

Novel Conversations, 1740-1817

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2017

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines how and why eighteenth-century novelists came to represent people interacting in ways that registered as lively and real. Speech had long been crucial in literary genres as varied as drama, philosophical dialogue, romance and narrative poetry; but techniques for representing speech would proliferate in the eighteenth century as writers gave conversation a new centrality in the novel, seeking to capture the *manner* of speech over and above its basic matter. “Novel Conversations” explores this literary-historical development with chapters on four writers who were especially interested in the technical challenge of recording vocal effects: Samuel Richardson, James Boswell, Frances Burney and Jane Austen. They developed a set of tools for rendering in prose the auditory and social nuances of conversation, including tone and emphasis, pacing and pausing, gesture and movement. I argue that their experiments resulted in a new “transcriptional realism” in the novel. This term describes the range of techniques used to craft dialogue that faithfully approximates the features of real speech, while remaining meaningful and effectual as an element of prose narrative.

In developing methods to this end, eighteenth-century writers borrowed techniques from other genres, combined them, and invented new ones. One rich source was life writing, the broad category of documentary prose genres that both absorbed and influenced the novel form in its early stages. Writers also sought complementary techniques in drama, whose stage directions, tonal notations and cues about who is speaking to whom at what point in time could be readily adapted for prose narrative. The task at hand was to calibrate two often opposing styles: the empirically driven, transcriptional mode of life writing and the more overtly stylized mode of

drama. Writers did so by developing two resources within the novel form: the narrator, who occupies a flexible platform from which to elaborate conversational dynamics with description; and print itself, with all of its graphic and spatial possibilities for shaping speech on the page, including accidentals, line breaks, and typography. What are in one sense formalist readings are complemented by a careful attention to the materiality of the manuscript page and the printed page. In approaching my primary authors' texts from a technical perspective, I do justice to their experimental efforts to use writing as a technology for capturing voice: a recording device *avant la lettre*. This approach in turn gives me critical purchase to analyze the effect that this technology serves: detailed representations of characters operating in a lively, familiar social world.

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List of Charts, Graphs, Illustrations

1. Facsimile excerpt from page 60 of Eliza Haywood's *Love in excess; or the fatal enquiry, a novel. Part the second*. By Mrs. Haywood. London: printed for W. Chetwood, at Cato's-Head, under Tom's Coffee-House, in Russel-Street, Covent Garden, and sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, [1719?].
2. Facsimile excerpt from page 132 of Daniel Defoe's *The fortunes and misfortunes of the famous Moll Flanders, &c. Who was born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest, and died a Penitent, Written from her own memorandums*. London: printed for, and sold by W. Chetwood, at Cato's-Head, in Russel-Street, Covent-Garden; and T. Edling, at the Prince's-Arms over-against Exerter-Change in the Strand, MDCCXXI. [1721] [1722].
3. Facsimile excerpt from volume I, page 54 of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: or, virtue rewarded. In a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel, to her parents. Now first Published In order to cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the youth of both sexes. In two volumes. The fifth edition. To which are prefixed, extracts from several curious letters written to the editor on the subject...* London: printed for C. Rivington, in St. Paul's Church-Yard; and J. Osborn, in Pater-Noster Row, MDCCXLI. [1741].
4. Facsimile excerpt from page 343 of Charles Dickens's *The Posthumous papers of the Pickwick Club*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1837.
5. Facsimile excerpt from volume I, page 144 of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa. Or, the history of a young lady: comprehending the most important concerns of private life. And particularly shewing, The Distresses that may attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, In Relation to Marriage. Published by the editor of Pamela*. London: printed for S. Richardson: and sold by A. Millar, over-against Catharine-Street in the Strand: J. and Ja. Rivington, in St. Paul's Church-Yard: John Osborn, in Pater-Noster Row; and by J. Leake, at Bath, M.DCC.XLVIII. [1748].
6. Facsimile excerpt from volume II, page 205 of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. London: [1748]. See full citation above.
7. Facsimile excerpt from page 49 of John Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite: or, the Earl of Essex. A Tragedy*. London: Printed for W. Feales; A. Bettesworth; F. Clay, R. Wellington, C. Corbett and J. Brindley, 1735.
8. Facsimile of page 144 of Jane Austen's *Volume The First (1787-93)*, MS, Bodleian Library, Oxford. In *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*.

Acknowledgements

I owe my biggest thanks to Jenny Davidson for encouraging me from the beginning to follow my own critical instincts, for training me to pursue them ambitiously yet responsibly, and for devoting her time and intellectual support so generously to this work and to me. Nick Dames and Erik Gray were likewise unfailingly generous in offering their time, insights and challenging questions to support a project whose scope slightly precedes their own periods of study. I am deeply grateful to my committee for all of this, and for their genuine attention and kindness since I started my PhD in 2010.

Conversations with Anahid Nersessian about the prospectus and first chapter were foundational to my thinking about this topic, and she has remained a source of counsel and encouragement since her move to UCLA. Dustin Stewart has been an expert outside reader, a pillar of support and a good friend since his arrival at Columbia. I can trace my intellectual interest in the topic back to a lunch date with Claudia Johnson during my preparation for oral exams, when we talked about the complex operation of Elizabeth and Darcy's exchanges in *Pride and Prejudice*; and I can trace my methodological interest in the visual page (both in print and in manuscript) back to the superb training in textual editing I received from Peter Sabor at the Burney Centre at McGill University. I'm exceedingly grateful to him, as well as to Robert De Maria and Edward Mendelson, for championing me in various ways through this early stage of my career. My thanks extend to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the doctoral fellowship that funded the first four years of my graduate work.

A reading group formed by Arden Hegele, Mike Paulson, Josh Swidzinski and myself—jokingly dubbed TMS, The Morningside School—was the source of much needed camaraderie, commiseration, and helpful editorial feedback on my second and third chapters. I'm grateful to

these three colleagues for their friendship and sincere support, as well as to Columbia's eighteenth-century colloquium for commenting on my first chapter and part of my introduction. In the wider world of eighteenth-century studies, Hilary Havens, Andrew Bricker, Stephanie De Gooyer and Jess Kaiser have generously shared professional wisdom and helped me learn the ropes. I've also had the good fortune to find friendship in a number of kind, smart people outside my field during these years at Columbia. I'm grateful to Amanda Lowe, Carina del Valle Schorske, Ben Barasch, Zach Roberts, and Atefeh Akbari for stimulating conversation, laughter and happy memories.

In the years it took me to complete this degree, a home away from home coalesced for me in New York. I owe my happiness here to many already named, but a few more come to mind: Kate Trebuss has been a loyal pal, and a partner in running and conversation alike; Ryder Kessler has been not only a friend but also a cheerleader, encouraging me in all my writing endeavours, both scholarly and creative; and Puneet Sabharwal has been a caring neighbour and daily provider of chai and sympathy. Chrissy Munroe was my family in New York before she moved back to Canada, and remains a constant source of laughter and unconditional support.

With my best friend Louise and my beloved sister Meg, I've found profound comfort and the easiest companionship the whole way through. I owe absolutely everything to my mother, Marg Doherty, who has always told me I have a way with words, and to my father, Ian Gemmill, who has taken every opportunity to delight in them with me. To these four people I am more grateful than I can say.

Finally, to Kareem, who makes everything better: there is no one whose intellectual respect I am more proud to have, or whose support over the past four years—with every page, and every day—has made more of a difference to me.

Dedication

For my parents,

Marg Doherty and Ian Gemmill

Introduction

This project examines how eighteenth-century British writers came to represent speech and conversation in prose narrative, specifically in novels and life writing. As readers of modern literature—even as readers of nineteenth- or twentieth-century literature—it is easy to take for granted that certain conventions for mapping speech on the page were always in place. Using line breaks to indicate new speakers, for example, or attributing speech with the narrative tags “she said” and “he said,” can seem like a given. But in reading novels written in the eighteenth century—the period during which the genre exploded in popularity—one can see that techniques for reporting direct speech were in fact highly variable and underwent significant innovation during this phase in literary history.

Collectively, the four chapters of this dissertation show how these techniques emerged over the course of the eighteenth century as the result of wide-ranging experimentation by a group of writers who wanted to figure out how to use text as a technology for reproducing speech. The earliest known device for recording sound would not be patented until 1857, seventeen years after the death of Frances Burney, the latest living author surveyed here. That the phonograph was ultimately invented by a printer, bookseller and theorist of shorthand, Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville, evinces one of the main premises of this project: prior to sound recording technology, it was those most closely engaged with the literary page who understood that conversation was richly worth representing and that the written word was the best medium available for doing so.¹ Well before the advent of Scott’s invention, the highly

¹ As science historians Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman note, “Scott was a typographer who became interested in the preservation of speech *written* in its own natural language, rather than in the artificially constructed characters that appear on a printed page. A manifest expression of his passion may be seen in his 1849 book *Histoire de la sténographie*, which traced the development of conventions for shorthand and bespoke his initial efforts to create a precise and universal inscription of

experimental and creative attempts of eighteenth-century writers to record conversation with paper and ink evolved into a standardized and self-consciously stylized set of conventions for crafting scenes of dialogue in the novel. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a narrative apparatus for configuring directly reported speech alongside a selection of tonal and gestural information had coalesced and become so widespread that writers who did not care to experiment explicitly with speech representation did not have to do so.

A few examples from early eighteenth-century English novels show just how much variation there was among techniques for reporting speech in this phase of literary history. In considering representations of conversation in prose, there are a number of categories of information to attend to—for instance, one might look at the stylistic composition of the speech itself, or at surrounding notations of vocal tone and bodily movements. Individual chapters will address each of these in time, but by way of introduction I will consider the most basic function that all speech representations need to achieve, which is to interpolate the quoted words into the narrative proper. This involves integrating speech into the grammar of the narrative voice, signalling where it begins and ends, and who is saying it. As modern readers, we might say that line breaks, quotation marks and speech tags are the standard trio of techniques for doing so—but what the following examples demonstrate is that early English novelists had all kinds of ideas regarding how this might be done.

I offer these conversational excerpts in facsimile (of early editions, and of first editions whenever possible) to preserve their original graphic features and the texture of the reading experiences they produce, a methodological choice I will elaborate on hereafter. This first example is drawn from the popular novelist Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess; or, the*

speech sounds.” See Hankins and Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 133-34.

Fatal Inquiry, published in 1719. Here the character Melantha, a coquette, begins her efforts to seduce Count d'Elmont:

MELANTHA, as soon as she saw the COUNT, put on an Air of Surprize, as if it were but by Chance, that she was come into his walk, and Laughing with a visible Affection, blefs me! You here, my Lord! (said she) I vow this has the look of Allignation, but I hope you will not be so vain as to believe I came on purpose to feek you.

Haywood, *Love in Excess*, 1719 (figure 1).

One of the most interesting features of this passage, to my mind, is that there is no explicit signal to readers that speech is beginning. Haywood disregards the grammar of the sentence in order to integrate Melantha's speech within it. The narrator's description of her speaking manner—"and Laughing with a visible Affection"²—butts up rather abruptly against her opening exclamation—"bless me!"—and it is only a few phrases later that a speech tag appears, intervening within parentheses, to confirm that speech is indeed being reported. The contrast between this method of introducing and integrating speech and that of a modern writer is quite striking.

A second example—from Daniel Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*, published three years later in 1722—shows a different method altogether for integrating and attributing speech. Here the cunning but likable narrator Moll resists her landlady's suggestion that a gentleman friend has left her short on cash:

² It bears noting that the word "affection" is used here in the sense of "affectation."

Now I could by no means like her Project; I thought it look'd too much like prompting him; which indeed he did not want, and I saw clearly that I should lose nothing by being backward to ask, so I took her up short; I can't imagine why he should say so to you, *said I*, for I assure you he brought me all the Money I sent him for, and here it is *said I*, (pulling out my Purse with about 12 Guineas in it) and added, I intend you shall have most of it by and by.

Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 1722 (figure 2).

This passage demonstrates a method of attributing speech that is quite typical of Defoe: he actually attributes the same utterance three times—with two “*said I*’s in italics, and one “added”—a practice that I’ve come to call “reiterative tagging.” This technique works dually: first, the repeated speech tags help to anchor the written words in a distinctly colloquial and conversational context; and also, more importantly, they clarify on a rolling basis who is speaking in long unbroken stretches of text on the page—a function that will later be rendered largely vestigial by the use of line breaks to introduce new speakers. Defoe’s is one of a number of different solutions that writers of this period devised for the problem of distinguishing voices from each other in a paragraph with multiple utterances.

In a final example from Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded*, published almost two decades after *Moll Flanders* in 1741, there is a slightly different solution for distinguishing multiple voices within a large swath of prose. Here, Pamela’s employer, Mr. B., is chastising her for staying too long in his house:

Pamela! said he, How long are *you* to stay here?—Only, please your Honour, said I, till I have done the Waistcoat; and it is almost finished.---You might, says he, (very roughly indeed) have finished that long enough ago, I should have thought.

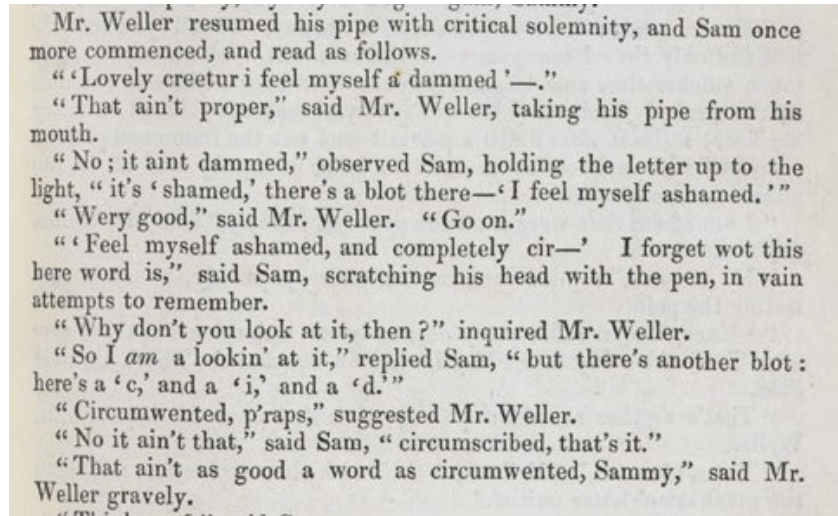
Richardson, *Pamela*, 1741 (figure 3).

Richardson uses the dash, in a manner similar to how we use modern quotation marks.

Specifically, dashes and hyphens serve an important demarcating function, spatially reflecting that fleeting moment of silence as one speaker cedes the floor to another, thus graphically helping to mark out for readers the different dimensions of the conversation being represented.

As these examples demonstrate, during this period in the history of the English novel, there really was no absolute standard dictating how direct speech should be organized on the page. Rather, what we see in all three writers is a shared sense that certain basic functions need to be achieved when crafting conversation in prose: characters' words must be integrated with the narrator's voice grammatically; they also need to be distinguished from the narrator's voice, and from one another's; and readers require some clarifying cues regarding who says what when, and to whom. In general, this process tends to involve some type of speech tag, variously positioned, as well as diverse uses of typography—uses that capitalize on the power of typography to separate units of text spatially and to distinguish them from each other through visual difference, as in Defoe's use of italics to signal transitions between Moll's voice as a character and her voice as a narrator. Notwithstanding these parameters, there remains a considerable degree of flexibility regarding what techniques can be mobilized—and *how*—to build a supporting apparatus for representations of verbal exchange.

Jumping ahead now, by nearly 100 years, to the year 1837: here is a page from the first book edition of Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (it first appeared as a print serial), which depicts the character Sam Weller trying to read a letter written to a young lady aloud to his father. Even a cursory glance at the facsimile confirms how much more familiar this conversation looks on the page to a modern reader:



Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with critical solemnity, and Sam once more commenced, and read as follows.
“‘Lovely creetur i feel myself a dammed ’—.”
“That ain’t proper,” said Mr. Weller, taking his pipe from his mouth.
“No; it aint dammed,” observed Sam, holding the letter up to the light, “it’s ‘shamed,’ there’s a blot there—‘I feel myself ashamed.’”
“Wery good,” said Mr. Weller. “Go on.”
“‘Feel myself ashamed, and completely cir—’ I forget wot this here word is,” said Sam, scratching his head with the pen, in vain attempts to remember.
“Why don’t you look at it, then?” inquired Mr. Weller.
“So I *am* a lookin’ at it,” replied Sam, “but there’s another blot: here’s a ‘c,’ and a ‘i,’ and a ‘d.’”
“Circumwented, p’raps,” suggested Mr. Weller.
“No it ain’t that,” said Sam, “circumscribed, that’s it.”
“That ain’t as good a word as circumwented, Sammy,” said Mr. Weller gravely.

Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 1837 (figure 4).

The techniques Dickens uses to build this scene are entirely consistent with conventions still regularly used in contemporary fiction. For instance: directly reported speech is separated from narration with quotation marks and commas; transitions between interlocutors are clearly signalled with line breaks; speech tags appear periodically for further clarification, either within or after utterances, and there is a whole range of communication verbs—not only the standard “said,” but also verbs that add some tonal specificity to speech, including “suggested” and “inquired.” Also, the narrator periodically chimes in with editorializing details about speakers’ tone (as in the adverbial modifier, “said Mr Weller *gravely*”), and gesture (as in Sam’s “scratching his head with the pen”). There is also, of course, Dickens’s

assiduous attention to detail in transcribing the specificities of Cockney rhythm and pronunciation.

With respect to its typographical features, then, as well as its techniques of narration, this scene is structured with all of the trappings we expect from—or associate with—conversation in the pages of a novel. Although the works of Dickens aren't central to my argument, I use this excerpt to illustrate that by the time he was writing, enough consensus had been built around this set of tools that writers could adopt them wholesale to craft their novels' conversations without having to think critically about how they work.

This brief survey gives an idea of the kind of technical experiments this work will address. But more pressingly, implicit in this constellation of examples is an important question: how might we account for the change over time in methods for representing speech in the novel—between the highly varied techniques of the eighteenth century, and the solidified conventions of the nineteenth, which are still used and recognized in fiction today?

“Novel Conversations” takes this question as a beginning premise. It considers how conversation works in the novel—specifically, by describing the birth and development of the set of conventions exemplified in Dickens's text—conventions that are now so familiar to us that they've become virtually invisible. I argue that these conventions grew out of the experiments of a group of writers who were invested in figuring out how to use text as a tool or technology for representing the real features of everyday speech. This task involved not only representing the words characters say, but also the more challenging problem of representing features of conversation that might not seem to have a natural place on paper because they are either acoustic or embodied. When it comes to conversation in the novel, words stand in for themselves—there's a one-to-one correspondence in that aspect of the

representation. But how should a prose writer notate extra-lexical features of speech such as pausing, interrupting, or gesture? Or mark auditory nuances that overlay speech with additional meaning, such as accent, tone and cadence?

The eighteenth-century writers surveyed here—Samuel Richardson, James Boswell, Frances Burney and Jane Austen—were all deeply interested in solving these technical problems, and all for different reasons. Some of their experiments led to conventions that would stick—while others would fall away. “Novel Conversations” collects and describes the variety of techniques they used under the central term “transcriptional realism.”

I coin the term “transcriptional realism” to encompass the range of compositional tools that writers used to manage the unusual status of speech in literary representation. To clarify how speech works in the context of theories of mimesis and realist representation, Gérard Genette’s narratological work *Figures of Literary Discourse* is especially helpful. Genette raises the question of mimesis in speech only briefly, when describing literature’s strange ability to produce the illusion of varying degrees of mediation. Literary narrative has two different modes of representation, he explains: first, the verbal representation of non-verbal events—or, straight narration—and second, the verbal representation of verbal events—or, quoted speech. While straight narration is essentially interpretive, in the sense that it necessarily curates and inflects the entities that it represents, quoted speech seems to have a unique status in literature given its apparent ability to represent itself “perfectly”—by letting spoken words stand in for themselves. Here is the vivid example Genette reaches for to illustrate his point: seeing direct speech in text feels “as if a seventeenth-century Dutch painter, anticipating certain modern methods, had placed in the middle of a still life, not the

painting of an oyster shell, but a real oyster shell.”³ When it comes to reporting speech within narrative, literature has the capacity to appear almost like mixed media—and Genette is inviting us to recognize the strangeness of this effect. In reality, though, as he later concludes, “mimesis *is* diegesis.” In other words, the apparent immediacy of direct speech is of course just as manufactured as narration is.

As Genette’s point implies, the fact that literature and speech both happen to be verbal media does not *de facto* help writers who might aspire to produce a perfect copy of conversation in their texts. Conversation is a complex discourse in itself, constituted not just by speech but also by the expressions and relations of the voice and body. Another way to frame this idea is to say that in literature, mere transcription of speech does not amount to meaningful realistic representation. Just think about how different the transcript of a casual real-life conversation would be—cluttered with filler words and run-on sentences—from a conversation you’d see in a novel, which is not only aesthetically tidier, but which also represents a very limited selection—some might even say an arbitrary selection—of the features of speech. In this vein, Brian McHale identifies a fallacy in much of the narratological literature about speech representation, namely the mistaken idea that “mimesis in the [Platonic] sense of speaking for the character should correlate with mimesis in the sense of faithfulness of reproduction—that the more direct the representation [is], the more realistic or life-like it would be.”⁴

Through their technical experimentation, eighteenth-century writers were not only discovering the representational possibilities inherent in transcription as a stylistic mode, but

³ Gérard Genette, “Frontiers of Narrative,” *Figures of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 131.

⁴ Brian McHale, “Speech Representation,” in *the living handbook of narratology*, eds. Peter Hühn et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University), accessed 26 June 2016. URL = <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/>

also learning how and where this mode hits its limits. To circle back, then, to my definition of “transcriptional realism”: I use the term to describe the range of stylistic and compositional techniques eighteenth-century writers developed to approximate the texture of speech as it is heard and as it might be transcribed verbatim, while artfully planting relevant supplementary information in and around it. This process involves balancing two kinds of mimetic illusion: first, the illusion that what each character “really” said is being faithfully reported, characterized by a style of empirical accuracy; and second, the illusion that the interaction as a whole is an authentic reproduction of what we take to be real-world conversation, characterized by a style of aesthetic selection.

As the term “transcriptional realism” itself suggests, this project contains a vital piece in the history of realism. But this piece has been missing until now: speech and conversation have been almost entirely neglected in critical debates about realism. Typically, realism has been thought of as an effect either of plot or visual description. On one hand, Peter Brooks and Leo Bersani have argued that realism is an effect of plots governed by the logic of cause and effect,⁵ while on the other hand Erich Auerbach, Roland Barthes and Ian Watt have argued it is the result of translating details of the material world into text. As this dissertation is more closely aligned with the second group of theorists—given its focus on description (and inscription) of voices on the page—I will briefly draw out their arguments. Barthes argues in “L’Effet de Réel” (1968) that the world of a given novel⁶ is made more real by the visual details described therein—details that may at first seem superfluous but which, taken

⁵ I’m referring here to Brooks’s *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1984) and in Bersani’s *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976).

⁶ It bears noting that Barthes’s canon of choice is nineteenth-century French fiction.

together, render the environment vivid and authentic.⁷ Auerbach takes a slightly different approach in discussing Balzac's "atmospheric realism," a descriptive process by which "every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men."⁸ We might find room to account for speech in one of the subjective categories listed here—"character," certainly, or even "activities"—but Auerbach himself does not do so. Ian Watt similarly leaves speech under-theorized in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Although he follows Auerbach and anticipates Barthes in privileging visual description, he also attends to some of the other formal features that contribute to realism in his view, including slower narrative temporality, ordinary nomenclature, and the individuation of characters.⁹ This last item in the list surely involves speech and conversation, but Watt and indeed all of these theorists tend to exclude speaking characters as a category of realist analysis: they fail to account for the ways in which representations of social interaction can contribute to impressions of what we take to be the real world. This consistent neglect of dialogue in the critical literature on realism suggests that it is taken for granted as an uncomplicated fact—a narrative feature that is drawn from drama and therefore vestigial, rather than ripe for technical innovation in a realist vein or otherwise. One of the broader questions my project poses is: where does dialogue and the representation of conversation fit

⁷ See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 141-48.

⁸ See Erich Auerbach, "In the Hôtel de la Mole," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003, c.1953), 473.

⁹ See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2001).

into these theoretical accounts? “Novel Conversations” is one of the first studies to address this fundamental part of the history of realism and, relatedly, the history of the novel.

The realism that this dissertation describes is one of craft and technique more so than of content. In this respect it does follow Watt—specifically, in his concern with the *how* of representation over and above the *what*. Here Monika Fludernik helpfully paraphrases the operation of Wattian realism:

the trick is to make the world of the novel seem like part of the real world and not, as is generally claimed, to depict the real world. Instead of imitating reality, realistic novels refer to aspects of reality which are already familiar to readers; these are then perceived as part of a conceptual frame and ultimately integrated into the world the readers know.¹⁰

I am similarly interested in writers’ rendering of closely observed details to produce fuller (if not full) representations in text. The details I examine, however—about conversing characters who are speaking, moving and emoting in relation to each other—belong to a different category than Watt or other theorists have focused on. Granular details about characters’ facial expressions, their accents or even their silence can effectively cue readers’ impressions to a familiar, recognizable social world and invite them to fill it out imaginatively. Although the technical experiments of writers crafting novel conversations often differ widely, they tend towards the same general result: representations of speech that are not only lively but also clear to navigate, springing to life in the reader’s imagining ear because of their careful integration of verbal, tonal and gestural information. The main challenge involved was to integrate the acoustic and bodily dynamics of conversation with quoted speech within the linear medium of prose—a process that involves not simply figuring out how to represent and organize extra-lexical speech features, but also, and perhaps more interestingly, selecting

¹⁰ Monika Fludernik, “Realism, Illusionism and Metafiction,” in *An Introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 55.

which ones should be included in the first place in order to create a meaningful impression of social interaction. My account of transcriptional realism considers questions such as: what aspects of speech get included? How are they rendered visually and lexically, how are they positioned in relation to each other? And in what ways do the what and the how of speech representation shape the kinds of meaning writers produce in their scenes of conversation?

In developing their respective answers to these technical questions, writers borrowed techniques from other genres, combined them, and invented new ones. One rich source was life writing, the broad category of documentary prose genres that both absorbed and influenced the novel form in its early stages. They also sought complementary techniques in drama, whose stage directions, directional and temporal cues (about who is speaking to whom and when), and tonal notations could be readily adapted for prose narrative. Often, writers can be observed reconciling these two opposing styles—the empirically driven, transcriptional mode of life writing and the more overtly stylized mode of drama. They did so by developing several different resources within the novel form: on one hand, the narrator, who occupies a flexible platform from which to elaborate conversational dynamics with description; on the other, print itself, with all of its graphic and spatial possibilities for shaping speech on the page, including punctuation, line breaks, and typography.

In this vein, with regard to my methodology, what are in one sense formalist readings are concretized by a careful attention to the materiality of the printed page and the manuscript page. In fact, this emphasis on composition and the visual page permits a slight retreat from the term “form,” which has recently been the subject of much conflicting critical definition

and whose efficacy as a category of analysis has come under some scrutiny.¹¹ In a recent essay titled “How To Do Things With Tunes,” which considers how the intonational profile of words lends them meaning, Simon Jarvis swaps the term “form” for “prose rhythm” and explicitly challenges readers to think about whether the switch impoverishes his analysis.¹² I follow Jarvis’s lead in actively choosing more specific terms to describe the object and mode of my critical attention, reading *technique* and *convention* from the broader perspective of craft. My mode of proceeding is thus taxonomic and descriptive, observing writers’ compositional choices, grouping them and discussing their respective impacts on textual interpretation.

In approaching my primary authors’ works (both published and unpublished) from a technical perspective, I also aim to do justice to their experimental efforts to use writing as a technology for capturing voices in conversation: a recording device *avant la lettre*. I use the word technology not simply to refer to paper, ink, pen and the printing press, but also to the novel itself. The eighteenth-century novel brings together two representational impulses that were not only culturally pressing in this period but also mutually interested and correlated: on one hand, to display real life and manners, as so many authors claim is their goal in the prefaces of their novels; and on the other hand, to capture voices with paper and ink. Regarding this second impulse, one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence that people viewed the page as the best chance for preserving voices is Joshua Steele’s *Essay Towards Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech* (1775), in which he attempts to transcribe

¹¹ Aspects of this debate have been summed up by Marjorie Levinson in “What is New Formalism?” *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007), 558-569; and more recently by Sandra Macpherson in “A Little Formalism,” *English Literary History* 82.2 (Summer 2015), 385-405.

¹² See Simon Jarvis, “How To Do Things With Tunes,” *English Literary History* 82.2 (Summer 2015), 366; 380.

David Garrick's performance of Hamlet's famous soliloquy with an adapted musical staff and a system of marks noting emphasis.¹³

Perhaps more important than the specific notational system Steele developed (which never really caught on) is the virtuosic attempt itself to record Garrick's voice. Like Steele, novelists writing before Scott's invention of sound recording technology naturally had a different set of priorities and aspirations when it came to representing the voice than those who would come after. What we might now anachronistically think of as a technological lack in that period was in fact the source of productive experiments in another medium, exerting pressure on eighteenth-century writers and documentarians to think creatively about what was possible with paper, ink, and technical systems of notation. Pioneers in any field always have a certain set of tools available to them, and what is present or absent in that toolkit inevitably shapes not only what they are capable of but also what their imperatives are—in other words, what they want to accomplish or feel is needed. The innovative work of typeface designers, to use a modern example, is no longer shaped by what is possible in a metal foundry; instead, the move from mechanical (or analog) design to digital has opened new technical possibilities and rendered experimentation with earlier methods moot for most practitioners, except perhaps for antiquarian hobbyists. An example closer to the eighteenth century might be found in the travel writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria

¹³ See Joshua Steele, *An Essay Towards Establishing The Melody and Measure of Speech to be Expressed and Perpetuated by Peculiar Symbols* (London: printed by W. Bowyer and J. Nichols for J. Almon, in Picadilly, 1775). For more on Steele's notational experiment see Noelle Chao, "Listening to the Voice on the Page: Joshua Steele and Technologies of Recording," *The Eighteenth Century* 54.2 (Summer 2013), 245-61; and Peter Holland's "Hearing the Dead: The Sound of David Garrick," in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660-1800*, eds. Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 248-70.

Williams, among others.¹⁴ The representational imperatives that led these documentarians to craft hyper-detailed descriptions of landscapes in their published letters surely changed when the photographic camera arrived in the commercial mainstream.

Similarly, the cultural consensus among some eighteenth-century writers that their medium offered the most viable tools for recording the voice helps to explain the extraordinary level of detail in their textual conversations. Conversation in the eighteenth-century novel is synonymous with length: it uses more pages to advance the plot than straight narrative does. The more fully a writer tries to render how characters' words are spoken with various types of vocal or embodied information, the more drawn out conversational scenes become. It is no coincidence that the first three writers considered here as innovators of speech representation produced some of the longest works in their period of English literary history. Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* is the longest novel in the language; Boswell's *Life of Johnson* totaled over 1100 pages in its original edition; and by the same count Burney's latter three novels all fall in the range of 1500-2500 pages—not to mention her archive of journal writings which more than doubles the length of *Clarissa*. The noticeably shorter length of Austen's novels by comparison is in fact a crucial aspect of her contribution to the technical history charted in the following pages, a point to which I will return shortly.

Likewise, the artistic practices and personae of all four of these writers are in some foundational sense bound up with the concept of conversation: in Richardson's case, he chooses epistolary conversation—much of which itself depicts characters in conversation with

¹⁴ I am thinking here of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, eds. Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013); Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, eds. Tone Brekke and Jon Mee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France: in the summer 1790, to a friend in England, containing various anecdotes relative to the French Revolution*, eds. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001).

each other—to form the fabric of *Clarissa*; Boswell crafts his biography from the premise that reporting his subject’s conversation would convey who he was better than any other narrative method; Burney indulges a compulsive habit of recording as much conversation as possible in her journals, overheard in the diverse social spaces she frequented; and Austen made a reputation for herself as a conversational novelist.¹⁵ Although in one sense this dissertation treats their writings representatively—as case studies revealing some of the directions in which speech-recording techniques advanced during their period—there is nevertheless an inevitability to their inclusion in this work, given its topic and time period.

What brings together all four authors more than anything is the dynamic of technical experimentation at play in all of their writings. Each one demonstrates a kind of pioneering exuberance in their efforts to represent various aspects of the conversational complex on paper. Within this rubric of technical experimentation, a few other forms of lineage connect them. Richardson is interested in using graphic features of the page to evoke high-pitched emotions, and he also finds new ways to individuate characters’ writing (and, by extension, speaking) voices from each other through style. Burney picks up on his interest in defining character through verbal manner, though she brings a different affective dimension to her experiments, many of which are informed by her sense of conversation as an ever-present threat and source of shame. Boswell is keenly aware of the same pitfalls as Burney, and

¹⁵ Kathryn Sutherland describes her as such in an educational segment about Austen’s manuscripts filmed at the British Library. What prompts her to assign this epithet is her observation that Austen’s scenes of conversation are relatively free of corrections compared to her narrative stretches: “One of the things that you see time and time again is that when she reaches a point where the characters are in conversation, her hand runs smoothly—often without a pause, often without a mistake—often without a slip or correction. In other passages where she’s setting up a scene, or introducing a new character and having to describe him, or some detail, *before* he actually becomes animated by conversation, those are the passages she struggles with. But she does come through in the manuscripts as essentially and most confidently a conversational novelist.” See Kathryn Sutherland, “Jane Austen’s Manuscripts,” in “Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians,” *British Library*, accessed 27 June 2016, <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/jane-austens-manuscripts>.

manages them by finding ever-new ways to restage the social performances of his real life in the pages of his journal. Austen unites all of their technical impulses, devising unique styles for every speaker and often mercilessly shaming them with words taken from their own mouths as they strive and often fail to perform properly in the social world. At the same time, however, she markedly retreats from her predecessors' impulse to get as much recorded as possible: the minimalism of her conversational representation is in fact her most important technical contribution.¹⁶

The project is organized chronologically. The first chapter, "Samuel Richardson's Transcriptional Realism," analyzes how Richardson makes the words on his page sound more spoken than written by notating, with a transcriptional style, two key features of impassioned speech: structural imperfection and vocal tone. His most important resource in this endeavor, I argue, is typography, a textual property in which he was directly invested as the printer of his own novels. Focusing on *Clarissa* (1747-8), the chapter delineates which typographical techniques Richardson develops *sui generis* and which ones he borrows from the conventions of play printing to model speech intensifying and breaking down under emotional stress. In tracing how he crafts speaking prose, as I term it, I argue that his experimental techniques allow him to invest conversation with the emotional and moral energies at the heart of his narrative.

The second chapter, "Life (Writing) as Performance in James Boswell's *London Journal*," argues for the value of Boswell's manuscripts in showing how an eighteenth-century writer resolved, through trial and error, the technical challenges of representing

¹⁶ Perhaps the most obvious missing member of this group is Laurence Sterne, who deserves a fifth chapter to examine his experimentation with page graphics, his further development of some of Richardson's new uses of typography, and his definitive transformation of conversation—with its colloquial lexicon and sociable gestures—into a prose style of its own.

speech alongside information about the material and bodily contexts of the scene. By way of introduction, I consider why the *London Journal* in particular should include such a varied array of speech-recording techniques in the first place, identifying a link between the experimental texture of his life writing and the improvisational and performative nature of conversation itself, the main object of his representation. This chapter provides a taxonomy of Boswell's speech-recording techniques and a critical account of how they work, with a focus on two of his particular technical achievements. I look first at his use of different types of tonal and gestural notation to convey an impression of lively sociability in text; and second, I consider how his particular methods for notating this information work to clarify scenic dynamics, such as who is speaking to whom, and against what affective backdrop.

The third chapter, "Frances Burney's 'Paper Conversations,'" demonstrates how the author's hypergraphic recording of conversation in her journals allowed her to develop two categories of techniques for representing speech: first, those for individuating character through verbal manner; and second, those for representing the nuances of conversational shame. To evoke the link between character and comportment, Burney treats language as fundamentally elastic and instrumental, molding it to notate the nuances of different people's versions of language: she adjusts orthography and syntax, she invents new words and she imports slang, transgressing standards of literary decorum in the service of character. At the same time, she uses her conversational scenes as literary exercises in overcoming, perpetuating and redirecting the embarrassment caused by social and linguistic errors. This chapter argues that Burney's peculiar use of her journals—as an experimental space to mine the resources of text both for preserving linguistic personality and deflecting social shame—is

what allowed her to develop such varied and influential techniques for representing character in the novel.

The final chapter, “The End of Conversation in Austen,” explores the marked transition to understated and under-reported representations of conversation in the novels of Austen compared to those of her eighteenth-century predecessors. In a sense, her conversations are more stylized and distinctly literary: she is less concerned than they are with approximating the acoustics and bodily features of everyday speech or with representing positive expression. Her project is rather to tap the potential of conversational scenes to generate ambiguity—to make space in her narrative for confusion, mistakes and misinterpretation, thus adding multiple layers of possibility to her plot. This chapter compares a dramatic sketch of Austen’s juvenilia with *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) to demonstrate how she selectively recuperates some aspects of the highly stylized mode of drama—namely, minimalist scripting and dramatic suppression—to invent for the novel a conversational form powered by understatement and partial understanding.

“Novel Conversations” concludes where transcriptional realism hits its limit. Retreating from the fullness with which her predecessors used this technique, Austen likewise helps pull the novel back from the extraordinary length that had already become a formal problem. By way of conclusion, the fourth chapter of this dissertation demonstrates Austen’s modulation of the technique towards a minimalist and even subdued aesthetic, retreating not only from length towards economy but also from body towards mind, sound towards text, and listening towards reading, setting the stage for the nineteenth-century realist novel.

A Note on Editions

Reading for craft responsibly requires thoughtful decisions regarding which editions and manuscript copies to examine. In the case of *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson, who printed the novel himself and oversaw its graphic presentation, I use facsimile excerpts of the first edition available in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (sourced from the British Library) to highlight the texture of his original dashes in choice cases, or to preserve his most unusual uses of typography, some of which Angus Ross's Penguin edition does not quite manage fully to reproduce. In other cases—when the technique under consideration is lexical, or not quite so granular—I rely on Ross's Penguin edition collated with *ECCO*'s first edition for typographical variants.¹⁷

I also include facsimile pages of *Volume the First* of Jane Austen's juvenilia, a fair copy, to demonstrate her mastery at a young age of the conventions of the dramatic page. In treating *Pride and Prejudice*, for which there is no extant manuscript material, I avoid reading textual features as granular as punctuation and pointing—which her publishers probably altered when they typographically rendered her fair copies, judging by the relative lack of dashes in the printed novels compared to extant manuscripts of her other works.¹⁸ I attend instead to compositional choices on a broader scale, including her peculiarly scant use of speech tags and her narrative adaptation of dramatic scene headers.

¹⁷ Ross's edition follows the copy of C1 in the library of Trinity College, with some silent adjustment to italics made to bring the text closer to C2 and C3 (which contain more italics, revised by Richardson). See Ross's "Note on the Text" in Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 32. It also bears noting here for good measure that my arguments about Richardson's typographical innovations are not solely dependent on the single instances I bring forward in the first chapter, which act rather as examples of patterns that can be observed all over the novel.

¹⁸ For more on Austen's punctuation, see Kathryn Sutherland's *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 123; 159-63; 301-306.

In the cases of Boswell and Burney's life writings, I rely on the editorial choices the editors at the Yale Boswell Editions and The Burney Centre have made in preparing these manuscripts for publication. These choices are generally speaking conservative. In his Penguin edition of Boswell's *London Journal*, Gordon Turnbull preserves Boswell's spelling, punctuation and paragraphing, and he encloses any punctuation added for clarification between square brackets. Unlike the modernizing editorial choices made by Boswell's first scholarly editor, Frederick Pottle, Turnbull's method makes it possible to reconstruct from his edition an exact transcription of the manuscript (which holds up to collation with the facsimile of the journal available in the Digital Collections of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library).¹⁹ Burney's archive of journals is so substantial that the labour of preparing her manuscripts for the press has been divided between multiple publishing houses and even more editors. All of them, however, helpfully attempt to restore Burney's obliterations and any passages deleted by the first editor of her journals and letters, her niece and literary executrix Charlotte Barrett. Uncertain readings are clearly marked in these editions, and furthermore I have been fortunate enough to have the current director of the Burney Centre, Peter Sabor, as a ready and generous resource in all cases requiring additional consultation.

¹⁹ See Turnbull's "Note on the Text" in James Boswell, *London Journal 1762-1763*, ed. Gordon Turnbull (London: Penguin, 2010), lvii. See also James Boswell, *London Journal, 1762-1763, Together with Journal of my Jaunt, Harvest, 1762. Prepared for the Press with Introduction and Notes by Frederick A. Pottle* (London: Heineman, 1951).

Chapter One: Samuel Richardson's Transcriptional Realism

Introduction

. My Hannah, Madam, listens not! — My Han-
nah—
No more in her behalf— She is known to make
mischief— She is known — But no more of that busy
intermeddler—

Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1748 (figure 5).

The topic of this chapter is the set of techniques that Samuel Richardson devised to approximate the texture and vivacity of real speech in his writing. The epigraph above is taken from an exchange between Richardson's protagonist and her mother, who interrupts Clarissa as she defends her maid against an accusation of eavesdropping. The most salient feature of these lines is the six dashes that structure them graphically, chopping up the prose into short expressive bursts to produce the effect of speech rather than writing. In such scenes of emotionally intense interaction, one has the impression that the letter-writer's style—this is an epistolary novel, of course—is important chiefly for its transcriptional function: in other words, it is valuable mostly or even exclusively insofar as it preserves an exact record not just of what was said, but also of *how* the words were uttered. Interactions of an emotional or bodily nature had thus far been especially the realm of the stage, but Richardson created a use for them in his novel; moreover, he understood that such interactions would be insufficiently represented with words alone, divorced from embodied features such as tone and pause that create so much meaning in speech. He discovered he needed to develop a whole new set of techniques in order to capture the vivacity of real human conversation. His experiments using print to represent emotion via embodied sound constitute an important yet under-examined development in eighteenth-century print culture.

As the example above demonstrates, Richardson's most important tool for transcribing the syntactical disorder of heated conversation is typography, particularly the dash. One can feel the mimetic impulse behind these dashes, as Richardson tries to model in text the broken and often precipitous nature of emotional speech. Much of the time, these marks serve this end effectively. But as this essay demonstrates, there is a limit to the efficacy of his dash-heavy mode of transcription. When a character reaches the peak of passion—be it anger, guilt or despair—the effect of this technique can tip over into the absurd. Note here how Lovelace's guilty hesitations and repetitions in his first post-rape interaction with Clarissa proliferate to the point of farce:

What—what-a—what—has been done—I, I, I—cannot but say—must own—must confess—hem—hem—is not right—is not what should have been—But-a—but—but—I am truly—truly—sorry for it—Upon my soul I am—And—and—will do all—do everything—do what—whatever is incumbent upon me—all that you—that you—that you shall require, to make you amends!——²⁰

In recording the verbal imperfections of the villain-hero at his most crazed, Richardson abandons what is really recognizable. Or is it Lovelace using a transcriptional style to exaggerate his own inarticulacy and distract Belford, though comic effect, from blaming him? Regardless of the answer, what the passage demonstrates is that overuse of this dashed technique disables some of its mimetic power. The effect moves away from realism: what may be accurate as transcription is entirely different from what is meaningful as a fictional representation of the real.

In his most successful uses of transcriptional style, Richardson taps into the medium of print as a creative resource—think of the dashes—and uses it in tandem with techniques of narratorial description to render verbal expression in its full tonal complexity. Listen, for

²⁰ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 901. All citations from Ross's Penguin edition have been collated with the first edition of *Clarissa* of 1747-8 for typographical variants.

example, to another guilty address from Lovelace to Clarissa: “My dear—my love—I—I—I never—no never—lips trembling, limbs quaking, voice inward, hesitating, broken—.”²¹

Initially, this sentence communicates through a directly reported transcriptional style, before giving way to the intervening epistolary narrator, Belford, who adds information about Lovelace’s broken manner, both oral and physical. Here and elsewhere, Richardson works along a spectrum between two modes of writing: one that has the texture of a record, and the other that is defined by its more artful, descriptive function.

With regard to realism, some of Richardson’s dashed, broken passages grate; others manage to strike a more familiar chord. The threshold between them is where transcriptional realism lives. This chapter will examine how the author’s calibrations—partway between a transcriptional mode and a stylized one—help him to represent the emotional substance and oral character of conversations more fully. In scenes of directly reported speech, Richardson cultivates an aesthetic of interruption at both the word- and sentence-level, aping the fragmentary nature of real human speech. At the same time, he finds creative ways to inscribe tonal information both in and around direct speech, rendering the emotional timbre of characters’ interactions with almost obsessive precision. In formulating his syntax to represent tonally rich yet structurally imperfect speech, he uses punctuation and font innovatively to mark and demarcate his prose, delineating emotional energies at odds with each other. Some of these typographical techniques he develops *sui generis*, while others he adapts from the conventions of play printing, with which he was familiar not just as a reader but also as a professional printer.

²¹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 900.

The end that this technical exertion serves is an unnatural kind of literary synesthesia: Richardson tries all ways to make readers hear words through their eyes, and thus to feel more vividly the emotional and moral weight of them. Elaine Scarry provides theoretical traction for thinking about the mechanics of verbal representation in a textual medium in *Dreaming By the Book* (1999), in which she examines writers' art of using language, paper and ink to reproduce the effects of visual sensory perception. Both her methodology and her term for successful translation of sensory information across media—*imaginary vivacity*—are equally useful for analyzing literary representations of voice. As readers navigate the high-stakes conversational frays that drive *Clarissa*, Richardson's use of graphic features lets him preside, directing their perception of character, sometimes guiding but often policing it. The reward of transcriptional realism is that it allows the author to individuate characters' emotional energies more fully than he could without it—drawing out their traits and their views as they express themselves, and respond to each other in conflict. In developing the technical tools to render verbal forms of meaning in print, Richardson is able to invest conversation with the emotional—and, in turn, moral—life of his narrative.

Richardson's Dramatic Immediacy

Considering its status as a million-word-long novel in letters, *Clarissa* contains a remarkably high volume of reported speech—especially given that the author himself, who was a prolific correspondent, never transcribed conversations in his own letters.²² Even though Richardson himself did not share this practice, his fictional letter-writers are

²² Confirmed by both Peter Sabor and Tom Keymer (general editors of *The Cambridge Edition of the Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*).

perpetually dramatizing scenes of conversation for their correspondents, recreating complex verbal interactions that occurred between themselves and other characters.

Examining the influence of drama on Richardson's fiction was a trend in mid-twentieth-century literary criticism: most notably, Mark Kinkead-Weekes has made a case for Richardson's essentially dramatic imagination, developing the premise that his to-the-moment epistolary writing parallels drama in its immediacy. More recently, John Richetti has examined characters' processes of self-dramatization in *Clarissa*.²³ These critics are right that reading Richardson can feel like reading a play: Lovelace is known to format his letters in scenic units, like a script; characters' self-expression in letters often has the flavour and function of soliloquy; even the overall design of the story is tragic. But the novel's animated effect is not only owing to these broad formal conventions borrowed from drama. As this chapter proposes, Richardson also works at the level of prose syntax to approximate the texture and vivacity of real live speech, as printed editions of play scripts had before him.

The resulting quality of spokenness heightens the immediacy of the novel's narration. Richardson's speaking prose style, as I term it, is not only one of the most distinctive formal features of this novel—it is also distinctive in the broader history of novelistic style. Before Richardson's fiction, there are only very limited examples of the kind of closely mimetic representation of speech he strives for. On one hand, popular novelists Aphra Behn and Eliza

²³ See Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); and John J. Richetti, "Richardson's Dramatic Art in *Clarissa*," *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800* (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1984), pp. 288-308; Ira Konigsberg, *Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1968); Leo Hughes, "Theatrical Convention in Richardson: Some Observations on a Novelist's Technique," in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: Essays in Honor of Alan Dugald McKillop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 239-50; A. D. McKillop, *Samuel Richardson: Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1936); Robert Adams Day, *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1924).

Haywood are both attentive in notating tone and gesture when they represent verbal interaction, probably inspired by their experiences as playwrights to translate to the page some of the bodily features of speech that actors project on the stage.²⁴ On the other hand, they focus more on extra-lexical speech features than on the words their characters actually say, which are consistently aristocratic and even archaic. This stylistic effect may derive partly from their dramatic training, and from the dominance of narrative modes such as heroic tragedy and romance in the literary tradition out of which they were writing. Drama is an important source of techniques for novelists to represent speech in a lively and realistic way, but some of the more stylized conventions of the genre actually work against that end.

One more immediate precursor of Richardson whom we might think of as having made a concerted effort to emulate the liveliness of speech in fiction is Daniel Defoe, who is more interested than Haywood or Behn in a mimesis of spoken language. When his characters talk, he tries to approximate a demotic idiom; he cultivates a paratactic, conversational rhythm; and he grounds his narrative in a distinctly colloquial context with Moll's chatty speech tag "says I." But even in Defoe's fiction, one style serves to signify a spoken mode for any given character,²⁵ in contrast to Richardson's meticulous efforts to individuate characters' voices through stylistic means.

²⁴ See Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 191.

²⁵ The exception to this rule, which is also relevant to the present study, is Defoe's representation of second-language speech patterns for characters like Xury and Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*. For a brief discussion of West Indian pidgin in *Robinson Crusoe*, see Roxann Wheeler, "Christians, Savages and Slaves: From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic" in *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 62; 89. Wheeler is currently expanding her study of pidgin in Defoe's works, and gave a paper at the most recent ASECS conference (2015) entitled "The Strange Surprising Literary Migrations of West Indian Pidgin."

Richardson outstripped all of his predecessors in expanding the stylistic conventions for representing speech realistically on the page. In considering why this is the case, it is worth noting some conditions surrounding his authorial practice that may have motivated his literary experiments in this direction. The first is his commitment to literary immediacy. In his preface to the fourth instalment of *Clarissa*, he justifies using the epistolary form with the fact that it “leads us farther into the recesses of the Human Mind, than the colder and more general reflections suited to a continued and more contracted Narrative.”²⁶ Generality and contraction leave a narrative cold, while Richardson is aiming for the warmth generated by psychological specificity and narrative dilation. The first-person mode of epistolary writing helps him to generate both, though with one drawback: that no matter how much detail and dilation a letter can accommodate, it is all necessarily related after the event.

To return, then, to the statistic with which this section begins: one hypothesis that would account for the high volume of reported speech in *Clarissa* is that Richardson uses it to counteract the time lag inherent to epistolary narration. Characters’ second-hand accounts are enlivened by doses of verbal immediacy in the form of “affecting Conversations; many of them written in the Dialogue or Dramatic Way.”²⁷ The first third of the novel is particularly rich with records of conversation: and indeed, when *Clarissa* provides Anna Howe with ostensibly verbatim accounts of the fractious conversations happening at Harlowe-Place, we gain fuller access to her emotional experience than if she told Anna more briefly and indirectly that her family wanted to marry her off against her wishes.

²⁶ Samuel Richardson, Preface to *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*, vol. 4 (London, 1748), v.

²⁷ Samuel Richardson, Preface to *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*, vol. 1 (London, 1748), v.

The author's choice to inject the novel with so much dialogue may have exacted its own peculiar cost in asking the reader to believe people would actually be able to record their past conversations in such detail. But ultimately, for Richardson, the immediacy he can achieve in these conversational scenes is worth more than scrupulously maintaining plausibility around the circumstances of the record making. In this vein, Kinkead-Weekes posits that the effect of spoken voices in *Clarissa* is so strong, it actually causes readers to forget the written medium that produces it:

with every character and in every scene a reading to the moment engages us in a constant process of imagining through and behind words, in ways that the drama achieves *viva voce* with actors on a stage. The more dramatic the letters become, the less one is aware of them as written. The spoken voice begins to predominate.²⁸

This chapter follows Kinkead-Weekes's idea that Richardson strives for an immediacy that almost transcends the written word. This effort causes the author not only to use a great deal of dialogue, but also to work minutely at the level of style to make it captivating, thereby inducing a sort of textual amnesia in his readers. Paradoxically, Richardson deploys his mastery of the written medium to produce lively effects that would suppress his readers' sense of the limits of that very medium.

The second factor that licenses a study of the more granular aspects of Richardson's technique is the fact that he worked not only as an author, but as a printer, too, meaning he was invested in the minute aspects of his texts' appearance in print. His dual professional status put him in a position to retain control over the production of his works to a degree unavailable to most authors of this period. His oeuvre is thus unique in the canon of eighteenth-century fiction, in the sense that his printed texts are more faithful to his technical

²⁸ Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*, 460.

vision than those of any of his peers; readers can be confident that the words that make up *Clarissa* in its first edition are assembled according to the author's own design.

As will soon become clear, punctuation marks and typeface are powerful tools for structuring verbal interactions between characters; they have enormous potential to clarify who is speaking to whom, in what sequence, and in what tone. It can be difficult to analyze punctuation marks (tellingly dubbed "accidentals" by textual bibliographers) as part of a consistent technique or pattern, because their source can vary—from author to editor or compositor.²⁹ But Richardson's works offer special cases. As Thomas Keymer notes, "given Richardson's own control of the printing process, his novels would seem to present a uniquely strong case for treating accidentals as an authorial rather than a compositional feature."³⁰

There is indeed a consistency to the aesthetic effect of his page design and punctuation that invites close attention.

The fact that the writer was an experienced printer also meant that, having seen a vast amount of contemporary writing pass through his presses, he would likewise have been

²⁹ As Janine Barchas notes, "bibliographers term dashes, along with italics, punctuation, ornamentation, and capitalization, 'accidentals', a term which captures the common eighteenth-century practice of leaving these details of a text to the discretion of the compositor. From a bibliographical standpoint, the appearance of the page (including the placement of dashes) was often an 'accident' of the physical production of the book rather than an intended part of the author's text. However, bibliography's technical vocabulary can be misleading, as accidentals are not always accidents of the printing process. In some cases, there is clear evidence that authors controlled the accidentals of their texts...Samuel Richardson, for example, printed his own novels; as a result, we can assume that his pages look the way he wanted them to look." See Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157.

³⁰ See Thomas Keymer's "Note on the Text" in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxxvi. In the case of *Pamela*, Keymer does warn against over-interpreting "the first edition's use of many fractionally different dash-lengths," suggesting that Richardson probably began using strings of hyphens whenever he had overrun his stock of em- and en-dashes. I would add another observation to Keymer's: the fact that Richardson would run out of dashes in the first place is in itself evidence of the foundational structuring work that this typographical mark performs in his texts.

familiar with current trends in punctuation usage, putting him in an ideal position to experiment with this particular feature of text.³¹ Because of Richardson's unique artistic and professional commitments, then, not only is there a large volume of represented speech to examine in his fiction, but the typographical techniques that he develops to structure these scenes of speech can also be fairly analyzed as part of a broader technical-representational strategy.

A Dashed Imperfection

Attending to Richardson's markedly spoken prose style means attending to the peculiar manner in which characters' words are strung together in passages of represented speech. The dash is instrumental in this regard. Richardson's uses of the dash to reflect imperfect features of speech are remarkably diverse: dashes work to expedite interruption between interlocutors, to break up a single character's speech into pithy, linguistically efficient thought fragments, and to mark cognitive hesitations, among other functions. Collectively, these usages form the foundation of Richardson's speaking prose style.

Returning briefly to the passage with which this chapter begins:

My Hannah, Madam, listens not!—My Hannah—
No more in her behalf—She is known to make mischief—She is known—But
no more of that busy intermeddler—³²

The syntax of both women's sentences breaks down under a circular excess, as each speaker doubles back to repeat an earlier part of her utterance. In Clarissa's case, *my Hannah* is the

³¹ In his study of Richardson's successive revisions of the copious italics in *Pamela*, Joe Bray likewise notes that "As a printer himself, it is likely that Richardson was alive to all shifts in typographical meaning". See Bray, "'Attending to the Minute': Richardson's Revisions of Italics in *Pamela*," in *Ma(r)king the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page*, eds. Joe Bray, Miriam Handley and Anne C. Henry (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 109.

³² Richardson, *Clarissa*, 144.

sticking point, the possessive pronoun evoking the complex of prideful incredulity and protective concern that prompts the repetition. In her mother's case, *no more* and *she is known* work in combination to foreclose the possibility of other truths, reinforcing her closed-mindedness. The repetition that fractures both characters' syntax into choppy imperfection is also the means through which each one's emotional and epistemological reality is expressed.

This parley demonstrates one of the central features of Richardson's spoken style as it operates on a syntactic level: badness. Here, bad syntax is born of an undeniable impulse to repeat—if only, thereby, to convert individual will into mutual understanding through sheer verbal perseverance. Whether it results from this kind of repetitive excess, or from some related form of grammatical incompleteness, like interruption or hesitation, prose that is in some way broken is a signifier of realistic verbal exchange in *Clarissa*.

Partial or broken sentences can convey the style of orality insofar as they are more typical of speech, an extemporaneous and imperfect medium, than of writing, a more deliberately crafted one. This effect operates on the principle of difference: deviations from standard sentence structure (grammatically complete and free of redundancies) produce distinct aural style through contrast. Beyond this stylistic fact, there is also a more rigorously linguistic reason why Richardson would use various kinds of syntactic imperfection as a mimetic signifier for speech. As Ann Banfield and other linguists have noted, repetition, interruption and hesitation all cause grammatical violations that bar them from being recorded indirectly in writing. These are purely *speakable* phrases—ones that cannot exist in language unless they are contained in real speech, in an oral context, or in directly reported speech, in a literary context. They belong to a category that Banfield terms “non-embeddable expressive elements”: non-embeddable, because they refuse to cohere grammatically following the

subordinating conjunction *that*, which introduces indirect speech; and expressive, because they pertain to the linguistic articulation of subjectivity and emotion.³³

Tellingly, under the logic of Banfield's term, the innately spoken nature of interrupted or repeated phrases has something to do with the fact that they express a thinking, feeling self. In the case of Richardson, whose goal is to depict his epistolary actors with hearts "wholly engaged," it makes sense that he should choose a linguistic mode that is inherently charged with subjective emotion; it happens that this mode is likewise essentially linked to speech.³⁴ Inevitably, then, the fractured sentences that result from repetition and interruption bring not only an emotional immediacy to Richardson's prose, but also an oral style.

This linguistic perspective tells us something more about why Richardson's novels need scenes of direct speech and conversation. The author either discerned or intuited that this mode of discourse would allow him to generate the aural and emotional vibrancy that were so crucial for the objective that he set for this work: bringing moral instruction "home to the breast of the youthful reader" via an engaging narrative immediacy.³⁵ But how, in practical terms, did he go about textually mimicking the fragmentary nature of spoken language as it buckles under emotional and interpersonal pressure?

Richardson was already using the dash textually to reflect interruptive speech³⁶ in his first novel, *Pamela* (1740-1)—but he was doing so in a slightly different manner than he later

³³ See Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (Boston: Routledge, 1982), 31-34.

³⁴ Richardson, Preface to *Clarissa*, vol. 1, v.

³⁵ Richardson, Preface to *Clarissa*, vol. 1, v.

³⁶ By "interruptive speech" I mean any kind of syntactical breakdown in spoken language, whether the disruption be external, such as an interruption by an interlocutor—or internal, as in the speaker's own hesitation, repetition or change in mental direction. Speech can be interrupted by the self or by

would in *Clarissa*. The following passage, a debate between Mr. B and Mr. Longman regarding the merits and faults of Pamela—recounted by Pamela herself—demonstrates the author’s standard method for notating interruption in the earlier work:

Mr. *Longman*, continued he, I said that Girl might come in with Mrs. *Jervis*; because they love to be always together. For Mrs. *Jervis* is very good to her, as if she was her Daughter. But else—Mr. *Longman*, interrupting him, said, *Good to Mrs. Pamela!* Aye, Sir, and so she is, to be sure! But every body must be good to her,—

He was going on. But my Master said, No more, no more, Mr. *Longman*. I see old Men are taken with pretty young Girls, as well as other Folks; and fair Looks hide many a Fault, where a Person has the Art to behave obligingly. Why, and please your Honour, said Mr. *Longman*, every body—and was going on, I believe to say something more in my Praise; but he interrupted him, and said, Not a Word more of this *Pamela*. I can’t let her stay, I’ll assure you.³⁷

The interruptions here are both signaled and enacted with a truncating dash: the dash typographically breaks the syntactic unit at the same time as it stands in, with its forward linear length, for the unspoken remainder that would have unfolded in that space. The mark emblemizes the tension between speakers’ opposing energies: it is both the fracturing agent and the consolatory trace that is left behind, inadequate to complete the utterance.

In these examples, as in their many counterparts throughout *Pamela*, Richardson over-explains the incompleteness of his characters’ sentences: in every instance, Pamela chimes in to tell readers either that the speaker *was going on* or that the interlocutor *interrupted*, using her platform as narrator to ease the shock of disrupted sentences. This narratorial explanation,

another. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom identifies a famous early example of this type of speech in the soliloquy delivered by Richard III before his defeat at Bosworth Field: “Is there a murthurer here? No. Yes, I am. / Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why— / Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?” Bloom describes it as “the poorest writing in the play” which Shakespeare mobilizes in an attempt to break out of its “too formal and stylized, rather too Marlovian” rigidity, and to give Richard some sign of an inner self (a failed attempt, in Bloom’s reading). See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xxxviii-xxxix.

³⁷ Richardson, *Pamela*, 72.

supplementing the work of dashes, bespeaks the author's slight discomfort with the transcriptional quality he is aiming to produce with these bad sentences: he feels the need to mitigate any confusion that might arise from characters' broken phrases with complete (and completing) ones offered by the narrator.

In *Clarissa*, by contrast, Richardson begins to dispense with such narratorial explanation, often aiming for a mode that more closely approximates the texture of a straight record. In this second novel, incompleteness owing to interruption takes on a vibrant life of its own, an aural self-sufficiency that it did not have in *Pamela*. Consider the following debate between Clarissa and Lovelace, transcribed in a more dialogic form, with line breaks signaling transitions from his voice to hers. Lovelace begins:

Let me ask you, madam (we talked of *pride* just now) what sort of pride must *his* be, which could dispense with inclination and preference in his lady's part of it?—What must be that love—

Love, Sir! who talks of *love*?—Was not *merit* the thing we were talking of?—Have *I* ever professed, have *I* ever required of *you* professions of a passion of that nature? But there is no end of these debatings; each *so* faultless, each *so* full of self—

I do not think myself *faultless*, Madam:—But—

But what, Sir!—Would you evermore argue with me, as if you were a child?—Seeking palliations, and making promises?—Promises of what, Sir? Of being in future the man it is a shame a gentleman is not?—Of being the man—

Good God! Interrupted he, with eyes lifted up, if *thou* wert to be thus severe—

Well, well, Sir, impatiently—I need only to observe, that all this vast difference in sentiments shews how unpair'd our minds are—So let us—

Let us *what*, Madam!—My soul is rising into tumults! And he look'd so wildly, that it startled me a good deal—Let us *what*, Madam—³⁸

Here, Richardson does not try to explain his characters' unfinished sentences, recognizing instead that minimal narratorial support actually sharpens the immediacy of this high-stakes, rapid-fire argument. Of the six interruptions that occur (notably, the speaking platform is never equably ceded here, only forcibly taken), one of them only is indicated by the narrator,

³⁸ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 592-3.

with the speech tag *interrupted he*. Otherwise, Lovelace and Clarissa's phrases are allowed to stand alone as unmediated transcriptions: fragmented, though whole in the sense that they accurately represent the jerky imperfection of verbal interaction in moments of high passion.

In one respect, the dashes that introduce each interruption in the passage from *Clarissa* are functionally similar to those in *Pamela*. This kind of dash is dually owned. It belongs only partly to the speaker whose utterance it follows, insofar as it stands in for what is unsaid; the tonal content of the dash, however, belongs to the interrupter, a mark of his or her conversational violence. It bespeaks an emotional plenitude and impatience on the part of an interrupter, who cannot contain the words long enough to preserve the integrity—both literal and figurative—of the current speaker's thought.

In another way, though, Richardson's use of dashes to generate oral immediacy in *Clarissa* presents a marked departure from and advance over his use of them in *Pamela*. In the sparer mode we see in the second novel, the absence of narratorial intervention usefully preserves a stronger sense of which words break each interlocutor's patience: Clarissa cuts Lovelace off when he pretends to *love*; she can't stand it when *but* heralds yet another one of his specious excuses. Lovelace defensively objects to Clarissa's implicit charges of his feigned *faultlessness*, and his failure to behave in a *gentlemanlike* manner. This conversation shows *how unpair'd [their] minds are*, as Clarissa herself makes explicit; but also, the minimalism of its framing—with only thin lines separating one speaker from the contesting other—helps the conversation to encapsulate, in microcosm, the tragic conflict that will ultimately cause these characters to destroy each other. Both of them are utterly uncompromising: Lovelace in his will to succeed in his performance, and Clarissa in hers to block it out and inure herself to the man's disingenuous rhetoric.

The reason why Richardson landed on the dash as a the best tool for representing emotionally motivated interruption and changes of verbal direction becomes clearer in light of the history of this punctuation mark in English usage. In prose, the dash was largely frowned upon as a lazy accidental in the eighteenth century. In his study *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*, M. B. Parkes quotes Joseph Robertson's *Essay on Punctuation* (1785) as evidence of its low and hackneyed status: the dash is "frequently used," writes Robertson, "by hasty and incoherent writers in a very capricious and arbitrary manner, instead of a regular point."³⁹ Janine Barchas elaborates on Parkes's suggestion, finding in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* definition of *dash* "a long-standing rhetorical prejudice against [this mark] in mid-eighteenth-century print culture."⁴⁰ Alongside an excerpt from Sir Thomas Browne's *Vulgar Errors*, Johnson cites the following from Jonathan Swift's "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" as an instructive example:

In modern wit, all printed trash is
set off with num'rous breaks and *dashes*. *Swift*.⁴¹

Both of these quotations evince a negative attitude towards the dash—one that traces back to its power to free writers from the obligation to compose in grammatically complete sentences. Nevertheless, from this hackneyed status the dash emerged as a crucial tool for Richardson, and ultimately for many other novelists of the eighteenth century, who were drawn to it by precisely the same quality Robertson deplores in the works of those hasty, incoherent and capricious writers: its ability to mark quick and easy transitions between incomplete yet

³⁹ Quoted in M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 4.

⁴⁰ Barchas, *Graphic Design*, 165.

⁴¹ Quoted in Barchas, *Graphic Design*, 165.

related thoughts, either within a single speaker's utterance or between two interrupting interlocutors. Richardson's innovations with this mark would be developed most memorably by Laurence Sterne, who adapted them to represent not just the precipitous emotional movements of the mind but also the associative and ideational ones.⁴²

While complete sentences joined by elucidating logical transitions might be perceived as a mark of quality in texts of rhetoric and composition, they are a source of clutter, even a hindrance to transcriptional style in novelistic conversation. *Pamela* suggests that Richardson had an inkling of this fact, while *Clarissa* shows beyond a doubt how well he had come to understand it. Parkes makes a conjecture about what prompted Richardson towards this innovative use of the dash:

Samuel Richardson—a master printer as well as a novelist—drew upon his taste for the drama, and his experience of printing plays, to introduce marks like the em-rule, or dash, and a series of points to indicate those hesitations and sudden changes in the direction of thought associated with spoken discourse.⁴³

The author used this mark so copiously not only to represent a desultory kind of speech, as Parkes suggests here, but also because he had identified it as the most powerful tool for representing speech that has become volatile and fragmentary under the pressure of intense emotion. Richardson brought dashes into his novels to help him approximate more closely the emotional tenor of two disparate wills and worldviews colliding in interpersonal relation.

The second assumption that Parkes makes—that Richardson's work as a printer influenced his dash-heavy style—is a sound one. The fact that the novelist owes a technical debt to drama is all the more interesting given his anti-theatrical views: indeed, longstanding

⁴² As Kinkead-Weekes notes, "Richardson anticipates Sterne in capturing the quick movements of the mind by the use of dashes; the first stream of consciousness in fiction, though it works by impulses of emotion rather than association." See Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*, 408.

⁴³ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, 93.

scholarly interest in Richardson's dramatic imagination is, somewhat perplexingly, matched by a critical commonplace that he was ambivalent towards the theatre. Thomas Keymer draws attention to "the overt distrust of theatricality from which Richardson's writing begins" and reminds us that the author was "one of the stage's most articulate opponents."⁴⁴ Despite the moralistic stance that may have caused him to be wary of the stage and the indecorous culture surrounding it, Richardson appreciated drama at least from the perspective of print, having evidently adapted his dash usage in the novel from that which he saw in the plays passing through his presses—in comedies, no less.

A cursory survey of the plays that Richardson is known to have printed prior to writing *Pamela* and *Clarissa* shows a remarkable contrast between the typographical properties of comedies and those of tragedies.⁴⁵ Interrupted lines shored up by dashes abound in the lighter plays, surely a legacy of the witty repartee characteristic of Restoration comedy; meanwhile, the tragedies are more likely to comprise long, unbroken blocks of text, owing to the genre's higher volume of grave orations and fraught soliloquies. To get a sense of the typographical relation between the novels that Richardson penned and the comedies that he printed, consider the following exchange from Susanna Centlivre's *The Gamester*, of which

⁴⁴ Thomas Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 143.

⁴⁵ According to Keith Maslen's study of Richardson's printing practice, the plays that the author is known to have printed prior to 1747 include: Samuel Madden's *Themistocles, the lover of his country. A Tragedy* (1729); two runs of the fourth edition of Susanna Centlivre's *The Gamester: a comedy* (1734 and 1736); William Popple's *The Lady's Revenge: or, the rover reclaimed. A comedy* (1734), and *The Double Deceit: or, a cure for jealousy. A comedy* (1736); John Banks's *The unhappy favourite: or, the earl of Essex. A tragedy* (1735); Philip Frowde's *The Fall of Sagungum. A tragedy* (1735); Eliza Haywood's *A wife to be lett. A comedy* (1735); Nathaniel Lee's *Nero, emperor of Rome. A tragedy* (1735); William Taverner's *The Artful Husband: a comedy* (1735); three editions of Aaron Hill's *Alzira. A tragedy* (1736, 1737, 1744); and Roger Boyle's *The Dramatick Works* (1739). See the section entitled "Books List" in Maslen, *Samuel Richardson of London, Printer: a Study of his Printing Based on Ornament Use and Business Accounts* (Otago: Department of English, University of Otago, 2001), 55-160.

he printed two runs, in 1734 and 1736 respectively (a work which also tellingly features a central character named *Lovewell*). In this scene, Angelica and Young Valere have a lovers' quarrel about his gambling habit:

Val. I'm in amaze——⁴⁶

Ang. You need not——I know my Sister's Design——but that's not my Quarrel to you——Quarrel, did I say? No, I am grown to a perfect State of Indifference——Quarrels may be reconciled——but a Man that basely breaks his Word, and forfeits Faith and Honour, is not worth our Anger, but deserves to be despis'd.

Val. I do confess I am a Wretch below your Scorn; I own my Faults, and have no Refuge by your Mercy.

*Fav.*⁴⁷ In the old Strain again—— (*Aside.*

Val. If you abandon me, I'm lost for ever——for you, and only you, are Mistress of my Fate,

Ang. Your daily Actions contradict your Words—— and shows I have no such Power in your Heart——Did you not promise, nay, swear you'd never game again——

Val. I did, and for the perjur'd Crime merit your endless Hate, but you, in pity, may forgive me——Oh, *Angelica*, see at your Feet an humble Penitent kneel, who, if not by your Goodness rais'd——will grow for ever to his native Soil.⁴⁸

This exchange shares some suggestive similarities with the one from *Clarissa* quoted above, both thematically (a rakish man attempts to convince his angry lady that he deserves another chance) and formally (dashes support the writer's representation of fragmented speech features like repetition and interruption). But while it seems clear enough that Richardson

⁴⁶ I've used a double em-dash here to approximate more closely the dashes Richardson's compositors used in setting this text, which are remarkably long.

⁴⁷ *Fav.* is a character called Favourite, Angelica's woman servant.

⁴⁸ Susanna Centlivre, *The Gamester: a Comedy. As it is acted at the Theatre Royal in Lincolns-Inn-Fields. By His Majesty's servants* (London: printed for J. Knapton in Ludgate-Street; A. Bettesworth in Pater-Noster-Row, and E. Curll in the Strand: and sold by W. Feales without Temple-Bar, 1734), 23.

borrowed from drama the basic principle of breaking up speech with dashes to reflect these verbal features, he nevertheless adapts this technique to make it serve a more aggressively mimetic end in *Clarissa*. In the Centlivre example, speech is broken, indeed, but in a decidedly tidy way; sentences cleave handily after full thoughts and clauses (*I know my Sister's Design—but that's not my Quarrel to you—*), and there persists in the exchange an overall effect of dramatic stylization. In *Clarissa*, by contrast, there is often a more precipitate quality to Richardson's dashes, which heightens the effect of immediacy. To get a sense of this stylistic distinction, consider another example of interruptive conversation between Clarissa and Lovelace, one which takes place after he has raped her and for once finds (or fashions) himself at a loss for words. Clarissa asks:

—What amends hast *thou* to propose?—What amends can such a one as thou make to a person of spirit or common sense, for the evil thou hast so inhumanly made me suffer?

As soon, madam—as soon—as—as soon as your uncle—or—not waiting—
Thou wouldst tell me, I suppose—I know what thou wouldst tell me—but
thinkest thou that marriage will satisfy for a guilt like thine?⁴⁹

The content of Lovelace's words is secondary to the content of the dashes that string his halting, spluttering efforts together. The brokenness of his speech is not only the medium, here, but also the message: interruption itself is given primacy over the meaning of his phrases in a way that happens neither in *The Gamester* nor in any of the other comedies Richardson is known to have printed.

One hypothesis about why the novel should need to prioritize interruption textually more than drama does has to do with medium. A dramatist, of course, can assume that actors will bring a sense of interruptive urgency to scripted lines in performance; a novelist, by contrast, relies wholly on his or her mastery of the medium of text to produce the impression

⁴⁹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 901.

of impassioned hearts “wholly engaged.” Alert to this fact, Richardson experiments confidently with dashes to develop an aesthetic of precipitation in his conversational exchanges, striving to evoke interruption on the page not as a straightforward feature of speech, but rather as a complex emotional-verbal-temporal phenomenon—one in which the emotional crux of the narrative resides. He begins with a basic technique borrowed from drama, but tries to ratchet up its mimetic potential by going farther than his dramatic counterparts in compromising the integrity of characters’ utterances, the better to demonstrate their genuine emotional distress. This intensely exact style, in its implicit claim that the accuracy of the account is more important than whether it makes good sense, augments the effect of a transcribed account that reaches the reader in an unmediated form.

The author’s effort to generate a spoken style by making strategic compositional errors originates in a mimetic impulse: a desire to record conversational interactions in a manner that captures the breakages and stops that run rife in real impassioned speech. And yet, the effects that he produces through bad syntax are perpetually at risk of tipping into the realm of the absurd, as noted earlier of the passage in which Lovelace performs broken speech to rhetorical ends—both in attempting to persuade Clarissa that he is remorseful, and in indulging himself after the fact in a highly performative transcription of the event in a letter to Belford:

What—what-a—what—has been done—I, I, I—cannot but say—must own—must confess—hem—hem—is not right—is not what should have been—But-a—but—but—I am truly—truly—sorry for it—⁵⁰

This is a typical example of Lovelace’s habit of writing down conversations in which he was a dramatic manipulator (and in which his writing up of the event is itself also manipulative). The account is layered with rhetorical strategy; and yet, what one can be certain of in reading this passage is the extent to which both Richardson and his villain-hero understand the power

⁵⁰ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 901.

of the dash to transform the page into something that does not feel very written at all, but rather distinctly (if absurdly) oral.

In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes makes a distinction that helps to clarify the representational issues that arise when Richardson takes this technique to its extremes in the novel's most emotional scenes. Barthes's distinction is between two terms of his own coinage: the real, and the operable. The following passage from "Sarrasine" incites the critic's observation:

'Addio, addio,' she said, with the prettiest inflection in her youthful voice. She added to the final syllable a marvelously well-executed trill, but in a soft voice, as if to give poetic expression to the emotions in her heart.

Prompted by the narrator's description of Marianina's vocal manner in saying farewell, Barthes asks:

What would happen if one actually performed Marianina's '*addio*' as it is described in the discourse? Something incongruous, no doubt, extravagant, and not musical. More: is it really possible to perform the act described? This leads to two propositions. The first is that the discourse has no responsibility vis-à-vis the real: in the most realistic novel, the referent has no "reality": suffice it to imagine the disorder the most orderly narrative would create were its descriptions taken at face value, converted into operative programs and simply *executed*. In short (this is the second proposition), what we call "real" (in the theory of the realistic text) is never more than a code of representation (of signification): it is never a code of execution: *the novelistic real is not operable*.⁵¹

What we can extrapolate from Barthes's claim, here, is that a style that too closely approaches the operable—in other words, textual representation that maps too well onto real-world referents—actually moves *away* from realism. Indeed, realism needs a degree of distance from the oral in order to avoid tipping into the ridiculous. When Richardson thinks too literally about transcription as a style of narration, as in the absurd speech above that he writes for Lovelace, he paradoxically winds up disabling some of its mimetic power.

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 80.

Richardson's speaking prose is more successful, indeed more immediate, when he tempers his hyper-realistic transcriptional style of reporting speech with description from the narrator, at one remove. Consider the following account (again styled by Lovelace himself) of the guilty manner in which he addresses Clarissa: "My dear—my love—I—I—I never—no never—lips trembling, limbs quaking, voice inward, hesitating, broken—Never surely did miscreant look so *like* a miscreant!"⁵² Initially, this complex sentence communicates through its style: the priority is not to preserve syntactically meaningful fragments, but rather to showcase Lovelace's choppy nonsense as meaningful in its very status as nonsense. The second half of the phrase then offers description, elaborating the direct speech with supporting information about Lovelace's broken manner, both oral and physical. Richardson balances the two modes available to him, here—one that has the texture of a pure record, and the other that is defined by its more artful, descriptive function.

In fracturing characters' phrases with dashes to evoke the emotional stakes of his story, Richardson discovers that there is a gap between what is transcriptionally accurate, and what is meaningful as realistic representation. The very phenomenon that the writer wants to represent with his dash-heavy technique is what eventually teaches him its limits: the more he tries to amplify the emotional pitch of his characters' conflicts with speechlessness and bad syntax, the closer he gets to the farcical territory that degrades both immediacy and realism. Nevertheless, his experiments in representing interruptive speech with dashes go beyond what either dramatists or novelists had hitherto done to develop a spoken, emotionally live style in print.

⁵² Richardson, *Clarissa*, 900.

Writing Voices: Richardson's Verbal Vivacity

A second reason why the concept of a speaking prose style is useful in discussing *Clarissa* is because it is so clear—especially from the novel's typographical features—that Richardson wants the reader to *hear* characters' speech qualitatively, in the mind's ear. There is a remarkable effort on the author's part to inscribe information about their vocal tone both in and around directly reported speech. Listen, for example, to the dying bawd Sinclair's last words:

And here, said she—Heaven grant me patience! (clenching and unclenching her hands) am I to die thus miserably!—of a broken leg in my old age!—snatch'd away by means of my own intemperance! Self-do! Self-undone!—No time for my affairs! No time to repent!—And in a few hours (Oh!—Oh!—with another long howling O- - - h!—U—gh—o! a kind of screaming key terminating it) who knows, who can tell *where* I shall be!—⁵³

The cadence of Sinclair's actual speech, here, is theatricalized—indeed, it bears noting that Richardson's effort to reflect speech dynamics more fully and accurately does not preclude him from writing in a dramatic mode. This passage presents a good example of this tension: nestled within Sinclair's stylized lines is one of the author's local efforts towards transcriptional realism, as he uses typography to maximize the fidelity of his onomatopoeic representation of Sinclair's screams.

The interruptive impulse manifests on a smaller scale, here, as Richardson breaks up individual words graphically to mark them with oral character. Taking “Oh” and “Ugh” as the orthographical standards for these two common, non-lexical ejaculations, we can see how Richardson interpolates em-dashes and hyphens within them to reflect their temporal duration and painful tone—effects which Belford's appended descriptors, *long* and *howling*, subsequently invite us to hear. The transcriptional style in which Sinclair's screams are

⁵³ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1389.

recorded gives them a basic contour; but it is the narratorial descriptions that help the reader further towards an idea of her peculiar verbal and aural pathos. Implicit in *howling* is a zoomorphic metaphor that likens the old bawd to a dog, while the phrase *a kind of screaming key terminating it*, in its perplexing impressionism, evokes a vague sort of pity and disgust. Indeed, Sinclair's peculiar way of dying tells us a great deal about her character.

Richardson's techniques for composing characters' speech are various, but tend towards a similar end: to evoke the impression of living, feeling people; to bring pages to life. It is worth noting that the epistolary mode he chooses for his narrative surely shapes this effect, too. As a form, the familiar letter brings with it a distinct set of possibilities, imperatives and features. In defining it, Thomas Keymer looks to Samuel Johnson's Dictionary definition:

As a passage cited in Johnson's Dictionary prescribes, 'the stile of letters ought to be free, easy, and natural; as near approaching to familiar conversation as possible'. Private in context and colloquial in style, the letter is thus uniquely placed to reproduce the intimacy of familiar speech: as in conversation, the analogy suggests, barriers falls away and gaps close, to leave on the page an unusually unguarded view of the writer's mind and of his immediate responses to the world.⁵⁴

Keymer then poses the obvious question—"But what of the novel in letters?"—wondering whether readers are to expect of epistolary fiction the same sort of candid disclosures real letters would display. I would pursue the same question to a different, more material end, asking rather what it means for familiar letters—which are necessarily handwritten—to be rendered and absorbed in print? In reality, the handwritten letter serves as a surrogate of the absent person, bearing all kinds of traces of the body that composed it. That the word "hand" is a homonym designating not only the person's body part but also their peculiar style of

⁵⁴ Keymer, *Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*, 3-4.

script supports the idea that real letters bring with them an embodied sense of presence. This intimacy must surely be compromised by setting those letters in type.

It may be that Richardson's efforts to evoke feeling, speaking characters on the page through graphic techniques is inspired by the embodied quality of the familiar letter. The experimental examples discussed thus far all show Richardson tapping the resources of print and using them in concert with description to help him render characters' utterances in a manner that is fuller, more complex and indeed more embodied—think of Sinclair's screaming key, of Lovelace's spluttering excuses—than if only their lexical content were reported. There are, as his technical performance proves, ways of using print that supply some of the immediacy that is lost with the writing (and written) hand. Elaine Scarry also believes these possibilities to be rich. In *Dreaming By the Book* (2000), she examines the process whereby “images somehow *do* acquire the vivacity of perceptual objects” in the verbal arts, noting how extraordinary it is that paper and ink can have such a pronounced sensory effect.⁵⁵ Indeed, innovations in literary technique and print led to the vivid sensory evocations that we find in books and poems, given that the textual medium itself is “almost wholly devoid of *actual* sensory content.” Scarry continues in her description of printed text:

its visual features, as has often been observed, consist of monotonous small black marks on a white page. It has *no* acoustical features. Its tactile features are limited to the weight of its pages, their smooth surfaces, and their exquisitely thin edges. The attributes it has that are directly apprehensible by perception are, then, meager in number. More important, these attributes are utterly irrelevant, sometimes even antagonistic, to the mental images that a poem or novel seeks to produce (steam rising across a windowpane, the sound of a stone dropped in a pool, the feel of dry August grass underfoot), the ones whose vivacity is under investigation here.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

⁵⁶ Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*, 5.

In these small black marks on the white page, Richardson evidently saw a wealth of stylistic possibilities for representing speech with tonal vivacity—in a manner that is readily apprehensible to readers’ auditory imaginations. To add an aural profile to direct speech, the author again takes inspiration from the typographical conventions of printed plays, elaborating and diversifying them for new functions in the novel. His technique of breaking up individual words with hyphens, for instance, has a precedent in the works of William Popple, a playwright whose comedies Richardson printed. In 1734, he published Popple’s *The Lady’s Revenge: or, the Rover Reclaim’d*, which features this technique in a line spoken by the character Angelina. Here she is trying stop her awkward interlocutor, Sir Harry, from saying something inappropriate:

Ang. What shall I say to him? This Silence is worse than any thing I can say. I don’t know what to talk of. [*Aside.*]——Methinks, they stay——very long, Sir *Harry*.

Sir Har. [*confuse’d*] I can never think the Time long, Madam, that furnishes me with an Opportunity of being alone with a Woman whose conversation has equal Charms with her Person, and whose Person——

Ang. S--ir.⁵⁷

The technique appears again in Popple’s *The Double Deceit: or, a Cure for Jealousy*—a comedy Richardson printed in 1736—this time in a line spoken by the character Sir William, as he instructs his compatriots in the art of wooing: “Look like an *Adonis*, when you attack; steal into their Hearts, Boys, so—ftly, so—ftly—Ah Rogues!”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ William Popple, *The Lady’s Revenge: or, the Rover Reclaim’d. A Comedy. As it is Acted at the Theatre Royal in Covent-Garden. Printed for J. Brindley at the King’s-Arms, New Bond-Street...And sold by A. Dodd, without Temple-Bar; J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane; J. Wilford, behind the Chapter-House, St. Paul’s Church-Yard; and E. Nutt, at the Royal-Exchange* (London, 1734), 55.

⁵⁸ William Popple, *The Double Deceit: or, a Cure for Jealousy, A comedy. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal, in Covent Garden. Printed for T. Woodward, at the Half-Moon between the Temple Gates in Fleet-Street; and J. Walthoe, against the Royal-Exchange in Cornhill: and sold by T. Cooper, at the Globe in Pater-Noster-Row* (London, 1736), 4.

Whether or not Richardson had Popple in mind when he adopted this sort of invasive tonal typography is impossible to determine; what one can safely assume, however, is that the author was exposed to this way of using hyphens and dashes in plays of his period, and probably in those that he himself printed. We saw him deploy this technique in the transcriptions of Sinclair's dying screams; another instance appears in Lovelace's description of Lord M.'s outrage (here, tellingly, he breaks up the same word that Popple does): "What say you to this, SIR-R—! Remember, Jack, to read all their *sirs* in this dialogue with a double *rr*, *sirr!*—denoting indignation rather than respect."⁵⁹ Not only does Lovelace double the final consonant, visually giving the word a more substantial liquid curl; he also uses capitalization, another form of emphatic typography, to amplify the volume. He then gives additional reading instructions to Belford, lest the polite address *sir*, standing alone in print, connote the wrong emotional timbre for the conversation. This insistence on aurally accurate reading is something that the rake shares with his author.

A technique that begins in printed plays, as either a trace of performance or a cue for reading aloud, takes on new interpretive significance when deployed in the novel. In his insistence that Belford attend to the distinction between a respectful *sir* and an indignant *sirr*, Lovelace exposes the anxiety about interpretation that prompts him to use textual features to capture Lord M.'s tone. This desire textually to dictate interpretation surely originates with (or at least resembles that of) Richardson himself, a symptom of his notoriously controlling authorial temperament. In the same vein, Richardson develops a related version of the word-breaking method we have already seen by combining italic vitality with the distinguishing power of hyphens. Consider first this excerpt from one of the contentious family conferences

⁵⁹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1030.

at Harlowe-Place, when James cynically counters his mother's claim that Clarissa is not interested in Lovelace:

You know with what indifference, said my mamma, she has hitherto seen him.—Her prudence may be trusted to, as my sister Hervey says.
With what ap-*pa*-rent indifference, drolled my brother—⁶⁰

And second, this ejaculation from Mrs. Harlowe during a later argument between her and Clarissa:

—I am tired out with your obstinacy—the most unper-*suade*-able girl!⁶¹

Richardson uses hyphens to intervene within individual words and fracture them into smaller units capable of bearing emphasis. In parsing words into syllables, he injects one in each—the middle syllables, *pa* and *suade*—with added force, which in turn allows him to inflect each whole word. In the first case, it generates the nasty irony he wants readers to hear in James Harlowe's voice, which is then narratorially reinforced with the unusual speech verb *drolled*; and in the second, it generates the indignation and incredulity he wants us to hear in Mrs. Harlowe's. In both cases, especially the first, a single syllable speaks volumes about the character uttering it.

This technique harnesses typographical contrast to apply pressure on readers' perception of character: Richardson takes a word on which interpretation hinges, and touches part of it with visual difference, defining the nuance of its emphasis, and thus the intentions behind it. The contrastive power of italics also operates on a larger scale in his spoken style, modifying whole words to shape speeches with tonal inflection. Like *Pamela* before it,

⁶⁰ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 58.

⁶¹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 112.

Clarissa is heavily italicized.⁶² The following speech by James to Clarissa shows the author's typical usage of this font in conversational scenes: here, the brother recalls his sister's vow to be "bricked up" in the Harlowe family tomb before she will agree to marry Mr. Solmes—

Judge my surprize, when he bolted upon me so unexpectedly, and taking my hand, which he grasped with violence, Return, pretty Miss, said he; return, if you please!—You shall not yet *be bricked up!*—Your *instigating* brother shall save you from That!—O thou fallen angel, said he, peering up to my downcast face, such a sweetness *here!*—and such an obstinacy *there*, tapping my neck!—... You shall be redeemed, and this worthy gentleman [Mr. Solmes], raising his voice, will be so good as to redeem you from ruin—and hereafter you will bless him, or have reason to bless him, for his *condescension*; that was the brutal brother's word!⁶³

Italic typography serves a mimetic function here insofar as it demonstrates Richardson's awareness that real spoken language delivers much of its meaning through the complex of cadence and emphasis that supports it. Italics allow the author to notate the aural and intentional telos of phrases as they rise and fall around crucial words.

Italics are particularly interesting for the interpretive role they play, creating an aural key to assist readers in imaginatively apprehending the dual meaning of certain words. *Assist* might be too mild a word; italics can be read as policing readers, bending their ears to hear more acutely the malicious undertone in everything that comes out of James Harlowe's mouth. Expressions like *bricked up* and *instigating*, which he adapts from Clarissa's original ingenuous usage, are then layered with italic mockery. Here and indeed in many of the novel's conversations, Richardson brings subtext to the level of text typographically, embedding the implicit within the explicit by marking the word as different, even as it remains the same.

⁶² Richardson uses italics copiously in *Pamela*; after the publication of the first edition, he would go on to revise his application of them obsessively. See Bray, "Attending to the Minute," 109.

⁶³ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 305-6.

Italic typography is an instrument of control and even coercion, specifying and often limiting the ways in which readers can interpret textual meaning. For Richardson, text that reports speech must mean in an auditory sense in order for it to mean according to his broader goals not simply for character painting but also, by extension, for the moral substance of the novel. James Harlowe must be unambiguously a villain, and the italics that point to his snarky duplicity as he converses with Clarissa are foundational in establishing that villainy. Within a necessarily visual prose medium, Richardson strives to develop an aural profile in characters' speech that is a source not only of stylistic vitality, but of didactic narrative meaning as well.

The impulse behind the author's copious use of italics is transcriptional, even if the final effect is less so. He wants to find a textual way to record the phenomenon of vocal emphasis in order to harness its signifying power—but the often over-determined result is more theatrical in its texture than transcriptional or realistic. Indeed, the tension between these two modes is apparent in many of Richardson's efforts to encode tone at a stylistic level, as in the following multi-player conversation. Here, Clarissa faces off with three people who are trying to convince her in Mr. Solmes's favour—her aunt and uncle Hervey, and Mr. Solmes himself:

Give me leave, sir—but I may venture to say, that many of those who have escaped censure, have not merited applause.

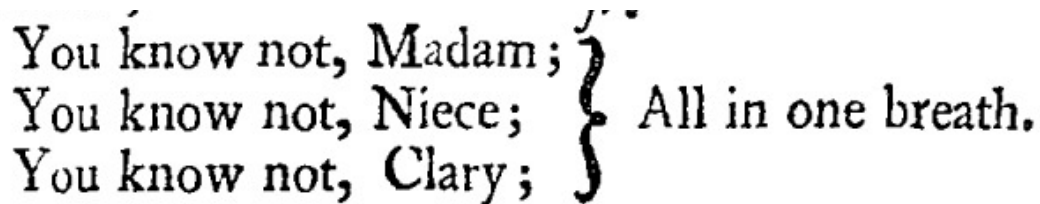
Permit me to observe further, that Mr Solmes himself may not be absolutely faultless. I never heard of his virtues. Some vices I have heard of—excuse me, Mr Solmes, I speak to your face—the text about *casting the first stone* affords an excellent lesson. He looked down; but was silent.

Mr Lovelace may have vices *you* have not. You may have others, which *he* has not. I speak not to defend him, or to accuse you. No man is bad, no one is good, in *everything*. Mr Lovelace, for example, is said to be implacable, and to hate my friends; that does not make me value him the more. But give me leave to say, that they hate *him* as bad. Mr Solmes has his antipathies, likewise, very *strong* ones! and those to his *own relations!* which I don't find to be the other's fault; for he lives well with *his*—Yet he may have as bad—worse, pardon me, he cannot have in my poor opinion: for what must be the man, who *hates his own flesh?*

You know not, madam;
You know not, niece; } All in one breath.
You know not, Clary;
I may not, nor do I desire to know his reasons.⁶⁴

Touches of transcriptional style come through in Clarissa’s conversational false start (*Give me leave, sir—but I may venture to say*), and her extremely spare documentation in marking the brief silence of Solmes’s non-response—*He looked down; but was silent*. In the same vein, Clarissa’s meaning-laden vocal emphases are rendered here with almost compulsive precision. But even as these italics ask to be read as small traces of how the words were “really” spoken, the global effect of her discourse is highly rhetorical, even theatrical.

The same tension is apparent in the new form of speech tag that Richardson develops here—one that reflects Clarissa’s interlocutors’ incensed and impatient tone more immediately than a simple *they said*. Instead, Richardson uses an oversized curled brace to indicate that *All in one breath* applies equally to three utterances that happen concurrently. To illustrate the unusual nature of this mark, here is a facsimile of the first edition of 1747-8:



You know not, Madam; }
You know not, Niece; } All in one breath.
You know not, Clary; }

Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1748 (figure 6).

The author appears again to have drawn the idea for this technique from the conventions of printed drama. The use of big longitudinal brackets to mark asides is common in plays of the

⁶⁴ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 316.

period; the following example (along with a number of counterparts) can be found in John Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite: or, the Earl of Essex*, which Richardson printed in 1735.⁶⁵

C. Eff. O that dear Name o' th' suddē how
it starts me!
Makes every Vein within me leave its Channel,
To run and to protect my feeble Heart;
And now my Blood as soon retreats again,
To croud with Blushes full my guilty Cheeks—
Alas I fear.

} *Aside*

Banks, *The Unhappy Favourite*, 1735 (figure 7).

In this dramatic context, the long bracket provides a way to record on the page some basic information about the speaker's manner of delivery—in this case, the Earl of Essex's words are spoken aside. Richardson's use of the long bracket in *Clarissa*, by contrast, is a novel attempt to create the illusion of verbal simultaneity within a conversational scene: he breaks with the single-line, linear imperative of the prose medium and divides the page laterally, so that he can use the left half of it to record the three utterances and the other half for a single, all-embracing speech tag indicating the simultaneity of the characters' response. Clarissa, as narrator, omits *they said* before *All in one breath*, turning her description of their manner into an implied speech tag of sorts which functions without an explicitly stated verb of communication. Through this innovative use of the spatio-graphic features of the page, the characters' precipitate expression of disbelief comes to the fore.

⁶⁵ John Banks, *The Unhappy Favourite: or, the Earl of Essex. A Tragedy* (London: Printed for W. Feales; A. Bettesworth; F. Clay, R. Wellington, C. Corbett and J. Brindley, 1735), 49.

This typographical innovation reflects Richardson's desire to let Clarissa produce a conversational record that exactly parallels what "happened"—a mimetic impulse that is in tension with the non-naturalistic aspect of her interlocutors' identical responses. Two forms of emphasis are working simultaneously in the craft of this passage: to-the-moment accuracy, on one hand, and theatrically stylized exaggeration on the other. It is also worth noting that the account would not be strictly parallel if it were merely a transcription of their speech: it requires the narrator's flexibility for providing additional information—and, by necessary extension, interpretation—of the speakers' timing and tone. Somewhat paradoxically, then, the account requires a certain degree of mediation in order to produce a closer approximation of the original conversation. In this persistent tension between a transcriptional style and a more artful one, we see the writer negotiating the technical pull that each mode exerts on his textual conversations as the writer tries to make those conversations register as lively and real.

In this process of negotiation, Richardson often keeps the narrator's interventions minimal to support the illusion of an accurate record. Consider this conclusion to one of Clarissa's letters, in which she transcribes a loaded conversation with her gatekeeper, Betty:

I will go down and deposit this; for Betty has seen I have been writing. The saucy creature took a napkin, and dipped it in water, and with a fleering air: Here, Miss; holding the wet corner to me.

What's that for, said I?

Only, miss, one of the fingers of your right hand, if you please to look at it. It was inky.

I gave her a look: but said nothing.⁶⁶

Clarissa's style of writing here—with minimal editorializing and spare framing of direct speech—help give the impression that she is a human recording device. She uses few speech tags, instead allowing context to establish who is speaking to whom, as well as its antagonistic

⁶⁶ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 344-45.

affect. Her description of tone stands in as a speech tag again, not unlike *All in one breath* from the previous example: in this case, *the saucy creature* is clearly stated as the subject, but the communication verb is omitted, while *with a fleering air* is left to imply the idea that Betty *said* it thus. These two narratorial descriptors, one of them partly disguised in its speech tagging function, bear all of the information we need about Betty's manner, and thus her character: she is daringly disingenuous; she is not an ally. Her simple action of holding out the napkin towards Clarissa propels the interaction directionally, establishing Betty as a passive aggressor. Even the women's silence speaks for itself, here, its hostile tone engaged in mutual amplification with another directional gesture: Clarissa's meaningful look back at Betty.

This interaction, though brief, gives a strong idea of what kind of information Richardson is supplying around direct speech, from the narratorial platform, to establish a clear impression of particular characters interacting not only in time and physical space, but also in an affective context. One of the most economical ways in which he attaches affects to conversations is through his experimental choice of verbs for speech tags, a lexical flexibility that does not exist within the dramatic mode. He often avails himself of this easy opportunity to specify characters' tone through creative diction: we saw the unusual *drolled my brother* in an earlier conversation at Harlowe-Place, to which we can add *interrogated he, retorted I, join'd my mamma* and *put in my sister*.⁶⁷ All of these inventive aberrations from the verb *to say* derive from one extended interactional scene in which they support the lexical content of characters' utterances with important information about their attitudes towards one another—mocking, accusatory, defensive, tentative.

⁶⁷ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 57-58.

Richardson's hyper-precision in notating tone from the narratorial platform also informs his frequent use of an odd phrasal structure: "with," followed by information about a tonal descriptor. This form appears in Clarissa's earlier stand-off with Betty, who addresses her mistress *with a fleering air*. Essentially, this construction is a lexically expanded adverb—one that offers more flexibility for descriptive nuance. While *fleeringly* might have worked as well in this case, *with a fleering air* makes room for that second loaded noun, *air*, with its negative connotations of affectation and fakery. Adverbs provide a pithy way to inscribe tone during interactions of rapid verbal volleying, without slowing the narrative pace; but often, Richardson opts for specificity over economy, exemplified in his tendency to dilate adverbs into these longer and more nuanced notational phrases:

O the fond, fond heart! *with a sneer of insult*, lifting up his hands.

Clarissa Harlowe! said he, *with a big voice*; and there he stopp'd—

My sister, *with the affectation of a whisper* to my mamma—This is—This is *spite*, Madam (very *spitefully* she spoke the word), because you commanded her to stay.⁶⁸

Richardson does not invent this construction; it finds precedent in performative art forms like music, echoing the Italianate notation *con* (meaning *with*) + affective noun (*spirito*, *veloce*, *forza*, etc.), which composers use to specify musical dynamics. Given this musical relative, it follows that the equivalent literary construction would work well to register cues for reading tone—a distinctly musical quality—in prose. In a parallel sense, such musical notations prescribe the particular character of the notes they modify, much as the verbal equivalent brings out the character of the speaker through her peculiar manner of expression.

⁶⁸ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 57; 87; 114. All emphases mine except for "*spitefully*."

The fact that this construction appears in earlier novels by Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood, themselves dramatists as well as prose writers, suggests its connection to a related genre of performative cue, the dramatic stage direction. For example, Behn writes that

Oroonoko reply'd, with a deep Sigh, and a languishing Voice,—*I am armed against their worst Efforts*——⁶⁹

While Haywood writes in *Love in Excess*,

I thought Madam, (said he, with an Accent Maliciously Ironical) that you had thrown off, even the Appearances of Love for me.⁷⁰

These examples are also striking in the way they suggest that Behn and Haywood considered the speech tag essential—quite possibly because speech tags easily clear a way in for these narratorial notations of speaking manner. Richardson's contribution, as is often the case, is to stretch an established technique to see how variously it can be applied, and what kind of related narrative work it can do. Although this construction often notes purely aural tone, as we have seen, he uses it just as often to specify aspects of physical comportment that confer tone in speech. Here, Clarissa uses it to describe Lovelace's expression when he hears someone moving behind the gate during the elopement scene:

Good God, said he! *with a look of wildness and surprize*, what is it I hear!

And here she uses it to describe her sister's face during one of the fights at Harlowe Place:

A man who had like to have been my brother's murderer, my *sister* said, *with a face even bursting with restraint of passion*.⁷¹

When Richardson extends the application of this construction from vocal to facial expression, he likewise expands his narratorial toolkit, enabling himself to do more types of vivid

⁶⁹ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: Or, The Royal Slave* (London: Printed for W. Canning [etc.], 1688), 74.

⁷⁰ Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess; or the fatal enquiry, a novel. Part the second* (London: Printed for W. Chetwood [etc.], 1719?), 70.

⁷¹ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 374; 60. All emphases mine except for "*sister*."

descriptive work. More importantly, in adapting a technique more commonly associated with the aural and applying it equally to the bodily, Richardson demonstrates his awareness that the tone of an interaction between two characters emanates not simply from the vocal cords but also from the moving, breathing bodies in which they reside. Applying the same technique to describe these two different types of expression effectively equates them, and even shows their relationship of mutual dependence in establishing individual characters' tone in conversational interactions.

Conclusion

Reading Richardson's conversational scenes, one often gets the sense that he is pursuing a fantasy of verbal representation that is so close to the real, it would transcend its status as representation. The desire behind this fantasy in fact permeates the whole book: the tonal italics and dashed up sentences he uses to evoke embodied and passionate speech in the examples I've brought forward also show up elsewhere, imbuing entire letters with a sense of the emotionally charged spoken voice.

In generating his conversational immediacy, Richardson experiments in a confident, often playful way, co-opting notational techniques from other performative arts: primarily printed plays, but also the musical score. He adapts these for the novel, at the same time discovering and developing new techniques specific to printed prose narrative to help him craft vivid, recognizable representations of speech. For Richardson, making speakers sound animated and convincing often involves using the graphic possibilities of the printed page to approximate the texture of transcription at a stylistic level. In doing so, he takes as his

representational goal the impression of an exact and immediate verbal record—this, indeed, is what constitutes his peculiar impetus towards fictional realism.

In his transcriptional mode of writing, Richardson uses typography to structure and inscribe speech with an unmistakably oral quality. His speaking style functions on the principles of interruption and difference, as his techniques usually reflect some aberration from the linguistic or graphic neutral. He interpolates dashes into his sentences to spin them into excess or fracture them into incompleteness; he also uses them to break up individual words so he can use some other typographical means to specify their tone. In short, he finds all ways available in print to make his prose in passages of direct speech visually pronounced, and thus aurally so, helping his characters speaking voices into the reader's imagining ear.

In many ways, the print medium is enabling for Richardson—but he can also be *too* good in print, when the graphic conventions of the medium allow him to pursue his transcriptional impulse into absurd territory. It is when he manages to balance this mode with some more artful tactics, deployed from the narratorial platform, that he produces the most successful scenes of conversation, in which particular characters' spoken voices come through in their emotional plenitude without grating.

For Richardson, the novel needs representations of conversation that strike this balance; readers need to hear precisely how characters express themselves under emotional duress. It is through the stylistic nuances of characters' impassioned verbal interactions that readers get a sense of them as individual players in the story, acting and reacting in situations that matter. Through conversation, unique personalities emerge, and the moral character of the agents driving the narrative present themselves to readers' imaginations. It is this effect, in the end, that Richardson's elaborate and innovative method for representing speech serves.

Chapter Two: Life (Writing) As Performance in Boswell's London Journal

Introduction

Whereas Richardson's technical experiments are geared towards rendering speech as it really sounds in moments of extreme emotion, those of James Boswell help him dramatize the mannered, sociable, everyday kinds of conversational exchanges he experienced in his own life. The habit he acquired in young adulthood of recording these in journals would one day help him make a literary legacy, in allowing him to identify and develop skills he would use to craft the famous conversational scenes of the *Life of Johnson* (1791). Specifically, this chapter focuses on the journal Boswell kept during an eight-month stay in London from 1762 to 1763. Writing for close friends only and unencumbered by any idea of publication, he produced a lively personal narrative that in many senses resembles a novel—it is, after all, an imaginative prose narrative with a striving protagonist at its center, Boswell himself. At the same time, however, the journal stands clearly apart from published narratives of the period in its technical variegation and rough, experimental texture.

What Boswell mostly chooses to set down for posterity are the conversations he has with people in various social milieux. Prefiguring both his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) and his *Life of Johnson*, the *London Journal* contains a vast amount of recorded conversation. As the introduction to this project highlights, there was no absolute standard at this time dictating how direct speech should be interpolated into prose narrative, or how extra-lexical features such as bodily gesture and tone should be inscribed in and around it. Before the modern set of conventions for mapping speech on the page coalesced in the early nineteenth century, writers experimented with all manner of techniques to configure these categories of verbal information on the page. More so than any other single text, Boswell's

London Journal showcases a wide range of them. In representing his diverse social experiences in the city, he does not hew to a consistent set of techniques but rather experiments with many. This chapter thus seizes the opportunity the journal presents to see various technical possibilities juxtaposed, and to leverage the contrast between them towards a fuller understanding of the mechanics of speech in text. The chief contributions of this chapter are a taxonomy of Boswell's speech-recording techniques and a critical account of how they work. Specifically, it charts how Boswell uses bodily action and vocal tone to constitute the impression of sociability in textual conversations, and how particular methods for notating this information work to clarify the dynamics of scenes (who is speaking to whom, for instance, and against what affective backdrop).

To begin, I consider why this particular piece of life writing should include such a varied array of speech-recording techniques. In doing so, I identify a link between the experimental texture of Boswell's journal and the performative, even improvisational nature of conversation itself, the main object of the his textual representation. I draw on two contexts in accounting for Boswell's experimentation in scenes of dialogue: first, his own biographical circumstances, which fostered a lifelong interest in in drama and performance; and second, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework for analyzing social interaction. Evidence abounds in Boswell's life writing and elsewhere that he loved the stage, and likewise understood life itself as a kind of performance. His daily memoranda, in which he directs himself to cultivate specific traits and attitudes in presenting himself to others, bespeak his fundamentally performative way of being in the social world. In this sense, Boswell's worldview anticipates Goffman's theory of social interaction as a complex performance

geared towards “impression management,” a term referring to the maneuvers we use to control how others receive us and our situation.⁷²

But Boswell does not just treat conversation as performance in real life: he also does so on the page, in seeking the best technical means to represent his latest feat of social role-playing. Goffman theorizes social interaction not just as a performance, but also as a game. The technical flexibility and range Boswell displays in the conversations of his *London Journal*, I propose, are related to the dynamic of play that defines impression management in real-life social scenes. Conversational improvisation finds a literary-textual correlative in Boswell’s self-documentary project: namely, the experimental texture of his representations of speech and sociable interaction. The journal offers a chance to consider not only the technical means of constituting sociability and scene in text, but also the inversely correlative relationship between mastering social performance in life, and perfecting its representation on the page. If the performance should fail in real-time, the journal provides space for endless rehearsals.

The London Journal: A Brief Textual History

Before drawing out the biographical details that elucidate Boswell’s relationship with drama and performance—most of which are recorded in the *London Journal* itself—I will briefly contextualize his life writing practice and the history of this particular manuscript. Regarding his early writing efforts, biographer Frederick Pottle notes that the young Boswell “kept a journal by fits and starts from at least as early as the autumn of 1758, but with one

⁷² See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 15.

possible exception his records up to the autumn of 1762 appear to have been unambitious.”⁷³

The exception to which Pottle is referring is Boswell’s *Journal of my Jaunt*, which he wrote not a year before the *London Journal* during a two-month journey through the Scottish Borders at the age of twenty-one. The *Jaunt* was a deliberate preparatory exercise for the longer journal he was planning to keep during his trip to London scheduled for later that year. Boswell casts this early piece almost entirely in a summarizing narrative mode, reporting most of his conversations indirectly. Dialogue is scattered sparingly throughout; only fifteen instances of direct speech punctuate the 195-page manuscript, and none are as substantial with regard to length or cast of characters as the set pieces of the later *London Journal*.

More experimental and more invested in reporting conversation than this or any of his other early attempts at life writing, Boswell’s *London Journal* shows his first concerted efforts to craft speech in prose. Despite the candid and often explicit nature of its accounts, the journal was not a private document; he designed it as a semi-formal project in literary self-training that would be read by others. He shared it with a coterie audience, including his close friends Andrew Erskine and William Temple, as well as John Johnston, to whom he sent weekly instalments. Even Samuel Johnson later read and critiqued it, “which he has done all along,” as Boswell writes in his journal of their Hebrides tour.⁷⁴ He was proud of his journal as a literary object. As editor Gordon Turnbull notes, the letters he sent to John Johnston along with weekly instalments of the journal manuscript contain poignantly precise instructions for its care: “You must lay it by carefully in the full Quarto size”; “Let it be

⁷³ See Frederick Pottle, ed., *London Journal, 1762-1763, Together with Journal of my Jaunt, Harvest, 1762. Prepared for the Press with Introduction and Notes by Frederick A. Pottle* (London: Heineman, 1951), 12.

⁷⁴ James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. Peter Levi (London: Penguin, 1984), 294.

carefully deposited at full quarto size and kept clean and safe. Perhaps at the year's end, we may think of binding it up."⁷⁵ In the journal proper, he makes plans to have "it carefully laid up among the Archives of Auchinleck," his family's estate in Ayrshire.⁷⁶

Boswell's wish was granted: the manuscript remained "laid up" for over a century, suppressed for years along with other caches of his papers by descendants who knew about their "startlingly frank personal content," to quote Turnbull's description.⁷⁷ (Indeed one of the most memorable and entertaining features of the *London Journal* is its documentation of young Boswell's sexual adventures with actresses and prostitutes and the spells of gonorrhea and drunken guilt that resulted from them.) The manuscript was found by accident in a trove of papers in 1930 by Claude Collier Abbott, a scholar questing after the archives of the Scottish poet and philosopher James Beattie at Fettercairn House in Aberdeenshire, which had once been owned by Boswell's executor Sir William Forbes (also, as it happens, Beattie's biographer). The document was then titled "Journal from the time of my leaving Scotland 15 Novr. 1762" in Boswell's own hand. It was acquired along with the rest of the discovered papers by an American collector, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Heyward, who already owned a substantial cache of Boswelliana.

As Turnbull explains, "Boswell's manuscript of the London portion of his 'Journal from the time of my leaving Scotland 15 Novr. 1762'—amounting to 736 manuscript quarto pages (734 in Boswell's numbering)—is an early part of the lengthy series of journals he

⁷⁵ Turnbull (ed.), "Introduction," *London Journal*, xix. These quotations are drawn from letters dated 6 December 1762 and 21 December 1762, respectively.

⁷⁶ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 273.

⁷⁷ For a scrupulously full account of the suppression, discovery and publication of the *London Journal* manuscript, see Turnbull, "Introduction," *London Journal*, xvii-xix. Turnbull's account is the primary source for my abbreviated description here.

wrote, with lapses, for most of his adult life.”⁷⁸ Frederick Pottle retitled this section of the manuscript *Boswell’s London Journal* when he edited it for publication in 1950. The unwieldy archive of papers had just been acquired by Yale University, one year previously in 1949, and the Yale Boswell Editions promptly established. In preparing his edition of the journal, which was published as part of Yale’s multi-volume ‘trade’ or ‘reading’ edition of Boswell’s life writing, Pottle applied aggressive editing to modernize Boswell’s spelling, punctuation and paragraphing. Turnbull’s own 2010 edition of the journal follows more conservative scholarly protocol, preserving the features of Boswell’s own manuscript and marking all adjustments in square brackets. In addition to Turnbull’s eminently usable and instructive edition, Yale has made facsimiles of the *London Journal* manuscript available through the Digital Collections of the Beinecke’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Conversation as Performance: Boswell and Goffman

Boswell was culturally and imaginatively immersed in theatre from young adulthood. His enthusiasm for all aspects of the stage primed him with the knowledge and the drive to experiment both with conversational self-presentation in life, and with conversational representation in text. The *London Journal* exhibits just how engaged he was with the theatre. In his journal account for 14 December, 1762, Boswell records a memory of going to the Edinburgh theatre “in my Boyish days, when I used to walk down the Cannongate, & think of Players with a mixture of narrow-minded horror, & lively-minded pleasure.”⁷⁹ In the

⁷⁸ Turnbull (ed.), “Introduction,” *London Journal*, xviii.

⁷⁹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 45. As Turnbull notes in his introduction to the *London Journal*, this “narrow-minded horror” was engendered by Euphemia Boswell, Boswell’s Calvinistic mother, who apparently wept the first time she was made to see a play, and refused to return to the theatre thereafter. Turnbull draws this anecdote about Boswell’s weeping mother from the autobiographical

latter part of his second decade, he threw himself into theatrical culture in both literary and social senses. One of his earliest publications was a collection of theatrical reviews entitled *A View of the Edinburgh Theatre During the Summer Season, 1759*, which he dedicated to his friend, the actor West Digges.⁸⁰ Aside from West Digges—whose repeated performances as Macheath in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* deeply impressed Boswell’s imagination, and whose jaunty rakishness he expressly strived to imitate—other actor acquaintances include James Love and Thomas Sheridan. London was the ideal place for Boswell not only to pursue his literary and social ambitions related to the theatre, but also to take in as many performances as possible. In the first week alone of his London sojourn of 1762-63, he took himself to two comedies: he saw Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour*, starring the famous comic actor Henry Woodward, on November 19 at Covent Garden; and he saw George Farquhar’s *The Beaux’s Stratagem*, featuring David Garrick and James Love, on November 22 at Drury Lane.⁸¹

Boswell’s longstanding love of live theatre is connected to the pleasure he finds in conversation as the closest analogue to performance in daily life. His awareness of the performative possibilities inherent in social interaction is immediately heightened on arriving in London: “‘Since I came up,’ he writes, ‘I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been

sketch Boswell wrote in French (called *Ébauche de ma Vie*) as a way of introducing himself to Jean Jacques Rousseau in 1764. Turnbull cites an English translation of the *Ébauche* in the introduction to his edition of the *London Journal*. See Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, xxi.

⁸⁰ Other juvenile publications relating to the theatre include: a 1760 pamphlet about the dramatist Samuel Foote’s satire on the Methodists, a piece Boswell cheekily titled *Observations good or bad stupid or clever serious or jocular on Squire Foote’s dramatic entertainment intitled the Minor, by a genius*; a 160-line poem entitled *An Ode to Tragedy*; and the defaming *Critical Strictures on the New Tragedy of ‘Elvira’*, written jointly with friends Andrew Erskine and George Dempster in 1763.

⁸¹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 8n.10-12; 10n.1-2.

fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we chuse.”⁸²

He chooses many characters during this time, both real and fictional. His actor friend West Digges is a touchstone for him, especially when it comes to courtship. Boswell devotes much of the *London Journal* to cataloguing his own sexual exploits—particularly those he had with an actress he calls Louisa. In documenting his relationship with her he regularly uses Digges’s character as a framework through which to process and perform his desire. Describing his first advance with Louisa, he writes:

I felt a warmth at my heart, which glowed in my face. I attempted to be like Digges, & considered the similarity of our Genius and pleasures. I acquired confidence by considering my present character in this light. A young fellow of spirit & fashion, heir to a good fortune, enjoying the pleasures of London, and now making his addresses in order to have an intrigue with that delicious subject of gallantry, an Actress.⁸³

Here he attempts “to be like Digges,” and in doing so indirectly invokes the fictional character that made Digges famous: Macheath, the swashbuckling protagonist of *The Beggar’s Opera*. As models of masculine confidence with which he was intimately familiar, these characters provide Boswell with inspiration—a rough script to follow, complete with expressions and attitudes—in interacting with Louisa.

He also looks to stock characters for inspiration. Here is Boswell describing his state of mind the morning after having succeeded in his goal of having sex with Louisa:

We awaked from sweet repose after the luscious fatigues of the night. I got up between nine & ten, and walked out, till Louisa should rise. I patrolled up and down Fleet-street thinking on London, the seat of Parliament and the seat of pleasure, and seeming to myself as one of the Wits in King Charles the Second’s time.⁸⁴

⁸² Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 9.

⁸³ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 53.

⁸⁴ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 94.

The combination of remembering the previous night and feeling the early-morning pulse of London has a powerful effect on Boswell. To enjoy these pleasures simultaneously, he invents a character to merge them cognitively: he transforms himself into a rakish wit from the court of King Charles II, a figure who brings together sexual adventure with English civil and political influence. For Michael McKeon, Boswell's adoption of roles relates to his desire to dissociate himself from his father's will and to actualize his own instead: "Boswell gives substance to pure willed choice," McKeon writes, "by momentarily and experimentally taking on a series of 'characters'—the man of pleasure, the character of a gentleman, the character of a soldier, and so forth."⁸⁵ Beyond giving him traction to execute his choices, these characters also seem to open up for Boswell a way of being in the world, enhancing his experience of specific social interactions situated in specific places. The dramatic mode is fundamentally an instrument for Boswell to grasp and engage with the environments—both social and physical—in which he finds himself, and to assimilate the diverse social scenes he participates in there.

One memorable way in which Boswell's life-as-performance philosophy manifests is in his skill at mimicry, the often satirical art of imitating another person's speech, which, as Frederick Pottle notes, Boswell was already "practising assiduously and with enormous gusto" by the time he moved to London.⁸⁶ He probably developed this skill by watching the famous mimic Samuel Foote in performance, as well as the actor David Garrick, who would later become a close friend. Like Boswell, Garrick was famously attuned to auditory nuances

⁸⁵ See Michael McKeon, "Writer as Hero: Novelistic Prefigurations and the Emergence of Literary Biography," *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991), 27.

⁸⁶ Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740-1769* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 63.

of the voice. As Boswell recounts in the *Life of Johnson*, to illustrate the subtleties of the Lichfield accent that caused Johnson to pronounce “once” as “woonse,” “Garrick sometimes used to take him off, squeezing a lemon into a punch-bowl, with uncouth gesticulations, looking round the company, and calling out, ‘Who’s for *poonsh*?’”⁸⁷ This shared interest in mimicry among Boswell, Foote, Garrick and others suggest their desire to expose *all* conversation as performance, by showing with virtuosic flair how apparently effortlessly its formal features can be studied and reproduced.

As suggested by the “uncouth gesticulations” and the pronunciation of “poonsh” that help Garrick imitate Johnson, mimicry requires mastery of the voice and body alike. Boswell acknowledges voice and body as the primary instruments of performance, both in presenting himself in social life and in representing conversations in his journal—indeed, as will soon become evident, much of the conversational information he seeks to capture on the page relates to tone and gesture. This special attention to physical and vocal comportment is particularly apparent in a scene from the *London Journal* that describes then seven- or eight-year-old Frances Gould, whose lively behaviour attracts him:

Miss Fannie runs smiling to me sets her chair close by mine, directs her lively prattle with a most engaging vehemence to me, asks me many questions & had a great respect for my opinion...she will be a most elegant match for a man of Spirit. I call her sometimes Mrs. Boswell. She is very angry to be sure; crests up her little head & tells me I am very impertinent. Then by & by takes me by the hand and throws out a sparkling sally of life. Were many People to read this leaf of my Journal, they would hold me in a great contempt, as a very trifling fellow.⁸⁸

He shapes his account with physically descriptive images to capture Fanny’s animated manner: one hardly absorbs the view of her running and smiling, before another idea—of her

⁸⁷ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman, introduced by Pat Rogers (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1953, c.1980), 707.

⁸⁸ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 84.

“most engaging vehemence,” her cresting little head or her “sparkling sally of life”—rises to supplant it. This final phrase helps to reveal Boswell’s understanding of the term “life” and, by extension, his sense of it as something that can find expression through performance. The word “sally” has multiple shades of meaning: it can be a vocal phenomenon, in the sense of “an outburst or transport (*of* passion, delight, or other emotion); a flash (*of* wit); a flight (*of* fancy)”; it can be gestural, in the sense of “a leaping movement”; or it can be vaguely both, in the sense of “a sudden start into activity.”⁸⁹ Fanny’s throwing out a “sparkling sally of life” suggests the Bergsonian *élan vital*, or vital impetus, which asserts itself in this case through her excited sounds or movements (or some combination thereof). Importantly, Fanny’s sally of life reveals to Boswell who she is: “a very fine child” who “will probably be one of the first Beauties & clever women in England,” suited to “a man of Spirit.” For Boswell, then, there is an elemental connection between the body and voice, on one hand, and a person’s spirit or life (understood in vitalist terms) on the other. Life comes into the world through the speaking, moving body—instruments that can, he well knew, be manipulated at will for mimicry or other kinds of performance.

In conceptualizing life as a performable phenomenon, Boswell anticipates Goffman’s use of a dramaturgical framework to theorize social interaction. A few of Goffman’s claims and definitions will make clear why his theory of social interaction is such a fitting (if anachronistic) framework for examining the writings of Boswell, in both thematic and technical senses. Goffman argues that humans, as social beings, constitute themselves through

⁸⁹ “sally, n.1”, *OED Online*, June 2016, Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/170072?rskey=qT4YAy&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed June 09, 2016).

the various performances they stage for the people with whom they interact. In social situations, he writes, it will always be in a person's interest

to control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan.⁹⁰

The term he coins to describe a person's collective efforts to influence others' responses is "impression management"; and the analogy he invokes to analyze its operation is that of theatrical performance. Further, Goffman makes a distinction between two spaces associated with social performance: the "front region, where the performance is presented" through various "vehicles for conveying signs"; and the "back region, where the performance of a routine is prepared."⁹¹ An actor's behaviour in the front region is defined by a dynamic of play: Goffman describes the outward-facing stage of social performance as "a kind of information game—a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery."⁹² I use the term *improvisation*—a concept Goffman himself implies, though never explicitly invokes—to unite the senses of performance and play at the core of his theory. Improvisation aptly encapsulates his idea of social performance as a theatrical display based on a certain number of concrete circumstances that nevertheless requires flexibility and adaptation as it unfolds.

Boswell's way of being in the world is defined by preparing and delivering social performances. But these performances extend beyond social life into the pages of his journal,

⁹⁰ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 3-4.

⁹¹ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 238.

⁹² Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 8.

too. The journal functions as a textual surrogate in which he can reproduce his social performances as a way of extending and assimilating them. Functionally, the journal maps directly onto Goffman's theoretical framework, right down to the distinctions between the front and back regions of performance. The scenes of conversation in his journal are analogous with Goffman's front region. Here, his performance extends across content and form alike, as he presents himself both as a social actor and as crafter of prose. The improvisation that characterizes Boswell's social performance finds an analogue in the technical experimentation of his literary performance. As we will see shortly, it is in these reported scenes that he mobilizes technical experiments most strenuously towards managing readers' impressions.

The journal also has a back region. Think of the moment in which Boswell prepares himself to court Louisa, using the character of Digges to channel masculine confidence: he certainly succeeds in getting her "to act voluntarily in accordance with his plan," to borrow Goffman's phrasing. Initially, one might think that such moments of narrative reflection and description function as the back region of Boswell's literary performance. But I would argue that these moments still effect their own kind of impression-management, priming readers interpretively for the scene to come. The journal's truer analogue for the back region is in fact Boswell's practice of making memoranda. Kept concurrently with his journal, these daily agendas often allude to his nighttime habits of carousing and having sex with prostitutes, for which he would berate himself the next day in fits of hung-over anxiety and post-coital disgust. To help himself recover, he writes emphatic notes to himself. An example:

For heaven's sake, think now that if you dont take care, you're gone for ever. Sit in all morning & bring up Journ well; so as to have week clear with it's warm transactions. At 2 call Temp[le] confess errors, & not only resolve but promise, So as to be under

his power. In the mean time acquire dignity—Think of living abroad, & in short try all ways.⁹³

These notes show Boswell as himself, divested of all borrowed characters, scripts and theatrical trappings—and indeed, Goffman defines the back region as a place where “the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character.”⁹⁴

Further, the back region is a place “where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course,” which the memoranda likewise do.⁹⁵ In the journal proper, Boswell often depicts himself with a swaggering confidence in scenes of sexual encounters with prostitutes. When a group of soldiers catch him forcing a prostitute, he poses as a fellow-soldier to mitigate any negative response: “Brother Soldiers (said I) should not a halfpay Officer r-g-r for sixpence?”⁹⁶ Consistent with Goffman’s characterization of the back region, Boswell’s self-presentation in the memoranda (anxious and self-flagellating) is in direct conflict with the impression he aims to give off in his social and literary performances (that of confident lady’s man).

Thematically speaking, Boswell’s sense that he can actively mold his daily comportment partakes of a proto-self-help tradition stretching back from Montaigne’s essay “Of Habit” (also translated as “Of Practice”) to Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*.⁹⁷

⁹³ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 227.

⁹⁴ See Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 107; 112.

⁹⁵ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 112.

⁹⁶ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 237.

⁹⁷ Castiglione advocates for habit as a moral category: “just as intellectual worth is perfected by instruction, so is moral worth perfected by practice. We ought, therefore, first to teach through habit, which is able to govern the as yet unreasoning appetites and to direct them towards the good by means

Formally speaking, Boswell's private and often self-scourging notes—"talk gently & Digges-like," "Study calm & deliberate," "be more {master of} myself"—are more reminiscent of dramatic technique. Cast in pithy imperative fragments, they serve as stage directions of sorts, there to guide his actions and cement his will. They show him actively coaching himself to prepare for the day's performances. In this sense, Boswell's memoranda can productively be understood as the back region of his performance in social life and also, by extension, in his journal.

The despairing tone of Boswell's memoranda suggest something about what kind of role they served for him personally. The very writing of these directive, imperative notes seems to have been a form of therapy, used to temper feelings of shame and self-consciousness. In this vein, Goffman posits that one of the main reasons we put on acts in social life is to protect ourselves from shame. "Concern for the way things appear; warranted or unwarranted feelings of shame; ambivalence about oneself and one's audience; these are some of the dramaturgic elements of the human situation," he writes.⁹⁸ Participants in social interactions use theatrical practices to present themselves in such a way to avoid embarrassing themselves or others. The front-facing conversational scenes of Boswell's journal and the back region of the memoranda constitute a literary extension of his self-protective social performance. His life writing practice is premised on the idea that if one's performance to fend off shame should fail in the actual moment of social interaction, then performance in writing can be used retroactively, as a kind of imaginative mental salve.

of that fair use." See Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903), 268.

⁹⁸ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 237.

Taken together, these biographical and theoretical contexts provide groundwork to account for the experimental and varied texture of Boswell's *London Journal*, and further, to understand the end towards which his experiments are geared—that is, managing readers' structural and affective impressions of conversational scenes.

The London Journal: A Taxonomy of Techniques

In crafting conversation in the *London Journal*, Boswell shapes representations of social exchange on both structural and affective levels. Theatrically minded, he of course looks to dramatic form for technical inspiration to do so. As the previous chapter demonstrates, printed drama could offer basic techniques for representing a verbal exchange textually, including some tools for recording how speech should be delivered (stage directions in adverbial and gerund form, for instance, or graphic markers such as italics). Such indications can be minimal in written plays, because actors are expected to bring structure and tone to dialogue on the stage: they do the physical work of indicating who is speaking to whom, and use gesture, volume, intonation and affect to clarify, amplify or complicate the meaning of characters' utterances. The performing body is taken for granted as a crucial instrument in drama, animating the words the playwright sets down on the page.

Prose narrative has a related yet distinct set of formal requirements and possibilities. The words on the page are animated by the reader in the theatre of the mind, and must therefore be crafted for ready imaginative apprehension. This is a complex task, and one toward which Boswell's technical experiments in the *London Journal* tend. In their range and variety, we see him casting around—not just to printed drama but also to earlier prose writers such as Defoe, Richardson and Sterne—to find the best means for supplying information

about tone, gesture and attitude at timely narrative moments. To put it otherwise, he played with different versions of a narrative apparatus that would create a stable plane from which readers could become absorbed in textual conversations. The following section presents a critical taxonomy of the various techniques he uses to integrate dramatic dialogue into prose narrative in a manner that is lively and complexly communicative, and yet easy to navigate on the page.

To describe these operations collectively, I borrow Goffman's socio-performative term "impression management" and give it a literary-performative application. According to Goffman, an actor engaging in impression management operates along two axes: there is "the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off."⁹⁹ Giving an expression involves using language and signs for direct communication "in the traditional and narrow sense," while giving *off* an expression is a more abstract and implicative mode, conveying information that may not be registered in positive semantic terms.¹⁰⁰

When it comes to the expressions conversational scenes give, Boswell tries various ways to make basic information clear: who is saying what, and to whom, and at what point in time. The techniques he uses to impart this information at moments of narrative transition—when the reader needs it most—include speech tags (of the "he said, "she said" variety); direct address, in which a given character names the other character to whom he is speaking; introductory and demarcating punctuation, most particularly the long dash or the quotation mark; notation of a directional gesture or accosting movement that typically precedes speech;

⁹⁹ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 2.

and narrative paraphrase of the scenario and topic relevant to the conversation being represented.

When it comes to the expressions Boswell's conversational scenes give *off*, their mood—which is often jaunty and lively, in keeping with his self-conception as a sociable young man—depends on the type of information he provides regarding tone and affect, as well as the manner in which this information is presented. His main techniques for inscribing tone include choice of speech verb, particularly on occasions when he departs from the standard “said”; the application of adverbs to speech verbs; and the phrasal stage directions that often accompany and modify utterances, typically adhering to the conventional terminology for specifying musical dynamics—“with,” followed by an affective noun, such as “energy.” Specialized inflection—namely a rising or exclamatory voice—can be registered with punctuation, whether the question mark or the exclamation mark. Moving into a category broader than simply voice quality, Boswell displays a number of other techniques to inscribe tone and affect in conversation. While pauses are technically an absence of vocal tone, silence still does its part towards conveying and complicating the mood of a conversational exchange. To this end, graphic marks such as the dash and the colon reflect silence spatially. Gestures and physical movements can also be powerful indicators of a speaker's affect. Finally, the property of orality is itself a form of tone, to be distinguished from the writerly. Interjected filler words largely devoid of semantic meaning, like “O,” or “indeed,” do much to produce an effect of colloquial speech, while idiosyncratic turns of phrase convey a tone particular to individual characters.

For the basic task of interpolating direct speech into his journal, Boswell tries a variety of configurations, sometimes letting dialogue stand alone in dramatic form and sometimes

absorbing it into longer stretches of narrative. The following scene strangely exemplifies both methods. In it, he deliberately styles himself as a Spectator, describing Child's coffeehouse and making two separate attempts to record what he overheard there:

It is quite a place to my mind; dusky comfortable & warm with a Society of Citizens & Physicians who talk politics very fully & are very sagacious and sometimes jocular. What is the reason said one that a soal is not a good fish? Why it is a good fish said another if you dress it plain with butter sauce: But you must have something so dev'lish high-seasoned: You might as well have a sauce of fire & Brimstone. I shall hereafter for the sake of neatness throw our Conversation into my Journal, in the form of a Dialogue: So that every Saturday, this my Journal shall be adorned with A Dialogue at Child's.

1st Cit: Pray now what do you really think of this Peace?

2^d Cit: That it is a damned bad one to be sure.

Physic: Damn'd bad one! Pray what would you be at? Have not you had all that you wanted. Did you not begin the war to settle your boundaries in North America; & have not you got that done, as Mr. Pitt the great Champion of the opposition acknowledged in the house, better than could have been expected.¹⁰¹

Hereafter the citizens continue in the same manner, with Boswell chiming in to support Britain's colonializing efforts in North America. This example demonstrates a chief technical challenge involved in sewing dialogue into a longer stretch of narrative: marking the transition between voices. The first portion of the conversation is subsumed within consecutive lines of prose, and therefore marks changes in voice with narrative speech tags—"said one" and "said another"—which appear after the first few words of the utterance they are tagging. In the second half of the conversation, Boswell shifts modes into dramatic scripted lines, justifying it with "the sake of neatness." Samuel Johnson defines neatness as "Elegant," "Cleanly," or more aptly for this case, "Pure; unadulterated; unmingled."¹⁰²

Boswell's moving into the "purer," more stylized form of dramatic dialogue—with its line

¹⁰¹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 35.

¹⁰² Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers* (London, 1755-56), vol. II.

breaks, and its tidy, italicized antecedent nametags—suggests a momentary impatience with the technical demands of incorporating the earlier fish dialogue within a paragraph, given the different kinds of narrative seams required to do so.

Boswell regularly “adorns” his journal with a weekly coffeehouse dialogue, which he continues to justify on the basis of its pleasing form. The following Saturday, he laments having arrived too late at Child’s to hear any political conversation; “However,” Boswell explains, “as I am a man who love forms, I shall allways continue to present such as it is my Dialogue at Child’s”¹⁰³. Three weeks later still, having been late to the coffeehouse again, and leaving with nothing to record, he expresses chagrin over this disruption of “[his] regular Plan,” because it impedes “[his] love of form for its own sake.”¹⁰⁴ This avowed interest in form partly accounts for his assiduous efforts to present (and *perform*) textual conversation so precisely in his journal—whether he imports it into his text wholesale, in the unmingled dramatic way, or whether he does the more complex narrative work of integrating it in prose.

While dramatic dialogue can remain spare, more clarifying information is needed when Boswell absorbs speech into longer narrative paragraphs. As noted, the first piece of information readers need to know is whose voice is doing the talking, and to whom. As the opening dialogue at Child’s suggests, strategic use of speech tags is the clearest technique for structuring dialogue in stretches of prose. They economically signal changes in voice, whether from the narrator to a speaking character, or from one character to another. I’ll return shortly to consider Boswell’s use of narrative speech tags more fully, but first, looking back to its origins: the technique finds its roots in dramatic form, which uses an antecedent tag consisting

¹⁰³ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 83.

of a character's name and some form of demarcating punctuation (whether a colon, a period or a dash). Boswell uses dramatic nametags to script his weekly dialogue at Child's between citizens (*Cit.*) and physicians (*Physic.*), and other conversations he chooses to record as dramatic dialogue. At times, though, he breaks slightly with the form, collapsing dramatic lines into narrative paragraphs, while retaining these antecedent nametags. Consider the following account of a literary conversation between him, Thomas Davies, Oliver Goldsmith and Robert Dodsley:

We talked entirely in the way of Geniuses. We talked of Poetry. Said Goldsmith 'The Miscellaneous Poetry of this age is nothing like that of the last: it is very poor. Why there now Mr. Dodsley is your Collection.'—*Dods*: 'I think that equal to those made by Dryden and Pope.'—*Golds*: To consider them Sir as villages your's may be as good; but let us compare house with house, you can produce me no edifices equal to the Ode on St. Cecilia's day, Absalom & Achitophel, or the rape of the lock...*Davies* Nay but you will allow that Shakespear has great merit. *Golds*. No. I know Shakespear very well. (Here I said nothing; but thought him a most impudent Puppy) *Bos*. What do you think of Johnson? *Golds*. He has exceeding great merit. His Rambler is a noble work.¹⁰⁵

This passage falls somewhere between the more stylized dramatic form and a more documentary narrative one: Boswell dispenses with line breaks, bringing dialogue into the narrative proper, though he retains scripted nametags rather than integrating them syntactically within the voice of his narrative consciousness. As a narrator, he intervenes only once, to record a trace of his own disapproving silence and condemn (to readers only) Goldsmith as an "impudent puppy" for denying Shakespeare's talent. The parenthetical status of his private thought communicates that it does not have a place in the dialogue proper; rather, it inserts itself forcibly therein to deflate Goldsmith's self-important yet mistaken performance of taste, and to establish Boswell as the one who knows better.

¹⁰⁵ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 64.

This hybrid method for recording conversation—uniting dramatic and narrative techniques to keep multiple speakers straight, and reserving the power of parentheses for narratorial judgment—is in fact relatively rare in the *London Journal*. This may be because the journal often deals in *dialogue* (in the literal sense of the word) rather than recording complex scenes of group conversation, in which multiple actors are engaging in impression management towards their own ends. Later, though, in the *Life of Johnson*, this hybrid method would in fact become Boswell’s first choice for managing the conversations he records between various high-powered members of Johnson’s literary club. As the number of speakers to be recorded in prose narrative multiplies, the appeal of nametags and clean-cut parenthetical asides, with their dramatic neatness, likewise increases.

Boswell is not the first to experiment with a rough blend of dramatic and narrative techniques when trying to capture conversation in prose with clarity and immediacy. Samuel Richardson experimented similarly in *Clarissa*, more so than other predecessors.¹⁰⁶ His characters often use narrative speech tags to report speech in their letters; but when the cast of characters and the length of a conversation grows, they reach for the dialogue form—probably, like Boswell, “for the sake of neatness” given the number of actors. In one of these cases, Lovelace aims to convince Mrs. Moore and her lodger Miss Rawlins of Captain Tomlinson’s legitimacy—“And,” as he writes to Belford, “how could I do this better than by dialoguing with him before them a little?”¹⁰⁷ Here, the highly performative Lovelace is

¹⁰⁶ Boswell’s familiarity with *Clarissa* manifests in an allusion in one of his accounts of visiting Louisa: “I hastened to my charmer. Here a little speculation on the human mind, may well come in. For here was I a young man full of vigour & vivacity, the favourite lover of a handsom Actress and going to enjoy the full possession of my warmest wishes: And yet Melancholy threw a cloud over my mind” (74). Here, he adopts not only Lovelace’s rakish posture, but also his language: “charmer” was one of his most common epithets for Clarissa.

¹⁰⁷ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 802.

feigning a grudging readiness to reconcile with the Harlowes, on his “spouse” Clarissa’s account:

Be that as it would, I should never love any of the family but my spouse; and, wanting nothing from them, would not, but for *her* sake, have gone so far as I *had* gone towards a reconciliation.

This was very good of me, Mrs Moore said.

Very good indeed; Miss Rawlins.

Good! It is *more* than good; it is very generous, said the widow.

Capt. Why, so it is, I must needs say: for I am sensible that Mr Lovelace has been rudely treated by them all—More rudely than it would have been imagined a man of his *quality* and *spirit* would have put up with. But then, sir (turning to me), I think you are amply rewarded in such a lady; and that you ought to forgive the father for the daughter’s sake.

Mrs M. Indeed so I think.

Miss R. So must everyone think who has seen the lady.¹⁰⁸

Richardson moves from narrative into dramatic dialogue easily and without signal, amplifying the immediacy of the exchange with this technical minimalism. His casual movement between modes suggests that antecedent dramatic nametags were, for him, only one of a number of techniques he kept at his fingertips for attributing speech, which could be variously combined to calibrate the level of mediation in a complex exchange—to economize and suppress with narrative, and to emphasize and draw out with dramatic dialogue—as he saw fit. Richardson’s earlier experiments hybridizing speech-integration techniques are clearly a creative resource from which Boswell draws.

Speech tags of course operate slightly differently when they are deployed in a purely narrative mode. Rather than blocking off the speaking character’s name graphically, the narrative absorbs the tag into the narrator’s own voice and syntax. As such, narrative speech tags form part of a grammatically complete utterance from the narrator, made up of the tag in

¹⁰⁸ Richardson, *Clarissa*, 803.

his voice, and the reported speech in the character's voice. Boswell regularly uses this technique, as in the following account of his first meeting with Johnson:

I drank tea at Davies's in Russel Street and about seven came in the great Mr. Samuel Johnson, whom I have so long wished to see. Mr. Davies introduced me to him. As I knew his mortal antipathy at the Scotch, I cried to Davies 'Don't tell where I come from.' However he said From Scotland.¹⁰⁹

The speech tag is antecedent, here, though not separated from spoken lines with italics or parentheses, as in printed drama: rather, they are paired with a speech verb—"cried" and "said"—and they come from the voice of Boswell's narrative consciousness.

More often than antecedent speech tags, Boswell uses intervening ones, which interrupt an utterance that has already been partly reported. Intervening tags play a central role in the history of reporting speech in eighteenth-century prose narrative. They are particularly common in Daniel Defoe's conversational scenes, often appearing a word or two into a given character's utterance. Take for example this dialogue from *Moll Flanders* (1722), in which Moll tells her nurse that she aspires to be a gentlewoman: "why, what? said she, is the Girl mad? what, would you be a Gentlewoman? Yes *says I*, and cry'd heartily, till I roar'd out again."¹¹⁰ When speech tags intervene later in the utterance, there is a general pattern to their syntactic positioning, exemplified in an earlier exchange from *Moll*, when the nurse accosts her for crying: "Thou foolish Child, says she, thou art always Crying; (for I was Crying then) Prithee, What dost Cry for? because they will take me away, *says I*, and put me to Service, and I can't Work House-Work."¹¹¹ In this example and in many counterparts in throughout the novel, intervening tags often appear at the end of a given clause, a natural point of

¹⁰⁹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 220.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. David Blewett (London: Penguin, 2003), 48.

¹¹¹ Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 47.

syntactic cleaving in the sentence where an interruption can occur unobtrusively without creating stylistic awkwardness.

Returning briefly, then, to Boswell's first attempt to record a dialogue at Child's: "What is the reason said one that a soal is not a good fish? Why it is a good fish said another if you dress it plain with butter sauce: But you must have something so dev'lish high-seasoned: You might as well have a sauce of fire & Brimstone."¹¹² Reading these consecutive lines, readers are asked to identify voices retroactively, after they begin speaking, in a style reminiscent not only of Defoe but likewise of Richardson, in *Pamela*. For comparative reference, here is a snippet of dialogue between Pamela and Mr. B regarding the infamous waistcoat she won't stop working on:

Indeed, and please your Honour said I, I have work'd early and late upon it; there is a great deal of Work in it! Work in it! said he; yes, you mind your Pen more than your Needle; I don't want such idle Sluts to stay in my House.¹¹³

In conversational scenes subsumed into longer swaths of prose, Boswell experiments with this *Pamelonian* manner of crafting conversation (I won't say Richardsonian, because speech is recorded not only diversely but also quite differently in *Clarissa* than in the first novel). What Defoe, Richardson and Boswell have in common in these texts is their reliance on intervening tags to clarify who is speaking in unbroken stretches of narrative containing lines of direct speech. In such cases, intervening tags unobtrusively help readers identify and move between multiple speaking voices, while mitigating the stilted effect that must result from using exclusively antecedent or posterior tags.

¹¹² Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 35.

¹¹³ Richardson, *Pamela*, 48.

Another dramatic technique Boswell borrows and adapts to structure narrative conversation is direct address, exemplified in this interview with Louisa during their early courtship:

I hope Madam, you are at present, a single woman. — yes Sir. ‘and your affections are not engaged. They are not Sir. But this is leading me into a strange confession. I assure you Madam; my affections are engaged Are they Sir? Yes Madam they are engaged to you. (She looked soft & beautiful) I hope we shall be better acquainted, & like one another better. Come Sir let us talk no more of that now. No Madam I will not. It is like giving the Book in the Preface. Just so, Sir, telling in the Preface, what should be in the middle of the Book. — (I think such conversations are best written in the Dialogue way). Madam I was very happy to find you. From the first time that I saw you, I admired you. O Sir. I did, indeed. What I like beyond every thing, is an agreeable female companion where I can be at home & have tea & genteel conversation. I was quite happy to be here. Sir you are wellcome here, as often as you please. Every evening, if you please. Madam I am infinitely obliged to you. This is just what I wanted. I left her, in good spirits, & dined at Sheridan’s.¹¹⁴

In order for direct address to be effective as the sole technique for indicating who is speaking to whom, it must be repeated with each shift in voice. Following his idea of “the Dialogue way,” Boswell marks most—though not all—of the transitions between his voice and Louisa’s by repeating “Sir” and “Madam” with each new utterance. The effect is at once rough and stylized. On one hand, the periodic omission of direct address on one character’s part or the other’s produces a slightly ambiguous effect. In this sense, the scene registers as somewhat clumsier than some of the more carefully crafted conversations Boswell would achieve towards the end of the journal. On the other hand, the volleying of names also produces a stylized effect, formally alluding to the loaded repartee of Restoration comedy. Like many scenes of Restoration repartee (a genre Boswell knew well), the exchange between Boswell and Louisa is rife with subtext and implication. His proposal to get “better acquainted” of course implies sexual knowledge, just as his desire for a “female companion”

¹¹⁴ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 49.

with whom to have “genteel conversation” brings with it the suggestion of sex, as the word “conversation” used to carry the same kind of double-meaning we now attach to “intercourse.” Both in the interaction itself, and in the technique used to represent it, there are things left unsaid, which affects the impression in two ways: first, it allows Boswell and Louisa to appear to maintain social standards of decorum; and at the same time, it gives off an ambiance of excited tension. The mild ambiguity about which words belong to whom actually charges the erotic relationship that is tenuously taking shape through this conversation. Thus, Boswell’s very style of crafting this conversation on the page brings out the form of his and Louisa’s burgeoning relationship—uncertain, though full of possibilities.

Direct address proves highly effective in Boswell’s narrative dialogues when he uses it in concert with a second technique for attributing speech. Consider the following account of his transaction in a sword shop:

I accordingly went to the Shop of Mr. Jeffries Sword-Cutler to his Majesty, looked at a number of his Swords and at last picked out a very handsome one, at five guineas. Mr. Jeffries said I—I have not money to pay for it. Will you trust me? Upon my word, Sir, said he; you must excuse me. It is a thing we never do to a Stranger. I bowed genteely & said Indeed Sir, I believe it is not right, However I stood & looked at him; & he looked at me. Come Sir cried he I will trust you.¹¹⁵

Here, the two men’s naming each other is not the primary source of information regarding who is speaking. Instead, it paves the way for more explicit speech tags—“said I” and “said he.” With the added clarity that tags confer, direct address can begin to serve additional affective functions, such as creating a tone of colloquial sociability and—in this particular case—generating the impression of a cordial yet assertive stand-off between the men (Boswell prevailing in the end, naturally).

¹¹⁵ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 20-21.

Some of the most vivid conversational set pieces in the *London Journal* show Boswell deploying a number of speech-structuring techniques in concert. The following scene, written well into the journal, recounts one of Boswell's many nighttime adventures:

I then sallied forth to the Piazzas in rich flow of animal spirits, and burning with fierce desire. I met two very pretty little Girls, who asked me to take them with me. 'My Dear Girls' said I—'I am a poor fellow. I can give you no money. But if you chuse to have a glass of wine and my company, and let us be gay and obliging to each other, without money, I am your Man.' They agreed with great good humour. So back to the Shakespear I went. 'Waiter' said I, 'I have got here a couple of human beings, I dont know how they'll do.' I'll look, your honour (cried he) & with inimitable effrontery stared them in the face, & then cried they'll do very well. What said I, are they good fellow-creatures? bring them up, then.¹¹⁶

His directly addressing the young women euphemistically as "My dear Girls" helps to notate not only where his speech is directed, but also his status as a genteel, sociable man (though consorting with prostitutes). All of the utterances he reports are attributed with intervening tags, appearing anywhere from one word to one clause into each utterance. The exception—when the waiter says "I'll look, your honour" before Boswell tags the speech with "(cried he)"—pairs a brief clause with direct address, a technique that itself encodes structural and affective information about who is speaking to whom. The deferential "your honour" establishes the power dynamics of this social interaction, signalling to readers that a subordinate is speaking to a superior: thus, the waiter to Boswell.

The other technique that marks the transition from Boswell's voice to the waiter's is punctuation. He ends his line—I don't know how they'll do—with a closing quotation mark, which asks the reader to identify what follows—I'll look, your honour—as a separate voice. Indeed, punctuation can provide a great deal of clarifying support in narrative dialogue. Commas and parentheses alike are effective tools for nesting narrative speech tags within

¹¹⁶ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 225.

reported utterances, and keeping them spatially distinct, as in “Sir, said he, is your name Boswell?” or, “Mr. Sheridan (said I) I have thought a good deal upon Education.”¹¹⁷

Alternatively, shifts between planes of mediation can be marked with long dashes, as in this transaction between Boswell and Louisa, in which he invites her to rely on his financial support, within reason:

Two Guineas is at present all that I have, but a trifle more. There they are for you. I told you that I had very little; But yet I hope to live. Let us just be honest with one another. Tell me when you are in any little distress, & I will tell you what I can do.— She took the Guineas.—Sir I am infinitely obliged to you; As soon as it is in my power, I shall return them. Indeed I could not have expected this from you.—Her gratitude warmed my heart.¹¹⁸

Boswell takes unusual care to mark a dash at every moment of vocal transition, including those in and out of his own narratorial voice. He probably absorbed this technique from reading Richardson (whose use of the dash is, as surveyed in the previous chapter, formative to literary history in this period) and also Laurence Sterne, whose works “Boswell knew and admired,” as Turnbull notes.¹¹⁹ In the first and most memorable dialogue of *Tristram Shandy* (the publication of which preceded the composition of Boswell’s *London Journal* by just three years) Sterne similarly signals vocal transitions with dashes:

Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?—Good G—! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time,—*Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?* Pray, what was your father saying?—Nothing.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 33; 61.

¹¹⁸ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 56.

¹¹⁹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 382-3 n.5.

¹²⁰ Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (New York: Penguin Classics), 6.

In Sterne's passage, as in Boswell's, dashes take the place of dramatic line breaks. Their main job is to distinguish between voices and signal the narrator's interventions; but their operation extends beyond this basic function, also reflecting an almost ostentatious reticence on the narrator's part. Both Boswell and Sterne capitalize on two features of this mark: first, its ability to represent time with space, as its length on the page enacts the temporal gap between distinct utterances; and second the sense of withholding that the dash implies with its truncating, elliptical power. In Sterne's case, the narrator's performance of withholding powers the joke, holding back sexual content with a knowing, even superior silence; while in Boswell's case, dashes help him to perform a withholding defined more by emotional and erotic plenitude, an impression he actively projects in all of his representations of conversation with Louisa.

As editor Marshall Waingrow notes of Boswell's writing habits, although he could be "inattentive to regular punctuation in the hurry of composition, he was not indifferent to it."¹²¹ During the process of publishing his *Life of Johnson*, for example, he expected the compositor to adopt his patterns of punctuation consistently, as evidenced in a note complaining about the lack of semi-colons in proper places: "Pray attend to this," Boswell writes, before owning up to his responsibility in the matter: "But it is *my duty* to point. So I have no right to find fault."¹²² That Boswell so often elects to introduce and conclude speech with quotation marks and dashes suggests he understood the spatial power of punctuation to clarify and shape dialogue, and that he deployed it with awareness.

¹²¹ See James Boswell's *'Life of Johnson': An Edition of the Original Manuscript, in Four Volumes, vol. I: 1709-1765*, ed. Marshall Waingrow (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), xxviii.

¹²² Waingrow (ed.), *Life of Johnson*, xxviii.

Though comparatively less common, the colon is another graphic tool that punctuates Boswell's journal—a vestige of the dramatic mode of introducing scripted lines. In this exchange between Boswell and the Countess of Northumberland, the colon helps to slow the pace of the scene in preparation for a genteel greeting:

As I was standing in pleasing reverie in the Gallery musing on the splendid scene around me, & joining with that the ancient ideas of the family of Piercy, My Lady came up to me with the greatest complacency and kindness: Mr. Boswell, I am very happy to see you. How do you do?¹²³

The colon marks a pivot between Boswell's narrative introduction of the Countess, and the beginning of her reported speech. But it is not just her name that the colon reins in. It also offers a loaded pause following the initial movement she makes in Boswell's direction. Her coming up to him “with the greatest complacency and kindness” evokes the image of a social agent approaching an interlocutor in a refined and steady manner. The colon's pause then allows this impression to linger, momentarily, as a tableau of polite conversation.

Her movement also plays a structural role in the representation. In narrative conversation, gesture can help to pave the way for a verbal exchange by exploiting our expectation that a person who approaches or looks at another also intends to speak. Boswell often mobilizes bodily gesture and movement to do multiple jobs, not only preparing readers for direct speech but also beginning to manage impressions relative to the imminent conversation. In this example, Boswell's notation of the Countess's sociable gesture introduces speech, projects the impression of politeness *and* clarifies the blocking of a conversational exchange on the page. Also of interest is the form Boswell chooses for this notation. In describing her manner in approaching him, he absorbs what would have been a dramatic stage direction into the narrative proper. The phrasal structure he uses to do so—

¹²³ Turnbull (ed.). *London Journal*, 31.

“with”, paired with information about type and degree of energy—is essentially an adverb, lexically expanded to match the form of notation used for musical dynamics. This formula for inscribing the type of energy that underlies speech and actions is a staple of his representational method—also seen, for instance, when he introduces a conversation with Sheridan by reporting that he approached him “with a manly firmness and a conscious assurance that I was in the right.”¹²⁴ Adverbs are an analogous (though more economical) technique for presenting speakers’ affects: he addresses Mr. Jeffries “genteely” in the sword shop, for instance, and “chatted easily” with the Countess of Northumberland.¹²⁵ These techniques for notating shades of sociability and feeling adjacently to the speech itself are even more prevalent in Boswell’s later biographical writings, though they also form part of his experimentation in the *London Journal*.

In scenes of pure dialogue, Boswell notates gesture meticulously with stage directions, confirming the fact that movements of the body are an important creative resource for him in representing the emotional timbre of conversation. In a reconciliatory dialogue between him and his mentor, Lord Eglinton,¹²⁶ with whom he has had a falling out, Boswell signals their mutual sensibility with parenthetical directions such as “(taking him by the hand)” and “(almost weeping).”¹²⁷ The only other parenthetical intervention in this exchange concerns Boswell’s feelings when the two men finally arrive at a moment of understanding: “(Here my

¹²⁴ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 31; 43.

¹²⁵ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 20; 31.

¹²⁶ Alexander Montgomerie, 10th Earl of Eglinton.

¹²⁷ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 120.

heart melted with tenderness, genuine candour, & joy).”¹²⁸ This is not a gestural stage direction like the other two; it is an introspective reflection on Boswell’s part, in which he uses his platform as narrator to give readers access to his inner experience as a complement to the physical signs of emotion already provided. Despite this difference, though—that one uses the stage direction form traditionally, to notate external symptoms of emotion, and the other borrows it to notate internal feelings—both occupy the same plane and status within the dialogue, building the affective impression given off by speech.

A closely related technique, which likewise signals direct speech at the same time as it prepare readers for its affective impression, is Boswell’s use of his authoritative, explanatory platform as narrator to introduce conversation. He often paves the way for directly reported dialogue by summarizing the scenario so far, as in this scene with Louisa: “We talked of French manners, & how they studied to make one another happy. The English, said I, accuse them of being false; because they misunderstand them.”¹²⁹ There is a pattern to Boswell’s use of this technique: one sentence of general description of the circumstance, or the topic currently under discussion (in this case, French manners), is followed by the first bit of directly quoted speech. This formula allows Boswell to prime readers for the mood of the exchange to come. In this case, he hints at coopting the reputation of French refinement with Louisa, to elevate their conversation; in another, for instance, he presents the dynamic of his male relationships with the following description: “Erskine & I walked down the Hay-market together throwing out sallies & laughing loud. Erskine said I, dont I make your existence pass more cleverly than any body.”¹³⁰ This flexible formula for signalling the start of direct speech

¹²⁸ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 119.

¹²⁹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 48.

¹³⁰ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 56-57.

while preemptively shaping its affect becomes a staple for Boswell in crafting the conversations in the *Life of Johnson*.

Beyond the diverse cues surveyed above, a few additional forms of tonal and affective information assist Boswell in crafting illusions of living, feeling characters on the page. He guards against tonal inertia in narrative passages of reported speech by using a range of techniques to inject his prose with a colloquial and distinctly oral tone, rather than a writerly one. Beyond the lexical content of the words spoken, the most basic way to attach affect to an utterance in prose narrative is by specifying the speech verb, a lexical flexibility that does not exist within the dramatic mode. Boswell makes creative use of a variety of verbs to add doses of tonal energy to narrative speech tags, matching their feeling to the lines characters speak. Particularly vivid in this respect are his records of romantic interactions with Louisa, in which he uses verbs with emotional and erotic freight:

I then sat near her & began to talk softly; but finding myself quite dejected with love, I realy cried out, & told her that I was miserable; & as I was stupid, would go away. I rose, but saluting her with warmth, my powers were excited, I felt myself vigorous, I sat down again I beseeched her. You know, Madam, you said you was not a Platonist. I beg it of you to be so kind. You said you are above the finesse of your Sex. (Be sure allways to make a woman better than her sex) I adore you.¹³¹

He exploits the affective valences of a number of verbs, here—cry, beseech, beg—to present himself in a state of sexually frustrated desperation, consistent with the rakish figure of masculine courtship he strives to emulate in conversations with Louisa (West Digges and Macheath). While adding layers of affective information to his own self-presentation, Boswell's specified verbs also serve to naturalize and minimize his narratorial notation, by not appearing as directly a result of a narratorial utterance, but rather of an emotionally engaged, specific character.

¹³¹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 60.

Aside from the particular energy with which words are uttered—whether cried, whispered, or retorted—vocal inflection also shapes speech over the course of a longer syntactic unit. The modern reader takes it for granted that particular types of inflection, particularly the rising of inquiry, or the force of exclamation, should be inscribed in prose with punctuation marks. Boswell’s use of these graphic marks, however, which is inconsistent at best, suggests an indifference to supplementing lexical and syntactic information about inflection with punctuation. This discrepancy in expectations now versus then comes through clearly in reading Boswell’s description of a mob scene that converged at Covent Garden, when he was there seeing the comic opera *Love in a Village*:

Just before the Overture began to be played two highland officers came in. The mob in the upper gallery roared out No Scots. No Scots. Out with them, hist & pelted them with Apples. My heart warmed to my countrymen my Scotch blood boiled with indignation. I jump’t up on the benches, roared out damn you Rascals, hist & was in the greatest rage. I am very sure at that time, I should have been the most distinguished of Heroes.¹³²

Boswell does much work here to present himself as a vigorous actor in a riotous scene—repeating the verbs “roared” and “hist” and describing his brisk jumping up onto the benches in the theatre pit in response to seeing apples “pelted” at his countrymen. Although all of the vocalizations represented here are clearly exclamations, they are punctuated by periods only. In a similar vein, Boswell regularly omits question marks, as in this speech record of a physician he overheard conversing at Child’s:

Pray what would you be at? Have not you had all that you wanted. Did you not begin the war to settle your boundaries in North America; & have not you got that done, as Mr. Pitt the great Champion of the opposition acknowledged in the house, better than could have been expected, Have not you got a large tract of country ceded to you? Is not the line of division plain and straight.¹³³

¹³² Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 32.

¹³³ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 35.

The fact that he is in some cases careless, in others careful, of using these two tools for inscribing inflection, confirms what we know about eighteenth-century punctuation: it was viewed as discretionary rather than standard. Boswell's periodic indifference to recording inflection with graphic marks suggests an aurally-minded writer, who himself expected a reader who would bring to the page a sense of the speaking body.

Boswell's attention to tone also manifests in his stylistic efforts produce a sense of colloquialism and orality in his reported conversations. The most basic way in which he does so is by peppering prose speech with direct address, and interjecting filler words that have a particularly conversational feel, as in this conversation with Sheridan:

I lamented to him the stiffness and formality of good company, & the emptiness of their conversation. Why, Sir said he, the People of fashion in England are very ill educated, & can make no figure; to disguise this, & prevent such as have got parts & application, from shining, conversation is just reduced to a system of Insipidity, where you just repeat the most insignificant common-place things, in a sort of affected delicacy of tone.¹³⁴

The combination of "Why, Sir" stands in for pure exclamation, with a connotation of convivial, gentlemanly objection. It serves as a means of interjection, and a platform from which to announce and launch a statement. Other words that Boswell uses frequently to this end are "Indeed," "Say," or "O," all of which signify a certain conversational confidence and strength of expression; these words contribute tonally not so much through their inherent content as through their cultural status as clichés—regularly used to signal respectful yet decisive changes in conversational direction.

Another group of words and phrases that similarly serve as bearers of colloquial tone are swear words. There is a great deal of swearing in the journal: Boswell is democratic in his representation, in that he records any speech that interests him aurally, whether from the

¹³⁴ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 52.

Countess of Northumberland, or the sentries at Buckingham house. One specimen that he culls from a lower-class stratum comes from Lord Eglinton's steward, a man named

Crookshanks, whose language stands out as particularly colourful:

He is a spirited fellow, has read a good deal, and is much of a Gentleman, but has at the same time much of what is called a *Rattle*. He went on thus. Damn me if I can see why God Almighty has created us all, just to complain & vex ourselves. By the Lord, I don't see who's happy, not I—and yet one may be happy with any thing. I have been happy with buying a new gun, and have been in high spirits for a week with a new Dog. By the Lord Mr. Boswell you have fine means of happiness by your turn for writing. I would rather have written the Preface to that Cub than had a good sum.¹³⁵

Crookshanks's rattle is characterized by frequent oaths—"Damn me," "By the Lord" and the like. Like interjecting, swearing is a peculiarly oral phenomenon. It too is a form of cliché, not unlike the more socially refined filler words like "indeed" or "why." The content of these swearing phrases is not particular: rather, they signify raw forcefulness in an oral context, thus presenting Crookshanks as a hard-living, vital character.

This record of Crookshanks's speech also demonstrates the degree to which linguistic idiosyncrasy contributes to dialogue. The steward's turns of phrase are not like those of other characters in the journal: indeed, there is a particularity to them that resounds, helping to build the tonal outline of his individualized character. Boswell is good at capturing—and, probably, artistically enhancing—the unique linguistic expression of the people he encounters. When he accepts an invitation to tea from David Garrick, for example, the actor replies with—"Then Sir said he the cups shall dance, and the sawcers skip."¹³⁶

His effort to present the tonal contour of individual character in speech sharpens considerably when he meets Samuel Johnson, who brings a focus both to Boswell's ear and

¹³⁵ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 147.

¹³⁶ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 112.

his performing pen. Following his first meeting with Johnson on 16 May, 1763, Boswell increasingly devotes the journal to capturing the novelty of his new friend's speech as a means of presenting his unique character. This effort would eventually largely supplant his efforts at conversational self-representation in text (though he continues to do so as a matter of course as Johnson's biographer and closest companion.) Some of his Johnsonian specimens in the journal are noteworthy simply for being unusual. On hearing of Macpherson's tendency to "rail at all established systems," Johnson undercuts him with an unexpected analogy: "So he would tumble in a Hog-stye, (said Johnson) as long as you look at him, and cry to him to come out."¹³⁷ Similarly incisive and surprising is his analogy for the literary efforts of Frederick the Great of Prussia: "He just writes as you would suppose Voltaire's Foot-boy to do. He has such a share of parts as the Valet might have, and about as much of the colouring of his Master's stile, as might be got, by transcribing his works."¹³⁸ Johnson's odd turns of phrase, his imaginative analogies and his witty *bons mots* have an animating force, which Boswell strives to present to his friend's advantage in the journal and, later—much more assiduously—in the *Life of Johnson*.

Conclusion

The central role this journal plays in Boswell's technical development as a writer of narrative conversation becomes clear in its final passages. This passage comes late in the journal, and it is striking for how many techniques he deploys deftly and simultaneously:

Mr. Johnson persisted in advising me to go to Spain. I said 'it would divert him to get a letter from me, dated at Salamanca'. I love the University of Salamanca, (said he)

¹³⁷ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 271.

¹³⁸ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 279.

for when the Spaniards were in doubt if they should conquer the west Indies, the University of Salamanca gave it as their Opinion that they should not. We talked how wretched a writer Derrick was. To be sure, Sir, said he; But it was his being a literary Man, that got him made King of Bath. Sir, he has nothing to say for himself, but that he is a Writer. Had Derrick not been a writer, he must have been sweeping the crosses in the streets, and asking half pence from every body that past. I begg'd Mr. Johnson's advice as to my method of Study, at Utrecht. Come, said he, let us make a day of it. Let us go down to Greenwich, and dine. Accordingly, Saturday was fixed for that jaunt, if a sail on the River may be so exprest. It must be something curious for the people in Turk's head Coffee-house, to see this great Man, and poor Me so often together, by ourselves. My Vanity is much flattered.

As we walk'd along the strand tonight, arm in arm, a Woman of the town came enticingly near us. 'No' (said Mr. Johnson) 'No, my Girl, it won't do.' We then talked of the unhappy situation of these wretches, & how much more misery than happiness, upon the whole, is produced by irregular love. He parted from me, at Temple-Gate, as he allways does.¹³⁹

Boswell is working at many levels to give this conversational anecdote mechanical clarity and affective substance. Throughout, he makes extensive use of his own platform as narrator to introduce instances of verbal exchange, summarizing the topic of the moment: whether the prospect of going to Spain, the wretchedness of Derrick's writing, or the course of his own study. All of the speech tags that signal direct speech are carefully integrated, either preceding an utterance, or intervening within parentheses or commas at a clausal break. These initial spoken clauses are sometimes paired with direct address, an additional clue that speech is happening and that the environment civilized and mannered. The repetition of "Sir" also grounds the prose tonally in a colloquial register; it reminds readers that although the information comes through a writerly narrative voice, it is meant to represent a living, speaking one. Filler phrases such as "To be sure" and "Come" are also combined with direct address to the same end. Gesture signals the beginning of a new verbal exchange when the prostitute comes "enticingly near" the two men, prompting Johnson to preempt her advance and say "No, my Girl." Meanwhile the image of the two men walking arm in arm along the

¹³⁹ Turnbull (ed.), *London Journal*, 293-94.

Strand situates the exchange both affectively, within the context of gentlemanly friendship and sociability—and also materially, within the urban topography of London. Johnson “persist[s] in advising” Boswell, while the younger man “beg[s]” for this advice, establishing their peculiar interpersonal dynamic through simple verb choice. Boswell makes sure to highlight Johnson’s dominant character and verbal style, recording the joke he makes at Derrick’s expense: “Had Derrick not been a Writer, he must have been sweeping the crosses in the streets, and asking half pence from every body that past.”

The artful structure of this set piece makes it easily realized in a reading context, in both technical and interpersonal senses. While it is not exactly dramatic—indeed, Boswell’s narrative voice is a prominent mediating force here—it is certainly a performance, supplying various pieces of information about the sociable nature of these characters’ exchange within close proximity of the words they speak. One might say that this technical display caters to a desire for realistic representation—to see a verbal scene elaborated in prose with the kinds of impression-forming details that accompany real speech, and that are required to assess its social forms of meaning in addition to its purely lexical ones. But in truth Boswell’s conversational accounts probably do not represent what really happened in his daily life—or perhaps even what is likely to have happened. Rather, they are performative presentations of self tending towards specific social goals, just as his real conversations are in their original embodied context. The performance of self in life and the constitution of self on the page are born of the same social impulse—as such, the dynamic of play and improvisation that was so alive to Boswell’s mind also shapes his technical experiments in making life records in writing, as he tried all ways to manage readers structural and affective impressions. In the end, Boswell’s real achievement is to have collected so many methods for representing speech

alongside animating information—both bodily and affective—in a manner that is readily apprehensible to the reading imagination reconstructing it from the page.

Chapter Three: Frances Burney's Paper Conversations

I know not, in truth, whether I most miss you when happy or when sad—that I wish for you most when happy is certain,—but that nothing upon Earth can do me so much good when sad, as your society,—Dear of All souls to me,—is certain too. Constantly to hear from you & to write to you is the next best thing,—so now, with as little murmuring as I am able, I return to our paper conversations.

Fanny Burney to Susan Burney, 1783

Introduction

Like Boswell, Burney made it her vocation to record everyday conversation for posterity, and like him she also understood that writing one's experiences down on paper was a way to constitute and protect a sense of self. In contrast to the jaunty and playful sociability Boswell aims for in his textual conversations, Burney's records can often be quite a bit more painful. In her case, much more explicitly than in Boswell's, recording conversations is a way of a way of retroactively taking control of situations that in the moment triggered feelings of embarrassment and humiliation. Many of the scenes in her journals and novels are not simply conversations but rather something more complex: at times punitive and always performative, her paper conversations are literary exercises in overcoming, perpetuating and redirecting the embarrassment caused by social and linguistic errors. As this chapter will explore, her sensitivity to shame and her constant awareness of speech as a fundamental source of it deeply influenced the techniques she developed for representing conversation on the page.

Burney produced an extraordinary number of pages in her lifetime. While her fictional and dramatic production is easy to quantify—she wrote four novels and eight plays—her body of life writing is more difficult to fathom. She wrote twenty-five volumes' worth of journals and letters, which amount to roughly 10,000 annotated pages, and 2.5 million words.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Peter Sabor, director of The Burney Centre and general editor of *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, estimates: "a typical Burney journals volume, in the standard editions, is 100,000

Cumulatively, her journals and letters are twice as long as all of her published fiction combined, and at least two-and-a-half times longer than Richardson's *Clarissa*, the longest novel in English—and this is not including the many memoranda, diaries and themes that she kept in scraps and notebooks, to practice writing and to remind herself of what to record.¹⁴¹

Despite widespread use of the term “journal” (by Burney herself and the scholars who study her) to describe these personal writings, they are generically much closer to letters in the sense that she is never writing in the abstract, or to herself, but rather—as her own use of the phrase “paper conversations” implies—always for a real or imagined interlocutor. One of her main interlocutors during the early years of her record keeping is the avuncular Samuel Crisp, a friend of her father Charles Burney and her second “Daddy” (an epithet she used frequently).¹⁴² A writer himself, Crisp positioned himself as a mentor for young Fanny, offering her craft advice and urging her to write more and oftener. Listen, for example, to Crisp making the case that the novel is a better genre for Burney to work in than the comedy:

In these little entertaining, elegant Histories, the writer has his full Scope; as large a Range as he pleases to hunt in—to pick, cull, select, whatever he likes:—he takes his own time; he may be as minute as he pleases, & the more minute the better; provided, that Taste, a deep & penetrating knowledge of human Nature, & the World, accompany that minuteness.—When this is the Case, the very Soul, & all it's most secret recesses & workings, are develop'd, & laid as open to the View, as the blood Globules circulating in a frog's foot, when seen thro' a Microscope... But of these

words—excluding notes and intro, of course. Some would be over, some under. Thus with 25 volumes in all, when complete, I'd say a ball-park estimate gives 2.5 million words.”

¹⁴¹ Most of Burney's surviving notebooks and memoranda are held by the Berg Collection, NYPL, as part of the larger “Frances Burney d'Arblay collection of papers, 1653-1894 [bulk 1775-1839], which lists 6351 items.

¹⁴² Crisp was a man of letters and a close friend of Fanny's father, Charles Burney. He was an aspiring playwright, and had one tragedy produced at Drury Lane, which had had a moderately successful run of eleven nights, but was never revived; the print edition was damned in the *Monthly Review*. See James Sambrook, ‘Crisp, Samuel (1707–1783)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6706>, accessed 23 July 2014].

great advantages, these resources, YOU are strangely curtailed, the Moment You begin a Comedy .¹⁴³

Although Burney does not strictly follow this advice about avoiding comedy—her first play, *The Witlings*, was already underway when she received this letter and she forged ahead with it anyway—she certainly seems to have heeded Crisp’s other decree, *the more minute the better*. Indeed, if there is one formal property that is consistent throughout Burney’s journals—one thing that unifies this otherwise sprawling, unwieldy body of scribblings—it is their minuteness. She is not only willing, but in fact seems compelled to dilate her journalistic records, often to such an extent that they match the real time in which the thing itself played out.

Put another way, what is constant about Burney’s journals is the practice of constant writing that produced them. Whether one labels it in general terms as an assiduous habit, or in pathological terms as a hypergraphic compulsion, the fact remains: Burney must always write. Her obsession with recording interactions is powered dually: on one hand, by her profound anxiety about the loss that time inflicts, as it dilutes lived experience into nothingness; and on the other hand, by her previously noted sensitivity to shame, which she seeks alternately to soothe and avenge by writing about it. For Burney, the practice of life writing is on a knife’s edge between being a compensatory tool for fending off loss, and becoming a self-scouring menace that keeps shame and pain alive long after they should have faded away. This chapter explores the nebulous relationship between these two parallel sources of Burney’s need to record. It briefly considers how the literary symptoms of these needs—namely, the techniques she develops to capture the conversational mistakes and embarrassments that defined her

¹⁴³ Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol. III, 1778-1779, eds. Lars. E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 189.

lived experience—find their way from the pages of her journal into those of her novels. Pushing back against the common critical narrative that her journals were a training ground to support her fiction writing, I argue that these techniques wound up in the novels as a side effect, an incidental byproduct of a much more important project—a survival tactic, really—that she was using her journal to carry out. Her life writing practice was a needed coping mechanism that allowed her constantly to take stock of her own socio-conversational capital and that of the people around her and to redistribute as necessary, at least in the world of her own representation. The lesson Burney’s paper conversations offer—more than those of the other authors surveyed here—is that in studying literary representations of speech, shame needs to be accounted for.

Frances Burney’s Hypergraphia

I. Writing as Transaction

My opportunities for writing grow less & less, & my materials more & More:—yet I am unwilling, for a thousand reasons, to give over my attempt,—& the first is, the Debt I owe my dearest Susan, who so kindly feeds me, whenever I am hungry, & she has abundance.

Fanny to Susan, 26 August 1778.

In pursuance of my promise, I will now begin a longer Letter to my sweetest Susan, & go on as I can steal Time.

Fanny to Susan, 2 November 1782

* * *

From an early age, Burney showed hypergraphic tendencies—hypergraphia being the medical term for an overpowering desire to write, as neurologist and writer Alice Flaherty explains.¹⁴⁴ On her fifteenth birthday, probably prompted by her disapproving stepmother,

¹⁴⁴ Alice Flaherty, *The Midnight Disease: the Drive to Write, Writer’s Block, and the Creative Brain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 2.

Burney torched what was already a substantial corpus of juvenilia—a pile of “Elegies, Odes, Plays, Songs, Stories, Farces—nay, Tragedies and Epic Poems,” as she would later describe these early writings.¹⁴⁵ Despite this serious (if slightly dramatic) effort to curb her writing habit, she was at it again before a year had passed: this time, in the journals she would keep until her death more than seven decades later.

A survey of Burney’s published journals¹⁴⁶—the semi-formal writings that she would eventually begin crafting “with a half-conscious eye to the future,” as John Wiltshire describes them—shows a writer with extraordinary technical range.¹⁴⁷ They are formally diverse and generically difficult to define. At a basic level, the boundary between the journalistic and epistolary modes is blurred in these writings. To her closest correspondents—her favourite sister, Susan, for example, and Daddy Crisp—Burney sent what were essentially just her journals, with salutations and signatures tacked on either end. Crisp aptly coins her peculiar brand of correspondence thus:

I am so far from being tir’d with your long letters as You call them, that I only wish them a quire apiece... You Young Devil You, You know in your Conscience I devour greedily your Journalizing letters, & you once promis’d they would be *Weekly Journals*; tho’ now you fight off, both in your Declarations & your Practice—I desire You would reform both—.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ See Lars E. Troide’s introduction to *EJL*, vol. 1, where he terms Burney “a compulsive author, it would seem, almost from the moment she could write,” and describes her birthday bonfire at greater length (xv).

¹⁴⁶ Twenty-two of these volumes are currently published in definitive editions; one is forthcoming in 2017 (vol. 5 of *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, edited by Geoffrey Sill); and two final volumes— vol. 6 of *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, edited by Nancy Johnson, and vol. 2 of the *Additional Journals and Letters*, edited by Peter Sabor—are still in progress.

¹⁴⁷ John Wiltshire, “Journals and Letters,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76.

¹⁴⁸ Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol. II, 1774-1777, ed. Lars E. Troide (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 108. Because of the generic fuzziness that Crisp identifies here, I refer to Burney’s journals and letters throughout as, simply, her journals.

Mainly, she chose to record the diverse conversations she overheard and participated in among the unusual, often high-profile characters she encountered in different social milieux. Her early journals in particular, which she wrote at the outset of her literary career, are loaded with conversation variously represented: at first, in the form of dramatic dialogue, and later in the blend of direct and indirect speech one might expect to find in a novel. She uses a synthesizing narrative mode to frame this second type of conversational record, and to intervene with commentary, often employing her self-identified “Descriptive Talents” to render the speaking characters more fully.¹⁴⁹

Similarly varied are the impulses that motivated Burney to write these journals: at times confessional—at times documentary—at times purely sociable. At a basic level, she herself is always in conversation with someone—“I must imagion myself to be talking,” she states in the inaugural paragraph of her journal—and her style inevitably changes depending on that interlocutor.¹⁵⁰ Her first is an imaginary one: Nobody, personified. Writing to her “dear Nobody,” whom she explicitly genders female, Burney is unreserved and intimate, in keeping with the strange sexual undertones of the Pygmalion figure she uses to describe her: “Adieu my charmer,” she writes—“I can make you fair or brown at pleasure—Just what I will—a creature of my own forming.”¹⁵¹ These connotations of erotic dominance and generativity interestingly conflict with the effacing denotations of Burney’s chosen epithet,

¹⁴⁹ “Here, again, my Descriptive Talents are rendered useless;—for you have forestalled a most excellent account,” Burney writes in reference to a visit to the house at Westwood Park in 1777. Burney, *EJL*, II.273.

¹⁵⁰ Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol. I, 1768-1773, ed. Lars. E. Troide (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁵¹ Burney, *EJL*, I.37.

“no body”—part of the larger tension which both characterizes and drives Burney’s life-writing practice.

Alongside Burney’s well-intentioned birthday purge and her inability to stay on the wagon thereafter, there is stylistic and thematic evidence that she experienced her writing habit as a compulsion. Hypergraphic writing is often of a literary cast and always extremely detailed, stylistic traits Burney’s journals display.¹⁵² Not only are her set pieces exhaustive—some span more than thirty annotated pages—but also, her modern editors invariably note the careful attention that she pays to craft in writing them. In a more thematic sense, Burney is always bemoaning her failure to write. If she has a characteristic rhetorical preamble in her journals—an invocation of her own peculiar muse—it would be an appeal to Time, lamenting that she does not find more of it for making her records. The following example, in which she apologizes to Susan for being late in expanding her memoranda into full journal accounts,¹⁵³ is typical: “As to my being so much behind the present Time, that seems what I hardly ever can keep writing regularly enough to prevent.”¹⁵⁴ Burney’s many references to lost time constitute a central trope of the journal, which she invents as if to absolve herself of the guilt she feels for not producing enough pages to manage, if not stem, the flow of days going by.

¹⁵² From Waxman, SG and Geschwind, N, “Hypergraphia in temporal lobe epilepsy. 1974” (*Epilepsy & behavior*: 6.2), 282–91; via “Hypergraphia,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypergraphia#cite_note-Waxman1974-2, accessed July 22, 2015.

¹⁵³ Describing Burney’s habit of keeping notes and expanding them into journals *post facto*, which she formalized during her most prolific period of journaling, at Court, Peter Sabor writes: “In the first of her Court journals, Burney describes her system of keeping daily notes in pocket memorandum books, which she wrote, together with her letters, in the afternoon, when she usually had two hours at her own disposal after attending the queen in her dressing room. Later, when time permitted, she would draw up these notes into full-fledged journals, but, like Tristram Shandy, she fell ever further behind.” See Frances Burney, *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. I, 1786, ed. Peter Sabor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xx.

¹⁵⁴ Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. V, 1782-1783, eds. Lars. E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), 369.

If Burney did in fact suffer her need to write as a pathology, she certainly did the mental work of rationalizing and even normalizing it. Here is the fifteen-year-old Burney explaining her motivations for starting a journal:

I cannot express the pleasure I have in writing down my thoughts, at the very moment—my opinion of people when I first see them, & *how* I alter, or *how* confirm myself in it—& I am much deceived in my *fore sight*, if I shall not have very great delight in reading this *living proof* of my manner of passing my time, my sentiments, my thoughts of people I know, & a thousand other things in future.—there is something to me very Unsatisfactory in passing year after year without even a memorandum of what you did, &c. And then, all the happy Hours I spend with particular Friends and Favourites, would fade from my recollection.¹⁵⁵

In this rhetorical apology for her journal, Burney styles herself as something in between a documenter, and a heroine of her very own epistolary novel. Surely, her relishing of *the very moment* is shaped by her reading and appreciation of the novels of Samuel Richardson, an influence to which we shall return for further exploration. Not long after penning this rationale, she elaborates on the idea of writing as a kind of investment: “I doubt not but I shall hereafter receive great pleasure from *reviewing* and almost *renewing* my youth & my former sentiments.”¹⁵⁶ By investing time into recording her life—by investing life and vitality into that record through art—she will in turn be able to reanimate former versions of herself in later years. The yield she can expect is, in her words, “great pleasure.” Grounded in this proto-Proustian sense of purpose, determined to fortify her memory by storing its data in backup, on paper, Burney sets about trying to preserve as much as she possibly can.

A related way in which she brings focus and order to her compulsive writing habit is by cultivating a more formal sense of herself as a born documenter, not just for her own pleasure and edification, but for others’ as well. She sees herself as someone with a gift for

¹⁵⁵ Burney, *EJL*, I.14

¹⁵⁶ Burney, *EJL*, I.61.

description and a powerful memory, and therefore a custodial duty to record. This sense of vocation is apparent in the figurative language that she uses to describe her writing. The metaphor I offer above—that Burney views her writing as an investment—is not chosen at random. She herself uses the language of taxation and payment, of collection and debt, to characterize her work on the journal. We have already seen Burney express fear that her experiences will fade from her recollection—a term for memory in which the figure of collection is already embedded. In another instance, when one Mr. Cure remarks that she must spend her time with the Streatham set “very—*profitably*,” she draws out his insinuation in the following terms: “*Meaning*, as I found by his manner, that I *turned to account* all that I saw & observed.”¹⁵⁷ Cure is not wrong: she does aim to give Susan “a most excellent account” of the most unusual personalities she encounters from one day to the next.¹⁵⁸ It is a word that she uses constantly, most often in conjunction with the concept of character. For Burney, to give an account of a person means to take stock of her traits and characteristics by studying habits of speech, voice and comportment—the operation of which we will explore shortly. In any case, if she has a primary formal unit in these unwieldy writings, it is certainly that of the account.

Almost as prevalent as the idea of taking accounts is that of writing as a form of compulsory payment. As Burney writes to Susan and Fredy:

My poor journal is now so in arrears, that I forget wholly the Date of what I sent you last. I have, however, minutes by me of *things*, though not of *Times*, & therefore, the *chronology* not being very important, take them, my dear Girls, *promiscuously*. I am still, I know, in August, et voila tout.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Burney, *EJL*, III.397

¹⁵⁸ Burney, *EJL*, II.273

¹⁵⁹ Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. IV, 1780-81, ed. Betty Rizzo (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 442.

Burney retains this financial metaphor, of being in arrears—which denotes the state of being late in paying money that is owed, usually taxes—through her years at Court. Indeed, it is during this stretch of time away, while witnessing so many extraordinary political events she wished to preserve, that she falls farthest behind in reconciling her memoranda with her journals.¹⁶⁰

The various monetary expressions that Burney uses to describe her writing habit suggest a tension in themselves. She is both the empowered banker—she (re)collects and saves memories, she keeps accounts of and for others—and the abject debtor—because she can never find quite enough time to do the work of writing. Time is money, as her financial figurative lexicon continually implies. She claims that writing is an investment in her own future pleasure: but reading her journals, one is struck by the impression that, in fact, she also feels that she owes something to an institution greater than herself: to the world of letters; to the Burney family and its legacy; to posterity. Indeed, what pleasure she may garner for herself in writing has its own peculiar price.

II. Writing as Salve

Had not this *Composition* fit seized me, *societyless & Bookless, & viewless* as I am, I know not how I could have wiled away my being. But—my Tragedy goes on, & fills up all vacancies.

Fanny to Susan, 22 October 1788

* * *

Burney's hypergraphic tendencies make her pay in more ways than one, figuratively speaking. The second has to do with her use—at times, one might say her abuse—of writing

¹⁶⁰ As Sabor notes, “she was ‘more than a week in arrears’ in writing her journal account of her first day at Court, and the gap grew steadily wider as the year progressed. By the time she came to record the events of December 1786, she was already a full year behind.” Burney, *CJL*, I.xx.

as a tool to manage emotional hurt and humiliation. Her shyness is well documented; as an adult reflecting on her younger self, Burney describes herself as “never of the party,” and “so peculiarly backward that even our Susan stood before me,” Susan being three years her junior.¹⁶¹ Sensitivity and a solemn demeanor even earned her a nickname in her childhood home, The Old Lady.¹⁶² Of a piece with her wallflower status in the large Burney brood was a general social discomfort that could be very debilitating. One of the first signs of it appears in her account of having a few pages of her journal confiscated by her father:

O Dear! I was in a sad distress—I could not for the Life of me ask for it—& so *dawdled* & fretted the time away till Tuesday Evening...Well, to be sure, thought I, these same dear Journals are most shocking plaguing things—I’ve a good mind to resolve never to write a word more.—However, I stayed still in the Room, working & looking wistfully at him for about an hour & half.¹⁶³

After the fact, she reports having been “so frightened that I have not had the Heart to write since, till now, I should not but that— — in short, but that I cannot help it!”¹⁶⁴ As this instance aptly demonstrates, the journal itself could be both her harm *and* her help. The writing compels itself cyclically: it is at once the material evidence of her shameful inner thoughts, always liable to incriminate her; and the repository in which she can “cannot help” but creatively unburden herself of the very shame it inflicts.

¹⁶¹ Susan’s own description agrees with Burney’s. As Troide notes in his introduction to the first volume of her early journals and letters, “Susan has left us a character of Fanny written at this period...Fanny’s [characteristics] are ‘sense, sensibility, and bashfulness, and even a degree of prudery’. Fanny has a ‘superior’ understanding, ‘but her diffidence gives her a bashfulness before company with whom she is not intimate, which is a disadvantage to her.’” Burney, *EJL*, I.xv. See also Kate Chisholm, “The Burney Family,” *Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, 10-11; and Frances Burney, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D’Arblay)*, vol. XI, 1818-1824, eds. Joyce Hemlow with Althea Douglas and Patricia Hawkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 286.

¹⁶² Burney, *EJL*, I.xvi .

¹⁶³ Burney, *EJL*, I.19.

¹⁶⁴ Burney, *EJL*. I.19.

The general source of Burney's shame is consistent, and has to do with her inability to deal with various forms of attention—whether literary, social or romantic. Usually, there is some specific bane on which she focuses her writing energy for a period, before moving on. The first, as we have seen, is writing itself. Her first novel, *Evelina* (1778), is a source of so much anxiety that she goes to extraordinary lengths to conceal her authorship, until the book's positive reception is secure. Once her literary career (and the celebrity it brings) is underway, she documents seemingly every comment or compliment about the book that she hears. She does so under the aegis of being ashamed of the attention—and yet, the very copiousness of these recorded comments, and the backward way in which they allow her to focus on her success, is evidence that pride is at play, too. The following example evokes the complex co-operation of embarrassment and ego that drives these accounts:

'No, no, continued [Mrs. Thrale], You must *blunt* your feelings, & learn to bear, & to hear, the praises you deserve: if *I* had written the Book, I should have been proud to own it.'

'O Mrs. Thrale! this is going too far indeed!'

'Not at all; *any body* would be proud of it.'

You will not wonder I should be ashamed to hear such Words at the Time, when I assure you I am shamed of *writing* them now.¹⁶⁵

For the young Burney, who had always stepped back and let her siblings shine by comparison, being singled out in public for her work inflicted pangs of bitter-sweetness. Part of her did not want to be perceived as “a *downright & known* scribbler,” while another part fed, in some way, on the attention.¹⁶⁶ As Wayne Koestenbaum notes in *Humiliation*, a study that constellates his diverse observations on this particular social response, “Humiliation has its

¹⁶⁵ Burney, *EJL*, III.117.

¹⁶⁶ Burney, *EJL*, III.117.

rewards. Among them: the privilege of being seen as exemplary. The pleasure of being a spectacle. The perk of visibility, of becoming legible.”¹⁶⁷

Writing about shame seems to have provided Burney with relief—both in the form of catharsis, and of a controlled indulgence in attention that she would not otherwise permit herself. In these ways, she used shame-writing as a creative analgesic; but she could not always sense the limits of its efficacy as such. As we heard her tell Susan, the writing could cause her as much shame as the original experience itself. This habit becomes even more self-punishing when she starts using it to process new and unfamiliar romantic feelings. In her young adulthood, one figure in particular dominated this part of her mind: George Owen Cambridge, whom she met in 1782. She developed a consuming attachment to him, and although they spent many hours conversing, he never acted on his intentions, nor even made them clear—which became a source of confusion, anxiety and humiliation for Burney.¹⁶⁸ From 1783 through until 1785, she writes at length of little else.¹⁶⁹ The copious records she produced in this time—in which she routinely describes feeling “terribly ashamed,” “vexed” and “anxious”—often seem to prolong, rather than mitigate, the pain of their interactions.¹⁷⁰ In the most torturous *and* tortuous of these accounts, Burney describes her relations with Cambridge as “so full of agitation, so rarely quiet; so frequently replete with distress—confusion—suspect—I had almost, my Susan, said misery? Last summer it was even

¹⁶⁷ Wayne Koestenbaum, *Humiliation* (New York: Picador, 2011), 27.

¹⁶⁸ See Burney, *EJL*, V.xi-xvi; and John Abbot’s introduction to Frances Burney, *Additional Journals and Letters*, vol. I, 1784-1786, ed. Stewart J. Cooke with Elaine Bander (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xv-xxiv.

¹⁶⁹ Volume 5 of the *Early Journals and Letters* and, in particular, volume 1 of *Additional Journals and Letters* reflect Burney’s obsession with recording every interaction between her and Cambridge, play-by-play.

¹⁷⁰ Burney, *AJL*, I.212; 206; 179.

torture!”¹⁷¹ And yet: she draws this account out over twenty meticulously detailed pages.¹⁷² Her recorded conversations with Cambridge reflect a kind of frustrated communication that surely shaped the conversations between Camilla, the protagonist of her third novel, and her love interest Edgar—which are similarly long, and notoriously strangled.

As Koestenbaum tellingly notes of the deep connection between writing and shame,

Writing is a process of turning myself inside out: a regurgitation. I extrude my vulnerable inner lining. I purge. And then I examine the contents—my exploded interior—and begin the bloody interrogation. I ask whether it is filthy or clean, valuable or deplorable.¹⁷³

That Burney uses writing similarly—as a means of unfiltered and unfettered self-expression—is evident in the personal content of her writings to Susan, first about her celebrity, and later about her painful unrequited love for George Owen Cambridge. It explains why the figure of “Nobody,” initially, and later that of Susan and Fredy as “second selves,” mirroring her own, was not only appealing to her, but even necessary, to license her extensive dwelling on shameful experiences and private feelings. Interestingly, the two forms of attention that leave Burney feeling exposed are erotic and literary. Margaret Anne Doody connects these two faculties when she describes the young writer’s fear “that the irresistible drive to write was merely masturbatory”; this statement also sheds further light on Burney’s need to falsely figure her life writing as a solo practice, at times, by making Susan into a second self.¹⁷⁴ As she writes her way through these two destabilizing forms of attention, she shows herself to be

¹⁷¹ Burney, *AJL*, I.183.

¹⁷² See Burney’s account of January 15th, 1785 in Burney, *AJL*, I.174-195.

¹⁷³ Koestenbaum, *Humiliation*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 37.

incapable of gauging when to stem the flow of her feelings and her ink. Whether the outcome of this excess yielded a net gain or loss—pleasure or pain—for Burney personally, it certainly profited her art. Her hypergraphic writing either forced or allowed her to hone her memory for speech, her acute sense for interpersonal dynamics, and her ear for character.

Conversation As Character

Although Burney's journals may give the impression of being exhaustive, there is in fact a rough set of criteria that governs her focus. Certain kinds of experience have a more lasting appeal, for her, than others: specifically, witnessing some peculiar character's antics, or participating in some interaction of acute emotional or comic substance. Relatedly, straight narration is not her favoured mode; or, put another way, it is not worth the time. She will do it when nothing more compelling is happening—"The rest of the Week will bear *compression*," she tells Susan at one slow point—but her norm is to be expansive, both in the amount that she records and in the techniques she uses to do so.¹⁷⁵ The sense of formal elasticity she brings to her life-writing makes sense, given that representing speech in a detailed way requires more tools than are available in homogeneous narration; the sort of live material she wishes to set down demands a capacious, even experimental method.

In Burney's conversational set pieces, she aims to capture not simply a record of what people said, but—more importantly—of *how* they said it. The journals reflect her preference for manner over matter; she sees the global form of a representation, and the effect that it

¹⁷⁵ One circumstance that might lead her to write a purely narrative account rather than one of the vivid, more formally varied representations that she usually does, is when something of political or cultural consequence happens, and she feels beholden to record it with a certain degree of gravitas. In the case of the Gordon Riots of 1780, for example, which she describes in the fourth volume of her early journals, she dispenses with her comic mode, instead providing a more serious account of the events that passed.

produces, as more communicative and interesting than its pure content. This value is evidenced in the description she writes for Susan of one particularly odd duck, Mr.

Blakeney.¹⁷⁶

I am absolutely almost sick with laughing,—this Mr. Blakeney half Convulses me,—yet I cannot make *you* Laugh by Writing his speeches, because it is the manner which accompanies them that, more than the matter, renders them so peculiarly ridiculous. His extreme pomposity,—the solemn stiffness of his Person,—the conceited twinkling of his little old Eyes,—& the quaint importance of his delivery—are so much more like some Pragmatical old Coxcomb represented on the stage, than like any thing in real & common Life, that I think, were I a man, I should sometimes be betrayed into *Clapping* him for acting so well!—As it is, I am sure no Character in any Comedy I ever saw has made me Laugh more extravagantly.¹⁷⁷

Burney understands the limitations of her medium, as evidenced here and elsewhere in the journals, when she tells Susan that something is “too *diffused* for writing.”¹⁷⁸ Notwithstanding the challenges of using text as a technology for recording, she knows that it is the only one available—and is invested in mining what unique potentialities it has for preserving life and manners. As the long passage above demonstrates, she understands that her powers of description can go a long way towards mitigating the loss of people’s performative social behaviours. The passage also points to one of the reasons behind her extensive efforts to preserve conversation: she conceives of social life itself as a kind of performance, which she knows must dissipate after a single iteration, but which she nevertheless wishes to preserve in some way. Whether she is watching David Garrick play Lear “exquisitely” on stage—or watching him in her own living room, as he “[runs] on with great humour upon twenty subjects” with the peculiar “drollery” that “belongs to his Voice, looks & manner”—she may

¹⁷⁶Editors Troide and Cook describe Edward Blakeney as “a foolish old Irishman whom [Burney] had met at Brighton.” For more biographical information, see Burney, *EJL*, III.xiv; 401n.

¹⁷⁷ Burney, *EJL*, III.407.

¹⁷⁸ Burney, *EJL*, III.146.

regret “that *Writing* loses it almost all,” but she still sets about trying to get down as much on paper as she can.¹⁷⁹

A related reason behind Burney’s recording efforts is that she views manner—and manners, a distinct but related social phenomenon—as the operation through which character makes itself known. She powerfully connects personality to comportment, as evidenced in her question to Susan regarding something that George Owen Cambridge had said: “How characteristic is this! do you not *hear* him saying it?”¹⁸⁰ When one writes only the words that are spoken—or, worse yet, a compressed description of the conversational event—everything one would *really* want to preserve and communicate falls away. The dead matter is all that remains. In writing to Crisp of a gathering of prominent Bluestockings at the house of William Pepys, she uses a telling word: “I wish, my dear Daddy, I had Time to write you some of the *Flash* that passes upon these occasions” (my emphasis).¹⁸¹ For Burney, what has real value, and what merits the investment of time to capture, is the flash, the live manner. It is where all of the life resides.

In her belief that the manner in which people express themselves tells others something essential about who they are, Burney draws not only on her own intuitions about the relationship between speech and personality, but also on her literary precursors. The reading that she did as a young person set her up to experiment with reported speech as an engine of characterization. The exemplars that most prompted her to this end were the novels of Samuel Richardson. As Claire Harman notes, “Novels were not banned in the liberal

¹⁷⁹ Burney, *EJL*, I.242; Burney, *EJL*, II.96.

¹⁸⁰ Burney, *EJL*, V.382.

¹⁸¹ Burney, *EJL*, V.34.

Burney household,” and the young Fanny “read much more demanding books than most ‘educated’ young ladies would have encountered.”¹⁸² Harman identifies Richardson as the young writer’s “literary hero,” which Burney herself confirms in a letter to Susan describing a fan of *Evelina*: “she has just such a youthful & mad enthusiasm about me as you & I, at her Age, should have had about Richardson.”¹⁸³

In the broadest sense, Burney models her mode of narration on Richardson’s epistolary one: not only in her first novel, *Evelina*, but even earlier, in styling herself as the epistolary narrator of her own journalizing letters to Crisp and Susan. On a more minute scale, one hears Richardson’s influence in the care that Burney takes to individuate her characters’ voices through style. Richardson first uses this technique in *Pamela*, differentiating the colloquial yet shrewd words that his heroine speaks from the thoroughly bumpkinish ones of Mr. Longman, on one hand, and likewise from the vulgar ones of Mrs. Jewkes, on the other.¹⁸⁴ But it isn’t until he writes *Clarissa* that he more widely explores the potential of this technique, by applying it not just to characters’ speaking voices, but also to their writing voices.

Pamela has one dominant writing voice, the heroine’s own. As Mark Kinkead-Weekes notes, Richardson’s subsequent decision to use multiple epistolary narrators in *Clarissa* effectively turned the novel into an “orchestra of style”: each letter-writer has a distinctive

¹⁸² Claire Harman, *Fanny Burney: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 42.

¹⁸³ Harman, *Fanny Burney*, 84; and Burney, *EJL*, III.424, qtd in Harman, *Fanny Burney*, 146.

¹⁸⁴ For more on Richardson’s mastery of a feminine idiom in the voice of Pamela, see Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 431-32. Also in this vein, Carey McIntosh collects a more comprehensive list of Pamela’s colloquialisms: see Carey McIntosh, *The Evolution of English Prose, 1700-1800: Style, Politeness, and Print Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 208-9.

tone, which the critic describes in detail.¹⁸⁵ Clarissa's, for example, "is primarily an analytic mode in which words are taken seriously, weighed against one another," with "a large conceptual vocabulary, aiming at precision."¹⁸⁶ Anna Howe, by stark contrast, is notoriously irreverent and clever. "Where Clarissa weighs words, Anna asserts her sovereignty over them. She makes up language, distorting or combining words with hyphens, playing with them in new senses or forms," and "her syntax represents the quick and volatile movements of her own moods, playful or scornful."¹⁸⁷ In the letters of Lovelace, Kinkead-Weekes identifies a style of theatrical imperialism, which "expresses itself in tone of address (Thee and Thou), in metaphors of power, warfare and conquest, and in his attitudes to language itself, which he invents and plays with more variously even than Anna."¹⁸⁸ The adjectives that describe style, here, all easily double as character traits—Clarissa is serious and analytical, Anna is volatile and playful, Lovelace is imperious. Indeed, Richardson's prose is crafted to invite this kind of description. As is the writing, so is the writer.

The idea that writing-manner is the nexus of character, then, is a Richardsonian one. What Burney does, for her part, is to take this idea out of the domain of writing, and explore it in the context of the spoken voice and the living body—back, in effect, in the realm of reported speech, where Richardson began in *Pamela*. The kind of manner that Burney is interested in is not so much a literary-stylistic one, as something more phenomenological,

¹⁸⁵ Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*, 434.

¹⁸⁶ Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*, 434.

¹⁸⁷ Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*, 436.

¹⁸⁸ Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*, 437.

something that is lived and performed. As we have seen, writing is not the thing itself, for Burney, but rather serves as the technology for recording it.

Perhaps because of this strong interest in speech, the text that Burney adopts as her first model in the journal is not *Clarissa*, but *Sir Charles Grandison*, in which the dialogue form features prominently. While Richardson reports speech variously in *Clarissa*—in a novelistic style, in which spoken words are integrated, either directly or indirectly, into narrated paragraphs, elaborated with description; and in a dramatic style, with line breaks and no editorializing—he is more partial to the latter form in *Sir Charles Grandison*. As Walter Scott notes in *The Lives of the Novelists*, *Pamela* and *Clarissa* have “but few of those digressive dialogues and dissertations with which *Sir Charles Grandison* abounds.”¹⁸⁹ Early in the second volume of this final work, as the heroine Harriet Byron recounts an elaborate episode to her correspondent, Lucy Selby, she adds—“By the way, Lucy, you are fond of plays; and it is come into my head, that, to avoid all says-I’s and says-she’s, I will henceforth, in all dialogues, write names in the margin: So fancy, my dear, that you are reading in one of your favourite volumes.”¹⁹⁰ From this point, she regularly invites her to “Take, Lucy, in the dialogue-way, particulars.”¹⁹¹ It is surely this turn of phrase that prompts Burney, almost twenty years after Richardson, to inform dear Nobody of her intention to “follow the Grandison way of writing Dialogue” in her journal.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Walter Scott, *The Lives of the Novelists* (New York: A. Denham, 1872), 69.

¹⁹⁰ Samuel Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison* (London: 1754), vol. II, 73.

¹⁹¹ Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, IV.200.

¹⁹² Burney, *EJL*, I.202.

The first volume of Burney's life writing shows her regularly importing pure dialogue into her prose; indeed, it is her preferred method for recording speech at this early stage of her career. Alongside her invocation of "the Grandison way" is a parallel sign of her debt to Richardson: her use of a variation on the *Dramatis Personae* to introduce long conversational accounts, as her predecessor does at the outset of his two longer novels. She has various terms for this listing practice—"I begin with the Company, first," she writes in one case, and offers to "mention the whole party by Name," in another—but she formalizes it in her account of a visit to Chessington, titling the list "A sketch of our Party." What follows are not only names, but also brief character descriptions. In this case, she nods to *Clarissa* more than to *Grandison*: while both novels list characters' names, only *Clarissa* offers details about their circumstances and personalities. After the name of Mr. Roger Solmes, for instance, Richardson writes: "a man of sordid manners, disagreeable in his person and address, immensely rich, proposed with a high hand for a husband to Miss Clarissa Harlowe"—the style of which Burney coopts for more comic purposes in her description of one Mr. Featherstone: "Brother of Sir Mathew, a weak-Hearted, dirty, pettish, absurd Creature, middle Aged but having broken his leg walks upon Crutches. He is equally ugly and cross."¹⁹³

Much has been made in critical conversations about the suppression by Burney's father and Samuel Crisp of her first play, *The Witlings*,¹⁹⁴ with the implication that her

¹⁹³ Richardson, *Clarissa* (Penguin), 37; Burney, *EJL*. I.158-59.

¹⁹⁴ CB and Crisp jointly penned a letter to Fanny delineating their reasons for wanting to suppress the play—one of them being that the cast of absurd and pretentious characters too closely resembled the *Bluestockings*—which Fanny later described as "that Hissing, groaning, catcalling Epistle." Burney, *EJL*, III.350.

original literary inclination was towards drama.¹⁹⁵ And while a cursory look through her first journal volume—with its *Dramatis Personae* lists and its many pages of dialogue—might seem to corroborate that narrative, it turns out that she was not trying to make it like a play, as much as she was trying to make it like her favourite novels. Her primary interest was in narrating, with a strong parallel interest in representing speech within that narration. To do so, Burney begins with various cues from *Pamela*, *Clarissa* and *Grandison*, letting the epistolary tradition established by her favourite author redound upon her life writing. In turn, her life writing redounded upon her first novel, *Evelina*—as Harman notes, “the sheer familiarity of writing to Crisp suggested the story’s central correspondence between a young lady in the city (Evelina) and an old mentor in the sticks.”¹⁹⁶ She went on to develop further Richardson’s more experimental methods for recording speech, branching out into a more complex blending of reported speech with narrative description. Eventually, she would abandon the epistolary mode altogether, as she learned that she did not actually need it to do what she wanted with voice, style and character—that in fact, she could do it even better without the *Grandison*-style mashup of epistolary and dramatic modes with which she begins in her journal. We will return to look at Burney’s transition from first-person epistolary to third-

¹⁹⁵ As Tara Ghoshal-Wallace writes, “Of course, we will always lament that Burney’s plays were so ill-fated in her own lifetime, for she was manifestly equipped to write drama, both by experience and inclination.” Francesca Saggini agrees that “Frances Burney’s passion for playwriting was suppressed,” but invites us to blame Charles Burney’s long-term hostility rather than “a fatal combination of ‘ill-advice and ill luck,’ as Ghoshal-Wallace suggests in her edition of *A Busy Day*. Margaret Anne Doody says as much of Burney’s missed dramatic calling when she pronounces, “If *The Witlings* had been staged, we would now remember Frances Burney as a predecessor of Pinero or Ayckbourn.” See Ghoshal-Wallace, “Burney as Dramatist,” *Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, 56; Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts*, trans. Laura Kopf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 131; 269 n.59; and Doody, *Frances Burney*, 98.

¹⁹⁶ Harman, *Fanny Burney*, 84.

person narrative in her published work, but first, a closer look at her experiments capturing manner in the pages of her journal will help to account for this paradigm shift.

Paper Conversations

Burney's goal required her to invent new techniques, over and above what Richardson had done, which would let her notate the nuances embedded in people's words and surrounding them—in other words, the intra- and extra-lexical features of their speech. Her idea of manner has everything to do with how a person's habitus—the peculiar structure of personality and background—takes verbal and vocal form. What kinds of words does she use? Slang ones, uppity ones? What sort of accent does he have? What turns of phrase are a crutch, what constructions and expressions, whether novel or clichéd? What is the inflection of her voice, the emphasis, the attitude?

It is interesting to note that many of these properties are aural and tonal ones. The idea that Burney had an “ear” for dialogue is a critical commonplace, and the musical metaphor is not amiss.¹⁹⁷ Her ability to hear and find meaning in the dynamics of a person's speech, and her desire to make this phenomenon legible on the page, partly stems from the fact that she was the daughter of one of the country's most renowned musicologists, Charles Burney. As his amanuensis, she would have copied much of his multi-volume *General History of Music* (1776-1789), including an opening proposition that powerfully connects speech and music:

¹⁹⁷ Editors Troide and Stewart state that Burney's dialogue “displayed a keen ear for the varied idioms of the day”; Magdalena Ożarska describes the narrating Burney as having an “ear for people's linguistic idiosyncrasies”; Katherine M. Rogers refers to Burney's “keen ear for pomposity”; etc. See Burney, *EJL*, III.xi; Magdalena Ożarska, *Lacework or Mirror? Diary Poetics of Frances Burney, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 89; and Katherine M. Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of 'Female Difficulties'* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 69.

“The love of lengthened tones and modulated sounds,” she would have written, “different from those of speech, and regulated by a stated measure, seems a passion implanted in human nature throughout the globe.”¹⁹⁸ The first volume also includes a section treating “The NOTATION or Tablature of Ancient Music,” and raises the idea that the aural nuances of speech can be recorded on paper for later reproduction:

many passages from Cicero, Quintilian, Plutarch, and Boethius, might be cited, to prove, that not only musicians and actors, but even orators, had a notation, by which the inflexions of voice, peculiar to their several professions of singing, declaiming, and haranguing in public, were ascertained.¹⁹⁹

Ideas about music, then—its close relationship to speech, its challenges of notation—would certainly have been alive to Burney’s imagination early in her writing career.

Given the circle in which her father moved, Burney regularly witnessed musical performances, both abroad and at home. Indeed, some of her most evocative descriptions of vocal manner can be found in her journal accounts of impromptu concerts, not all of which she enjoyed. For instance, on hearing their Tahitian guest, Omai, sing a traditional song, she balks at the unfamiliar sound:

Nothing can be more *curious*, or less *pleasing*, than his singing Voice, he seems to have none, & *Tune*, or *air*, hardly seem to be *aimed* at; so queer, wild, strange a *rumbling of sounds* never did I before hear; & very contentedly can I go to the Grave if I never do again. His *song* is the only thing that is *savage* belonging to him.²⁰⁰

This final statement rings slightly false, given Burney’s earlier notation of Omai’s speaking manner. Here is his description of horseback riding, as recorded by her:

¹⁹⁸ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London: 1776), vii.

¹⁹⁹ Burney, *History of Music*, 170.

²⁰⁰ Burney, *EJL*, II.196.

‘First goes man, so! (making a motion of whipping a Horse) ‘then *here*’ (pointing behind him) ‘*here* goes Woman! Ha, Ha, Ha!’

Miss Lidderdale, of Lynn, who was with us, & was in a riding Habit, told him that *she* was prepared to go on Horseback.

He made her a very civil Bow, & said ‘O you,—you *dood* woman, you *no man*;—dirty woman,—Beggar woman;—ride so;—not you.’²⁰¹

As these records of the singing and speaking Omai illustrate, Burney has two main avenues through which to convey the aural properties of speech: she uses a transcriptional method to quote them directly, as in the horseback riding story; and, later in her journal, she begins to rely more on narrative description, too, as in the singing account.

Regarding the first method, she can accomplish a great deal simply by shaping directly quoted speech to reflect its intra-lexical properties. One of her favourite and most flexible techniques for doing so is orthographical adjustment, which she uses to convey foreign accents, as in Omai’s *dood* for *good*.²⁰² Transcribing Omai’s accent and his “broken English”²⁰³ lets Burney exploit some of the comic quality of second-language speech. Her own sensitivity to shame made her more alert to the fundamental embarrassment involved in speaking in a non-native language; and in turn, in her journals, second-language speech becomes at times a kind of receptacle for the potential shame that attends all speech, especially in formal social settings.

²⁰¹ Burney, *EJL*, II.195.

²⁰² Note that Burney gets this technique from Colbrand in *Pamela*, while Richardson in turn probably gets it from Xury and Friday in Defoe’s *Crusoe*—there are precedents for recording accents, but she builds upon this technique substantially, extending it to regional dialects—see below.

²⁰³ Burney uses this phrase a number of times in her journal series, the first being four years earlier, in reference to Vincenzo Martinelli, an Italian writer whom Charles Burney had met on the musical circuit and who visited their home: “He was boasting to this effect in his broken English, & said—‘I hear the nobleman talk—I give him great attention—I make him low Bow—& I say my Lord! you are a very great man—but, for all that—a Blockhead!’” Burney, *EJL*, I. 168-69.

At its most ruthless, the technique of orthographical adjustment lets Burney wield the shame of faulty speech not just for comedy—as in Omai’s case, above—but for punishment. The most famous examples of such punitive effects can be found in her records from Court, when she was forced to contend with Elizabeth Schwellenberg—also Keeper of the Robes, who shared Queen Charlotte’s native language of German, and whose “domineering, tyrannical personality” tormented Burney.²⁰⁴ The following account features a transcribed impression of her German colleague, as she responds to Colonel Manners’s suggestion that she left something in his bed:

“In your Bed?—O, ver well!—that is reely comeecal!”
“And pray what was it?” cried Miss Port, almost bursting.
“Why...a great large clumsy lump of Leather.”
“Of Leadder, sir?—of Leadder? What was that for me?”
“Why, ma’am, it was so big, & so heavy, it was as much as I could do to lift it!”
“Vell, that was nothing from *me!*”²⁰⁵

There is still comedy, here, in her thudding repetition “of Leadder?”—but it is of a more contemptuous brand. For Burney, this record constitutes a kind of payback for the humiliating ordeals Schwellenberg put her through on a daily basis. Here, dialogue is both satirical and therapeutic. Burney takes a foreign accent, puts it on paper and all of a sudden this powerful woman—whom she hates—looks illiterate. This retroactive, therapeutic settling of scores happens often in her Court journals. On another occasion, for example, Schwellenberg unfeelingly informs Burney, “you are to have a Gown...The *Queen* will give you a Gown!—the Queen says you are not rich.” And then, when an incensed Burney

²⁰⁴ Burney, *CJL*, I.6, n.28.

²⁰⁵ Frances Burney, *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. II, 1787, ed. Stewart Cooke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 167.

declines—“‘Miss Bernar,’ cried she, quite angrily, ‘I tell you once—when the Queen will give you a Gown,—you must be humble thankful.’”²⁰⁶

While Burney’s journal records of foreign-language speakers are often powered by the shame of imperfect speech, they can also be motivated by quite a contrary impulse: her love of different languages, and her desire to capture speech as it is diversely lived and experienced. When multiple languages factor into a conversation, she always transcribes them as far as her knowledge permits, ready to sacrifice some coherence for accuracy. In one instance, she proves her fluency in Fr-Anglais with an account of a conversation between her sister Hetty and the Italian soprano Lucrezia Agujari, who asked to meet their father in 1775. Speaking in their common language of French, Hetty accidentally accuses Agujari—also called “the Bastardini” because of her alleged illegitimacy—of having a child out of wedlock herself.²⁰⁷

when my sister was asked to play, she pleaded want of Practice, & said to Agujari that she had other Things to mind than Harpsichords.—
‘Et qu’avez vous donc, Mademoiselle?’ demanded the Bastardini. ‘Des Enfants!’ answered Hetty. ‘Ah Diable!’ exclaimed she, (for that is her favourite Exclamation) et vous etes si juine [*sic*] encore! & combien [en] avez vous?’
‘J’en ai trois.’ answered Hetty—
‘Ah Diable!’ C’est bien extaordinaire!
‘Avez vous une Enfant?’ asked Hetty—
She stared—& after some Gestures of surprise, said ‘Moi!—je ne suis pas mariée, moi!’²⁰⁸

Here, the speakers’ French words are syntactically yoked, though discordantly so, with the narrator’s English ones. One does not sense Burney capitalizing on the shame of faulty speech, as in the accounts of Omai and Schwellenberg; rather, one senses her commitment to

²⁰⁶ Burney, *CJL*, I.84, qtd in “Introduction,” xxi.

²⁰⁷ Burney, *EJL*, II.74, n.24.

²⁰⁸ Burney, *EJL*, II.76.

preserving the very real linguistic variety that surrounds her, even at the cost of smooth narration. Burney harboured a lifelong interest in languages, particularly French, prompted by a close attachment to her French grandmother and namesake, Frances Sleepe (née Dubois). Both the foregoing account and the following one suggest that she likewise harboured a fantasy of a social world that could accommodate quick transitions in and out of languages, and of a writing mode that could effortlessly trace this verbal fluidity. In accounts like this—of which the journals have many—we feel the author relishing the Babelistic cacophony around her, trying to capture the real-time dynamism of multiple speakers and tongues.

The conflicting dynamics that attract Burney to foreign accents and languages—her appreciation of linguistic vibrancy, coupled with the shame that inheres, for her, in speech—can be heard in a tri-lingual conversation with yet another visitor at the Burney household, the world-travelling Richard Twiss. Here, he tries to coerce Burney into speaking Italian, which her written use of the language suggests she might be capable of, though her fear of embarrassment will not permit her to try:

‘But, Dr. Burney,’ said Mr Twiss, ‘was you never Accosted by *una bella Ragazza?*’ then turning to me, ‘you know what a *Ragazza*, is, ma’am?’

‘Sir?—’

‘A *signorina?*’

I stammered out something like niether yes or no, because the Question rather frightened me, lest he should conclude that in understanding *that*, I knew much *more*...finding me silent he said, in English—

—Why what Objection can you have to speaking to me in Italian? [xxxxx 3-4 words]

‘A very obvious one,’ answered I, ‘because it is not in my power.’

‘Mais, vous avez la bonté de me parler en françois,’ cried he—determined to *sift* me—but I again Assured him of my inability;—for I was quite ashamed of this Address before so many people, all of them listening.

He turned then to my Father—‘*Questa signora ai troppo modesta*—’²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Burney, *EJL*, II, 15-16.

This complex example bears drawing out at greater length. The gist of the exchange is: Twiss asks Burney's father if he's ever been accosted by a Neapolitan prostitute, to whom he euphemistically refers as "una bella ragazza." Twiss then tries to coerce Burney into doing two things that apparently horrify her: first, to speak Italian to him, and admit her knowledge of the language; and, implicitly in doing so, to admit her knowledge of the Italian word for prostitute. What ensues is a kind of language game in which Burney absorbs the shame of admitting a faulty knowledge of Italian in order to protect herself from the worse shame of admitting any knowledge at all about sex. What is perhaps most interesting here is the way in which the complex operation of shame in this interaction materially shapes how the dialogue is crafted, and how it conveys meaning. In a strange way, the two forms of knowledge—linguistic and sexual—are expressing each other. Burney's mistakes with regard to language are covering for, and protecting her from, even worse mistakes simmering under the surface. And as for Twiss, he is making a social mistake by even raising the question of prostitutes, which Burney shames him for through style, figuring him as persistent and socially tone-deaf, in contrast to her measured and guarded demeanor. One senses that writing this dialogue not only serves a recording function, but also allows Burney yet again to do some therapeutic settling of scores, wherein shaming someone else is simultaneously a way of expressing her own shame. This is only one of a number of parallel examples to be found throughout journals, in which foreign language both protects and imperils; and in which she manages to distribute her own shame through others by crafting conversation on the page.

Second-language speakers, or variations thereof, abound not only in Burney's journals; they also emigrate from there into her fiction. As a general rule, she uses their foreign status, whether real or feigned, for comic and satirical purposes. *Cecilia* (1782)

features a character called Captain Aresby, whose affected overuse of “fashionable” French jargon makes him a booby; in a more sinister vein, *Camilla* (1796) features Alphonso Bellamy, allegedly an eligible Frenchman, but actually a pistol-toting English fortune-hunter called Nicholas Gwigg. Most memorable, though, is Madame Duval of *Evelina*, the heroine’s grandmother. To conceal her low social status and idiom, she adopts a French name, an exaggerated French locution and a battery of pretentious Gallicisms. The ridicule that this character draws is largely powered by the badness of her language; she tries to use a French manner to establish a genteel character, but she cannot do it convincingly. On one hand, her French expressions are clichéd—*ma foi!* and *pardie!* are the two most common—while her English, on the other hand, is misshaped by misapplied French syntactical patterns.²¹⁰ Her lack of insider knowledge about how to speak—her lack of control over her own language—reveals to readers, with a chilly elitism, who she “really” is.

In this way, the dynamics of shame prove to play an important role in Burney’s speech-based method of characterization. Madame Duval, just like her fellow imposters in the other novels, is both satirically exposed and punished by shameful faulty language. Reading Burney’s published works in the context of her ongoing life-writing project, one sees how she manages to convert past personal pain into literary technique. In the novels, we hear her punitively fictionalizing—and to remarkably vivid effect—many of the foreign-language speakers who amused, embarrassed, or goaded her in the journals.

The Wanderer (1814), Burney’s last and most unusual novel, offers a corrective to these unflattering portrayals of foreign-language speakers. She began to write the book in her late forties, at the turn of the nineteenth century, and would continue to work on it for over a

²¹⁰ Frances Burney, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51; 52.

decade: mainly during her forced residence in France, when she and her French husband, Alexandre D'Arblay, were stuck in Paris during the Napoleonic wars. The novel centres on a young woman who becomes a wanderer in England after fleeing the Terror. At first, she is nameless: the initials she uses, L.S., contract to become the Anglophone Ellis, before her true (bilingual) name, Juliet, is revealed. Before that happens, she has an emotional reunion with a beloved French friend, Gabriella. In the novel, Burney scripts their conversations in the same hybrid manner that she used much earlier to record the conversation we heard between her sister Hetty and Agujari. Here are Ellis and Gabriella:

‘Ah, mon amie! Ma bien aimée!’ cried Ellis, wiping her eyes, but vainly attempting to repress fresh tears; ‘t’ai-je cherchée t’ai-je attendue, t’ai-je si ardemment désirée, pour te retrouver ainsi? pleurant sur un tombeau? Et toi!—ne me tu pas? M’as-tu oubliée?—Gabrielle, ma chère Gabrielle!’

‘Juste ciel!’ exclaimed the other, ‘que vois-je? Ma Julie! Ma chère, ma tendre amie?’²¹¹

The spirit behind Burney’s two different modes of second-language transcription would seem to contradict one another. On one hand, Ellis and Gabriella’s French is carefully preserved, almost as a form of homage; while on the other hand, Madame Duval’s words, polluted and contorted by French, expose her true, low-brow self, even as she utters them. This division reflects, in microcosm, the tension that drives Burney’s whole writing practice: there is an earnest part of her that wants to document precisely this variegated socio-linguistic life of ours; but at the same time, she cannot help but notice and draw out, with satirical incisiveness, the shame and the pitfalls that come along with it, especially for those who are not privy to elite knowledge. At every turn—where her documentary rigour meets her obsession with shame, where her celebration of language meets her inherent embarrassment

²¹¹ Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, eds. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack and Peter Sabor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 386-7.

about speech—we can see the same two conflicting impulses channeling through—and defining—her peculiar literary cast of mind.

While the journal is certainly her most immediate tool for coping with this tension, her fiction also absorbs it, for better and for worse. Often it is for better. Burney's love of playing with written language to capture sound and expression helps her to generate some of the most memorable characters of her period. And it is not only critics who have, long after the fact, singled her out for this talent. She earned praise in her own day from many, among them Samuel Johnson. Here, Burney captures him favourably comparing the sharply drawn personalities of her books to those of her two main male predecessors:

It's very true, continued [Johnson]; Richardson would have been really *afraid* of her;—there is merit in *Evelina* which he could not have borne.—No, it would not have done!—unless, indeed, she would have flattered him prodigiously.—Harry Fielding, too, would have been afraid of her,—there is nothing so delicately finished in *all* Harry Fielding's Works, as in *Evelina*;—(Then, shaking his Head at me, he exclaimed) O, you little *Character-monger*, you!²¹²

Johnson corroborates the idea that Burney developed novelistic techniques over and above what Richardson (and certainly what Fielding) had done. And in his choice of word, *monger*, he unwittingly taps into the author's own sense of the previously noted connection—both figurative and literal—between accounts of character and accounts in the bank. What he does not manage to do, though, is identify precisely what it is that lets her excel her precursors in conveying such distinct impressions of character. Johnson would have been dismayed to know that Edmund Burke could sum it up much better. Here, Burney describes a compliment proffered by Burke in a crowded room of company:

Then, looking very archly at me, & around him, he said 'Are you sitting here for Characters?—Nothing, by the way, struck me more in reading your Book, than the

²¹² Burney, *EJL*, III.109-110.

admirable skill with which your *ingenious* Characters make themselves known by their own Words.²¹³

This was in December of 1782: just four months earlier, Burney had published *Cecilia*, the book to which Burke is surely referring here. Arguably the most memorable character in this second work of hers is Mr. Briggs, whose strange language is unlike anything she tried in *Evelina*. Her transcription of foreign accents turned out to be good training for her to learn how to represent another kind of “foreign” language: namely, regional dialects of English, and other socio-linguistic peculiarities, of which Briggs has many. Although these other Englishes—usually belonging to lower socioeconomic classes—are not primary, for Burney, she does a remarkable job of attuning her ear after hearing them in the world around her, and using their cadences to diversify the cast of characters in her books.

Again, orthographical adjustment works well for her in representing other versions of English—and again, her experiments begin in her journal. Listen to Burney quoting a beloved phrase to Susan, an inside joke of sorts in the family, as she dismisses some blunder made by her brother James: “Poor Jem is not very refined, so never mind him, for *I* do not. He has not any knowledge of Mr. Crisp’s acquaintance with the affair, as I found he thought it very *silly* that you had told me:—! ha! ha! ha!—*never meend, miss! don’t be frettened!*” (my emphasis).²¹⁴ As editor Betty Rizzo notes, Charles Burney would later write the same line to Fanny in a letter of 8 October, 1792: “don’t be *frittended!*—*niver mind!*” Calling it “a family catch phrase,” Rizzo conjectures that it originated with an incident in which “one of the Burney girls was reassured by a country bumpkin.”²¹⁵ Interestingly, daughter and father

²¹³ Burney, *EJL*, V.194.

²¹⁴ Burney, *EJL*, IV.272.

²¹⁵ Burney, *EJL*, IV.272, n.45.

respectively make different orthographic adjustments to the principal words of this phrase, suggesting that what is important in the representation is the basic fact that it deviates from the standard, rather than the precise way in which it does so. Moreover, the fact that everyone recognized and used this phrase for at least a decade demonstrates something telling about the culture of the Burney clan: they all delighted in the novelty of different sounds, and in linguistic variety. While there is a comic element to this phrase—it is, after all, clearly a shared joke—it is of a celebratory flavour more so than a derisive one. The nameless “bumpkin” who Rizzo envisions charmed the whole family, and indeed stayed with them for years.

In representing different dialects, Burney also relies on neologisms and syntactic innovations. Her frequent and flexible deployment of these, along with orthographical adjustment, reflects her conception of language as something fundamentally elastic. It is, in its essence, a representational tool that a writer can make to work for her in any number of ways. “Making Words, now & then, in familiar Writing,” Burney cheekily writes to justify inventing the word *entertainingly* in her journal, “is unavoidable, & saves the trouble of *thinking*, which, as Mr. Adison [*sic*] observes, we Females are not much addicted to.”²¹⁶ With this ironic jab at Addison, Burney likewise does justice to her own talent: her use of language is fresh and creative, and indeed far from lazy. Not only does she make new words—she also remakes old ones, as in *meend* and *frettened*, so that they become more accurate written signifiers for the aural signs they are meant to stand in for.

Transcribed dialects are more common in her published works than in her journals—indeed, Mr. Briggs looms larger in her oeuvre than any counterpart to be found in the

²¹⁶ Burney, *EJL*. II.194.

journals. Cecilia's father chooses Briggs as a trustee of his daughter's fortune for his experience "in money matters, and his diligence in transacting business"—but not for his linguistic or social decorum, for he has neither.²¹⁷ In a certain sense, Briggs recapitulates Madame Duval from *Evelina*: he is an elder with some degree of influence over the heroine, who is imposed on her by inevitable circumstance, and who causes much vexation. The two characters differ, however, in their authenticity. While Duval causes embarrassment because she fails to notice that she is making herself ridiculous, Briggs does so because he fails to care—he fairly vibrates with his own peculiar life force, which emanates entirely from his unusual speech. The defining feature of his dialect is his odd way of turning phrases: he leaves out pronouns and words willy-nilly, speaking in short, descriptive bursts. In writing, Burney imagines and inhabits his syntax with remarkable vigour. Listen to him as he startles Cecilia with a pinch on the cheek, and counsels her about the husband-hunting he's been doing on her behalf:

‘Only me! *don't be frightened*. Have something to tell you;—had no luck!—got never a husband yet! can't find one! Looked all over, too; sharp as a needle. Not one to be had! All caught up...Pretty duck!’ cried he, chucking her under the chin; ‘*never mind*, don't be cast down; get one at last. Leave it to me. Nothing under a plum; won't take up with less. Good by, ducky, good by!’²¹⁸

Not only does this passage convey the syntactic peculiarity and the characteristic percussiveness of his dialect, but it also directly recalls the Burney family's favourite bumpkin, with *never mind* and *don't be frightened*. Burney invokes these expressions to invest Briggs with her own peculiar idea of lower-class language; and for her readers, she

²¹⁷ Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, eds. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody (New York, Oxford World's Classics, 1988), 33.

²¹⁸ Burney, *Cecilia*, 122. Emphasis mine.

amplifies this effect with more universal slang phrases like *all caught up* and *nothing under a plum*, a term meaning £100,000.²¹⁹

In fact, the *OED* cites a number of Burney's usages in this novel as original. Many of these freshly tweaked words and turned phrases belong to Briggs. Listen, for example, as he advises his co-trustee, the grave and pompous old Mr. Delvile, on the matter of headwear:

‘Mind what I say, never give your mind to a gold lace hat! many a-one wears it don't know five farthings from twopence. A good man always wears a bob wig; make that your rule. Ever see Master Harrel wear such a thing? No, I'll warrant! better if he had; kept his head on his own shoulders. And now, pray, how does he cut up? what has he left behind him? a *twey-case*, I suppose, and a bit of a hat won't go on a man's head!’²²⁰

In the same harangue, he scorns Harrel his profligacy in throwing a lavish ball and feast—

‘Pretty way to spend money! Stuffing, and piping, and hopping!’²²¹

According to Doody and Sabor, the first usages in this speech include: *How does he cut up*, meaning how much is his fortune; *a twey-case*, meaning a case of small instruments; and *piping*, meaning loud talking.²²² Although it seems unlikely that these words and phrases are pure innovations by Burney, she certainly invented new ways and contexts in which to use them. If she didn't make them up, she was at least the first to bring them into popular published prose. She injects the literary lexicon with the real language of everyday people, a dose of novelty in the form of linguistic diversity.

²¹⁹ Burney, *Cecilia*, 122n.

²²⁰ Burney, *Cecilia*, 452-53.

²²¹ Burney, *Cecilia*, 453.

²²² See Burney, *Cecilia*, 452-53n. *OED* also records a very early and obscure definition of “to pipe” as “to drink,” which—given that drinking costs more dearly than loud talking—could also be what Burney had in mind, here.

Burney's own cousin Richard praised this innovation—though he did not know to whom he was paying the compliment, as her authorship had not yet been revealed to the family. He says, according to Burney's records:

such amazing knowledge of Characters,—such an acquaintance with *high, & low* Life,—such universal & extensive knowledge of the World—I declare, I know not a man Breathing who is likely to be the author,—unless it is my Uncle.²²³

Richard was closer to the truth in declaring that there was “not a man Breathing” who could have written like this than in making an exception for his uncle Charles. Where he truly gets it right, though, is in observing that the author must have taken great pains to gather such a wide knowledge of social life—which indeed Burney did, in her journals.

One of her journal's many functions—along with its being a tool to mitigate shame, and the loss of days—was as a flexible environment for writing experiments. In the first volume, which spans five years of her life, narration and dialogue are largely distinct. Either she is writing introspectively to her beloved Nobody, or she is composing in pure dialogue form for pages at a time, in the Grandison way. Reading the second volume of her early journals, though, one begins to feel a technical shift. She suddenly begins complexly blending recorded speech together with narrative description. She seems to start training towards a new style—almost a cinematic one, to use an anachronistic term, in which speech is framed and shaped with touches of other emotional or scenic information for fuller, more nuanced representations of characters conversing. Some of the foregoing examples—I'm thinking of the account of Hetty and Agujari—show how Burney subtly complements transcription with additional description. But she was not always so deft in this regard: it isn't really until 1774 that her life writing begins to feel more polished and tidy in this way, more tightly woven

²²³ Burney, *EJL*, III.11.

with regard to all its component parts. It starts reading like a novel. And indeed, it was at this time when she was beginning, or was about to begin, the first piece of fiction that she would publish, *Evelina*. As the formal transformations of the second volume suggest, the journal and the first novel seem to have been mutually evoking each other, and drawing each other out.

In the more finely finished set pieces of the second volume, Burney supports and elaborates direct representations of speech with extra-lexical properties—aspects of manner that aren't conducive to transcription—and also with information about characters' affects and environments. By tapping into the descriptive talents in which she takes great pride, she conveys a wider, more encompassing idea of conversations, anchoring speech in place as well as in complex interpersonal dynamics. A good example of this sophisticated execution is her set of linked accounts about Thomas Barlow, a suitor who forces her to reject him more than once, much to her chagrin. As Troide notes, “Fanny really comes centre stage herself for the first time in the journals” in her accounts of Barlow's courtship. There is something about the nature of this experience that incites her to insert herself as a central character in her own record—and not only that, but also to dwell on it at length, crafting it with evident care.²²⁴

Here is an excerpt from one of their conversations:

He Bowed. I curtsied. He seemed at a loss what to say—& as I determined not to ask him to sit down, or to say any thing that might encourage him either to stay, or to repeat his Visit, I was silent also. At length, he stammered out ‘I hope—Ma’am—you—are well?—’

‘Very well, I thank You, Sir,’ was my laconic reply.

Another silence; & then—‘Your Cold?—I hope, Ma’am, I hope you have quite—’

‘O it is quite gone,’ cried I; ‘I am perfectly well.’

‘I am very happy to hear it—I could not,—Ma’am—I could not deny myself—the satisfaction of enquiring after your Health.—’

‘I am sorry, Sir,’ answered I very gravely, that You should have taken the trouble to Call.’

²²⁴ Burney, *EJL*, II.xiv.

‘Does it give you—I hope, Ma’am—it does not give you any *uneasiness*?—’
I made no answer, but went towards the Window, where I saw Dick & Miss Fydell, a lady who was coming to see Miss Lidderdale, in the street. I was rejoiced at so speedy an opportunity of Ending our Tête à Tête, & flew myself to the Door to let them in. I then began to talk with Miss Fydell, all the Time standing myself, that I might not be obliged to ask Mr. Barlow to sit.²²⁵

She concludes the account with a few more narrative paragraphs, eventually telling how he “took his leave, with a look so mortified & unhappy,” that she felt “shocked at myself for what, in fact, I could not help.” If she could not help it in practice, she might have helped it in writing; but she opts not to. She even amplifies the imbalanced power dynamic between them with her technical choices. Repetition structures the Barlow episode on multiple scales: first, broadly speaking, their halting and awkward meetings replay themselves day after day as he stubbornly refuses to give up his suit,²²⁶ and more minutely, his words and phrases reappear as he struggles through his broken speeches. But Burney herself is never at a loss, in this version of events: she either carves her own stubborn silence into the narration by referring to it, or she is perfectly articulate in responding to Barlow’s platitudes. They are at odds—and the account seems designed only to demonstrate the contrast between her empowered status and his pathetic, stammering one.

Reading these pages, one senses the care that Burney has taken in crafting it—a degree of care that cannot be entirely explained by her documentary impulse. Rather, it seems more likely that she is getting something out of exercising control: both in a social sense, in the moment, and in a literary sense after the fact. In real life, she and Barlow are a dyad, but on paper there is solely Burney, inhabiting his speakerly position along with her own. She gets to be the shaming party and the shamed, the sadist and the masochist, all at once. She deploys

²²⁵ Burney, *EJL*, 151-52.

²²⁶ For the accounts of Barlow, see Burney, *EJL*, II.115-129;135-158.

transcription and description in tandem: on one hand she ventriloquizes Barlow, embellishing (even to the point of implausibility) his hesitations and repetitions in direct speech; meanwhile, she touches her own speech from without, using descriptors—*silent*, *laconic*, *grave*—that set her above her tortured pursuer. The tone of the account reflects a self-satisfaction that she seems to have obtained in the writing, as she gauged how best transcription and description could dovetail to achieve her desired effect. Her technical experimentation, here, does not feel like the end in itself, but rather incidental and instrumental; it seems to serve the fulfillment of a personal—I won't say pathological—need.

Notwithstanding how it came about, Burney must have sensed that she had landed on a promising technical-thematic pairing, here, because similar scenes reappear in *Evelina*. In particular, the heroine's interactions with the persistent Sir Clement Willoughby recapitulate her interactions with Barlow. Although Willoughby is, in contrast to his real-life counterpart, more foppish than abject, the dynamic of mannered misunderstanding in courtship is the same—Willoughby's refusal to hear Evelina's *no* results in much distress and provocation.

One question raised by this kind of account in a first-person context—whether in *Evelina* or in Burney's journals—is about narratorial integrity. The Barlow episode demonstrates particularly well how a representation so minutely crafted to evoke imbalanced power immediately makes one think, often skeptically, about the writer behind it. In styling herself so clearly as the winner of her conversation with Barlow, Burney opens herself as a target for accusations—not only about unreliable narration, but also about unfeeling narration. Luckily, her readership in the journals is limited, and wholly biased in her favour. In her published writing, Burney would eventually move permanently into a third-person mode—perhaps having realized that it helpfully suppresses, if not eliminates, such questions around

authorial ethics and intention. Moreover, she had become firmly rooted in her new method of writing from two different planes—that of the transcribed character, and that of the describing narrator. She probably realized that keeping these two voices distinct could only increase her technical flexibility.

Accounts of Burney's later interactions with George Owen Cambridge—traces of which are retold from a third-person perspective in conversations between Camilla and Edgar in her third novel—provide an interesting counterpart to the Barlow episode. Her courtship with Cambridge is much more fraught, with breakdowns of communication and fluid shifts of power defining it at every turn. Below I quote a substantial excerpt of one of their interactions: not only as an exemplar, but also to give an idea of just how long and exhaustive these records are. Burney herself knows how unwieldy they tend to become, and interestingly attributes their excessive length to technical precision. Referring to a separate visit with Cambridge, she tells Susan, “Some of his speeches I should tell you, but without *method*, which would make me too long for my Paper” (my emphasis).²²⁷ This effort to be disciplined is isolated; her norm in these accounts is to dilate, suggesting that there is a great deal of technical exertion involved in the writing of them.

Reading these long accounts, one senses an authorial fastidiousness in them, even a compulsive need to be comprehensive. To Burney, bringing “method” to bear on these accounts may have seemed like a good way to get a mental handle on a situation that confused and pained her greatly. In practice, though, her obsessive writing habit seems only to compound the effects of her obsessive crush. In the instance below, Burney is giving Cambridge an account of her cold, from which she is convalescing under the care of his sister

²²⁷ Burney, *AJL*, I.232.

Charlotte. He begins by telling her how “alarmed” he had been after a servant of the Burney family informed him that her illness had become “a good deal worse”:

After a little, he added—. “That a *good deal worse*,—after what I had already heard—I was very anxious—till I saw Dr. Burney in the Evening.—”

The words *alarmed*, & *anxious*,—how strong from *him*, the most cautious of all men in *Words*, though the least in *manner*!—Then he talked on about my Cough, & then said “But I hope you see the great pleasure Charlotte takes into attending You?—I hope you see how much good it does her?”

“I see how good she *is*.—”

“It is just the thing in the world to interest & employ her.—”

“Why, it was quite a *providence*, then, that came to her!”—cried I, laughing.

“There are so few things, now, that *can* interest her, that I was sure this would be of real service to her. It takes up her thoughts as well as Time,—to have the nursing you.—”

“She is very kind,—but I am sure, when it was first proposed, I thought this should be the *very last House* in the World I could consent to come to.—” —

My Breath,—still short & easily exhausted, making me stop an instant, I felt so shocked at the double construction which my words might bear, that I would have given the World to call them back,—especially as he heard them in silence & amazement;—& without a *why*: but I explained as quick as I could that I thought This House, in which there had already been so much sickness & nursing, ought, beyond all others, to be in future exempt from what ever was not absolutely necessary. When I had made him understand me, he repeated again that it was so exactly the right occupation for his sister’s present state of mine, that he had had a great inclination to run about the Town, on purpose to pick up somebody that was sick for her.—“Why I find my illness was quite fortunate! cried I;—all my fear now is lest I should get well too soon for her!”—

“Why then,—if you do—you must be *very agreeable*,—& so amuse & interest her another way!”

His view, evidently, I saw, was to reconcile me to the trouble I am giving & to make me, if possible, believe I was *doing* rather than *receiving* a benefit!

When I enlarged upon the astonishing speed of my amendment—“If, said he, you shall have *another* good night—I shall have some hopes—I shall think this *then* something more than a mere cessation.—”

After wards,—I forget how,—I happened to say “*I Thought more of myself*,” & he cried out, with quickness—I am glad *you* thought of yourself—for I am sure *you*—he stopt short,—*have a right* seemed on his lips,—but *how* he dreads any compliment!—Again, & I forget, also, how, something passed relative to Health & Spirits, & he said “out of *spirits* I believe You *never* are,—for *yourself*.—” —Ah, Dearest Susan—Can I doubt he thinks well of me?²²⁸

²²⁸ Burney, *AJL*, I.233-34.

Without mounting a full-fledged reading of this entire piece, I will instead only note how, in describing Cambridge as “the most cautious of all men in *Words*, though the least in *manner*,” Burney returns to the idea that has occupied her writerly imagination for over a decade: namely that communication is always the product of content (words) as it interrelates with form (manner). There is, however, an important difference between her exploration of the idea here, versus that of ten years ago, when she lamented to Susan that she could not quite capture Mr. Blakeney’s comic way of speaking. A just description of Mr. Blakeney’s manner would have complemented his words, and indeed brought them to life. Here, though, and indeed in most of her conversations with Cambridge, there is antagonism between words and manner. They butt up against each other, each one belying the other to frustrate mutual understanding between the conversing parties. Burney shows herself to understand not simply that conversation comprises two distinct means of signification, but also that they can bifurcate and negate each other, leaving each person trying mentally to tabulate the sum total of meanings. “Can I doubt he thinks well of me?” Burney asks her sister, taking as evidence of Cambridge’s feelings his quick cadence, his stopping short, and the words that he *seems* to have on his lips (though they never declare themselves anywhere except in her imagination). In the end, he would never present himself as a suitor, and she would spend years trying to figure out what had gone wrong.

It is important to note that the details Burney cites as proof of Cambridge’s affection are not ones that can be transcribed. His quickness, his stopping short, his *seeming* to say something—all of this information issues from Burney in her capacity as a narrator, rather than from Cambridge’s own mouth—and indeed, there is more room for subtle fictionalization in description than transcription. If one were to charge Burney with

inaccuracy in this account, she would resist: in a letter to Crisp written very early in her career, she states firmly that

I never mix Truth & Fiction;—all that I relate in Journalising is strictly, nay plainly Fact: I never, in all my Life, have been a sayer of the Thing that is not, & now I should be not only a knave, but a Fool also in so doing, as I have other purposes for Imaginary Characters than filling Letters with them.²²⁹

Notwithstanding, her adamancy here—which smacks of protesting too much—the slippage we have already observed in her writing practice, between documentation and literary reimagination, should already teach us to approach her records with circumspection. In particular, any account that engages her emotional core—her shame, anxiety, or desire, or some complex of all three, as in these Cambridge conversations—seems vulnerable to fictionalization. In these lengthy accounts, she brings technical control to bear over a situation that, in real life, left her feeling entirely at a loss.

Conclusion

A confluence of peculiar circumstances in Frances Burney's life as a writer put her in a position to make some important contributions to the representation of social exchange in on the page: her anxiety about time and loss; her ear for performance and music; her fundamental belief in speech as the primary site where character manifests; her delight in the vibrancy of language; her position in a diverse, conversible milieu; and above all, her complicated relationship with shame and her peculiarly literary way of working it out; all of these factors led to her compulsive and expansive recording of conversation in her journals, and later in her novels.

²²⁹ Burney, *EJL*, I.xiv.

Much of what Burney does in her novels with regard to themes and method is seeded in her life writing. Burney writes things down in her journals—topics and techniques emerge, and coalesce around one another accordingly—and she goes on to transpose them into her fiction. Another way of framing this conclusion would be to say that the journals have a kind of primacy in her writerly imagination. Burney herself offers evidence to support this conjecture in a letter of 1783 to Frances Brooke, declining an invitation to collaborate in some publication:

I must frankly own I am at present so little disposed for writing, that I am certain I could produce nothing worth reading. I have bid adieu to my Pen since I finished Cecilia, not from *disgust*, nor *design*, but from having fairly *written all I had to write*; it was the same for 2 or 3 years after I had done with Evelina; & I am as unwilling now as I was then, to deal hardly with an empty Brain. If any thing again occurs to me, I shall again venture to try its success—if nothing—it is surely most judicious, & certainly most pleasant to myself, to remain perfectly quiet.²³⁰

Burney's description here suggests that she was motivated to work on fiction in cycles. When something “occurs” to her, she works it out on paper, publishes it, takes a break and waits for another concept to coalesce. All the while, though, what persists always is her journal; her life writing is not inspired in cyclical bursts, but is rather a deep-seated habit that shaped her daily life for decades.

Even though the novel was an important genre for Burney, I would even argue that it was not her primary or most formative one, in both personal and technical senses. As it turned out, it was not only the first-person narrative mode of *Evelina* that would prove inadequate for her writing, but the third-person as well. Her three third-person novels turn out to be odd in certain formal ways: in their strange topical variegation and particularly in their exorbitant length. *Camilla*, which Burney packs with conversations that go nowhere, is exceptionally impacted and tortuous. This quality can be traced back to the way she used writing to mediate

²³⁰ Burney, *EJL*, V.404.

anxiety about loss, and shame. She has no filter, in the journals. She cannot discipline herself to identify when writing stops productively mediating experiences, and starts producing stasis, at best, or reanimating a painful experience, at worst. And that is fair enough: she had no reason to stem the flow of her ink in the journals. What that also meant, though, was that she never trained herself to do so in her novels. The result was *Cecilia*, *Camilla* and *The Wanderer*: three strange productions that are wonderful for their local techniques, specifically when it comes to evoking character through speech, but which would not themselves turn out to be predictive archetypes of the novel form.

Critics have a number of narratives about Burney's creative character: to some, she is a true dramatist, stifled by her two Daddies; others think of her as a novelist who also kept a journal that is an extraordinarily valuable cultural-historical resource. I would argue, though, that the journal is her original genre, more authentic to her particular cast of mind than any other. As such, her journals tell us a great deal about why she wrote the novels the way she did. A look at Burney's journals suggests that she was not writing to serve the developing genre of the novel in any self-conscious or deliberate way: she was writing to serve her own various needs, and it just so happens that one of them—her need to recalibrate power dynamics after embarrassing experiences—found a particular balm in the representation of conversation in writing. Her paper conversations are not representations for their own sake, but rather instrumental; dialogue does specific work for her, helping her to settle accounts with those people who caused her pain or humiliation. She experimented creatively in order to use this tool at her disposal more effectively: and the eighteenth-century novel just happens to be the richer for it.

Chapter Four: The End of Conversation in Austen

Introduction

Sometime around the year 1788, Jane Austen (then a teenager) crafted “The Mystery,” a dramatic sketch powered by a technique that would later become foundational to the design of her published novels. The following is a partial transcription of the play along with a facsimile of one of the corresponding manuscript pages:

Scene the 2nd

A Parlour in Humbug’s house.

Mrs Humbug and Fanny, discovered at work.

Mrs Hum:) You understand me my Love?

Fanny) Perfectly ma’am. Pray continue your narration.

Mrs. Hum:) Alas! It is nearly concluded, for I have nothing more to say on the Subject.

Fanny) Ah! here’s Daphne.

Enter Daphne.

Daphne) My dear Mrs Humbug how d’ye do? Oh! Fanny ‘tis all over.

Fanny) Is it indeed!

Mrs Hum:) I’m very sorry to hear it.

Fanny) Then t’was to no purpose that I...

Daphne) None upon Earth.

Mrs. Hum:) And what is to become of?....

Daphne) Oh! that’s all settled. (whispers Mrs Humbug)

Fanny) And how is it determined?

Daphne) I'll tell you. (whispers Fanny)

Mrs. Hum:) And is he to?....

Daphne) I'll tell you all I know of the matter.

(whispers Mrs Humbug and Fanny)

Fanny) Well! now I know everything about it, I'll go away.

Mrs Hum: And so will I

Daphne

(Exeunt)

Scene the 3d

The Curtain rises and discovers Sir Edward Spangle reclined in an elegant Attitude on a Sofa,
fast asleep.

Enter Colonel Elliott.

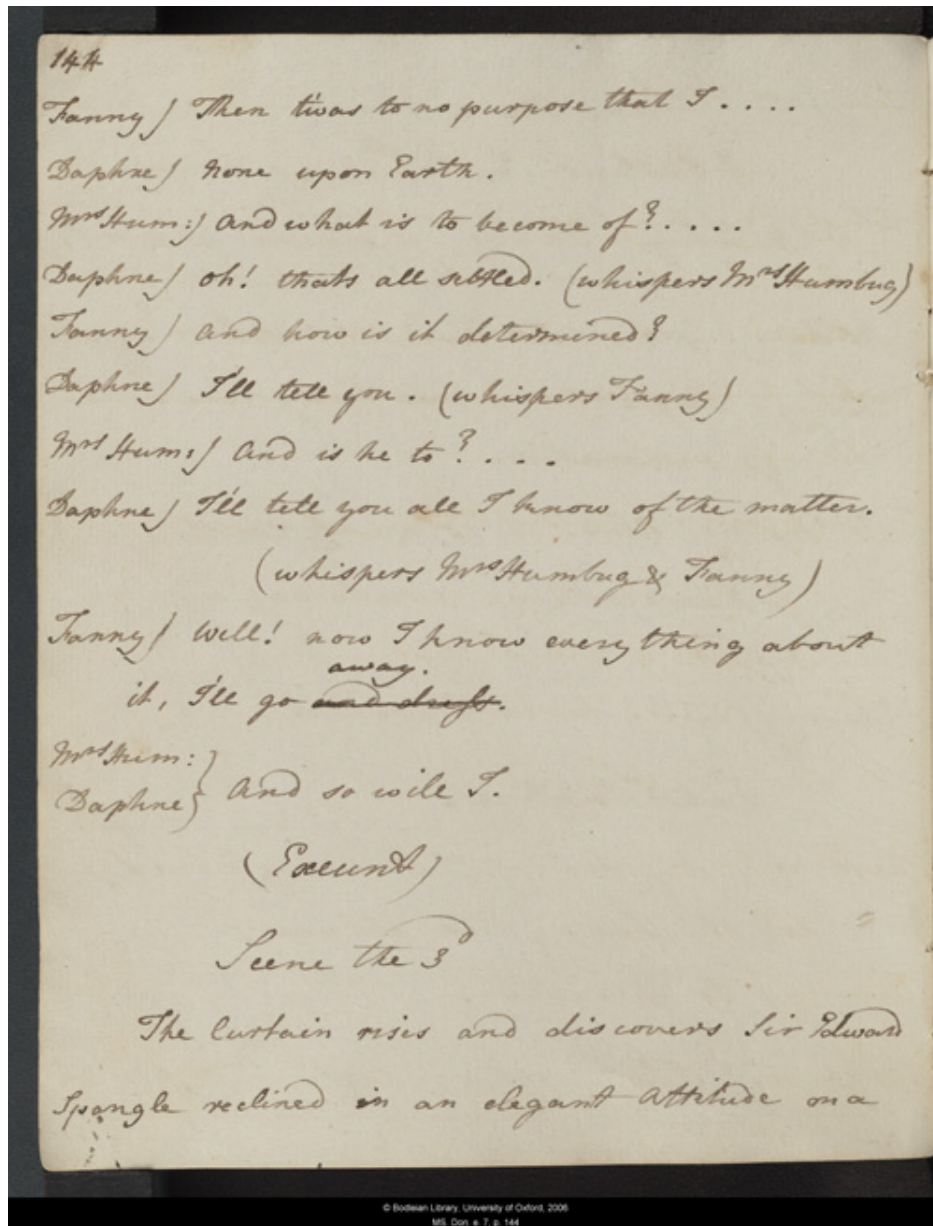
Colonel) My Daughter is not here I see...there lies Sir Edward...Shall I tell him the
secret?...No, he'll certainly blab it...But he is asleep and wont hear me...So I'll e'en venture

(Goes up to Sir Edward, whispers him, and Exit)

End of the 1st Act.

FINIS.²³¹

²³¹ Jane Austen, *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 71-72.



Austen, "The Mystery," c.1788 (figure 8).

In keeping with its title, "The Mystery" functions by virtue of what is not said. Paula Byrne, who has extensively studied Jane Austen's connection to the theatre, aptly describes this comic playlet as "a series of interruptions and non-communications" in which "we are never told any information about the conversations between the characters," and suggests its

allusion to similar “whisper scenes” in Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The Critic* and The Duke of Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal*.²³² For Byrne, the main interest of “The Mystery” lies in its topicality: it “allude[s] specifically to what was popular on the London stage, and mock[s] it by drawing attention to its limitations and artificiality.”²³³ But what is even more striking about the sketch, to my mind, is the way in which it both enacts and emblemizes the narrative principle that would drive all of Austen’s later fiction: the tactical withholding of information, particularly in scenes of conversation.

I offer “The Mystery” as a framing device because it prefigures the two aspects of Austen’s mature technique with which this chapter is chiefly concerned. First, on a granular scale, the sketch showcases her mastery of the conventions of the printed drama. As Penny Gay notes, all three of Austen’s juvenile plays demonstrate “perfect compliance with the conventions of the printed drama, with stage directions including asides and instructions for actors’ movements,” corroborating the wealth of evidence that “from childhood, Austen was reading plays, dissecting their characteristics, and delightedly reproducing them in her early experiments in writing.”²³⁴ As part of this study will show, Austen continued to employ and adapt dramatic conventions with precision in a narrative context—specifically, to manipulate interpretation in the conversational scenes of her novels.

²³² Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2002), 21-22.

²³³ Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, 24.

²³⁴ Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1. Austen’s other dramatic sketches are titled “The Visit” (c.1789) and “The first Act of a Comedy” (c. 1793). For more information about the tentative dating of Austen’s juvenilia, see Peter Sabor’s introduction to Austen, *Juvenilia*, xvii-xxix, and see also (as he suggests) the explanatory notes for each item.

Second, in a broader conceptual sense, “The Mystery” demonstrates an interest in both conversation and communication—especially with regard to their potential uses in prose narrative—that would persist through Austen’s career. The world of “The Mystery” is one in which understanding between characters is so perfect that verbal communication only needs to be partial. The sketch generates a strange, inverted form of dramatic irony in which the characters know all and the reader knows almost nothing of substance: we know that Old Humbug has issued some kind of advice to his son, who plans to follow it; we know that some event—whose conclusion Fanny endeavoured to shape in some way, but to no avail—has ended in a manner that is regrettable to Mrs. Humbug; and we know that the fate of the man involved in this event has been determined in some direction. The indefiniteness of “some” inevitably abounds in this précis, as our curiosity is not satisfied at the end of the play. Instead, the conclusion of “The Mystery” informs us that the only outsiders who are allowed to be privy to pertinent information are unconscious (albeit elegantly reclined) nap-takers. The radical exclusion of the reader-viewer—which drives the play’s comedy of frustration and absurdity—is never redressed.

We may not acquire much concrete information from the conversations we hear in “The Mystery”—but that dearth in itself helps us understand a narrative principle that Austen herself understood at 13, and would continue to exploit in her mature writing: namely, that partial understanding generates interest in a plot. In “The Mystery,” only the reader’s interest is compelled in this way; in the later fiction, however, Austen experiments with the dynamic of imperfect interpretation on multiple levels. Characters are often allowed to understand even less from their conversations with each other than the reader is; thus, the inverted operation of dramatic irony in the juvenile play is set aright in the mature novels. All six of them generally

reflect the idea that the movement from an imperfect understanding towards a more perfect one makes for a good story: it is most prominently her design in *Northanger Abbey*, almost to the point of crudity or awkwardness, though she continually refines the design in her later novels, finally retelling the earlier novel in a more polished and sophisticated manner in *Emma*. The novel this chapter focuses on, however, is *Pride and Prejudice*: a work in which conversation is crucial to design on multiple scales, and about which there exists some rare reflections from Austen about how it works—a point to which I will return.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, characters talk a lot and understand comparatively little. Austen experiments with an extraordinary range of techniques to represent conversation in such a way that holds information back. In passages of narration, this effect might be achieved by reporting speech indirectly, or simply by reporting that a conversation happened without relating its substance. When there *is* direct access, negation rules the day: much is falsely or ironically spoken, unspoken, understated or implied. Suppression is a fundamental structuring principle when it comes to representing speech in *Pride and Prejudice*, making space for ambiguity and interpretive errors, and establishing misunderstanding as the basic condition of being in this text. In turn, this withholding of conversational information²³⁵ drives the plot, as characters and readers are kept in (various degrees of) the dark until the moment of *éclaircissement* between Elizabeth and Darcy, which—in its final annihilation of misunderstanding—necessarily constitutes the novel’s conclusion.²³⁶

²³⁵ My phrase here, “the withholding of conversational information,” refers to tactical concealment on two scales: first, within the scope of directly reported conversations, when information is held back by characters or the narrator; and second, at the level of narration, when the narrator either reports speech indirectly or makes reference to unreported conversations.

²³⁶ As Kay Young aptly notes, “Once the conversation of Darcy and Elizabeth changes to understanding, the novel must soon end.” Young’s essay makes a distinction between two types of conversation in *Pride and Prejudice*: “word-work,” which she defines as “crux conversations” that

This chapter examines the techniques with which Austen manages—ironically, true to form—to use the representation of conversation itself as a means for holding genuine expression and listening apart, and thus positive communication at bay. To put it differently, it shows the operation of Austen’s narrative transmission (to use an automotive metaphor), which manages to convert the chaotic energy of faulty conversation into plot. In focusing so intently on the craft of conversation in *Pride and Prejudice*, I aim to bring home two points of central significance. The first relates to Austen studies: specifically, to their longstanding preoccupation with the author’s development of free indirect discourse (FID). The achievements attributed to Austen’s use of FID are too numerous to catalogue here, but a sense of its predominance in the critical conversation might be heard in Frances Ferguson’s declaration that “free indirect style is the novel’s one and only formal contribution to literature,” to quote a powerful example.²³⁷ Without refuting the importance of this technique, I nevertheless seek to reclaim some attention for Austen’s regular old discourse—her conversations—a subject which, as Bruce Stovel has aptly noted, “has rarely been treated by critics” despite the “primacy of speech in Austen’s novels.”²³⁸ Jane Austen’s very name is

advance the plot; and “word-play,” which she defines as conversations that add texture and feeling to the relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth. See Young, “Word-Work, Word-Play, and the Making of Intimacy in *Pride and Prejudice*” in *The Talk in Jane Austen*, ed. Bruce Stovel (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 69.

²³⁷ Frances Ferguson, “Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 159.

²³⁸ Stovel cites early work on this subject, including: Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen’s Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1962); Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972); K. C. Philips, *Jane Austen’s English* (London, Deutsch, 1970); and Stuart M. Tave’s *Some Words of Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973)—with the caveat that “the latter three books give as much attention to her narrator’s use of written discourse as to dialogue” and “Babb’s analysis of dialogue largely limits itself to Austen’s characters’ ability to speak logically.” He also notes by far the most prolific scholar on the subject, Juliet McMaster, who has written four essays about talk in four of the novels: “The Secret Languages of *Emma*”; “Talking about Talk in *Pride and Prejudice*”; “The Talkers and Listeners of *Mansfield Park*”; and “Clothing the

synonymous with narrative and the birth of the modern novel, but her technical achievement is profoundly rooted in dramatic principles, more so than the critical mythology tends to allow. What follows shows that it is her dexterity in adapting dramatic techniques for a specifically narrative context, also, that sets her apart.

The second stake relates to this particular study of conversation in the English novel. When it comes to representing speech and conversation in prose, Austen decidedly pulls back—both in execution and effect—from the predecessors surveyed here. The diverse experiments of all three of these earlier prose writers tend towards a similar general aim: to capture the living, speaking body on the page, whether it be the peculiar aural character of a voice, or the bodily gestures that constitute conversational sociability. They are interested in finding technical means to inscribe, in positive terms, the diverse expressions of speaking people in print. Austen, however, inverts her efforts towards the negative; she spends less effort on acoustics and more on finding various ways for characters to fail at positive expression, a strategy that proves highly productive of readers' amusement and suspense. Even though she retains many of the techniques of her forerunners at her disposal, she is more interested in figuring out how to use what's *not* there—what is not recorded, or what is faultily or only scarcely recorded—to do much of her meaning.

Thought in the Word: The Speakers of Northanger Abbey.” To this survey I would add Bharat Tandon’s *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem Press, 2003) and Michael Prince’s “Utopia or Conversation: Transforming Dialogue in Johnson and Austen” in *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), both of which treat the concept of conversation abstractly, as a mode of being and knowing. None of these studies attend to Austen’s granular technique in crafting scenes of conversation in the manner this chapter seeks to do.

“I Do Not Write for Such Dull Elves”: Austen’s Dramatic Minimalism

In January and February of 1813, around the publication date of *Pride and Prejudice*, there is a flurry of references to the new novel in Jane Austen’s letters. All are valuable for the rare insight they give into the author’s thoughts on her work, but one of these is especially so in the context of this project, as it contains her only extant reflections on crafting conversation in prose. I’ll quote the first half of it here, and return to the rest later. She writes to her sister Cassandra,

I want to tell you that I have got my own darling Child²³⁹ from London;—on Wednesday I received one Copy, sent down by Falknor, with three lines from Henry to say that he had given another to Charles & sent a 3^d by the Coach to Godmersham...Miss Benn dined with us on the very day of the Books coming, & in the even^g we set fairly at it & read half the 1st vol. to her...There are a few Typical errors²⁴⁰—& a “said he” or a “said she” would sometimes make the Dialogue more immediately clear—but

“I do not write for such dull Elves
As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves.”²⁴¹

In this assessment of her own work, Austen refers to a technical choice that is indeed prevalent in *Pride and Prejudice*: dispensing with narrative speech tags in favour of a more spare dramatic style of reporting speech. The novel’s conversations often leave speech attribution to the reader’s own discretion, to be gleaned either from context or, in the most ambiguous cases, from a rigorous, almost stylometric mode of reading that attends to characters’ peculiar linguistic self-expression. There are two things that strike me about Austen’s passing observation. The first is the fact that she made it not while writing the work,

²³⁹ i.e. *Pride and Prejudice*.

²⁴⁰ Austen is using “typical” in the sense of “typographical” rather than in the modern sense of “Having the qualities of a type or specimen; serving as a representative specimen of a class or kind” (*OED*).

²⁴¹ Jane Austen, *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 4th edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 210.

but after reading it *aloud* for the first time from a printed copy (or hearing it read—we can't be sure who the principal reader was from the collective “we set fairly at it”). Intuitively, one would think that reading aloud would bring conversation to life off the page, and generally work to clear up ambiguity about who is speaking. The fact that the opposite seems true for Austen suggests that there is something essentially writerly about her dialogue. Although it formally resembles the dramatic mode in its minimalism, there is nevertheless something about it that works better on the page—an idea to which I'll return.

The second striking feature in this passage is the quotation Austen adapts from Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*, which communicates a great deal about her authorial values. The allusion is to the penultimate stanza of his epic on the Battle of Flodden, which concludes the poem with a remarkable extended litotes:

I do not rhyme to that dull elf,
Who cannot image to himself,
That all through Flodden's dismal night,
Wilton was foremost in the fight...
Nor sing I to that simple maid,
To whom it must in terms be said,
That King and kinsmen did agree,
To bless fair Clara's constancy;
Who cannot, unless I relate,
Paint to her mind the bridal's state;
That Wolsey's voice the blessing spoke,
More, Sands, and Denny pass'd the joke...²⁴²

The effect of this stanza is, of course, highly rhetorical; even as Scott claims he would not want people reading his poem who haven't the imagination to project the ending of the story in the theatre of their own minds, he provides all the basic details anyway. It cleverly works both to make a statement about his theory of reading, and to deflect responsibility back upon

²⁴² Walter Scott, *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field. In Six Cantos*. From *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott...Complete in One Volume* (London, 1841), 6.38, 1-22. All emphases mine.

any unimaginative reader who might fault him for wrapping up in this hasty manner—a style of ending Austen also favoured. Her use of the phrase “dull elves,” then, economically invokes all of Scott’s requirements for his audience: he (and through allusion, she) wants a creative reader who can “image” and conjure and “paint to her mind” the world of the narrative, without needing every little detail spelled out in positive terms. The implication Austen makes with this reference is that there is imaginative and interpretive work to be done in the reading of her novels in order to join with her in her meaning.

Although we know intuitively that this hard reading work is required at all levels of Austen’s narrative, the aspect of *Pride and Prejudice* that specifically prompts the observation is its conversational form. What Austen acknowledges explicitly is that speech tags are often withheld—but that is not the only way in which her conversational apparatus is spare. She also keeps bodily gestures and tonal markers to a striking minimum, the overall result of which is a collection of scenes that more closely resemble play scripts than some of the elaborately editorialized, tonally inscribed conversations of other authors surveyed here. An extended reading of the following scene between Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet and Lizzy will demonstrate how complexly this dramatic minimalism works, compounding misunderstanding along multiple axes. Here is Mrs. Bennet attempting to enlist her husband’s help to make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins:

“Oh! Mr. Bennet, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You must come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will not have him, and if you do not make haste he will change his mind and not have *her*.”

Mr. Bennet raised his eyes from his book as she entered, and fixed them on her face with a calm unconcern which was not in the least altered by her communication.

“I have not the pleasure of understanding you,” said he, when she had finished her speech. “Of what are you talking?”

“Of Mr. Collins and Lizzy. Lizzy declares she will not have Mr. Collins, and Mr. Collins begins to say that he will not have Lizzy.”

“And what am I to do on the occasion?—It seems an hopeless business.”

“Speak to Lizzy about it yourself. Tell her that you insist upon her marrying him.”

“Let her be called down. She shall hear my opinion.”

Mrs. Bennet rang the bell, and Miss Elizabeth was summoned to the library.

“Come here, child,” cried her father as she appeared. “I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?” Elizabeth replied that it was. “Very well—and this offer of marriage you have refused?”

“I have, Sir.”

“Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is not it so, Mrs. Bennet?”

“Yes, or I will never see her again.”

“An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents.—Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*.”

Elizabeth could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning; but Mrs. Bennet, who had persuaded herself that her husband regarded the affair as she wished, was excessively disappointed.

“What do you mean, Mr. Bennet, by talking in this way? You promised me to *insist* upon her marrying him.”

“My dear,” replied her husband, “I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be.”

Not yet, however, in spite of her disappointment in her husband, did Mrs. Bennet give up the point. She talked to Elizabeth again and again; coaxed and threatened her by turns. She endeavoured to secure Jane in her interest, but Jane with all possible mildness declined interfering;—and Elizabeth sometimes with real earnestness and sometimes with playful gaiety replied to her attacks. Though her manner varied however, her determination never did.²⁴³

This scene operates as a kind of microcosm of the novel’s broader narrative design, gaining its effect from a tactical withholding of information that builds towards a concluding moment of clarity. Austen supports this dynamic on multiple scales, both in the words characters speak and in the apparatus that supports them. Beginning with the latter, we can see how she adapts and deploys the conventions of printed drama—sparely scripted lines, stage directions for gesture and scene-setting, and typographical tonal markers—with strategic minimalism. With regard to spare scripting, her report to Cassandra proves true: narrative speech tags are often

²⁴³ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124-25.

absent. Only 3 of 14 utterances in this passage are tagged, giving the exchange a distinctly dramatic feel on the page. What's more, the three tags that are present are not chiefly working to attribute speech, but rather serve some adjacent end.

Austen makes her speech tags do work; her habit is to tag utterances only when it serves an additional narrative purpose. I'll explain what I mean by this, working backwards from the end of the passage: the final tag in the exchange, "replied her husband," reminds readers of the particular relationship between these two interlocutors who are so decidedly at odds, inflecting the joke with a slip of seriousness, a poignant reflection on their mismatched understandings and the unhappiness of their marriage. The speech tag in the middle of the exchange—"Come here, child,' cried her father as she appeared"—enables a slight shift in the blocking of the scene, recalibrating it to include a third speaker, Elizabeth. But the most interesting of these three tags may be the very first one, which attributes Mr. Bennet's opening utterance to his wife: "I have not the pleasure of understanding you,' said he, when she had finished her speech." We know pretty well who Mrs. Bennet's interlocutor is, as she tells us so herself at the beginning of the exchange by directly addressing him. The speech tag is therefore not necessary in itself, but rather works to cut a way into the dialogue for the narrator to editorialize with an ironically inflected bit of temporal information: "when she had finished her speech." The word "speech" is loaded, here, inviting readers to hear an oblivious, oratorical self-importance in Mrs. Bennet's appeal, and thus to align themselves with Mr. Bennet's disdainful position. This prepares readers for—without explicitly telling them—what will follow: a scene powered by Mr. Bennet's fuller understanding and judgment. Indeed, after this initial primer, in order to maintain the misunderstanding that drives the humour of the scene, it is crucial that Austen's narrator *not* intervene much. Abstaining from

chiming in to tag speech, then, and confining the dialogue within a spare dramatic mode instead, is a symptom of this strategic restraint on the author's part.

The narrator's notation of gesture—a technique that descends from the dramatic stage direction—is similarly minimal. Considering how much conversation *Pride and Prejudice* contains, it is striking how comparatively rare it is that Austen alludes to the bodies from which all this speech issues. She never makes references to the body gratuitously, or for aesthetic ornamentation, but does so rather—like her method in applying speech tags—to effect some specific narrative function. In this particular scene, the body asserts itself twice: at the outset, when Mr. Bennet raises his eyes to meet the face of his wife with “a calm unconcern which was not in the least altered by her communication”; and again at the end, when Elizabeth smiles in appreciation, if not approval, of her father's punch line, modelling the response of an ideal reader. Here (and repeatedly in this novel), gesture almost aspires to be semantic—to communicate specific meaning when words are held back or insufficient or unavailable. Mr. Bennet's look and Lizzy's smile are highly communicative gestures, working not only to frame the joke but also playing a role in its operation. The look is particularly instrumental: of a piece with the narrator's faintly damning description of Mrs. Bennet's opening utterance as a “speech,” it affectively suggests (without spelling out explicitly) the indifference and willful obtuseness that Mr. Bennet will wield somewhat cruelly over his wife for his own amusement and Elizabeth's. Together, the look and the narrator's comment work implicatively, supporting Austen's production of partial understanding in both characters and readers. These features of the conversation give just enough information to allow the rest of the scene to be crafted sparingly. Meanwhile, they can function either as antecedent referents to support the joke once it reveals itself definitively to

be one, or—for the less dull elves among us—as prefiguring clues about how the conversation will go.

Gestural stage directions are not the only ones Austen narrativizes: she also adapts directions relating to setting and blocking, conventionally found at the head of scenes in printed plays. Think back to her precise use of such directions in “The Mystery”: scene the 2nd prepares us to see “A Parlour in Humbug’s house. Mrs Humbug and Fanny, discovered at work,” while in scene the 3d “The Curtain rises and discovers Sir Edward Spangle reclined in an elegant Attitude on a Sofa, fast asleep. Enter Colonel Elliott.” Preceding the dialogue, these directions conjure a basic idea of the particular physical world in which the exchange will unfold. I would propose that this dramatic practice significantly shapes Austen’s design of novelistic scenes as well. My use of the term “scene” to describe conversations in *Pride and Prejudice* is deliberate, following a lead from the author (and here I’ll digress briefly from the reading at hand to consider an adjacent passage): in introducing the conversation in which Elizabeth initially refuses Mr. Collins, the narrator announces that

The next day *opened a new scene* at Longbourne. Mr. Collins made his declaration in form. Having resolved to do it without loss of time, as his leave of absence extended only to the following Saturday, and having no feelings of diffidence to make it distressing to himself even at the moment, he set about it in a very orderly manner, with all the observances which he supposed a regular part of the business. On finding Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth, and one of the younger girls together, soon after breakfast, he addressed the mother in these words...²⁴⁴

The first and final sentences in this passage are most closely related to dramatic scene headers in the sense that they situate the speaker in space and time. The first phrase—“The next day opened a new scene at Longbourne”—distinctly echoes “The Curtain rises and discovers Edward Spangle,” as the verb “opened” even suggests the idea of a figurative curtain. The

²⁴⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 117. Emphasis mine.

closing sentence of the paragraph, with its details about characters in physical space, can likewise be read as a version of “A Parlour in Humbug’s house. Mrs Humbug and Fanny, discovered at work”—though the information is drawn out from fragments into smooth full sentences befitting the narrative mode.

Beyond simply filling out syntax, however, one of the more substantial ways in which Austen adapts this technique for narrative is by extending its purview to include social information, over and above details about setting. After situating the action at Longbourne in the first sentence, she goes on to suggest the peculiar mix of obliviousness, presumptuousness and bloodlessness that will, in the end, make Collins’s suit so unsuccessful, before circling back to conclude the preamble with a few more concrete details. Formally speaking, this affective scene-setting is so much of a piece with its more conventional physical counterpart that it splices easily together with it—hence the fact that physical details constitute the frame for the paragraph, with social information seamlessly sewn in the middle. But its chief effect is different from conventional scene setting. Rather than priming the reader with a visual idea, it begins instead to guide interpretation of the conversation (and of the characters engaged in it) before it is even underway. Readers arrive at the dialogue already knowing that Collins has no idea how courtship and proposals work—evident in his rushed timeline, lack of humility and overly methodical approach.²⁴⁵ Not only do these details shape how his suit is heard and understood; they also effect dramatic irony, as shrewd readers start the conversation knowing full well what Collins will take five consecutive refusals to figure out (that Lizzy will not

²⁴⁵ The narrator slips into free indirect discourse at the end of this social scene-setting, when specifying Collins’s plan to proceed “with all the observances which he supposed a regular part of the business”—the word *suppose* cues us to recognize this thought as Collins’s own. Indeed, the narrator would not be at risk of tipping so dangerously far from the figurative to the literal in referring to “the business” of making marriage proposals.

have him). Austen's habit of front-loading basic information into an economical narrative paragraph allows her then to retreat as the dialogue unfolds: the scripted lines are thus allowed not only to be dramatically spare, but also to operate in an ironic mode defined by the degree to which one—either character or reader—has access to information.

To finish briefly, then, reading the scene between the Bennets: with regard to its conversational apparatus, it is worth noting how few tonal markers there are in this exchange. Compared to her predecessor Samuel Richardson—with his diverse use of italics and other typographical techniques borrowed from printed drama to inscribe tone—Austen is relatively uninterested in vocal acoustics. The one technique she retains for notating extra-lexical tone is italic type; but even in her use of it, one senses that it generates more of a rhetorical kind of emphasis than a vocal one. In two cases in this exchange between husband and wife, italics highlight the second word in a pair of opposites, emphatically answering a call for syntactic balance. Listen to Mrs. Bennet as she presents the problem of Lizzy's refusal: "she will not have him, and if you do not make haste he will change his mind and not have *her*." The italics bring home the corollary with a heavy finality, likewise amplified by the percussive rhythm of the last three monosyllabic words. Whether he would like to realize it or not, Mr. Bennet closely mimics his wife's balanced style shortly thereafter: "Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*." In this second case, the italics perform an additional function: they appear precisely at the moment when the joke finds full expression, helping to burst the bubble of misunderstanding. Throughout the whole exchange, the clarifying power of italics is itself held back, reserved by Austen for this key bathetic moment.

In both of these uses of italics, any aural trace they carry (over and above their role in underscoring rhetorical balance) feels more poetic and stylized than truly spoken. Austen's particular use of this typographical feature thus supports my suggestion at the outset of this section that there is something particularly page-friendly about the way Austen's conversations work. The tone she seeks to generate in conversations is more essentially writerly compared to that sought by earlier writers, the goal of whose experiments was, as this project has argued, partly to use print as a tool for recording the voice. They sought ways to notate in print the many types of extra-lexical information relating to speech. For Austen, however, the quality and volume of the voice is not a priority; all meaning comes through in verbal form (or in comparative silence). She is more concerned with the way in which the words themselves mean—more so than with any additional significance that might follow from the illusion of their being uttered by a living, speaking body.

Speaking of the words themselves: the manner in which characters' utterances are crafted is the other means through which narrative information is held back, in this particular scene and the novel as a whole. It is clear that Austen's precise yet spare conversational apparatus materially assists her broad strategy of withholding; but its secondary effect is to allow, in its very unobtrusiveness, the words characters speak to stand out by contrast and do their own work. Within the world of the fiction, Mr. Bennet takes over from the narrator as the primary withholding agent in this conversation. He begins by withholding admission of his own understanding. Mrs. Bennet's opening description of the situation could hardly be clearer; her husband's response, then—"I have not the pleasure of understanding you...Of what are you talking?" sounds not just falsely but even aggressively obtuse. We are set up to hear the irony of the word "pleasure" by the telling look that precedes Mr. Bennet's speech;

the overly formal phrasing of his clarifying question likewise alerts us to possible pretense. This impression is confirmed with the next two utterances. Note that his wife does not actually clarify the case for him at all, but only reiterates it without changing her phrasing. The fact that the husband can, then, with no new information, so quickly shift from a state of apparent ignorance into one of resistance—“And what am I to do on the occasion?”—confirms that he was indeed deliberately withholding, drawing out the exchange by refusing to acknowledge what he understood pretty well.

From here, he further protracts the exchange by changing the object of his withholding. Until now he has refused to admit his understanding; from this point onwards, he refuses to grant Mrs. Bennet the information that would enable her own. This shift in intention begins with his choice of words in calling Lizzy into the conversation, the authoritarian yet vague “She shall hear my opinion.” His mode is both passive, as he suppresses himself as the agent delivering this news, and generalized, as he refrains from specifying the content of the opinion, leaving it as a blank space onto which his wife can project her own. Indeed, Mr. Bennet knows his wife’s solipsistic worldview well enough to predict she will assist him in making herself the butt of his joke. It is important to note that his words must function on their own, here; the narrator *can’t* comment. To guide interpretation in any direction would disrupt the joke’s unfolding, which Mr. Bennet orchestrates with a sequence of polar questions so carefully posed that one can almost hear (on second reading, anyway) his glee in inching by logical degrees towards the moment in which he can reveal himself with the final verb in that pair of balanced propositions—“if you do *not*...if you *do*.”

Just as the whole novel’s plot is born of delayed understanding—it ends when the main characters are finally able to express themselves sincerely and mutually—this specific

scene gains its momentum from the same principle. Interestingly, the exchange contains a great deal of sincere speech—but the problem is, it is never mutual, issuing willingly from both quarters. Mrs. Bennet, for her part, continually expresses her thoughts and desires directly. Respectively, she and her husband are sincere and obfuscating in direct proportion: it is his dissimulation that forces her to be crystal clear at every turn. Although she deals in positive expression, the novel neither likes nor rewards her particular kind, as it is linked to an inferior understanding. Rather, the gradated structure of the joke invites readers to scorn her way of spelling things out and to respect only Mr. Bennet's (comparatively brief) moment of positive expression, which brings the whole into view. His superior judgment gleans respect from narrative structure, even as he wields it unfeelingly (some might say cruelly).

In this respect, readers follow the lead of the narrator, who gives Mr. Bennet the last word—literally, his utterance is the last one directly reported before the narrator reverts back to an indirect mode, describing Mrs. Bennet's persistent appeals without giving us access to them. The narrator and Mr. Bennet are thus aligned in opposition to Mrs. Bennet, an idea supported by Gary Kelly's observation that "there is significant convergence if not overlap between the talk of protagonists and important characters and the discourse of the narrator," in contrast to those characters belonging to a lower tier (including Mrs. Bennet) who are often "comic, intellectually limited, ethically flawed, and socially insensitive."²⁴⁶ Such characters are at times permitted to give voice to true or rational observations—as Mrs. Bennet's sincere appeal demonstrates—complicating the reader's allegiances. In any case, the plot of the novel not only operates on faulty conversation devoid of mutual understanding, but also, specifically, on *character*. It is because of these characters' peculiar minds and manners of

²⁴⁶ Gary Kelly, "Jane Austen's Imagined Communities: Talk, Narration and Founding the Modern State" in Stovel, *The Talk in Jane Austen*, 131.

self-expression that their misunderstanding exists in the first place to engage readers' interest and invite them to weigh in with their own judgement.

Juliet McMaster states succinctly what many Austen readers know intuitively to be true: "in Austen, talk is character, talk is action."²⁴⁷ The connection between these two narrative dynamics—which she leaves unspecified by splicing them together with a comma—can be critically particularized by attending to Austen's granular techniques of withholding information in scenes of conversation. These techniques operate on two planes: first, through the scene's dramatic conversational apparatus—dramatic both in the sense that it adapts conventions of printed dramatic dialogue, and in the sense that Austen deploys them with the minimalism characteristic of a script. Her adaptation of the scene-setting stage direction is particularly important, allowing her narrator to direct interpretation at the outset while intervening little in the dialogue itself. In the dialogue itself, privileged characters take over from the narrator as withholding agents. Taken together, the effect of these various forms of minimalism is to establish (mis)interpretation itself as a central theme and structuring principle of the narrative.

"Beyond Expression": Suppressed Conversation as Narrative Design

As I have suggested, *Pride and Prejudice* as a whole is premised on partial understanding becoming full: its plot both traces and is animated by a movement towards sincere expression and listening. Panning out from the granular level in which the chapter has thus far been interested, one can see how Austen deploys this motif on broader narrative scales, too. She effects her tactical withholding not only through the careful design of directly

²⁴⁷ Juliet McMaster, "Mrs. Elton and Other Verbal Aggressors" in Stovel, *The Talk in Jane Austen*, 88.

reported conversations, but also through the choices she makes *not* to report conversations at all, or to report them indirectly. In his essay “Mishearing, Misreading, and the Language of Listening,” Ronald Hall rightly notes that “Austen’s strategic offering or withholding of direct-speech dialogue deserves a whole book.” (His essay’s contribution to this area of inquiry is a reading of *Persuasion* demonstrating that dialogue in Austen “is not merely talk, but communication involving the silence of listening”).²⁴⁸ The second half of this chapter supplies a portion of the account Hall calls for by showing how key instances of indirectly reported or unreported speech in this novel are materially linked to its broader design. Austen’s choices about what to represent directly and what to mute (through various technical means) directly serve the plot’s gradual inversion of that which has simmered below the surface, somewhere beyond expression, out into positive, explicit terms.

To begin, I return to the rest of Austen’s reflection on *Pride and Prejudice* in her 1813 letter to Cassandra. Following her declaration that “I do not write for such dull Elves / As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves,” she goes on:

The 2^d vol. is shorter than I cd wish—but the difference is not so much in reality as in look, there being a larger proportion of Narrative in that part. I have lopt & cropt so successfully however that I imagine it must be rather shorter than S. & S. altogether.²⁴⁹

She makes no further reflection on why direct speech and narrative are distributed in a this disproportionate manner, but I would hypothesize that it is related to the particular way in which the plot functions. The many directly reported conversations of the first volume are highly productive in that they set up all of the misunderstandings and social conflicts whose resolution will form the stuff of the remaining volumes. Once the book has established what

²⁴⁸ See Ronald Hall, “Mishearing, Misreading, and the Language of Listening” in Stovel, *The Talk in Jane Austen*, 142, 148.

²⁴⁹ Austen, *Letters*, 210.

needs to be resolved, though, it must be careful not to do so too abruptly, but only by degrees—an end that can be effectively managed by varying the immediacy of readers’ access to characters’ conversations.

Darcy’s initial proposal to Elizabeth—itself in the second volume—is a moment when the author’s muting of conversation is particularly noticeable, as the information she suppresses is of immediate curiosity. She frustratingly holds back nearly all of his declaration. We hear him only at the outset: “In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”²⁵⁰ Although brief, this tidbit creates an ambiguity about Darcy’s status as a sympathetic character in this moment. On one hand, there is a poignant sincerity to the final phrase, “allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you”; on the other, earlier references to the struggle of repression and the imperative “must” each bespeak the domineering nature we have been taught to see in him thus far. From here, however, the ambiguity cannot be resolved nor even considered through further listening;²⁵¹ instead, the narrator informs us that

the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride.²⁵²

The narrator’s vague take on Darcy’s proposal—which remains readers’ only source of information—is full of judgment that directs interpretation against his favour. I would argue, too, that indeed this *is* the narrator’s voice, free of traces of Elizabeth’s thoughts. The narrator

²⁵⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 211.

²⁵¹ My use of the verb “listening,” here, draws on Ronald Hall’s idea that “‘reading’ is itself a species of ‘listening,’ and the two easily become metaphors for each other” in Austen. See Hall, “Language of Listening,” 148.

²⁵² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 211.

is aligned with Elizabeth in this moment without borrowing the form of her reaction through FID.

Thinking counter-fictionally, if readers *were* allowed to hear Darcy express himself here, there would be greater risk of readers sympathizing with him too much too soon, diminishing the tension of misunderstanding that is still needed to drive the story. Consider what good can be extrapolated from a narratorial report that asks us to see mainly bad: it is true that “he spoke well” “on the subject of tenderness,” and that “feelings of the heart” *were* in fact detailed, even if alongside other, less noble feelings. It would be harder to suppress this good if readers were able to hear it expressed in words.²⁵³

Direct speech thus poses a danger to design, here, and Austen accordingly avoids it and deals mainly in indirect reports and bodily gestures loaded with traces of all that remains unspoken. Elizabeth, for her part, is “beyond expression”; she can only “stare[...], colour[...], doubt[...]” and be “silent.”²⁵⁴ Elizabeth’s refusal immediately affects Darcy’s mode of communication: wounded, he draws back from expressing himself sincerely and reverts to concealing his thoughts. In his moments of silence, he leans “against the mantle-piece with his eyes fixed on her face,” his “complexion” alternately becomes “pale with anger” and “change[s] colour.” When he *does* speak, he holds back. Consider his response to Elizabeth’s accusation regarding Wickham:

‘And this,’ cried Darcy, as he walked with quick steps across the room, ‘is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation, are heavy indeed!’²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Although the conversation does eventually slip back into directly reported speech after this point, the narrator’s interpretive coaching has already trained the reader’s ear.

²⁵⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 211.

²⁵⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 214.

His questions are rhetorical and highly significant, and yet we do not sense them landing with Elizabeth; she does not acknowledge their implication that there is another version of the events at hand, nor does he take the opportunity to make it explicit. The conversation comes to a close when she delivers the final blow of damning conditionality—“had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.” At this, Darcy “start[s]” but—in keeping with Austen’s principle of suppressive design—“[says] nothing.”²⁵⁶

This conversation precisely marks the mid-point of the book.²⁵⁷ Its conclusion leaves Darcy and Elizabeth more starkly at odds than they have been thus far: the distance between their perceptions is at its greatest, and the remainder of the novel will chart the steps each one takes—knowingly and not—to close the gap. The first and most drastic of these steps is effected by the letter Darcy gives to Elizabeth the next day detailing his efforts to influence Bingley and his dealings and Wickham. Elizabeth’s reflection on its contents prompts the single major revolution in her understanding (the degrees by which she follows in this direction hereafter are smaller by comparison). Two aspects of Austen’s technique in representing this event are relevant to the present argument about the role of conversation in the novel. First, it is surely significant that the information that causes Elizabeth to overcome the inertia of a closely held viewpoint and realize her mistake comes to her in written form. In this letter, Darcy expresses himself sincerely and Elizabeth reads and understands him—a combination I have already suggested carries the force of conclusion in Austen’s narrative philosophy. It is fitting, then, that this mid-novel clarifying event is mediated by writing: text

²⁵⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 215.

²⁵⁷ The Cambridge edition contains 428 pages of Austen’s text, and this exchange spans between 211 and 216.

and paper work to hold characters at one remove, both from each other and from any mutual acknowledgement of their newfound shared understanding. This narrative choice on Austen's part constitutes a different kind of suppression, then: not of information, but rather of personal immediacy. It suggests that the living, speaking body does matter, in Austen—not because she wants to capture a sense of it on the page for recording purposes, like her predecessors, but rather because she privileges understanding achieved reciprocally by real people in real time. It is not simply sincere expression and understanding that the novel tends towards for its conclusion, but rather that which is brought about by—and thus genuinely shared through—live conversation.

The other striking feature of Elizabeth's epiphany is the form Austen gives it. Elizabeth's consciousness is a powerful structuring force in the narration: as Kelly notes, "Austen rarely uses free indirect discourse to represent the subjectivity of anyone other than the protagonist," giving the heroine's perspective a primacy in the telling of the story.²⁵⁸ The moment in which Elizabeth realizes her error, though, is not itself delivered through FID, nor even through an indirect report from the narrator. Instead, her clarifying thoughts are framed as direct speech addressed to herself:

'How despicably have I acted!' she cried.—'I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameless distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind...Till this moment, I never knew myself.'²⁵⁹

Austen uses dashes in a vaguely Richardsonian way, here, to mark moments of distressed pause. Despite this technical sympathy, however, the passage does not aspire to

²⁵⁸ Kelly, "Jane Austen's Imagined Communities," 131.

²⁵⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 230.

transcriptional realism; it is still a far way off from the broken, interruptive speech that characterizes Richardson's crux scenes. It is too perfectly realized to really resemble—or even pretend to resemble—self-talk in a private moment. What seems to matter more than any resemblance to real distressed speech is simply the passage's status *as* speech. Of the many types of speech in this novel, Austen privileges that which is sincerely meant and understood, leading to self-knowledge and knowledge of others. This particular scene constitutes an important first step towards Elizabeth's fuller understanding, so it follows that it should strongly project a sense that she has achieved successful communication with herself. Austen's forming the heroine's thoughts in direct speech compounds this sense, elevating the epiphany by conferring upon it the privileged status of successful conversation. Elizabeth must understand herself: she must therefore speak aloud in earnest and really listen. This, for Austen, is speech at its most transformative; it is true conversation. It is the first moment in the novel of its kind.²⁶⁰ From here, Austen continues to use the formal trappings of direct speech to notate moments of narrative importance for her heroine, in which her thoughts evolve in some way to increase her self-knowledge (or her knowledge of Darcy) and build the sympathy. Each such productive instance of thought-as-speech marks a step towards the critical mass of understanding necessary for conclusion.

Elizabeth eventually reaches a point of such certainty about Darcy's real character that by the time he proposes again, there is nothing left of mistaken thinking to correct, except for her uncertainty about whether he still loves and wants her. In this final transformative conversation, she has only to communicate to him the status of her feelings and thoughts, and

²⁶⁰ In a single earlier instance, after Colonel Forster mentions that younger sons are too dependent to marry where they like, we hear the following—"‘Is this,’ thought Elizabeth, ‘meant for me?’" In this preceding case, though, thoughts are only narrated as speech rather than truly uttered aloud. See Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 206.

vice versa, for them to come into alignment. As she approaches this position, though—acquiring more and more privileged knowledge through the second and third volumes—she herself begins to pose something of a design problem, given her ability to uncover vital plot-forming information (Bingley’s real feelings for Jane; Wickham’s dissipation). Interestingly, Austen finds a way to give Elizabeth a degree of awareness of this new narrative responsibility. On leaving Hunsford after their protracted stay with the Collins family, Maria Lucas exclaims:

‘We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there twice!—How much I shall have to tell!’
Elizabeth privately added, ‘and how much I shall have to conceal.’²⁶¹

The fact that these thoughts are delivered in the form of direct speech signals, as we have seen, their narrative importance; more telling, though, is their discovery that the novel has recruited its own protagonist as an agent of withholding. The closer Elizabeth comes to real understanding, the closer she comes to the status of the orchestrating narrator. Thus, she too must begin assisting in the narrator’s project of tactical concealment.

She does so to great effect, and Jane also becomes partly complicit. Jane provides a pressure relief valve for Elizabeth, allowing her to unburden herself and be heard, thus making further concealment from other characters possible. In the novel’s first instance of true conversational sympathy between characters, Elizabeth discloses, though very belatedly, what she knows to her sister, and describes the taxing effects of keeping so many secrets at Hunsford: “‘I was very uncomfortable, I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to, of what I felt, no Jane to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and

²⁶¹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 240.

nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! How I wanted you!”²⁶² Previous conversations between the sisters are defined by a dynamic of respectful, companionable debate, each character championing a different side of the argument at hand (Is Caroline Bingley sincere? Is Wickham’s account to be trusted?). In these earlier parleys, Elizabeth’s turns establish her playfulness, precipitousness and skeptical worldview, while Jane’s respectively communicate her patience, ingenuousness and trusting instinct. But in this later conversation after the Hunsford journey, neither sister is at odds with the other; the exchange is only defined by sincere expression and listening. The novel shows readers its most privileged mode of conversation between sisters long before it offers it up between lovers. The conversation’s effect on Elizabeth is fittingly powerful. As the narrator confirms, “the tumult of Elizabeth’s mind was allayed by this conversation. She had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on her for a fortnight and was certain of a willing listener in Jane, whenever she might wish to talk of either.”²⁶³

It seems Jane’s act of conversational generosity, which so greatly relieves her younger sister, ironically enables Elizabeth to hold the new information back from a wider audience. Part of this incentive to conceal comes from their mutual validation of each other’s views, in contrast to their former affectionate sparring. When Elizabeth asks Jane’s advice about whether to publish Wickham’s bad deeds, her older sister responds, “surely there can be no occasion for exposing him so dreadfully,” and she turns the question around: “What is your own opinion?”²⁶⁴ Elizabeth, for her part, already has a list of rationalizations for not spreading

²⁶² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 250.

²⁶³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 251.

²⁶⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 250.

the word, the most material of which—her fear of breaking Mr. Darcy’s confidence—prefigures the novel’s conclusion:

‘Mr. Darcy has not authorised me to make his communication public. On the contrary every particular relative to his sister, was meant to be kept as much as possible to myself; and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to the rest of his conduct, who will believe me? The general prejudice against Mr. Darcy is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Meryton, to attempt to place him in an amiable light. I am not equal to it. Wickham will soon be gone; and therefore it will not signify to anybody here, what he really is. Sometime hence it will be all found out, and then we may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present I will say nothing about it.’²⁶⁵

Jane validates these points in turn, saying “You are quite right. To have his errors made public might ruin him for ever.”²⁶⁶ This sisterly support, in allaying the tumult of Elizabeth’s mind, is further incentive to suppress what she knows.

Elizabeth’s participation in the novel’s motif of withholding is required at the level of plot—Wickham’s infamy must remain unknown so Lydia can make the error that will seal her fate as negatively as it will seal Elizabeth’s for the better. But of course, Elizabeth’s particular motivation to contribute to the novel’s climate of suppression cannot be narrative. Austen effectively disguises her motivation in other trappings, ones that themselves foreshadow the outcome the plot is already tending towards: love, and conversation defined by shared understanding. Regarding the first of these, Austen dresses Elizabeth’s motivation up with a new, under-examined loyalty to Mr. Darcy, which suggests her inclination to love; and regarding the second, Austen mobilizes the good feelings generated by the sisters’ affectionate communion—itsself a suggestion of what is to come between Elizabeth and Darcy—to validate and enable the concealment. The narrative operation of this exchange

²⁶⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 251.

²⁶⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 251.

between Lizzy and Jane is complex: one good conversation absorbs and defuses the need for any others, effectively extinguishing them—and the risks they might pose to the plot’s trajectory—as narrative possibilities.

Once Elizabeth has been recruited as an agent of the novel’s tactical withholding, she becomes something of a nexus, holding back in relation to a number of characters. In some cases, she is quite aware of her role. Thinking of what she knows regarding Darcy’s having persuaded Bingley against marrying Jane, she admits—

Here was knowledge in which no one could partake; and she was sensible that nothing less than a perfect understanding between the parties could justify her in throwing off this last incumbrance of mystery. ‘And then,’ said she, ‘if that very improbable event should ever take place, I shall merely be able to tell what Bingley may tell in a much more agreeable manner himself. The liberty of communication cannot be mine till it has lost all its value!’²⁶⁷

Austen invests her heroine not only with an awareness that she does not have the “liberty of communication,” but also with prescience regarding the outcome of this particular subplot. Clearly the union of Jane and Bingley is not, in her mind, “improbable”: her going so far down the imaginative road of picturing him confessing to Jane that he has loved her all along belies her use of the word. In her status as a suppressor of information and a source of foreshadowing, Elizabeth again approaches the status of the narrator.

In other cases through the final volume, though, Elizabeth has far less control over her status as a withholder. During her visit to Pemberley, the flow of information is stemmed at multiple levels. Hardly any of the conversation between her and Darcy in this episode is reported directly: the only quoted lines appear when Elizabeth explains the unannounced visit by telling him the housekeeper “informed us that you would certainly not be here till tomorrow,” and when he in turn asks, “Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce

²⁶⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 251.

my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?”²⁶⁸ Austen makes this last utterance count: the striking humility that informs Darcy’s parenthetical middle clause makes this moment stand out in relief from the rest of the exchange, which is represented indirectly. We learn from the narrator that Darcy “spoke to Elizabeth, if not in terms of perfect composure, at least of perfect civility,” and that she “received his compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome”; she “scarcely dared lift her eyes to his face, and knew not what answer she returned to his civil enquiries after her family.”²⁶⁹ Elizabeth herself thus loses grip on her powers of speech, prevented by embarrassment from consciously forming or even remembering her words. As she and Darcy stand together on the lawn, the narrator tellingly reveals that “she wanted to talk, but there seemed an embargo on every subject.”²⁷⁰ Awkwardness is what imposes the embargo, here, generating the atmosphere of reticence and uncertainty that defines the episode.

Elsewhere, though, the embargo persists as a narrative imperative. Austen’s word choice has ramifications beyond the scope of this single scene. The word “embargo”—meaning “a stoppage, prohibition, impediment”—aptly describes the operation of her overall design.²⁷¹ The conclusion itself is formed in such a way to lift the novel’s calculated check on conversation, clearing the stoppage so that all that has been held back through various means—characters’ embarrassment, personal reticence or ignorance, on one hand, or the

²⁶⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 283.

²⁶⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 278.

²⁷⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 284.

²⁷¹ “embargo, n.” *OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/60781?rskey=PakXak&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed June 12, 2016).

narrator's plot-serving silence on the other—suddenly floods forth. Elizabeth's acceptance of Darcy's proposal is reported indirectly; we hear from the narrator that she "gave him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances."²⁷² What is more important in constituting the novel's conclusion, however, comes next. The remainder of their directly reported conversation is entirely constituted by each one sharing what has so far been concealed from the other (and often from the reader, too). The motion of the interaction is one of give and take: in turn, each one makes an offering to the other in the form of some disclosure, thereby inviting the other to reciprocate. Elizabeth, for instance, reveals her own past thoughts about their awkward meeting at Pemberley as a way of asking Darcy to verify them against his own: "I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me; when we met at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?"—"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise...my object *then*," replied Darcy, 'was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past."²⁷³ Each turn of the conversation corresponds directly to a scene in which information was only partially revealed, or in which understanding was not reached or acknowledged. Here's Darcy, responding to Elizabeth's mentioning how she abused him "so abominably" when he first proposed:

'What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time, had merited the severest reproof.'²⁷⁴

Here, again, is Darcy, mentioning his letter:

²⁷² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 406.

²⁷³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 410.

²⁷⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 407.

“‘Did it,’ said he, ‘did it *soon* make you think better of me?’”²⁷⁵

Their conversation continues in a rhythm of equalizing oscillation: rehashing each event through conversation, they go back over what they had really felt in those vexed moments but could not say, so that all might come to light and be corrected. In this way, the conclusion of the novel is defined not only by positive expression but also by temporal regression, as it systematically returns to individual conversational scenes to address and eradicate all misunderstanding.

Conclusion

In Austen’s novel conversations, less ultimately proves to be more. The novel’s structuring principle is one of negation: she deals in concealment, omission, the unstated or understated, the falsely or mistakenly spoken, all of which create a general ambiance of misunderstanding in the novel. Suppression is the guiding principle of her conversational craft, and it works in service of plot: much narrative information is held strategically back, and what direct conversation readers do get is reported with a controlled and controlling minimalism. I have attempted to show the complex operation of conversation within the broader narrative design of the novel, and I would emphasize again that, although it doubtless works in concert with free indirect discourse, it can be attended as a robust and sophisticated technical category in its own right, within Austen’s narrative toolkit.

Austen dispenses with many of the hyper-expressive speech features that writers such as Richardson, Boswell and Burney strove so assiduously to encode in their pages. Part of why she does so is precisely because she does not always want things to be perfectly clear and

²⁷⁵ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 408.

vivid in their meaning: the spareness of what information is there, and the spareness of the apparatus that frames it moreover, tap the enormous potential of textual ambiguity to make room for the interpretive mistakes and the atmosphere of uncertainty that drives the story. Positive expression is, for Austen, an ultimate goal if not a sustained goal throughout. In this way, she marks a retreat and a turning inward in comparison to her predecessors: from expression to impression; from sound to text; from body to brain; from listening to reading.

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