, Parson Adams reacts in exactly the opposite way the narrator expects his audience to respond, as he becomes very emotionally invested in the story and wants to hear all the mundane details of the characters’ lives.

In a place other than the “safe space” created by the tales and the letters, a reaction like Parson Adams’s would be ridiculed and a reaction like Mrs. Grave-airs’s would be lauded. However, in the safe space of the tale, out of the purview of the worldly-wise narrator, readers are encouraged to view Adams’s response as positive and Mrs. Grave-airs’s as negative. Mrs. Grave-airs’s name alone lets readers know that they are not to admire her. Affectation, or “putting on airs” is one social ill that Fielding specifically mentions as worthy of derision in his preface to the novel and Mrs. Grave-airs is the living embodiment of this flaw. Additionally, Adams enthusiastic response is in no way ridiculed and it, in fact, allows readers to gain even more “fulsome” details about the two lovers’ romance.

The five letters included in Leonora’s tale of romantic misfortune contain the emotional center of the piece: the first two letters are intended to give the coach passengers “no small Idea of [the] passion” that Leonora and Horatio felt for each other, the third letter contains the fortunate news of Bellarmine’s recovery from his fight with Horatio, the fourth letter informs Leonora’s father of her disgraceful conduct, and the

final letter tells the unfortunate news that Bellarmine has decided he cannot marry Leonora (132).

The letters between Horatio and Leonora express the romantic sentiments of the couple, and surprisingly are quite tender and beautiful. The sentiments expressed in the letters are nothing like the romantic sentiments expressed elsewhere in the novel as they are not exaggerated for comical effect nor are they tempered in any way by sarcastic comments by the narrator. Horatio's letter to Leonora is charmingly written and it reveals that Horatio is an intelligent and sensitive man who has integrity. Horatio writes to Leonora to express his happiness at their impending nuptials and his letter contains musings on the subject of love, musings that are philosophical and mature in nature and nothing like the exaggerated passions displayed by Lady Booby, Mrs. Slipshod, and others. His vision of love is not the kind of physical desire that overpowers one, as we have seen in these other characters. Instead, he views being a lover as an opportunity to exercise "every human Virtue" (133). He writes, "the Beloved whose Happiness [the lover] ultimately respects, may give us charming Opportunities of being brave in her defence, generous to her Wants, compassionate to her Afflictions, [and] grateful to her Kindness" (133). The letter written from Leonora to Horatio is similar in its expression of a mature love. The "delicate Sentiments" expressed in Horatio's letter delight Leonora, and she avows that "all the generous Principles human Nature is capable of, are centered in [Horatio's] Breast" (133). Additionally, she is happy that she is "led by Inclination to love" a person who her own rational judgment approves (134).

In both Horatio and Leonora's letters, we see a vision of love that is part reason and admiration of character and part pure emotion. At this point in the story of Leonora, readers can become emotionally invested in the romance because—even by the standards of the rest of the novel that mocks the ridiculous passions of the heart—this romance seems to be one founded on both passion and mutual respect. These letters, like Joseph's, reflect a less cynical view of the world than the narrator does, and show the possibility of a kind of love that can be openly admired. Although Leonora does later make a poor decision and rejects Horatio in favor of Bellarmine, these letters still serve as a positive and serious expression of love that readers can contemplate and enjoy without cynicism.

It is also interesting to note that most scholars believe that it was Sarah Fielding, not Henry, who wrote the letter from Leonora to Horatio.<sup>14</sup> As Sarah Fielding's talents lie not in the comic world, but in the world of "moral romance,"<sup>15</sup> it is interesting that Fielding would have recruited her to write a letter in this particular part of the novel. His use of his sister's talent gives us some indications of how the letter is intended to be taken by readers. The idea that the letters in the tale are meant to be satiric is undermined by the fact that it is Sarah, the romance writer, who probably wrote the letter, not Fielding, the comic writer. With this letter, Fielding is not only incorporating the voice of a different genre, he is incorporating directly into the novel the voice of a different writer.

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<sup>14</sup> As Jane Spencer puts it in "Fielding and Female Authority" in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding* (2007), Sarah Fielding's "first publication is generally agreed to be the letter from Leonora to Horatio inserted in Joseph Andrews as 'written by a young Lady'" (132).

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Fielding's novel *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) is referred to as a "moral romance" in the advertisement for the book.

The remaining letters in the tale come at pivotal points in the denouement of Leonora's story and provide readers with the same kind of sentimental pathos and vicarious emotional experience offered by amatory and epistolary novels. The first letter from Bellarmine seals Leonora's "tragic fate" when it reveals that Bellarmine has not suffered a fatal wound at the hands of Horatio and that he will recover. The next letter serves as an ignored warning to Leonora's father, informing him of Bellarmine's lack of fortune, and the final letter is Bellarmine's rejection of Leonora. Bellarmine's first letter to Leonora is filled with pretty romantic phrases: he tells her, "The wound I fear you have heard I received from my Rival, is not like to be so fatal as those shot into my Heart, which have been fired from your Eyes, tout-brillant" (142). He also tells Leonora that her "Absence will be the greatest Anguish which can be felt by [him]" (142). Dramatically, he signs his letter "Avec tout le respecte in the World, Your most Obedient, most Absolute Devoté" (142). Bellarmine, in his next letter tells Leonora that he will not marry her. Again, his letters are marked by false dramatics. Although he rejects Leonora solely because she does not have a substantial enough dowry, he pretends to be devastated by what he calls her father's "refusal" of him. He ends his short note by writing

You will certainly believe me, Madam, incapable of my self delivering this triste Message: Which I intend to try the French Air to cure the Consequences of—Ah jamais! Coeur! Ange!—Ah Diable—If your Papa obliges you to a Marriage, I hope we shall see you at Paris, till when the Wind that flows from thence will be the warmest dans le Monde: for it will consist almost entirely of my Sighs. Adieu ma princesse! Ah L'Amour!" (153)

Each of Bellarmine's letters provides the high drama that is a hallmark of amatory/romantic fiction, as his letters embody the glib, overly passionate sentiments of the typical disreputable rake of the genre. It is through his letters that readers are able to judge his character for themselves and understand that Leonora has truly made a poor choice. His letters provide readers with the same kind of "guilty pleasure" that would be derived from reading the melodramatic tales of seduction and betrayal found in amatory and epistolary fiction, an aspect of these types of novels that is clearly parodied by the narrator elsewhere in the novel. Here, however, there is no indication that readers need to do anything but enjoy what they are reading. The letters are not parodies of the melodrama. They are not exaggerated nor are they comical; they are a straightforward representation of what letters were like in sentimental fiction.

The tale of the "Unfortunate Jilt" and the letters contained within, which are the emotional and romantic high points of the tale, serve as a very clever way to infuse some much-desired and needed romance into the novel without endangering the consistency of the narrative voice. The letters express a level of sentimentality that could not be portrayed anywhere else in the novel without being satirized, and allows readers a break from the harsh ironic stance of the narrator and a chance to feel freely. They also allow the "voice" of a competing ideology into the text for the reader's consideration. The vicarious emotional experience offered by romance of the story and letters serves as a counterpoint to the dry, detached view of the world offered by the narrator. Even though the romance ends badly, readers are given a chance to appreciate sentiment and to feel an emotional connection to the text.

There is one final letter in *Joseph Andrews*, and it too appears in an interpolated tale: the tale of Mr. Wilson's early libertinism. In the guise of a reformed rake telling a tale of conversion, Fielding creates a mini-romance and again borrows the pathos of romance writers. As in the interpolated tale of Leonora, Adams becomes emotionally invested in the story, just as the readers of *Joseph Andrews* do. As Mr. Wilson recounts the story of his early life as a rake, Adams jumps up and paces the room and groans aloud in response to Mr. Wilson's folly.

The embedded letter included in the story marks the turning point in Mr. Wilson's story. As Wilson is languishing in prison for unpaid debts, he receives a letter from a good and moral woman, "the handsomest creature in the universe," for whom Wilson had "long had a Passion" (228). Although the style of the letter is straightforward and simple, the letter marks a dramatic shift in the tale and turns it from the story of a wretched, foolish man to the story about the reformation of a rake by a good woman. The letter informs Wilson that Harriet, the daughter of the man to whom Wilson sold his winning lottery ticket, has heard of his troubles. Harriet writes that she was "so much touched by [his] present Circumstances, and the Uneasiness [he] must feel at having been driven to dispose of what might have made [him] happy" that she has decided to send him 200 pounds (228). Harriet's generous gift both liberates and reforms Wilson, as he is able to free himself from debts and to fall madly in love with a worthy woman. Wilson's tale and the letter it contains present another opportunity for readers to engage with the novel on an emotional level without the narrator's persona being undermined. Just as Parson Adams responded emotionally to the story of the "Unfortunate Jilt," he becomes very

engrossed in Wilson's tale of debauchery. Again, readers are free to respond as Adams does to Wilson's tale because the tale is completely out of the purview of the narrator.

### ***Conclusion***

The unique narrative persona Fielding created helped to set him apart from his literary predecessors but also created a distance between the readers and characters of his novels and limited the sentiments that could be expressed without undermining the narrator's credibility. Traditionally, when discussing *Joseph Andrews* critics have conflated the voice of this narrator with the voice of Henry Fielding the man, ascribing to Fielding the sometimes-limiting ironic and aloof perspective that seems to dominate the text. However, the narrator—although controlling, intrusive, and seemingly ever-present—does not represent the only voice in the text nor a complete embodiment of Fielding's ideology. A close examination of the embedded letters in the novel, in fact, reveals that *Joseph Andrews* is less monologic than many critics have long believed it to be. Although Fielding never gives his characters free rein and they cannot all be viewed as characters with fully developed and autonomous voices, through the embedded letters, Fielding includes other voices that complicate our understanding of both Fielding's moral universe and his literary aesthetic.

Through Joseph's letters, readers are able to explore the idea that, unlike what the narrator seems to be encouraging him to think, it is possible for a man to be both virtuous and worldly; one does not have to be Don Quixote to uphold high ideals, even in a corrupt world. Through the letters of the interpolated tales, Fielding gives the "Sentimental pathos" of the early novel a legitimate, nonsatirical voice in a work that is

dominated by a narrator who promotes looking at virtually everything with a cynical eye. These letters demonstrate that on some level, Fielding understood the importance of sentiment in the novel and recognizes readers' needs to feel, not just think, while reading. In the space of the embedded letter, removed from his narrator, Fielding gives readers opportunities to connect with characters and their emotions and romances enthusiastically, without fear of castigation from the narrator.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Opposing Voices and Ideologies: The Embedded letter in *Tom Jones***

In writing *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding created a narrative persona that set his novels apart from his contemporaries' and became the most distinctive aspect of his writing. In his next and most successful novel, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, Fielding's narrative voice, while sharing many similarities with the narrative voice of *Joseph Andrews*, evolves into an even more intrusive, authoritative, and controlling force that dominates both the narrative and readers. In fact, Eric Rothstein goes so far as to say that "*Tom Jones* gives the reader less actual freedom of interpretation and moral stance than any other major eighteenth-century novel" (112). In some ways, Rothstein's assessment of the novel is correct. The ever-present narrator's even more vociferous attempts to bully, cajole, and manipulate readers into relying solely on their judgment does frequently make it appear as though the narrator is presenting an objective world entirely defined for his readers. However, this is only true if we choose to conflate the narrator and Fielding and believe that the narrator is the single voice of authority in the text, a claim that this chapter's exploration of Fielding's use of the embedded letter invalidates. Much as it did in *Joseph Andrews*, the embedded letter in *Tom Jones* provides a vehicle through which different and sometimes contradictory voices enter the text and complicate the fictional world presented by the narrator. The letters make the text polyphonic and undermine the idea that the narrator's voice is the sole voice of authority in the text or that it embodies the totality of Fielding's vision for the novel.

This chapter will begin by looking at the narrator's perspective and the ways in which the narrator curtails readers' interpretive freedom. Following this discussion, we will look at how the embedded letters in *Tom Jones* help to loosen the narrator's interpretive control by bringing into the novel other voices that enter the text unfiltered and allow readers to gain perspectives of the world different from the narrator's limited, ironic one. Specifically, we will explore how the love letters of Tom, Sophia, and Lady Bellaston bring into the novel the language of two different epistolary genres—the letter-writing manual and the epistolary novel—how a letter written by Honour Blackmore gives a voice to the struggles of the “lower orders,” and finally, how Square's and Thwackum's letters vocalize criticism of the narrator's moral philosophy.

***Everyone wants to be a “Sensible” Reader: How the Narrator Manipulates Readers***

The narrator of *Tom Jones* establishes and maintains his control over readers in several subtle and persuasive ways. He creates two categories of readers—“sensible” readers who believe as he does and “Readers of the lowest Class” who do not—and then effectively convinces readers that those who agree with him possess intelligence and wisdom superior to the others (25, 77). The narrator also uses the prefatory chapters of each book to establish himself as a wise and paternal figure who is in a position of authority over readers and on whom readers should rely, and finally, he clearly defines the “correct” roles of both writer and readers, again reinforcing readers' subservience.

The single most effective way the narrator brings the reader under his “power” is by creating images of two potential types of readers: the reader who is “sensible” and “learned,” capable of discerning the superiority of *Tom Jones* to the many “other” works

“with which the Stalls abound,” and the obtuse reader who would read the opening chapter, the novel’s “Bill of Fare,” and not recognize Fielding’s superior offering (25-26). In creating this dichotomy, the narrator “flaunts his authority and wields a powerful irony, setting ‘good’ readers, who practice what he preaches, apart from aesthetic and moral reptiles” and pushes readers to interpret the text in the way the narrator wants by playing on readers’ natural human desires to be admired and belong (Rothstein “Virtues” 99). It is, of course, normal for the reader to want to be identified as a “sensible reader” and not a reader of “the lowest class” if sensible readers are smart, educated, and sophisticated, as the narrator implies. This desire to be part of a selective group certainly affects how readers assess the events and actions of the novel and creates in readers an overwhelming desire to please the narrator by reading as sensible readers “should.” As readers move through *Tom Jones*, they begin to get a clear sense of the values and the worldview of the narrator, and once they have at least a tentative understanding of the way the narrator looks at the world, they try to interpret the novel in the way the narrator would. This eagerness to please ensures that all but the most independent and rebellious readers actively share the narrator’s perspective of the fictional world.

The narrator helps to ensure that readers clearly understand how sensible readers should respond to the text by frequently labeling particular interpretations of his ideas as being either the reactions of astute readers or the reactions of readers of the lowest class. For example, when the narrator is explaining his choice of subject matter for *Tom Jones*, he claims that “his *Sensible* reader, though most luxurious in his Taste [emphasis added]” will not “start, cavil, or be offended” because the narrator offers up only one topic for

exploration in the novel—human nature (25). Here the narrator has labeled a positive response to his choice of subject matter as the reaction of a “sensible” reader who presumably has excellent taste. He is also implying, quite obviously, that a reader who objects to his choice is not sensible and lacks a refined palette. The narrator then goes on to assert that the “learned Reader” also understands that in the single topic of human nature lies a great deal of variety, consequently intimating that only an uneducated reader would fail to appreciate the narrator’s brilliance in choosing simply human nature as his subject (26). This labeling of reactions continues through the entire text, establishing the responses of “judicious Readers,” “upper Graduates in Criticism,” and readers who possess “Judgment and Penetration” as those judgments that agree with the narrator and the judgments of “Readers of the lowest Class” as those that do not (77-78).

Even when readers are presented with an event or idea about which the narrator offers little reaction or commentary, they are so well trained that they find themselves attempting to mold their responses to fit what they believe the narrator’s response would be. When they are confronted with a seemingly romantic and sentimental scene between Sophia and Tom in Book VI, for example, they know from the decidedly anti-romantic stance of the narrator that even though the scene seems to be as sentimental as any scene that could be found in a seventeenth-century French romance, they are to remain detached from the emotion of the scene. Such readers are rewarded at the end of the scene when the narrator says, “I believe some of my Readers will think [this scene] had lasted long enough” and abruptly cuts from this romantic scene to a humorous one involving Squire Weston (195). Readers who foolishly enjoyed the romance of the scene

and wished it longer are subtly shamed by the reminder that learned readers do not delight in romantic foolishness.

As we read *Tom Jones* and strive to interpret as the narrator wants us to, we develop what Eric Rothstein calls “interpretive smugness” (“Virtues” 110). As readers, we “naively [congratulate] ourselves on our collusion” with the narrator and we revel in our role as sensible readers, superior to readers who are not perceptive enough to understand the narrator’s irony and interpret the events of the novel as the narrator does (Rothstein “Virtues” 110). Rothstein points out, however, that one “we pay for the pleasure of elitism by making automatically and reductively the only judgments that Fielding lets us make, seemingly unprompted, on our own” (“Virtues” 111). Rothstein is correct about readers developing interpretive smugness, although I would contend that readers are being led to these judgments by the *narrator*, not *Fielding*. As we will see shortly, the narrator’s voice, although perhaps the loudest in the novel, is not the only valid voice in the text and does not by itself reflect Fielding’s entire vision for the novel. Nonetheless, in a desire to be considered sensible readers, we do subconsciously read just as the *narrator* wishes us to by aligning our belief system, if only temporarily, with the ideology the narrator espouses. This blind allegiance discourages independent thought and assessment.

In addition to controlling readers through labeling responses as “sensible” or indicative of “low class,” the narrator establishes interpretive control through the prefatory chapters that begin each book of the novel. These essay-like, introductory chapters are separate from the rest of the narrative, and they frequently do not address the

characters or plot of the novel but rather discuss extra-textual matters, such as the state of contemporary literature. Although these chapters do not always have an effect on readers' understanding of the characters and events of the story being told, they do have a profound effect on readers' feelings about the narrator. As Wayne Booth explains in his seminal work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*:

If we read straight through all of the seemingly gratuitous appearances by the narrator, leaving out the story of Tom, we discover a running account of growing intimacy between the narrator and the reader, an account with a kind of plot of its own and a separate denouement. (216)

As readers move through the novel, they develop a close relationship with the narrator that stands apart from their relationships with the characters and plot of the novel.

This relationship between narrator and reader is not equitable, though. Through these prefatory chapters, the narrator takes on "the role of patron and refuse[s] the reader the equality of free choice, let alone the superiority of sitting in judgment or being catered to by right" (Rothstein "Virtues" 107). Readers come to view the narrator as an almost paternal figure who is wise and benevolent, proffering advice allegedly with only the reader's well being in mind. Like many dysfunctional family relationships, however, this relationship is fraught with flaws and broken promises. Drawing on Richard Sennett's work on different modes of authority, Eric Rothstein claims that the narrator's paternalism, described as "an offer of intimacy and protection to those who are deferent," follows the contradiction Sennett often finds in such offers: "there is a promise of nurturance made . . . [but] the essential quality of nurturance is denied; that one's care

will make another person stronger' ” (Rothstein 100, Sennett quoted in Rothstein 100).

In *Tom Jones*, the narrator promises to look after readers, but the narrator's nurturance does not, in fact, help readers get stronger; it actually stifles their ability to make interpretations independently. The narrator's paternalism infantilizes readers and causes them to seek the narrator's approval, just as children would from a parent.

One of the main functions of these paternalistic prefatory chapters is to teach readers what to think about literature and how to behave as readers. In the first chapter of Book II, in fact, the narrator explicitly, although humorously, defines the reader-narrator relationship as that of superior and subordinate. The narrator tells readers:

I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing, so I am at liberty to make what Laws I please therein. And these Laws, my Readers, whom I consider as my Subjects, are bound to believe in and obey; with which that they may readily and cheerfully comply, I do hereby assure them, that I shall principally regard their Ease and Advantage in all such Institutions: For I do not, like a *jure divino* Tyrant, imagine that they are my Slaves, or my Commodity. I am, indeed, set over them for their own Good only, and was created for their Use, not they for mine. Nor do I doubt, while I make their Interest the great Rule of my Writings, they will unanimously concur in supporting my Dignity, and in rendering me all the Honour I shall deserve or desire. (53-4).

Although there is clearly humor in this comment, the narrator's proclamation accurately describes the relationship that will develop between the narrator and readers, as the

narrator does set himself over them and attempts to become the ultimate authority in the text.

In several other places in the novel, the narrator also specifically spells out what he views as the correct behavior of readers. In the first chapter of Book V, the narrator provides readers with “a few wholesome Admonitions” so that they will not “grosly misunderstand and misrepresent” him (337). He warns the reader “not too hastily to condemn any of the Incidents in this our History . . . because thou does not immediately conceive in what Manner such Incident may conduce to that Design” (337). With these statements, the narrator is intimating that any negative judgment readers come to may simply be a reflection of their inability to see the “big picture.” Here the narrator is encouraging the reader to trust that the narrator will make everything clear to him in due time. Readers become more likely to reserve judgment and criticisms of the narrator’s vision of the world and less likely to think independently if they encounter any inconsistencies in the text because they feel confident that the narrator will explain everything at the appropriate time.

The narrator is very successful in his attempts to get readers to view him as their guide, protector, and advisor. Readers become attached to him, in a way they never do to the characters of the text. Some readers, such as Wayne Booth, become so attached, in fact, that “when [the narrator] draws to the end of his farewell, then, at a time when we know we are to lose him, . . . we find, lying beneath our amusement at his playful mode of farewell, something of the same feeling we have when we lose a close friend” (Booth 218). Even if readers do not develop as much fondness for the narrator as Booth does,

they still become undeniably dependent on the narrator, making it difficult for them to separate their own judgments and opinions from the narrator's.

***The Embedded Letter: A Forum for Opposing Voices***

Although the narrator's voice so dominates the novel that readers frequently have difficulty thinking for themselves, there is at least one element of the text—the embedded letter—that allows for the expression of voices and ideologies other than the narrator's, providing readers with different perspectives that encourage them to question the narrator's vision of the world. As in *Joseph Andrews*, the key to the letters' power of freedom lies in readers' willingness to view the letter as a separate space outside the narrator's purview and control.

Chapter Two's explanation of how and why readers are able to view the letters as a separate and safe space applies here as well. As we discussed earlier, the embedded letter maintains its own independence as an incorporated genre, and the same internal cues that directed readers of *Joseph Andrews* to view the letters separately are also present in *Tom Jones*. The narrator rarely comments on the content of the letters, creating the impression that, unlike almost any other facet of the text that bears his heavy stamp, the letters are somehow outside his scope of authority. Also, the letters are again presented typographically in the form of "real" letters, even if a character in the text is merely reciting the contents of a letter that is not currently in his or her possession. Just as they did in *Joseph Andrews*, the letters are again physically separated from the rest of the narrative and presented as artifacts, as extra-textual material, written by others and inserted into the writing of the narrator. In *Tom Jones*, the narrator himself even discusses

one of the letters in the novel in these terms. When Lady Bellaston shows Mrs. Western a letter Tom has sent her, the narrator comments, “if the Reader hath a Desire to see [the letter], he will find already on Record in the XVth Book of this History” (562).<sup>16</sup> The phrase “already on Record” presents the main narrative as a kind of official retelling of the events of Tom’s life, with the embedded letter serving as a secondary source that supports the veracity of the main document.

Once the letter is established as a separate space in the minds of readers, it becomes the vehicle through which they can gain some interpretive autonomy and freedom. At least for the time it takes to read and interpret the letter, readers disconnect from the narrator, disengage with the main narrative and become connected to the letter and its “writer.” As Godfrey Singer points out, epistles inherently

[place] the reader in a position of confidential friend, thus creating a connecting contact between [the] writer [of the letter] and reader. . . . The animated and dramatic nature of the letter likewise enables it to make a more forcible and lasting impression upon the mind of the reader, than could be expected from a composition purely narrative or didactic. (84)

Through this connection with the letter-writing character, the reader of the text is “invited to participate in the creative work of the story by finding out [what a character thinks or why he does something] for himself, so that the fictional impact on him gains in vividness and comprehensiveness” (Day 6). The letters become a direct conduit, so to speak, between the readers and the characters. Unlike in the rest of the text, where readers

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<sup>16</sup> The letter is included in the prior chapter in which Tom composes it.

judge the characters based on the values and standards imposed on the fictional world by the narrator, through reading the embedded letters, they are given the freedom to assess the letter-writing characters and the content of their letters for themselves.

*Voices of the Epistolary Novel and the Eighteenth-Century Letter-Writing Manual: The Love Letters of Tom Jones*

The love letters of Tom, Sophia, and Lady Bellaston account for more than half of the total letters in the novel. Through these letters, readers are given an extended glimpse into the thoughts and emotions of these major characters and are given the chance to assess them without interference from the narrator. At times, the letters present a perspective of an individual character that undermines or complicates the narrator's vision by bringing into the novel the voice of two contemporary epistolary traditions/contexts: the epistolary novel and the letter-writing manual. With their expression of mutual admiration and their emphasis on virtue, the more emotionally restrained letters between the two young lovers reflect the conventions and ideology of the letter-writing manual while Lady Bellaston's letters clearly evoke the ethos of epistolary fiction with its emphasis on passion and erotic love.

Before we can tackle what assessments the readers might have made about individual letter-writing characters in *Tom Jones* and whether these assessments challenge the narrator's authority, we must first discuss the contexts in which eighteenth-century readers formed their opinions about the epistle as a genre. Although we can never know with absolute certainty what eighteenth-century readers thought about letters, we can gain a fairly good idea about social attitudes toward letters by examining letter-

writing manuals, which greatly influenced contemporary letter-writing practices, and letters found in the epistolary literature of the time.

By the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, letter writing had become a very fashionable pursuit, and many factors influenced the proliferation of letter writing: the English postal service became more efficient, reliable and cheaper; the general population was more literate than ever before; schools taught students how to write letters using classical and contemporary examples; and many popular literary figures, such as Alexander Pope, published their personal letters with great success (Day 49). As discussed in Chapter One, letters also became an important part of the novel, a genre that flourished in the eighteenth century.

Although letter-writing began as a pursuit of the upper class, with “ladies and gentleman of breeding in the country as well as in town endeavor[ing] to write letters following the models of [classical letter writers such as Ovid and more contemporary letter writers such as Mme de Sevigne, and Pope],” letter writing became in the eighteenth century popular among people of all socio-economic backgrounds (Wurzbach x). This “disseminat[ion] of letter-writing down the social hierarchy” was due in large part to the proliferation of British letter-writing manuals (Bannet xv-xvi). Letter writing manuals, which cost only about a shilling, were widely available and used by everyone from gentleman and ladies to servants. These manuals made “epistolary kinds, codes, and conventions familiar to all manner and ranks of people. One might say that the eighteenth century naturalized the idea that anyone can (or should be able to) read and write a letter”

(Bannet xvi). Today, the manuals offer scholars great insight into the writing practices of eighteenth-century England.

Letter-writing manuals aimed to provide readers with examples of letters written on a wide variety of occasions that represented real life situations that readers might themselves experience. They were in large part made up of sample letters that readers were to imitate in their own writing, rather than writing instruction. These letters contained in the manuals “express feelings, intentions, and thoughts in the most general way so that letters will be widely applicable as models. . . . The individual correspondent was able to adapt such a model for his own purposes simply by inserting a few personal details” (Wurzbach xiv). Through these letters, readers were taught, among other things, the appropriate way to write the introduction and closing of letters, how to discuss common events—deaths, births, travel—with proper decorum, and how to adjust the expression of sentiments according to the social rank of a letter’s recipient.

As discussed in Chapter One, letters also found their way into the popular consciousness through literature. Epistolary literature was very popular in the eighteenth century; in fact, it accounted for one fifth of all literature published during the period.<sup>17</sup> In novels, letters were most frequently used to tell romantic tales. As Janet Altman points out, this was because “the letter form seems tailored for the love plot, with its emphasis on separation and reunion” (14). The literature of this period, particularly amatory fiction, focused on love and relationships and used the letter as a means for absent lovers to

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<sup>17</sup> “Epistolary” fiction encompassed works that included only a few letters in their texts, others that split their text equally between third-person narrative and letters, and still other works that were entirely comprised of letters.

communicate. In this context, the literary letter subsequently became tied to the romantic excess of early British fiction and became a space in which characters could express unbridled, enthusiastic emotion—emotions that would have often been met by public disapproval. As Singer points out, the use of letters in literature reflects the contemporary belief that “the letter itself is an admirable and convenient means whereby the deepest sentiments and sensibilities of characters may be presented, and that the letter, at least in the eighteenth century, was likely to be a delving into the most secret soul of the writer” (101). The literary letter then, unlike the more practical letters found in letter-writing manuals, was effusive, emotional, and often reflected a lack of restraint on the part of the writer. Both letter-writing manuals and epistolary novels helped shape the eighteenth-century public’s opinions about letters and provided the readers of *Tom Jones* a set of conventions and values, separate from those of the novel and the narrator, on which they could base their assessments of the letters and the characters who “wrote” them.

One may object to the idea that eighteenth-century readers would have judged the letters in *Tom Jones* using the conventions of the epistolary novel, particularly because *Tom Jones* is not of course an epistolary novel and because Fielding took such great pains to separate himself from the world of epistolary fiction. This objection is certainly understandable, but one should not underestimate how well the embedded letters let the readers of *Tom Jones* escape the expectations and directives of the narrator. Once in the separate space of the letter, readers feel less connected to the narrator and consequently less pressure to read in a way constructed by him. As Fielding explained in his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, he was attempting to create a new kind of writing that had never before

been attempted in English. While readers are under the spell of the narrator, they are forced to read this new kind of writing in a new way, the way the narrator wants him to—with irony and distance. This way of reading was different from how readers had been reading the works of many of Fielding's contemporaries and close predecessors. In *Tom Jones*, the narrator's heavy hand keeps readers in line, keeps them looking at everything ironically, distanced from the characters and thinking in a way that reaffirms the narrator's worldview. However, when the heavy hand is lifted while readers are considering the love letters, it becomes possible for them to revert to reading and judging the way they did when dealing with similar letters found in sentimental novels. It would seem only natural to read and judge the letters using the standards of the already established literary tradition found in epistolary fiction.

The “voices” of these two contexts provide readers with different and sometimes competing value systems on which they can base their assessments of the letters. As we will soon see, these two traditions reflected very different ideas about the proper tone, content, and style of letters. Writing manuals encouraged emotional restraint and prudence—“values” that traditionally have been associated with Fielding's moral philosophy, as expressed by his narrators at least. In *Tom Jones*, it should come as no surprise then that “good” characters such as Tom and Sophia all write letters that seem to embody the advice proffered by the manuals. It should also not be surprising that “bad” characters such as Lady Bellaston write letters that reflect the “values” of the epistolary novel—spontaneity and the open expression of emotions, values not embraced by the narrator of the novel. Because these voices are being expressed in the separate space of

the embedded letter, an area devoid of the ironic commentary of the narrator, they are allowed to enter the novel on an equal footing with the narrator's voice. They are not, like so many other "voices" in the text, filtered through the narrator's consciousness, so they possess their own authority and independence.

It is quite clear from the treatment they receive in the rest of the novel, what the narrator wishes us to think about Tom, Sophia, and Lady Bellaston. The narrator has set up the couples as obvious foils for one another. We are meant to view Sophia as a paragon of womanly virtue—she is all the things that are valued in the worldview of the narrator: kind, virtuous, modest, rational, and restrained—and we are to view Lady Bellaston as cruel, promiscuous, arrogant, and highly emotional, all the things that are devalued in the fictional world of *Tom Jones*. Tom's relationships with the two women reveal much about all three characters. In his communications and dealings with Sophia, Tom is prudent, letting reason dictate his actions, and he is motivated by a true admiration for her character. In his dealings with Lady Bellaston, on the other hand, Tom lets his lust get the better of him and behaves quite imprudently. It is obvious then that the relationship that brings out the best in Tom, his relationship with Sophia, is intended to be more admirable than his relationship with Lady Bellaston, which brings out the worst in him. While it is quite apparent what the narrator would have us think about the characters and their romantic entanglements, it is less certain how readers actually feel about the two couples when they are separated from the influence of the narrator and use their own experiences with epistolary novels and/or letter-writing manuals as a basis for judgment.

One of the primary differences between letters found in letter-writing manuals and those found in epistolary writings is the level of emotion the letters express. In letter-writer manuals, writers were told that “affect, however sincere, must bow to decorum,” while the novel prized the expression of emotion in letters perhaps above all else (Brant 35). If one is to look at letters in the manuals, it becomes evident that practicing emotional restraint is of great importance. For example, in *The Young Secretaries Guide* (1721), a writer who intends to write a letter of remonstrance is very practically cautioned to consider “what Influence he has over the Person he is writing to” and urged to write in an appropriate style and not to let his or her emotions rule what he or she writes (Hill 2). Manuals tell the readers that one should never let displeasure, even if warranted, be too obvious, particularly when writing to a superior.

This kind of practical consideration is often not present in the letters contained in contemporary fiction. In novels, the letter writer often throws caution to the wind and writes boldly, despite the possibly dire consequences he or she will face. For example, it is quite evident that before Richardson’s *Clarissa* writes several letters of remonstrance to her brother, she does not consider the fact that she has little to no influence over him and that he has the power to affect her life greatly. In her description of one of the letters she has written, *Clarissa* tells her friend Miss Howe that her letter to her brother was “struck off while the iron was red hot” after she had been “fired” from overhearing him laugh about her misfortunes (71). In her letter, *Clarissa* accuses her brother of behaving in an “unbrotherly manner” and tells him in no uncertain terms that she dislikes him intensely for “treating [her] as no brother ought to treat a sister” (72). While *Clarissa* does suffer

for her outburst of emotion, readers admire her ability to stand up for herself against a tyrannical brother, in spite of the consequences she faces. Clarissa's letters are certainly not atypical of epistolary writing. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Richardson's epistolary style, in particular, is the "instantaneous Descriptions and Reflections" that his characters make as they record in their letters their immediate reactions to the world around them (*Clarissa* xx). In fact, in his preface to *Clarissa*, Richardson contends that letters "writ[ten] in the height of present distress" by a person whose "mind [is] tortured by the pangs of uncertainty" are "much more lively and affecting" than "the dry, narrative, unanimated Style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted" after some period of reflection (*Clarissa* xx).

The level of emotion in the letters in manuals and novels differs particularly when the subject of love is broached. Even many of the love letters—letters that one would assume would contain a great deal of emotion—that are presented in the letter-writing manuals are restrained in style and far less effusive than those found in novels. For example, in the opening letter of the *Post-Office Intelligence* (1736), a man writes the following to his beloved:

I have had the Honour and Happiness of being admitted to a familiar  
 Conversation with you, so your obliging Deportment and personal Endowments  
 have made a deep Impression on my Mind; for who can forbear admiring that  
 which shines with so bright a Lustre? Or who can converse with so pleasing, so  
 delightful a Companion and not be smitten with attractive Charms? (1-2)

While the sentiments expressed in the letter are pleasing and complimentary, they can hardly be considered demonstrative or perhaps even romantic by epistolary novel standards.

Look, however, at a love letter found in John Littleton Costeker's epistolary novel, *The Constant Lovers* (1731) written on a similar occasion:

Twas with the greatest Regret that the other Night I met with so great a Disappointment when I had the honour of waiting on you home, by that Lady's being with you, of declaring how great a Wound I have received from your Eyes: sure, nothing, dear Madam, could ever have rais'd so great a Passion in my Breast but your Beauty! Never was any thing equal to my Surprise! To see united in one Person so many excellent Perfections, as are, undoubtedly to be found in no other than the beauteous Sylvia. . . . I should certainly have taken you for a Divinity.

Oh! Madam, I want Ovid's Softness to express my Passion. (Costeker 102)

There are quite obviously marked differences between the two letters. The letter that appears in the novel is full of enthusiastic praises: "I should certainly have taken you for a Divinity"; flowery language: "how great a wound I have received from your eyes"; and hyperbole: "never was any thing equal to my Surprise." By comparison, the first letter, which is representative of a typical love letter that would be found in a letter-writing manual, seems restrained and almost platonic. The writer of that letter finds his beloved "pleasing" and "obliging" and he is honored and happy to have met her, but he is far from awe-struck, as the writer of the second letter is or at least appears to be.

Tom's letters to Sophia typify the kind of love letter that might find its way into a letter-writing manual. His letters, although written under emotional strain and containing romantic sentiments, express a desire for rationality to triumph over emotion and for virtue to triumph over self-interest. This emphasis is reflected in both the tone and content of his letters, which are far less overtly "passionate" or emotionally unrestrained than the letters composed by Lady Bellaston and sent to Tom are. Tom knows that Sophia's father heartily disapproves of a match between himself and Sophia, and although he loves her, he feels that it is imprudent for her to disregard her father's wishes. In his first letter to Sophia, Tom tells her, "I have resolved, Madam, to obey your Commands" and leave her because "Fortune hath made it necessary, necessary to [her] Preservation" that she forget his affection for her (204). Later in another letter, he asks that she come to him *unless* "Wisdom shall predominate, and on the most mature Reflection, inform [her], that the Sacrifice is too great, and if there be no Way left to reconcile [her] father, and restore the peace of [her] dear Mind, but by abandoning [him]" (548). Tom's words clearly reflect what the writer of a letter-writing manual might term "good sense." Although he wishes to be with Sophia and wants her to know that he loves her, he does not want her to jeopardize her relationship with her father for a romantic relationship with him. His letters express a willingness to ignore his own self-interest in order to preserve Sophia's virtue and future, and just as the letter writing manuals suggest that sentiment must be appropriately moderated and rash expressions are inadvisable, Tom's letters reflect a restrained expression of emotion.

In her letters to Tom, Sophia also refrains from making rash romantic statements or declarations of love. After she and Tom first begin to discover their feelings for one another and it becomes clear that her father strongly objects to a match between the two, Sophia seems to accept rather easily the idea that Tom and she will not be together. In response to Tom's letter that urges her to make a "mature" decision to abandon him if she believes her father cannot be reconciled to the match, she writes to Tom to apologize for her father's behavior, but she does not promise to disregard Squire Weston's wishes. Instead, she merely "reassures" Tom that "nothing but the last Violence shall ever give [her] Hand or Heart where [he] would be sorry to see them bestowed" (206).

Lady Bellaston's love letters to Tom are dramatically different in their tone and sentiments than either Tom's letters to Sophia or Sophia's letters to Tom, and they clearly capture the spirit of the kind of letters found in epistolary fiction. While the letters exchanged between Tom and Sophia could be described as restrained and proper, the letters sent from Lady Bellaston to Tom could only be described as dramatic, effusive, chaotic, and passionate. Two of the most noticeable differences between the letters are Lady Bellaston's tendency to "compose" when emotions are fresh in her mind and the freedom with which she expresses these emotions. She clearly gives no thought to propriety and/or proper epistolary decorum. Similar to the letters found in Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Lady Bellaston's letters seem to be "written in the moment" and consequently seem to have been often written, as the letters in *Clarissa* were, "in the height of present distress" (Richardson xx). Lady Bellaston is unable to control her feelings for Tom and her letters clearly demonstrate a triumph of emotion over reason

and propriety. In fact, Lady Bellaston, herself, often remarks about her lack of restraint: she describes the “Hurry of Spirits” in which she wrote one emotionally charged letter to Tom and in another letter, she discusses the “strange Infatuation” that causes her to be unable to keep her resolutions not to talk to Tom (481, 529).

The love letters between Tom and Sophia and Lady Bellaston and Tom are different not just in the amount of emotion they convey but also in their writing style. Tom and Sophia’s letters reflect the style advocated by letter-writing manuals while Lady Bellaston’s letters reflect the conventions of the literary epistle. In letter-writing manuals “Ease of style” was frequently stressed. According to the manuals, letters were to be “natural and simple” and contain ideas that “flow readily” from the writer’s brain (Hugh Blair qtd in Bannet 45, 46). Ideally, letters should be easily understandable, direct, and should lack affectation or the appearance of being overly stylized. This, of course, did not mean that writers were given absolute freedom or encouraged to write however they “felt.” Writers in fact were encouraged to make a concerted effort to give the *appearance* of an easy style, all the while considering things such as tone, audience, and decorum. The manuals went as far as warning readers that “writing letters with too careless a hand, is apt to betray persons into imprudence in what they write” (Blair qtd in Bannett 46).

Letters in novels also emphasized a “natural style,” but the style that was considered “natural” in the milieu of the epistolary novel was very different from what was considered natural/easy in the letter-writing manuals. In epistolary fiction, style was judged to be a reflection of a letter writer’s level of sincerity. Letters that were formally structured or appeared to have been careful constructed were believed to be the product

of insincerity or even a writer's intention to be manipulative. Consequently, this desirable "natural style" was actually an "artificially disheveled style of incoherent exclamation derived from the sensationally popular letters of the *Portuguese Nun*" (Day 107). Although modern readers would never describe these letters as *natural*, this highly emotional and carefree style "evidently looked convincingly artless to its readers in comparison with the stilted, conventionally ornamented style of the formal letter" (Day 107). What stylistically would be seen as evidence of unadvised impulsiveness in the outside world—the appearance of hastiness in composition, as reflected by the use of dashes and postscripts and the overt expression of unrestrained emotion through the use of dramatic vocabulary—was highly valued in the world of epistolary fiction. In the outside world, letters written like this, particularly those written by women, were often pejoratively stereotyped as having a writing style that was "gushing and chaotic like their speech," but in the world of fiction, the chaos of the letters written by women reflected honest, powerful, and true emotion (Brant 43).

Tom's letters would be more likely found in a letter writing manual than a traditional epistolary novel in part because of their style: his letters seem studied, carefully constructed and philosophical, not emotional and chaotic. Also, Tom's letters appear to be less subjective and spontaneously composed because he uses far fewer personal pronouns than either other writer; more compound, complex sentences; more polysyllabic words; and longer sentences. The most striking aspect of Tom's style is not his sentence construction, however, it is his word choice. The vocabulary of his letters is modulated and the tone of his letters is very sensible. Although the letters he writes to

Sophia are love letters, the vocabulary Tom uses is far from intense or fanciful. Most frequently, Tom declines to give voice to his emotions by claiming that he does not have the words sufficient to describe the way he is feeling. He writes that “no Language can express [his heart’s] dictates” and he claims that the tenderness Sophia has in her heart will “sufficiently inform her what her Jones must have suffered,” so that he does not need to spell it out for her in a letter (204). Upon first glance, these seem like rather emotional and romantic statements; however, the end result of declining to describe his feelings is that the letters are far less emotional and romantic than they would have been if Tom had made his feelings explicit. Sophia also refrains from making her feelings for Tom explicit in her letters, as she claims that “it is impossible to express what [she] has felt” since she was last able to see Tom (206).

In addition to declining to detail emotions in his letters, Tom’s love language seems fairly restrained, especially when compared to the language found in epistolary fiction and the letters written by Lady Bellaston to Tom. In his epistles, Tom discusses the “goodness and tenderness” of Sophia’s heart, his “sincerest love” for her, and his reluctance to cause her any “disquiet” (204). These terms seem to reflect what could be construed as an admiration of character rather than unrestrained passion or Eros.

Sophia uses even less romantic language than Tom does in her letters. Rather than refer to the feelings that Tom has for her as “love,” Sophia instead makes reference to the “Regard” and “Concern” Tom feels for her (484). Her rather passionless terminology is most striking, however, not in her “love” letters to Tom, but in the letter she sends Tom

after she discovers he has proposed to Lady Bellaston. The letter is worth looking at in its entirety:

You owe the hearing of me again to an Accident which I own surprizes me. My Aunt hath just now shewn me a Letter from you to Lady Bellaston, which contains a Proposal of Marriage. I am convinced it is your own Hand; and what more surprizes me is, that it is dated at the very Time when you would have me imagine you was under such Concern on my account.—I leave you to comment on this Fact. All I desire is, that your Name may never more be mentioned to

‘S.W.’ (568-9)

Given that Sophia is discussing what must be seen through her eyes as a terrible betrayal of her affections for Tom (her beloved proposing marriage to Lady Bellaston), the reserved tone of the letter and her use of decidedly unemotional vocabulary is quite striking. Her “surprized” reaction to Tom’s marriage proposal indicates admirable emotional restraint, particularly given the circumstances. Her stoic refusal to rail at Tom or even demand an explanation of him can be viewed as the appropriate response of a morally upstanding woman, but it may also cause readers to question her love for Tom. In the context of the epistolary novel, love often causes even virtuous women to breach etiquette because love is portrayed as an overpowering emotion that even the best among us are unable to control or resist.

Conversely, Lady Bellaston’s epistolary style is unlike both Tom’s and Sophia’s. While Tom tends to write long compound complex sentences, Lady Bellaston

tends to write simple, short sentences. Additionally, Lady Bellaston uses fewer polysyllabic words than Sophia and Tom and she uses first-person pronouns more frequently than the other two writers do. Her choices in sentence structure and diction make her writing more subjective and personal and give the impression of a writer who is composing hurriedly and carelessly.

One of the most interesting aspects of Lady Bellaston's epistolary style is her use of rather dramatic vocabulary, which is quite unlike the language used in Tom's and Sophia's letters. While Sophia describes her reaction to Tom's proposal to Lady Bellaston as mere "surprise," Lady Bellaston describes herself as feeling "betrayed" by Tom's lack of a response to a compliment she gave him, a rather petty offense (481). When she discovers that Tom and Sophia are acquainted, Lady Bellaston dashes off a letter to Tom telling him that she "depise[s]" Tom, Sophia and even herself for loving him and also warning Tom that she can "detest as violently as [she has] loved" (481). When Tom has the audacity to propose to her, she writes him a letter in which she calls him "a villain" and again professes to "despise" him "from [her] Soul" (533). Her letters are full of highly emotionally-charged language that reveals that she is a passionate woman who is not willing or able to curb her emotions.

Lady Bellaston's passionate, impulsive nature is further revealed by her use of postscripts and even her punctuation choices. Her extensive use of the postscript and even the post-postscript reveals that she is writing her letters quickly and that she is writing her emotions as she feels them. Often Lady Bellaston uses the postscripts to set up assignations with Tom. In them, she tells Tom that she has "ordered to be at Home to

none but [him]” and that he should on one occasion “come immediately” and on another “come to [her] at Eight” (481; 532). The postscripts make it apparent that she is apt to write quickly and toss any additional thoughts she might have into a postscript, rather than revising her letters. In the eighteenth century, letter writing manuals discouraged the use of postscripts because they were seen as “less respectful and less affectionate than including the ‘compliments’ . . . and ‘services’ expressed by them in the body of the letter” and reflective of a writer’s reluctance to revise his or her writing properly (Bannet 67). Additionally, the postscripts in combination with her excessive use of dashes allow readers to paint a picture of a passion-filled woman hastily scribbling letters with no regard for propriety, epistolary conventions, or decorum.

Readers’ impressions of the love letters and the characters who “write” them could differ significantly depending on whether they are assessing the letters based on the standards of letter-writing manuals or on the standards of epistolary literature. Tom’s and Sophia’s writings more clearly reflect the values of the letter-writers, as they both refrain from displaying excess emotion and use more complex and sophisticated diction and sentence structure. Their letters give the appearance of the easy style so valued by writing masters. Because of this, readers who judge according to the values of the letter-writing manuals would most likely assess the two characters positively and in accordance with the assessment to which the narrator is guiding them. Tom and Sophia’s expressions of love would be viewed as appropriately restrained and their attention to practical matters would be applauded.

However, if the readers of *Tom Jones* judge the lovers' letters using the standards of epistolary literature, the assessment of Tom and Sophia might be the complete opposite. Tom and Sophia's "restraint" may be viewed as coldness and a lack of passion in a world where emotion and passion are of utmost importance. While Sophia's filial obedience, modesty, and allegiance to reason may evoke admiration in some, her level of "passion" may leave other readers cold. Sophia does not, for example, promise to be true to Tom, as many might expect a woman in love to do; rather she simply promises not to marry someone of whom Tom might disapprove. For the romantic at heart, this kind of easy acceptance of her father's objections to Tom may lead readers to believe that Sophia is rather passionless.

Additionally, the "easy style" that marks Tom's and Sophia's letters may be viewed suspiciously, as their letters contain none of the "touchingly disheveled" style that was so valued in epistolary fiction and was seen as a sign of true emotion. Tom and Sophia's love for one another may even appear suspect if it is judged by the standards of epistolary fiction. One of the tenets of early epistolary fiction is the idea that love is an emotion that is felt strongly and that one is powerless to control himself once he/she has succumbed to the emotion. Sophia and Tom's willingness to accept the obstacles that interfere with the progress of their relationship may appear to be a sign that they do not truly love one another or that they are perhaps too young to know what love is.

Just as reactions to Tom and Sophia could differ depending on the tradition relied upon for assessment, readers' reactions to Lady Bellaston could also differ. Using the standards found in the letter-writing manual, readers would likely judge Lady Bellaston's

writing as the antithesis of what is desired. Lady Bellaston clearly writes impulsively, with little revision, and does not exhibit the paradoxical “ease of style” that results from polishing one’s writing. The chaos of her writing is exactly what the editors of letter writing manuals were trying to steer writers away from. Lady Bellaston clearly does not believe that emotion should bend to decorum, as emotion dictates the content and style of her writing.

On the other hand, Lady Bellaston’s letters epitomize the style found in early epistolary fiction. Her letters are as chaotic, dramatic, and emotional as any of those found in the writings of Behn or Manley. When taken within the context of the rest of *Tom Jones*, her letters could be viewed as a very pointed satire of the romantic writing from which Fielding, through his narrator, was seeking to distance himself. However, even though readers may know that the letters are not intended to be viewed positively within the context of the novel as a whole, that does not prevent them from viewing the letters, and consequently their “authors,” positively once they escape the guidance of the narrator. If readers are judging letters by the standards set in early epistolary fiction, Lady Bellaston’s letters could be viewed as the sincere expression of a woman who is overcome with desire for a man. The simplicity of her sentence structure, her “writing to the moment” technique, her use of dashes and postscripts could all be viewed as signs of sincerity of emotion. She does not revise and polish her writing style because she is reacting with her heart not her mind. Her letters may be viewed by readers as refreshing in their lack of restraint; they can be seen almost as a “guilty pleasure” for readers. Here, readers can appreciate the letters as a continuation of the delightful and entertaining

excess of early epistolary fiction. A reaction such as this challenges the narrator's presentation of Lady Bellaston. Instead of viewing her as a silly, overwrought, lascivious widow who preys on an innocent young man, one may see her as the unfortunate victim of an overwhelming passion for someone who does not reciprocate her feelings.

While it is certain that the narrator would not approve of the epistolary outpourings of Lady Bellaston, her letters give the epistolary novel a voice within Fielding's novel, a voice that is not directly subsumed or satirized by the narrator's perspective. Giving a voice to this point of view in the letters, a space that is safe from the satiric commentary of the narrator, reminds readers of all the values associated with that genre, values that are radically different than those espoused in the novel proper, without delegitimizing them.

Overall, the reader is given, when assessing the letters of Tom, Sophia, and Lady Bellaston, two different sets of values on which to rely. It is not so important for our purposes which set of values readers use; what is important is that the novel offers multiple perspectives/voices, one of which conflict with that of the narrator. The dialogic relationship between these voices and the narrator's creates for readers a complex fictional world, a world full of different perspectives and voices all in dialogue with each other. Recognizing this dialogic relationship helps to expose the fallacy of viewing *Tom Jones* as a monologic novel in which the narrator, who represents the ideas of the author, is the center of consciousness and the only voice of authority in the text.

*Giving Voice to the Lower Orders: Honour Blackmore's Letter to Tom*

The letters in *Tom Jones* not only bring the voices of other genres into the text, they also bring in the voices of people of different socioeconomic backgrounds from the narrator's. While eighteenth-century novels frequently feature characters from different socioeconomic backgrounds, many critics contend that in these novels members of the "lower orders" are at best one-dimensional characters, and at worst, nothing more than satiric targets. It is certainly true that in many eighteenth-century novels, the voice of the underclass is lost because servants and tradesmen are reduced "to the repetition of stock responses" and are most often only featured in predictable scenes in which their untrustworthiness and/or their immorality is emphasized (Richetti, "Representing" 85). Fielding's works are a bit different because "social comprehensiveness" is one of the "explicit features" of his novels, although this has not insulated him from similar criticism, as many of his characters of lower socioeconomic status seem more like comic literary constructs than individuals with their own ideologies and perspectives (Richetti "Representing" 86). John Richetti, for one, believes that there are only a "few interesting cases" in Fielding "where one can observe the literary servant being constructed out of an actuality in which there lurks other beings, the under class from which the eighteenth-century servant class was in fact recruited" (Richetti, "Representing" 86).

Some see Fielding's tendency to use servants and tradesmen characters primarily as comic relief as a result of his own socially conservative viewpoint. Fielding is believed to be an advocate of a strict adherence to the contemporary social hierarchy and one who possesses a distaste and distrust for those who are not members of the gentry. This interpretation of Fielding's work is certainly understandable given the rather conservative

stance he takes in nonfictional works such as *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase in Robbers*, in which he complains about, among other things, the “lowest kind” consorting with gentlemen and about the “Idleness of the common People” (93).

Additionally, the patrician and sophisticated narrators of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* rarely miss an opportunity to criticize servants and tradesmen, frequently accusing not only particular characters of being lazy, untrustworthy, and comically pretentious but also similarly characterizing an entire socioeconomic class or all members of a single occupation.

Given that many critics conflate Fielding and his narrators, it is unsurprising that Fielding’s novels are said to reflect Fielding’s own fear of social mobility and his disdain for members of the under class. However, as we argued earlier, it is a mistake to oversimplify Fielding’s perspective by assuming that the narrator is Fielding’s sole spokesman in the novel and that it is only he who embodies Fielding’s worldview. While it must be acknowledged that the narrator of *Tom Jones* is decidedly conservative and frequently makes disparaging comments about the disenfranchised, Fielding’s own understanding of the social tension of the time is far more complex than the narrator’s. The embedded letter written by Honour Blackmore, Sophia’s maid, demonstrates that Fielding was quite aware of and even sympathetic to the difficulties those in the lower orders faced. As Michael McKeon points out, “Fielding’s mastery of a certain aristocratic hauteur belies a social background—and social attitudes—of considerably complexity” (382). Honour’s letter gives voice to the struggles of servants, providing readers with a far more sympathetic perspective of their lives than the narrator does and creating

polyphony by bringing a voice into the text that offers a different but equally valid perspective as the narrator.

*Satirizing the Lower Order: The Narrator's Opinion of Servants*

Although many of the servants and tradesmen in *Tom Jones* are certainly underdeveloped characters who often seem little more than walking stereotypes, readers will periodically get a glimpse of the challenging circumstances many of them face when characters occasionally “allude in passing to a state of social injustice that cannot be treated more centrally without threatening to displace or overbalance the story of the protagonists” (Robbins 124). However, much of the sympathy readers might feel upon hearing about the mistreatment of servants is effectively diminished by the narrator's rather unsympathetic comments about the laziness, immorality, and deviousness of members of the lower orders. In his role as moral guide, the narrator frequently offers the readers warnings and commentary about both the under class in general and about characters in the novels specifically.

In one instance in *Tom Jones*, the narrator warns readers about the danger of speaking too freely to servants when he says, “there is no Conduct less politic, than to enter into any Confederacy with your Friend's Servants against their Master. For, by these means, afterwards you become the Slave of these very Servants; by whom you are constantly liable to be betrayed” (62). Of course, implicit in this comment is the idea that servants are incapable of keeping confidences and that they would not hesitate to try to manipulate their “betters” for their own personal gain. The narrator later comments again about the untrustworthiness of servants when he casually remarks that Fortune sent Tom

“the Company of two such faithful Friends, and what is perhaps more rare, a faithful Servant” (581).

The narrator also brings attention to servants who inappropriately affect the manners of their “betters.” In *Tom Jones*, servants consistently imitate their employers in dress, manners, and their condescension to those they believe are socially inferior, and this behavior provokes the narrator’s disdain. In the scene in which Partridge talks with an exciseman and a landlady, among others, in the kitchen of an inn, the narrator describes the corruption of footmen that comes from their acting above their station:

Though the Pride of Partridge did not submit to acknowledge himself a Servant, yet he condescended in most Particulars to imitate the Manners of that Rank. [...]. But, tho’ Title and Fortune communicate a Splendor all around them, and the Footmen of Men of Quality and of Estate think themselves entitled to a Part of that Respect which is paid to the Quality and Estates of their Masters, it is clearly otherwise with Regard to Virtue and Understanding. . . . Now for these Reasons we are not to wonder that Servants (I mean among the Men only) should have so great Regard for the Reputation of the Wealth of their Masters, and little or none at all for their Character in other Points, and that, tho’ they would be ashamed to be the Footman of a Beggar, they are not so to attend upon a Rogue, or a Blockhead. (417)

In this comment and others like it, the narrator laments that “vanity, luxury, conspicuous consumption” have “spread throughout the ranks of society” (Weeks 122).

It is not just the hypothetical servant who is the target of the narrator's disdain; servants such as Honour, who is portrayed as being entirely motivated by self interest instead of being motivated by what is best for her mistress, are described with little sympathy. Although Honour does show an admirable loyalty to Sophia at times, even allowing herself to get fired from her post at the Westerns to help Sophia run away, she is primarily a comedic figure who reinforces the "novel's" contention that "the basis of society is and should be a system of classes each with their own capabilities and responsibilities" (Watt 270). According to the narrator's conceptions, a servant's primary responsibility should be the welfare of his or her master or mistress, and a servant who seems primarily motivated by self-interest is treated with suspicion, particularly if the servant chooses his or her own financial security over the needs of his or her "betters." Indeed, Honour's desire for financial security is the most satirized character trait that she, and the servant class that she represents, possesses. The narrator's characterization of Honour's attempts at securing her future at any cost reflects the trend that Ian Watt identifies in *Tom Jones*: "only bad characters devote any effort to getting [money] or keeping it" (269). Honour's "selfish" desire for security causes her to work for Sophia's "enemy" Lady Bellaston. The narrator derisively remarks that Honour "had as much love for her mistress as most servants have" and tells readers that "the violent Affection which the good Waiting-woman had formerly borne to Sophia was entirely obliterated by that great Attachment which she had to her new Mistress" (589). Honour is "principally attached to her own Interest," and does not, according to the narrator, demonstrate sufficient concern for her mistress's wellbeing (226).

Honour's letter, through which we truly hear her voice for the first time free from the satiric commentary of the narrator, challenges the narrator's characterization of her as selfish and greedy. Firstly, in writing Honour's letter, Fielding abandons the patrician diction he has his narrator use and attempts to give the lower orders a voice through the use of a sociolect. Although the phonetic spelling of words and the grammar and spelling errors in Honour's letter are intended somewhat for comedic effect, they also do reflect the very real differences in language used by the underclass and the gentry. Additionally, they serve as a poignant reminder of servants' limited access to education. As Eve Bannet points out, even though servants often read letter-writing manuals and used "classical rhetorical epistolary conventions of salutation and signature," errors in "grammar, punctuation, and spelling" were frequently found in their letters (33). Letters like Honour's, which attempt to capture the language use of a particular social group, introduce into the novel language that is different from typical novelistic discourse and "[make] available points of view that are generative in a material sense, . . . and have the capacity to broaden the horizon of language available to literature, helping to win for literature new worlds of verbal perception" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 323). Honour's letter opens up the world of *Tom Jones* beyond the limited and limiting experience of the upper class, as it offers readers a language that is very different from the narrator's and most of the other characters in the novel. The language of the letter adds authenticity to Honour's voice and helps readers view Honour as an independent character rather than a rhetorical figure being used by the narrator to promote his own ideology.

Through Honour's letter to Tom, readers are not only able to hear Honour's voice, they are able to see the world from her perspective, a perspective very different from the narrator's. In her letter, Honour reveals that she has accepted an offer of employment from Lady Bellaston, Sophia's enemy, not out of disloyalty and selfishness as the narrator would have us believe, but out of necessity. Honour reminds Tom that "ever Persun must luk first at ome" when making decisions, and in doing so, she felt compelled to accept the position because she feared that "such anuther offar mite not ave ever hapned" now that she has lost her position with Sophia (535). Honour's characterization of her decision as an understandable necessity reveals the difficult reality of many servants' lives: "a servant's life was precarious, often driven by fear of losing a place, slipping lower in the social order and into abject poverty and misery, a condition much to be feared" (Weeks 123). Readers are reminded that Honour is a person who has needs of her own, independent of her desire to see Sophia happy, and that she does not have the luxury of waiting for Tom or Sophia to take care of her in the future: she must take care of herself if she is to survive. Honour's letter also reassures readers that she does, in fact, genuinely care about Tom and Sophia when Honour assures Tom that she "[doesn't] cuestion butt thatt [he] will haf Madam Sophia in the End," and when she refers to Sophia as "mi one mistress" (536). These statements directly challenge the narrator's contention that Honour cares only about herself and easily and completely shifts her loyalties from Sophia to Lady Bellaston.

Additionally, it is hard not to feel compassion for Honour when readers realize that Honour's future is now dependant on someone as fickle as Lady Bellaston. Knowing

that a servant's position in a household was "held almost solely at the pleasure of another, the employer, and getting or maintaining a place might have very little to do with the skill and industry of the servant, who was always in a position of dependence," readers understand and sympathize with Honour's attempts to convince Tom not to reveal any negative comments she has previously made about Lady Bellaston (Weeks 103). Honour writes to Tom:

to bee sur if ever I ave sad any thing of that Kine [i.e. negative comments] it as bin thru Ignorens, and I am hartili sorri for it. I nose your Onor to be a Genteelman of more Onur and Onesty, if I ever said ani such thing, to repete it to hurt a pore Servant that as always ad thee gratest Respect in thee World for ure Onur. . . . I beg ure Onur not too menshon ani thing of what I haf sad." (535-536)

Her comments again emphasize the dependency of servants—all Tom has to do is reveal Honour's early statements to Lady Bellaston, and Honour could be left without a position and little hope of gaining another. Readers cannot help but be struck by and sympathize with the lengths Honour must go to in order to protect a rather undesirable position in Lady Bellaston's house.

Honour's letter not only allows readers to understand her perspective, it also contributes to the polyphony of the novel by providing a voice for the underclass, a group that is otherwise under represented or even misrepresented by the narrator elsewhere in the text. In Honour's letter we hear not the voice of Henry Fielding the gentleman, but the voice of servant who faces difficult decisions with which readers can sympathize.

Honour's letter provides a view of a servant's life that proves to be equally valid, if not more valid, than the narrator's depiction.

***Challenging the Narrator's Moral Philosophy: The Letters of Square and Thwackum***

In addition to giving a voice to other genres and socioeconomic classes, the embedded letter also brings into *Tom Jones* challenges to the narrator's moral philosophy. Critics have long contended that the concept of the "good-natured" man lies at the very center of Fielding's moral philosophy.<sup>18</sup> In "An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men," Fielding offers the following definition of good nature:

good nature is that benevolent and amiable temper of mind, which disposes us to feel the misfortunes, and enjoy the happiness of others; and consequently, pushes us on to promote the latter, and prevent the former; and that without any abstract contemplation on the beauty of virtue and without the allurements or terrors of religion. (408)

This definition, which divorces man's benevolence from both religious and philosophical training and makes good nature "the wellspring of virtuous action," is believed to be the major premise on which Fielding's ethical viewpoint, at least as it is expressed by his narrators, is founded (Shesgreen 161). As Sean Shesgreen explains, Fielding believes in the inadequacies of religion and philosophy as sole motivators of man's good conduct or fair treatment of his fellow man for several reasons:

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<sup>18</sup> See Battestin's *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* (1959) and "Fielding and Ralph Allen: Benevolism and its Limits as An Eighteenth-Century Ideal," Bernard Harrison's *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (1975), and James Lynch's "Moral Sense and the Narrator of *Tom Jones*."

The abstract, philosophical love of virtue is rejected because the writer believes that virtues of the head, indeed, almost all cerebral motives, are amoral in tendency if not in nature. The allurements and terrors of religion are rejected for the simple reason that, by themselves, Fielding believed them to be weak and insufficient as motivating forces. (160)

One can find just such a rejection of religion and philosophy in *Tom Jones*, a novel in which the “strength and vitality of unsophisticated human sympathy” is embodied in the character of Squire Allworthy and the “shallowness, insufficiency, and . . . hypocritical tendency of weak religious and philosophical motives or professions” are embodied by Thwackum and Square, respectively (Shesgreen 161).

Readers’ understanding of these three characters and the ideas they embody is shaped not only by the characters’ actions but also by the commentary of the outspoken narrator. The narrator continually praises Allworthy, who according to the narrator possesses a “benevolent Heart” and in whom “good Nature had always the ascendant in his Mind,” just as he continually mocks Thwackum and Square, who he describes as “Objects of Derision” (85). It is not hard to dislike Square and Thwackum, even without the narrator’s guidance, as both are almost entirely unsympathetic characters whose cruel treatment of our hero Tom earns the reader’s contempt. Readers’ feelings about Allworthy, however, are less straightforward. It is very easy to like Allworthy who seems fair in his dealings with everyone around him and who seems to be genuinely kind-hearted; however, Allworthy makes some grave errors in judgment, including expelling

Tom from his house, which cause readers to question the validity of the narrator's claims that benevolence is a sufficient guiding moral principle in one's life.

The narrator, however, works hard to lessen readers' doubts and persuade them to overlook Allworthy's errors by presenting them simply as the understandable results of Allworthy's "propensity for refusing to think evil of anyone unless he is forced to (defined by [the narrator] as an asset rather than a weakness) and by his limited possession of the relevant facts" (Sacks 103). Take for example, Allworthy's decision to employ Square and Thwackum as tutors for two impressionable young boys. The narrator, in order to point out his contemporaries' hypocritical use of religious and philosophical teachings for selfish gains, needs to make it very clear that the two men are reprehensible. Yet in doing so, he opens up Allworthy to criticism because readers cannot help but be concerned by Allworthy's failure to recognize the men's moral failings and his willingness to put them in charge of his nephew and ward's education. The narrator anticipates such a reaction and quickly moves to assure reader that he/she

is greatly mistaken, if he conceives that Thwackum appeared to Mr. Allworthy in the same Light as he doth to him in this History; and he is as much deceived, if he imagines, that the most intimate Acquaintance which he himself could have had with that Divine, would have informed him of those Things which we, from our Inspiration, are enabled to open and discover. Of Readers who from such Conceits as these, condemn the Wisdom or Penetration of Mr. Allworthy, I shall not scruple to say, that they make a very bad and ungrateful Use of that Knowledge which we have communicated to them. (89).

Even Allworthy's decision to expel Tom from the house based on the claims of people he fails to recognize as untrustworthy, is presented by the narrator as a "correct—even exemplary—action in light of the facts as [Allworthy] knows them at the moment of the action" (Sacks 103).

The narrator is so successful in emphasizing the importance of benevolence as a guiding principle for man's actions and in exposing the failings of contemporary conceptions of philosophy and religion that many critics have concluded that Fielding, himself, rejected philosophical and religious knowledge in favor of "good nature" as a true measure of a man's worth. This characterization of Fielding's moral philosophy has generated a great deal of criticism from those who are appalled by Fielding's elevation of good nature, what many would classify as "merely a natural disposition," over "deliberate and conscientious moral choice[s]" made as a result of religious or philosophical beliefs (Harrison 13). John Hawkins, for example, was so appalled by *Tom Jones* that he claimed the work is "seemingly intended to sap the foundation of that morality which is the duty of parents and all public instructors to inculcate in the minds of young people, by teaching that virtue upon principle is imposture, that generous qualities alone constitutes true worth" (214).

Hawkins, and those like him, make the error of assuming that the narrator, who does seem to reject religion and philosophy as sufficient motivators for virtuous action and who champions good nature as an excellent indicator of moral worth, can be seen as Fielding's sole spokesman. They also err in failing to find other voices in the text that challenge the narrator's doctrine of good nature. Just as the narrator's beliefs about the

contemporary social hierarchy do not fully represent Fielding's own complex understanding of the issue, the narrator's comments about questions of morality do not represent the totality of Fielding's moral philosophy. Embedded letters in the novel, particularly those of Thwackum and Square, again serve as a forum through which voices can enter the text and express opinions that are contrary to the narrator's without being subjected to satirical commentary.

Thwackum's and Square's letters appear near the end of the novel, shortly before Allworthy and Tom's reconciliation. At this point in the narrative, the reader's disappointment and perhaps even uneasiness at Allworthy's earlier decisions to expel Tom and find Partridge "guilty" of fathering Tom, two misguided decisions that reveal the dangers of good nature as a guiding principle, have faded a good deal. Instead of dwelling on Allworthy's past mistakes, readers find themselves caught up in Tom's immediate legal troubles. Square's and Thwackum's letters, however, bring the reader back to the events of the beginning of the novel and bring with them renewed questions about the fitness of the narrator's moral philosophy.

While Square's letter prompts Allworthy's forgiveness of Tom when Square reveals that Tom "hath been basely injured" and that Square had in fact been "active in Injustice towards him," it also is far more than a simple plot device (603). The letter also proves to be a forum through which the narrator's worldview is challenged. In what is a surprising reversal of beliefs, Square reveals that a deathbed rejection of philosophy and open acceptance of Christianity prompted him to write to Allworthy to redeem Tom's reputation. Square tells Allworthy, "the Pride of Philosophy had intoxicated my Reason,

and the sublimest of all Wisdom appeared to me, as it did to the Greeks of old, to be Foolishness” but “God hath however been so gracious to shew me my Error in Time, and bring me into the Way of Truth, before I sunk into utter Darkness for ever” (603).

Square, who the narrator earlier established does not possess a good nature, is prompted to help Tom and facilitate the reconciliation between Tom and his uncle, solely because of his recent acceptance of Christianity. Square’s letter, consequently, undermines one of the primary tenets of the narrator’s philosophy—that the allurements and terrors of religion are weak motivating forces. Clearly, Square is prompted to right his wrongs by nothing other than religious training. If a man with such little innate good nature can be persuaded to live an honest life by studying the Bible, than why could not other men? It is also significant to note, that it is Square’s letter, prompted by religious belief, that ensures the happy ending of the novel and justice for Tom, not Allworthy’s benevolence or good nature. Even though Nightingale and Mrs. Miller provided evidence of Tom’s goodness to Allworthy, he only changes his mind about Tom after reading Square’s letter. Ultimately, Allworthy’s good nature contributes much to the troubles Tom faces but little to the resolution of these problems.

Thwackum’s letter, which is received by Allworthy in the same post as Square’s, further undermines the narrator’s moral viewpoint by reminding readers of the grave mistakes in judgment Allworthy has made because his good nature prevents him from seeing evil in others. Thwackum, unlike Square, does not write to Allworthy to repent, but writes instead to berate Allworthy for the “many unwarrantable Weaknesses” Allworthy exhibited in his kind treatment of Tom (604). Thwackum claims that he is

completely unsurprised that Tom now stands accused of murder, and in an attempt to blame Tom's actions on Allworthy's leniency he writes, "I should yet be wanting to my Duty, if I spared to give you some Admonition, in order to bring you to due Sense of your Errors" (604).

Of course, readers recognize that Thwackum's criticisms of Allworthy are motivated by self-interest and are inaccurate, but they cannot help but be reminded of Allworthy's true failing—his inability to recognize deceit in others because of his own good nature. It is troublesome to realize that Allworthy chose an unmerciful and deceitful man such as Thwackum to be responsible for the religious instruction of his ward and his nephew. It is clear from his letter that Thwackum has no remorse for mistreating Tom and that he felt he had sufficient influence over Allworthy to be able to write in such a blunt and critical fashion. While readers may not fault Allworthy for his lack of insight, they cannot ignore that much of Tom and Partridge's misfortunes could have been avoided if Allworthy had simply been more perceptive. Allworthy's failures of perception emphasize the limitations of benevolence as a guiding philosophy in life.

Thwackum's letter perhaps creates more philosophical questions for readers than it solves, as it also shows the limitation of religious doctrine as a guiding principle for man. Thwackum's letter not only reminds us of the weaknesses inherent in good nature as a virtue but also reminds us of how man can horribly misconstrue and misuse religion to justify the mistreatment of others. The reassurances that readers receive from Square's letter about the motivating powers of religion are at least somewhat undermined by this reminder of religious hypocrisy.

Ultimately, Thwackum's and Square's letters give voice to doubts about the moral philosophy of the narrator and reflect Fielding's complex feelings about the roles of benevolence, religion and philosophy in the moral life of man. Readers are left with the knowledge that no one system of belief operates perfectly in an imperfect world. They are also reminded that even the most good-hearted man like Allworthy is not without flaws and that sometimes one needs more than good-nature, religion, or philosophy alone to guide him.

### ***Conclusion***

In *Tom Jones*, Fielding developed his narrative voice even further and created a persona that is a character onto itself. The narrator of *Tom Jones* is intrusive, controlling, and manipulative and his heavy presence seems to allow readers very little interpretive freedom. However, the embedded letter becomes a safe haven for readers, a place where they can escape from the narrator momentarily and think for themselves and a forum through which the voices of characters and opposing ideologies can be expressed. Because readers consider the letters a separate space and because the letters themselves are not filtered through the ironic and controlling voice of the narrator, these voices are able to enter the novel without being delegitimized or subsumed by the narrator's perspective and consequently make the text polyphonic.

Once the narrator's grip is loosened and readers start to judge the characters for themselves, they are free to deconstruct the text, to tease out voices that contradict or confirm the narrator's tightly controlled presentation of the fictional world. The love letters of the novel express the voices of two contemporary genres—the epistolary novel

and the letter-writing manual; Honour's letter gives the eighteenth-century servant class an unfiltered voice in the novel; and Square's and Thwackum's letters challenge the narrator's doctrine of good nature. Through these opposing voices, readers are able to see the value of emotion and passion, the perils of the servant world, and the possibility that major weaknesses exist in even the best men, all of which are antithetical to the ideas expressed by the narrator. Regardless of whether readers ultimately challenge or accept the narrator's authority, the letters at least open up a dialogic exchange of ideas and demonstrate that the moral universe of the novel is not as fixed as it may first appear.

## Chapter Four Creating Monologim: The Embedded Letter in *Amelia*

With *Amelia*, which was to be his last novel, Henry Fielding made a radical departure from his previously successful “comic epic in prose” formula. Although Fielding referred to the novel as his “favorite child,” his new approach, which included themes, methods of characterization, plot structure, and a tone that Fielding’s readers were unaccustomed to finding in his works, was met with derision from his contemporaries (*Covent* 186). Most modern critics also consider *Amelia* to be his least successful novel.<sup>19</sup> The critical consensus is that *Amelia* contains little of the wit and vitality of the earlier novels and contains too few sympathetic characters—Amelia Booth, for example, is a touch too perfect and William Booth is a bit too immoral to be really likeable. Of all the changes Fielding made to his novel formula, however, his adoption of a radically different narrative persona is perhaps the most obvious and surprising one.

Although the narrative personas found in Fielding’s earlier novels, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, are certainly not identical, as I have demonstrated in the second and third chapters of this study, they do share certain important characteristics: they are prominent and authoritative figures who are intrusive, acerbic, witty, and Olympian in nature. Readers who delve into *Amelia* expecting to be greeted by a narrator similar to the familiar, witty moral guides of the previous novels are sure to be disappointed. In the

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the failure of Fielding’s attempts to combine authorial and dramatic narration see Anthony Hassall’s “Fielding’s *Amelia*: Dramatic and Authorial Narration.” For criticism of Fielding’s characterization of women see Patricia Meyer Spacks’s “Female Changelessness, or What do Women Want?” For a discussion of inconsistencies in *Amelia*, see Robert Alter’s *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel* (1968).

place of Fielding's familiar second self, readers find an inconsistently drawn narrative figure who does not provide the firm guidance and moral authority his predecessors do. The new narrator differs from the previous two in several key ways: he plays a less prominent role in the text because he is presented as a historian rather than an author; moreover, because Fielding switched from relying mainly on authoritative narration to relying mainly on dramatic narration, the narrator, when he does appear in the text, is not as reliable a figure as the two earlier narrators were.

With Fielding's change in narrative persona came a change in the role of the embedded letter in his works. In *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, the embedded letter brings polyphony to the texts because it is a vehicle through which opposing ideologies and voices can enter the novel without becoming subsumed by a dominating narrator. In *Amelia*, there is no such dominating, authoritative voice providing readers with the proper interpretations of characters and events, so that the embedded letter actually becomes a vehicle through which the *author's* own voice/ideology enters the text, as it aids readers in coming to preordained conclusions about many key characters and expresses the didactic aims of the novel. Through the letters of Dr. Harrison, Fielding is able to provide the kind of explicit moralizing necessary to guide readers' interpretations of the text, a service previously supplied by the narrator. The letters of characters like Booth, Miss Matthews and Mrs. Bennet also help to promote Fielding's "finalizing artistic vision" for the novel by clarifying for readers the essential moral character of each of the key individuals in the text (Bakhtin *Problems* 5). The letters do not, as they did in earlier works, provide a venue for competing ideologies and voices nor do they reflect the

complexity that most characters seem to exhibit elsewhere in the novel. Instead, they reinforce those aspects of the characters that the author would have us focus on and they become a platform for relaying the moral messages of the novel.

### **The Narrator of *Amelia*: An Inconsistent and Unreliable Guide**

As we discussed in chapters two and three, Fielding first distinguished himself from early practitioners of the novel, such as Defoe and Richardson, by creating a third-person narrator whose intrusive direct addresses and metafictional commentary dominated and sometimes even overshadowed the characters and events of the novels. In his first two works, the narrators are not only the tellers of the tales, they are the creators of the tales as well. One could even argue that the main focus of the earlier novels is novel writing and that the narrators play a more important role than the characters do in establishing and promoting the main themes of the texts. However, in *Amelia* the narrator takes on a role that is closer to the roles played by the “narrators” of early epistolary fiction. Although Fielding does not adopt the persona of an editor who is merely publishing the writings of another, as those writers did, the narrator of *Amelia*, while claiming “a competent knowledge of the ways of the world in which the story takes place” is seen “as a witness to [the] events [of the novel] rather than as their instigator or controller” (Coolidge 249). The narrator’s new and different role as observer is established early through the author’s dedication to Ralph Allen, which prefaces the novel. Here, Fielding proclaims, “the following Book is sincerely designed to promote the Cause of Virtue and to expose some of the most glaring Evils, as well public as private, which at present infest the Country” (3). As Ian Bell indicates, Fielding’s use of

the word *expose* “seems to be promising an unmediated, frank revelation of the workings of the world, rather than a playful or metafictional revelation of the workings of a novel” (217).

Gone is the all-powerful writer figure who frequently interacted with the readers and who made the events of the novel of almost secondary importance to his own ideas about literature and life. In his place is a serious, almost morose “historian” who speaks with a “darker and more monitory” tone (Battestin, Introduction xv). As a historian, the narrator has less of a role in the story than the previous writer-narrators had, and because of the narrator’s stance as an observer, readers come to expect a more unbiased, uneditorialized version of the events of the story than previous narrators provided.

Not only does the narrator’s role as historian lessen his prominence in the novel, his role is further shrunk by Fielding’s new focus on dramatic rather than authorial narration.<sup>20</sup> In the previous novels, the narrator featured prominently and was able to tightly control readers’ interpretations of the text because authorial narration was the primary means of exposition. The reader’s vision of the characters and actions was filtered through the consciousness of a very outspoken and ever present narrator, and the reader’s ability to interpret and think independently was consequently very limited. In *Amelia*, however, Fielding uses far more dramatic narration, and readers do not rely heavily on a narrator for information but on the characters’ self-narrated life stories and,

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<sup>20</sup> In my discussion of *Amelia*, I will be using Anthony Hassal’s terms “authorial narration,” to mean “narration which is presented through and coloured by the fictive personality of the ‘author’” and “dramatic narration” to mean “narration in which no such ‘author’ is overtly present, the characters speaking for themselves” (225).

to a lesser extent, the often clumsily incorporated “dramatised commentary” (Hassall 231). For example, nearly three quarters of the first book of the novel is made up of the characters’ self-narrated life stories, throughout which the narrator makes only “uninspired” commentary (Hassall 233). Even in the parts of the novel that do not rely on the self-narrated life stories of the characters, the narrator offers very little of the overt guidance and commentary his predecessors do, particularly when it comes to some of the more problematic characters like Colonel James and Mrs. Bennet, both of whom resist easy classification.

There is nothing inherently superior in Fielding’s authorial narration, and his shift to dramatic narration as the main means of exposition would not necessarily be troublesome (even though readers would undoubtedly miss the wit of his early personas) if the shift were complete. The shift in *Amelia* is not complete, however, and the novel seems at times to be a work of transition. It represents a tentative step in a new direction rather than a decisive break from the past, particularly because the inexplicable shifts between authorial narration and dramatic narration are jarring. As Anthony Hassall points out:

the two methods are difficult to combine, because they engage the reader in different degrees of involvement, and create different intensities of fictional illusion. It is argued that the uncertainty shown by Fielding in his attempted combination of dramatic and authorial narration unsettles the reader of *Amelia* and disrupts his engagement with the novel. (227)

Readers have a difficult time with the combination of techniques particularly because there seems to be no discernible logic behind the appearances and disappearances of the narrator.

In the earlier novels, the appearance of the narrator was expected and perhaps even welcomed in part because “the introductory essays in [*Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*] give him a firm position from which to view the story” and a structure and rhythm to his appearances. In *Amelia*, however, the narrator is not given a “formal part in the structure of the novel,” so his appearances seem arbitrary and unnecessarily intrusive (Hassall 228). Even if readers are able to adjust to his appearance, they are soon flummoxed when the narrator “withdraw[s] dramatically,” only to reappear “squarely in position between the work and the reader” (Hassall 228). These shifts leave readers without a stable core, without a reliable source of authority. Ultimately, contends Hassall:

a considerable part of the novel is dramatic only to the point of emasculating the authorial commentary, and authorial only to the point of explaining what has already been revealed dramatically. Fielding [through his narrator] seems to have been unable to commit himself wholly either to telling or showing. (233).

Fielding’s narrative voice “no longer inspires confidence” in readers and the inconsistencies give readers the “disconcerting sense that the tone of the writing is not always under the writer’s control” (Battestin, Introduction xvi; Alter 141).

Also troubling for readers is the narrator’s failure to adhere primarily to either a neutral point of view or an editorial point of view. Often times the narrator appears to be a neutral figure who is far more content than previous narrators to allow readers to come

to their own conclusions. For example, when the narrator informs readers that Booth has forsaken his beloved Amelia and had a tryst with Miss Mathews, unlike the narrators of old, who would have told readers exactly how to view Booth's actions, the narrator willingly leaves the final assessment of Booth's actions to the readers:

We desire therefore the good-natured and candid Reader, will be pleased to weigh attentively the several unlucky Circumstances which concurred so critically, that Fortune seemed to have used her utmost Endeavours to ensnare poor Booth's Constancy. Let the Reader set before his Eyes a fine young Woman, in a manner a first Love, conferring Obligations, and using every Art to soften, to allure, to win and to enflame . . . let him remember that Mr. Booth was a young Fellow . . . if [the reader] will not acquit the Defendant, he must be convicted; for I have nothing more to say in his Defense. (154).

This is a very different stance than the one taken, for example, by the narrator in *Tom Jones* who, as we discussed earlier, pointedly warns readers about judging Allworthy's decision to employ Thwackum too harshly. This example is certainly not anomalous, as *Tom Jones*'s narrator repeatedly cautions readers against making erroneous interpretations that would be inconsistent with the narrator's view of a character or situation.

Nevertheless, the narrator also seems on occasion "uncertain of his reader's acumen" and "feels the need to spell things out" for him through heavy-handed and unnecessary commentary (Bell 228-9). One such instance comes at the beginning of the novel when the narrator is introducing all the characters who are being brought before

Judge Thrasher. In this scene, the narrator leaves nothing to chance by telling readers exactly what to think about the flaws of the magistrate instead of allowing them to derive the flaws from the judge's actions. His assessment of Thrasher as a man who "was never indifferent in a Cause but when he could get nothing on either Side" is completely unnecessary, as Thrasher is quite obviously a one-dimensional character who exists solely as a representative of judicial corruption (21). The narrator also feels compelled, over the course of the novel, to indulge in the occasional sermon, particularly about the subjects of generosity or adultery even when the scenes speak for themselves. Inexplicably, however, the narrator often does not provide this sort of commentary when readers are faced with a troublingly ambiguous character or event. The narrator's inconsistency is unsettling for readers because it undermines their confidence in the authority and stability of the narrator.

While Fielding's use of a controlling author-cum-narrator figure in the previous novels prevented the reader from independent assessment, the readers of *Amelia* are given a great deal of freedom, particularly in assessing the moral worth of the characters because of the absence of a strong, authoritative figure. As Coolidge explains, "there is a kind of finality about *Tom Jones*" because the narrator "suppl[ies] the 'character' of each person from his omniscient point of view, and he almost invariably does so on the person's first appearance" in the novel (246). In *Tom Jones*, readers find themselves judging the character based on the opinions of the narrator even more than on the character's own actions and words. In *Amelia*, however, readers are often left to discern a character's true personality or moral worth on their own. As one reads *Amelia*, "instead

of being supplied from the beginning with the essential idea of each person, we receive only what might be described as an 'idea,' . . . an impression which will be combined with others in the course of our developing experience of the person" (Coolidge 250).

Where Fielding's previous narrators would have guided, sermonized, and pushed readers to specific conclusions, the narrator of *Amelia* is quiet and largely absent.

Determining the "truth" about these independent characters without the help of the narrator is no easy task because much of what readers learn in the novel seems to come from unreliable sources. In particular, readers are wary of trusting information they receive from the characters themselves because a good deal of it comes from first-person accounts of their own prior lives. First-person stories like Booth's, Mathews's, and Bennet's are inherently biased, particularly when story-tellers have a vested interest in having their listeners perceive them in a certain way, as Miss Mathews and Mrs. Bennet certainly do. Additionally, in the second half of the novel, readers find that "hidden motives are discovered, secrets are disclosed, leading [him] into constant suspicion that the public performances of any individuals may not properly represent their real moral character" (Bell 232). Readers' suspicions are well grounded: with the exception of *Amelia*, most characters in the novel, even the "good" ones, are at one point or another disingenuous in substantial ways.

Because the narrator does not provide a strong narrative voice that prompts readers to feel that he is the novel's moral center or moral guide and because many of the main characters narrate their own story, *Amelia* is, on the surface at least, Fielding's most polyphonic novel. Unlike Fielding's previous two novels, *Amelia* contains no "single

authoritative voice” that suppresses the characters’ voices. Instead the characters of the novel seem to “escape to become full *subjects*” who “[tell] their own tales” rather than being “objects *used* by the author to fulfill preordained aims” as the characters in most monologic works are (Booth, Introduction xxii).

The question is whether Fielding intended to create a truly polyphonic novel that does not lead readers ultimately to already-determined, authorial-sanctioned conclusions about the text. Did Fielding intend for his readers to walk away from the novel with ambiguous or mixed feelings about the characters and events, or did he intend for readers to classify the characters as primarily “bad” or “good” and consequently deserving of their fates? Given the polyphonic nature of the text and the complexity of Fielding’s own political and social beliefs, it is very tempting to believe that Fielding would have been content to let readers draw their own conclusions about the novel; however, there is compelling evidence indicating the contrary.

Firstly, Fielding clearly indicates in the dedication of the novel that he intends for the work to be a didactic text that exposes what he perceives to be the evils of society (3). To accomplish this aim, he must encourage his readers to come to unequivocal judgments about the characters and their actions if the work is going to be successful in its moral instruction. Readers need to know which characters should be emulated and which should be reviled. Indeed, Fielding was quite bothered that the reading public and critics found fault with *Amelia* because they were intentionally or unintentionally “misreading” his novel and “misinterpreting” the characters and actions of the novel. He was so distressed by the public’s reaction that he put *Amelia* on trial against the charges of “Dulness” in the

January 25, 1752 edition of *Covent-Garden Journal* (178). This ironic trial, which was designed more to attack the reading public than defend the book, nonetheless reveals Fielding's disdain for those readers who judged Amelia to be a "Milksop" and a "Fool" instead of a paragon of virtue and Dr. Harrison to be "low" and "dull" instead of learned and wise (178-9). Fielding's reaction indicates that he clearly intended some characters to be seen as admirable and others as not, and he was bothered when readers did not interpret his characters "correctly."

Secondly, the ending of the novel makes it clear to readers that Fielding has classified some characters as essentially good and worthy of the reader's appropriation and other characters as essentially bad and deserving of the reader's disdain. There is no ambiguity in the end of the novel, no question of whether a character will ultimately redeem himself or herself; instead the narrator offers a tidy summary of the fates of each of the characters, each of whom suffers either much misfortune or great happiness—nothing in-between. The narrator reveals that "the noble peer and Mrs. Ellison have been both dead several years, and both of the consequences of their favourite vices; Mrs. Ellison having fallen a martyr to her liquor, and the other to his amours, by which he was at last become so rotten that he stunk above-ground;" Colonel James is left to support an "immensely fat" and "very disagreeable" Miss Mathews, who treats him "in the most tyrannical Manner." Mrs. Bennet is happily married to Atkinson, and they have "two fine Boys;" and Booth and Amelia enjoy "an uninterrupted Course of Health and Happiness" (531, 532).

There is no doubt that the characters of the novel are complex and perhaps more “realistic” than the characters in the earlier novels because they possess both good and bad characteristics as real people do and that the text allows the reader a good deal of interpretive freedom; however, it is quite clear from the dedication of the novel, Fielding’s comments in the *Covent-Garden Journal*, and the ending of the novel that he wants his reader ultimately to come to a definite opinion about their moral character. As Alter explains, *Amelia* “leads us at once to a firm moral judgment of character and a tolerant recognition of the mixed nature of human motivations” (176). In the previous two novels, although the letters brought into the text other voices, the reader mainly relies on the narrators for moral guidance. Because of his decision to rely more on dramatic narration in *Amelia*, however, Fielding no longer had an authoritative narrator through whom he could articulate the guiding moral principles of the work. Consequently, he had to rely on other methods and devices to direct his readers; one such device proved to be the embedded letter.

Letters are featured more prominently in *Amelia* than in any other of Fielding’s novels and they play a critical role in assisting readers in assessing the central themes of the novel and the “true moral character” of the inhabitants of the novel in the absence of narrative commentary and in the presence of the characters’ sometimes untrustworthy perceptions of events. As discussed in the previous chapter, many in the eighteenth century firmly believed in the revelatory power of epistles, and the early romances and epistolary novels of the period exploited this belief to great effect. In these works, letters had the power to expose villains and vindicate innocents, and they could bring previously

unknown or undetected character traits to light that were indiscernible through a character's words or actions.

Although he showed disdain for the epistolary novel and sentimentalism at the beginning of his career, Fielding himself seemed to have personally believed in the revelatory power of letters, as evidenced by the following words that he wrote in a letter to his friend James Harris:

For my own Part, I solemnly declare, I can never give Man or Woman with whom I have no Business (which the Satisfaction of Lust may well be called) a more certain Token of a violent Affection than by writing to them, an Exercise which, notwithstanding I have in my time printed a few Pages, I so much detest, that I believe it is not in the Power of three Persons to expose my epistolary Correspondence. (*Correspondence* 11)

As Sarah Davis explains, "Fielding's reticence [to write letters] stems from a letter's dangerous ability to 'expose' him to others, and since it involves paper and ink, it is an exposure that is shareable and potentially permanent" (115). Despite, or perhaps because of his own personal feelings about letters, *Amelia* thoroughly explores the epistle's ability to expose and reveal.

Because of its capacity for revealing what is hidden, the embedded letter is used in several ways in *Amelia*: it helps provide the readers with an authoritative explanation of the novel's themes, it helps readers confirm suspicions about a character or prove a character's essentially good nature, and it serves as evidence for or against a character's presentation of his or her own life. The letters work so well for this purpose because they

are, as we have established in the two previous chapters, a separate space outside the narrator's purview. Essentially, the letters provide a vision of the characters that is untainted by the reader's lack of confidence in the narrator, and they serve as a conduit between the readers and the characters. It is the insight into the characters' minds afforded by the letters that helps readers draw more definitive conclusions than they could by simply relying on the narrator.

*Doing the Narrator's Job: The Letters of Dr. Harrison*

In both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, readers are offered two moral guides to help navigate the fictional world of the text: an infallible guide in the form of the narrator and a somewhat flawed, but in the end redeemable, guide in the form of the characters Parson Adams and Mr. Allworthy, respectively. In both these novels, the readers are firmly steered in the "right" direction by the narrator's instructions on how to interpret the text while the characters of Adams and Allworthy both help to strengthen the narrator's worldview by illustrating "an essential element in Fielding's ethical system": the importance of a good nature (Battestin, *Amelia* 4n). On their own, neither Adams nor Allworthy could serve as the ethical center of the novel because each has significant, though not terrible, character flaws. Adams is so hopelessly naïve that he is unable to understand the motives and behaviors of people who are not as good-natured and benevolent as he is, and Allworthy is also duped by others because he fails to recognize the machinations of the untrustworthy people around him. Because of these flaws, readers know that since they can only trust Adams and Allworthy so far, they must rely on the narrator as the authoritative figure of guidance in the text.

Things are a bit different in *Amelia*. Here the narrator proffers little moral guidance and readers must look almost exclusively to the characters of the text for direction. In an attempt to fill the void created by a mostly absent narrator, Fielding gives readers Dr. Harrison. Dr Harrison, like Adams and Allworthy, demonstrates the importance of benevolence and goodness of spirit, but because he is less flawed and naïve than Adams and Allworthy, he can actually take the place of the narrator as a “spokesman for the author,” a character through which Fielding’s voice enters the text (Hassall 231). As Hassall explains, “Harrison preserves his dignity more successfully, and he wins an intellectual respect from the reader that is not accorded to Adams or Allworthy” (232). Additionally, because the narrator’s presence is not strongly felt in *Amelia*, Harrison is not subject to the distancing irony that presents the other two figures in an often unflatteringly comical light. Harrison, “though not without flaws . . . can usually be trusted to present the author’s values with sufficient authority” (Hassall 232).

The problem with Fielding relying on Dr. Harrison as a vehicle for expressing societal evils and for providing moral guidance is that Harrison is merely a character in the novel; he can neither playfully interrupt the text to directly address readers nor can he include prefatory chapters filled with philosophy and wisdom as a narrator could. Presumably, the Doctor can only appear when it is logical for him to do so; consequently, there are large portions of the story in which the doctor’s presence is inconceivable. Fielding tried to solve this problem in one rather unsuccessful way: the inclusion of “dramatised commentary [which] consists of scenes, usually of altercation, between Dr. Harrison, championing the author’s point of view, and various other characters

representing false views” (Hassall 231). This method of exposition does not really work well because readers are forced to endure long and somewhat tedious lectures by Dr. Harrison that greatly lack verisimilitude. One can only insert so many of these scenes before the text loses the essential feel of a novel. The Doctor’s letters, which can conveniently appear where the doctor cannot, offer a much more palatable alternative. Through the letters, Harrison’s character can deliver lengthy sermons more naturally and with less disruption to the larger narrative.

Readers are first introduced to Dr. Harrison in Booth’s story about his courtship of Amelia. We come to know Dr. Harrison not just through Booth’s assessment of his character but also through his own words found in the two letters he had written to the Booths. Each of Harrison’s letters tackles an important theme, explicitly or implicitly, that is a primary focus of the text, themes that in the previous novels would have been explicitly conveyed through the commentary of the narrators. The topics of these letters—Christian stoicism, man’s good nature, vanity/affectation, and adultery—are arguably the four most important topics discussed in the novel. Perhaps even more than any commentary provided by the narrator, these letters offer a set of values with which readers can judge the rest of the inhabitants of the fictional world.

One of the novel’s chief concerns is the appropriate way for one to deal with adversity. Through its main characters, Amelia and Booth, readers see two very different life philosophies in action, both of which seem appealing and unappealing at various moments in the text. Amelia, with her ready forgiveness and cheerfulness when facing adversity, clearly embodies a positive and appealing sense of Christian stoicism.

However, while Amelia's attitude is certainly admirable, readers cannot help but find her moral perfection a bit unrealistic and perhaps even grating at times. While Amelia is certainly the embodiment of Christian stoicism, our hero of the novel, William Booth, lacks faith in religion and does not use the tenets of Christianity as guiding principles in his life. Instead Booth operates by his own philosophy, as he "did not believe Men were under any blind Impulse or Direction of Fate; but that every Man acted merely from the Force of that Passion which was uppermost in his Mind, and could do no otherwise" (32). His worldview, although agnostic by eighteenth-century standards and therefore subversive or immoral for many readers, often seems appealing and even proves to be accurate in some parts of the text; for example, Colonel James appears to act very generously even though he is not religious in any way. Readers with no clear guidance from the narrator seem to be adrift between two opposing philosophies until Harrison makes it clear through one of his letters which worldview is being advocated.

In the epistle Harrison writes to the Booths informing them of the death of Amelia's mother, the doctor provides a sophisticated treatise explaining how one is to deal with adversity with a sense of Christian stoicism and seeks to remind readers that focusing only on the temporal world is an unwise, contemporary habit that the doctor scorns. The idea that one should meet hardships, particularly the death of a loved one, with patience and an understanding that worldly suffering is inconsequential in the larger scheme of eternity is a recurrent theme in Fielding's writing. In *Tom Jones*, the narrator approvingly describes Allworthy's reaction to the death of a friend:

what Reader doth not know that Philosophy and Religion in time Moderated, and at last extinguished, this Grief? The former of these teaching the Folly and Vanity of it, and the latter correcting it as unlawful, and at the same Time assuaging it, by raising future Hopes and Assurances, which enable a strong and religious Mind to take Leave of a Friend, on his Death-bed, with little less Indifference than if he was preparing for a long Journey; and, indeed, with little less Hope of seeing him again. (77)

In *Amelia*, however, these sentiments are not expressed by the narrator; they are expressed by Dr. Harrison. Through Harrison's letter of consolation, Fielding is able to make clear to readers, without having to resort to awkward dramatized commentary or a narrator's direct address, how he believes the characters should behave when facing various worldly problems.

Harrison has written to the Booths primarily to tell them that Amelia's mother has died and to urge them to deal with her death in a fitting manner. Before he reveals the main point of his letter, he tells the Booths that he has bad news but urges them to "learn this Temper from me; for, take my Word for it, nothing truer ever came from the Mouth of a Heathen than that sentence: '—Leve fit quod bene fertur Onus'" (137).<sup>21</sup> He goes on to contrast the "divine assurances of immortality and the uncertain hopes of the heathen philosophers" that were "a commonplace of the Christian 'consolatio'" (Battestin *Amelia* 138n). Booth provides readers with no such comprehensive and learned explanation of

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<sup>21</sup> The burthen becomes light by being well borne

his worldview, so Harrison's expression is clearly superior, thus serving as the final word on the matter.

The letter also reminds readers, who are part of a world in which "every little Rub, every trifling Accident" is severely "lamented," that the hardships found in the temporal world are fleeting and that one should keep one's focus on eternal life (138)..

The Doctor believes that

while the most poultry Matters of this World, even those pitiful Trifles, those childish Gewgaws, Riches and Honours, are transacted with the utmost Earnestness and most serious Application, the grand and weighty Affair of Immorality is postponed and disregarded, nor ever brought into the least Competition with our Affairs here. (138)

He goes on to ask, rhetorically: "If one of my Cloth should begin a Discourse of Heaven in the scenes of Business or Pleasure; in the *Court of Requests*, at *Garraway's*, or at *White's*; would he gain a Hearing, unless, perhaps, of some sorry Jester who would desire to ridicule him?" (138-9). Harrison's letter echoes the frustrations about the frivolity of English society that drove Fielding to write a novel of social criticism. This letter is perhaps the best articulation in the whole of the novel of this important concept.

While the main theme of the letter seems to be Christian stoicism, the letter also illustrates *good-nature*, "an essential element in Fielding's ethical system" and the "distinguishing attribute of all his most amiable characters. . . . It signifies those benevolent, social affections which cause us to become involved empathically in the concerns of others and which prompt us therefore to charitable actions" (Battestin *Amelia*

4n). In his letter, Dr. Harrison shows a deep concern for the Booths' spiritual, emotional, and financial well being that goes beyond the expression of mere platitudes. Dr. Harrison promises that their child "will be taken Care of, with the Tenderness of Parent" until their return and he sends them a hundred pounds to help them out of their financial difficulties (139). Unlike so many others in the novel who make the Booths promises they cannot keep or who do not back up their proclamations of friendship with anything tangible, Dr. Harrison illustrates in this letter what it truly means to be a man of good-nature. The topic of good naturedness will come up again and again in *Amelia* in subtle ways, as various people make promises to the Booths they have no intention of keeping, but it is really this letter that first points out to the reader that man's good nature, or lack thereof, should be of major importance in judging his moral worth.

In his second letter, Harrison writes to Booth to discuss some news about Booth's behavior that gives the doctor "much Uneasiness" (165). He begins the letter by telling Booth that while he has disapproved of some of the choices Booth has made in his attempt to become a farmer, those ill-advised choices were all "pardonable Errors" (165). The main error he seeks to address through the letter, however, is one that he views as much more egregious: Booth's purchase of an equipage. Harrison classifies Booth's purchase as "a Folly of so monstrous a Kind that had [he] heard it from any but a Person of the highest Honour, [he] would have rejected it as utterly incredible" (165). Harrison objects so strongly to Booth setting up an equipage because he views vanity as an entirely inexcusable sin. He tells Booth that "Vanity is always contemptible; but when joined with Dishonesty, it becomes odious and detestable" (165). He is most concerned about the

“criminal Vanity” of buying a coach whose upkeep will place an unnecessary strain on Booth’s already perilous financial state (165). “Let me beg you seriously consider your Circumstances and Condition in Life and to remember that your Situation will not justify any the least unnecessary Expence,” Harrison urges Booth (165-6). He ends his letter to Booth by reminding him, “simply to be poor, says [his] favourite Greek Historian, was not held scandalous by the wise Athenians, but highly so to owe that Poverty to our Indiscretion” (166).

Harrison’s rabid objection to Booth’s purchase may seem a bit odd at first, especially given that he has forgiven many of Booth’s other silly errors and perhaps some more serious ones as well. However, if one looks at Fielding’s corpus, it becomes quite clear that vanity is an almost unforgiveable error in the moral framework of Fielding’s fictional world. In his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, for example, Fielding tells his reader that “the only source of the true ridiculous . . . is affectation” and that affectation comes from two sources: hypocrisy and vanity (52). To illustrate his point about vanity, which Fielding defines as “affecting false Characters, in order to purchase Applause,” he offers the reader the following statement:

nor do I believe any Man living, who meets a dirty Fellow riding through the Streets in a Cart, is struck with an Idea of the Ridiculous from it; but if he should see the same Figure descend from his Coach and Six, or bolt from his Chair with his Hat under his Arm, he would then begin to laugh, and with justice. ( 52-53)

In *Amelia*, Booth becomes this “dirty fellow,” who by “indulging his vanity by setting up an equipage when his family is impoverished, . . . illustrates his author’s theory of ‘the

true Ridiculous” (Battestin *Amelia* 165n). Harrison’s letter of admonition to Booth serves to bring attention to yet another social ill that is explored in the main narrative, and it serves as the most explicit condemnation of a character flaw we see so many characters exhibit. Miss Matthews, Colonel James, and Mrs. James all make unwise decisions based on their own vanity, and this letter reminds the reader, in the absence of a comments by narrator, that we are to judge these mistakes harshly, even if the transgressions seem relatively minor.

Dr. Harrison’s final letter addresses one of the most dangerous social ills in the fictional world of *Amelia*: adultery. Although the sexual peccadilloes of the characters in the earlier novels were a source of great humor, in *Amelia* the sexual misconduct of married people becomes a topic that is addressed with much more seriousness. In the novel, numerous characters—Colonel James, Mrs. James, Miss Mathews’s husband, and, of course, Booth—are unfaithful or wish to be unfaithful to their spouses. Readers, particularly if they are familiar with Fielding’s earlier work, do not know quite what to make of the married Booth’s decision to stay with Mrs. Mathews in prison. As I mentioned earlier, the narrator offers the reader only a half-hearted defense of Booth’s behavior, but ultimately leaves it up to the reader to either convict or acquit Booth for his crime of adultery. The only other explicit discussion of adultery in the text beside Harrison’s letter is a conversation Harrison has with Amelia about Colonel James’s interest in her. In this conversation, Harrison laments the reluctance of the government and society in general to condemn the practice. While Harrison takes a stand in this

conversation, it is just one of many conversations in the novel that the reader may or may not take as an expression of the novel's stance on the issue.

The reader is provided, however, in Dr. Harrison's letter to Colonel James a much more obvious condemnation of adultery, which could be considered a "small dissertation on the subject" (Battestin, *Henry Fielding* 221). This letter is given particular emphasis, because unlike the other letters in the novel, this letter is given a wider audience than just the intended recipient of the letter. The letter, intended only for Colonel James, falls into the hands of some bucks at a masquerade and is read aloud in a mocking fashion by these insolent youths. The dramatic reading of the letter, which includes not only the text of the letter but the commentary of the audience allows the reader to hear Fielding's opinions about adultery as expressed by his stand-in Harrison and to hear and understand the generally permissive societal attitude about adultery that Harrison/Fielding is trying to combat.

The beginning of Harrison's letter and the "orator's" commentary reveal Fielding's deep concern about the effects of adultery on society and what he perceived to be society's lax attitude toward the subject. Harrison starts his epistle by reminding Colonel James, and of course the reader, that adultery is first and foremost "forbid in the laws of the Decalogue . . . and is expressly forbid in the New Testament" (414). Harrison asks rhetorically, "Is not such a Man guilty if the highest Ingratitude to that most beneficent Being, by a direct and avowed Disobedience of his most positive Laws and Commands?" (414). To this remonstrance, the buck mockingly replies, "You will see therefore . . . what the Law is, and therefore none of you will be able to plead

Ignorance when you come to the Old-Bailey in the other World” (414). His flippant attitude is clearly intended to shock the reader into considering how easily his contemporaries dismiss the threat of eternal damnation to pursue their own earthly pleasures.

The letter also touches on one aspect of the topic that Fielding discusses elsewhere in his writing: his government’s reluctance to punish adulterers. Harrison tells the reader, “Nations where the Sun of Righteousness hath never shined, have punished the Adulterer with the most exemplary Pains and Penalties, not only the polite Heathens, but the most barbarous Nations have concurred in these” (414). Harrison, like Fielding, claims that “there is scarce any Guilt which deserves to be more severely punished” than adultery (414). Harrison’s dismay at England’s lack of laws regulating infidelity is echoed elsewhere in Fielding’s writings. In 1752 Fielding “devote[d] two entire leaders [in the *Covent-Garden Journal*] to the subject, reviewing at length the laws and severe punishments devised in antiquity to control ‘this atrocious *Vice*’ and regretting the levity with which his own countrymen regarded it” (Battestin, *Amelia* 375n). Clearly Fielding is again using the embedded letter as a way to insert his own moral philosophy into the text in the absence of another mechanism, such as the opening chapters of each book in *Tom Jones*.

In the second part of his letter, Harrison then goes on to explain that Colonel James will have little success in seducing Amelia because she possess, “a chastity so strongly defended . . . that the Woman must be invincible even without that firm and constant Affection of her Husband.” (415) With these words, the reader is reminded that

a woman of good character should be able to resist the temptations of a lover because of her own strong moral character, regardless of whether or not she is being properly loved by her husband. This reminder helps the reader to view Miss Mathews's desire to commit adultery with Booth, in part because of a neglectful husband, and Booth's decision to have sex with Mathews when he has been imprisoned for an indeterminable time away from Amelia, as completely unacceptable. We are encouraged by this letter not to let a consideration of extenuating circumstances sway our negative judgments of adulterers. This is an important reminder because without a controlling narrator to keep them in line, readers may frequently find themselves judging the actions of the adulterous characters less harshly than Fielding would like.

In *Amelia*, Dr. Harrison's letters express not a character's own individualized voice but the voice of the author. Consequently, they bring both authority and a monologic element to the text as they make the moral values of its author explicit for the reader. Fielding is able to shape readers' interpretations of the themes of the novel through these letters by providing readers with a moral framework with which they can judge the characters' words and actions. While Dr. Harrison's letters do a good job of establishing and promoting the important themes of the story, they do not offer the reader the assessments of the moral worth of individual characters as narrators in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* did. Consequently, it is difficult to get a firm grasp on the characters who often say and do contradictory things. Readers' confidence in the reliability of their assessments of these characters is particularly tenuous because much of what they learn about them comes from the characters' own first-person accounts of the

events of their lives, about which the narrator offers very little commentary. The imbedded letters written by characters other than Harrison, however, provide the readers with an inside view into the characters' personalities, either collaborating or clarifying the stories each one tells and making their essential nature clear to the reader.

*Flawed Hero or Reprobate? William Booth's Epistolary Revelations*

In the introduction of the main character to the novel, William Booth, Fielding clearly employs his new method of dramatic exposition, which forces readers to come to their own conclusions about the character rather than rely on the narrator's editorial commentary. In the narrator's first mention of Booth "all we are told about him is what brought him there, and the only indication that he is to be any more important than the others is that his name is given" (Coolidge 251). Instead of providing a summary of the character's personality or traits as the narrators of *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones* would have, the narrator in *Amelia* tells the reader merely that Booth, despite being charged with "beating the Watchman, in the Execution of his Office, and breaking his Lanthorn," is innocent (24). The narrator provides absolutely no background about Booth and how he finds himself in this legal predicament. Instead, the reader must wait several chapters until Booth is implored upon by Miss Matthews to tell his life story to come to any real understanding of his personality and character traits.

In some ways, Booth's tale provides answers to many of the questions about his character that have arisen in the reader's mind in the chapters between his introduction and the beginning of his autobiographical tale, but the reader is still left a bit unsettled by Booth's story because "in [this] dramatic section the author offers no overt guidance as to

how the reader should evaluate the character and reliability of . . . Booth” (Hassall 229). If we are to believe Booth’s story without any outside corroboration from the narrator, we must be convinced that Booth is a perceptive individual who is capable of presenting his own life story objectively. It is somewhat difficult to believe this of Booth because prior to his telling of his history, “he has not been very precisely judged by the author: he is generous and good-natured enough . . . but his encounter with Robinson make us suspect his wit, and the author casts some doubts on his religious skepticism” (Hassall 229). We are left to wonder if he is a character similar to Tom or Joseph, who though good-natured and basically moral (although Tom is certainly more flawed than Joseph), are often obtuse and duped by others, or if he is more morally flawed than Fielding’s other protagonists. Without the narrator to offer us reassurance of the validity of Booth’s tale, the reader is seemingly left adrift. However, the two letters Booth shows Miss Mathews, one from Dr. Harrison and one from Amelia’s sister Betty, and the one letter Booth composes later in the text offer readers confidence in their ability to make a definitive judgment about the hero. They lead the reader to the “correct” assessment of Booth’s character, an assessment that supports Fielding’s decision to reward, in the conclusion of the novel, his essential good nature with an “uninterrupted course of Health and Happiness” (532).

The two letters Booth shares with Miss Mathews offer two very different opinions of Amelia and Booth, but both serve to support the validity and accuracy of Booth’s tale. Betty’s letter reassures the reader that Booth’s negative opinion of Amelia’s sister is not unfounded and that Miss Betty’s objection to their marriage is just as Booth presented it

to be: selfish. Dr. Harrison's letter also verifies Booth's opinion of Betty and bolsters our opinion of Booth through Dr. Harrison's obvious approval of and affection for both Booth and Amelia.

Betty's letter appears at a critical point in the text when the reader may be beginning to have doubts about the wisdom of Booth having married Amelia, and may perhaps even be feeling support for Betty's objection to their relationship. Before Booth produces the letter from Betty, he is telling Miss Mathews about Amelia having fallen ill after coming to tend to Booth overseas. The couple has fallen on hard times, and Amelia is forced to "[write] to her Mother to desire a Remittance, and set forth the melancholy Condition of her Health, and her Necessity for Money" (120). Although Booth has presented his relationship with Amelia as being extremely positive, the reader has to begin to doubt the wisdom of a penniless military officer taking a sweet, lovely woman away from the comforts of her home only to cause her to endure a stressful and penurious existence.

However, after reading Betty's letter, which Booth carries with him as a "Curiosity," the reader cannot help but think that perhaps Amelia is better off away from her family and that Booth's characterization of Betty has been accurate (120). The "barbarity" of Betty's letter informing Amelia that she is no longer the favorite daughter and that she will not be receiving any help from her family echoes in many ways the cruel letter Blifil sends to Tom Jones informing Tom of his banishment from the family. Through Betty's words the reader develops a clear picture of her as a shrewish, jealous

woman who is attempting to ingratiate herself to her mother by weakening her mother's relationship with her sister.

Betty begins the letter, not by expressing any sympathy for Amelia's illness, but by reminding her that Amelia's marriage to Booth was "entirely against . . . the Opinion of all [her] Family" and by describing Amelia's decision to marry Booth as a "fatal Act of Disobedience," conveniently ignoring the fact that Amelia's mother had made peace with the marriage and supported the newly married couple (120-121). Betty goes on to berate Amelia for her choices and to tell her mercilessly that she is completely on her own. One may agree with Betty's arguments, as things do not seem to be going well for the couple, but one cannot approve of the heartless manner in which the feelings are expressed. Betty has absolutely no sympathy for her ailing sister and even ends the letter with scathing criticism and a threatening remark:

remember (for I can't help writing it, as it is for your own Good) the Vapours are a Distemper which ill becomes a Knapsack. Remember, my Dear, what you have done; remember what my Mamma hath done; remember we have something of yours to keep and do not consider yourself as an Only child—No, nor as favourite child. (121-122)

The "something" Betty is referring to is Booth and Amelia's child who has been left in the women's care. These closing remarks illustrate the honesty of Booth's earlier claims about Betty's personality and help the reader to have faith in the accuracy and honesty of his story.

The second letter he proffers to Miss Mathews during the course of his narrative further bolsters Booth's reliability as the narrator of his own life story and supports the essential goodness of his character. He offers the letter to Miss Mathews because he is telling a story about Dr. Harrison and he "would not willingly do any Injury to [Dr. Harrison's] Words" (136). This letter serves several purposes: it provides a perspective on Betty that is consistent with Booth's, and it gives the reader more confidence in Booth's intelligence and character. Harrison opens his letter by telling the Booths that he would have written to them earlier if he had known where they were. He comments, "If your Sister hath received any Letters from you, she hath kept them a Secret, and perhaps out of Affection to you hath repositied them in the same Place where she keeps her Goodness, and what I am afraid is much dearer to her, her Money" (136). The Doctor's words reveal a judgment of Betty's character that again confirms for the reader that Amelia would not necessarily be better off at home with her family than married to Booth.

The letter allows the reader to more easily believe that Booth is in fact a moral man. One of the only criticisms that is implied of Booth early in the novel, which undermines the reader's confidence in his intellect and perception, is that he is not a Christian: the narrator says of Booth, "tho' he was in his Heart an extreme Well-wisher to Religion (for he was an honest Man), yet his Notions of it were very slight and uncertain" (30). In his letter, Dr. Harrison, the "good divine," also shows his approval of the Booths' union (77). Dr. Harrison declares that the couple is "extremely and deservedly fond of each other" and he tells the couple that they have in him a "zealous Friend" (139). Dr.

Harrison's letter helps to bolster the reader's confidence in Booth's moral worth because Dr. Harrison comes across as a reputable, generous, learned, trust-worthy figure, and as such a man, his approval of Booth influence the reader's own assessment of Booth's character.

The novel also contains a letter written by Booth himself, and it is this letter that is perhaps most influential on the reader's perception of Booth's character. Booth's willingness to commit adultery and his attempts to hide his indiscretion leave the reader with serious reservations about his character, even taking Dr. Harrison's approbation into account. Unlike the main characters of earlier novels who are involved in some seemingly harmless sexual indiscretions that the narrator urges the reader not to take seriously, Booth has committed a grievous error, particularly within the context of this novel. One of the most persistent themes in *Amelia* is the horror of adultery, and we are urged to view the other adulterers in the text, James and the noble Lord, with disdain, if not disgust. It is therefore difficult to believe that Booth is a good man because he has not acknowledged his sin and asked for forgiveness, until he writes this letter to his wife.

The letter written by Booth to his wife Amelia goes a long way in aiding the reader in believing that Booth is at heart a good man who has erred but is sorry. In his letter, Booth confesses to a sin "with which [he] cannot stain [his] Paper" to spell out explicitly—having left Amelia "to go to the most worthless, the most infamous" Miss Mathews (492). Booth acknowledges his own folly in "endeavouring to keep a Secret from [Amelia]" and asks for her forgiveness (142). Booth even signs the letter as Amelia's "ever fond, affectionate, and hereafter faithful Husband" (142). The fact that

Booth commits his confession to paper, even though he does not explicitly spell out what he has done, gives his words added weight and authority. If, as many eighteenth-century readers and writers believed, the letter reveals the writer's inner self or true character, then this letter assures the reader that, in his heart, Booth is simply a good and honest man who made a grave error in judgment. The confession, by being placed in the separate space of the letter, becomes an authoritative and independent testament to Booth's true goodness and his desire to act as a good husband.

*Abused Victim or Temptress? Miss Mathews's Epistolary Revelations*

Just as the letters addressed to and written by Booth shed light on his character, the letters written by Miss Mathews help the reader to gain a better understanding of her complex character. Like Booth, much of what we learn about Miss Mathews at the beginning of the novel comes from her first-person account of her life up until her imprisonment; however, we are given a bit more information about her character from the narrator than we are about Booth's character. As mentioned earlier, in *Amelia*, unlike his earlier novels, Fielding has largely abandoned the practice of explicitly spelling out a character's worth upon his or her introduction in the story; though, in the case of Miss Mathews the narrator does step in to provide the reader with a few hints about how to assess her character (Coolidge 250).

The narrator stops short of explicitly telling us what to think of Miss Mathews, but he does preface her first-person tale with a warning that women are not always who they seem to be. The narrator attempts to address any readers' concerns about the

inconsistency they have perceived in Miss Mathews's conduct—her generosity toward Booth and her status as an accused murderess—by offering the following:

But before we put an End to this, it may be necessary to whisper a Word or two to the Critics, who have perhaps begun to express no less Astonishment than Mr. Booth, that a Lady, in whom we had remarked a most extraordinary Power of displaying Softness, should the very next Moment after the Words were out of our Mouth, express Sentiments becoming the Lips of a Dalila, Jezebel, Medea, Semiramis, Parysatis, Tanaquil. . . . We desire such Critics to remember, . . . that it is the self same Celia, all tender, soft, and delicate; who with a Voice, the Sweetness of which the Sirens might envy, warbles the harmonious Song in Praise of the young Adventurer, and again, the next Day, or perhaps, the next Hour, with fiery Eyes, wrinkled Brows, and foaming Lips, roars forth Treason and Nonsense in political Argument with some Fair one, of a different Principle. (44-6)

What is meant as a clear explanation, however, only provokes further uncertainty in the reader.

In order to demonstrate the potential evil of women, the narrator provides a list of infamous women, most of whom have committed heinous crimes. However, as Battestin points out, “In this catalogue of infamous women . . . Tanaquil seems out of place: . . . she did have a reputation for being ‘too imperious’ and for dominating her husband, but she was generally revered for her virtue” (Battestin, *Amelia* 45n). Are we to view Mathews as a Jezebel or a Tanaquil? Additionally, even if we are to accept the narrator's

warning at face value, all we know is that women often have complex, contradictory personalities; what we do not know is which side of their personality represents their true character. Readers are left to decide on their own if Mathews is either a vain, manipulative, selfish, immoral woman or a generous woman whose life understandably deteriorated after she was preyed upon by a lecherous adulterer, or something in-between. The letters make the answer to this question much clearer for the reader and reveal what the author intended readers to think of Mathews.

Miss Mathews narrates her own story and because the narrator is not there to guide us, the reader cannot help but feel a grudging sympathy and perhaps even respect for all the trials she has faced, although some of her past actions are quite shocking. While in prison, Miss Mathews tells Booth the story of her unfortunate meeting with Hebbers, the man who would seduce her and whom she would try to murder, and the disastrous consequences of their relationship. She begins her story by recounting her rivalry with another woman over who had the “uppermost Place” in the minds of the men at an assembly at which Booth was present (48). As Miss Mathews reveals her secret hatred for Miss Johnson, the woman she believed to be her “rival for Praise, for Beauty, for Dress, for Fortune, and consequently for Admiration,” the reader cannot help but be struck by two things: Mathews’s extreme shallowness and her surprisingly perceptive view of herself (48). As she details her former self, the reader is repulsed by her superficiality but also impressed by her willingness to present herself in such an obviously unflattering light. It seems evident that Miss Mathews reveals the ugliness of

her character knowingly, not out of ignorance, and it leads the reader to believe that despite her seeming vapidness, she is quite perceptive and even introspective.

Our sympathies for Miss Mathews are further roused by her description of her courtship with Hebbers. She tells us that it was her father's habit to invite the officers of the local Troops of Dragoons to their house and that her father, because of Hebbers's musical talent, invited into their home the man who would bring about the destruction of his daughter. With great insight, Mathews details how Hebbers set about winning her heart by first persuading her that she was a better musician than her sister was. She tells of how she came to "love Hebbers for the Preference which he gave [her music]" over her sister's because she was selfishly afraid that her sister's musical talent might allow her to "gain too great a Preference in [her father's] Favour" (50). Her story goes on to detail Hebbers's masterful manipulation of her feelings and how she foolishly capitulates to her desire for him and loses her virginity before she is married. The story ends with her confessing to having stabbed Hebbers in a fit of rage after discovering that he was secretly married to another woman.

After the conclusion of Miss Mathews' sad and shocking tale, the reader is left with conflicting feelings about her. On the one hand, the reader cannot help but feel both deep sympathy for a woman who has been so cruelly abused by a man whom she loved and admiration for a woman who can discuss her own mistakes and character flaws with such honesty. On the other hand, the reader cannot help but feel that Miss Mathews' selfishness, vanity, and superficiality played a large part in her destruction and that her subsequent pursuit of Booth is strong evidence that she is going to continue her life of

vice even after she has rid herself of Hebbers. The narrator offers us very little additional commentary about Mathews after his initial warning about the deceptiveness of women, so readers are left to their own devices in figuring out how to judge her. As Coolidge notes, *Amelia*, in most cases,

sets out to follow a process of observation and discovery. That is, where *Tom Jones* presents a reality which is essentially known at the outset, *Amelia* ostensibly follows the process by which mortal human intelligences build up such knowledge of the world. . . . Our knowledge of a person's character is always provisory, pending further discovery. (250)

After the prison episode, readers anticipate that they must simply wait for further information to clarify their impression of Miss Mathews. The reader believes this because “every indication through the first quarter of the novel is that [Miss Mathews] is to be a central figure”; however, much to the dismay of many critics and readers, Miss Mathews plays only a negligible role in the rest of the story (Coolidge 252). While her presence is felt through Booth's continuing guilt over his affair with her, she makes only two very brief appearances in the novel after Booth is released from prison, neither of which offers the reader any sort of definitive picture of her.

One critic even believes that her surprising absence from the second half of the novel is a result of Fielding being unable to “trust himself not to make her more interesting than Amelia” (Saintsbury, Introduction xvii). While George Saintsbury's comment is not meant to be taken seriously, it does contain a kernel of truth. Miss Mathews, because she is a complicated and multi-dimensional character, is intriguing to

the reader in a way that the long-suffering Amelia, with her ever-present optimism and unerring morality, may not be. This presents something of a challenge to the moral message of the novel. Through Dr. Harrison, it becomes clear that the reader is supposed to despise vain, materialistic, immoral adulterers, such as Miss Mathews, but Miss Mathews is too dynamic a character and her story evokes too much sympathy for readers to feel about her only what Fielding wants them to.

Miss Mathews's two embedded letters help to solve this problem, however, as they allow Fielding to gain a bit more control over the reader's impression of her by reminding the reader of Miss Mathews's flaws without evoking any sympathy for her as her own story did and without giving the dynamic woman any more time on the "stage." Also, some of the vivacity of Miss Mathews's character is lost because much of her wit and charm, which depends in large part on her reactions to the comments of others, is lost in letter form. The letters shape our last impressions of Miss Mathews because it is in them that her presence is most felt in the second half of the novel. They also justify the decidedly negative fate that befalls Miss Mathews at the end of the book: being saddled with Colonel James and becoming "immensely fat" and "very disagreeable" (531).

Both of the letters Miss Mathews writes address her inappropriate romantic feelings for Booth and reveal a great weakness of character. The first letter discloses that, unlike Booth, who once removed from the immoral setting of the prison becomes ashamed of his weeklong dalliance, Mathews wishes to continue their affair outside of the prison's walls and will stop at nothing to do so. The letter in which Mathews tells Booth, "I can refrain no longer from letting you know that I lodge in *Dean-Street*, not far

from the Church, at the Sign of the *Pelican and Trumpet*, where I expect this Evening to see you” drives away any doubt the reader may have about Mathews’ affair with Booth being the result of grief or temporary poor judgment (as we are to believe is what drove Booth to make the mistake) (164). Mathews’s blatant attempt to seduce Booth again, particularly now that he is back in the arms of the angelic Amelia, must raise the disgust of the reader.

The reader’s negative view of Mathews is further confirmed by her second letter, in which she reveals the depths of her selfishness and her callousness. Mathews is prompted to write this letter when she hears an erroneous report that Colonel James has killed Booth in a duel. Although she supposedly “looked on herself as the Murderer of an innocent Man” as the dispute between the two was caused by lies that she had told, she does not blame herself, rather she “hated and cursed James as the efficient Cause of that Act which she herself had contrived, and laboured to carry into Execution” (225). She writes a letter to James calling him a fool for having murdered “one of the best Friends that ever Man was blest with” and for believing “what the Anger and Rage of an injured Woman suggested; a Story so improbable that [she] could scarce be thought in earnest when [she] mentioned it” (225). She cruelly ends the letter by writing, “If this Knowledge makes you Miserable, it is no more than you have made the unhappy, F. Mathews” (225). Mathews’s letter again leaves the reader contemplating the most unflattering aspects of her character: an inability to accept blame for her own actions, a vicious temper, and a complete disregard for the feelings of others.

These two letters, which establish a vision of a petty, jilted lover who blames everyone other than herself for her problems, replace the more sympathetic vision of a younger Miss Mathews lured into a life of vice by an unscrupulous man that is established by her own story. Toward the end of the novel, readers are far removed from the tale she told earlier, and they are forced to judge her for the woman she is at that moment, a woman who is beyond redemption.

*Vainly Jealous or Merely Misguided? Mrs. Bennet's Epistolary Revelations*

Mrs. Bennet is arguably the most complex of all the characters in *Amelia* and perhaps the most difficult for the reader to judge. Not surprisingly, the narrator offers the reader scant guidance when Mrs. Bennet first appears in the novel: "her first appearance in the novel is reported in the same matter-of-fact manner as was that of Booth. We learn little about her" from either the narrator or other characters (Coolidge 253). As the reader continues on in the story, a fuller picture of Mrs. Bennet emerges, but the picture is quite complicated, as much of the information about her character comes from potentially unreliable sources: Mrs. Ellison, who aided in the rape of Mrs. Bennet, and Mrs. Bennet herself, who narrates her life story to Amelia in an attempt to save her from the same fate.

On the one hand, one cannot help but admire and feel sympathy for Mrs. Bennet. When we first meet her she is described as "remarkably grave" with a "Sickness [which] had given her an older Look," yet we learn that the gravity "was not, however, attended with any Sourness of Temper: On the contrary, she had much Sweetness in her Countenance, and was perfectly well bred" (192). Amelia, the paragon of virtue, is quite taken with Mrs. Bennet, and Amelia's enthusiasm and even Booth's lack of enthusiasm

for her, as he has already proved to be a bad judge of character, help to establish the reader's early good opinion of Mrs. Bennet.

However, the first hint of unpleasantness in Mrs. Bennet is revealed during her second meeting with Amelia that the noble Lord interrupts. In this scene, the narrator describes the man's rapt attention to Amelia and Mrs. Bennet's negative reaction to this man who so admires Amelia and whom Amelia so admires. Mrs. Bennet "express some little Dislike to [the] lord's Complaisance, which she called excessive" (203). Mrs. Bennet's reaction seems a bit odd, but it is the narrator's comment about the reaction that resonates. The narrator says, "I believe, it may be laid down as a general Rule, that no Woman who hath any great Pretensions to Admiration, is ever well pleased in a Company where she perceived herself to fill only the second Place" (204). This is our first indication of any serious character flaw in Mrs. Bennet and this raises suspicion in the reader about her motives and character. It seems Mrs. Bennet does not care for the Lord simply because he did not pay enough attention to her. Her petty jealousy, particularly of the sweet and generous Amelia, makes the reader look unfavorably on Mrs. Bennet.

The reader is given further pause when the subject of Mrs. Bennet's education arises. Mrs. Bennet proves to be a very learned woman, but this is presented not as a positive aspect of her character, but a negative one. Because she is educated and Amelia is not, Mrs. Bennet "suddenly appears as Amelia's opposite in an important respect" and there now appears a "satirical strain . . . in the treatment of her character" (Coolidge 254). Dr. Harrison, our moral guide, seems put off by Mrs. Bennet's display of knowledge and

pokes fun at her. It is clear that we are to prefer Amelia's limited, but useful knowledge, which is "confined to *English* and Poetry," the work of Dr. Barrow, and the histories of Bishop Burnet, to Mrs. Bennet's knowledge of the classics and Latin (256). Even Amelia and Booth only "outwardly concurred with her Sentiments" about the importance of educating women out of "Complaisance than from their real Judgment" (259).

Nowhere else do the different sides of Mrs. Bennet's character become more readily apparent than in her self-narrated life story. In order to save Amelia from perhaps being raped by the Lord, Mrs. Bennet must tell Amelia about her own experience with the man. However, when the time comes to tell Amelia about the noble Lord, rather than starting her story at the relevant point in her life, she tells Amelia almost her entire life story in order to provide some context for her later transgressions and to, as the narrator puts it, "inculcat[e] a good Opinion of herself, from recounting those Transactions where her Conduct was unexceptionable, before she came to the more dangerous and suspicious Part of her Character" (268). Despite her best intentions, the reader and even Amelia's reaction to her story is mixed.

Mrs. Bennet begins her narrative with a wicked stepmother story that details how she became alienated from her father because of her new stepmother's unreasonable and selfish dislike of her. Although our sympathy is raised by the seemingly unfair treatment Mrs. Bennet receives, "it is possible to suspect her of evasion or equivocation. An alternative story can be constructed by reinterpreting the events she relates" (Coolidge 255). The reader must decide whether the young Mrs. Bennet was "the pitiable victim of the machinations of the young widow who became her stepmother" or "the 'only

darling' of her father, fighting desperately and even viciously to drive out a rival for his love" (Coolidge 255). The reader is also presented with two possible versions of Mrs. Bennet when she recounts the rest of her life up until the present day. Mrs. Bennet tells Amelia that she was forced to live with her aunt after living with her stepmother and father becomes unbearable and how her aunt also mistreated her once they become rivals for the same man. Mrs. Bennet discusses the combative relationship between herself and her aunt and how her aunt vainly "valued herself chiefly on her Understanding" and was "extremely jealous of [Mrs. Bennet's], and hated [her] on account of [her] Learning" (284). Mrs. Bennet tells Amelia that, once she came to view her aunt as a rival for her husband-to-be's affection, her "Hatred encreased" and she detested her aunt mightily (283). Here we can choose to view Mrs. Bennet as she would want us to—as a victim of a rather unintelligent, vain woman who tries to thwart her budding relationship because she is jealous of her—or we could also see her as a "high-spirited, intensely vain young woman . . . cooped up with a boring and equally vain maiden aunt in the country, . . . [who] sees her escape in a poor young clergyman, plays her eyes upon him successfully, and soon makes sure of him" (Coolidge 255). Because the reader receives little help from the narrator and because there are no disinterested characters to collaborate or undermine the story, the reader is left uncertain about which image of Mrs. Bennet is more accurate.

Mrs. Bennet's actions and/or the characters' reactions to her in the main narrative do not help significantly to clarify the two contradictory visions of her created by her and Mrs. Ellison's stories. At times she seems like a generous friend: she tells the shameful secret of the rape she experienced in order to prevent Amelia from experiencing the same

thing. Yet, at other times, she seems manipulative and self-centered. She greatly risks Amelia's reputation when, dressed as Amelia at the masquerade, she approaches the noble Lord and asks him to secure a commission for Sergeant Atkinson, her second husband, as a favor to Amelia. Amelia is understandably appalled when she receives a letter from the Lord that indicates that Mrs. Bennet granted him some sort of favor in Amelia's name. Mrs. Bennet becomes quite angry about Amelia's reaction and tells her that she is "too great a Prude" and accuses Amelia of having "used [her] cruelly ill" (445, 447). Because of Amelia's nearly infallible moral sensibility, it is clear that the reader is also expected to be appalled at Mrs. Bennet's trickery, and in this instance, she appears to be extremely selfish.

How is the reader to judge such a multifaceted character? It would be tempting simply to accept that Fielding has created a complex character whom we must be content never to understand fully, but there is this nagging sense that this complexity of character is something that "to all appearances, [Fielding] neither desired at the outset nor welcomed when it came" (Coolidge 258). Although even the best of Fielding's characters are often flawed, they do not have what Fielding would consider serious character flaws, and there is usually a clear delineation in his fictional worlds between the "good" characters and the "bad" characters. But this simply does not seem to be the case with Mrs. Bennet, as her true character seems to be nearly impossible to ascertain.

What the reader does have that proves to be helpful in assessing Mrs. Bennet's character, however, are four embedded letters written by her. These letters provide the reader with the kind of insight into her character that Mrs. Ellison's words and Mrs.

Bennet's biography do not because the ideas in the letter are not being expressed as part of a self-interested revisionist presentation, nor have they been filtered through Mrs. Ellison, who has a vested interest in ensuring that Amelia and the others think the worst of Mrs. Bennet. The letters seem to reflect an honest representation of Mrs. Bennet and a reading of the letters does not force the reader to face two conflicting visions of the woman. Instead, the letters emphasize the best and most sympathetic aspects of Mrs. Bennet's character and life.

Mrs. Bennet's first letter goes a long way in impressing upon us the tragic circumstances she found herself in after the demise of her husband. This letter, addressed to Mrs. Ellison, reveals a frightened, desperate woman who has "no other friend on earth" but Mrs. Ellison (237). In her letter, she tells Mrs. Ellison that "ruffians" have seized her dead husband's corpse and that her son Tommy stands by her "crying for Bread, which [she] has not to give him" (237). The letter shows Mrs. Bennet to be a humble woman at her wit's end who the reader certainly must sympathize with as Amelia did when she read the letter. The letter contains no hint of the vanity or pride that seems present in her character elsewhere in the story.

The other three letters written by Mrs. Bennet emphasize her generosity of spirit and her willingness to help her friends in a meaningful way. These letters go a long way in erasing the idea that Mrs. Bennet may be self-centered, and consequently inconsiderate of others. The first letter is really nothing more than a note, sent anonymously to warn the Booths about the Lordship's plans to try to seduce Amelia. It reads:

*Beware, beware, beware*

*For I apprehend a dreadful Snare  
Is laid for virtuous Innocence,  
Under a Friend's false Pretence. (262)*

Although this letter reveals nothing new about Mrs. Bennet's circumstance or character explicitly, it serves as a testament to the strong feelings she has for Amelia and the fact that she cannot bear to see Amelia meet a fate similar to the one she faced. Although she did not perhaps anticipate Amelia discovering her as the author of the note, she still risks the revelation of her secret in sending the note, and ultimately it is the note that does prevent Amelia from having to face the Lord's unwanted advances.

Mrs. Bennet's last two letters are addressed to Amelia and demonstrate a sweetness and humbleness of character that undermine the image of Mrs. Bennet as a self-absorbed and vain woman. In the first of these letters, Mrs. Bennet joyfully writes to inform Amelia about her own husband's recovery from his illness. She thanks Amelia humbly for her help and wishes that heaven bless Amelia. The second letter is perhaps even more revelatory. In this letter, Mrs. Bennet expresses her dismay at hearing that Booth has been imprisoned: "The Surgeon of the Regiment . . . hath almost frightened me out of my Wits by a strange Story of your Husband being committed to Prison by a Justice of Peace for Forgery. For Heaven's Sake send me the Truth," she writes (525). She then goes on to ask if her husband could be of service and she promises to bring the Booths twenty pounds as soon as she wakes up in the morning. The generosity she reveals in the letters is all the more noteworthy because she, unlike some of the other less generous characters in the story, does not have much money to spare. Just as we admired

Dr. Harrison's willingness to provide tangible help to the Booths instead of mere platitudes, we must also admire Mrs. Bennet for doing the same.

The letters clearly present the more positive side of Mrs. Bennet's character, and in the end, they seem a more lasting and concrete testament of Mrs. Bennet's character than anything else in the text. Because it does not seem that Mrs. Bennet wrote the letters with the intent of fashioning a particular image of herself, as she had in her autobiographical story to Amelia, the letters offer the reader more insight into a her character than her own story does. It becomes clear that the author expects us to admire Mrs. Bennet and her letters make her fate of a happy marriage and "two fine Boys" seem just (532).

*Casanova or Lech? Captain Booth and the noble Lord's Epistolary Revelations*

The last two characters of note who pen letters that are included in the novel are Colonel James and the Noble Lord, the two characters in the novel who have the most questionable morals. Both men have had affairs and attempt to seduce Amelia, and in a novel that makes marriage the "central value in society, the model for all human relationships" and that considers adultery the "prime social and personal evil," it should be easy to condemn both men for their behaviors (Loftis 226). However, extenuating circumstances complicate the reader's perceptions of both of them. Colonel James seems to be, at least at first glance, a good and reliable friend to Booth, and much of the negative impressions the reader has of the Noble Lord comes from questionable sources: Mrs. Ellison and Mrs. Bennet. The embedded letters of both characters, in the end, however, provide the reader with a more accurate glimpse into their souls.

We first learn about Colonel James when Booth is telling Miss Mathews about the injury he received while stationed abroad. Booth describes Colonel James as “one of the best-natured Men in the World” and tells Mathews, “this worthy Man, who had a Head and Heart perfectly adequate to every Office of Friendship, stay’d with me almost Day and Night during my Illness” (114). Booth’s description of James’s conduct recommends him highly, but the reader cannot help but be a bit alarmed by Booth’s description of James’s belief system: “*Bob James* can never be supposed to act from any Motive of Virtue or Religion, since he constantly laughs at both” (114). As we discussed earlier, it is quite evident that this belief of Booth’s is not endorsed by the novel as evidenced in part by Booth’s adoption of Christianity at the end of the book. While the narrator is quick to point out that Booth, although not a Christian, is no enemy to religion, he does not step in to make similar assurances about James.

This initial nervousness about James’s moral character increases when the reader finds out that James is conducting an extramarital affair with Miss Mathews. The first real proof of James’s moral lapses comes in the form of a letter he sends to Miss Mathews in jail, a letter in which he professes his affection for her and promises to provide the bail she needs to be released from jail. He also promises to send her his chariot and includes a hundred pound bank note to help her once she leaves the jail, signing the note “your most passionate Admirer” (156). Booth believes the letter demonstrates the “excessive Respect” the writer has for Miss Mathews, but Miss Mathews dismisses the sentiments expressed in the letters by saying, “I am not therefore obliged to the Man whose Passion makes him generous” (157). Once we learn that the

generous writer is in fact a married man who is pursuing Miss Mathews for sexual pleasure, we tend to agree with Mathews and view the sentiments expressed in the letter a bit more darkly. Although we do not know that James is the author of the letter when we first read it, as it is signed “Damon,” once the reader becomes aware that James penned the letter, it becomes a lasting testament to his questionable moral character.

Even the knowledge that he is committing this act, however, does not completely erase in the reader’s mind all that he seems to do for the Booths: the kindness, advice, and good company he has provided them. After all, the hero of the novel, Booth, also fell prey to Miss Mathews’ charm. Additionally, the narrator and Dr. Harrison, the author’s two stand-ins, seem to approve of James’s actions. The narrator, just pages after the scene in which Dr. Harrison’s letter condemning adultery is read (and we are consequently reminded of James’s moral frailty), laments the lack of generosity that he sees in society, but praises Col. James for giving Booth money, and he wishes that more men would share James’s “benign Disposition” (170).

Even when James turns his attentions to Amelia, the reader is still hesitant to condemn him outright. As Alter explains, “The inferential method of presenting character leaves us room to wonder whether a man may not, after all, be an admirable, honestly disinterested friend, until he takes too close a look at the fair figure of his wife’s friend” (157). Because the narrator does not offer us any guidance and because James seems to have so many other redeeming qualities, we are able to let ourselves believe that it is possible that James is a good man who simply got swept away by the passion that he feels for his friend’s wife and that he means no injury to Booth or his wife.

All of these doubts and sympathetic feelings are completely erased, however, by the second embedded letter penned by James in the novel. This letter, which was ostensibly sent to Booth, although opened by Amelia, reveals the true corruption of James's character and clarifies in the mind of the reader what he should feel about James. The letter, which greatly agitates Amelia, berates Booth for meeting alone with Miss Mathews and asks Booth to meet James in Hyde Park the following day for a duel. James then ends the letter with the following reproof: "You will forgive me reminding you once more how inexcusable this Behaviour is in you who are possessed in your own Wife of the most inestimable Jewel" (490). We later learn that James sent the letter to Booth's home instead of Miss Mathews's because he hoped Amelia would read it, "with a Prospect of injuring *Booth* in the Affection and Esteem of *Amelia*, and of recommending himself somewhat to her by appearing in the Light of her Champion; for which Purpose he added that Compliment to *Amelia* in his Letter" (495). It becomes clear that James is not above gross manipulation and hurting his dear friend Booth. The letter reveals James's true character and the reader starts to realize that "the gold he showers on Booth is intended to buy his way to Amelia's bed." (Alter 156). We begin to reevaluate our perceptions of much of James's past kindness, and we are once again reminded that there is no excuse for adultery in the fictional world of *Amelia*.

Like Colonel James, the noble Lord, who remains nameless throughout the novel, first appears to be a kind and generous friend to the Booths who just happens to have a reputation as something of a Casanova. Although Colonel James warns that "The Peer loves the Ladies, I believe, as well as ever *Mark Antony* did; and it is not his Fault, if he

hath not spent as much upon them. If he once fixes his Eye upon a Woman, he will stick at nothing to get her," the reader is not thoroughly convinced that the Lord's friendship with the Booths and the favors he bestows on them are based solely on his desire to get Amelia into bed (227). Colonel James himself is of questionable morals and readers cannot feel confident that their assessment of the situation is accurate. Also, the Lord appears to act as a perfect gentleman to Amelia and to be working hard to secure employment for Booth. Amelia, in fact, is quite taken by the Lord because

in short, he treated *Amelia* with the greatest Distance, and at the same time with the most profound and awful Respect; his Conversation was so general, so lively, and so obliging, that *Amelia*, when she added to his Agreeableness the Obligations she had to him for his Friendship to *Booth*, was certainly as much pleased with his Lordship, as any virtuous Woman can possibly be with any Man, besides her own Husband. (216-217).

This initial pleasant portrait of the noble Lord is tarnished, however, by Mrs. Bennet's revelations about the mistreatment she suffers at the peer's hands and Mrs. Bennet's fear that he plans to treat Amelia in the same way. Certainly some of the events of the novel lend credence to Mrs. Bennet's version of her sexual past with the Lord and to her fears: the Lord gained access to Amelia through Mrs. Ellison, just as he had gained access to Mrs. Bennet; he is responsible for the invitation to the masquerade that Mrs. Ellison gives Amelia, just as he was the invitation given to Mrs. Bennet; and most damningly, the Lord secures Amelia's affections by paying attention to her children, just as he had paid attention to Mrs. Bennet's son Charly. Nevertheless, the reader has no

definitive proof of the noble Lord's intentions from a completely reliable source until we read the embedded letter he sends to Amelia.

In this letter, it becomes readily apparent that the noble Lord is without a doubt the "ubiquitous spirit of corruption of a degenerate aristocracy" (Alter 152). Just as James's letters reveal his true character, the noble Lord's letter leaves the reader with no question about the validity of Mrs. Bennet's story and confirms his immoral intentions for Amelia. In it he tells Amelia, "no Language hath the Words of Devotion strong enough to tell you with what Truth, what Anguish, what Zeal, what Adoration I love you" (443). Despite his flowery declarations of love, it is clear to the reader that the Lord is intent on seducing Amelia, just as James had suggested he might be. He goes so far as to request a meeting with Amelia, although he claims he would "rather die than offend [her delicacy]," so she has nothing at all to fear from him (443). His blatant angling for an assignation is appalling given Amelia's virtue and the condemnation of adultery that permeates the entire text. Once again, an embedded letter serves as "proof" for the reader of a character's true moral character.

### *Conclusion*

The new narrative persona Fielding adopted in *Amelia* proved to be not as consistent or reliable as the narrative personas in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* primarily because of Fielding's decision to rely more on dramatic narration than authorial narration. Unlike the narrators in his earlier works, the narrator of *Amelia* inspires little confidence in the reader with his disconcerting switches between neutral and editorial commentary and limited and full omniscience, and he leaves readers quite free to come to

their own opinions about the characters and events of the novel. This freedom, however, does not come without a price—without the guidance of the narrator, it is often difficult to assess the characters of the novel.

While one cannot deny that Fielding has drawn some fairly complex characters who defy easy classification, it is also clear from the didactic purpose of the novel, the novel's neat ending in which Fielding clearly punishes and rewards the characters, and Fielding's own dismay about readers misjudging his characters, that he wished for readers to walk away from the novel with a clear impression of the characters as either being worthy of our admiration or not. In the absence of an omnipresent, authoritative voice that expresses Fielding's views, the embedded letter goes a long way in helping the reader determine whether Booth is only a slightly flawed man or a reprobate, whether Miss Mathews is an abused victim or an immoral temptress, whether Mrs. Bennet is a vain bluestocking or a good friend, and finally, whether Captain James and the Lord are harmless Casanova or moral degenerates.

Although, or perhaps because, Fielding's new narrative persona makes *Amelia* far more polyphonic than his earlier works, the embedded letters in *Amelia* serves the exact opposite purpose as they did in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*; instead of creating polyphony, they make the work more monologic by expressing authorial intent. It seems that Fielding was uncomfortable with giving his characters or his reader absolute freedom, and he turned to the embedded letter as a way to infuse his own voice and ideology into the text and to clarify for the reader the sometimes ambiguous portraits the characters draw of themselves and others. Through the letters of Dr. Harrison, who one

may view as a spokesperson for Fielding, Fielding is able to include in the text the kind of explicit moralizing that was previously provided by the narrators of his novels. Dr. Harrison's letters provide the reader with clear explanations of the moral themes the novel is exploring. The letters of Booth, Miss Mathews, Mrs. Bennet, Colonel James, and the noble Lord help the reader to understand how they are ultimately to judge these characters.

## Conclusion

The notion that the narrator is the sole voice of authority in Fielding's novels and that he serves as a stand-in for Fielding, expressing accurately and *completely* Fielding's own ideology and moral convictions, has stubbornly persisted. Despite the widely accepted practice in literary studies of avoiding the conflation of author and narrator, critics have consistently treated Fielding's narrators as spokesmen for the novelist, and this tendency to view the narrator and Fielding as one and the same frequently has led to an oversimplification of Fielding's own beliefs and the beliefs and ideas expressed in the novels. When we insist on hearing only the voice of the narrator, Fielding's works appear dogmatic and monological and seem to offer the reader only a very narrow perspective on the world.

As discussed earlier in this study, it is certainly understandable that critics tend to see Fielding's works as monological, as the narrators (of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, at least) are controlling figures who present authoritative and fixed views of the fictional events they narrate. These figures, with their direct addresses to the readers and their frequent insistence on a particular way of looking at the world, push and prod readers to arrive at a fixed set of conclusions about the characters and their actions. However, as this study has indicated, the narrators are not the only voices of authority in Fielding's novels nor do they accurately represent the totality of Fielding's artistic vision and moral philosophy.

By applying Mikhail Bakhtin's theories to Fielding's use of the embedded letter, we discover that Fielding's texts do not simply present a static and rigidly defined world,

the tenets of which the reader is encouraged to accept unthinkingly. Instead, following in the footsteps of amatory novelists, albeit unwillingly or perhaps unknowingly, Fielding uses embedded letters to bring opposing ideologies and points of view into the works in a way that gives them authority and validity. By expressing these different voices through an inserted genre, which maintains its own integrity and independence even when made part of a larger work, Fielding ensures that the voices of these letters are not subsumed by other voices in the text; instead they stand alongside them, offering a different, although equally valid, perspective.

In *Joseph Andrews*, the embedded letters allow the reader to view Joseph as an independent character with his own voice, rather than a rhetorical puppet of the narrator/author. Joseph's letters challenge the narrator's characterization of him and demonstrate that he is a far less foolish figure than the narrator would have you believe. The letters in *Joseph Andrews* also bring into the text the "voice" of sentimental fiction, a voice that represents a different literary aesthetic and set of values than those espoused by the narrator. The letters in *Tom Jones* similarly create polyphony by bringing into the text the voices of two very different epistolary traditions—the epistolary novel and the letter-writing manual—and voices that represent a different class consciousness and moral philosophy than the narrator's.

In *Amelia*, Fielding's use of the letter is somewhat different because of the radically different narrative persona he adopts in this, his last novel. The narrator in *Amelia*, unlike the narrators in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, lacks authority and presence in the novel; consequently, the text is inherently more polyphonic than its

predecessors. In this work, Fielding again uses the letters to bring different voices into the novel, but here the voice he is bringing to the text is his own. The letters, then, serve as the more monologic element of the text as they offer the kind of interpretive guidance that the narrators of the previous novels did.

Fielding himself held many complex and sometimes contradictory political, social, and philosophical views, and this study has sought to remind readers of this by exposing the error many critics make in assuming that the rather straightforward and unambiguous ideology of the narrator must represent completely Fielding's own ideology. Although Fielding's novels are not polyphonic in a strict Bakhtinian sense, as the reader of his novels most often comes to the conclusions advocated by the narrator in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* and the letters in *Amelia*, his works contain multiple authoritative voices making them far less monologic than many critics believe. Fielding, through the embedded letter, infuses his novel with voices that challenge and complicate the narrator's straightforward moral philosophy, in the case of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, or add his own voice to the many voices of the characters in *Amelia*. The dialogic interplay of the narrator's voice and the voices of the letters create a far more complex and nuanced consideration of the various social, political, and philosophical topics the novels tackle than previously thought.

This study serves as a foundation for the further exploration of relationships between embedded letters and/or other inserted genres and narrative voice in writers who follow Fielding. A further investigation of the use of embedded letter in the novels, particularly in the work of Jane Austen whose novels have been consistently compared to

Fielding's, would help to invalidate further the notion that the embedded letter is merely a device of convenience and could bring a new perspective to discussions of narrative voice.

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